

**CONSTRUCTING A NEW PAST:**

**THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE IN POST-SOVIET HISTORIOGRAPHY**

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“There is no way in which the Soviet era can be written out of Russian or world history, as though it had not been. There is no way in which St. Petersburg can return to 1914” (Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 83).

“Perhaps what is responsible for this outpouring is exactly the opposite: the incompatibility of the present with what’s remembered. Memory, I suppose, reflects the quality of one’s reality no less than utopian thought” (Joseph Brodsky, “In a Room and a Half,” *Less than Zero*, p. 478)

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, that polity’s past finally can be treated as “history.” Of course, this does not mean that the past is no longer at issue, but that it is at issue in different ways. While the Soviet Union may be no more, its past marches on in popular memory and the professional historical literature.

For seventy-five years the Soviet regime used history to legitimate itself. Now, with its passing, history is used to frame that regime and its society, most often to delegitimize it. At the grossest level, the most obvious change has been the reversal of ideological markers. What was once good is now bad (1917, socialism, etc.), and vice versa. But, at a more profound level, much of the topography of historical memory itself remains strikingly unchanged. My paper focuses on three ways in which the Soviet regime’s matrix of history has stubbornly outlived the polity it was meant to justify. And I should note that my observations are equally true for much of Western scholarship as they are for what is now termed *otechestvennaia istoriia*.

1. The first realm in which Soviet self-representations have carried over into the post-Soviet world is in the form of “Soviet exceptionalism,” as expressed in spatial or conceptual terms. The Soviet Union presented itself as the bearer of the future and all that was good for mankind. Thus the “socialist world” (meaning not all socialist countries, but only those following the Soviet lead) confronted the “capitalist world.”

There is now a tendency to maintain this monolithic image, but to invert its signifier from one of salvation to that of ruin and devastation. What is strikingly absent is any comparative understanding of the Soviet experience. Many post-Soviet works simply assert the distinctiveness of the Soviet regime and the society it produced.

Even the most common yardstick of comparison--Nazi Germany--highlights the tendency to treat Soviet history as exceptional. Whatever parallels might exist between these two regimes, the argument for their similarity is most often embedded within a broader polemical project, a project simultaneously to bracket the USSR with Nazi Germany while marking both off from other twentieth century societies.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that the comparison is not valid, but that many such comparative treatments embody an implicit or explicit meta-narrative that dictates the comparison prior to actual analysis. Indeed, most existing treatments of the similarity of the Nazi and Soviet regimes are in fact constructed with the German case as the norm, with the analysis mechanically extended to the Soviet case. It has long been observed, for instance, that Hannah Arendt's treatment of the Soviet Union in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* is much less compelling and convincing than her treatment of Nazi Germany (although, at the time, this was also a problem of sources).<sup>2</sup> More recent treatments, explicitly seeking to discuss totalitarian terror in a comparative dimension, merely take the Nazi case as their skeleton and append (largely memoir) material from

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<sup>1</sup> Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism: the Inner History of the Cold War* (New York, 1995); George Steinmetz, "German Exceptionalism and the Origins of Nazism: the Career of a Concept" in Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge, 1997). Gleason's "Epilogue" traces the migration to Russia of the Nazi-Soviet comparative project.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1976 [1951]); Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, ch. 6.

the Soviet case onto this existing edifice.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Alan Bullock, Igor Golomshtok and Jacob Talmon have also made the analytical comparison between totalitarian regimes, but their treatments extend the comparison prior to building up the empirical or analytical case for such an analysis from the Soviet side (again, in part for reasons having to do with access to sources).<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most florid, current manifestation of this indictment by comparison, *Le Livre Noir du Communisme: Crimes, terreur, répression* [Paris, 1997], explicitly seeks to demonstrate that the model of genocide should be extended tout court to communism.<sup>5</sup> In the face of this tendency, it seems that the Soviet case has (hitherto?) actually contributed little to the construction of a morphology of totalitarian regimes.

Even more suggestive than a return to the totalitarian school are recent departures that seek to compare the Stalinist experience against the backdrop of the more general interwar period, both in terms of the planning ethos and aesthetic categories.<sup>6</sup> Paralleling this, one strand within the new work on the Soviet Union seeks to situate it

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<sup>3</sup> Sofsky, *The Order of Terror* (Princeton, 1997); Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme* (New York, 1996). This is true also of Russian studies: the introduction to Vladlen Izmozik's impressive *Glaza i ushi rezhima: Gosudarstvennyi politicheskii kontrol' za naseleniem sovetskoi Rossii v 1918-1928 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1995) simply asserts the USSR's affinity to Nazi Germany, with much citation of Western literature on totalitarianism.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York, 1993); Igor Golomshtok, *Totalitarian Art* (London, 1990); Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London, 1952). I thank Grisha Freiden for reminding me of these works.

<sup>5</sup> For the debate on this book, see Tony Judt, "The Longest Road to Hell," *New York Times*, December 22, 1997 and Martin Malia, "The Lesser Evil?" *TLS*, March 27, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York, 1994) is refreshingly aware of Soviet developments; James Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, 1998) situates Soviet aspirations within the context of "high modernism"; Maia Turovskaia's project on Soviet film in the 1930s notes its aesthetic and genre affinities with American films of the same period, produced under the Film Code; Susan Buck-Morss's project "Dreamworld and Catastrophe: Socialist Time, Capitalist Space and Myths of Progress in the 20th century" in fact insists on the imbrication of the capitalist and socialist imaginaries.

within a broader pan-European or indeed worldwide context, and especially identifies affinities in trans-national disciplinary practices.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to raising questions of the appropriate comparative model for the USSR as a discrete whole, the collapse of the Soviet Union problematizes the received view of the homogeneity of the entire Soviet space. “With the dissolution of the Soviet Union,” notes Stephen Kotkin, “the boundaries of Russia have changed (again), and presumably so have the boundaries of Russian history.” Should territories that once belonged to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union continue to be treated within the sweep of Russian history?<sup>8</sup> How are we to correlate present sovereign states--and their new national memories--to their Union past? In this sense, it is very clear that Russia has, rightly or wrongly, for better or worse, become the heir to the Soviet Union’s past. Yet, ironically, this conceptual hegemony no longer corresponds to the former otechestvennye practitioners of that single union history. One striking feature of the financial-cum-institutional crisis in the former USSR is the breakdown of academic contacts between former Union republics. It is said, not without some truth, that Petersburg scholars are more likely to see their Moscow colleagues in New York or Paris than in Piter or Moscow--not to speak of their former Ukrainian or Georgian colleagues. The exchange of academic literature has broken down even more dramatically.

The conceptual shift occasioned by the collapse of the USSR extends beyond the former national components to the question of the identity and nature of those

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain* (Berkeley, 1995); Susan Solomon, “Social Hygiene and Soviet Public Health” in Solomon and John Hutchison, *Health and Society in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, 1990); Francine Hirsch, “The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress,” *Slavic Review* 56:2 (1997); Amir Weiner, “Delineating the Soviet Body National” in Weiner, *Population Management and Modernity* (forthcoming); Douglas Northrop, “Uzbek Women and the Veil” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation: Stanford University, 1998).

component cultures themselves. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the emergence of independent nation states from the former Soviet polity, “Russia” for the first time must fashion a modern national identity separate from an imperial or union matrix.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, one way of conceiving the various memory-projects for reworking the Soviet past (see below) is as an attempt to recode this past in such a way that it can be appropriated as meaningfully Russian. One might point to the prominence of Orthodox symbols for victims of Soviet persecution, despite the obvious fact that very many of these victims were either not Orthodox themselves or would not have identified with this form of commemoration. As is evident from the monuments--Russian, Polish, Belorussian--in the Leningrad burial ground for victims of the NKVD, the genre of commemoration is religious and its grammar is national.<sup>10</sup>

2. And the tendency to appropriate the Soviet past as a hermetically sealed spatial realm (or, at best, one shared solely with Nazi Germany) is compounded by an even more successful heritage of Soviet self-understanding: Soviet history itself as a discrete chronological bloc. The success of this self-appellation is apparent in the title of this paper: the only way of nominating the current period is not as yet by its own attributes, but as “post”-Soviet. (This conference’s agenda -- “Russia at the end of the Twentieth Century” -- is thus a refreshing departure in situating Russia not solely in relation to its Soviet past.) As evidence of this tendency to treat Soviet history as a

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<sup>8</sup> “Czars to Bolsheviks,” *New York Times Book Review*, May 3, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Here I am following the concluding thoughts of Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as Communal Apartment,” *Slavic Review* 53:2 (1994): 414-52; see also Terry Martin’s observation that the history of Russia and other “national” histories tend not to intersect (Introduction, “An Affirmative Action Empire” [Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation: University of Chicago, 1996]).

<sup>10</sup> See photographs 28, 30-35 in *Leningradskii martirolog, 1937-1938*, tom 1 (Sankt-Petersburg, 1995); likewise, the frontpieces of both *Ne predat’ zabveniiu: kniga pamiati reprissirovannykh* [Iaroslavl’, 1993] and *Rekviem: kniga pamiati zherv politicheskikh repressii na Orlovshchine* [Orel, 1994] have mourners

discrete unit, one might point to current treatments of the Cossackry as a specific collective identity, both in the West and in Russia. Such treatments tend to stop their account in 1917 and pick it up again only in 1992, bracketing the intervening seventy years as simply a period of repression. But current Cossack forms of identity are deeply indebted to concepts from the Soviet period, especially those of ethno-national identity and rights. It is no accident that that the contemporary Cossack movement sets forth its claims not as a privileged estate [soslovie] but as an “ethnos” [etnos], a concept derived from Soviet sociological studies of the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> The demonization of the Soviet period thus determines the romanticization of the Imperial past, a phenomenon most glaringly evident in the fairy-tale like portrayal of Rossiia, kotoruiu my poteriali or the ceremonial interment of the tsarist family’s remains in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

Obviously, the master event of this chronology is the 1917 Revolution as a foundation event. The Russian Revolution, to an extent rivalled only by the French Revolution, has been seen, by both its opponents as well as its detractors, “as a zero point in history pregnant with its future achievements implicitly contained in the universality of its principles.” Consequently, it “is thought not only as the fundamental rupture between before and after, but as the founding element of these trends.”<sup>12</sup> Frederick Corney demonstrates how the Soviets invested great effort in signifying October as a founding

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holding votive candles. One might also point to the figure of St. George in the *Park Pobedy* and the campaign to reconstruct the Church of Christ the Savior, almost as a penance for the Soviet past.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Holquist, “From Estate to Ethnos: The Changing Nature of Cossack Identity in the 20th Century” in ed. Nurit Schleifmann, *Russia at the Crossroads: History, Memory and Political Practice* (London, 1998). The entry on “Cossacks” in *Narody Rossii: Entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1994) describes Cossacks’ pre-revolutionary lifestyle and their reemergence after 1992; the intervening seventy-five years are dismissed in two sentences as a period of undifferentiated repression.

<sup>12</sup> Francois Furet, “The Revolutionary Catechism,” in Frank Greenlaw, *The Social Origins of the French Revolution* (London, 1975), pp. 63, 91; see also Roger Chartier, “The Chimera of Origins” in Jan Goldstein, *Foucault and the Writing of History* (Cambridge MA, 1994). For Russia, see also Stephen Kotkin, “1991 and the Russian Revolution,” *Journal of Modern History* 70:2 (1998): 392-98.

event, an achievement so successful that it patterned both pro- and anti-revolutionary narratives for decades to come. Not only the chronology, but the underlying narrative structure is similar. Corney writes:

This focus on the political, pivoting on the issue of October's (il)legitimacy, has reduced Soviet historiography in the West and increasingly in Russia to what David Joravsky has called 'good guy-bad guy melodrama'. . . . In a sense, October's affirmers and deniers were motivated by the same desire, namely to save Society from the State. Those who celebrated it as a revolution regarded it as a perhaps destructive, but ultimately empowering force. . . . Those who rejected it as a classic 'coup d'etat'" contrasted it with "genuine revolutions."<sup>13</sup>

The Soviet variant of this narrative, emphasizing 1917 as the dawn of mankind's bright new future, was institutionalized in quite concrete ways, first and foremost by the Party as an institution itself, as well as its very own historical branch (Istpart, the subject of Corney's research), but also in the accumulation and gradual accretion throughout the country of visual evidence: new statues, new plaques adorning streets with changed names, decorated buildings, festivals held on appropriate anniversaries, films and, of course, museums.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Frederick Corney, "Rethinking A Great Event: The October Revolution as a Memory Project" in *Social Science History* no. 4 (1998).

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Corney, "Writing October: History, Memory, Identity and the Construction of the Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1927," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation: Columbia University, 1997); James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals* (Berkeley, 1993); Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge MA, 1995).

The anti-Soviet side equally constructed a narrative, in their case of disillusionment, with 1917 as its fulcrum. One need only recall the efforts of the Bolsheviks' opponents to construct counter-archives, intended to contest the hegemonic Soviet narrative and its constitution of memory. Nearly every strand of the anti-Bolshevik emigration had its own "archival" publications (e.g., *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii*, published in Berlin from 1922 to 1937 or the "Don Historical Commission," which published the three-volume *Donskoi arkhiv* and several historical monographs from Belgrade).<sup>15</sup> Despite their inability to agree on most other issues, several anti-Soviet movements collaborated in establishing the "Russian Foreign Historical Archive" [RZIA].<sup>16</sup> The significance of this memory project can be judged by the fact that after the Second World War the Soviet state seized the archive and returned it to Russia, where it was held under "special" conditions, while the emigres attempted to sweep together in new places the flotsam and jetsam of history, to continue their own archival counter-project (e.g., the Bakhmeteff Archive at Columbia University, whose first curator was the former newspaper librarian of the Prague archive). The abiding concern of former Mensheviks in emigration was to maintain their account of history, especially of their conduct in 1917, an endeavor they pursued to the end of their days.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, recent archival "revelations" have shifted the center of academic research from 1917 to the decade of the 1930s. Clearly, this periodization predated the opening of the archives, but the newly sifted archival materials continue to be

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<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Jan Plamper for first suggesting this line of inquiry in his unpublished paper to the conference "Assessing the New Soviet Archival Sources" (Yale University, May 16-18, 1997). There he noted the widely-shared implicit assumption that "'archive' and 'repository of truth' are coterminous."

<sup>16</sup> Richard Kneeeley and Edward Kasinec, "The Prague RZIA Collection," *Slavic Review* 1 (1992): 122-30; Patrissiia Kennedy Grimsted [Patricia Kennedy Grimstead], "Zarubezhnaia arkhivnaia Rossika i Sovetika," *Otechestvennye arkhivy* no. 1 (1993): 20-53.

situated within this preexisting chronological frame. New materials are being appended to a periodization that is largely an artifact of an earlier period in our historiography. The empirical focus of much of this research means, however, that it remains embedded within an unquestioned “Soviet narrative” beginning in 1917, and have the unintended consequence of blunting comparative analysis, either of broader European trends or of more persistent currents in Russian history. My point is obviously not that the 1930s were unimportant, but rather how rarely the significance of this decade as a discrete block is explicitly articulated and analyzed. This periodization has become one of the unstated assumptions of the modern Russian field. For instance, the impressive volume of articles edited by Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* grew out of a conference devoted to an extended chronological comparison between Germany and Russia in the twentieth century; the published volume, for a variety of reasons, narrowed the analysis to the period 1929-1953. What had originated as a comparison of Germany and Russia in all their breadth ends up as a comparison of Nazism and Stalinism as dictatorships. This is indeed ironic, for the editors denounce the totalitarian paradigm, but nevertheless end up reflexively replicating its chronological parameters and the implicit objects and forms of comparison that come with them (e.g., comparing “dictatorships” rather than “societies” or “cultures”). In a similar vein, there have been at least four conferences in North America over the past year devoted to the 1930s as a historical bloc--with no concerted analysis as to the limitations and especially the implications of that periodization.

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<sup>17</sup> Leopold Haimson, “Introduction” in *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries* (New York, 1987).

Obviously, the understanding of Soviet history as a discrete chronological unit, with 1917 and the decade of the 1930s as its distinguishing moments, likewise has its own political valence in the present. If treating Russia in geographic-cultural isolation allows one to dismiss the unpleasantness of Soviet history as a peculiarly Russian phenomenon (the “Russian Sonderweg” thesis), treating Soviet history as a distinct bloc of time allows one to compartmentalize the repression and tragedy as a peculiarly Marxist -- or, more often, Marxist-Leninist -- development (the “Marxist Sonderweg” thesis). This analytical and publicistic bracketing off of the Soviet period, as much as any events in Russian history, sets Russia apart from the general European scene. (Doubtless, one reason the Sovietological profession appropriated the Friedrich-Brzezinski variant of totalitarianism rather than Hannah Arendt’s was the fact that Arendt did not bracket off Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia but presented them as embedded within broader European currents.)<sup>18</sup>

The almost unconscious tendency to begin Russia’s twentieth century narrative with 1917 is evident by a key events it does not encompass. One way in which the study of Russian history remains different from that of other European societies is in the virtual absence from the Russian narrative of three of the most crucial years in twentieth-century world history: 1914-1917. Any general textbook of imperial Russia is likely to end in 1914. Books on Soviet history begin in 1917. Russia’s First World War experience, in both the Western and Russian literature, has been virtually devoured by 1917. I am not advocating replacing the 1917 divide with a 1914 one. Without engaging in a spiral of perpetual regression, any study of Russia’s 1914-1921 “deluge experience”

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<sup>18</sup> Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, chs. 6-7.

must analyze how the mass violence which unfolded in those years had become conceivable and been made institutionally possible in the pre-war years (hence, to my mind, the significance of colonial imaginary and its practices of violence in the late nineteenth century). However, the war years marked a watershed in the breadth and depth of such practices. Colonial violence, in Arendt's words, was still marked by a certain moderation and controlled by respectability; the First World War would import this violence back to Europe, where it would be extended beyond any conceptual bounds (e.g., the previous distinction between military or civilian realms) or geographic limits (e.g., the colonies or the front).<sup>19</sup> One way of conceiving of the Russian civil war, from this perspective, is as the extension of such violence from first the colonies to the warfront, and then from the warfront to the entire political space of the polity (compare, for example, the anti-insurgency measures practiced in 1916 in Turkestan with later Soviet -- and anti-Soviet policies -- in Russia's agrarian regions during the Civil War).

Indeed, contemporaries such as Peter Struve and Maxim Gorky asserted that the war was not so much a generic catalyst for revolution, but that the Revolution was embedded--for better and for worse--in the war experience.<sup>20</sup> From this vantage point, the Bolshevik regime does not mark so much a sharp break from the idyllic Russia of 1913 as an extension of total war practices already emerging, within both state and

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<sup>19</sup> Arendt, *Origins*, p. 123; see also ch. 9, "The Decline of the Nation-State."

<sup>20</sup> Petr Struve, "Razmyshleniia o russkoi revoliutsii," *Russkaia mysl'* [Sofia], kn. 1-2 [1921], esp. p. 6 (this is the text of a lecture Struve read in Rostov-na-Donu in 1919); Maxim Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts* (New Haven, 1995 [1917-1918]), pp. 9-12, 76-77, 128-130, 185, 195-99. For historical works emphasizing this nexus, see Peter Holquist, "Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work," *Journal of Modern History* 69 (1997): 415-50; Roger Pethybridge, *Social Prelude to Stalinism* (New York, 1974), ch. 3; George Yaney, *Urge to Mobilize* (Chicago, 1982); Lars Lih *Bread and Authority* (Berkeley, 1990); John Hutchison, *Politics and Public Health in Revolutionary Russia* (Baltimore, 1990); Dan Orlovsky, "Professionalism in the Ministerial Bureaucracy" in ed. Harley Balzer, *Russia's Missing Middle Class* (Armonk NY, 1996); Alessandro Stanziani, *L'économie en révolution: la cas russe, 1870-1930* (Paris, 1998).

society, from 1914. While it may be emotionally satisfying to blame the Bolsheviks for the massive surveillance of society, the practice actually began under the Imperial regime during the First World War, a practice paralleled, incidentally, by all other major European powers in the deluge years. A similar story could be told for state anti-insurgency measures targeting the civilian population or the management of the economy. The Bolsheviks thus were not distinct in conceiving of or deploying surveillance, state violence or economic planning, but rather for retaining these practices after the Great War's end (an act not so inexplicable if one believed, as the Bolsheviks did, that the national violence of the Great War had simply been recast along the axis of civil war and class struggle).<sup>21</sup>

As significant as the First World War was as the context for the emergence of particular state practices, it was equally significant for the national mythologies and identities it generated. What does it mean for Russian history that the First World War, which several scholars have identified as having established the principles and matrix of modern memory, was virtually occluded in Russia by the Revolution?<sup>22</sup> Again, it is clear that contemporaries recognized the war experience's significance, both for national and individual narratives of identity. S. Annskii (the pseudonym of Solomon Rappoport), famed ethnographer of prewar Jewish shtetl life, embarked on a project to collect material documenting the Jewish experience during the First World War. Noting that "we are living through an extraordinarily important historical moment without precedent in world history," he insisted that "each drop of our

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<sup>21</sup> Holquist, "Information" and "Total'naia mobilizatsiia i 'politika naseleniia': Rossiia, 1914-1921" (unpublished paper presented to the conference "Rossiia v pervoi mirovoi voine," St. Petersburg, June 1998).

shed blood, each tear, each act of suffering and sacrifice must be entered into the historical account. . . . We must become historians of our part in the process. . . . Woe to the people whose history is written by strange hands. . . . BECOME HISTORIANS YOURSELVES! DON'T DEPEND ON THE HANDS OF STRANGERS! Record, take it down, and collect!"<sup>23</sup> Instructors in late 1914 assigned the First World War as a topic for school compositions, a pursuit clearly analogous to later Soviet assignments on the Revolution.<sup>24</sup> To my knowledge, Dan Orlovsky is the first scholar to problematize the issue of "the Great War and Russian Memory," extending Paul Fussel's brilliant treatment of Britain to the Russian case.<sup>25</sup> Orlovsky calls attention to the abortive attempt to commemorate the Great War through a national "fraternal cemetery" for war dead in Moscow, a cemetery which offered free internment to all those who had perished fighting the foe. The cemetery was also projected to have an "all-Russian monument to the present war." (This project also marked the attempt to fashion a homogenized, decorous form of civic, rather than personal, commemoration: cemetery officials requested that family members refrain from employing metal garlands on tombs, as they "soon deteriorate from the passage of time and from weather, and take on a gloomy and

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York, 1975); George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* (New York, 1990); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge, 1995)

<sup>23</sup> S. Annsky-Rapoport *et al.*, "Appeal to Collect Materials about the War," in ed. David G. Roskies, *Literature of Destruction* (New York, 1989), pp. 209-210, originally published in *Haynt* (Warsaw Yiddish daily), 1 Jan. 1915. Ironically, no one knows what ever became of Ansky's war collection (personal communication from Benjamin Nathans).

<sup>24</sup> "Shkol'nye socheneniia o pervoi mirovoi voine," *Rossiiskii arkhiv* vol. 6 (1995): 449-58.

<sup>25</sup> Dan Orlovsky, "The Great War and Russian Memory," unpublished paper presented to the Conference on Rossiia v pervoi mirovoi voine (St. Petersburg, June 1998).

unsightly visage, totally dissonant with the general nature of the fraternal cemetery's layout and upkeep.")<sup>26</sup>

As Orlovsky demonstrates, the Revolution soon eclipsed this Great War memory project and replaced it with another, with the new regime first using the cemetery as a burial ground for Cheka victims in the Civil War, then laying streets over it in the 1930s, and finally placing a movie-theater upon its location in the 1950s. However, with the collapse of the Soviet regime, the Russian Ministry of Culture has now published a commemorative volume, *The Moscow City Fraternal Cemetery: an Attempt at a Biographical Dictionary* (Moscow, 1992), clearly an attempt to find a usable past to reinscribe over Soviet memory. Consequently, this project is entirely commemorative and celebratory, drawing its data for its biographies from celebratory and commemorative publications and newspapers of the war period itself. It thus refrains from problematizing how the war dead were both victims yet simultaneously killers in the "First World Slaughterhouse" (*Pervaiia mirovaia boinia*, as Soviet literature at times called it).<sup>27</sup>

As the commemorative volume demonstrates, Russia's Imperial and even Great War past can be mobilized against its Soviet counterpart, serving as a contrast to the Soviet period rather than as providing its point of historical departure. This dynamic explains the troubling response in 1994 to the research of S. Nelipovich. Nelipovich addressed one of the major lacunae in Russian twentieth century history with an archivally-based overview of the Russian Imperial regime's deportation policy during the

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<sup>26</sup> Orlovsky, "Great War"; see also "Bratskoe kladbishche" *Russkoe slovo* 25 June 1916 (from whence I take the information on the planned monument) and "Ot popechitelia bratskogo kladbishcha," *Russkoe slovo* 7 Sept 1916 (from whence I take the citation on metal embellishments).

First World War, a policy that resulted in the mass, forced deportation of hundreds of thousands of innocent Imperial subjects.<sup>28</sup> (Nelipovich originally calculated the number of forced deportees--Russian imperial subjects--at 600,000; he has now revised this figure upwards to one million.) The editors of the volume in which the article appeared felt compelled to include a disclaimer criticizing the article, running at the bottom of five of the article's thirteen pages of text, apologizing for Russian Imperial policy as "non-systematic" and in any case comparable to the measures of other states. What is striking here is the need felt, in 1994, to salvage the Russian Imperial past as one's own, in a way the compilers would obviously not have felt about having, for instance, to "contextualize" dekulakization or the Soviet state's deportations during the Second World War. Subsequent publications by Nelipovich, however, have appeared without apologetic commentary, and this summer witnessed there was a conference devoted to the First World War, with both Russian and non-Russian participants, which witnessed a heartening convergence of views (but, thankfully, no orthodoxy!)

In addition to the studies cited previously, the works of Yuri Slezkine (Arctic Mirrors), Alessandro Stanziani (L'Economie en révolution) and Mark von Hagen's forthcoming project on Ukraine between 1914 and 1939, to take but three examples, suggest the value of examining Russian history across the 1917 divide. Interestingly, it has been works in cultural studies that have been most innovative in attempting to reconfigure the periodization of modern Russian history, and to great effect. Works by Katerina Clark, Aleksandr Etkind, Eric Naiman, and Stefan

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<sup>27</sup> On the "victimization" of the war dead and veterans, see Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: the Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation* (New York, 1996), pp. 43-47.

<sup>28</sup> "V poiskakh 'vnutrennego vruga': deportatsionnaia politika Rossii (1914-1917)" in *Pervaia mirovaia voina i uchastie Rossii v nei (1914-1918)*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1994), 1: 51-64.

Plaggenborg, among others, have all emphasized the prerevolutionary origins of certain currents that became ascendant in the Soviet period, and have marked the significance of the 1920s as a precursor to the 1930s.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, scholars are now beginning to extend study of “the Stalin period” beyond the 1930s, into the war and postwar years<sup>30</sup> Perhaps most encouraging, scholars can move beyond past the Soviet regime’s self-periodization and instead have begun to study how the Soviet state sought to inscribe its own meaning into historical events like 1917, and how it succeeded in doing so to such an extent that its inscriptions remain after the regime has collapsed. Much can be gained, and not only for Soviet history, by questioning the self-evidence of Soviet history as a unitary and distinct chronological zone.

3. Yet perhaps the most profound way in which the signification has been reversed but the underlying structure of memory has remained has been the tenacious tendency to think in manichean and bifurcated terms. Yuri Lotman, Vladimir Papernyi and Boris Gasparov all have identified the tendency of Russian culture to binary systems; and this binary tendency is also clearly operative in relation to the past, especially the Soviet past. Indeed, Eric Hobsbawm goes so far as to suggest that “the world that went to pieces at the end of the 1980s was the world shaped by the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917. We have all been marked by it, for instance, inasmuch as we got used to thinking in terms of binary opposites, ‘capitalism’ and ‘socialism’ as alternatives.”<sup>31</sup> This tendency remains embedded in approaches to that very past. The

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<sup>29</sup> Clark, *Petersburg*; Aleksandr Etkind, *Eros nevozmozhnogo* (St. Petersburg, 1993); Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, 1997), esp. p. 299; Stefan Plaggenborg, *Revolutionskultur* (Weimar, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Amir Weiner, “The Making of a Dominant Myth,” *Russian Review* 4 (1996):638-60.

<sup>31</sup> *Age of Extremes*, p. 4; see also Omer Bartov’s observations on the cycle of enemy-making and victimization (“The Elusive Enemy,” *American Historical Review* 103: 2 (June 1998): 771-816..

proposal to construct a monument honoring both Red and White victims of the Civil War has languished, with apparently little interest or support.<sup>32</sup> I suspect that this neglect comes in part from the difficulty in mobilizing memory around an ambiguous heritage (both Red and White), rather than, say, Yeltsin's attempt to invoke historical reconciliation around the "martyred" tsarist family during its interment in the Peter and Paul Fortress. (Note also the lavish attention to the fate of the tsarist family in both Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* and Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy*).

People clearly are able to see both bad and good in the Soviet past: one need only contrast the prevalent condemnation of the regime's atrocities with the nostalgia evinced by Stalin-era films or for the camaraderie and idealism that the Stalinist period undoubtedly fostered alongside its mass "repressions" (quotes because the term "repression," an artifact of Khrushchev's measured distancing of the Stalinist past, should no longer serve as a euphemism for individuals' deliberate execution or imprisonment). Yet all too rarely does historical memory manage to accord for the possibility of simultaneity and ambivalence, to deal with the two phenomena--idealism and persecution, fear and hope--simultaneously. Frequently these contradictory aspects simply oscillate. In his study of one primary school generation from the 1930s, Larry Holmes discovered that his interviewees could excoriate the routinized, politicized rote drill of their 1930s classroom ("everything was black and white, good and evil, no hues or shades"), but in interviews they would express themselves differently, emphasizing how much they had enjoyed their school days and expressing their appreciation for an education that provided them both with knowledge and critical skills. When Holmes

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<sup>32</sup> "Obrashchenie k chitateliam," *Rodina* no. 6 (1990); appeal repeated in *Rodina*, no. 9 (1996), p. 14.

pressed his interlocutors, asking what Stalinism represented, the interviewees answered “concentration camps.” As Holmes notes, this response suggested that his interviewees viewed the school as somehow existing apart from the Stalinist context.<sup>33</sup> This failure to fall neatly and unequivocally into one category or another led Adam Hochschild to conclude from his study on how “Russians remember Stalin,” that “since I had visited Karaganda, the lens through which I had previously been tending to see the Stalin period--heroes and villains, noble victims and evil executioners--had seemed much too simple.”<sup>34</sup> And Aleksandr Zinoviev, long before the collapse of the Soviet Union, perceptively noted that “stalo privychnym shtampom rassmatryvat’s stalinskuiu epokhu kak epokhu prestupnuiu. Eto--gruboe smeshenie poniatii. . . Obshchestvo stroili milliony liudei. Oni byli uchastnikami protsessa. Oni byli pomoshchnikami palachei, palachami i zhetvami palachei. One byli i ob”ektom i sub”ektom stroitel’stva.”<sup>35</sup> Jochen Hellbeck’s study of Soviet diaries and the fashioning of a Soviet form of subjectivity emphasizes precisely how Soviet citizens were both agents and objects of history.<sup>36</sup>

As Zinoviev’s and Hochschild’s comments suggest, if one is to produce an account that avoids a manichean and self-righteous vision of the past, it is essential to capture ambivalence and ambiguity. There remains a tendency to retain the regime’s manichean template, but simply to invert its signifiers. Discussions of victims of Soviet state violence fix their subjects solely in relation to the regime, with a person’s standing

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<sup>33</sup> Larry Holmes, “Part of History: The Oral Record and Moscow’s Model School no. 25, 1931-1937” *Slavic Review* 56:2 (1997): 279-; also, Kathleen Smith, *Remembering Stalin’s Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996), esp. p. 195.

<sup>34</sup> Adam Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin* (NY: Penguin, 1994), p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> Aleksandr Zinoviev, “Nashei iunosti poet”, *Kontinent* (1983), pp. 196, 205-206; see also Vaclav Havel’s comment that the divide ran “not between us and them, but through every heart.”

<sup>36</sup> Jochen Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44:3 (1996): 344-73; Stepan Podlubnyi, *Tagebuch aus Moskau, 1933-1939*, ed. Jochen Hellbeck (Munich, 1996).

(and remembrance) determined largely by their time and circumstances of persecution alone, thereby creating a veritable camera obscura of the Soviet state's own view of the world. Nowhere is this truer than with the interesting phenomenon of "memory books" (*kniga pamiati*), tragically thick books which list the victims of the Terror by name, date of birth, social status, charge of arrest, date of arrest, date of sentencing and, often, date of execution, and sometimes including even a mug shot.<sup>37</sup> While their purpose is laudable--to put an individual face on Stalin's mass persecutions--they result in flattening these individual lives out into the very categories of the regime which devoured them. One unfortunate if unintentional consequence of this form of commemoration is that it continues to situate the victims entirely within the matrix of Soviet prosecution. Even their titles echo Soviet administrative parlance: one, titled Not to be forgotten [*ne podlezhit zabveniiu*], is a play on the very prevalent Soviet administrative terms for documents from the period -- "not to be announced" and "not to be destroyed" [*ne podlezhit oglasheniiu, ne podlezhit unichtozheniiu*]. In short, the individual, even in commemoration, becomes coterminous with his or her dossier--and exist eternally fixed as "victims." Some of those involved in the unofficial society Memorial also protest the involvement of the Federal Counter-intelligence Service -- the KGB's successor -- in the memory book project.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> E.g., *Iz bezdny nebytii: kniga pamiati repressirovannykh kaluzhan*, 2 vols. (Kaluga, 1993); *Ne predat' zabveniiu: kniga pamiati repressirovannykh v 1930-e i 40-e gody, sviazannykh sud'bami s Iaroslavskoi oblast'iu* (Iaroslavl', 1993); *Kniga pamiati zhertv politicheskoi repressii Novgorodskoi oblasti*, vol. 1 of several (Novgorod, 1993); *Rekviem: kniga pamiati politicheskikh repressii* 2 vols. (Orel, 1994); *Liudskaia bol'*, 4 vols. (Tomsk, 1994); *Leningradskii martirolog: avgust-sentiabr' 1937*, vol. 1 of several (Sankt-Petersburg, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> See esp. Il'mira Stepanov's praise of *Leningradskii Martirolog* ("Sorok tysiach imen," *Ruskaia mysl'* no. 4092 [14-20 Sept 1995]) and the indignant protest of the Veniamin Iofe on behalf of Memorial ("Kto sostavliai 'Leningradskii martirolog,'" *Ruskaia mysl'* no. 4095). I am indebted to Jan Plamper for alerting me to this latter exchange.

Still, it is important that the Soviet manner of individual persecution allows the possibility to commemorate victims individually, or, in the words of Anna Akhmatova's Requiem, "to recall them all by name" [vsekh ikh poimennenno vspominat'] (a line cited explicitly in several of the memory books).<sup>39</sup> Thanks to the Soviet propensity for documenting and photographing individual victims, from December 1990 the newspaper *Vecherniaia Moskva* could publish a weekly column of photographs with short biographical sketches of the victims.<sup>40</sup> However, one might also ask how the availability of such data will shape the contours of official and public memory. What of that which was not recorded? (As one example: will the experience of collectivization figure less prominently in public memory than, say, the terror and its impact on intellectuals, only because collectivization generated less visual and narrative forms of record?) Several recent projects seek to interrogate how Soviet society created vectors of memory for both the terror and war experience.<sup>41</sup> Amir Weiner in particular has argued that not only the Second World War, but the instrumental and popular deployment of its memory, was a defining feature of both the Soviet and post-Soviet social landscape.

The "memory book" project extends to another field: the *velikaia otechestvennaia voina*.<sup>42</sup> Among other aspects, a striking feature of these volumes is the large percentage of individuals who remain "MIA" [propal bez vesti v . . . godu]. The Stalin era's disregard for the fate of individuals is eerily mirrored by the relative

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<sup>39</sup> E.g., *Rekviem*, p. 4; *Ne predat' zabveniiu*, pp. 8-9. Jan Plamper reminded me of Akhmatova's lines.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims*, pp. 165-66.

<sup>41</sup> The term "vectors of memory" from Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); for such studies on Russia, see Catherine Merridale, "Death and Memory in Modern Russia," *History Workshop Journal* 42 (1996); and Irina Paperno's comparative study of how mass death is experienced and remembered.

effacement of the sacrifices of the individual soldier in Moscow's Park Pobedy. One commentator, the architect Mikhail Tumarin, remarked in 1995 that: "What strikes the visitor most profoundly is the triumph of a typical new-Russian, Russian-Orthodox, mass cultural facade laid over the corpse of one of the great last gasps of socialism. . . . Patriotic Russian Orthodox symbols (a church, St. George) work in tandem with prestigious western fetishes in a generically soviet space--signified by its emptiness, lined by marble and granite for what are literally kilometers."<sup>43</sup> In contrast to monumentalism of this sort, one arch-Russian patriot in Rostov-na-Donu in 1992 related to me that the USA was good in at least one respect: the Vietnam memorial demonstrated that United States government could identify, but, more importantly, was committed to identifying, the name of each of the fallen. In this respect, a perhaps more significant development than the Park pobedy is the phenomenon of small, voluntary excavation teams which set out to find unmarked mass graves from the war period (especially of *opolchentsy* killed early in the war), and then seek to identify, even in broad terms, the identity of the interred, and to reconsecrate the territory.<sup>44</sup>

The much-celebrated opening of the archives alone will not help in recapturing the human complexity and ambiguity of twentieth-century Russian history.<sup>45</sup> In part, this is because they do not contain the type of documentation that has proved

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<sup>42</sup> Among many others, see *Kniga pamiati* (Tver', 1994), listing Tver natives who fell during the war; *Kniga-memorial voynov, umershikh ot ran v gospiataliakh i zakhornonennykh na territorii Bologodskoi oblasti v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* [Vologda, 1988].

<sup>43</sup> "Nevynosyamaia legkost' ofitsioza," *Segodnia*, 26 June 1995 (as cited by Bruce Grant, "New Moscow Monuments," unpublished paper presented to Cornell Seminar on Democratization)

<sup>44</sup> For the 1989 collaboration of Memorial, the local *kraevedcheskii* museum and local KGB to identify the remains of Terror victims in Voronezh, see E. Iu. Sadovskaia, E. A. Tolokonnikov, "Metod gruppovoi identifikatsii ostankov zhetv massovykh rasstrel'ov" in *Korny travy* (Moscow, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> Vladimir Kozlov, Ol'ga Lokteva, "'Arkhivnaia revoliutsiia' v Rossii," *Svobodnaia mysl'* nos. 1-4 (1997); for a bibliography of documents that have appeared in the publicistic press, see *Otkrytyi arkhiv: spravochnik opublikovannykh dokumentov po istorii Rossii XX veka* (Moscow, 1997)

most useful in other cases for reconstructing agency in mass death. (Here I mean specifically the materials generated by prosecution of perpetrators which have provided the foundation for pathbreaking and deeply layered analyses by Christopher Browning, Mark Mazower and others in the Nazi case.) More profoundly, the problem is no longer one of archival access or even access to relevant materials, but of our ability to work through them. We suffer not from a shortage of materials, but from a surfeit of them. Tellingly, the most representative genre of post-Soviet historical study is the documentary compilation, bursting with primary source documentation but eschewing interpretation. For this reason, Aleksandr Zinov'ev's "Nashei iunosti polët," Lev Kopelev's *I sotvoril sebe kumira* and even Joseph Brodsky's "In a Room and Half" are invaluable not so much as documents of events or attitudes to the regime per se, but as studies of complexity and ambiguity. One might suggest that if there are any blank spots now, they lie more in our conceptualizations than in the archives themselves.<sup>46</sup>

CODA: as I was finishing this paper, several articles appeared dealing with Yale Press's decision not to appoint Vladimir Brovkin editor of its proposed volume on the Gulag in the Yale Press *Annals of Communism* series.<sup>47</sup> This unedifying dispute hinges precisely on the macro-political lessons to be drawn from yet another assembly of archival documents.

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<sup>46</sup> This point is also suggested by Oleg Khlevniuk, "Istoriik protiv dokumenta: neskol'ko zametok ob ispol'zovanii arkhivov," forthcoming in *Cahiers du Monde russe*.

<sup>47</sup> *The New Republic* Oct. 12, 1998; *The Washington Times*, Oct. 15, 1998. I thank Amir Weiner for bringing the *New Republic* article to my attention.