

# Lubyanka: Dissonant memories of violence in the heart of Moscow

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## Abstract

An infamous Soviet edifice, the Lubyanka's yellow bulk still stands in central Moscow. The building is controlled by the federal security service (FSB), the contemporary security services, and the FSB provides no tangible acknowledgment of the building's past. Yet, it is not erased; instead, the surrounding landscape has become a meaningful space for memorializing the victims of Soviet repression. Although the government's official policy is to ignore or muffle the Lubyanka's dark heritage, other actors have stepped in to interpret this painful legacy in various ways. This article examines different processes of heritagization and memory work within this "heritagescape." It sheds light on the Lubyanka area's polysemic meanings and sociopolitical roles in contemporary Russia, as well as the contested processes of heritagization and memorialization at sites of violence. It also introduces the idea of "accountability" as a concept that can be communicated at a heritage site, especially at times of increased state violence.

## Keywords

contested heritage, heritage, memorialization, protest, Soviet heritage, Russia

## Introduction

What happens to sites of violence when an oppressive regime falls? The possible outcomes depend on many things: the nature of transition from that regime to the next, the type of violence enacted at a specific site, and the newly reformulated relationships between groups of victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and collaborators. This article examines the Lubyanka building, the former headquarters of the Soviet secret police, and its surrounding "heritagescape" in Moscow, Russia, to determine how official and nonofficial actors have worked to hide or make visible the area's legacy of violence since 1990.<sup>1</sup> It further explores "accountability" as a concept that can be communicated through heritage interpretation at sites of past violence. The data examined here were gleaned from a mixed methodology research study that included elements of participant-observer ethnography; site visits; the analysis of oral, written, and web-based interpretation; and archival research.

According to J.E. Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth (1996), all heritage is "dissonant": no narrative of the past can include all possible facts or viewpoints. However, some interpretations are

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“dissonant” in a way that is calculated to exclude the stories of a minoritized or otherwise under-represented group. The sites considered here can be seen as sites of “dark” (Stone, 2006) and “difficult” (Macdonald, 2009) heritage because they are places where acts of violence were perpetrated and/or planned on a massive scale. Many of the memory actors involved, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like *Memorial* as well as loosely organized groups and individual protestors, can also be considered “guardians of memory” (Carr, 2015), since they have safeguarded memories of the past that have met with official disfavor.

As Mary-Catherine Garden (2009) explains, moving the focus of “heritage” beyond a single site to consider landscapes comprising different places that may communicate a shared or conflicting memory narrative, introduces three conceptual qualities of a “heritagescape”—boundaries, cohesion, and visibility—which help us consider what the visual and conceptual limits of a heritagescape are; how the elements within it fit together, physically and meaningfully; and how different elements are and are not “intervisible” (Wheatley, 1995) to the visitor from different points within the heritagescape (pp. 276–277). This concept frames our exploration of the places and actions within the Lubyanka heritagescape.

In previous work, I (Comer, 2019) have explored the memorialization of Soviet mass repression through the lens of Judith Butler’s (2009) theory of “grievability.” Butler (2009: 31) contends that, in life, some groups of people are already regarded by other groups as people who are less worthy of grief and so “loseable” as collateral damage. To use her example, the loss of Iraqi civilians in war is considered more acceptable to the average American citizen than the loss of American servicepeople. I re-imagined this phenomenon and theoretical lens for sites of past mass violence: who is most visibly and publicly grieved at each site, and why?

The opposite side of the coin is “blameability”: who is most visibly and publicly blamed for a past regime of violence at a site related to that same violence, and why? This can overlap substantially with a search for “accountability” assigned or taken on at a given site. This article uses these lenses to identify how and why different memory actors choose different models of memorialization; it also considers whether attempts are made by various non-state memory actors to assign accountability to the Soviet secret police and Russian security services when legal options are not available. By accountability, I do not here mean the term as commonly used in the legal sectors of transitional justice movements; in the heritage sense, accountability for a past crime or human rights abuse can be taken on by (or, in the case of dissident heritage, assigned to) a past actor or institution with or without an accompanying campaign of lustration, truth commissions, and/or prosecution of past perpetrators of violence.

This article thus converses with work focusing on the intersections of memory and transitional justice (Hayner, 2011; Hinton, 2011) and memory and trauma (Herman, 1992; LaCapra, 2014), as well as the work of NGOs and individuals who work to memorialize atrocities for which transitional justice was not officially undertaken (Andrieu, 2011; Hinton et al., 2014). The federal security service (FSB) as well as other successor power organs have little interest in communicating accountability on the landscape or otherwise. But NGOs and civil society organizations use the permanent memorial of the Solovetsky Stone and Last Address plaques, as well as temporal ceremonies and the digital sphere, to try to ascribe accountability to these inheritors. By analyzing these memory acts, we can better understand why and how challenges to a hegemonic memory culture that is significantly implicated in contemporary human rights abuses can be formulated.

## The Lubyanka building

The Lubyanka building served as the headquarters of successive Soviet secret police and security agencies. After the revolutions of 1917, the Bolsheviks founded the Cheka; this was replaced by

the NKVD in 1934, and the KGB in 1954. The Russian FSB took over many of the KGB's functions upon the Soviet Union's dissolution. The gulag system, which began under Vladimir Lenin's rule, comprised a network of prisons, concentration camps, labor colonies, "special settlements," and various other enterprises. Estimates vary widely and are always political,<sup>2</sup> but up to 14 million people were imprisoned in the network between 1929 and 1953; between 1.6 and 3 million people died during that period. The Great Terror, as an organized campaign of state repression, peaked between 1937 and 1939, under Joseph Stalin. Approximately 1.6 million people were arrested; half were shot, and half were sent to forced labor facilities across the Soviet Union (Getty et al., 1993: 1023).

Unlike the Nuremberg trials, which brought some Nazi perpetrators to justice via a legal framework and provided a presumptive model for postatrocity accountability (but see Zolo, 2020, for a critique of this "victors' justice" model), or the postapartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, which placed a focus on hearing victims' testimonies (Karstedt, 2010: 18), there has been no tribunal or truth commission in post-Soviet Russia. Although an attempt was made in 1992 to put the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on trial, this "Russian Nuremberg" did not succeed (Toymentsev, 2011).

The Russian situation may be more comparable to the transitional justice and memory situation in Spain, although Spain, unlike Russia, is now widely considered to be a liberal democracy. In Spain, the post-Franco Franco Amnesty Law of 1977 undergirded the "Pact of Forgetting" ("Pacto del Olvido"), which stymied prosecutions of people who committed human rights abuses during the Civil War and General Franco's reign; however, in the past few decades, a "campaign to recover memory" (Davis, 2005), especially through exhumations of Civil War-era mass graves, has been spearheaded by activists and NGOs (Aguilar, 2008; Rubin, 2010). Dacia Viejo-Rose (2011) and Alfredo González-Ruibal and Carmen Ortiz (2015) have critically analyzed landscapes of remembering and forgetting Francoist violence in Spain, while the recent removal of Franco's remains from the monumental Valley of the Fallen mortuary complex signals a marked change, though incomplete and heavily contested, in confronting the material heritage and necropolitics of the Franco regime (Brescó de Luna and Wagoner, 2022; González-Ruibal, 2022). These shifts in Spanish memory culture have not been accompanied by a project of official lustration or a truth and justice commission; in the words of Rachele Wildeboer Schut and Zoltán Dujisin (2022), "the intense disagreement over the role of memory in Spanish society seems to both reflect and contribute to a larger crisis of regime legitimacy in Spain" (p. 19).

In Moscow, the FSB, which serves as the "inheritor" of the KGB and NKVD in many ways (Bateman, 2016; Fedor, 2013), still owns the Lubyanka building. Yet, it has neither become a "heritagized" (Milošević, 2018: 54) site of memory nor retained its previous function as the center of the country's security services. In this sense, its past is arguably "forgotten" on the official level. The building was originally constructed for the All-Russia Insurance Company in 1898. The newly formed Cheka used the building from 1917 as its own administrative headquarters. As the Cheka metamorphosed, the building retained this function. However, the entire area was connected to the secret police. Even nearby apartment buildings originally built for the Dynamo sporting club were connected to the NKVD; Cheka founder Feliks Dzerzhinsky himself founded the sporting society in 1923.

The Lubyanka building was the site where many decisions were taken that caused mass violence to be enacted across the Soviet Union. As a site of institutional violence, it is like the Wannsee House (Digan, 2014), the building in Berlin where Nazi leaders agreed on the form and function of the Holocaust in 1942. However, the Lubyanka was also a site of direct violence, imprisonment, and killing. The building contained prison cells that, at different times, held prisoners including Nikolai Bukharin and Alexander Solzhenitsyn (*International Memorial*, 2022), and people were



**Figure 1.** Gathering of victims of repression, family members, and activists in front of the Lubyanka building on October 30, 2017 (annual Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression). Source: Photo by Margaret Comer.

reportedly executed on the premises (Roth, 2006: 164). Its exact function now is unknown, although it is widely thought to be used as office or storage space. Previously, there was a museum inside that members of the public could sometimes access; this has been closed for years.

As an organ of the federal government, the FSB does not take any accountability for the crimes of the Cheka, NKVD, and KGB; this silence is reflected in the absence of any sign of memory on the Lubyanka premises. According to Anatoly Khazanov (2008), the new powerholders in independent Russia represented a “direct continuation of the communist one [ . . . ] The same can be said about the judiciary and power machinery” (p. 298). Aaron Bateman (2016) argues, “Under Gorbachev and his post-Soviet successors, there have been no admissions of excessive KGB security practices and the use of violence and terror to crush dissent,” trends that he views as continued and even intensified in Putin’s FSB (pp. 25, 46–47).

But, since 1991, various memory actors have intervened to draw attention to this history of violence and its legacies (Figure 1). The Lubyanka building remains a magnet for protest over contemporary human rights abuses. Recent examples include the 2018–2019 For Your Children and Ours movement, in which people gathered to protest the arrest and prosecution of a group of young people on alleged terrorism charges, widely held to be trumped-up. In 2022, protestors gathered at the Lubyanka metro station (the main entrance of which is intervisible with the Lubyanka building) to protest Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine (TSN, 2022). Even though participants in unsanctioned protests risk arrest, the site has been a “symbolically charged” place of protest since the 1990s (Gabowitsch, 2017: 716) and remains resonant and potent for challenging what people perceive as overreaches of power and infringements of human rights (discussed further below).

The Lubyanka’s metal doors were also the scene of an artistic protest in 2015 by Petr Pavlensky, an artist who “defines his own trend as ‘political art’” (Bodin, 2018: 273).<sup>3</sup> Pavlensky set the doors on fire in the middle of the night, proclaiming,

The Lubyanka's door on fire is the gauntlet that society is throwing down in the face of a terrorist threat. The Federal Security Service uses the method of nonstop terror to maintain power over a hundred and forty-six million people. Fear turns free individuals into a sticky mass of unconnected bodies. (quoted in Gessen, 2015)

This action illustrates the symbolic continuity perceived between the building as a metonym for the Soviet-era security services and for the contemporary FSB.

Interestingly, part of the subsequent criminal case against Pavlensky centered on "damage to heritage," showcasing the official value that the state attributes to the aesthetic edifice. Yet, in refusing to officially acknowledge the building's difficult and dark past, the state opens the site up to activist, even destructive, interventions carried out by people who will not allow that past to be erased or forgotten.<sup>4</sup>

### Solovetsky Stone and "Return of Names"

Another set of memorial interventions within the Lubyanka heritagescape centers on the Solovetsky Stone. During the Soviet period, a statue of Cheka founder Dzerzhinsky had been erected in Lubyanka Square. In the mid-1980s, several civil society organizations began to advocate for the rights of formerly repressed individuals and to research the history and victims of the gulag and Soviet repression. One of the most prominent such groups was *Memorial*, which had the dual focus of remembering the victims of Soviet repression and fighting contemporary human rights abuses.<sup>5</sup> In 1990, *Memorial* activists arranged for a boulder from the Solovetsky Islands to be brought to Moscow and placed in Lubyanka Square, directly facing the later-removed Dzerzhinsky statue, as a memorial to victims of Soviet repression. The choice of stone was meaningful because the Solovetsky Islands were the site of what became the first camp in the gulag system; thus, installing the Solovetsky Stone in Lubyanka Square brought the far-flung locations of state violence back into the metropole, visible and material. This was remarkable, not least because the Soviet Union had not yet collapsed; such an act of tangible memorialization of victims of government repression would have been impossible even a few years before.

The Solovetsky Stone stands as a perennial reminder of the Lubyanka's violent past and a challenge to official, institutional silence about this legacy of violence. Furthermore, on specific dates, the Solovetsky Stone becomes the center of memorial ceremonies, drawing thousands of people to remember together. On October 29 of each year, *International Memorial* holds the "Return of Names" ceremony in Lubyanka Square (Figure 2). For 12 hours, people read the names and short bits of biographical information of Moscow citizens who became victims of the Great Terror; the event organizers distribute small pieces of paper with these data, drawn from *Memorial's* database of victims. Many people wait in line for hours; when they step to the microphone, many add the names and information of their own repressed family members. The event is webcast live, and, at the end of the event's allotted time, there are always many people left waiting to read.

On October 30, the national day of remembrance,<sup>6</sup> the site instead becomes a meeting place for activists from across the Moscow region. This gathering is shorter, and the speeches tend to focus on the government's perceived failings in caring for the victims of repression and ensuring that Soviet repression is remembered; some speakers connect Soviet human rights abuses to current Russian ones. Before 2017, many speeches lamented the lack of a national memorial to the victims of repression; finally, in that year, the Wall of Sorrow memorial was opened in central Moscow. President Vladimir Putin gave remarks at the opening, stressing the need to remember the victims and ensure such violence never happened again, but he made no mention of perpetrators at all, let alone current human rights issues (President of Russia, 2017).



**Figure 2.** Solovetsky Stone during “Return of Names” ceremony, October 29, 2017.  
Source: Photo by Margaret Comer.

In 2018, the usual Return of Names ceremony was nearly derailed. Just weeks before it was due to take place in Moscow, the city government suddenly threatened not to allow it to go forward on-site, citing construction in the area. Officials suggested that remembrance activities move to the Wall of Sorrow. Activists rejected this proposal because “the Return of Names is inextricably linked with the Solovetsky Stone. Therefore, the idea of trying to move the Return of Names action to the Wall of Sorrow monument [ . . . ] seems unacceptable to us” (International Memorial, 2018). In a rare reversal, the ceremony was allowed to go ahead as planned. In 2020 and 2021, the ceremony was held online due to COVID-19. People were invited to film themselves reading the names and information of victims. These videos, interspersed with other programming, were streamed live for 12 hours through the event’s website.

Even after *Memorial*’s legal liquidation, its former researchers and activists continue their work unofficially, and the group, along with Belarusian human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski and Ukraine’s Center for Civil Liberties, was awarded the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the Return of Names could not be held as before in 2022. Instead, *Memorial*’s revamped social media channels invited people around the world to record themselves reading the names of victims of Soviet repression, preferably in a small group and at a “historic or symbolic place in your own city” and to send the video in to be featured in a live transmission on October 29 (Memorial Society,

2022a). Such gatherings took place across Russia and in locations as far-flung as Milan and Jerusalem. Many supporters of *Memorial* had fled the country since February 2022, often to destinations such as Georgia and Armenia that were themselves no strangers to Soviet violence; participating in this iteration of the Return of Names, they chose local sites of Soviet repression for their memorial gatherings.

Thus, the ceremony took on new layers of meaning and memory. Although Return of Names ceremonies had been arranged across the world in previous years, in 2022, “The Russians in new cities were joined by locals and refugees from Ukraine, the names sounded in a variety of languages” (Memorial Society, 2022b). The connections between past and present violence and repression were made explicit and took on an aspect of deliberate protest, while the geographical spread of the commemorations<sup>8</sup> was undoubtedly influenced by both the arrivals of Russians fleeing the Putin regime and greater local awareness, often encouraged by Ukrainian historians and memory activists working online, of the connection between Soviet violence and contemporary Russian violence—including the lack of accountability assumed by institutional inheritors of Soviet power.

In the Return of Names 2022, in-person and digital commemorations combined with a newly enlarged scope of activity and an expanded group of global stakeholders, stretching the Lubyanka heritagescape across several dimensions. The physical landscape and heritagescape of Lubyanka Square thus comprise myriad symbols, tangible markers of memory, and intangible memorial interventions on the space, which can and do change in relation to shifting ideological and political winds; however, we can see that the digital space is also utilized for memorial ends. The next sections will analyze how the broader heritagescapes surrounding the Lubyanka building are marked and memorialized, both physically and digitally.

### “It Is Right Here” and “Last Address”

*International Memorial* also intervenes in the Lubyanka heritagescape within the digital realm. Its flagship digital heritage program is “It Is Right Here,”<sup>9</sup> which combines a digital mapping project with occasional in-person programming. The map covers Moscow and its suburbs, and many different categories of sites of violence are covered, including sites of protest, incarceration, shooting, and burial. Walking tours covering several of these itineraries are available multiple times per month. The sites covered by the tours focus on uncovering the hidden histories of anonymous-looking buildings, usually past sites of state violence. On their own, many of these sites would not individually express the scope and depth of Soviet repression; thus, these tours might be usefully viewed as “perambulatory,” “memory by means of perambulation and walking through,” as theorized by James Young (2019: 631).

The itinerary “Lubyanka and Surroundings” starts in front of the Solovetsky Stone. It deliberately expands the heritagescape to cover several city blocks, encompassing the square, the Lubyanka edifice, and several other sites that would not immediately seem to be part of the Lubyanka landscape. After covering the history of the Lubyanka building itself, the tour continues throughout the Lubyanka district, pointing out, among other sites, the apartment buildings built for Dynamo Moscow and the government building where people applying for rehabilitation had to line up to be seen.<sup>10</sup> One of the last stops is the Garage Shooting Range, which holds many layers of history and heritagization. The building served as the first headquarters of the Cheka, and a plaque to Dzerzhinsky is affixed to the façade (Figure 3). As the first headquarters of the Soviet security services, the building was considered a place worthy of marking and remembering, and its plaque has been updated with a city-funded “Get to Know Moscow” QR code. The QR code leads to audio



**Figure 3.** Plaque in honor of Feliks Dzerzhinsky on first Cheka headquarters building. Note newer QR code below.

Source: Photo by Margaret Comer.

and written material that acknowledges this building as a place of incarceration, torture, and killing.

The tour then leads visitors to an anonymous-looking fence. This surrounds the place where thousands of people were shot in the building's garage area, at night, with truck engines left running to cover the sound of gunshots. There is no memorial plaque at this spot, no sign that this was a site of death and suffering. An in-person or digital tour must lead visitors here to remember. Yet, the possibility of following an online map, whether one funded by the City of Moscow or *International Memorial*, to this location and reading about its history retrieves the memory erased through the official nonmarking of the site.

The Lubyanka area also includes a few Last Address plaques (Figure 4). These memorialize victims of Soviet oppression at the “last address” where each person lived before being arrested. The project's motto is “one name, one life, one sign” (Last Address, 2021): each plaque displays the name of one person, along with some biographical information, including dates of birth, arrest, execution, and rehabilitation. Installed on the façades of individual houses, these plaques stand as silent but constant reminders of loss and absence; as a decentralized memorial network of individualized signs, it spreads the memorial heritagescape of the Lubyanka across a much wider physical and conceptual space. The plaques provide an acknowledgment of violent death in a public space. As Kora Andrieu (2011) observes, “Since the state refused to make public apologies, build monuments or open up its archives, however, it was up to civil society and individuals to deal with the ghosts of the past” (p. 215). We can also see the multivocal and spatially scattered plaques, It Is





**Figure 4.** Last Address plaque, central Moscow.

Source: Photo by Margaret Comer.

Right Here program, and the Solovetsky Stone itself as “multidirectional” memory actors, in that they display a “more open-ended sense of the possibilities of memory and countermemory that might allow the “revisiting” and rewriting of hegemonic sites of memory” (Rothberg, 2009: 310). This is especially relevant when we consider that *Memorial* rejected the national memorial to victims of repression as a suitable site of memorialization on October 29 (discussed above).

### Grievability, blameability, and accountability in the heritagescape

Although the Lubyanka building itself has not been made into a site of memory or mourning, various other actors intervene in a range of ways to make the memory of Stalinist repression legible on the landscape and heritagescape. Except for the actual Lubyanka building itself, with its lack of interpretation, the initiatives considered in this article all exhibit a “private” model of grievability (Comer, 2019: 168); that is, the interpretation and ceremonies focus on identifying the victims of repression as discrete, specific individuals and broadcasting their names or images to the public. These initiatives bring the memory of victims into the light of public acknowledgment, whether this is through a plaque permanently installed on an apartment block’s wall or the reading of a name in a massive public ceremony. As *International Memorial* describes the Return of Names: “people were shot in secret—we remember them publicly” (International Memorial, 2020).

It is also clear that approaches to the issue of perpetration differ considerably. Most sites memorializing the victims of Soviet repression in contemporary Russia utilize either an “abdication” or an “authoritarian” model of blameability (Comer, 2019: 174–178): either the question of perpetration is elided or the entire phenomenon is blamed on Joseph Stalin or leaders like successive heads of the NKVD. On the governmental level, as discussed above, no link is made between the crimes of the Soviet secret police and the existing Russian security services. However, in the memorial initiatives provided by civil service organizations, this link is made by pointing out the geographic continuity of the Lubyanka’s spaces of power as well as occasionally exploring the life stories of perpetrators.

This latter topic raises a conundrum: how to memorialize former perpetrators of Soviet state violence who later became victims? There is little consensus within or between sectors of memory actors about how to handle this issue. In an era when massive efforts are being made to rehabilitate Stalin’s image as a “great leader” who beat the Nazis or speedily industrialized a nation of peasants

(Nelson, 2020; Ryan, 2021), the differences between a narrative that blames Stalin and one that blames other members of the Politburo is an important one that cannot be fully considered here. Regardless, either one of these foci does not pay much attention to the issue of rank-and-file perpetrators; neither their reasons for participating in a regime of repression nor the status that many of them later held as victims of the same regime of repression is given any consideration. This elides these individuals' lived experience of "complex personhood," in which people "remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others [ . . . ] people suffer graciously and selfishly too" (Gordon, 2008: 5). In other words, such approaches do not leave room for exploration of the various choices these people made and the consequences that ensued throughout their lives (though see Dixon, 2017 and Wollaston, 2016, for analysis of the ethical challenges of representing perpetrators). Although there are scattered instances in which the stories of perpetrators are told within the Lubyanka heritagescape—for example, during interpretation at the Garage Shooting Range—this is the exception rather than the rule. Thus, questions of complicity with repressive regimes that might nudge visitors to think about their own roles in contemporary human rights abuses remain unvoiced—even though *Memorial Human Rights Centre's* activities did include campaigning and activism to help the victims of contemporary oppression, like persecuted members of the LGBTQ+ community in Chechnya. In *Memorial's* new, unofficial form, its former staffers are continuing their education and research activities while also advising Russian citizens about protesting the war in Ukraine and providing links to legal aid resources

## Conclusion: accountability and the heritagescape

Is it possible for a heritage site to display accountability? That is to say: does an institution or its successor attempt to hold itself accountable for past repression and violence? Blameability is rooted in the past and tends to assign culpability to specific people or groups, while accountability speaks to the acknowledgment of continuities in power structures and institutions as well as ongoing legacies of repression (Comer, 2019: 160). Heritage actors attempting to promote such narratives face myriad challenges, including government opposition, lack of funding, and the problems of Internet communication.

We have reviewed the different ways in which non-official actors, such as NGOs and activists, intervene in the Lubyanka heritagescape to draw attention to the history and legacies of Soviet repression in contemporary Russia. Some of these projects leave tangible, permanent traces, such as the Solovetsky Stone memorial or the Last Address plaques. Other initiatives are intangible, involving group ceremonies or gatherings, which might take place annually or be organized spontaneously, in response to an alleged human rights abuse perpetrated by the Russian government. Many of these activities emphasize returning personhood to the victims of repression, whether through name-reading rituals or the installation of memorial plaques. These initiatives bring individual victims out of obscurity, into the light of remembrance. Attempts to identify specific perpetrators of past violence are less common. Although participants in the Return of Names might mention Stalin or another Politburo member by name, it is rare for any of these initiatives to tackle the phenomenon of rank-and-file perpetration or directly address the fact that many perpetrators later became victims themselves. However, this does not mean that issues of perpetration and state violence go wholly unaddressed. Sometimes, such as at the protests against contemporary abuses of power, protestors choose the Lubyanka building as a site of protest to underline a perceived inherited legacy of government oppression.

In these cases, the site of the protest holds meaning precisely because of the crimes committed on-site by the FSB's predecessors. In other cases, such as during the Return of Names, mourning the victims of past repression takes on many layers of meaning at a site that is both overlooked by

the façade of past repression and centered on a piece of the first gulag camp's landscape, which was carefully moved to that specific spot because of the Lubyanka building's symbolism as a place of state violence (Bogumil, 2018: 46–48). These actors can be viewed as working within the heritagescape to assign accountability on behalf of institutions that do not reckon with their inherited legacies of violence and repression.

Considering the many difficulties that are involved in installing permanent memorials on the landscape, the digital sphere has provided a space of relatively unfettered communication and information dissemination to many memory actors. Digital spaces such as those considered here allow memory actors to reintroduce stories of repression, victimhood, perpetration, and accountability onto a landscape that is officially anathema to these narratives. They provide an additional layer of interpretation to an in-person visit and complement temporal ceremonies like those held on and around official memorial days.

Thus, we see that the heritagescape as theorized by Garden can have a digital layer as well, one whose importance cannot be underestimated in an increasingly connected, digitally mediated world. As smartphone-equipped visitors enter the Lubyanka area, the digital layer is no longer clearly delineated from the material one; it can also be used to access more information than could ever be engraved on a single plaque. Furthermore, the digital heritagescape offers an alternative to physical memorials when there is financial difficulty or political opposition to tangibly intervening in the landscape. This level of communication opens new possibilities of memory, education, and activism to a broad and potentially global audience.

Although *Memorial* has been officially liquidated, tours of the area continue, and affiliated social media channels share both historical information and real-time information on government abuses, especially those related to the war in Ukraine, fighting to assign a measure of past and present accountability to the Russian state. In this sense, organized and unorganized acts of embodied memory intertwine with a newer, digital layer of heritage to create an arena where dissonant and nonhegemonic memory narratives can still be voiced and witnessed, facing down authoritarian measures that try to silence this uncomfortable past and its present-day ramifications.

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## Notes

1. The case studies used in this article, as well as the heritage concepts of grievability, blameability, and accountability, are material from my PhD thesis (Comer, 2019). However, the lenses through which these sites are examined here, especially those relating to transitional justice and the Russian war in Ukraine, differ completely from that text. In addition, all text about these case studies and theories have been completely rewritten, except in the case of direct citations.
2. As J. Arch Getty et al. (1993) explain, “Revisionists have accused the other side of using second-hand sources and presenting figures that are impossible to justify, while the proponents of high estimates have criticized revisionists for refusing to accept grisly facts and even for defending Stalin” (p. 1018).
3. Petr Pavlensky received political asylum in France in 2017 after being accused of sexual assault by a colleague in Russia; he and other dissidents have called this accusation “politically motivated,” akin to the child sexual abuse case against memory activist Yury Dmitriev. Pavlensky has continued to make controversial art and has been arrested multiple times in connection with these actions.
4. My thinking about the danger to the Russian state that stems from its silencing of the Lubyanka’s violent heritage, a “dangerous ruin,” owes a great debt to Dacia Viejo Rose, Paola Filippucci, and Gilly Carr.
5. *Memorial* was officially “liquidated” by the Russian courts in December 2021, with the decision upheld for *International Memorial* in January 2022 and for *Memorial Human Rights Centre* in April 2022.
6. Even before the USSR collapsed, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) passed legislation regarding the rehabilitation of victims of Soviet repression; the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression was declared in connection with this legislation in October 1991 (RSFSR Supreme Council, 1991). On this date in 1974, “prisoners in the labor camps went on a hunger strike in protest against the political repressions in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and against the inhuman treatment of the prisoners in prisons and labor camps” (Cingerová and Dulebová, 2020: 82). Thus, it is unlikely that the date was chosen arbitrarily; however, it has never been as widely commemorated as, for example, Victory Day.
7. This joint award was controversial; although both Bialiaty and *Memorial* starkly oppose human rights abuses and acts of war carried out by their respective governments, some Ukrainian activists and their supporters found this grouping problematic, either because it seemed to promote the Russocentric idea of the three “brotherly nations” or because Russia and Belarus were actively attacking Ukraine at the time of the award ceremony.
8. A full list of 2022 locations is available here: <https://october29.ru/cities-2022/>
9. Это прямо здесь, available at <https://topos.memo.ru/>
10. In both the USSR and the Russian Federation, there have been several rounds of official rehabilitation offered to victims of Soviet repression; this entails acquitting each victim of the “crimes” they were convicted of at the time, while living rehabilitees are entitled to a small amount of financial compensation. In the Soviet period, rehabilitation could mean the lifting of restrictions on where one could work or live. Posthumous rehabilitation is also possible and could ease similar restrictions on the families of the repressed. However, not all victims of repression have been deemed rehabilitated: some because they were not convicted under articles widely recognized as tools of repression now, and some because they are deemed to have committed too many crimes before they became victims. In the words of Alter L. Litvin (2001), “Juridically, rehabilitation is an unsatisfactory measure because it does not condemn the system as such, but simply recognizes its destructive effects, exposes its secrets and shows how it can be reformed. It leaves a legal vacuum. This could be filled only if judgment were passed on the criminal regime itself and on those who did its bidding” (p. 95).

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