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WITNESS MEMORIES OF DEPORTATION

Sapiyat Saipuddinovna Tsutsulaeva (a)*, Eliza Mokhmadovna Yangulbaeva (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Chechen State University, 32, Sheripova Str., Grozny, 364021, Russia, sapiyat_univ@mail.ru,

(b) Chechen State University, 32, Sheripova Str., Grozny, 364021, Russia, drevniimir95@mail.ru

Abstract

In modern historical science, the study of the 'subtle' everyday activities of an 'ordinary' person in 'unusual' conditions is of heightened interest. The issue of deportation is no exception. One of the relevant directions in the study of everyday life is the memories of deported peoples. In the paper, based on the source material, the author has shown the tragic pages in the life of the Chechen people associated with deportation. Deportation is an unhealed wound in the heart of the Chechen people. The memories of the witnesses cited by the author show both the inhumanity of the authorities and the desire of the doomed to survive in any situation. Their memories reflect the atmosphere in which they had to survive at the most difficult time. Statistical data indicate a high mortality rate in the first years of deportation due to the dire consequences of forced resettlement. Special settlers, heads of families or persons substituting them, were obliged to inform the NKVD about all changes in the family composition within three days. Thus, the deported peoples, including the Chechen people, were completely at the mercy of the special commandant's offices. According to agent's reports, Chechens were persecuted even for the idea of an offense against the Soviet regime, which was viewed as an anti-Soviet speech. However, the deported Chechen people, like other peoples, overcame moral and material hardships to survive and preserve their ethnic culture.

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1. Introduction

On February 23, 1944, about 77 years ago, almost half a million of Chechens were deported from the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and adjacent territories to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The secret operation code-named *Chechevitsa* was one of the largest ethnic deportations in the history of the Soviet Union.

As a result of this operation, tens of thousands of people died due to difficulties on the way to their settlements and difficult living conditions such as lack of housing, lack of food, medical care, clothing and basic necessities (Kulagina & Shchepakov, 1999).

After the deportation of residents, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was officially removed as an administrative unit, and its territories were transferred to the newly created Grozny Region, the Dagestan and North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics and the Georgian SSR (Milova, 1992).

In January 1957, the Chechen-Ingush SSR was recreated within slightly altered borders. In 1957–1962, the overwhelming majority of Chechens returned to their homeland.

2. Problem Statement

In those terrible and cold days of February 1944, the Chechens were deprived of their homeland and left to die in a foreign land. The ethnocide of the Stalin-Beria clique against our people was aimed at destruction. Neither children, nor women, nor old people were spared. At that time, the glorious sons of Checheno-Ingushetia fought heroically at the fronts of the Great Patriotic War. The Chechen people took part in the heroic defense of the Brest Fortress. A lot of Chechens were awarded medals and orders. There is no justification for the mean and cynical crime of the totalitarian regime against the Chechens and other deported peoples. The day of February 23 marks a national tragedy of the Chechens and Ingush, because deportation caused the demographic catastrophe: thousands and thousands of people died. These irreparable losses were caused by illness, hunger, and inhuman living conditions for the Chechens and Ingush, especially in the first years of their stay in a foreign land.

3. Research Questions

The forcible deprivation of the homeland is the most terrible punishment in the world. The deportation of the Vainakh peoples is one of the most tragic pages in the history of the Chechens and Ingush. Every year there are fewer and fewer of those who survived that difficult time. The paper presents memories of deported Chechens. Memories are a specific genre of literature, the documentary nature of which is based on the testimony of witnesses of the described events. Memories help restore many facts that are poorly reflected in other sources. The main thing is to preserve the memories of old people who witnessed those terrible events of February 1944. This type of sources has a number of distinctive features, both in the field of knowledge provided and in the field of criticism. Work with personal documents is difficult due to the fact that they are close, to a certain extent, to literary works. In this study, only one type of personal documents is of interest – memories of the deported Chechens.

The study investigates the works by Russian scientists Maksimov (2014), Bugay (1990, 1992, 1995), Lidzhiyeva, (2014), Tsutsulaeva (2019, 2020), Patiev (2004) and others, which contain documents, materials and memories of deportation during the Great Patriotic War.

4. Purpose of the Study

In the paper, the author aimed to discuss memories of the Chechen people of deportation on ethnic grounds obtained in the interviews of people who were witnesses of the events. The paper presents memories of the Chechen people of deportation, death of relatives, life in exile, and return to the homeland.

5. Research Methods

The principles of objectivity, science and historicism were used as methodological basis to study the facts and phenomena in all their diversity, in specific historical conditions of their emergence and development, and to highlight both the positive and negative aspects of the problem. The study employed a comprehensive approach, the methods of objective historical comparison and comparative analysis.

6. Findings

The history of the Soviet Union is full of forced resettlement of people, both individually and in groups. The whole families, villages and peoples were evicted. Deportation to Central Asia caused severe demographic and ethnocultural problems; at the same time, for many Chechens, Germans, Ingush, Balkars, Kalmyks, Karachais and other peoples this event significantly affected their self-consciousness and perception through tough boundaries of ethnicity.

A. Muradov, a resident of the village of Roshni-Chu, says: 'We lived in the Tista farm (Nashkha village, Galanchozh district). There were 6–7 farms in total. Our house was on the outskirts. Nearby was the Khaibakh farm. During the eviction, everyone in our family was sick with typhus: me, my mother Bakka, sister Zaripat, brothers Umar, Akhyad, who was demobilized from the army, Shaman, Uvais, Abu and his daughter Ashkhu. The little Uvais was in a relatively good state.

Three days after the eviction, Uvais went to fetch water and stayed behind for some reason. After a while, he came back and said:

– In Khaibakh, dogs are barking, shots are heard and smoke can be seen...

It turned out that the soldiers gathered all the residents of the village of Nashkha in Khaibakh. Most of them were locked in the long barn of Movla, the son of Chebirg, and the rest were taken away. The soldiers said that the rest would then be brought by car. And those who were taken away thought that they would be returned home. The hopes of those and others did not come true. The soldiers committed an act of vandalism: they forced people to bring hay into the barn, threw gasoline and set it on fire. People tried to get out through the door and windows, the soldiers fired at them. I found out about that event later. I suppose, the number of victims was approaching 147 ...

On the fourth day after the eviction, several soldiers entered our house. They looked at us as if they were looking for someone. Their looks and voices were severe. When one of the soldiers approached me, I tried to get up as I was lying on the bed. The hand I pulled to lean on brushed against the mattress. After that, two soldiers ran up to me, grabbed my hands, ripping apart my sleeves, dragged me into the yard and threw me on a stone. The rest were dragged there. One of the soldiers came up and put a rifle to my left cheek.

The others were three or four steps away from me. An officer stood aside, who apparently was the commander. He ordered: 'Fire!' I thought that Umar, who knew Russian, had said something impartial and angered the officer. Therefore, they were ordered to shoot at him. Turning around, I managed to say: 'Look, Umar, keep silence.' But at that moment a shot rang out. The bullet went through my right shoulder and broke the jaw. I was thrown aside. Again I heard: 'Fire!' Shots rang out. Several bullets entered my body. After that, they pierced me with a bayonet, lifted and threw into a cliff. I fainted...

After a while I came to myself and opened my eyes. I could not move my hand. Both legs were riddled with bullets, covered in blood, the broken jaw drooped helplessly. I did not know where I was. I thought about my family as I knew they had been shot. I wanted to know what happened to them. I looked up and realized that it is necessary to crawl a long distance. I tried to move but it did not work, my clothes froze to the cold ground. 'They shot at my mother,' my heart ached. I felt a surge of strength and forgot about my pain. One hand, the left, moved and I leant on it to crawl forward. The earth attracted me like a magnet. I did not know how long I had been crawling ...

I approached and saw a terrible picture: a mother, a brother and his three sons were lying dead. Each of them was killed with shots in the neck. Everyone's throats were ripped apart as if with a knife. I laid them flat, read my death prayer and crawled to look for my sister, she was not among them. She crawled away from them a little, still alive, but soon she died.

I was not far from the house but I did not dare to approach, because there could be soldiers. I crawled to a hole near the shore and lay down there, hoping that a landslide would cover me. I did not want dogs to tear my body to pieces after death.

At dawn I saw a soldier on the roof of my house. He looked around. Although I was in a difficult situation, I did not want to die now. I had been lying for three days there and did not move. Then I crawled back to my dead family members. They laid in the same position ...

Later, Yandarov Abdul-Hamid and Baudi from Urus-Martan, priests respected by the authorities, came to the village. They asked us to come to the authorities. Then we (including my brother and the people who were called abreks) gathered at the Yandarovs' in Roshni-Chu. They explained everything to us as it was. We understood. After that, we helped them to gather other people who remained in the cutans, and those who, willingly or unwillingly, became abreks. Sometimes those who paid a bride to the authorities to avoid military duties had to become abreks. Hiding from people and authorities, they became abreks. The authorities called them enemies, traitors. Yet the Vainakhs were never enemies and traitors. It should be noted that educational work among the population was rather weak. The authorities sent a person to prison as soon as someone pointed the finger at him. People were losing faith in the authorities. They, who never knew what a city, a car, a train, a war, easily believed in what they were told.

In March 1945, we were all brought to Alma-Ata and assigned to different places. Some were accused of sabotage and aiding the enemy and sent to prisons. I was also accused of being an abrek and was sentenced to 8 years ... ' (White Book, 1991).

In the memoirs of Aza Vitaeva, the deportation echoes with pain in the heart: 'I was born in the village of Dattakh, Nozhai-Yurt district. Our family was small – parents, me and two younger sisters. I was five years old when we were sent into exile, like many others. We were herded into dirty cattle carriages. Women, men, children, young and old – all were together in terrible conditions. People were seized by panic, children were crying, breastfeeding mothers lost their milk. It is impossible to describe this terrible day using words.

During the fourteen days' journey, many people died of hunger and cold. It was especially difficult for children. Women wrapped them up in their own things.

At each station, the military entered the carriage and threw out the corpses and sick. I caught a cold and had a bad cough. When the train stopped at a station in Kazakhstan, my mother covered me with herself to save me, and told me to sit still. Again they began to throw out the corpses and the sick. Those who put up resistance were shot.

A man sitting next to us betrayed me: he was afraid that I would infect him. I was snatched from my mother's arms. I screamed, clung to my mother, who did not want to release my hand. She begged to leave me in the carriage, but these monsters did not listen to her. My father also tried to save me, but a weapon was pointed at him, and he fell silent. I remember the last words of my mother: 'Daughter, do not forget us!'

I was lying in the snow with those who were thrown out of the train. I do not remember how I felt at that moment. But for me it will forever remain a moment of horror ...

The doctors who examined those who had been thrown out of the train found me still alive and took me to the hospital. I did not know how long I spent there.

When I recovered, I was sent to an orphanage. At first it was very difficult for me, because I did not know Russian and could not say my name, surname, who were my parents, what year I was born. Only the father's name remained in the memory – Shahid. They gave me the name Elya, the surname Shahidova, and wrote the year of birth – 1937.

I finished eight classes in the city of Kyzyl-Orda, after that in 1953 I was sent to study at the agricultural technical college.

After graduating from college, I met Shamad Dombaev in Kazakhstan, and soon we got married. In 1957, we returned to our homeland, to Chechnya, to my husband's village, Shali.

My parents did not stop looking for me, hoping that I survived. My father traveled to Kazakhstan to find his lost daughter. Wherever he visited, but he did not succeed. Luckily, the staff of one of the orphanages recognized me by the description. Moreover, my father met an elderly man who knew my husband. He said that I was married and we left for Shali. My father did not believe his happiness, he immediately returned to Chechnya and came to Shali.

In 1989, we finally met each other. My mother recognized me and burst into tears. But I did not remember the faces of my relatives and could not say for sure that I was their daughter. I remembered only the scar on my mother's palm and asked: 'Do you have a scar on your palm? If there is, then I am

your daughter.' There was a scar and I was so happy to find my relatives again! I was taken to our native village Dattah, I remembered the places where I spent my childhood.

I was one of the few who managed to survive and return home, and most importantly, many years later, I found my relatives, whom I lost in the terrible 44th year' (Ochetova, 2014).

7. Conclusion

Thus, the study yields the conclusion that memories, like no other historical source, are subjective. Nevertheless, despite possible inaccuracies and details erased by time, memories show the difficult state of affairs for the deported Chechens, which bears the imprint of the author's personality. The events of the past years receive new interpretation through the fate of different people. After all, history is the self-knowledge of mankind, and what could be more interesting than the person himself? These memories tell about one of the tragic periods in the history of the Chechen people. Of course, memories of the repressed people will be further collected and published.

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