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The Archival Revolution and Contested Memory:
Changing Views of Stalin's Rule in the Light of New Evidence

The Archival Revolution and Contested Memory: Changing Views of Stalin's Rule in the Light of New Evidence

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Abstract

The article discusses the impact on Western scholarship of the opening of secret police archives in Ukraine since the 1990s. The extent of the phenomenon known as the "archival revolution" is surveyed, with special attention to the Stalin period. The archives have answered some old questions concerning the way Stalin exercised power, organized show trials, and forced people to admit to crimes they did not commit. Archival revelations have also stimulated Western researchers to consider new ways of interpreting the Soviet period as a whole.

Key Words:

Stalin, Archival revolution, Western Scholarship, Ukraine.

After 1990, many secret police files were declassified and made available to researchers and the wider public throughout the former communist countries. This has led to interesting explorations into the secret police's mentality and modes of operations in East Germany, Romania, Hungary and various other East European countries.[1] The amount of material already made available is massive, and much more may come to light. The Central Party Archive in Moscow reportedly contains 250 million documents.[2] The SBU (Security Services of Ukraine, the former KGB) archives

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1   For some of the best known works, see Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta Books, 2011) (Orig. pub. 2003); István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

2   Jonathan Brent, *Inside the Stalin Archives: Discovering the New Russia* (New York: Atlas and Co., 2008), 5.

in Kyiv alone contain over 800,000 files, and there are archives in all the larger towns.[3] In the 1990s, Yale University Press began publishing material from Soviet archives and put out over twenty-five volumes in sixteen years. KGB dossiers and interrogations, speeches, letters of Kremlin leaders, secret Central Committee decrees, Comintern deliberations, reports and directives of intelligence organizations have appeared. Confiscated literary works and diaries have also been found among the archival materials. This article examines the impact of archival revelations on our understanding of Stalin's rule and the thirties.

It should be noted that early hopes of finding quick answers to specific questions in the form of sensational documents, or "smoking guns" were often disappointed. Instead, the need for long term programs of painstaking research has become evident, and researchers have reasserted the importance of informed interpretation, of putting together in new ways the pieces of the mosaic, or the jig-saw puzzle, produced by such a mass of materials.

Moreover, in regard to a range of questions the archives do not provide a complete picture. Many files were destroyed as the USSR and Eastern European regimes fell apart. A large number had already been removed earlier, especially when they concerned the Holodomor, the Great Terror, and sensitive individual cases. Other files are still inaccessible. Jonathan Brent, one of the leaders of the Yale University Press project, has pointed out that there was no Soviet equivalent of the Nuremberg trials, and that obtaining incriminating evidence, although never easy, has in recent years become more difficult as the Russian regime in particular has retreated

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3   Individual criminal cases, including the secret police's operational materials, can be found in the HDA SBU (Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine – *Haluzevyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy*), which has an estimated 800,000 case files, the TsDAHOU (Central State Archive of Civic Organizations of Ukraine – *Tsentralnyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromadskykh Obiednan Ukrainy*), TsDAVOU (Central State Archives of the Higher Organs of the State – *Tsentralnyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Vyshchykh Orhaniv Vlady*), the AU SBUKhO (Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine of Kharkiv Oblast – *Arkhiv Upravlinnia Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy Kharkivskoi Oblasti*), the DAKhO (State Archive of Kharkiv Oblast – *Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Kharkivskoi Oblasti*).

from openness and accessibility. In today's Russia, even condemnation of Stalin has become harder. The former supporters of the Communist Party have allied with Russian nationalists and entrenched themselves behind a defence of Stalin and Soviet statehood. They have redefined the enemy as anyone who undermines the current government or casts aspersions at the Russian and Soviet past. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation remains legal. After an unsuccessful attempt to put the party on trail in 1993, no state sponsored project of national introspection has been undertaken.[4] Today, an attempt to stage such a trial, or to voice opposition to Putin, can land one in jail. The Russian government has now issued instructions on how scholars and researchers should interpret events like the Holodomor and the Second World War – a message to researchers that they should avoid probing certain topics.

Addiction to secrecy and lack of transparency are legacies of the past. The archives reveal that throughout the Soviet period there was an effort to conceal the decision-making process and the internal mechanisms of power. In Stalin's day, certain decisions were not implemented through written documents at all, but passed on to the relevant people over the telephone. No minutes seem to have been taken of meetings in the highest decision-making forums.[5] Deliberate attempts were made to conceal the very existence of certain institutions, either through total secrecy or through constant changes of name and reorganizations. Many employees in the secret institutions were not allowed to appear under titles that revealed their actual occupations and some documents were not signed by anyone.[6]

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4   Brent, *Inside*, 7.

5   His subordinates conducted themselves in a similar manner. Vsevolod Balytsky, the head of the Ukrainian secret police, explained in a letter of 22 March 1933 to Genrikh Iagoda, the chief of the OGPU, that he had requested from his subordinates that no written reports on the Famine by the OGPU should be circulated among party secretaries. Instead oral reports should be given to him personally. See Nicolas Werth and Alexis Berelowitch, *L'État soviétique contre les paysans. Rapports secrets de la police politique (Tcheka, GPU, NKVD) 1918–1939* (Paris: Tallandier, 2011), 279–80.

6   Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World: Stalin's Power Apparatus and the Soviet System's Secret Structures of Communication*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2009), 35.

Language was meant to conceal more than to reveal. Stalin often communicated in half-words.[7] Code words were used to legitimize repression or to suggest where to look for victims.[8] The Special Department of OGPU/NKVD used coded communication.[9] This was done in large part to conceal the truth about who really took the initiative and pulled the strings.[10] For example, although a decision was actually taken in the Politburo, this would not be indicated on a document, which would often be stamped as coming from the Central Committee or a state organ.[11] It was forbidden to pass extracts from minutes of Party meetings or Central Committee resolutions to lower offices without permission, so that the origins of decisions could not be traced.[12] The *core* of the system, one researcher has argued, lay in the demand that all evidence revealing the Communist Party's actual role in running the rest of society was by definition to be treated as "strictly secret" or "conspiratorial."[13]

Nonetheless, the declassified information has caused a significant shift in the way the Stalin period is seen. Today historians of the Soviet era who avoided discussing the harsh realities of the Second World War, or of the Stalin period as a whole "so as not to offend the memory of veterans," appear "timid" and "weighed down by numerous ideological prejudices."[14] Brent has put the key issue as follows: "Over time, a larger question began to take shape: what was the mechanism by which the Soviet system operated as a whole?" According to him, understanding the mechanism eventually became the overriding goal of the series volumes of archival documents he edited.[15]

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7   Brent, *Inside*, 233.

8   Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World*, 1, 36.

9   Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World*, 2, 15–17.

10   Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World*, 74.

11   Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World*, 75.

12   Ibid.

13   Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World*, 1, 105.

14   Volodymyr Hrynevych, *Nepryborkane riznoholossia: Druha svitova viina i suspilno-politychni nastroi v Ukraini 1939 – cherven 1941 rr.* [*Unrestrained Dissonance: World War II and Socio-Political Moods in Ukraine, 1939 – June 1941*] (Kyiv; Dnipropetrovsk: Tsentr Tkuma, 2012), 36.

15   Brent, *Inside*, 6.

As scholars like Andrea Graziosi, Vladimir Tismaneanu, Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, and Jonathan Brent have pointed out, the documents made available since the fall of the USSR tend to vindicate the "traditionalist" or "totalitarian" school, which emphasized the role of ideology and terror, and the decisive role of Stalin. By contrast, the "revisionist" school of the seventies and eighties, which focused more on society and structural features, has been in retreat. The theories of "revisionists" argued, among other things, for the amplifying role of local bureaucracies in creating disasters like the Famine of 1932–1933. Documents show, however, that local authorities did all they could to oppose the hard line. This is why Stalin constantly insisted on absolute ruthlessness and sent his most trusted colleagues to impose the most draconian and murderous policies on local communists. In the 1980s, a new generation of revisionists, particularly in the US, argued that Stalin exercised only a limited amount of control over society, that local forces played a crucial role, that the Great Terror of the thirties was not carried out primarily for political motives, was not planned from above, and was less extensive than traditionalists claimed.[16] The archives have brought to light documentary evidence that overwhelmingly supports the "traditionalist" interpretation: "the materials that have emerged in recent years have given powerful new support to the traditionalist emphasis on Stalin's personal rule."[17] This conclusion has in turn shifted interest toward the motives behind Stalin's political initiatives. His intentions will continue to be debated, largely because of the difficulty of imputing subjective content to documentation.

How did Stalin exercise power? One important discovery has been the existence of a "Special Chancellery" (Rosenfeldt's term) that hid behind many veils and for most of its existence operated under the titles of "Secret Department" (*Sekretnyi otdel*) or the "Special Sector" (*Osobyi sektor*). Until the 1970s there was virtually no information on this apparatus. Today, however, most historians agree that the various purge campaigns of the 1930s

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16   Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World*, 1, 20.

17   Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World*, 20–21.

and the Terror of 1936–1938 were directed from the very top of the Party. They were neither initiated locally, nor to any significant extent "got out of hand." What took place was a coherent, targeted and strictly centralized operation aimed first and foremost at eradicating any form of real or potential disloyalty. In order to deprive any potential fifth column of its social base, entire populations were removed. The Special Chancellery and secret police were the means for achieving this end. They allowed Stalin to bypass the Central Committee and local Communist Party leaderships.[18]

Many of the secret police archives in Kyiv and Kharkiv deal with the thousands of individuals, mainly writers and members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, who were arrested and interrogated in the thirties. Most were condemned for subversive activities and destroyed physically. The psychology of both the victimizer and the victim has always fascinated researchers. One set of questions concerns the psychology of the *chekist* or GPU agent. Although some were brutes, others were intelligent men and women. What motivated them, and what were they thinking? Another set of questions concerns what happened during the trials, arrests and interrogations of the thirties. In particular, why did so many people confess? What process was used in breaking individuals and getting them to confess to charges?

A series of high-profile show trials and conspiracy cases took place between 1929 and 1934. They were pretexts for the imprisonment of thousands of people who were active in developing the policy of Ukrainization in education, the press, political and cultural life. The scale was massive: most leading academics, many teachers, all Ukrainians who came from Galicia (some 60,000) to work in the educational, scholarly and cultural fields were arrested.[19] The Ukrainization policy had been declared in 1923

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18 Brent, *Inside*, 231.

19 On the treatment of this emigration, see Oleksandr Rublov and Iu.A. Cherchenko, *Stalinshchyna i dolia zakhidnoukrainskoi intelihentsii: 20–50 roky XX st.* [*Stalinism and the Fate of the Ukrainian Intelligentsia in Western Ukraine in the 1920s–1950s*] (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1994); Olga Bertelsen and Myroslav Shkandrij, "The Secret Police and the Campaign Against Galicians in Soviet Ukraine, 1929–34," *Nationalities Papers*: *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 42.1 (2014): 37–62, accessed March 5, http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/7w2TW3sgItN2MEGcxKDD/full.

and implemented since 1925. The staged trials and mass arrests of the late twenties and early thirties signalled the rolling back of this policy. Over the decades many people have wondered whether these conspiratorial organizations actually existed. The archival evidence shows that in fact they did not. There was plenty of hatred for the regime, but the actual organizations were fabricated. We can now study how the organizations were "created" by special sections of the GPU and NKVD, the process used to torture or manipulate people into confessing to membership, and into implicating others. Stalin was out to prove the validity of his intentions. Before liquidating a particular group of people, he passed on instructions that interrogators had to find evidence of widespread conspiracy in the group and had to link it to a hostile foreign power. The confessions were constructed step by step, often "trying one approach, then another, never stating a goal, but clearly linking the interrogation to the international situation."[20] These confessions were circulated within the Politburo; extracts were made available to the party and government elite; Stalin even kept a set of confessions in his *dacha*.[21]

But why did so many people admit their guilt? The answer lies in the fact that only certain individuals were selected for show trials. They were coached, prepared, blackmailed, and threatened for months until the secret police was convinced that it could get the desired result. Anyone who refused to cooperate or was considered an unreliable "actor" was never allowed to "perform" in staged proceedings.

The interrogation process can now be studied in thick files. The first document in an individual's file is normally an "autobiography." It is neatly and lucidly penned by the prisoner. Invariably it was "rejected" by the interrogator. The prisoner was then tortured through sleep deprivation, poor food, appalling cell conditions, threats (normally to his or her family), and violence. As a result, the prisoner's story undergoes a change: the words of the interrogator supplant those of the prisoner; the prisoner's

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20   Brent, *Inside*, 187.

21   Brent, *Inside*, 193.

handwriting becomes huge, deformed; smudges caused by blotches of water (perhaps tears or sweat) sometimes appear on the pages. There may be long pauses between recorded interrogations, during which time the prisoner was allowed to rot for weeks or months in a cell. The final document in the file is a confession supposedly written by the interrogator and then typed by a typist. It is only signed by the prisoner, although even the signature is missing on many confessions. The broken prisoner confesses to an attempted assassination of Stalin, or the head of the GPU in Ukraine, to membership of an underground fascist organization, to contacts with Ukrainian nationalists abroad, to fomenting revolt in the countryside – in fact to anything that the interrogator demands.[22] This leads to amusing, if macabre, moments in which the prisoner discusses with the interrogator the appropriateness of including certain charges. The most popular Ukrainian humourist in the 1920s was Ostap Vyshnia. During his interrogation he suggested that he should confess to being a German spy, since he had visited Germany. The interrogator told him this was unnecessary.

This entire procedure is an example of the mechanism that operated within the Soviet Union to reduce "people to non-people" once they were identified as enemies. Brent has argued that "the mechanism of this process lies at the heart of the Stalinist state. It fused a way of thinking, a way of seeing, with a set of powerful political ideas. At the heart of this way of thinking is Josef Stalin."[23]

The show trials and mass arrests took place at the same time as the collectivization, the deportations, and the Great Famine (Holodomor) of 1932–1933. The latter event holds a particular interest for researchers working in the Ukrainian archives. Scholars have wondered how an event of this magnitude could have occurred. (Almost four million died according to the state's demographic commission, which released its findings in 2008–2009.) Thousands of documents dealing with this issue have now

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22   On the construction of these "nationalist conspiracies" in the early thirties see Myroslav Shkandrij and Olga Bertelsen, "The Soviet Regime's National Operations in Ukraine, 1929–34," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 55.3–4 (2013): 417–48.

23   Brent, *Inside*, 15.

only been published, and many have been made available on the Internet, stimulating public interest in a number of issues. The information available today shows the complicity of the Soviet leadership in orchestrating events, demonstrates their knowledge of what was happening, and their efforts from the start to organize a cover-up.

Andrea Graziosi has used the archives to construct a new interpretation of the Soviet period from 1918–1934 as a "war on the peasantry" and the imposition of a "second serfdom." Since the peasant and national questions in Ukraine were so closely linked, he argues, the war on the peasantry was in fact a disguised war on the Ukrainian people.[24] The evidence shows clearly that the Soviet leadership used the agricultural disaster to mold the countryside. As many scholars have pointed out, Stalin "used" suffering whenever he felt it would achieve the ends he desired.[25] He therefore exploited hunger and fear to "teach a lesson" to recalcitrant opponents of the regime. Graziosi, Oleg Khlevniuk, Stanislav Kulchytsky are among scholars who argue the leader's personal role in directing the application of violence, a role can be traced in his correspondence, as well as the decrees and instructions he issued.[26] Kulchytsky has argued that the language used in the correspondence and decrees was a kind of code: "kulaks," "speculators" and "traders" were words for those that resisted or opposed collectivization. "Grain" meant all food. The evidence

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24   See Andrea Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War: Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1918–1934.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1996).

25   Brent, *Inside*, 271.

26   See Stanislav Kulchytsky, *Holodomor 1932–1933 rr. iak henotsyd: Trudnoshchi usvidomlennia* [*The Holodomor of 1932–1933 as Genocide: Difficulties of Comprehension*] (Kyiv: Nash chas, 2008), 32. Khlevniuk sees an important function of the terror in "ensuring that society was kept in a state of submissiveness, suppressing dissent and opposition, and solidifying the sole authority of the leader." See Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 168; Andrea Graziosi, ed., *Lysty z Kharkova: Holod na Ukraini ta Pivnichnomu Kavkazi v povidomlenniakh italiiskykh dyplomativ. 1932–1933 roky* [*Letters from Kharkiv: the Holodomor in Ukraine and in the North Caucasus in the Italian Diplomat's Reports, 1932–1933*] (Kharkiv: Folio, 2007), 29–40; and Iury Shapoval, "Vizii Holodomoru. Mystetstvo ne bachyty: Bytva za zhnyva skorboty," ["Visions of the Holodomor. The Art of Non-Seeing: the Battle for the Harvest of Sorrow,"] *Krytyka* 12.6 (2008): 6–9.

for "theft" was the presence of anything edible. When on 1 January 1933 an instruction was issued to remove all food (not just grain but any scrap of food), it was couched in language suggesting that the very existence of any food meant that "theft" had occurred.[27] Molotov, Postyshev, Balitsky all fell into line by making similar statements, speaking of "organized sabotage and mass thefts," the existence of a "counterrevolutionary underground" led by "nationalist" and "Petliurite" elements. "Nationalist" and "Petliurite" were also code words for anyone who resisted or even questioned the leadership's policy in Ukraine. Eventually, almost all leaders of the Communist Party in Ukraine were identified in this manner. Practically the entire Central Committee was removed by the end of the thirties. Most were imprisoned and killed. Kulchytsky is among those researchers who have concluded that the Famine was a tactical move to head off a potential revolt of massive proportions, one that was triggered by the grain extraction through collectivization and requisitioning.

The archival collections provide a wealth of data that has convinced most skeptics inside and outside academia not only of the terrible scale of the event but also of its deliberate and preventable nature. It is notable that a number of scholars, including Kulchytsky and Graziosi, now put together three sets of data – the tragedy of the peasants, the simultaneous targeting of the Ukrainian elite, and the curtailment of Ukrainianization – in order to make this case. In this way the Famine's national dimension – long suppressed or denied – has come to the fore.[28]

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27 The indirect and often obfuscatory use of language is discussed in Kulchytsky, *Holodomor*, 31, 83, 140, 168–69, 171, 193–203. He makes the point that "even in his most secret correspondence Stalin communicated with his closest subordinates in an Aesopian language." Kulchytsky, *Holodomor*, 227.

28 Kulchytsky has argued: "Stalin really did fear losing Ukraine, as he admitted in his letter to Kaganovich of 11 August 1932. But in the period between December 1932 and February 1933 he delivered a warning blow of terrible force that completely eliminated the development of events along a path that might lead to the appearance of a "Ukrainian independent republic." See Kulchytsky, *Holodomor*, 298. Graziosi has argued that Stalin's intention was to simultaneously break the peasantry and cripple Ukraine's intellectual and political elite. See Andrea Graziosi,"The Soviet 1931–33 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, What Would Its Consequences Be?" in *Hunger by*

Recently new questions have emerged: how did this event shape ensuing Soviet history? How did the trauma of silence and denial affect the minds of ordinary people? And how could it have been kept quiet for so long? These questions are related to our understanding of the Second World War and the postwar period. Here the archival revolution has shed light, for example, on long-suppressed events, such as the secret protocols of the Hitler-Stalin pact, the union with Nazi Germany, the Katyn massacre, and the war against Finland in 1939–1940, which began after a provocation was organized on border in village of Mainila.[29] This last act of aggression and the subsequent bombing of Finnish towns led to the expulsion of the Soviet Union from the League of Nations.[30] Some research has been done into popular attitudes. During the War secret police reports were kept on moods in the Red Army and the army bureaucracy. The secret police in the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR had analytical departments that prepared detailed reports on attitudes to specific events. They surveyed workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia, various national groups, age groups, and regions. The results were sent to the higher party authorities and are now available in the Branch Archive of the Secret Police (*Haluzevyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv SBU*).[31] The SBU has published a significant number of these materials.[32] As a result, many "uncomfortable truths" raised by Western historians have turned out to be true: the repression in Western Ukraine 1939–1941, the shooting of prisoners by the NKVD in 1941, the escape in panic of town administrations in the first weeks of war, the mass desertions from the Red Army and ruthless forms of mobilization in 1943–1944, and the punitive expeditions against partisans and population of Western Ukraine.[33]

The role of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) during the war is another area of interest among contemporary scholars mining

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Design: The Great Ukrainian Famine and Its Soviet Context, ed. H. Hryn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1–10.

29   Hrynevych, *Nepryborkane riznoholossia*, 23.

30   Ibid.

31   Hrynevych, *Nepryborkane riznoholossia*, 38–39.

32   Hrynevych, *Nepryborkane riznoholossia*, 39.

33   Hrynevych, *Nepryborkane riznoholossia*, 46.

the archives. In particular, scholars have asked how the OUN should be characterized and what role it played in the thirties and during the war. Much new archival material has been integrated into recent research, but definitive answers to these questions have still not been produced. One interesting revelation is the deep penetration of the OUN by Soviet agents. We now know that all OUN-B (Bandera faction) contacts in Poland, for example, went through Leonid Lapinsky (Leon Lapiński, alias Zenon, Ryshard, Boguslaw, Roman). He was member of OUN from 1941 and its leader in Eastern Poland (Chelm and Podlasie) in 1945–1948. Recruited by the Polish and Soviet secret service in the years after 1947, he controlled all the OUN-B's channels into Poland and Ukraine at a time when émigré members were trying to establish contact with the underground. The organization therefore had no choice but to work through him, which meant that all messages and scores of couriers were picked up or shot.[34]

Our image of Soviet apologists has also been affected by the archives, although here the evidence is still closely guarded since it involves spy operations and disinformation campaigns. The general point is that the recognition of mass crimes and the regime's criminal nature was long delayed. The reasons for the delayed recognition of communist mass crimes have to be sought in the decades of state-controlled information in East European countries, the belatedness of archival openings, and the nervous reaction of some pro-communist circles in Western Europe (especially in France, Greece, and Spain) to what they saw as a political instumentalization of the past.[35]

A large part of the problem, according to Tismaneanu, has been the refusal to characterize the regime as criminal. Unlike Nazism, in which genocidal practices were "built into" the system, Soviet genocidal practices took place "by consequence." Nonetheless, as Tismaneanu points

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34 For a discussion of Lapinsky's career see Igor Hałagida, *Prowokacja "Zenona". Geneza, Przebieg a Skutki MBP o Kryptonimie "C-1" Przeciwko Banderowskiej Frakcji OUN i Wywiadowi Brytyjskiemu (1950–1954)* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2005).

35 Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 36.

out, pre-deterministic victimhood *did* become a state norm under communism.[36] In other words, the regime murdered entire populations not because of some racial theory, but because it felt this was required for its survival. Moreover, the Gulag can be seen as "the normative design at the basis of the Communist project of modernity, the original source of the misdevelopment brought about by *all* Soviet-type regimes."[37] In short, both the genocidal politics and the Gulag are today increasingly viewed by scholars as the very essence of the Soviet experience.

There were, of course, many reasons why intellectuals in the West often turned a blind eye to Soviet reality. Tismaneanu has indicated that the perceived need to support anti-fascist resistance was an important factor. But there were among Western intellectual fervent believers in the utopian experiment, dupes, cheerleaders, victims of blackmail, reticent or cynical diplomats, greedy businessmen hoping to deal with the Soviet Union, scholars afraid of having their visas denied, and embarrassed victims who sometimes preferred to forget their past suffering rather than relive the trauma.

Why is it important to recall this today? One reason is that, unfortunately, a high price must be paid for silence and denial. On the shelves of bookstores in the former Soviet space one can today read outright denials of this past. A certain A.T. Kuptsov has recently written: "The paranoid phantasmagoria of 'the bloody Russian past' has been (and continues to be) implanted into the heads of all citizens of Russia. [...] However, there was no hunger in Ukraine in 1933, although the entire world is convinced of its real existence."[38] The millions of corpses that covered the devastated land of Russia was, in Kuptsov's opinion, exclusively the work of the White armies: "Tens of millions of false 'execution' accusations were written."[39] "The White terror accounted for over twenty-six million citizens of Russia."[40] Kuptsov uses the silence of Western sources as evidence that

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36   Tismaneanu, *Fantasies*, 39–40.
37   Tismaneanu, *Fantasies*, 41.
38   A.G. Kuptsov, *Mif o krasnom terrore* [*The Myth of the Red Terror*] (Moscow: Kraft+, 2008), 4.
39   Kuptsov, *Mif*, 5.
40   Kuptsov, *Mif*, 6.

history is now being rewritten in a perverted manner: "Does it not amaze anyone that neither the League of Nations, nor a single Western journalist from those who were present at the *open trial proceedings* condemned the legal actions of the Soviet administration."[41] The writer describes the great purge, the building of canals by forced labour, and the Cheka terror as "myths." The Cheka, according to him, "did not shoot or imprison anyone."[42]

There are also more sophisticated justifications of mass murder, Stalin, and the Gulag. In another readily available book, a certain Mikhail Morukov argues that the Second World War (in his words the Great Patriotic War) "in effect confirmed the vitality and adequate efficiency of the model of development chosen by the USSR."[43] Prison labour, he insists, played a great role in the economy's modernization and the country's defence: "The Gulag in its 'pure' form was a tool of extensive development, which lost its value when the transfer to more intensive methods occurred…" In the end the country was able to "accomplished gigantic tasks at less material expense."[44] In other words the Gulag, collectivization, and Stalinism were a justified form of modernization. They served their purpose, which included industrialization, construction of a powerful state, suppression of internal resistance, and overcoming threats from abroad.

Although these books, published in Russia, continue to be sold in bookstores throughout the former Soviet space, things have changed, at least in the academic community. Outright deniers of the mass terror, Famine, and Gulag are today viewed as eccentrics, fools, or paid propagandists. The vast amount of information in the archives entirely contradicts their views. Ironically, the archival data that was kept from the public in order to shield the real workings of Soviet power from scrutiny, now offers up a "deferred" meaning, one that works to expose the criminal nature of Stalin's regime, and the violence and abuse of legality throughout the Soviet period.

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41   Ibid.

42   Kuptsov, *Mif*, 136.

43   Mikhail Morukov, *Pravda GULAGa iz kruga pervogo* [*Truth of the Gulag from the First Circle*] (Moscow: Algoritm, 2006), 5.

44   Morukov, *Pravda*, 172.

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