

# Siberian album "Halmg Unn": Transformation of historical memory

*Baldzhya Batnasunovna Dyakieva\**, *Oleg Vladimirovich Usalko*, *Tat'yana Nikolaevna Goryaeva*, *Tamara Ivanovna Kovaleva*, and *Nelli Alekseevna Erekteeva*

Kalmyk state University, 11, Pushkin str., Elista, Russian Federation

**Abstract.** The article presents the project "Siberian Album" of the Kalmyk newspaper "Halmg Unn" as a resource for preserving collective, family memory associated with tragic events in the past of the Kalmyks – the exile of the people to Siberia. Family photos and albums are presented as translators and custodians of historical events in places of settlements, as obvious witnesses of the past. The traumatic experience generated by demographic losses during the deportation of the Kalmyk people still has an exceptional effect on the life of modern Kalmyk society, forms its identity and transforms the structure of memory about the past. This has been demonstrated most clearly by the active participation of the region population in the Siberian Album project. Siberian photographs continue to evoke bitter memories of injustice, of exile, but at the same time, for many, these were the years of youth, study, friendship with peers, so many bright, joyful experiences remain in their memory. Despite the well-developed methodological tools of memory policy, new discourses are fixed in this problem area. These include, in particular, "post-memory" as a new discursive form of broadcasting historical memory and constructing an image of the past with the help of media technologies. The project "Siberian Album" of the Republican newspaper can be considered as a demonstration of the memory of an individual, family, dynasty. When analyzing commemorative practices, it is worth highlighting an important component of the national memory policy – "historical trauma", that is, traumatic, painful memories of past events of both an individual actor and a community (family, people, etc.).

**Keywords:** newspaper "Halmg Unn", "Siberian album", post-memory, traumatic experience

## 1 Introduction

December 28, 1943, is one of the most mournful and tragic dates in the history of the Kalmyk people. The whole nation was "uprooted" and scattered across the vast Siberian land. Time inexorably pushes back the tragic events of those years, the older generation, whose memory was passed from mouth-to-mouth, is leaving.

"I know and believe: years, decades will pass, and generations of Kalmyks, historians-researchers, while the people are alive, will consider it a sacred duty to make their share of the contribution to the reflection of the objective, full-blooded history of the unprecedented tragedy of the Kalmyks in December 1943. There will be dozens, hundreds of books on the deportation of the Kalmyk people," Vladimir Ubushaev, a professional historian, professor at Kalmyk University, wrote in 1991 [1].

Today, many multi-volume works have been published not only by scientists, various genre books have been written by writers and publicists, memoirs of those who lived for 13 long years of exile in Siberia have been released.

## 2 Problem Statement

On the 75th anniversary of the Kalmyk people deportation (December 28, 2018), the newspaper undertook the implementation of the Siberian Album project, creating a special section for Siberian photographs. The project was started two years before the 75th anniversary date: here is what the newspaper noted in its address to readers in the issue of May 16, 2016, announcing this project: "Dear readers! The editorial board of our newspaper decided to publish a book called "Siberian Album". It will include photographs of fellow countrymen who were in culpable Stalinist exile in the period from 1943 to 1957. The book will consist of territorial sections arranged in alphabetical order, starting from the Altai Territory. In this regard, we appeal to our readers, all residents of Kalmykia with a request to send letters to our address (including in electronic form) marked "Siberian Album" with photographs of the Siberian years, accompanying them with the necessary information: who is shown in the photo where and what they did in Siberia (or in other eastern regions of the country), how their fates turned

\* Corresponding author: [raisadyakieva@mail.ru](mailto:raisadyakieva@mail.ru)

out upon their return to Kalmykia. You also need to specify the location and time (year) of the shooting. It is welcome if the authors share additional information on this topic.

Leaving the “Siberian Album” to posterity is our civil and human duty” [2].

### 3 Research Questions

The project of the “Halmg Unn” newspaper journalists has become special in the life of the media outlet, touching and emotional in its own way. Twice a month, the newspaper began to publish a thematic page under the headings “Exiled, but not broken”, “Sivrin Tusk Todlvr (Stories about Siberia)”, “Publications of veterans' memories”, etc.

The reaction of readers exceeded all expectations, the newspaper departments began to receive letters and photographs from various places in our large country, near and far abroad, but most of the photographs, of course, were from cities and distant corners of Kalmykia. Those who personally experienced the horrors of deportation sent them, children and grandchildren of those who had already passed away came and brought family photos. And this is no coincidence: in recent years there has been a need to restore historical and cultural memory, to rethink the spiritual and moral experience of the people. “The long-term psychological consequences of the demographic losses of deportation are still manifested today at different levels — at the level of ethnic community, family and individual,” Kalmyk historians note [3]. Photographs from family albums became vivid witnesses of the experience, a resource for preserving and transmitting family memory.

The photographs and destinies described in the essays and stories of the national newspaper journalists are not only the memory of those who survived the harsh 40-50s of the last century. This is also the perpetuation of good deeds, merits and excellent achievements of our fellow countrymen in education, science, culture, medicine, agriculture, that is, the memory of those who personify the true sons and daughters of their people with their destiny. Their love of life and patience will always be an example for posterity.

Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Tyumen, Sverdlovsk regions, Krasnoyarsk, Altai territories, Kazakh SSR. The people of the warm steppe region suddenly found themselves in the harsh Khanty-Mansiysk, Yamalo-Nenets, Tobolsk districts and Sakhalin Island, etc. – these are the territories where the Kalmyks were dispersed. And the photos have become obvious witnesses of past life in these harsh lands.

Today, the problems of the national memory policy, as well as various types of memory (cultural, social, traumatic, collective, etc.) are actively studied in academic science [4].

The works of leading foreign scientists, such as P. Nora [5], M. Halbwachs [6, 7] and others are devoted to the research of commemorative practices.

The French scientist Pierre Nora was the first to introduce the categories “territory of memory” and

“commemoration” into scientific circulation. As he notes, “places of memory” or “territory of memory” is not just a description of the world of memory using spatial categories, but, firstly, the bonds that connect a person with the past [5].

The founder of the theory of historical memory is the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, author of the work “Collective Memory”. He put forward the idea of historical memory as the most important factor in the self-identification of a social or any other group [6]. As M. Halbwachs states, on the one hand, people have their own memory, but on the other hand, they are part of a group and at some moments behave like a part of it. According to his conclusions, “collective images wrap around individual memories” [6].

This topic has also become the research subject for domestic scientists. Thus, O. Yu. Malinova explores the commemoration as an important element of the symbolic policy of the state. The author considers in her works the problems of comparative study of one of the most important practices of memory policy – the commemoration of historical figures and events, i.e., the totality of public acts of their “recollection” and (re)conceptualization in the modern context. A methodology for studying this process as an instrument of symbolic policy is proposed [8]. Researcher M.L. Shub in his works draws attention to the practice of commemoration as a cultural phenomenon, the study of their educational and pedagogic potential [9].

Despite the well-developed methodological tools of memory policy, new discourses are fixed in this problem area. These include, in particular, “post-memory” as a new discursive form of broadcasting historical memory and constructing an image of the past using media technologies [10]. The undertaken project “Siberian Album” of the republican newspaper can be considered as a demonstration of the memory of an individual, family, dynasty.

When analyzing commemorative practices, it is worth highlighting an important component of the national memory policy – “historical trauma”, that is, traumatic, painful memories of past events of both an individual actor and a community (family, people, etc.). As the researchers note, “trauma” is “a way of bond through which the past continues to exist” [11]. In addition, they distinguish two paradigms in the study of cultural trauma: psychological, according to which the traumatic experience experienced by the actor is not realized, but has an impact on behavior and attitude, and sociological, in which the “traumatic discourse” is relayed to the next generations due to the mechanisms and forms of this discourse transmission, for example, through the media [11]. Family photos have become an important tool in preserving the memory of the long 13 years spent by the people in exile. An analysis of the photographs allows us to note an amazing fact: that, despite all the hardships associated with staying in places of exile, people not only brought photographs with them, but preserved and carefully kept them for almost 80 years. And today they – photographs become silent, but convincing evidence of the Siberian life of the people. Photographs can be differentiated based on their integral

and decisive part, what plots are on the subject. Family Album is a visual family saga with a wide variety of story options, both joyful and sad. Thanks to the project of the newspaper, black-and-white photographs act as a marker and representative of a specific historical event, allow the new generation to introduce their families to relatives, friends, and countrymen.

Due to the project visualization, the image of the Siberian period as a resource of national identity is relayed by the Kalmyk memory policy through the actualization of certain plots and events. Thus, the “Siberian Album” project has become one of the most popular projects that attracted the attention of a large number of families. The descendants of those who are no longer alive actively responded, but family photos keep the memory of them and the tragic events of the past. Moreover, the “Siberian Album” project has become a kind of reflection through commemorative practice, aimed at both the presentation of the past and its evaluative representation in the present, post-memory mediated and based on memories and experiences. Each structural element of photography is designed to actualize collective memory, strengthen the identity of social groups.

Despite the painful memories, the population of the republic took an active part in the implementation of the project, along with the readers of the newspaper. “We are continuing our project “Siberian Photographs”, which has caused a keen response among our readers. The editorial office receives an increasing flow of letters and appeals. In 2017, there was not enough time to publish all the photos and stories, so we decided to extend the project. In addition, in the coming year, the Kalmyk people will mark the mournful date, the 75th anniversary of the culpable deportation. Let us remind that all the photos published in our newspaper as part of the “Siberian Photographs” project will be included in the book that we plan to release by December 28, 2018,” the newspaper noted at the end of 2017.

We continue our project “Siberian Photographs”, during this time we have received more than a hundred letters and appeals. By the sad date of December 28, 2018, the 75th anniversary of the culpable deportation of the Kalmyk people, we are planning to release a truly folk Siberian album. The book will contain photos and stories published in our newspaper – the newspaper wrote in the summer of 2018.

The project “Halmg Unn” caused a resonance among the younger generation. For example, Victoria Lidzhi-Goryaeva, a 3rd year student of the Faculty of Foreign Philology of KalmGU, turned to the editorial office. Having learned about the project, she brought old photographs from the family archive for our “Siberian Album”. “We, the grandchildren, decided to publish them in order to perpetuate the memory of grandparents. During the deportation of the Kalmyk people, they and their relatives and friends were expelled from the village of Buranny, Lagansky district, to the Pospelekhinsky district of the Altai Territory. In 1957, they returned to their homeland,” Victoria said in the issue of October 9, 2017.

The memory of the people preserved Siberian life in detail, as evidenced by numerous positive responses to the editorial office about the “Siberian Album” project. We will provide only a few of them:

“Hello, dear editorial board of the “Halmg Unn” newspaper! I am sending you a photo of my parents so as not to stay away from the “Siberian Photographs” project, which I received with gratitude. The photograph of 1952 shows my parents: Mandzhiev Erdni (Eduard) Nanunovich and Mandzhieva Bosya (Badma) Nimyaevna. They have already had 4 children. There is no eldest daughter in the photo, she died after falling from the windowsill while waiting for her parents from the hayfield. At that time, the children were left alone while the adults worked. My father is a disabled war veteran, worked as a teacher at the school of the village “Tingino” of the Tertezhsky Village Council of the Mansky district of the Krasnoyarsk Territory. He had the Order of the Patriotic War II degree and other awards. Having arrived in Kalmykia, he continued to teach in the schools of the Yustinsky district. He spent most of his life in Tatal village, where he was buried.

My mother is a “Mother Heroine.”, gave birth to 11 children and raised 10 of them. She outlived my father by 5 years. Both lived for only 68 years. Currently, 9 children are alive, there are grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Everyone keeps the memory of them,” Natyrova Nina Erdnievna wrote to the editorial board.

Dear editors of “Halmg Unn”, we, the large family of the Erdnievs and Haptaevs, express our great gratitude for your noble work to preserve the memory of our older generation. They courageously fought on the war fronts, showed fortitude and wisdom in the appalling conditions of deportation, revived the republic and gave birth to a new generation,” noted Erdniev Manc Lidzhi – Goryaevich.

“Hello, dear editorial board of the “Halmg Unn” newspaper! I am a regular subscriber of the newspaper and pay close attention to the heading “Siberian photos”. Thank you for keeping the memory of those infamous years of deportation of the Kalmyk people, thousands of innocent victims of the Stalinist genocide,” wrote a labor veteran of the Russian Federation from the village Troitskoye, Dordzhieva Tatyana Vasilievna. As a ten-year-old girl, she was exiled to Siberia from Iki-Manlan village of Maloderbetovsky district.

Here is what T.V. Dordjieva tells in her memoirs: “In January 1944, our family came to the village of Cherepanovo (now Spirino) Shipunovsky district of the Altai Territory. On the way to Siberia, my mother Dzhalaykova Khalga Batkaevna fell seriously ill. In December 1949, Anya, the youngest of six siblings, died, and half a month later we lost our mother. The wife of the elder brother, Leva Shurvayevna, took care of us. The three youngest in our family were: 12, 7 and 3 years old.”

A veteran of war and labor, one of the oldest and respected residents of the village of Gashun-Burgusta of the Ketchenerovsky district, G. T. Naiminov, a long-time reader also could not stay away from the “Halmg Unn” project. “I always closely follow the materials of the heading “Siberian photos”. This folk project can not

leave anyone indifferent. We are obliged to preserve the memory of those infamous years of deportation of the Kalmyk people, thousands of innocent victims of the Stalinist genocide,” the veteran believes.

Such unanimity in the assessment of the project is not accidental: all aspects of life were also affected by the deportation: political, social and economic activities, education and the native language, religious issues, family-marriage relations. To a significant, if not decisive, extent, it was the deportation that predetermined the entire further course of development of the Kalmyk ethnic group and its number. The long-term psychological consequences of the demographic losses of deportation are still manifested today at different levels – at the level of ethnic community, family, and individual. The “Siberian Album” became a statement of the memory of the tragic past, a reflection on what the people experienced.

The traumatic experience generated by demographic losses during the deportation of the Kalmyk people still has an exceptional effect on the life of modern Kalmyk society, forms its identity, and transforms the structure of memory about the past [1]. This has been demonstrated most clearly by the active participation of the region population in the Siberian Album project. “Siberian photographs continue to evoke painful memories of injustice and exile, but at the same time, for many of them those were years of youth, study, friendship with peers, so a lot of bright, joyful experiences remain in the memory of our readers. They continue to bring testimonies of those years – photos to see the faces of their relatives in the newspaper,” the newspaper noted.

## 4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the article is the designation of meaningful contours and the representation of specific historical events to solve the problem of the moral formation of a person. Visualization of the project image of the Siberian period as a resource of national identity relayed by the memory of the Kalmyks through the actualization of certain plots and events.

## 5 Research Methods

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was the works of literary critics and historians. Literary criticism concerning the issues under study was analyzed. We used a descriptive method and complex analysis. Despite the elaborated methodological tools of memory policy, new discourses in this problem area are being recorded. These include, in particular, “post-memory” as a new discursive form of broadcasting historical memory and constructing an image of the past with the help of media technologies.

## 6 Findings

In fact, the family album is a visual family saga with a wide variety of story options, both joyful and sad.

Thanks to the project of the newspaper, black-and-white photographs act as a marker and representative of specific historical events, allow the new generation to introduce their families to relatives, friends, and countrymen.

## 7 Conclusion

The initiative of the regional publication allowed to restore the connection between the cultural codes of the past and the present in the media dimension, provided an expansion of the space of meanings and accessibility of information about the tragedy of the people that happened almost 80 years ago.

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