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Propaganda and the Question of Criminal Intent; the Semantics of the *Zachistka*

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Abstract

This article seeks to explore the origins and evolution of *zachistka* ('cleansing') and the particular role it played in the second Chechen war of 1999–2005. It argues that *zachistka* has become part of state, military and media representations of violence, building a psychological environment in favour of war. The article seeks to understand how the propaganda of the Russian Ministry of Defence might have contributed to the perpetuation of war crimes or incitement to atrocity crimes in the region.

In December 1999, the Russian daily, *Moskovskie Novosti*, published an article entitled 'Words of the Year' in an effort to define the most popular and symbolic catchwords of the year in the tradition of the German daily, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The first word on the list was *zachistka* (Pavlova-Sil'vanskaya 1999). Translated as 'sweep', 'mopping up' or 'cleansing operation', *zachistka* emerged in the popular political imagination in post-Soviet Russia to define a strategy of war in relation to the ongoing military conflict in Chechnya. It became the chosen expression for indeterminate military practices that ranged from simple house-to-house administrative passport checks to the summary execution of Chechen males and females, beginning with the attack on the village of Samashki in 1995, and extending to massacres in Novye Aldi in 2000, Novaya Katayama in 2000, and Shatoi in 2002 (Politkovskaya 2011, pp. 34–43). The practice of the *zachistka* fostered fear in Chechen civilians precisely because of its potentially arbitrary and undisciplined execution. 'Cleansing' operations ranged in duration, size and number, but were almost always underscored by the absence of a coherent legal framework to regulate the behaviour of the Russian armed forces in the region.

In the same way that the term ethnic cleansing (*etnicko ciscenje'*) was coined in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the word *zachistka* found a distinct voice in popular Russian vocabulary and in the official addresses and speeches of military and civilian personnel. By October 1999, as the bombing campaign in the Northern Caucasus advanced, the Russian Ministry of Defence was using the word liberally in its routine press releases. Regular updates

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in the ministry's broadsheet, *Krasnaya Zvezda*[1] included characteristic announcements such as, '… Sub-units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs … conducted a passport check, took measures to cleanse (*po zachistke*) the population points and outlying areas of fighters'.[2] *Zachistka* was also adopted as part of the official vocabulary of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, and other international governmental and non-governmental organisations to explain the military practices of the Russian armed forces in the region (Human Rights Watch 2001). To the mind of the Russian speaker, however, the word summoned a picture of potential violence, extrajudicial executions, looting, disappearances and humiliation of the civilian population with a resonant subtext of purging, cleansing and sweeping out. As Irina Levontina, the Russian linguist concluded, 'At first glance, the word is absolutely concrete, even technical, and completely deprived of any pathos. In essence, it is a powerful ideological tool' (Levontina 1999). 'As a philologist, I am quite intrigued by the word "zachistka", which one hears so often on television', claimed Russian writer, Sergei Esin. 'I always wonder how much life will be taken along with this "zachistka"' (Kublanovskii 1999). 'The word "zachistka" has entered our lexicon, it's shameful to say, without a trace of the horror or repugnance that accompanied its use in 1995–1996', concluded Russia's first Human Rights Commissioner, Sergei Kovalev. 'It is now pronounced as something that goes without saying. The result, unfortunately, has been a very powerful and effective manipulation of public opinion' (Kovalev 1999).

This article seeks to explore the origins and evolution of the Russian word *zachistka* and the particular role it played in the second Chechen war of 1999–2005.[3] While disagreement exists on the degree to which language is shaped by social and historical conflict, there is general consensus that language cannot be viewed as a neutral medium and does possess historical causality. One reason for studying the word *zachistka* is to clarify its own historical etymology. The root of *zachistka* is linked to other descriptive verbs denoting 'to cleanse' or 'to purge' such as *ochistit'* or *chistit'*. Such words were used during punitive campaigns at crucial turning points in Soviet history: communist party purges in the 1920s; collectivisation between 1928 and 1940; dekulakisation between 1929 and 1932; and resettlement and deportations between 1939 and 1945. The probability that the appearance of the word *zachistka* reflects a similarly violent turn deserves analysis. The question then is why the word *zachistka* appears at this particular historical moment and whether its appearance elucidates anything further about the social and political changes in Russia from 1994 to 2005.

The pressure of violence at different historical moments has given rise to important changes in cultural discourse in Russia. *Zachistka,* like other terms before it, is specific to a particular historical period and this article explores how the repeated use of *zachistka* played a key role in the construction of a social and political reality during the second Chechen war. It argues

[1] 'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 8 oktyabrya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 9 October 1999; 'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 11 octyabrya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 12 October 1999; 'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 12 octyabrya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 13 October 1999; 'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 19 octyabrya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 20 October 1999; 'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 21 oktyabrya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 October 1999; 'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 25 oktyabrya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 26 October 1999; 'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 27 oktyabrya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 28 October 1999.

[2] 'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 11 octyabrya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 12 October 1999.

[3] I take the end of large scale military activity in Chechnya at the time of the death of Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov on 8 March 2005.

that *zachistka* becomes part of state, military and media representations of violence, building a psychological environment in favour of war. Moreover, its proliferation in the public sphere resonated with cultural and political associations that linked social memory back to the violent practices legitimated under earlier Soviet regimes. More specifically, the Russian High Command and state media validated—through public discourse—the abuses taking place in Chechnya. Acts of extreme prejudice were often presented publicly as part of the collective endeavour 'to clean up' the region. To conduct a 'cleansing operation' (*provodit' zachistky*), therefore, became a euphemism for a counterinsurgency measure that could include punitive measures: indefinite detention, torture, extrajudicial killings and disappearances.

This article seeks to understand how the propaganda of the Russian Ministry of Defence might have contributed to the perpetuation of war crimes or incitement to atrocity crimes in the region. How did the Russian armed forces use the word? And how might our understanding of the word clarify what was expected of the soldiers and special forces during the conflict? To what degree were their actions structured by the euphemisms surrounding them? Certainly, this would have to be proven on an individual basis in a court of law, taking into account the specific circumstances of each individual case, whether the incitement was direct or not, the position of the person who made the particular speech and how the person—for whom the message was intended—interpreted the message. This was the approach adopted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia when leaders of the Serbian armed forces were asked to explain the meaning of 'ethnic cleansing' (*etnicko ciscenje'*).[4] The International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda (ICTR), in its charges on incitement to commit genocide, found a direct causal connection between the RTLM radio broadcasts and subsequent violence in the *Prosecutor v. Nahimana, Barayagwiza, Ngeze* judgment. While admitting that the extent of the causation may have varied depending on the case, the court advanced a clear causal link between speech acts and violence.[5]

Given that a legal investigation was not available for this study, six anonymous interviews were conducted, four with troops of the Russian Special Forces, and one each with a retired ground force officer and a reconnaissance officer who served in Chechnya between 1994 and 1995, and between 1999 and 2005, with the aim of understanding how they understood and interpreted the instruction to conduct a cleansing operation (*provodit' zachistky*), how the term was used on the ground, how it differed from other military terms and how, if at all, they considered their actions were influenced by it. For understanding the Chechen interpretation of *zachistka*, six interviews were conducted with civilian victims of the war. While not an extensive database of interviews or surveys, these interviews provide the working basis

[4]Slobodan Milosevic Trial, International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia, Case No. IT-02-54, Transcript of Trial Proceedings, 2 November 2005, pp. 46260–66, available at: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/trans/en/051102ED.htm, accessed 12 June 2014. See also, Momcilo Krajisnik Trial, International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia, Case No. IT-00-39, Transcript of Trial Proceedings, 4 March 2005, p. 9905, available at: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krajisnik/trans/en/050304IT.htm, accessed 10 June 2014; Radovan Karadzic Trial, International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia, Case No. IT 091927, Transcript of Trial Proceedings, 27 October 2009, pp. 510, 572–68, available at: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/trans/en/091027IT.htm, accessed 12 June 2014.

[5]*Prosecutor v. Nahimana, Barayagwiza, and Ngeze*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda Trial Chamber I, Case No. ICTR-99-52-T, 3 December 2003, available at: http://ictr-archive09.library.cornell.edu/ENGLISH/cases/Nahimana/decisions/131205.html, accessed 2 March 2011.

for further qualitative research.[6] To determine the collective media response, open sources including newspapers and websites were also analysed.[7]

This article is divided into five sections. The first section traces the original meaning of *zachistka* from the early twentieth century through to the second Chechen war (1999–2005). The second section explores how the meaning of *zachistka* was transformed in early 1995 to denote a mode of military action, the meaning of which expands to encompass a range of counterinsurgency tactics over the course of the conflict. My working premise is that the monitoring and research conducted so far on the crimes committed by Russian armed forces during the second Chechen war satisfy the criteria of war crimes and crimes against humanity (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2009, pp. 367–446). The aim here is to illustrate how language use might enable us to better understand the nature and intention of those crimes. The third section explains the widespread appearance of the word in the Russian press from 1999, the context in which it was used and suggests possible frames of understanding its rapid rise in public discourse. This section highlights the various layers of war propaganda that emerged in the media, the state press and the military. From 1995, employed either deliberately or benignly by different social groups, the term *zachistka* takes on a life of its own. This phenomenon presents a more complex empirical picture of how war propaganda is formed and transmitted through societies on a multi-dimensional level through various state, military and media institutions. The fourth section considers how this research contributes to contemporary debates about the role of language in the prosecution of human rights violations, notably in relation to international crimes. Although recognised as important, there is a difference of opinion on how a court of law might determine a line of inquiry for connecting speech acts to mass violence. Some scholars argue that the courts have yet to provide a clear threshold of certainty 'to determine that a speech act has actually caused a criminal offense' (Wilson 2015, p. 145). This section then will consider how the theoretical arguments of J.L. Austin, John Searle and Predrag Dojcinovic on the 'force' of speech acts and the criteria outlined by Susan Benesch (2008) have helped to advance a framework for understanding the causal links between language and violence. Finally, the fifth section considers Dmitrievskii's application of the legal category of the Joint Criminal Enterprise to the second war in Chechnya and argues that the study of language might provide additional insight into mental causation and shared criminal intent.

This article constitutes the first attempt to consider the language of the second Chechen war as part of these emerging trends in international law. It argues that the speech acts

[6]In order to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, I am unable to cite the exact location of the interviews with members of the armed forces, except to say that they were all conducted in Russia. Nor was I able to record their exact unit and only their general rank. Subject A, reconnaissance officer, 2 May 2013; Subject B, Russian officer, 3 May 2013; Subject C, Special Forces officer, MVD, 4 May 2013; Subject D, Special Forces commander, MVD, 7 May 2013; Subject E, Special Forces officer, MVD, 8 May 2013; Subject F, Special Forces officer, MVD, 9 May 2013. The civilian interviews were conducted in Austria since the Chechen diaspora population has reached nearly 16,000 since 2001. Several groups, such as the humanitarian organisation, Caritas, and former staff of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights were able to provide contact names for potential interviewees living in the region. All interviewees had lived in Chechnya up until 2005 and experienced both Chechen wars. Subject 1, male, 45 years, 1 October 2012; Subject 2, female, 46 years, 2 October 2012; Subject 3, female, 45 years, 2 October 2012; Subject 4, female, 55 years, 3 October 2012; Subject 5, female, 44 years, 4 October 2012; Subject 6, male, 45 years, 5 October 2012.

[7]Although fully aware of how important television and radio broadcasts were in the Chechen wars, analysis for this article was confined to print media.

of Russian generals were not benign statements without significant propagandistic effect. Discriminatory statements were common, inflaming anti-Chechen sentiment and consolidating a shared understanding of terms such as *zachistka* among the rank and file serving in the region. The responses of soldiers confirm that further analysis of the use of *zachistka* could provide an alternative line of inquiry into understanding the collective intentionality of certain military units.

The origin and concept of zachistka

Zachistka is a polysemic word with a variety of meanings. Prior to the 1917 Russian Revolutions, it was used in various forms in Imperial Russia. Examples include to 'iron out', 'to press', 'to make smooth', 'to level' or 'even up', or 'to polish' (Dal' 1903). At the same time we find the word applied to broader expressions such as to be completely cleaned out, that is, to be robbed (*menya obobrali zachisto*) (Dal' 1903, p. 109). From these examples it is apparent that the basic meaning of *zachistka* was relatively neutral; it could suggest anything from the simple levelling of a particular surface to a thorough cleaning out (to be robbed). By 1935, with the advance of Soviet industrialisation, a second more specific meaning in the development of the word was apparent that emphasised a caustic approach. Stakhanovites appeared on the front page of *Pravda* working on the final 'cleaning' (*zachistka*) of ammunition supplies during World War II and the word soon conjured images of Soviet citizens at work in the rapidly expanding mine and metallurgy sectors.[8] The most prominent usage related to flame chipping, using a flame to remove surface defects from sheets of steel by scorching the surfacing (*zachistka metella*,[9] *ognevuyu zachistku metalla*[10]) or cleaning the coal face in coal mines.[11] This emphasis on the removal of debris or surface defects, was also embodied in examples of lathe operators working to remove unwanted fragments of metal in the production of parts.[12] Used extensively in the practice of metal rolling—the first step in creating raw metal forms—the emphasis here was on the use of the suffix 'za'. The suffix emphasises the continuous movement as the metal is rolled into a bloom or a slab to flatten it out before being shaped into other parts. Thus the term 'a continuous cleansing or casting' (*sploshnaya zachistka*) soon appeared to reinforce the forward motion of the rolling mill.[13]

This is the main evidence to support what might be called the mechanical–technical explanation of *zachistka* that relates to the pointed and direct targeting of objects to be cleaned. The word was also used extensively in archaeology to mean the removal of sand or dirt to reveal patches of colour, remains of buildings, traces of ancient pits and other structures on the fresh surface of an archaeological excavation site to identify the sequences of cultural remains (stratigraphy). The smoothing out of the sediment layer was done to prepare the

[8]'Zavodi uvelichivayut vypusk boepripasov sovetskie voiny! Eshche krepche beite vraga!', *Pravda*, 29 August 1943.

[9]Ushakova (1935). See also, 'Na "Kr. Oktyabre" zachistka, sortirovka i khranenie metalla v zagone', *Pravda*, 6 October 1932; Galin (1935); 'Vsesoyuznye sorevnovanie mettallurgov', *Pravda*, 24 September 1940.

[10]'Plan rosta proizvodstva i kapital'nogo stroitelstva', *Izvestiya*, 21 March 1946.

[11]'Tonneli stroyat nastoyashchie muzhiny', *Izvestiya,* 5 September 1981; 'Goryachii bereg', *Izvestiya*, 20 June 1980.

[12]'Metod Stakhanovitsa Kondakova', *Pravda*, 29 February 1939.

[13]'Sploshnaya Zachistka', *Pravda*, 3 April 1935.

layer for a photograph, before uncovering the next layer of sediment.[14] The only important extension of the meaning of *zachistka* beyond this period was its application to more expansive and open spaces and the notion of restoring order. No longer was it only associated with the notion of surfaces or thinning out. New definitions were cited meaning 'to clean out wagons after unloading' (*zachistit' vagony posle vygruzky*) (Tadulevich 1972), to 'clean out shipping vessels',[15] the 'cleaning of a field' after harvest (*zachistka polei*) (Rud' 1937) and cleaning out of reservoirs (*zachistka reservuarov*).[16] The term 'cleanup' was also used as a synonym for 'restoring order' (cleaning, removal of temporary buildings, even planting flowers) (Zakrutin 1952).

The main evidence to support what might be called a violent explanation of the word's usage is in its shared etymology with 'purge' (*chistka, chistit'*), the 'Great Purge' (*velikaya chistka*) and 'cleanse' (*ochistit'*) that emerged in the 1920s. According to this explanation, the word *za [chistka]* shares its etymological roots with other violent terms and these associations have important cultural resonances that will be discussed later in this article. *Chistka* was used to depict the periodic purging of the Communist Party (*chistit' partiyu*) of ideological 'enemies' or 'aliens', and was associated, above all, with conceptions of loyalty and staunchness. The 1919 operation by the Bolsheviks was the 'first of several operations officially called purges' in which members were screened for suitability (Getty 1985, p. 40). The *modus operandi* was to purge the party of enemies, real or imagined and to 'weed the party of hangers-on, nonparticipants, drunken officials, and people with false identification papers as well as ideological "enemies" or "aliens"' (Getty 1985, p. 38).

Similarly, *chistit'* or *ochistit'* were used interchangeably in the Soviet reports on the quelling of the mass insurgencies in the Don region in 1920–1921 and during the Antonov rebellion of 1920 as the peasant 'class enemy' revolted against the forced procurement of grain at the height of the Russian civil war.[17] The emphasis then was on cleansing the territory and military measures were directed at removing and eliminating 'the bandit element' (*iz"yat' i istrebit' banditskii element*) and 'to cleanse those regions infected by banditry' (*ochistit' raiony zarazhennye banditizmom*). As Holquist argues, 'the goal was not just to secure obedience and order but explicitly "to cleanse" (*ochishchenie, chistka, ochistit'*) the population of pernicious threats, to secure its full health and recovery (*polnoe ozdorovlenie*)' (Holquist 2003, p. 26).

Thereafter, during the dekulakisation campaign of 1929–1930, Soviet directives were given to 'cleanse the collective farms from kulak and other counter-revolutionary elements' and to 'cleanse the farms of the elements that are infecting them' (Holquist 2003, p. 30).[18] As Holquist argues, the intent of the Soviet forces was not necessarily to exterminate all malignant 'elements', but to filter out the redeemable from the non-redeemable, as judged by the Soviet

[14]'Risovodstvu-nadezhnuyu material'no-tekhnicheskuyu bazu', *Izvestiya*, 26 March 1980; 'Proizvodstvo vozrastet', *Izvestiya*, 13 July 1982; 'Pamyatka komandiru otdeleniya', *Tikhookeanskaya Vakhta*, 13 October 2004.

[15]'O ribe sibirskoi', *Pravda*, 3 March 1960.

[16]'Risovodstvu-nadezhnuyu material'no-tekhnicheskuyu bazu', *Izvestiya*, 26 March 1980; 'Proizvodstvo vozrastet', *Izvestiya*, 13 July 1982. See also, 'V chest' Dnya Konstitutsii SSSR', *Izvestiya*, 4 October 1980; 'Pamyatka komandiru otdeleniya', *Tikhookeanskaya Vakhta*, 13 October 2004.

[17]Correspondence with Peter Holquist, 9 December 2006. See also, Singleton (1966) and Landis (2004).

[18]From email conversations with Sheila Fitzpatrick, Arch Getty and Peter Holquist, I gathered that none of these scholars has come across the word *zachistka* in their work on either the revolutionary or Stalinist period.

government (Holquist 2003, pp. 25–32, 38). The choice of language (*ochishchenie, chistka, ochistit'*) reflected the ultimate military goal of the operation and did not, at first, suggest a racial prejudice. Such language was used against Russian nationals during and after the civil war. The ideological emphasis appeared to rest more with class than race as the Bolshevik government sought to consolidate its power base. As illustrated by Martin, however, ethnic hostility was also a part of the dekulakisation campaigns of the late 1920s. Polish households were 'significantly cleansed (*ochistilo*) from the border regions …' (Martin 1998, p. 848) and Germans and Poles were typecast as kulaks. Similarly, this ethnic cleansing, as Martin defines it, targeted entire nations, especially the diaspora nationalities, to complete 'a larger transition from a primary focus on class-based terror to a preponderant emphasis on ethnic based terror, which would continue until Stalin's death' (Martin 1998, p. 858). By 1936, the 'Soviet Union's western diaspora nationalities had been stigmatised as collectively disloyal and subjected to ethnic cleansing' (Martin 1998, p. 850).[19] Facilitated and enhanced by 'popular ethnic hostility', Soviet ethnic cleansing spread from diaspora groups to several North Caucasus nationalities including the Chechens, Ingush, Balkars and Karachai (Martin 1998, p. 860).

This usage of *ochistit'* and *chistka* is symptomatic of the violent period in Soviet history in which it appeared. And there is good reason to associate the emergence of *zachistka* in the 1990s with a similar social turn. These new attributes around the word *zachistka* follow reasonably from attributes pertinent to '*ochistit'* and *chistit'*; meaning to separate the 'counter-revolutionary elements', the 'bandits' and the 'kulaks' from the pro-communist population in an effort to cleanse the political landscape. These interpretative frames, as will be discussed, are very similar. The use and concept of *zachistka* in the Soviet period, however, had no sense of the violence—nor the range of meanings—that it would eventually develop in the post-Soviet era.

The linguistic structure of *zachistka* also differs in some ways from its Russian root, *chistit'*. The suffix 'za' especially enhances its meaning here. This suffix suggests movement with the stress on cleaning up or cleaning out as the operative implications.[20] Thus we see the emergence of the expression in the 1930s of 'continuous cleansing' (*sploshnaya zachistka*) with regard to metal rolling. The word is also expressed, in the majority of cases, as a noun—as if it were a distinct concept itself. The use of the verb as a noun does not include aspect or tense which suggests that the temporal flow of the action is ongoing, unbounded and potentially limitless, a factor which later becomes important when depicting the counterinsurgency strategy of the Russian armed forces. One possible interpretation of the suffix also suggests that in cleaning an object, you only remove a layer or portion of whatever substance stands out in order to clean the surface. As Levontina has suggested, 'you might remove a layer of fat from a piece of meat, which could either be a very large or a very small portion of the object in question' (Levontina 1999). Thus the very linguistic ambiguity in the meaning of *zachistka* is present from the late nineteenth century; from the delicate and cautious cleaning of a thin layer of soil to uncover archaeological spoils, to the force of a metal rolling machine, flame chipping to remove visible defects from metal and steel surfaces, to the thorough cleaning of reservoirs and shipping vessels.

[19]See also Pobol' and Polyan (2005, p. 37). They argue that the first deportation grounded in ethnic prejudice from 1928 to 1930 was against Koreans, Poles and Finns.

[20]Email discussion with Dr Robert Lagerberg, Department of Russian, University of Melbourne, Australia, 6 December 2006.

According to this explanation, the goal of the *zachistka* is to clean up particular inanimate objects or restore order to a particular region. The use of the word always implies that an inanimate object such as steel, a region or an archaeological site will be subject to the will of a machine or the individual controlling it. It is only in the 1990s that human subjects become the central object of the *zachistka.*

Zachistka *as counterinsurgency*

Whatever may have inspired the emergence of *zachistka* in post-Soviet Russia, the word gradually found its way into the everyday discourse of the Russian military establishment during the first Chechen war. I have not been able to determine exactly when this transition occurred, yet when asked whether it had been used during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, one Russian officer responded: 'I have never heard this term from veterans of the Afghan war. I heard the term "implementation" [*my poekhali na realizatsiyu'*], but not "cleansing" [*zachistka*]'.[21] The first real articulation of what *zachistka* means on a conceptual level in the post-Soviet period came in the aftermath of an attack on the Chechen village of Samashki in April 1995. Conducted by troops of the Ministry of the Interior (MVD), OMON and SOBR (Special Rapid Reaction Forces), Sergei Kovalev, then Human Rights Commissioner, reported that MVD forces were calling the operation a '*zachistka*'.[22] On the morning of 8 April, according to villagers interviewed, soldiers wearing head and neck scarves with the hand-written words 'Born to Kill', moved along the streets, looting and setting fire to homes, and detained many of the village's men. Although no separatist fighters were believed to be in the area, it is estimated that the village formed its own self-defence unit of some 40 volunteers. Memorial's observer mission began interviewing villagers as they were fleeing Samashki (Memorial 1995a). On 12 April, human rights monitors entered the village and concluded that 103 civilians had been killed and 30 of them had been executed after being detained and subjected to beatings; 363 homes were either completely destroyed or seriously damaged (Memorial 1995a, p. 107).

The attack on the village of Samashki grew to symbolise the very worst type of punitive operation in Chechnya.[23] And in the historical memory of the Chechens, Samashki is the lasting symbol of a *zachistka*. As one civilian recalled, 'I passed a Russian armoured personnel carrier with the word SAMASHKI written on its side in bold, black letters. I looked in my rearview mirror and to my horror saw a human skull mounted on the front of the vehicle' (Baiev 2003, p. 131). It is widely recognised that the first Russo–Chechen war (1994–1996) was a strategic improvisation (Felgenhauer nd), with forces hurriedly assigned together from different army and airborne units. The repercussion of this failure to build up efficient mobile troops was a lack of cooperation between forces. Indeed, the circumstances were unique; a combined force operation of troops from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defence had not been attempted before on such a scale and at such short notice. After Samashki, Lt. Gen. Anatoly Antonov, Deputy Commander of MVD forces in Chechnya, claimed that what took place in Samashki was the 'first completely independent military operation conducted by Interior Ministry troops in history' (Gilligan 2004, p. 175), a comment

[21]Interview with Subject B.

[22]'Valerii vye zhertvy yakoby zakonchennoi voiny', *Izvestiya*, 4 December 1995.

[23]This was later referred to as a *karatel'naya zachistka*. See, Snegirev (1996).

that reflected the growing tension between the MVD and the Ministry of Defence Forces since the internal troops were reassigned to the Interior Ministry in 1989.

Indeed, this was not the first mention of *zachistka* in the war—it had appeared three months earlier in February during the attack on the capital, Grozny, when a journalist talked about the 'so-called *zachistki*' conducted by the MVD.[24] A Russian officer admitted that he first remembered hearing it used during the winter of 1995: 'It was the first time I heard such a term used by the officers—"cleansing operations in districts", "cleansing operations in certain neighborhoods" and so on. … It was not written in any field manual; at least, I had never seen it before'.[25] Journalist Lt. Colonel Nikolai Starodymov, when embedded with a battalion in Grozy in 1996 for *Krasnaya Zvezda*, claimed that 'we are no doubt bound to hear this new and unusual word "*zachistka*" again' (Starodumov 1996). Lieutenant Colonel Dmitri Kislitsi recalls,

> Somehow my group was identified to conduct a cleansing [*zachistka*] of a section [*kvartal*]. I had no idea what the term 'zachistka' really meant, and even as an officer of the intelligence service, I had no idea of this concept. However the order was given and I was obliged to fulfil this measure to the best of my understanding, which is not quite the way the military does things [*po militseiski*]. (Ptichkin 2000)[26]

Since much of the fighting in the first Chechen war involved direct combat operations, counterinsurgency tactics were rare. The order to conduct a 'cleansing operation' (*provodit' zachistky*) nevertheless had a specific military goal. While the armed forces struggled to understand the exact meaning of the order to 'cleanse' [*provodit' zachistky*] a region or neighbourhood, MVD troops were already using *zachistka* as a tactical term with concrete implications. The core sense of the *zachistka* included sealing (though not always) a village or a town with ground troops, conducting a thorough check of the streets through house-by-house searches with the aim of exposing or detaining hidden fighters, as well as the search and confiscation of hidden weapons and ammunition. The Federal Security Services (FSB), the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) officers or Special Rapid reaction forces (OMON or SOBR) then entered the region from several directions by foot or by military vehicle, and paratroopers were dropped into the village by helicopter. The goal was not just to secure order, but 'to cleanse' a region of 'bandits', 'illegal armed formations', 'separatists', 'Dudaevtsi' (President Dudaev's forces)[27] or 'terrorists' and to 'cleanup' a populated area or building from a hidden enemy.

The events in Samashki therefore symbolised the most tragic embodiment of a *zachistka* and set the stage, in Dojcinovic's terms, for a mental fingerprint, that is, a unique word or phrase that links the instigator and the instigated, shared among certain MVD soldiers, military leaders and political ideologues (Dojcinovic 2012b, p. 95). The bandanas, the singlet tops, sunglasses and tattoos—all of these emblems of macho pride and self-aggrandisement that the Russian government was prepared to indulge as Special Forces executed their orders. As Dojcinovic argues in relation to the use of certain terms within units in the Bosnian war:

[24] 'Zametki Tsveta Khaki 4. Prikhod konstitutsii na derevenskuyu svad'bu', *Izvestiya*, 17 March 1995.

[25] Interview with Subject B.

[26] Kislitsi is recalling events in Grozny five years before when he heard *zachistka* used for the first time.

[27] 'Storonniki Dysaeva atakovali Grozny i deistvovali kak otkrovennyie banditi', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 11 March 1996.

'their mental state was cognitively "fingerprinted", potentially containing evidence of mental causation and shared criminal intent' (Dojcinovic 2012b, p. 95). Routine cleansing operations also took place in Novogroznenskii (Snegirev 1996), Shali and Gudermes, as well as other towns and villages in Chechnya, but none reached the scale of Samashki. What is clear, however, is that despite the confusion and struggle for strategic cooperation between the armed forces and internal troops, the violent practices that came to define the Northern Caucasus by the end of the twentieth century were integrated into military strategy between the winter of 1995 and the summer of 1996. The tactical measures embodied in the *zachistka* could and did include illegal detention of the male population and their transportation to temporary filtration points (factories, canneries, open fields, earth pits, roadblocks and interior troop garrisons) before being transported to detention facilities such as the one in Mozdok. Before or after arriving at Mozdok, detainees were subject to beatings, burns with cigarette butts, cutting of feet, dogs set upon them, attacks with stones while in earth pits and electric shock treatment (Memorial 1995b). However, the troops in the first war practised not only illegal detention, torture and extrajudicial murder, but also some of the most pervasive practices of both Chechen wars—bribing, ransacking and pillaging. These practices were instrumental in establishing the patterns of violence that were later refined in September 1999.

The term *zachistka* was not pervasive during the first Chechen war. It was never widely invoked by the media, except by *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Ptichkin 2000). When it was spoken, it was strongly criticised by public commentators and the press media as crude slang. It had root connotations linked to violent and arbitrary acts of power, and there was deliberate and conscious self-censorship to control its travelling into the public realm. Almost without exception, it appeared in quotation marks or with the modifier 'so-called'. The outrage that Russia's first Human Rights Commissioner speaks to in an earlier quote also reminds us of the unsettling historical and cultural associations the word evoked. In condemning the use of *zachistka*, Kovalev is also rejecting old political forms and repressive systems. It is against this background therefore that we must appreciate the emergence and proliferation of the term *zachistka* in 1999. The most percipient observers could not have foreseen how the military, the state and pro-government press would provide Russian society with a vocabulary to frame the second Russo–Chechen war. *Zachistka* became, as never before, a ubiquitous term in the press and in the military, along with accompanying phrases: 'liquidation', 'destruction', 'bandits' and 'international terrorists'. From September 1999 to 2005, *zachistka* appeared 787 times in the headlines of Russian central newspapers. In a survey of the text of 7,236 articles, it appeared 10,730 times.[28] This time the Russian Army was far more organised. Having learnt from the failures of the first war, Russian staffs were forced to use combined operational groupings instead of a traditional system of divisions, regiments, brigades and battalions. These combined tactical groups were often built around battalions with strong reinforcements, especially of artillery (Orr 1999). While in the first Chechen war Russian forces tended to go into Chechen settlements with infantry and armour, the military used firepower to avoid infantry engagements as much as possible. Ground troops, the number of which had doubled since the first Chechen war, were sent in only after heavy artillery and air attacks in both the cities and the village settlements.

[28]I derived this figure from a database search of 7,236 articles in 63 of Russia's central newspapers run on the Eastview database of Russian Newspapers from 1999 to 2005. The search term was *zachistk[a]* from 1 January 1999 to 12 February 2005.

The second Chechen war took on more of the character of guerrilla warfare with fewer front lines and actual fighting. As one senior officer acknowledged, 'The cleansing operations [*zachistki*] did not take on the character of active military fighting'.[29] When asked in an interview what *zachistka* meant, one Russian officer responded with far more precision than those who had served in the first war: 'I understood it to mean taking control of an area and the liquidation, capture of the enemy who might be in the area, in a house, a basement or anywhere else. That is, the liberation of the area from the enemy'.[30] The word, *zachistka* was used to depict a number of practices—many of them consistent with the model used at Samashki. Similar terms were also used, such as 'special operation', 'special measures' or 'spetsukha'. Yet it also became clear that *zachistka* related to the cleansing of populated areas (*naselennye punkty*) only, and more specifically, areas that were considered liberated by the Russian armed forces.[31] The meaning here was directly linked to its original meaning in metallurgy, moving over an area to separate the surface defects (separatist fighters) from the base (the population). The armed forces rarely spoke of 'cleansing' a mountain or forest region. A 'special operation' or 'special measures' could mean, for example, 'the liquidation of the enemy in the forest or the mountains',[32] outside a populated area. For a member of the internal security forces, the goal of the *zachistka* was to 'get the militants moving. … If we couldn't find them directly through passport control, then it was meant to make them nervous, make them open up or move'. The aim was 'to separate the civilians from the bandits'.[33]

It also became clear that the very meaning of *zachistka* (and its consequences) was dependent on the context in which the word was used, the speaker's intent and the way in which the recipient interpreted it. The content and intent of the order to conduct a 'cleansing operation' continued to be problematic for soldiers. As one soldier admitted, 'Often the guys don't even know what to cleanse, where to cleanse, who to cleanse and so everyone is cleansed'.[34] The more the soldiers served in the region, the more it was necessary, however, to enforce meaning and order on their everyday lives in the military. In an effort to counter this confusion, they began to add adjectives to the noun to distinguish between different tactical operations: 'brutal cleanse' (*zhestokaya zachistka*), 'total cleanse' (*total'naya zachistka*), 'ethnic cleanse' (*etnicheskaya zachistka*), 'target cleanse' (*adresnaya zachistka*) (Veklich 2001), a 'storm cleanse' (*shturmovaya zachistka*) (Kachmazov 2000), a 'gentle cleanse' (*myagkaya zachistka*), a 'final cleanse' (*okonchatel'naya zachistka*) (Petrov 1999), 'second cleanse' (*vtornaya zachistka*),[35] 'continuous cleansing' (*sploshnaya zachistka*) (Vasilenko 2002), 'superficial cleanse' (*poverkhnostnaya zachistka*)[36] and 'cleansing is a sweet word' (*eto sladkoe slovo zachistka*).[37]

[29]Interview with Subject C.
[30]Interview with Subject B.
[31]Interview with Subject B.
[32]Interview with Subject B.
[33]Interview with Subject C.
[34]Anonymous Russian soldier, cited in Memorial (2001).
[35]'Chechnya: Bandity zhdyt podkremleniya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 23 May 2000.
[36]'Totalnye zachistki Generala Baranova', *Utro-Ru*, 4 September 2000, available at (weblink no longer active): http://www.utro.ru/articles/ politics/2000/09/04/200090040320042039.shtml? 2000/09/04? 2000/09/04, accessed 11 September 2011. See also, Dmitrievskii *et al*. (2009, p. 82).
[37]Interview with Subject B.

These new meanings are also the product of an evolutionary process that demonstrates the changing dynamics of the situation on the ground and varied military strategies imposed on the soldiers. We get a better understanding of those military strategies by turning to an explanation of their features as provided in interviews with military servicemen. In reading such descriptions, it is difficult to tell, of course, whether these descriptions were understood in the same way for all servicemen, but it provides important terms of reference that correspond with those found in interviews conducted for this article and field research conducted by Memorial (2003). The *zachistki* then were part of the overall military goal of maintaining control by positioning staff headquarters outside of villages or towns (either temporary or semi-permanent garrisons), as well as by setting up accompanying 'filtration points' to check identities. A brutal cleanse (*zhestokaya zachistka*), as explained by one officer, involved the following: 'The night before we entered a populated region, the area was subject to artillery strikes, not a pointed strike, but sweeping artillery that covered the whole populated area'. The officer acknowledged that, in his experience, he never had any intelligence as to whether there were separatist fighters in the region or not. 'I did not possess any intelligence information—was there someone there or not, were they [the civilians] warned or not'.[38] Examples of particularly brutal cleansing operations included that in the village of Novye Aldi in February 2000 in which 56 civilians were massacred. On 4 February Russian conscript soldiers (*srochniki*) entered the village and warned civilians to leave before the Special Forces conducted a *zachistka* the following day. The town had been bombed and fired upon with artillery strikes for the previous two days. As one witness recalled, 'They said to us—"Don't stay in your cellars, contract soldiers will come and throw grenades in"' (Gilligan 2010, p. 56). The Special Forces (*kontraktniki*), serving alongside or within OMON, the riot police and units from the Ministry of Defence arrived the following day, and as one witness recalled, 'The first thing they said to us when they saw us was "Mark their foreheads with green iodine [*zelenko*] so that we'll have a better target to aim at"' (Gilligan 2010, p. 56). The soldiers walked along the main road and then spread out through the three main cross streets. As they moved, they taped small grenades to the doors of several storehouses and to several gates with trip wires leading into the yards. They spilled kerosene and set the houses on fire. At the same time, 56 civilians were summarily executed. Over the next two days, the soldiers returned to the village to loot the intact houses. On 10 February, 16 men were taken to the outskirts of the village and made to kneel at the edge of a ditch, their hands bound. They were saved by the appearance of Viktor Popkov, a Russian journalist and Orthodox layman, who arrived in the village with a camera crew. The soldiers disappeared.

While the term 'brutal cleanse' (*zhestokaya zachistka*) was commonly used, it was the expression 'total cleanse' (*total'naya zachistka*) that was publicly acclaimed in the internet publication *Utro.ru* as marking a new phase in the war. This phase was launched after the appointment of General Lieutenant Valerii Petrovich Baranov as Commander of the United Group of Forces in July 2000. By 4 September an article appeared in *Utro-ru* with the headline 'The total cleansings (*totalnye zachistki*) of General Baranov', outlining the purported new tactics of the federal forces in the struggle against Chechen separatists. The author writes: 'Cleansings of the population points were conducted by the federal forces earlier. But,

[38]Interview with Subject B.

generally, such operations resulted in nothing. … The military are now acknowledging that "superficial cleansings" (*poverkhnostyi zachistki*) will no longer take place'.[39]

Between July and August 2000, 14 operations took place in which 679 persons not involved in fighting were illegally detained. The military operations conducted that summer leave no doubt that the most widespread of them followed a single strategy. Important signs of this include the length of the operation, evidence of coordinated action between different military groupings, departmental affiliations, the distribution of functions between them, the presence of highly ranked representatives of the command at the cleansing operation, and also the appearance of the 'temporary filtration point' (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2009, p. 83). Precisely in August 2000, the process of 'filtering' the population of the Chechen republic was gradually transferred from stationery places called 'in the field' to the practice of the 'on the spot' filtration—carried out directly by those units conducting the cleansings, and often strengthened by members of the MVD or FSB (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2009, p. 83).

Soldiers also began to use the term 'continuous cleansing' (*sploshnaya zachistka*), meaning an operation that could take place over consecutive days in which a town or village was blocked from entry and exit. As the MVD press centre reported, the *sploshnaya zachistka* of the village of Cherno'rechie led to the detention of 53 fighters over two days (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2009, pp. 82–3). Such 'continuous cleansings' were often the result of a mine or explosion in the vicinity. Such examples include those in Alkhan Kala (12–14 August 2000). In this case, all the APCs that entered the town did so without identifying number plates or the number plates were covered in paint or mud. Many of the troops wore masks. The *zachistka* included the setting fire to homes, the beating and random detention of men, including a 13-year-old whose mother was told that her son would be released if she came back with a weapon by 7pm that evening. He was released, badly beaten with cigarette burns to his back and in between his fingers. Over the course of the three day operation, over 100 people were detained, with 15 sent to Khankala and four disappeared (Memorial 2003, p. 163).[40]

Soldiers also referred to a 'gentle cleanse' (*myagkaya zachistka*) or a 'repeat cleanse' (*vtoraya zachistka*) as something that could take place daily in either a sealed or occupied town or settlement. According to one officer, a 'gentle cleanse' was more like a 'check' (*proverka*) in the hope of finding *hors de combat* still living in the region. 'Repeat' or 'gentle' cleansing operations usually took place in those regions where troops were settled on the outskirts or in an occupied city or village. Examples include Tsotsin Yurt, Argun, Alkhan Kala, Starye Atagi and Avturi (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2009, p. 105). A *proverka* was distinct from a *zachistka*. A ground force officer understood it to mean 'checking the passport regime … checking whether citizens had certain documents and second, to determine whether an individual lived at a particular address, or at least within that populated region'.[41] The word 'examination' (*dosmotr*) was also used, predominantly at check points or block posts: 'This is the checking of transport vehicles, the passage of

[39]'Totalnye zachistki Generala Baranova', *Utro-Ru*, 4 September 2000, available at (weblink no longer active): http://www.utro.ru/articles/ politics/2000/09/04/200009040320042039.shtml? 2000/09/04? 2000/09/04, accessed 11 September 2011. See also, Dmitrievskii *et al*. (2009, p. 82).

[40]A Russian military base that houses the 42nd Motor Rifle Division is situated in Khankala, a small settlement to the east of the Chechen capital, Grozny.

[41]Interview with Subject B.

a car or motorcycle through the circulation control point. Examination of citizens in the vehicle and search for weapons, ammunition and drugs'.[42]

While the aim of the *zachistka* was considered the capture and or destruction of separatist fighters, other aims were also at the forefront of particular operations. One such aim was the pillaging of civilian homes and the taking of bribes. Bribes were exchanged to secure the release of men or boys detained by Russian troops, or to pay-off soldiers who threatened families with the detainment of their relatives. Pillaging took place as either part of an official *zachistka* or in random small groups that visited towns or villages close to where they were stationed. Such random cleansing operations were common (Memorial 2003, p. 89). Soldiers, at least in one battalion, characterised such operations as, 'cleansing is a sweet word' (*eto sladkoe slovo zachistka*) to designate a type of operation, the sole aim of which was to loot civilian homes (*maroderstvo*). One officer described the general feeling among his unit, 'Yes, we could plunder what we liked. We could take anything from, I don't know, from a TV set, to a box of laundry detergent and soap. Anything. We could take anything, anything that could fit into a BMP …'.[43]

By the summer of 2003, large scale sweep operations were gradually replaced by an increasing number of targeted cleansings or *adresnaya zachistka* that included night-time abductions and disappearances. The targeted cleanse led to the disappearance of between 4,000 and 5,000 individuals from 1999 to 2005 (Gilligan 2010, pp. 82, 88). As one intelligence officer acknowledged, 'Large operations are no longer necessary. We need night operations, directed and surgical. Normal people are not disappearing in Chechnya. It's the scum who are disappearing, who should be destroyed, cleaned out (*zachistit'*)' (Gilligan 2010, p. 78). 'The only difference between a wide-scale and targeted cleansing is in the number of forces', recalled one officer of the special forces 'and the accuracy of the information'.[44] Witnesses began to speak of masked men, in groups of between six and 30, arriving in camouflage or black uniforms during curfew times—11pm, 1:30am, 3am, 5am and 9am. Arriving in APCs and military trucks, so called *tabeletka* minivans, UAZ jeeps and VAZ-2107s, the Russian Special Forces entered private homes, pulled suspected fighters, civilians and those placed *hors de combat* from their homes in the middle of the night and took them away. As one officer recalled, 'Destroying an insurgent under the cover of night is the most effective strategy in this war. They are afraid of it. And they don't feel safe anywhere, neither in the mountains nor at home' (Gilligan 2010, p. 77).

A target cleanse could also take place in the midst of a routine *zachistka.* As recalled by one officer,

> [s]uch measures as an *adresnaya zachistka* would take place under the auspices of a larger cleansing of the population centre. Having received the required address, we quickly worked out where the address was and raided them. In this way, it wasn't so noticeable and, in principle, more effective.[45]

The methods that evolved to fully encompass the *zachistka* were driven by a number of contiguous factors. One of the first underlying reasons to consider is the issue of expediency.

[42]Interview with Subject B. A BMP (*Boyevaya Mashina Pekhoty 1*) is an infantry fighting vehicle.
[43]Interview with Subject B.
[44]Interview with Subject F.
[45]Interview with Subject C.

During the beginning of the second war it grew clear that the Russian Prosecutor's office did not have the resources to process the thousands of prisoners being detained by the Russian armed forces. Within a year, the Prosecutor's office had released thousands of detainees on a general amnesty for lack of infrastructure to deal with each individual case through the justice system (Memorial 2003, p. 5). The direct response to this appears to have been that from January 2000 the armed forces deployed more direct methods that included extrajudicial executions and disappearances. This was interpreted by the Prosecutor's office as the only way of circumventing the return of these individuals back into Chechen society and sustaining the military success of the Ministry of Defence in the region. Viewed in this light, these forms of violence should not be seen as random aberrations, but rather as an expansion of state sanctioned violence.

While the Russian armed forces were attempting to quell the separatist movement, its actions were also aimed at conditioning Chechen society in general. This was achieved by the rhetorical strategy of the Russian high command. Not only did the high command sanction indiscriminate violence—through their speech—but the *zachistka* itself or the mere threat of a *zachistka*, contributed to a steady, sustained, environment of fear in the region. The *zachistka* therefore could also be a clear directive to instil fear in a community as evidenced in the repeated measures to detain individuals based on age and gender, and beat and then release them soon after their capture.

The *zachistka* then was central to the reassertion campaign of the Ministries of Defence and the Interior after the military catastrophe of the first Chechen war. If the Russian state was trying to force upon Chechen society an idealised image of a reinvigorated state through its use of violence, there were two corresponding practices taking place. One was the promotion by President Putin of a resurgent Russian nationalism in early 2000, partly achieved through the discourse of anti-terrorism. The other that worked hand in hand with this state narrative was the desire of the Ministry of Defence to reassert itself politically after years of marginalisation under the Yel'tsin administration. While the presidential administration and the Ministry of Defence continued to experience heightened tensions, the synchronicity of their respective aims allowed for this parallel level of power to take root. Chechnya was the key to this reassertion campaign.

Zachistka *as war propaganda*

Contemporary theorists of war crimes propaganda fundamentally agree that some of the most relevant features of propagandistic communications are culture dependent.[46] As argued by Dojcinovic, 'the starting premise is that investigating war crimes propaganda means cutting deep through the most complex social, historical, political and cultural tissue'. This 'semantic frame' as Dojcinovic calls it, 'opens up a far more complex world that consists of memories, beliefs, ideas and words' (Dojcinovic 2012b, p. 82). The interviews completed for this article illustrate the deep associations Chechen civilians made when hearing the word *zachistka* between the violent state formation in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s and the accompanying terms that emerged in the late 1990s.

[46]I am using the Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell definition: 'propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist' (Jowett & O'Donnell 2007, p. 7). See also Dojcinovic (2012a, pp. 4–5).

Whether the comparisons between the 1920s and 1930s are historically accurate is not the central issue here, and indeed some of the interviewees recognised that the context of the historical eras were very different. What is important is that the civilians had no trouble in making these direct associations between the use of the word *chistit'* and *zachistit'* and the lawlessness associated with particular historical moments in Russian history. And indeed, it is this association that really defines the effectiveness of *zachistka* as propaganda by 1999. As one civilian commented when asked whether any association with the 1930s came to his mind, he responded:

> Yes, because people also disappeared under Stalin. … The times may have changed, but the politics hasn't. There was the Cheka, the all Russian Emergency Commission, then the NKVD, then the KGB and now the FSB. They are the political police. And the politicians are pushing all the work onto their shoulders.[47]

Another civilian similarly acknowledged, '[o]f course the same thing happened in '37. A person disappears and nobody knows where he is and where to search for him'.[48]

For many civilians then the term becomes a highly charged emotional symbol—directly linked to an arbitrary regime that had unlimited capacity to practise disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings in violation of the law. Clearly, one of the important features of assessing propaganda is to understand how it makes people feel, how they respond on hearing certain terms, what emotions or memories it evokes, and what micro-narratives the word generates. One interviewee admitted that when he heard that a *zachistka* was taking place,

> I felt my own weakness. I really felt for those simple people who were living in a particular population centre. I felt pain and suffering for them; … my weakness; and anger at myself. This is a punitive operation where the rule of law does not apply, where the law is not present.[49]

Another interviewee reflected that the *zachistka*,

> broke any concept I had of my own personal values. There was misery, death, tears, blood, torture, losses. There were mothers without sons, wives without husbands, children without fathers. It is fear, it is horror, it is feeling weak, feeling helpless. You know that you are not guilty of anything, but it will still affect you in any case. For me, a *zachistka* was always intertwined with enormous fear.[50]

Zachistka is also an example of what Dojcinovic calls 'priming', a process whereby a single word 'can lead us into one or several related semantic fields' (Dojcinovic 2012b, p. 87). As one civilian stated, 'This word always appeared with other information such as "a cleansing took place there", "people were detained here", "they were shot there, they couldn't find someone", and so on'. 'There was a particular kind of horror linked to this word.'[51] One Chechen civilian confessed, 'Nothing good was linked to it. Only horror'.[52] But the use of *zachistka* as a

[47]Interview with Subject 1.
[48]Interview with Subject 2.
[49]Interview with Subject 1.
[50]Interview with Subject 2.
[51]Interview with Subject 3.
[52]Interview with Subject 4.

propagandistic tool took two decisive forms. As discussed above, it evoked fear in the civilian population of Chechnya as 'cleansing' operations became part of the routine depiction and experience of violence in the region. On the ground, the language served to dehumanise the civilian population and such operations were frequently referred to as punitive operations (*karatelnaya operatsiya*) to emphasise the collective punishment civilians associated with the military strategy. The respondents felt that their physical integrity was directly threatened. The effect had become so widespread that during the election campaign of Chechen politician Alu Alkhanov in 2004, large street billboards appeared throughout Grozny with the campaign slogan : 'No to cleansing operations!' (*net k zachistkam*).

For those Chechens interviewed, the extent to which they associated the *zachistka* with race was mixed: 'During the first war whether you were a Muslim or not had no significance. What was important was whether you were Chechen or not, a Caucasian or not', recalled one interviewee. 'In this first war there was a nationalist factor. And during the second religion became a strong factor—whether you were a Muslim or not'.[53] Another commented, 'for me a large part of the racism was that I was a Chechen, not a Muslim'.[54]

The role of *zachistka* in fomenting fear in the region, as told through Chechen civilians, served a different function in the Russian media. In the broader public sphere, the language was designed to convince Russian society that the violence in the region was justified. The media was all too ready to invoke the word for rhetorical or propagandistic ends. It was in this context that the use of *zachistka* began to flourish, underpinning a larger political objective that set the tone of the coming years. The priming in the press releases of the Ministry of Defence and state television was carefully constructed, repetitive and persuasive. Such devices sought, above all, to bureaucratise the language of violence and eradicate any emotional connection to the conflict. *Zachistka* appears matter-of-factly in the state press, as if it were part of accepted military discourse. Routine sentences, such as, there was 'a cleansing (*zachistka*) of liberated population points and surrounding regions' were used repeatedly. The press releases begin with the neutral and non-descriptive expression—'illegal armed formations'—to collapse the legitimately elected Chechen government into a small radical group of fighters. Within a paragraph, however, the language deteriorates to a routine depiction of Chechen separatists as 'terrorists', 'bandits', 'extremists', 'wahhabis' and 'bandit formations'.

The word *zachistka* was directly linked to this larger state narrative of 'international terrorism' and an 'eliminationist' discourse to build and consolidate a psychological environment in favour of the campaign.[55] Thus Kovalev's earlier statement that the use of *zachistka* in everyday discourse was a powerful ideological tool is pertinent here. When Russian armed forces entered Chechnya in 1999, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior presented a clearly articulated campaign that what Russia was now facing was a struggle against 'international terrorism'. According to a Ministry of Defence press release, 'Chechnya, as the centre of international terrorism, continues to attract foreign fighters including Arabs, Pakistanis, as well as members of the Taliban'.[56] Statements made by Russian generals such as Viktor Kazantsev set the tone, '[w]e will cleanse [*zachistit'*] the land of

[53]Interview with Subject 1.
[54]Interview with Subject 2.
[55]For discussion on eliminationist discourse, see Oberschall (2012, pp. 174–75).
[56]'Obstanovka v Severo-Kavkazskom regione na 25 octoberya', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 26 October 1999.

Chechnya of bandits. The sooner they are caught, the sooner they will leave. They will not be caught—they will be destroyed. There is no third way' (Babichev 1999). The leadership propagated the idea that 'terrorists' and 'bandits' had to be 'eliminated' and 'wiped out'. Towns and villages had to be 'cleansed' and 'purged'. As President Putin famously declared in September: 'The whole world knows that terrorists must be destroyed at their bases … if they are hiding in the outhouse, excuse me, but we'll wipe them out there. There's nothing left to discuss' (Gilligan 2010, p. 32).

The notion of 'cleansing' was directly linked to the eradication of 'international terrorism' that threatened the existence of the Russian nation and justified an extreme and uncompromising response in the region. The narrative of the struggle against international terrorism was tied to a broader nationalist discourse that included 'saving' the world from the collapse of civilisation. For public relations spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembskii, this war was being waged by the Russian state to protect 'Europe and the whole world' from the 'terrorist abyss' (Falaleev 2000). 'Cleansing' the region was therefore linked to these broader global aims. No longer was the aim to simply quell an internal separatist threat, but the actions of the Russian state were now central to eliminating an external threat (Oberschall 2012, p. 176). The surge of press releases from the Department of Defence illustrates the determination with which the Russian government re-characterised the Chechen conflict. What makes this narrative especially effective as propaganda is the complete rejection of a compromise or negotiated conflict settlement (Oberschall 2012, p. 175). All nuances and qualifications were eliminated from the state position, with 'all or nothing' distinctions that undermined agreements. There was no possible discussion of withdrawal. Moderates within the Chechen separatist movement, including the country's legitimately elected president, were rejected as possible negotiating partners. Incoming President Putin publicly stated he would not 'negotiate with terrorists and bandits',[57] thus serving the basic objective of delegitimising the Maskhadov regime.

The militarisation of Russian language in the Putin era symbolised the dominant role of the power ministries in the second Chechen war. The Russian security services, including the FSB played a far greater role in the media under Putin than during the Yel'tsin era, albeit behind the scenes (Bacon *et al*. 2006, pp. 34–40, 77). This was an orchestrated campaign, inspired in part, by the new 'Doctrine on Information Security' issued by President Putin's Security Council in 2000 that called for 'stepping up counterpropaganda activities aimed at preventing negative consequences of the spread of disinformation about Russian domestic policy' (Panfilov 2005).[58] Clearly the censure on Russian and foreign correspondents from visiting Chechnya made it next to impossible to fact-check statements issued by the state-sponsored press. While there is no direct proof, *Kommersant"* reported it had obtained a document that outlined how tightly the military controlled the mass media. The newspaper cited a Russian Information Centre document directing what terms military spokesmen and journalists must use when reporting on events in Chechnya (Panfilov 2005).

This propagandistic framing went beyond the Department of Defence and pro-state newspapers. Emil Pain, the former Russian ethno-national relations adviser, commented in 2000 that 'by using professional military jargon in their reports, journalists lend the war

[57]'Putin Declares War on Terrorism', *Moscow News*, 30 October 2002.

[58]See also, Article 19, Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 9 September 2000, available at: http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/1e5f0de28fe77fdcc32575d900298676/2deaa9ee15ddd24bc32575d9002c442b!OpenDocument, accessed 14 January 2014.

an everyday flavor' (Pain 2000, p. 2). The sudden appearance of the word *zachistka* in the press releases of the Department of Defence was also connected to a sharp militarisation of language in the media more generally, soldier memoirs, interviews and fiction. An assessment of the public media not only creates a fuller understanding of the ways in which particular language stereotyped Chechens, but opens a way of understanding how the Russian public projected broader anxieties in wartime. The hardened public responses to the second Chechen war symbolise not only the return of the Russian armed forces and the Security Forces as a serious and influential presence under President Putin, but the legitimate fears of the Russian public as radical Chechen separatists penetrated Moscow itself.

The media's use of the term is not being used in the same way as it is in the military, that is, to urge soldiers to commit prohibited acts. Rather, it is being used to persuade the public to accept the already occurring violence. There is therefore a distinct difference between 'national' mobilisation directed at persuading the broader public to tacitly approve of the violent practices in the region and 'group' mobilisation that serves to instil unity within a unit or battalion (Fiser 2012, p. 41). Effective propaganda is usually the result of forces established long before the actual propaganda emerges (Dojcinovic 2012b, p. 79). As argued by Russian human rights activist, Stanislav Dmitrievskii, 'in many respects, we had already been primed for the use of the word *zachistka* by late 1999'.[59] Dmitrievskii is referring not only to the occasional use of the word during the first Chechen war, but to its repeated use by Moscow mayor, Yuri Luzhkov in the aftermath of the hostage crisis in Buddenovsk in 1996 and the trolleybus bombing in July of the same year. Luzhkov began to use the word in public addresses, directly connecting its use to 'cleansing' Moscow of unwanted people. 'We are beginning a massive operation to cleanse (*zachistit'*) the city from homeless people, vagrants, all possible "barnstormers" and those without Russian citizenship', declared the mayor.[60] As *Izvestiya* journalist, Valery Yakov argued, 'It is not accidental that the authorities in the capital are beginning to master the term "zachistka"' (Yakov 1996). Yet the task of 'cleansing' the capital also explicitly targeted Asians, Caucasians, Africans, Latin Americans, criminals, beggars and homeless people.[61] The point is that the term *zachistka* could be explicitly racial, as much as it could target social groups considered a blemish to Russian society. The limitless use of the term allowed it to be both racial and prejudicial. Mayor Luzhkov stated that, '[w]e will do a strong cleansing [*zachistky*] of Moscow in order to protect ourselves from those who represent a danger to us' (Feofanov 1996). This was backed up by President Yel'tsin's statement that '[a] Moscow not cleansed, will not be clean' (Feofanov 1996). As one editorial in *Izvestiya* noted, 'All checks are taken on the basis of visual looks—dragged from the crowds without conversation. This is the best-case scenario—the worst is a beating. The operation of the "cleansing" [*zachistka*] is painted in a threatening racist tone'.[62] In Tomsk, it became known colloquially as the 'Day of the Big Broom' (*v den' bol'shoi metli*) when the city was cleansed of beggars and vagrants (Sinyavskii 1997).

Research on the Russian media has shown the extent to which journalism remained politicised in the twenty-first century. As Oates argued after interviewing Russian journalists

[59]Author's interview with Stanislav Dmitrievskii, human rights activist, Connecticut, USA, 12 May 2013.

[60]'Neob'yavlennaya voina protiv moskvichei', *Izvestiya*, 13 July 1996.

[61]'Primer podaet Moskva: natsional'nyi chistki v rossiiskikh gorodakh', *Izvestiya*, 28 May 1998; 'Korichnevaya Rossiya', *Izvestiya*, 9 June 1998.

[62]'V borbe za pravoporadok ne dolzhni byt' "svobody ruk"', *Izvestiya*, 25 July 1996. See also, Arifdzhanov (1996).

in 2005, 'Journalists view themselves as political players and do not seek to change that role. They work for their particular political patron. Viewers and readers will essentially be presented with propaganda from the point of view of the political patron' (Oates 2007, p. 1288). Despite the fact that researchers in this field recognise a partial de-politicisation of Russian journalism, Pasti argues that at the end of the 1990s '… the state held power over political and economic processes and used the leading media for propagandist coverage of elections and privatisation campaigns. Journalism, which was shaped for the needs of the state, remained in the old frames biased in favour of the government' (Pasti 2005, p. 100).

The question arises then of the difference between casual usage and deliberate appropriation of *zachistka* in the press. To what extent did the use of *zachistka* reflect a casual habit of journalists or a deliberate appropriation by the state for propagandistic purposes? This distinction is particularly difficult to make since the use of *zachistka* in the media was certainly driven in the early days of the war by the strong deliberate proliferation of this term within the state papers, the military press and government-sponsored television networks, especially *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*. It was then taken up by the independent, but (pro-Putin) papers *Trud* and *Izvestiya* and the opposition (liberal) *Novaya Gazeta* (Panfilov 2005).[63] Each of these media groups dealt with the Chechen wars differently, but the word *zachistka* entrenched itself in all three arenas. In particular, it is clear that the pro-state papers, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, appropriated the discourse as part of a pro-state agenda that began with the dissemination of the Ministry of Defence press releases in early October 1999.

There is no smoking gun in these papers. There is no repeated hate speech in the state and pro-state press based on racial categories. But there is stigmatisation based on 'ethnic' and 'national' groups. The use of *zachistka* is effective precisely because it is based on perception and inferences, as well as the context in which events are taking place and the actions that are ultimately sanctioned by it. The word *zachistka* constantly appears against a background of more generalised claims about the 'nature' of the Chechen people who are often cast derisively as 'goats jumping around the mountains',[64] 'bandits' and 'scum'. As General-Colonel Vladimir Moltenskoi said of the village of Mesker Yurt, 'this is a pro-bandit inclined village. … It is clear that this group of bandits, with the quiet consent of the entire population of Mesker Yurt, had the right to deprive people of their lives' (Pilipchuk 2002).

Commander Koshman's interview, for example, in *Krasnaya Zvezda* exemplifies a common pejorative tone often used by the military to depict the Chechen people. When reflecting on how the Russian armed forces can win the war, he encourages ethnic stereotyping in a manner that casts Chechens as a people who understand the language of force,

> we must hold on, and persuade this very strange, contradictory and confused people. The most difficult thing here, in my view, is to find a common ground and set of values that will help us to work out the rules of the game. And one of the 'basics', common for Chechens, for all of the Caucasus is the concept of force [*sila*]. Blind and stupid force is not respected here and is despised, but the mountain people have always trusted and been humbled by confident and intelligent force and will do so in the future. (Shurygin 2000)

[63]The papers chosen for this study include: state-owned: *Izvestiya*, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*; independent: *Trud* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*; and opposition: *Novaya Gazeta* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.

[64]Interview with Subject 2.

One of the chief officers from a Special Reconnaissance Unit of the Ministry of Defence in Chechnya answered a journalist from *Izvestiya,* Vadim Rechkalov with the following statement:

> From time immemorial, they [Chechens] have lived as robbers and murderers. It is in their blood. … We have to comb through Chechen society. They speak out against the cleansing operations, they complain that their relatives are disappearing. But it is not that way at all. Normal people are not ending up in Chechnya. Monsters end up there, and they need to be destroyed, cleaned out (*zachistit'*). (Rechkalov 2003)[65]

Zachistka *through the legal lens*

Given the absence of an international tribunal on the conflict in Chechnya, and the severe limitations of the European Court of Human Rights, the question of the role of language in the Chechen wars has not been addressed in a legal setting. As Dojcinovic points out, 'the prosecution of propaganda remains a controversial topic for lawyers, one very much in its formative period' (Dojcinovic 2012a, p. 18). Indeed, an analytical framework on hate speech or propaganda and its causal links to direct violence is still evolving (Wilson 2015, p. 143). The International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) dismissed discriminatory language as a motivating factor among soldiers in the Radislav Krstic case after the prosecution argued that the use of derogatory language toward Bosnian Muslims was evidence of Krstic's genocidal intent. The Trial chamber accepted that 'this type of charged language is commonplace amongst military personnel during war' and placed no weight upon Krstic's use of language in establishing his intent.[66] By the time of the case against Vojislav Seselj, the Serb nationalist leader in 2012, this disregard for language had changed. Indeed, Seselj was charged with instigating crimes against humanity on the basis of three speeches he gave between 1991 and 1995 (Wilson 2015, p. 105). Similarly, in the case of *Prosecutor v. Nahimana, Barayagwiza, Ngeze*, at the ICTR, the prosecutor proved direct and public incitement to commit genocide through an analysis of language used by Radio RTLM and the newspaper, *Kangura,* giving precedence to where the statements were made, the content of the words, audience interpretation and the state of mind of the speaker (*mens rea*) (Gordon 2008).

The Serbo-Croatian word with similar meanings to *zachistka* is *ciscenje*, meaning, in its most innocent permutation, to 'clean an object', to its most punitive, to cleanse and purge a region through killing, ethnic cleansing, torture and rape.[67] Despite the fact that the ICTY dismissed the use of derogatory language in the Krstic case, the tribunal remains troubled by

[65]In the same interview, when asked who he was fighting against, the chief reconnaissance officer responded, '[w]ith those who don't want to live in Russia by Russian laws, don't want to follow our faith. Chechens are a nation of scums. Of course there are good people among them, but the majority are monsters. … Normal Chechens, those who are Russified, have already fled. And the entire infection is coming from the mountains. Who are we fighting now? Either dim-witted youngsters, pensioners that have grown up through the two wars. Or those who have already spilt so much blood that they have nowhere to go' (Rechkalov 2003).

[66]'Prosecutor v Radislav Krstic', International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia, Case No. ICTY. IT-98-33-T, August 2001, available at: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krstic/tjug/en/krs-tj010802e.pdf, accessed 16 June 2016.

[67]Conversation with Predrag Dojcinovic, University of Connecticut, USA, 4 April 2012.

the multiple meanings that *ciscenje* has in Serbo-Croatian. It almost always leaves *ciscenje* in its original in the court documents to signal that the word may resonate differently for a native speaker (Dojcinovic 2012b, p. 83), and that its meaning is entirely dependent on the context in which a particular act has taken place. The court concluded that the word had various meanings and implications; from interpreting *ciscenje* to mean 'mopping up' in the military context (dealing with pockets of resistance in a post-conflict situation) or 'cleansing', in this case, either detaining civilians, forcibly removing them from a prescribed territory or extrajudicially executing them. As one witness observed in the Krajisnik trial when commenting on a report on the village of Svravke: 'It's not sufficiently clear from this sentence alone whether they mean the military term of cleansing the terrain after battle or mopping up the last resistance or the way we see it used in many other cases—also known as ethnic cleansing'.[68] Interpreting the meaning and context of *ciscenje* was instrumental, however, in the Milosevic case when defence witnesses, General Milos Djosan and Colonel Vlatko Vukovic, argued that *ciscenje* meant nothing more than 'separating terrorists from the rest of the population'.[69] In an attempt to acquit Milosevic of ethnic cleansing, the defence tried to convince the court that *ciscenje* was a strict military term with a fixed military aim. As the role of propaganda in the incitement of violence is increasingly recognised in international justice, trying to determine the exact meaning of words such as *ciscenje* and the intent behind them are becoming important instruments in the adjudication of cases against military and political leaders.

J. L. Austin argued famously that 'To *say* something is to *do* something'. Austin's central argument asserts that 'speech acts are acts—deeds in and of themselves—and therefore can be assessed according to what each individual speech act does; that is, according to its function' (Austin 1975, p. 12; emphasis in original).[70] Speech act theorists agree that language does more than depict reality and they draw 'sharp lines among the meaning, the force and the effects of a speech act' (Wilson 2015, p. 136). Austin outlined three characteristics of speech acts: locutionary acts, 'roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain "meaning" in the traditional sense'; illocutionary acts, 'such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking, &c., i.e. utterances which have a certain (conventional) force'; and perlocutionary acts, 'that we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading' (Cline nd). Austin 'focused on illocutionary acts, maintaining that here we might find the "force" of a statement and demonstrate its performative nature' (Cline nd). It is argued further that 'illocutionary acts are all intentional and are generally performed with the primary intention of achieving some perlocutionary effect' (Cline nd). This has an effect on the 'feelings, thoughts or actions of the audience, or of the speakers, or of other persons'.[71]

[68]Momcilo Krajisnik, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Transcript of Trial Proceedings, International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia, Case No. ICTY IT-00-39, 4 March 2005, p. 9905, available at: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krajisnik/trans/en/050304IT.htm, accessed 4 May 2009.

[69]Slobodan Milosevic, Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia, Transcript of Trial Proceedings, International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia, Case No. ICTY IT-02-54, 31 October 2005, pp. 45946, 46121, available at: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/trans/en/051101IT.htm, accessed 12 June 2010.

[70]See also, Wilson (2015, p. 133).

[71]'John Langshaw Austin', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/austin-jl/, accessed 22 March 2015.

Bach and Harnish argue that people do not speak simply to 'exercise their vocal cords' (Stefanescu 2000). They would add that speakers have primary intentions that are perlocutionary. What determines the 'force' is the meaning of the sentence together with the seriousness of the speaker and other conditions. The speaker then can create 'social realities within certain social contexts' (Cline nd). Kent Greenawalt observes that some kinds of speech are 'situation-altering utterances' that change the social context in which we live (Wilson 2015, p. 131). This deconstruction of the speech act then into three distinct modes allows for Austin to argue that illocutionary force is stable with roots in social life and therefore has a particular conventional force. Both Austin and Searle agree that the 'uptake' of the utterance by the audience will inevitably depend on the individual, but the central point is that any utterance has intention and is either suited or ill-suited to any situation.

What is important to analyse in the case of Chechnya then is the public statements of the Russian military command and the interpretation of *zachistka* by Russian soldiers. One of the features of researching speech acts is to determine the level of authority the speaker has in a given society, the degree of responsibility and therefore the possible resonance or effect this speech may have on a unit, or battalion, on civilians and the broader Russian public. These are called 'authoritative illocutions' (Langton 1993, p. 305). When Benesch writes on criminalising war propaganda at the ICTR, she adopts a six-prong approach. Although she is writing on a particular case of genocide, the categories are useful for framing propaganda and mass violence in conflicts generally, including the Chechen wars. While she does not fully elaborate the evidentiary basis for linking speech acts to violence, her framework provides an extremely useful starting point. Her criteria insist on: firstly, a factual investigation of the message in its cultural context and how that message was understood in a given society; secondly, the position of the speaker and his/her ability to be able to influence the audience; thirdly, whether the targeted group had suffered violence in the past; fourthly, whether the marketplace of ideas was functioning; fifthly, if the targeted group was dehumanised; and finally, whether the messages against the targeted group were repeated (Benesch 2008).

If we adopt Benesch's criteria, the cultural associations of the term *zachistka* with violent acts has been firmly established in previous sections of this article through an analysis of the historical etymology of the term, its strong associations with other violent moments in twentieth century Russia, as well as events in the Chechen village of Samashki in 1995. The Chechen population had also suffered indiscriminate violence during the first war, and the marketplace of ideas, as established above, was severely compromised by a government-backed media and an independent press still struggling for legitimate plurality. Moreover, the targeted group was dehumanised as also established above. Stereotyping of Chechens as 'wahhabis', 'bandits', 'goats', 'ghosts' and 'terrorists' by highly placed military personnel was common and, in some contexts, associated or even equated with Chechens as an ethnic group.[72]

Therefore, according to five of the criteria set out by Benesch, the use of *zachistka* should qualify as propagandistic. The first criterion, that is, a factual investigation of the message in its cultural context and how it was understood, needs further elaboration. The key distinguishing feature for prosecutors who enforce international humanitarian law is to 'separate speech

[72]The most prominent military actors considered here are General Viktor Kazantsev (Commander of the Allied Group of Federal Forces in the North Caucasus), Vladimir Shamanov (Colonel General, Russian Commander of the Airborne Forces), Vladimir Moltenskoi (Colonel General, deputy chief of the Russian Land Forces) and Roman Shadrin (Colonel and Commander of the 503rd Tank Regiment).

… intended to encourage the lawful killing of enemy soldiers from illegal communications promoting the unlawful killing and mistreatment of civilians and other *hors du combat*' (Saxon 2012, p. 118). The question then is whether individuals of authority in Chechnya bear criminal responsibility for using propaganda to commit or instigate and aid or abet violations of the law of armed conflict during the Chechen war (Saxon 2012, p. 119). Was there a genuine risk that certain communications might incite violence (Saxon 2012, p. 123)? And do these expressions illustrate the criminal intent of the accused?

Zachistka was part of a much broader linguistic landscape and served a dual purpose. As a form of national mobilisation it generated a linguistic field that accepted and encouraged violence. One might argue that General Viktor Kazantsev's statement in January 2000 that 'only children up to the age of ten and those older than 60 years of age and women will be considered refugees', set the stage for a mental fingerprint that blurred the social lines between Chechen fighters and the civilian population. His statement can be read as an incitement to violence against all Chechen males between the ages of 11 and 59 based on age and gender (Kazantsev 2000). Although there is no mention of *zachistka*, the timing of his statement coincides with one of the most violent periods of the war during the winter of 1999 when pamphlets were being thrown from airplanes over the capital Grozny stating that 'people who stay in the city will be considered terrorists and bandits and will be destroyed by artillery and aviation. … Everyone who does not leave the city will be destroyed. The countdown has started' (Gilligan 2010, p. 38). Kazantsev stated that he regretted the 'softheartedness' that had led his troops to making exceptions when checking residential homes, especially 'fathers of large families and senior citizens'. He then continued threateningly: 'we are now being forced to correct those mistakes' (Kazantsev 2000).

Kazentsev's subsequent threat two weeks later that, '[w]e will cleanse (*zachistit'*) Chechnya of any scum', becomes more inflammatory when viewed in light of his broad assessment of Chechen enemies (Falichev 2000). Across many of these public statements by Russia's military command there falls the shadow of collective discrimination. During an interview with Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya on events in the village of Alkhan Yurt, General Shamanov was asked why certain individuals were being detained, to which he responded that they were linked to 'bandits':

Q: What does this mean, one way or another connected with the bandits? The wife of a bandit—who is she from your perspective?
A: A bandit.
Q: Why?
A: If she wasn't a bandit, why wouldn't she leave him.

Politkovskaya explains that by their rules, she cannot leave.

A: If the bandits don't understand our morals, they should be destroyed. If a person is sick, you cut of the affected part of the body that is making the patient sick.
Q: But they are not operating on the relatives. The baby of a bandit is also a bandit?
A: Also. Tell me, how do you tell the difference between a wife and a sniper? It's ok for you, sitting in Moscow, discussing all this—clean and comfortable—looking at the box [television]. And I'm here. … (Politkovskaya 2000)

Indeed, Colonel Roman Shadrin's statement that '[w]e will leave about 100,000–120,000 Chechens and then we can sleep soundly for 30 years. For the time being, they are not

breeding. I bombed Komsomolskoe and everything is quiet there now …' is a direct threat with clear intent to target Chechens as a group (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2009, p. 16). The content of his public interview arguably had the potential to incite further violence. Genocidal intent is the only reasonable interpretation of his message. Shadrin's statement was also made at the height of the bombing campaign in March 2000 to journalist Sergei Petukhov from the magazine *Expert*, when Chechen fighters were being forced out of the capital through the village of Komsomolskoe where hundreds of civilians still remained.

Zachistka appears so frequently and consistently in the public speeches of the high command that it became one of the most enduring messages of the second Chechen war, matched by severe war crimes and crimes against humanity on the ground (Borovkov 1999; Denisov 1999; Oliinik 1999).[73] It is the manner in which they are spoken, as well as the public forums—particularly newspaper and television interviews—that determine their propagandistic value. All highly placed military personnel were aware of the violence taking place and the cultural context in which their messages were being heard. Indeed, the deprivation of language, as embodied in *zachistka*, is the first sign of a culture accepting and encouraging indiscriminate violence against another social group.

Tracing the statements not only of Russia's generals, but unit and battalion commanders, as well as soldiers is crucial here. Did *zachistka* act as a form of group mobilisation? In the interviews conducted for this study, the task was to determine how soldiers understood and responded to the word *zachistka*. Were there any shared patterns in their attitudes or evidence of a 'mental fingerprint' that signalled a collective understanding of the meaning of a *zachistka* in a particular context? The meaning of *zachistka* was clear to all soldiers, insofar as it was acknowledged as a counterinsurgency tactic directed at population points with the aim of destroying separatist fighters. Finding direct evidence to determine whether the speeches of the Russian military command were interpreted by the Russian soldiers as calls to violence was more challenging, that is, that the military knowingly made such calls and in doing so knew that they would result in violence. Of course, threatening statements by soldiers are quite easily available, such as this one directed at Avalu Aidamirov, a Chechen civilian in Chernorech'e: 'you won't be living here for long. We'll erase you from the face of the earth (*s litsa zemli sotrem*)'.[74] Or a further statement by a soldier with the ground forces, 'we need a first-rate cleansing (*kapitalnaya zachistka*), in essence, a scorched earth policy (*vyzhennyi zemli*)' (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2009, pp. 10–1). Yet, the soldiers interviewed for this article never spoke of top-down propaganda, nor about the influence of the press. They never acknowledged that they felt influenced by the public speeches of the high command, their superiors, or even that they were necessarily self-aware, ideologically.

Hearing the word *zachistka* evoked no particular emotional feeling for more than half the soldiers interviewed. It was accepted by the majority as nothing more than military slang, a military order to fulfil. With two exceptions, none interpreted it as a euphemism for a potentially punitive operation, nor did they comment on its propagandistic resonance. A special forces commander argued, 'I assure you again', he insisted, 'that in military circles

[73] 'Dlya soglasovaniya deistvii', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15 January 2000.

[74] Interview with Avalu Aidamirov, a resident of the village of Chernorech'e, 6 July 2001. See, 'Zachistka poselka Chernorech'e', available at: http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/N-Caucas/misc/chernor.htm, accessed 10 August 2010.

nobody gave it any more meaning than it happens to share the same root with the word—to clean (*chistit'*)'.[75] Contrary to this majority view, when the reconnaissance officer was asked how he responded to hearing it, he replied, '[n]egatively. It seemed to me that it was very close to the term "chistka" used by the NKVD in the 30s. … The word "check" (*proverka*) sounds more agreeable and "examination" (*dosmotr*) sounds normal', he argued.[76]

> In the reconnaissance unit we used the word 'examination'. … The term does not have the same negative energy as *zachistka* does. For the past 20 years, or a little less, say from the time of the second Chechen campaign, [the word *zachistka*] has evoked a nauseous feeling in the soldiers, at the very least, among the soldiers that I socialised with, and among the civilians.[77]

'All our efforts were aimed at one thing only', stressed one Special Forces officer, 'to complete the task, to stay alive and bring the group as a whole unit out, with no casualties. This is it. Nothing more'.[78] Three shared meanings emerge from the interviews. The first was on the question of personal survival. As has been argued elsewhere, the survival strategy, when founded on a perceived common threat, usually means that a social group will unite strongly around that threat. 'Your obligation is to stay with the living', argued another, 'stay together with your unit. Regardless of who is in front of you'.[79] The soldiers concentrated in their answers on the importance of protecting their unit from mines, snipers and improvised explosive devices (Fiser 2012, p. 53). Exhausted by the daily grind of walking with packs, cleaning weapons, on constant alert for mines and sniper attacks, the retired officer commented,

> [t]o ponder the particular details, to examine it, to ask or answer any questions. There was no physical strength left to do it, nor was there any moral power. Even more so since I was the unit commander, its head. I had to first care about my soldiers, I mean, I had a responsibility toward them. And for this reason there was no time to think in depth and besides, we were never able to forget that we could encounter the enemy at any time.[80]

A sense of exclusion, from decision-making and thus from power, reflected another dimension of the soldiers' responses. For different reasons, they commented on how intelligence information was closed to them. When speaking about whether civilians were still in villages at the time of artillery attacks or cleansings, the field officer admitted, 'That kind of information

[75]Interview with Subject D. Similar thinking lay behind the response of another officer of the Special Forces, 'It's just slang. Officially there is no term such as "cleansing" … [There were] no emotions, to be honest. It was just a standard task. Everyday work' (interview with Subject C). 'There was always fear' said Subject E, 'but at that moment, it was probably anxiety because there was work to do during a cleansing'. 'It evokes no emotion in me whatsoever', said Subject D. 'It was a standard military or police operation that had such a banal name, there was nothing evil about it, it was just banal.' For Subject D, it meant to 'clean up the scum'.

[76]Interview with Subject A.

[77]Interview with Subject A. Subject B responded: 'For the one retired officer who served with the ground forces for 20 years—"It's likely some kind of military slang. … Well, the associations come close to "cleaning dirt from your hands", "lice from your hair", "cleaning out"—anything, even "cleaning under your nails" and so on. … Or to "clean up dirty rooms from cobwebs, bugs, mice". I'm not linking the enemy to bugs or mice, but just when it comes to the linguistic side of this issue, these are my associations' (interview with Subject B).

[78]Interview with Subject C.

[79]Interview with Subject E.

[80]Interview with Subject B.

was shut down to me'.[81] An officer of the Special Forces acknowledged that they were just given a direct order:

> When you are based there for over six months, and you fulfil your duty once or twice a week based on address information, there is no opportunity to analyse the reason why. We didn't have an opportunity to conduct personal intelligence investigations or work with an agent. We didn't have any such data.[82]

What the interviews do tell us is that half the soldiers interviewed directly linked the practice of the *zachistka* to violations of the laws of armed conflict. Thus the experiences of the soldiers, far from concealing a lawless environment during the cleansing operations, significantly expand discussion of the cultural *milieu* of the Russian armed forces. Several of the soldiers managed to insist upon their own weakness. One confessed to witnessing the torture of detainees, 'I did not take part in these actions. I simply stood by and brought people in who had been caught'.[83] Another confessed,

> We came, we went in, checked, made hay of everything, turned it upside down, found something or not and went away. … There was a lot that wasn't clear, what, how, why? My sense was telling me that this was not right. Not right in the sense that we just go somewhere and shoot. … Even when they told us to shoot prisoners, around 20 to 30 of them, we didn't do it, we didn't execute the order. We simply didn't want our own hands covered in blood.[84]

For another officer when asked if extrajudicial killings took place, he responded, 'Not openly, but there were [cases]'.[85] Two of the soldiers regretted what had taken place in Chechnya, admitting to serious human rights violations during the counterinsurgency operation. With the benefit of hindsight, the retired field officer offered a traumatic appraisal of his experience,

> The cleansing operations (*zachistki*) left me with a painful feeling. I would have preferred to sit somewhere else in a command-and-staff car and conduct remote control of the units, not to have seen it with my own eyes. After all these years, I can re-evaluate things now, and I can say that this painful feeling has continued and to some extent intensified. There wasn't much time to assess this experience when I was walking around there, but after sometime, when I started to put all the pieces of the mosaic together, I can say it was an utterly painful experience.[86]

For the Special Forces officer, 'In the 1990s I looked at this completely differently. I had to do my work, fulfil my orders. Now I see that there really were a lot of mistakes and I seriously acknowledge those mistakes'.[87]

[81]Interview with Subject B.

[82]Interview with Subject F. When asked how he could tell the difference between a fighter and a normal civilian, Subject E recalled, 'With my eyes. We called their eyes "animal eyes"—they were really evil eyes, empty. There was one time when we found someone in one of these houses—he had a really murderous glare, hatred in his eyes. Some civilians were standing opposite and had despair in their eyes as if something was going to happen at that very moment'.

[83]Interview with Subject E.

[84]Interview with Subject C.

[85]Interview with Subject E.

[86]Interview with Subject B.

[87]Interview with Subject E.

Zachistka *and the burden of responsibility*

This was the mindset in which military strategy could be implemented in Chechnya. The suggestion from the interviews is that the soldiers perceived themselves to have little power over the order to conduct a *zachistka*, but there was power to interpret how to implement that order. And in this rested their burden of responsibility. In this sense, *zachistka* became value-laden, infused by additional meanings provided by the overall context of the events taking place. The additional adjectives added to the word are testimony to that. Knowing the term *zachistka* to be polysemic, the soldiers took time to formulate the message, categorising the scale of the operation through words such as 'gentle', 'cruel', 'total', 'ethnic' or 'sweet'. In fact, the power of the word *zachistka* rests in the fact that it directly encouraged a climate of irresponsibility; no-one took responsibility for the repercussions of the word, allowing some to claim that it was being used metaphorically as military slang, for others to use it to sanction indiscriminate violence against civilians and prisoners of war and still others to use it in the mass media as a rhetorical tool. As the reconnaissance officer argued, 'I think that order is important here, that the terminology be appropriate for the moment'.[88]

The degree to which *zachistka* urged the commission of an offence or offences has to be analysed on an individual basis in the context of a pattern of events by a single unit or battalion, keeping in mind its semantic complexity. Other semantic aspects of the word, such as connotation and pejoration, would also need to be considered. The research of Dmitrievskii confirms that there was widespread acceptance of such methods of conducting military and police operations in certain circles. Moreover, there is sufficient evidence to establish presumable liability for complicity in crimes within joint criminal enterprises. The degree to which actors possessed knowledge of the crimes, but failed to take necessary and reasonable measures to prevent or punish crimes, or acted with the element of recklessness or criminal negligence has been established (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2013). Scholars need to continue working on establishing 'patterns of conduct' which means the steady repetition of similar criminal acts in time and space, alongside making the links between particular events and the semantic environment. The uptake of the speech act by the listeners and criminal acts committed by them would then be subject to criminal liability for ordering, instigating or aiding and abetting (Wilson 2015, p. 130). As Dmitrievskii has pointed out 'when the intent is not expressed directly and specifically, then one way to establish its existence is inquiry into the sequence of conduct of a group or units to find out whether it is possible to prove the intent with their "system of conduct"' (Dmitrievskii *et al*. 2013, p. 4).

Alongside identifying patterns of conduct, further research on the meaning of *zachistka* in context might provide insight into mental causation and shared criminal intent. It is accepted that the degree of causation is difficult to prove, but as Dojcinovic has argued in an elaboration of the theories of Austin and Searle, the repetition of certain phrases creates what he calls 'an evidentiary feedback loop as one of the links between the instigated and the instigator' (Dojcinovic 2012b, p. 95). The repetition of the phrase, the 'Karlobag–Ogulin–Karlkovac–Virovitica line', for example, in the Seselj case was code for ethnically cleansing territory up to the Karlobag line in Croatia and was central for the prosecution in identifying a shared criminal intent (Wilson 2015, p. 145). Researchers such as Dojcinovic who work for the ICTY's Prosecutor's Office continue to work with the theories of Austin and Searle, as well

[88]Interview with Subject A.

as other contemporary theorists and social scientists, to establish a more rigorous framework that will improve the 'condition of satisfaction under which speech acts have concrete effects' (Wilson 2015, p. 143).

War propaganda in Chechnya worked in more complicated ways than international tribunals have necessarily presumed or Benesch's criteria allows. The need to identify the smoking gun or direct calls for violence often marginalises the complex trajectory that war propaganda might often assume. In the case of Chechnya, the term *zachistka* did not originate with any 'mastermind' or was it traditional 'poster-type' propaganda (Fiser 2012, p. 40), but rather originated among the soldiers and military personnel and is linked most intimately to the massacre of 103 civilians in the village of Samashki in April 1995 by MVD forces. The evidence strongly suggests that it was strategically co-opted by the state by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov in 1995 from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and streamlined in the state press by the end of 1999 with the compliance of several state institutions from the Department of Defence, the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of the Interior, battalion commanders and foot soldiers to the independent press.

Three modes of war propaganda were developing over time, operating simultaneously and intersecting at different historical moments. In the first place, such propaganda was expressed through the military and its violence against Chechen civilians and treatment of detainees or prisoners of war. Secondly, it was used by the state-backed media as justification for the violence in the region and to persuade the public to accept such measures. Finally, the more liberal press duplicated its use, albeit more reluctantly, for rhetorical ends. This is certainly a bottom-up development of war propaganda that is deeply rooted in twentieth century patterns of violence in Russia (Fiser 2012, p. 46). The more the word was repeated the more palpable it became. This is also a story of war propaganda taking on a life of its own that challenges the classical notion of the propagandist directly controlling and influencing events. Propaganda on Chechnya cannot be reduced to a paradigmatic or simple clear-cut case (Fiser 2012, p. 45). It operated on many levels and accomplished several functions. A study of *zachistka*, then, constitutes an important opening to the linguistic world forged during the first and second Chechen wars, a product of government policies and military cultures that had an enduring and tragic impact on post-Soviet society.

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