

# Stalin's Repressions and Rehabilitation of the Victims in the Politics of Memory in Uzbekistan

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This article is devoted to the analysis of how Stalin's repressions are represented in the politics of memory in Uzbekistan, becoming part of the process of constructing a national ideological discourse. Uzbekistan's multi-ethnicity and authoritarian system of governance have had a significant impact on understanding the country's past and the formation of official memory. The research sources included official data, published memoirs, as well as individual interviews with witnesses of the era. The idea that Soviet repressions should be seen in the context of the anti-colonialist struggle against the aggression of the Russian Empire was not an invention of Uzbek political elites, but was developed by Uzbek cultural elites. The first president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, in close dialogue with the Uzbek intellectual elite, contributed to the formation of a national memory of Soviet repressions and their victims. During this period, the rehabilitation of victims of Soviet repressions was carried out selectively. Since Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power, there has been a more liberal government policy and a wider discussion of the issue of Soviet repressions and the rehabilitation of their victims. In official narratives, all residents of the former Uzbek SSR who suffered from Stalinist repressions, regardless of their political position, are considered victims of the Soviet regime. Unlike neighbouring countries, the political and cultural elite of Uzbekistan does not follow the ethnic principle of studying the victims of Soviet repressions, but adheres to internationalism and territoriality.

**Keywords:** memory of Soviet repressions, nation-building, cultural elites, authoritarianism.

## Introduction

During the Soviet era, millions of people became victims of the tyranny of a totalitarian state and were subjected to repression for their political and religious beliefs, and other reasons. The process of rehabilitation of victims of the Stalinist repression began in the second half of the 1950s. Later, the rehabilitation process was stopped. It resumed under public pressure in 1989.

After the collapse of the USSR, the issue of the repressed was closely connected with the criticism of the USSR, which has different forms. In Uzbekistan, within the framework of the nation-building policy, the issue of Stalinist repressions is of particular importance, which is associated with the deeply traumatic consequences of the Soviet era for the religious and cultural values of the local society. Active Russification of ethnic groups, as well as the suppression of cultures and minority leaders, became the main strategy of the Soviet authorities from the mid-1930s.<sup>1</sup> According to official data, more than 100,000 Uzbek citizens in 1937–1953 were subjected to repression. In particular, 13,000 people were shot and thousands of local intelligentsia were exiled.<sup>2</sup>

The multi-ethnic character of independent Uzbekistan and its cultural elites, as well as the complex structure of the Uzbek nation itself, had a significant impact on the understanding of the country's national identity and the past. However, it should be noted that the state policy towards the Soviet past in post-Soviet Uzbekistan varied depending on the personality of the country's president and the interaction between political and cultural elites. The history of independent Uzbekistan can be roughly divided into two long periods, which are associated with the personalities of the presidents of Uzbekistan: Islam Karimov (1991–2016) and Shavkat Mirziyoyev (since December 2016).

Research on Stalinist repressions and their place in historical memory, and nation-building in Uzbekistan can be divided into several groups. The first group includes late Soviet historiography, which had a significant impact on the formation of state policy on nation-building in independent Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan, as in other states of the former USSR,<sup>3</sup> it was only during perestroika that the first publications about those repressed during the Stalinist era appeared in the press. The very first publications about those repressed in Uzbekistan were devoted not only to Uzbeks but also to representatives of other nations, including Kazakhs<sup>4</sup> and Russians.

<sup>1</sup> Samira Samamo, Ulla Savolainen, "Chapter Introduction: Moving Memories of Stalin-Era Repression and Displacement", in: *The Legacies of Soviet Repression and Displacement* (edited by Samira Samamo and Ulla Savolainen), 2023, Milton Park, Oxon: Taylor & Francis, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Репрессия*, выпуск 1, Ташкент, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Раса Чепайтене, "Тулаговский опыт в культурных нарративах и коллективной идентичности постсоветской Литвы", in: *Вестник археологии, антропологии и этнографии*, 2021, № 2 (53), с. 166–176.

<sup>4</sup> Рано Раджапова, "Имя, возвращенное истории и народу", in: *Общественные науки в Узбекистане*, 1988, № 12, с. 17–30.

The second group of studies relates to Uzbek historiography of the independence era (1992–2024) and is characterised by an anti-colonial approach. In Uzbek public discourse, “colonialism” (*mustamlakacilik*) was used to describe the negative aspects of the Soviet period, but the term only came into use gradually during the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Bakhtiyor Hasanov defended his doctoral (habilitation) dissertation, which reflected the state policy towards the cultural elite and the tragic fate of representatives of the intelligentsia of Uzbekistan.<sup>6</sup> The Red Terror and Stalinist repressions against the cultural elite were the subject of research by Zamira Ishankhodzhaeva.<sup>7</sup>

The State museum of memory of the victims of the repressions<sup>8</sup> has published six editions of scientific collections.<sup>9</sup> Rustambek Shamsuddinov created a group of researchers at Andijan State University who have been studying repression for many years and publishing articles and books.<sup>10</sup> A separate topic about Stalin's repressions was about the deported people. After 2012, the number of publications about repressed Russians, Tatars and other nationalities increased in Uzbekistan. R. Shigabdinov wrote about the repressed Tatars, in particular Gaziz Gubaidullin.<sup>11</sup> The fates of the deported kulaks (peasants) were reflected in the work of Uzbek historians.<sup>12</sup> During the years of independence, a series of documentaries about repressed representatives of the intelligentsia of Uzbekistan was shot in Uzbekistan. Askar Dzhumashev wrote that from 1933 to 1938 more than 10,000 people were repressed in Karakalpakstan [an autonomous republic in Uzbekistan].<sup>13</sup> Unlike Kazakhstan, where research is being conducted on Stalin's repressions against ethnic Kazakhs in the Central Asian republics,<sup>14</sup> in Uzbekistan there is no ethnic approach to this issue.

The third group of studies touched upon different aspects of the interpretation of the Stalin period in the history of Uzbekistan. These studies draw on contemporary theoretical

<sup>5</sup> Laura Adams, *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Бахтиёр Хасанов, *Национальная интеллигенция Узбекистана и исторические процессы 1917–начала 50-х годов*, Ташкент, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Замира Ишанходжаева, *Репрессивная политика советской власти и культура Узбекистана: трагедия выживания (1925–1953 гг.)*, Ташкент: Тафаккур, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> <[http://muzey-xotira.uz/en/en\\_about-museum/#bosses\\_en](http://muzey-xotira.uz/en/en_about-museum/#bosses_en)>, [2024-10-16].

<sup>9</sup> *Тарихнинг номатълум саҳифалари. Хужжат ва материаллар. Биринчи китоб*, Тошкент: Ғафур Ғулом номидаги нашриёт-матбаа ижодий уйи, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Рустам Шамсутдинов, *Қишлоқ фожеаси: жамоалаштириш, қулоқлаштириш, сургун*, Тошкент: Шарқ, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> *У истоков узбекской историографии: взгляд татарских учёных Г. Губайдуллина и Б. Салиева*, Отв. ред Р. Шигабдинов, Казань: ИЯЛИ, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Рустам Шамсутдинов, Анвар Мамажонов, *Шимолий Кавказ сургундаги юртдошлар қисмати*, Тошкент: Шарқ, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Аскар Джумашев, „Политические репрессии 30-х годов советской власти в Каракалпакстане и ее последствия“, in: *Ўзбекистон тарихи*, 2020, № 1, с. 60.

<sup>14</sup> *Политические репрессии среди казахов на территории республик Средней Азии в 20–50-е годы XX века (в свете новых архивных источников)*, Алматы, 2021, с. 186.

approaches to nationalism, postcolonialism and nation-building. Certain aspects of the ideas of the State museum of memory of the victims of the repressions Tashkent were studied by the Russian scholar Sergei Abashin.<sup>15</sup> He did not take into account the historical memory of numerous victims of Soviet repressions, which was reflected in a number of publications from 1988 to 2000. Marlene Laruelle notes that under the conditions of an authoritarian regime and pursuing his political interests, Karimov reinterpreted the ideas of fighters against the Soviets.<sup>16</sup> The perception of Stalin and Stalin's repressions on the example of the population of the Fergana Valley was studied by Timur Dadabaev. Based on surveys, he was able to identify versions of the positive interpretation of the personality of Stalin in Uzbekistan.<sup>17</sup>

The present study differs from previous ones in that it is devoted to the analysis of how Stalin's repressions are represented in the politics of memory in Uzbekistan. The article also aims to shed light on how the forms and meanings of representations of Soviet repressions in official memory changed over time. It is argued that the politics of memory in Uzbekistan and the attitude towards Stalinist repressions is carried out through the interaction of the political and intellectual elite. The dynamics of these relationships depend on which circles of the cultural elite are close to certain influential political figures of our time, or are themselves part of the political elite. In what chronological framework are Stalinist-Soviet or colonial repressions in Uzbekistan defined? What are the criteria by which victims of Stalinist or Soviet repression are determined? How was the official policy formed and changed about repression and the Soviet era in Uzbekistan? How are the victims of repression being rehabilitated? Special attention will be paid to the institutionalisation of memorialisation of Soviet repressions in Uzbekistan in this article.

The politics of memory includes public activities of various social institutions and actors aimed at promoting certain interpretations of the collective past.<sup>18</sup> The past in people's imagination has multiple forms and consists of numerous conflicting and complex versions.<sup>19</sup> Does the nature of the state allow for a pluralistic debate? The relationship of individuals to public forms of official memory is complex, and public narratives can resonate with personal experiences.

<sup>15</sup> Сергей Абашин, "Мустакиллик и память об имперском прошлом: проходя по залам ташкентского Музея памяти жертв репрессий", in: *Неприкосновенный запас*, 2009, № 4, с. 37–54.

<sup>16</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *Central Peripheries: Nationhood in Central Asia*, London: UCL Press, 2021, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> Timur Dadabaev, "Trauma and Public Memory in Central Asia: Public Responses to Political Violence of the State Policies in Stalinist Era in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan", in: *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 2009, No. 3 (1), pp. 108–138.

<sup>18</sup> Olga Malinova, "Politics of Memory and Nationalism", in: *Nationalities Papers*, 2021, No. 49 (6), pp. 997–1007.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Herzfeld, *A Place in History. Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 226.

The sources of the research include official data, published and unpublished memoirs, and individual interviews with witnesses of that era. The interviewees fall into several groups, but the largest number are children and grandchildren of the 'victims of 1937–1938'. As to social background, the majority come from the urban and rural intelligentsia – teachers and scholars, while others were former party workers.

## Discourses on Soviet Repressions

Several historians believe that the violence of the decades after 1917 must be understood in the context of such issues as the global violence of the First World War, and the colonial struggle.<sup>20</sup> Memoirs and literary works about the Soviet era have played a major role in the broad public discussion of Stalin's repressions. As the Uzbek writer Kamil Ikramov (1927–1989) noted in 1989, "the lie about the voluntary annexation of Turkestan [in the pre-Soviet and early Soviet period, Turkestan was a general name for the whole of Central Asia] to Russia, established by the monstrous repressions of Stalin, his Joint State Political Directorate (*Объединённое государственное политическое управление – ОGPU*), then Yezhov [head of the NKVD from 1936 to 1938] and Beria [chief of the Soviet secret police] must finally be exposed".<sup>21</sup> Shukrullo Yusupov (1921–2020) the Uzbek writer, poet, translator and playwright was convicted in 1951 on charges of nationalism and anti-Soviet activity, and sentenced to 25 years in prison. His arrest, investigation and the stay in the camp are described in the autobiographical story "Buried Without a Shroud" (*Kafansiz ko'milganlar*), published in 1995.<sup>22</sup> The Uzbek writer Tog'aymurod Mengnorov (1948–2003) wrote the novel "Father's Valleys" (*Otamdan qolgan dalalar*) and in 1998, based on this novel, director Shuhrat Abbasov made a film that reflected the repressions from the Russian conquest of Central Asia to the repressions of the 1980s. The writer Poyon Ravshanov (1941–2020) wrote novels that showed the struggle against the expansion of the Russian Empire and the Soviet repressions in Uzbekistan.<sup>23</sup>

Uzbek historians believe that the great terror of 1937–1938 was started by Lenin and later, Stalin brought it to its climax.<sup>24</sup> Stalin turned political terror into official state policy and gave it a legitimate, legal character.<sup>25</sup> Researchers in Uzbekistan noted that the

<sup>20</sup> James Harris, "General Introduction", in: *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin* (edited by James Harris), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Камил Икрамов, *Дело моего отца*, Москва: Советский писатель, 1991, с. 74.

<sup>22</sup> Шукрулло, *Погребенные без савана*, Ташкент: Ёзувчи, 1995.

<sup>23</sup> Поён Равшанов, *Қизил салтанат исканжасида. Қатағон. (Хуржжатлардаги тарих). Учинчи жилд* [In the clamp of the Red Empire. Repression, [Third volume], Тошкент: Sharq, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Наим Каримов, "Ўзбекистонда "катта қирғин"нинг бошланиши", in: *Ўзбекистонда совет давлатининг қатағон сиёсати: келиб чиқиши сабаблари ва фожияли оқибатлари*, Тошкент, 2012, с. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Замира Ишанходжаева, *op. cit.*, с. 26.

review and approval of family lists with a predetermined punishment were carried out by Stalin himself and his closest associates.<sup>26</sup> Condemnation of Stalin and Stalin's repressions was reflected in Bahrom Irzaev's monograph. He believed that local communist leaders were victims of this repression and some of them, such as Akmal Ikramov, even opposed the repression.<sup>27</sup>

According to Uzbek historians, various people holding different political views fell under repression, including the Bolsheviks themselves. They believe that we must pay tribute to the memory of all our fallen compatriots, to those who did not accept the Bolshevik ideology, and to those who served it. This approach to interpreting the status of the repressed was supported by the current leadership of Uzbekistan.

The subject of debate is the status of the repressed; for example, there are different views on the Basmachi<sup>28</sup> movement (1918–1930), which during the Soviet period was considered criminal and counter-revolutionary. Some researchers generally reject the current use of this term, believing that it was invented by the communists. They suggest using the term *istiqlolchilar* (independence fighters). Kahramon Radjabov considered Basmachi and Jadidism (a modernist movement in Central Asia) as a single national liberation movement.<sup>29</sup> The third group of researchers believes that it is necessary to distinguish bandit formations from supporters of the independence movement; the fourth group still adheres to the Soviet interpretation of this movement. Another group of intellectuals believes that there was no general resistance movement against Soviet power, but rather isolated pockets of struggle for the independence of individual regions. According to Marlene Laruelle, Islam played a significant role in the ideology of the Basmachi movement against the Soviet regime in the 1920s, which created problems for Karimov due to the secular authoritarianism that was legitimised by the fight against religious fundamentalism. Therefore, the Basmachi movement was gradually interpreted as an “armed movement”, and the role of Islam in the idea of national liberation was ignored.<sup>30</sup>

According to researchers, archival materials of those arrested in the Samarkand region show that they were falsely accused of participating in such nationalistic or religious organisations as *Ittihod va Taraqqiy*, *Milliy Ittikhod*, *Shuroi Islomiya*, *Shuroi Ulamo* and *Milliy*

<sup>26</sup> Репрессия, выпуск 1, *op. cit.*, с. 206.

<sup>27</sup> Бахром Ирзаев, “Катта қирғин”нинг келиб чиқиши арафасидаги сиёсий-ижтимоий ва иқтисодий шароит, Тошкент: Фан, 2014, с. 23.

<sup>28</sup> The term “Basmachi” means “bandit”. The communists used this term for resistance fighters in Central Asia in an attempt to convince the public that the fighters were nothing more than criminals.

<sup>29</sup> Kahramon Radjabov, “Struggle for Independence in Turkestan and Muslim clergy”, in: *Oriente Moderno, Nuova serie, Anno 87, No. 1, Studies on Central Asia* 2007, pp. 177–188.

<sup>30</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

*Istiqlol*.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, despite extensive research, the question of the real existence of anti-Soviet organisations in the 1930s remains open.

In general, unlike Russia where there are conflicting interpretations of the events of the 1930s, discourses negatively related to this period dominate in Uzbekistan. In assessing the population's memory of the organiser of repressions – dictator Stalin – researchers of the history of Uzbekistan have come to different conclusions. Dadabaev noted that despite the recognition by the residents of Uzbekistan of many negative aspects associated with Stalin, the positive images of Stalin remain in the minds of people.<sup>32</sup> Existing materials and public opinion in Uzbekistan show that we must be careful with such a generalisation of opinions in Uzbek society about Stalin. Stalin's positive image is preserved among those who did not suffer from his repressions, and mainly among former members of the KGB of the USSR, their agents and some war veterans.

During the Soviet era, religious leaders were especially subjected to repression. I was able to record traumatic stories of repression against the Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) and Khojas (descendants of Islamic saints). During the years of Soviet power, the Khojas and Sayyids of the Bukhara Oasis lost their property and privileges, and their leaders were repressed. Khoja intellectuals emphasised that their grandfathers suffered greatly from Stalin's repressions, which had a huge traumatic impact on the society, especially in Bukhara, which was a major centre of religious education in pre-Soviet Central Asia. The Khojas were officially identified and branded as “socially alien elements” or “class enemies”. (Interviews, Bukhara, February–March 2011). Similar stories about traumatic events of the Stalin era were recorded among the Khojas of southern Kazakhstan.<sup>33</sup> There were cases when even critics of the Soviet regime did not end up in the Gulag. According to Michael Rywkin (1925–2022),<sup>34</sup> in Samarkand in 1944–1945, separate youth groups critically discussed Soviet power, but they were not repressed (interview, New York, May 2019). Apparently, none of them reported such conversations to the secret police (NKVD). I recorded cases when, on the eve of arrest, some people fled to other regions and thus they avoided arrest and survived (interview, Samarkand, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Рустам Шамсуддинов, Элёр Холмирзаев, *Коллективлаштириш ва «катта террор» даврида қатағон қилинган ватандошларимизнинг хотира китоби*, Тошкент: Янги аср авлоди, 2015, с. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Timur Dadabaev, *Identity and Memory in post-Soviet Central Asia: Uzbekistan's Soviet Past*, London: Routledge, 2015, p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> Azim Malikov, “Sacred Lineages in Central Asia: Translocality and Identity”, in: *Mobilities, Boundaries, and Travelling Ideas: Rethinking Translocality Beyond Central Asia and the Caucasus* (edited by Manja Stephan-Emmrich and Philipp Schröder), 2018, Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, p. 140.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Rywkin (1925–2022), American scientist, specialist in Central Asia. Born in Vilnius. In 1941–1945 he was evacuated to Uzbekistan. He joined the City College of New York in 1963 as Professor and Director of Russian Area Studies and remained there until his retirement in 1993.

As Igor Torbakov noted, a “nationalised” history is necessary for the imaginary image of the nation, but at the same time, the traditional national narrative can be filled with a multi-ethnic or transnational approach.<sup>35</sup> Currently, the multi-ethnic approach dominates the politics of Uzbekistan. According to Laura Adams, the Uzbek government seeks to emulate a secular, civic-national model of statehood, which is partly due to the Soviet legacy of internationalism and the pressure of international norms.<sup>36</sup> The officials of Uzbekistan emphasise that Soviet repressions were directed not only against Uzbeks but also against representatives of other nationalities. Researchers admit that certain people were deported from different regions of the USSR to Uzbekistan. In 1943–1944, Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Greeks and Meskhetian Turks were resettled to Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan, data is published on repressed people of various professions and different nationalities such as Belarusians, Jews, Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, Kyrgyz, Latvians, Lithuanians, Russians, Tajiks, Tatars and Ukrainians.<sup>37</sup> The Uzbek authorities follow the principle of territorialism when defining categories of repressed people. Ethnic Uzbeks who lived outside the Uzbek SSR and suffered from Stalin’s repressions do not figure in official narratives in Uzbekistan.

### **The Politics of Memory in Uzbekistan and the Institutionalisation of the Memory of Repression Victims**

The Central Asian states are inventive in using different sets of tools to represent the nation. These include new official historiography, school textbooks, updating exhibits or creating new museums, as well as changes to urban landscapes, toponyms or new monuments.<sup>38</sup> The essence of the politics of memory is the creation of various films, memorials, toponyms, museums, public holidays, symbols and rituals.<sup>39</sup>

According to Igor Torbakov, a serious obstacle to dialogue and discussion about different images of the past is an authoritarian political culture that is intolerant of dissent, debate and competing ideas.<sup>40</sup> Although many actors are involved in the politics of memory, under the conditions of authoritarian rule in Uzbekistan, the role of the state in this process and the official interpretation of the Soviet era and Stalinist repressions take on

<sup>35</sup> Igor Torbakov, “History, Memory and National Identity: Understanding the Politics of History and Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Lands”, *Demokratizatsiya*, 2011, No. 19 (3), p. 224.

<sup>36</sup> Laura Adams, *op. cit.*, pp. 104–105.

<sup>37</sup> *Репрессия. 1937–1938 гг.: Документы и материалы. Выпуск 4: Жертвы Большого террора из Узбекистана. 1937 год, декабрь*, Составители: Шамсутдинов Р. Т., Абдуллаев М., Дусматов Э. П., Курбанов Х. Р. Ташкент: Шарк, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Samira Saramo, Ulla Savolainen, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Igor Torbakov, *op. cit.*, p. 223.



special significance. According to some researchers, intellectual elites in Uzbekistan are largely marginalised by the current political elites.<sup>41</sup> A study of state policy on perpetuating the memory of the victims of Stalinist repressions in Uzbekistan allows us to assert that representatives of the intellectual elite Bakhtiyor Khasanov, Naim Karimov and a number of others actively interacted with the political elite on the issue of developing a strategy for studying and popularising certain aspects of Stalinist repressions in Uzbekistan.

The theme of mass political repressions of the Stalin era and the rehabilitation of their victims were used by the political elites of the post-Soviet Central Asian republics with the exception of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan there are museums and monuments associated with the memory of Stalin's repressions.<sup>42</sup> A feature of the attitude towards Stalinist repressions and their victims was the selective rehabilitation of certain victims of Soviet repressions. Unlike Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan does not have a law on the rehabilitation of victims of political repression. There are only decrees and orders of the President of Uzbekistan on perpetuating the memory of victims of repression.

Some features of the politics of memory in Uzbekistan can be highlighted: 1) the creation of new ideas that are an alternative to the Soviet historiography; 2) creating various images of Russia, including negative ones; 3) the emergence of new public holidays; 4) renaming streets, squares and other places; 5) the demolition and installation of new monuments – the creation of memorials that carry a symbolic meaning associated with the formation of national identity.<sup>43</sup> In the policy of memory in Uzbekistan in relation to the past and especially the Soviet period, three main stages can be distinguished: 1) 1991–1999; 2) 1999–2016; 3) from 2017 to the present. In the first stage, under the influence of the legacy of the perestroika era in Uzbekistan, archives were opened, research was conducted and materials on Soviet repressions in 1917–1989 were published. In the second stage, the state more actively participated in the formation of the memory of repression, a day of remembrance for victims of repression was designated, a State museum of memory of the victims of the repressions was created and Books of Memory were published.

Under the first President of Uzbekistan Islam Abduganiyevich Karimov (1991–2016), the Soviet past was interpreted differently at the first stage, then negative perceptions intensified. It should be noted that during this period, some representatives of the country's cultural elite were included in the state apparatus and had a certain influence on the

<sup>41</sup> Diana Kudaibergenova, Boram Shin, "Authors and Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Failed Agency and Nationalising Authoritarianism in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan", in: *Asian Studies Review*, 2018, No. 42 (2), p. 319.

<sup>42</sup> Павел Дятленко, "Взаимосвязь реабилитации жертв сталинских репрессий и политической трансформации постсоветских Центральноазиатских государств", in: *Вестник Кыргызско-Российского славянского университета* [Bulletin of the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University], 2015, No. 15 (12), c. 31–32

<sup>43</sup> Azim Malikov, "The Politics of Memory in Samarkand in Post-Soviet Period", in: *International Journal of Modern Anthropology*, 2018, No. 2 (11), pp. 127–145.

formation of state ideology. For many representatives of the intellectual elite, the era of Soviet repressions was a trauma that affected not only families but spiritual national values and religion. At the same time, it should be noted that in the 1990s and early 2000s, within the cultural elite of Tashkent there were many ambivalent opinions about the Soviet legacy of colonialism, modernisation and cultural development.<sup>44</sup> However, the peculiarities of Uzbekistan's authoritarian system reduced the opportunities for discussion and coexistence of different versions of the interpretation of the Soviet repressions. The policy of Karimov and his circle in relation to the Soviet past is explained by the nature of post-colonial nationalism. Karimov sought to declare a reinterpretation of historical, cultural and ideological ideas in accordance with his own goals.<sup>45</sup> Territoriality – and least of all ethnicity – have become some of the key aspects of national identity that Uzbekistan's political elites are trying to promote.<sup>46</sup>

The discourse of rejecting the heritage of the Soviet era also manifested itself in state policy towards Soviet monuments. From 1992 to 2010, some memorial monuments from the Russian Empire period, as well as the Soviet era, were destroyed in Uzbekistan, including monuments to repressed Uzbek communists (for example, monuments to Akmal Ikramov (1898–1938) and Mirkomil Mirsharapov (1900–1938) in Samarkand were destroyed). This policy expressed the state's strategy for decommunisation and de-Sovietisation of the memorial culture of Uzbekistan.

The demands of intellectuals to perpetuate the memory of those killed during the Russian conquest and Soviet repression were supported by the government of Uzbekistan. However, the initial focus was on Stalin's repressions. In May 1999, the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Perpetuating the Memory of Victims of Repression in Uzbekistan" was published. In June 1999, the charitable foundation "Shahidlar Xotirasi" ("In Memory of the Victims of Repression") was created, which assists in the preparation of a book of memory – "Qatag'on Qurbonlari" ("Victims of Repression"). In July 1999, a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On perpetuating the memory of patriots who gave their lives for the freedom of their homeland and people" was promulgated.

The Shahidlar Xotirasi Memorial Complex (In Memory of the Victims of Repression) was opened on 12 May 2000. Then in May 2001, a decree was issued by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Abduganiyevich Karimov "On establishing a day of remembrance for victims of repression". President Karimov noted in 2001 that "repression

<sup>44</sup> Laura Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew March, "State Ideology and the Legitimation of Authoritarianism: The Case of Post-Soviet Uzbekistan", in: *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 2003, No. 8 (2), p. 212.

<sup>46</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, State Formation and Foreign Policy: Uzbekistan and 'Uzbeks abroad'", in: *Central Asian Survey*, 2007, No. 26 (1), p. 119.

is the basis of the hostile, violent, oppressive and intimidating policy that was carried out against our entire people, a nation in the era of dependence and colonialism. Many innocent people were punished by the tsarist troops during the occupation of Tashkent" [1865].<sup>47</sup> In my opinion, the policy of President Islam Karimov and political elites regarding the Soviet past is explained by the nature of anti-colonial nationalism. In addition, in the 1990s, the Uzbek diaspora abroad exerted a certain influence on the formation of anti-Soviet discourse among the elite of Uzbekistan. The issue of Soviet repressions and anti-Soviet discourse was reflected in the publications of foreign Uzbeks before and during the era of independence, for example Baymirza Hayit,<sup>48</sup> Ahat Andizhan and others.

Cultural elites and their attitude towards Stalinist repressions play an important role in understanding state policy regarding the Soviet past. The cultural elites of Uzbekistan include not only intellectuals from the capital but also from regional centres such as Samarkand, Andijan, Karshi and Bukhara. The initiative to perpetuate the memory of victims of repression was also supported by the regional elites of Uzbekistan. Separate collections were published on the repression of the cultural elite in certain regions and of these, researchers from the Ferghana Valley were the most active. In 2001, in Andijan, Professor Rustam Shamsutdinov created the "Shahidlar Xotirasi" charitable foundation and the International Foundation for the Scientific and Practical Expedition "Meros" ("Heritage"), which collect and publish materials concerning the fate of victims of political repression.<sup>49</sup>

I believe that with Mirziyoyev's coming to power, a new stage in the politics of memory has begun. It assumes a more liberal government policy and a wider discussion of the issue of Soviet repressions and the rehabilitation of its victims. Under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, an order was issued on 8 October 2020 "On additional measures for a deeper study of the heritage and perpetuation of the memory of victims of political repression".<sup>50</sup> To study this issue and perpetuate the memory of victims of repression, and to promote the idea, ministries, museums, the Academy of Sciences, the National Archive and others have been involved. The question has been raised about compiling a complete list of victims of repression. It should be noted that in this complex process, discussions arise about the issue of "executioners" and their "victims". Uzbek authorities continued to clarify the details of the legal aspect of the repressions in the 1920s and 1930s. On 19 April 2023, the Criminal Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Republic of

<sup>47</sup> Ислам Каримов, *За процветание Родины – каждый из нас в ответе*, т. 9, Ташкент: Узбекистон, 2001, с. 330.

<sup>48</sup> Baymirza Hayit, "Turkistan: A Case for National Independence", in: *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs Journal*, 1979, No. 1 (1), pp. 38–50.

<sup>49</sup> *Репрессия*, выпуск 1, *op. cit.*, с. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Распоряжение Президента Республики Узбекистан О дополнительных мерах по более глубокому изучению наследия и увековечению памяти жертв репрессий, 8 декабря 2020 года, in: <<https://lex.uz/docs/5041021>>, [2024-09-30].

Uzbekistan acquitted 208 Uzbek citizens born in the Ferghana, Samarkand and Kashkadarya regions of the country. All of them were sentenced to execution or long terms of imprisonment by decisions of special meetings of the OGPU "troikas" in 1930–1931.<sup>51</sup> It is planned to create corners in memory of victims of repression and books of memory of mahallas [mahalla – local territorial-administrative unit in Uzbekistan], and the annual preparation and publication of collections dedicated to the life and work of victims of repression.<sup>52</sup>

Uzbek historians consider Stalin's repressions in the context and as part of the anti-colonial struggle against the Russian Empire. The issue of Soviet repression is also reflected in school textbooks in Uzbekistan. In the textbook for the 10th grade of secondary schools there is a paragraph "The repressive policy of Soviet power in Uzbekistan: its meaning and consequences".<sup>53</sup> Historians of the Mirziyoyev era pay much attention to studying the lives of the repressed Jadids [modernists]. Currently, some Jadid ideas are selectively used to popularise their ideological platform and are included in official narratives. Unlike the Karimov era, historians can now freely talk about the ideas of Turkism propagated by the Jadids. However, the Islamic elements and local identities expressed by some Jadid leaders remain ignored.

The state's pluralistic policy in studying the past of Uzbekistan allows representatives of local society to openly express different views on the colonial era. Until 2022, other factors such as the consideration of the voices of the Russian diaspora and the historical memory of World War II also played an important role in Uzbekistan's memory policy. For example, a new monument to the Soviet heroes of World War II was erected in Tashkent: Sabir Rakhimov and others, and in 2018, a historical monument – the chapel was restored in memory of the Russian soldiers who fell during the capture of Tashkent in 1865. It should be noted that there are heated debates and alternative opinions on these issues in society. In general, unlike Russia where there are contradictory interpretations of the events of the Stalin era,<sup>54</sup> discourses negatively related to this period dominate in Uzbekistan.

<sup>51</sup> Рустам Темиров, "Узбекистан реабилитировал более 200 жертв сталинских репрессий", in: <[https://central.asia-news.com/ru/articles/cnmi\\_ca/features/2023/05/11/feature-01](https://central.asia-news.com/ru/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2023/05/11/feature-01)>, [2024-09-30].

<sup>52</sup> Шавкат Мирзиёев, "Участникам международной конференции «Джадиды: национальное самосознание, идеи независимости и государственности»", 11-12-2023, in: <<https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/6919>>, [2024-09-30].

<sup>53</sup> Кахрамон Ражабов, Акбар Замонов, *История Узбекистана. Учебник для учащихся 10-классов средних образовательных учреждений и учреждений среднего специального, профессионального образования*, Ташкент: 2017, с. 80.

<sup>54</sup> Kathleen Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 207.

## The State museum of memory of the victims of the repressions<sup>55</sup>

Museums are places that construct specific and selective narratives about identities, “concretising memory or institutionalising a certain vision of history. Museums in the post-Soviet space shape discourse, legitimise national memory and create collective memory”.<sup>56</sup> Museums are unique cultural forms as well as political instruments with specific policy agendas, as well as centres for education, research and knowledge dissemination about the contexts and situations in which violence and injustice occur.<sup>57</sup> The politics of memory entails “remembering” certain events of the past and “forgetting” others.

In 1990–1991, the children of the repressed, including the director of the Astronomical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR Toymas Yuldashbaev, advocated for the creation of a memorial in Tashkent to those who died as a result of Stalin's repressions.<sup>58</sup> Ten years later, the Uzbek authorities decide to create such a museum. The state museum of memory of the victims of the repressions was formed in accordance with the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the establishment of the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Repression” dated 1 May 2001. The museum is located in a place where, from the early 1920s to the end of the 1930s, mass executions of repressed people took place. On the inside of the museum's dome there is an inscription: “The memory of those who died for the freedom of their country must live forever” (in English and Uzbek).

The museum consists of six sections, the exhibits of which chronologically begin with the period of colonisation of Central Asia (Turkestan) by tsarist Russia and the struggle of the local population against the colonisers. Other sections are devoted to the repressions of the 1920s–1950s. Video material in particular contains the memories of children whose parents were dekulakised and expelled from the country, and the difficult conditions in which they were forced to live and work. Separate stands are devoted to the repressions against different nationalities. Thousands of Koreans, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, Volga Germans and representatives of other nationalities were deported from their places of residence to other republics, in particular to Uzbekistan. The last two sections include the repressions of the 1980s, as well as the perpetuation of the memory of those repressed during the years of independence. The museum's exhibitions reflect the history of representatives of all nationalities who suffered from Soviet repression. These facts

<sup>55</sup> <[http://muzey-xotira.uz/en/en\\_about-museum/#bosses\\_en](http://muzey-xotira.uz/en/en_about-museum/#bosses_en)>, [2024-10-16].

<sup>56</sup> Katarzyna Jarosz, “National Narratives of ‘Occupation’ in Historical Museums of the Post-Soviet Landscape”, in: *Visual Histories of Occupation: A Transcultural Dialogue* (edited by Jeremy E. Taylor), 2021, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021, p. 242.

<sup>57</sup> Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018, p. 5

<sup>58</sup> Камил Икрамов, *op. cit.*, с. 256.

refute the opinion of some researchers who wrote that the museum is dedicated only to repressions against Uzbeks.<sup>59</sup>

The State museum of memory of the victims of the repressions shows that the repressions of the peoples of Uzbekistan are somewhat different from Russian narratives in that they are given a general colonial character, covering a longer period.<sup>60</sup> The museum did not arise out of nowhere and this can be easily understood if you read publications from the late 1980s and 1990s, where the problem of trauma and repression was much discussed by the cultural elites of Uzbekistan. The official memory of the repressed and the State museum of memory of the victims of the repressions created by the state evokes support from relatives and descendants of the repressed. However, as Timur Dadabaev noted, there are also different, alternative versions of the perception of the Stalin era.<sup>61</sup>

In 2017, by decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan, the museums “Qatagon qurbonlari hotirasi” (The State museum of memory of the victims of the repressions) were created as part of regional universities, for example at Andijan State University. The principles of compiling exhibitions are similar to the museum in Tashkent but taking into account regional specifics and materials from researchers. A similar museum was created in Urgench, the regional centre of the Khorezm province of Uzbekistan. It reflected the tragic fates of the natives of Khorezm, including the founder of Uzbek cinema, Khudai-bergen Devanov (1879–1938).<sup>62</sup>

There are exhibitions containing information about Stalin's repressions in the house-museums of Abdulla Qodiriy, Oybek in Tashkent and Fayzulla Khojaev in Bukhara. Since 2017, monuments to repressed cultural figures have been erected in Uzbekistan: Abdulla Avloni, Iskhokhon Ibrat, Abdulrauf Fitrat, Abdulhamid Cholpon, Abdulla Qodiriy.

## Conclusions

The multinationality of Uzbekistan and its cultural elites had a significant impact on the understanding of the country's past and the formation of official memory. For many representatives of the intellectual elite, the era of Soviet repression is a trauma that affected not only families, but spiritual national values and religion. The policy of the Gorbachev era and publications by intellectuals about traumatic memories played a major role in the

<sup>59</sup> Zhanat Kundakbayeva, Didar Kassymova, “Remembering and Forgetting: the State Policy of Memorializing Stalin's Repression in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan”, in: *Nationalities Papers*, 2016, No. 44 (4), pp. 611–627.

<sup>60</sup> Виктор Шнирельман, “Музей и конструирование социальной памяти: культурологический подход”, in: *Этнографическое обозрение*, 2010, № 4, с. 24.

<sup>61</sup> Timur Dadabaev, *op. cit.*, p. 91

<sup>62</sup> Хоразм қатагон қурбонлари хотираси музей тарихи, in: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z0YN5xIN7Q>>, [2024-01-15].

beginning of a mass discussion of Stalin's repressions. The idea that Soviet repressions should be viewed in the context of the anti-colonialist struggle against the aggression of the Russian Empire was not an invention of Uzbek political elites, but was developed by local cultural elites and under the influence of Uzbek intellectuals abroad. However, the authoritarian policy of Islam Karimov influenced the interpretation of the ideas of resistance, excluding Islamic and pro-Turkic (pan-Turkic) elements from them.

Since 2017, there has been a more liberal state policy and a wider discussion of the issue of Soviet repression and the rehabilitation of its victims. Unlike neighbouring countries, the political and cultural elites of Uzbekistan do not follow the ethnic principle of studying archival materials on the repressed, but adhere to internationalism and territoriality. Ethnic Uzbeks who lived outside the Uzbek SSR and suffered from Stalin's repressions are not included in the official narratives of Uzbekistan. Compared to the Karimov era, the state is now paying more attention to the issue of rehabilitation of victims of Soviet repressions. In the public discourse of Uzbekistan the problem of those responsible for the repressions is discussed, but the political elites preferred the concept of reconciliation and refused to search for traitors and condemn supporters of the Soviet regime. According to the new policy, all residents of the former Uzbek SSR who suffered from Stalinist repression, regardless of their political position, are considered victims of the Soviet regime.

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### **Stalino represijos ir aukų rehabilitacija Uzbekistano atminties politikoje**

#### *Santrauka*

Šio straipsnio tikslas – išnagrinėti, kaip Stalino represijos atsispindi Uzbekistano atminties politikoje ir tampa nacionalinio ideologinio diskurso konstravimo proceso dalimi. Uzbekistano daugiatautiškumas ir autoritarinė valdymo sistema turėjo didelę įtaką šalies praeities suvokimui ir oficialiosios atminties formavimuisi. Tyrimo šaltiniai – oficialūs duomenys, publikuoti ir nepublikuoti memuarai, taip pat individualūs interviu su epochos liudininkais. Sovietinių represijų vertinimo antikolonialinės kovos prieš Rusijos imperijos agresiją kontekste idėja kilo ne uzbekų politiniam elitui – ją suformulavo ir išplėtojo vietos kultūrinis elitai kartu su užsienyje gyvenančiais uzbekų intelektualais. Pirmasis Uzbekistano prezidentas Islamas Karimovas, glaudžiai bendraudamas su uzbekų intelektualiniu elitu, prisidėjo prie nacionalinės atminties apie sovietines represijas ir aukas formavimo. Šiuo laikotarpiu sovietinių represijų aukų rehabilitacija buvo vykdoma selektyviai. Į valdžią atėjus Šavkatui Mirzijojevui, vyriausybės politika tapo liberalesnė, o sovietinių represijų ir jų aukų rehabilitacijos klausimas pradėtas svarstyti plačiau. Oficialiuose naratyvuose visi buvusios Uzbekijos SSR gyventojai, nukentėję nuo stalininių represijų, nepriklausomai nuo jų politinės pozicijos, laikomi sovietinio režimo aukomis. Skirtingai nei kaimyninėse šalyse, analizuodamas sovietinių represijų aukas, Uzbekistano politinis ir kultūrinis elitai nesivadovauja etniniu principu, o laikosi tarptautiškumo ir teritoriškumo principų.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** sovietinių represijų atmintis, tautos formavimasis, kultūrinis elitai, autoritarizmas.