Stalinism and Russian and Ukrainian national identities

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ABSTRACT

This article is the first comparative study of the policies taken by Russian and Ukrainian émigrés, governments and intellectuals towards the legacy of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. The article analyses how these differing approaches have contributed to diverging national identities in Russia and Ukraine which preceded, and were reinforced by, the 2014 crisis in their relations and war between both countries. Stalinization was not a central question for Russian émigrés and was supported by 50 out of 69 years of the USSR and since 2000 by the Russian state. Ukrainian émigrés were more influential and the state actively supported de-Stalinization over the majority of 25 years of independent statehood that integrated de-Stalinisation with national identity and since 2015, de-communization.

For fifty of the USSR’s sixty-nine years, it was led by Joseph Stalin (1922–1952) and three Soviet leaders who supported a cult of Stalin (1965–1985). The USSR experienced only three short periods of liberalizations in the 1920s, following Stalin’s death in 1953 and in the second half of the 1980s. A Stalin cult has been supported by Vladimir Putin since he came to power in 2000 representing the majority of independent Russia’s quarter of a century of statehood. Stalin and Stalinism has therefore represented a dominant influence over Soviet and Russian history over the last century. Putin believes “excessive demonization of Stalin is one of the means of attacking the Soviet Union and Russia” (Parfitt, 2017).

The cultivation of a Stalin cult and myth of the Great Patriotic War are intricately tied to the integration of Russian and Soviet identities that took place from the second half of the 1930s and existed throughout the majority of Soviet history during periods of conservative anti-reform entrenchment. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev did not seek to disentangle these identities, President Borys Yeltsin usurped Soviet institutions in Moscow and half-heartedly approached building an independent Russian civic nation outside of Soviet identity (Brudny and Finkel, 2011) and President Putin has fostered a deepening of the integration of Soviet and Russian identities (Brandenberger, 2001). The emergence of Soviet Russian identity in World War II and cultivated since during the “era of stagnation” and Putin’s Russia is an obstacle to the forging of a new post-Soviet identity (Vujacic, 2007).

Ukraine and Russia have viewed Stalin and his legacy in diametrically opposite ways. In Russia, liberals and nationalists have clashed over Stalin. Russian nationalists in the USSR and independent Russia have promoted a Stalin cult by highlighting his transformation of a backward country into an industrialized, nuclear superpower that won World War II while at the same time ignoring or justifying his crimes. Russian liberals received state support in the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras but could never compete against nationalists and national Bolsheviks who were influential in the conservative wing of the Communist

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Party of the Soviet Union (Kommunistitcheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza — KPSS thereafter) and in the military and security services where Putin was a KGB officer.

Ukrainians in the homeland and diaspora have viewed Stalinism critically. This is particularly true of the 1932–1933 artificial famine (Holodomor [murder famine]) which is an “emotional and highly charged” question for Ukrainians (Wanner, 1998, 41). Ukrainian democrats and nationalists in the diaspora and homeland have been united in their condemnation of Stalinism and the Holodomor.

During the last half century, Ukrainian views of Stalinism have been radicalized by three critical historical junctures. The first was the 1971–1972 “pohrom,” the term used by the samvydav (or samizdat which was an underground publication printed by the dissidents) Ukrains’ky Visnyk (Ukrainian Herald) to describe the “heaviest single KGB assault on any group since Stalin” (Reddaway, 1978, 35). The “pohrom” undermined the belief of Ukrainian dissidents that had pitted a “good Vladimir Lenin” versus a “bad Stalin” and created the basis for a broader anti-Soviet opposition (Nahaylo, 1983). The second critical juncture was Ukraine becoming an independent state in 1991 which facilitated state support for de-Stalinization, open access to archives, the freedom to research, write and publish and provided opportunities for the Ukrainian diaspora to influence post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography. The third critical juncture was Russia’s military aggression in 2014 which, in the manner of all conflicts and wars, speeded up the formation of a Ukrainian national identity with 70 percent of Ukrainians saying their patriotism had increased because of the heroism and self-sacrifice of Ukrainian soldiers and volunteers (Konsolidatsiya Ukrayinskoho Suspilstva: Vykylyky, Mozhylivosti, Shlyakhy, 2016, 4). Important for the study of Stalinism was how Russia’s aggression has shattered the Soviet myth of “friendship of peoples” between Russians and Ukrainians that had allegedly necessitated their eternal unity in one state (Kuzio, 2017a).

Russian and Ukrainian identities are grounded in diametrically opposite ethnic-linguistic and civic factors respectively. Russia views Russian speakers as “compatriots” and Russians (Russkii) can be defined as either ethnic Russians or three eastern Slavs — Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Therefore, Putin and Russian nationalists from the exiled writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn to Putin, have always viewed Russian speaking eastern and southern Ukraine as wrongly included in Soviet and now in independent Ukraine and Russian speakers living there are viewed as “Russians.” Ukrainian identity is grounded in civic factors with ethnic-linguistic identity only predominant in the western part of the country. Russian leaders were therefore surprised to find that Russian speakers in so-called NovoRossiya (the old Tsarist name for eastern and southern Ukraine that Putin revived) did not support Moscow or the pro-Russian protests. Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and military aggression against Ukraine has led to greater integration of Russian-speaking Ukrainians into the Ukrainian civic nation and growing patriotism among Russian speakers living in eastern and southern Ukraine. During a conflict and war there is no possibility to sit on the fence and in 2014, Russian speaking Ukrainians showed their patriotism when they supported Kyiv and took up the arms to fight the separatists.

1. Stalinism and national identity in Russia and Ukraine

Russian and Ukrainian intellectuals and writers for nearly seven decades since the death of Stalin in 1953 have approached the Stalinist era from different interpretations. Official and dissident Russian nationalists and Russian writers focused upon Stalin as a great war time leader who transformed a peasant country into a modern society, won the Great Patriotic War and made the West fear a Soviet nuclear superpower. In focusing on Stalin, they glossed over and marginalized his crimes against humanity. The anti-Gorbachev wing of the Russian Writers Union and intellectuals were allied to extreme official Russian nationalists and Stalinists who prepared “A Word to the People” in July 1991 that became a call to arms for conservatives who backed the putsch the following month. Three of the signatories of the open letter were members of the State Committee on Friendship of Peoples.

Since the 1930’s, Soviet Russia had a large body of national Bolsheviks to whom domestic and émigré Russian nationalists, including supporters of Eurasianism, oriented themselves. In the mid-1930’s, Soviet nationality policies underwent a strategic shift from viewing Russian nationalism as the greatest threat to the USSR to that of non-Russians, particularly Ukrainian nationalism. Stalin re-integrated many aspects of Tsarist historiography. In the second half of the 1930s and World War II, Russians were elevated to the status of “elder brother” and “leading nation” of the USSR (Martin, 2001, 81). From 1936, Russians became the first among equals and in 1945, Stalin’s famous toast congratulated them for winning the Great Patriotic War. Russians had become the state-bearing nation of the Soviet Union.

Whereas Russian imperialism and colonialism had been condemned during the 1920s, Tsarist/Soviet historiography viewed Russian expansion as “progressive”, bringing modernity to backward non-Russian peoples, and hence, the “lesser of two evils.” This blending of Bolshevism with (Russian) nationalism came to be called national Bolshevism and was strongly backed by émigré Russian nationalists who developed the theory of Eurasianism where Russia/USSR was at the center of a separate, unique and superior civilization. Eurasianism remained influential in the Russian diaspora but was brought to Russia in the 1990s by intellectuals such as Aleksander Dugin.

The integration of Russian nationalism and Bolshevism in the 1930s facilitated the integration of Soviet and Russian identities. Unlike Serbia in Yugoslavia, the Russian SFSR never possessed republican institutions except briefly after Yeltsin’s election as Russian president in 1990–1991. Instead of national communists defending the republics’ sovereignty, as in Soviet Ukraine, national Bolsheviks in the Russian SFSR defended the Soviet state and empire. Russian liberals (with the exception of a few like Vladimir Bukovsky and Andrei Amalrlik) did not seek independence for the Russian SFSR and instead sought to
transform the USSR into a loose confederation of sovereign republics that resembled Gorbachev’s plans for a Union of Sovereign Republics.

Liberal Russian dissidents and intellectuals supported Gorbachev’s backing for the Soviet media to investigate “blank spots” and opposed any rehabilitation of Stalin. But, they had few émigré or domestic allies and only received relatively limited state backing under Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

Ukrainian and Russian liberals viewed Soviet history from different perspectives. The 1920s were a “golden era” for Russian liberals because of the New Economic Policy whereas for Ukrainians the 1920s was remembered for the Soviet policy of indigenization that supported Ukrainianization. Russian liberals welcomed the publication of the secret protocols of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact, recognition of the Soviet crime in the Katyn forest, where Polish officers had been murdered, and publicity for Stalin’s crimes. When dealing with World War II their focus was different to that of the Great Patriotic War myth launched under Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and expanded by President Putin. Under Gorbachev, liberal Russian intellectuals asked why there had been so many Soviet casualties, why the USSR was so unprepared for war, what was the cause of its initial defeats, and praised Soviet peoples, including non-Russians, for the victory rather than the “great leader” Stalin (Tumarkin, 1994, 187–198).

Under Gorbachev the changing official line on collectivization that challenged the Stalin myth complimented what was taking place in intellectual discussions in Soviet Ukraine. For the first time, the Soviet media talked of the millions who had died under Stalin and discussed whether Stalinism had roots in Leninism or was it an aberration, that is, was communism to blame or was it badly implemented (Tolz, 1988a, 1988b). Soviet and Russian intellectuals called for a return to “Leninist policies,” a demand Ukrainian dissidents and cultural intelligentsia had also promoted until the 1960s but had given up in the 1970s.

In Ukraine, a broader coalition stood opposed to official attempts at the rehabilitation of Stalin. Ukrainian nationalists and democratic dissidents aligned with the official cultural intelligentsia and national communists to oppose a Stalin cult in the USSR. Demands for de-Stalinization in Soviet Ukraine were always far broader than the Great Terror and included the Holodomor, murders by the Soviet secret police in Western Ukraine in 1939–1941 (Kiebuzinski and Motyl, 2017) and mass deportations to Siberia in the 1940s. Of these four crimes, only the Great Terror had resonance with Russian intellectuals and liberal politicians. In Ukraine, “Stalin was determined to destroy their culture and traditional way of life” (Naimark, 2010, 29, Applebaum, 2017).

Half of the uprisings in the USSR against collectivization took place in Soviet Ukraine where the Soviet regime was faced with fighting a two-front war against a peasant counter revolution and Ukrainian nationalism. Stalin knew about the Holodomor but “was completely indifferent to the fate of the victims” (Naimark, 2010, 77). Ukrainians were perceived as the “enemy nation” and their submission into a Homo Sovieticus would ensure they “would be completely reliable, trustworthy, and denationalized in all but superficial ways” (Naimark, 2010, 78). The Soviet secret police GPU was the most consistently anti-Ukrainian Soviet organization (Martin, 2001, 225) and viewed Ukraine and the Ukrainian-populated Kuban “as the most threatening regions for rural counter-revolution” (Martin, 2001, 293). Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev revealed in his secret speech to the 1956 congress of the KPSS that Stalin had wanted to deport the entire Ukrainian people but “there were too many of them and there was no place to which to deport them” (Khrushchev, 1976, 58).

The Holodomor took place after Ukrainianization was curtailed and at the same time as widespread repression in Soviet Ukraine of political, cultural and religious elites. Thousands were arrested and executed or sent to Siberia (Martin, 2001, 250–254). In December 1932, two decrees put an end to Ukrainianization. For the next half century, the Soviet state treated Ukrainian nationalism as a grave threat to its existence while Soviet propaganda linked domestic dissent with émigré groups and external conspiracies. The trial of members of the fictitious Union for the Liberation of Ukraine in the late 1920s received the most attention in the Soviet media “than all the other national show trials and purges combined” (Martin, 2001, 249).

Henceforth, Ukrainians “could venerate their past as long as it complimented, but did not compete with the story of Russian imperial pursuits” (Yekelchuk, 2004, 52). The Soviet regime’s attempts at creating a “hegemonic discourse” was though never completely successful in Soviet Ukraine where it always competed with a “counter-discourse” (Yekelchyk, 1999, 597–598).

Trials of Russians in the early 1930s in Moscow were not publicized to the same extent as in Ukraine and they were never linked to nationalist threats to the Soviet state (Martin, 2001, 258). Russians were, after all, never separatists. In the 1930s, Russians were less likely to be shot in the Great Terror and less threatened by famine than Ukrainians and Kazakhs (Snyder, 2010, 404). A total of seven million died from the famine in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, northern Caucasus and the Russian lower Volga. In 1933, the annual mortality rates per 1,000 inhabitants in the countryside were 188.1 in the USSR, 138.2 in Russia (which is higher because the Russian SFSR included Kazakhstan until 1936) and a far higher 367.7 in Ukraine (Graziosi, 2009, 73). Kiebuzinski and Motyl (2017, 51) cite estimates that 12 million Soviet citizens were murdered under Stalin of whom half were Ukrainians who “came to view Soviet policy towards them as being systematically destructive.”

The “complete indifference to human suffering that permeated the Soviet ruling circles in Stalin’s time” led to millions of victims in Soviet Ukraine (Snyder, 2010, 42). Millions died in Soviet Ukraine “in the greatest artificial famine in the history of the world” and “During the years that both Stalin and Hitler were in power, more people were killed in Ukraine than anywhere else in the bloodlands, or in Europe, or in the world” (Snyder, 2010, 20). The Holodomor primarily occurred in Soviet Ukraine and what was until the 1930s primarily Ukrainian populated Kuban region (Kulchytsky, 2002). Stalin consciously directed the famine towards Ukraine and “He decided that peasants would die, and he decided which peasants would die in the largest numbers: the inhabitants of Soviet Ukraine” (Snyder, 2010, 395).
The 1932–1933 famine has never played a similar role in the formation of Russian national identity. The famine affected only the Russian Cossack populated Don region and Ukrainian Cossack populated Kuban regions of the Northern Caucasus, and the Volga German region, but not the entire Russian SFSR. There are no monuments to the famine anywhere in Russia. Stalin’s policies towards Soviet Ukraine “was special, and lethal” and were applied only towards that republic (Snyder, 2010, 42). The famine in Kazakhstan was an outcome of forced collectivization of nomadic people while in Ukraine it was a deliberately created “political famine” where the state was at war with its peasantry (Graziosi, 2009).

2. Anti-Stalinist liberalization versus conservative Stalinist Nostalgia

Ukrainians raised the same demands during the two periods of Soviet liberalization in the second half of the 1950s-1960s and second half of the 1980’s. In the first liberalization period de-Stalinization was only partially carried out by Khrushchev while in the second popular demands outstripped the ability of Gorbachev and the KPSS to remain in control of intellectual discussions. “In Ukraine, the cultural intelligentsia pressed for a complete exposure of all the crimes committed under Stalin and a radical settling of accounts with Stalin himself” (Lewytskyj, 1994, 53).

Only a minority of the demands raised during the first post-Stalin liberalization were echoed in Russia. Crucially, Russian dissidents and cultural intelligentsia never possessed the same concerns as Ukrainians about chauvinistic history writing, banning of national Churches and threats to their language and culture. Bohdan Nahaylo (1999, 30–31) cites a Ukrainian intellectual writing in the Gorbachev era that during the conservative “era of stagnation” the Soviet state had promoted a Soviet Ukrainian inferiority complex towards the Russian “elder brother” and “A disdainful nihilistic attitude towards the Ukrainian language, culture, and history had become almost the norm for many of our denationalized fellow citizens.” Similar concerns did not exist in Russia where Russian greatness, guidance, leadership and the need for servile gratitude towards the Russian Ukrainian language, culture, and history had become almost the norm for many of our denationalized fellow citizens.

Demands put forward by Ukrainian dissidents, cultural intelligentsia and national communists were far more extensive than those raised in Russia and included:

- Condemnation of all Stalinist crimes in Ukraine, including the Holodomor as an artificial famine.
- Rehabilitation of writers and other members of the cultural intelligentsia who had been repressed under Stalin and during the Brezhnev—Yuri Andropov–Konstantin Chernenko “eras of stagnation.”
- Rehabilitation of national communist leaders who had led the Ukrainianisation (indigenization) campaign of the 1920s. These included national communists such as Mykola Khvylovyy who had called for Ukrainian literature to free itself of Russian influence and Mykola Skrypnyk who had made territorial demands on Ukrainian populated border areas of Russia. Khvylovyy and Skrypnyk committed suicide in May and July 1933 respectively during the height of the Holodomor. Demands for the rehabilitation of Ukrainian intellectuals stretched into the tens of thousands.
- Rehabilitation of national communist leader Petro Shelhest who had been deposed in the 1972 “pohrom” and exiled to Moscow to only emerge from forced obscurity in 1988.
- Rehabilitation of left-wing Ukrainian patriotic parties, such as the Ukrainian Party of Socialist-Revolutionary-Borotbiists (Communists) and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU) which had been active in Poland and disbanded by Stalin in 1938.
- Rehabilitation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox and Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Churches which were repressed in the late 1920s and second half of the 1940s respectively.
- Trials of all those guilty of crimes against humanity. Ukrainian writer Borys Oliynyk told the 19th KPSS conference that “Because repressions in our republic started long before 1937, we must also determine the causes of the 1933 famine, which killed millions of Ukrainians; we must list the names of those who are to blame for this tragedy” (Kulchytskyy, 2002).
- Removal of any glorification of Stalin from history books and to end Stalinist interpretation of history that glorified Tsarist expansionism.
- De-Russification of higher education, overturning of Khrushchev’s 1958 school reforms (which ended compulsory teaching in the local language) and defence and protection of the Ukrainian language. Khrushchev, traditionally viewed as a “liberal” communist because of his 1956 speech condemning Stalin, was seen by the Ukrainian intelligentsia as somebody who opened the flood gates of Russification wider than Stalin had.

A major dilemma facing Gorbachev during the second post-Stalin liberalization was how to manage and guide intellectual discussion of “blank spots” in Soviet history, especially those related to Stalinist crimes. It was easier for Soviet leaders to deal with Russia where demands were less numerous and did not threaten the unity of the state.

Khrushchev and Gorbachev both sought to focus criticism upon Stalin as a Soviet leader who had “distorted” and undertook “excesses” that made him different from Lenin. In the late 1980s this question became intricately tied up with sustainability of the Soviet regime. If Stalinism had naturally evolved from Leninism the entire Soviet system was a criminal enterprise because all of the arrested “enemies of the people” were not guilty and “the country was not being run by a legal government but by a group of gangsters” (Satter, 2012, 118).
Discussion of “blank spots” as “distortions” of Leninist policies proved to be increasingly untenable after glasnost publicized large numbers of eyewitness accounts, access to official documents being easier, and the print runs of samvydav literature increased. Added to this were growing numbers of copies of Russian translations of Robert Conquest’s *Harvest of Despair* about the Holodomor and other books published in the West which were smuggled into the USSR.

Separating Stalinism and Leninism proved to be difficult, but nevertheless manageable, in the Khrushchev era but became impossible to sustain during a period of rising non-Russian nationalism in the late 1980s. In the 1960s, liberal Ukrainian writers and dissidents as well as their national communist mentors, believed in a fundamental difference between a “good” Lenin and a “bad” Stalin and they had called for a return to “Leninist nationalities policies.” This thesis underlay one of the most influential tracts written in the 1960s by a prominent Ukrainian literary critic, social activist and dissident, Ivan Dzyuba for the Soviet Ukrainian Communist Party leadership. Leaked and given the title of “Internationalism or Russification?” it first circulated in samvydav and was then published in 1968 in the West in English and Ukrainian and in 1973 in Russian and later into Chinese.

Ukrainian dissidents and the cultural intellectuals during two Soviet liberalizations condemned the myth of the “friendship of peoples” as a fraud aimed at perpetuating Ukraine’s colonial subservience. Internationalism and the friendship of peoples were terms that were viewed by dissidents and the cultural intelligentsia as camouflage for assimilation and Russification of Ukrainians. In his 1983 open letter to Soviet leaders, Yuriy Badzyo (1984) writes that these policies “block our access to the future and to the past.” From 1991, the myth of “friendship of peoples” was side-lined by a national historical narrative that carved a separate Ukrainian historical path to Russia’s (Yekelchuk, 2004, 161). In 2014, Russian military aggression against Ukraine was viewed by Russian-speakers as a betrayal of the “friendship of peoples” making it redundant (Kuzio, 2017a).

The “pohrom” in Ukraine destroyed the premise of a “good” Lenin versus a “bad” Stalin among central and eastern Ukrainian dissidents (it had never been popular among western Ukrainians). The “pohrom” created a class of professional political prisoners who “now saw themselves as part of a Ukrainian national opposition to Moscow’s rule” (Nahaylo, 1999, 38). It ended any hope of dialogue with the authorities or working within the system, cast doubt on a legal approach to dissent, and exposed the incompatibility of the regime’s goals and dissident demands. Ukrainian patriots understood that to be patriotic was a crime in the eyes of the conservative Soviet authorities. The psychological impact of the “pohrom” was such that when Ukrainian dissidents and nationalists re-launched their demands under Gorbachev they were more radical. The Soviet regime had inadvertently transformed dissidents into oppositionists ahead of Gorbachev’s liberalization.

The Soviet authorities perceived non-Russian national democrats, who raised national and democratic demands, as a greater threat to the regime and their sentences were longer than those given to Russian dissidents. Russian democrats sought liberalization and human rights while Russian nationalists were usually loyal to the regime or they sought to transform the USSR into a Russian empire. Russian democrats and nationalists were never separatists. In this sense, what is described as “Russian nationalism” is, as Alexander J. Motyl (1990a,b) has written, a “myth.” The Russian SFSR did not declare independence in August 1991 from the USSR, unlike the Ukrainian and Belarusian SSRs, and celebrates Russia Day based on its June 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty.

The “pohrom” and curtailing of the first Soviet post-Stalin liberalization presaged two decades of conservative retrenchment. In 1975, Putin voluntarily joined the KGB in which he served up to the collapse of the USSR. The “era of stagnation” from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s is synonymous with the cultivation of the myth of the Great Patriotic War and cult of Stalin, and enhanced Russification. Economic efficiency was sacrificed for the status quo and stability in a “neo-Stalinist system” that eventually exhausted itself (Zaslavsky, 1982, 131).

The Communist Party of Ukraine came under pressure during the second half of the 1980s from the cultural intelligentsia, informal groups such as the Ukrainian Popular Movement for Restructuring (commonly known as Rukh) and Memorial. Investigative journalists in Moscow and Ukraine unveiled “blank spots” in Ukrainian history (Moscow was home to both all-union and Russian official publications).

In 1986—1987, Ukrainian dissidents released from the Gulag revived the same demands they had raised in the 1960s and 1970s. Badzyo’s 1984 open letter had raised the question of the Holodomor which he believed had killed 6—8 million Ukrainians (a figure similar to Conquests (1986)1). The Committee in Defense of the Ukrainian Catholic Church condemned the Holodomor as part of a broader pattern of Stalinist repression against Ukrainian identity that culminated in the banning of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (The Ukrainian Catholic Church: The Catacomb and Alternatives, 1987). Chornovil, one of the leading Ukrainian dissidents and editor of the samvydav Ukrayinsky Visnyk, made similar demands to those made by the more radical anti-Soviet opposition and members of the cultural intelligentsia.

Glasnost led to an explosion of new information about “blank spots” in the more liberal Moscow media which gradually spread to Kyiv by 1988—1989. The Holodomor remained at the center of attention in Ukraine as knowledge of Stalinist repression grew in response to civil society activists unearth evidence of mass graves.

A mass grave near Kyiv in the Bykivnya forest holds hundreds of thousands of victims which Rukh and Memorial first made public through commemorations, requiem masses and publications in the late 1980s. In 2006, a memorial complex was opened at Bykivnya and since that time, Ukrainian leaders have held annual commemorations of the victims. Mass graves in Vynnytsya (“Ukraine’s Katyn”) holds 10,000 victims and was uncovered by Nazi occupying forces in May 1943 (Sverstiuk, 2017).
In the late 1980s, mass graves were uncovered in Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk of political prisoners executed by the NKVD as they fled from the invading Nazi’s (Kiebzinski and Motyl, 2017).

Soviet repression and the Holodomor led to the spiritual destruction of Ukrainian culture, language and memory, or what Lidya Kovalenko (1992) described as “dukhovna ruina (spiritual ruin).” As early as September 1986, head of the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Literature and former Deputy Prime Minister Mykola Zhulynsky said that the loss of national memory led to “mankurtsivo” (slave syndrome) (DzyubenkoYa, 1991). The Holodomor murdered the “village intelligentsia – the carriers of culture and of the national idea” and gave a “heavy blow” to “its spirit, culture, national consciousness and morals” (Kovalenko, 1992, 22).

New revelations about Stalinist crimes were prominently featured in independent media printed in Poland and Lithuania and smuggled into Soviet Ukraine which reached a wider audience compared to the earlier retyped samvydav. In addition, these revelations were receiving a far wider audience on the pages of official publications. Stalinist crimes were prominently featured in Komsomol (Communist Youth League) newspapers, such as Leninska Molod (Lviv) and Komsomolskyy Prapor (Ivano-Frankivsk).

Regional Communist newspapers more gradually opened their pages to new revelations. In 1989–1990, the Communist Party disintegrated in Western Ukraine at the same time as in the three Baltic States and following elections in March 1990 democrats took power in Galicia. The Lviv Communist oblast newspaper Vilna Ukrayina (Free Ukraine) was renamed by Chornovil, the newly elected Chairman of the oblast council, as Za Vilnu Ukrayinu (For a Free Ukraine). Edited by Vasyl Bazar the daily circulation of Za Vilnu Ukrayinu skyrocketed to over half a million copies reaching an audience far beyond Galicia.

The Union of Writer’s newspaper Literaturna Ukrayina became a very important source of information and lobbyist demanding the rehabilitation of its fellow writers and cultural intelligentsia. From autumn 1987, Literaturna Ukrayina devoted an entire page of its newspaper to “Pages of a Forgotten Heritage.” In addition to newspapers, the Writers Union published numerous republican and regional journals which opened their pages to “blank spots;” Zhovten, the organ of the Lv oblast Writers Union played a particularly important role in this process.

Historical journals were slower in responding because the profession had been tightly controlled and the history profession had portrayed Ukrainians as perennially seeking “reunification” with their “Russian brothers” while those supporting independence were denounced as “traitors.” Ukrayinsky Istortychnyi Zhurnal (Ukrainian Historical Journal), established in 1957 during the first post-Stalin Soviet liberalization had become dull and dry. “Historians are truly slower getting into perestroika than literary scholars; this has to be admitted,” head of the Institute of History at the National Academy of Sciences and a leading specialist on the Holodomor Stanislav Kulchytsky said. By 1988, historians could “call things by their proper names” (Solchanyk, 1990).

Both Ukrainian and Russian historians demanded the rehabilitation of their historians who had been repressed or had been ignored but this opened up competing historical claims between both professions. Socialist Mykhaylo Hrushevsky, the doyen of Ukrainian history writing, was a historian and the president of the Central Rada (Council) that fought for independence in 1917–1918. Hrushevsky returned to Soviet Ukraine in the 1920’s and his suspicious death in 1934 remains unresolved. For the next half century Hrushevsky was castigated by the Soviet media and his Ukrainian history writing was banned in the USSR. He remained influential in the Ukrainian diaspora and his large body of historical work returned to Ukraine in the Gorbachev era when it became dominant within post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography. The Hrushevsky framework outlines a history of Ukraine that is independent of Muscovy and the Russian Empire and therefore was at odds with a Tsarist and post-1930s Soviet historiography that trumpeted age-old Russian-Ukrainian “friendship” and “unity” that began in the medieval state of Kievan Rus, was endorsed in the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav and reached its apogee in the USSR.

The mass publication in the late 1980s and 1990s of Russian historians, such as the 18th century defender of Russian autocracy Nikolai Karamzin (Nahaylo, 1988), deepened a Great Russian chauvinistic view of Ukrainians. Both Russian imperial and official Soviet historiography had claimed the three eastern Slavs originated in Kievan Rus which represented a time of unity they have always sought to maintain by fighting Polish, Austrian and more recently US and EU conspiracies seeking to destroy this “organic unity.” Russian chauvinist views of Ukrainians as a branch of the “Russian people” is today reflected in Putin’s belief that Ukrainians and Russians constitute “odyn narod” (one people). For Russians, the “norm” is Russian-Ukrainian unity with Ukrainians in a subservient position. Such an approach was incompatible with post-1991 Ukrainian nation-building and especially impossible after 2014.

In February 1990, six months after his resignation, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party Volodymyr Shcherbytsky died. Shcherbytsky had led Soviet Ukraine since the 1972 “pohrom” and during the bulk of the “era of stagnation” under Soviet leaders Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko. Both Shcherbytsky and Brezhnev were from the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipropetrovsk. Shcherbytsky’s departure from the scene permitted the Communist Party of Ukraine to acknowledge that a famine had taken place in 1932–1933. Shcherbytsky had under pressure from glasnost and Ukrainian intellectuals opened the door to this in late 1988 when he had said there had been a famine and the following year the Communist Party of Ukraine had issued a resolution on the rehabilitation of Stalin’s victims. The 1990 Communist Party of Ukraine’s resolution stated that the covering up of the famine had “hindered scientific understanding and an objective, moral, and political assessment of a national tragedy.” It condemned the famine as an outcome “of the criminal course pursued by Stalin and his closest entourage ([Vyacheslav] Molotov, [Lazar] Kaganovych) towards the peasantry” (Nahaylo, 1999, 249). Soviet Ukrainian academician Valeriy Soldatenko, a native of Donetsk, had written the 1990 statement of the Ukrainian Communist Party. In 2010, when Party of Regions’ leader Viktor Yanukovych was elected as a Ukrainian president, Soldatenko
was appointed as a head of the government’s Institute of National Memory where he continued to stand by the 1990 statement that the famine was not artificial (Kuzio, 2015, 438–439).

The 1990 Communist Party of Ukraine statement was timid and ignored the enormity of the changes in public attitudes that were taking place in Ukrainian society. But, the Communist Party of Ukraine could not do more than pin the blame for the Holodomor on Stalin as going further would have required a denunciation of the entire history of the Soviet Union and its political system. The resolution could not stem the tide of anti-communism and nationalism sweeping Ukraine that would propel the republic’s parliament to declare independence a year later. The Communist Party of Ukraine had only another eighteen months of life before the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet (parliament) voted to make the party illegal after accusing it of supporting the hardline coup d’etat in Moscow in August 1991.

3. The strategic influence of the Ukrainian diaspora

Émigré communities are rarely studied because they are often considered to be on the wrong side of history and their writings are perceived as not adopting a scholarly approach. Nevertheless, they are part of the political process and émigrés could be “agenda setting” (Motyl, 1990a,b, 137). Long before the Gorbachev era in the USSR, Ukrainian dissidents, oppositionists and nationalists received émigrés’ books and journals, including on the Holodomor and other “blank spots,” while émigrés republished samvydav received from Soviet Ukraine (Kuzio, 2012). Small, pocket sized editions of the émigré journal Suchasnist were easy to smuggle and émigrés’ books were often published with fake Soviet covers to fool Soviet border guards. Radio Liberty, Voice of America and Radio Canada International broadcast to Soviet Ukrainian audiences. Soviet tourists, journalists and officials travelling abroad were interviewed by a branch of Radio Liberty which received from them insider sources of information and they in turn were often given émigrés’ books and journals (Martyniuk, 2017).

Émigré groups need two factors to possess influence in the homeland. The first is political instability which provides them with openings, which Gorbachev’s policies inadvertently provided. The second is an ability to forge alliances with opposition elites. Democratic émigré groups, such as the US-government funded Prolog Research Corporation, which had a long record of publishing books and articles in the journal Suchasnist on national communists and its associates, had nurtured contacts with Ukraine’s political elites and cultural intelligentsia (Kuzio, 2012). Glasnost “invigorated the émigrés” as “there will always be Soviet elites willing to join forces with them, pool resources, develop common strategies, and mount coordinated assaults on the state” (Motyl, 1990a,b, 144).

In 1980–1981, the Ukrainian diasporas in the US and Canada launched the Harvard Famine Project and Ukrainian Famine Research Committee respectively to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Holodomor in 1983.1 The timing would prove to be fortuitous. The Russian diaspora had always been far less organized and had never viewed the Holodomor as central to its national identity. Until the 1970s the Russian diaspora had been dominated by the nationalist People’s Labor Alliance (National Alliance of Russian Solidarists) or Narodno-Tradovoi Soyuz—NTS in Russian. The latter had emerged from the Russian Liberation Movement (ROA) led by former Soviet General Andrey Vlasov who had collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.

Ukrainian diasporas in the US and Canada undertook a broad range of scholarly activities on the Holodomor. A US Congressional Commission on the Ukrainian Famine, headed by an American historian James Mace, was established in December 1985 and submitted its findings in April 1988. A Ukrainian-language translation of the eyewitness accounts was published in Ukraine two decades later with a foreword by President Viktor Yushchenko (Kulchytskyy, 2008). An International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932–1933 Famine in Ukraine was established which issued its legal findings in 1990. Academic conferences on the Holodomor, the first of which took place in Montreal in 1983, became increasingly common. In 1981, well-known historian Robert Conquest (1986) was contracted by the Harvard Famine Project to write a book with Mace as his research assistant. A Russian-language edition was published in 1988 in London (which was smuggled into the USSR) and a Ukrainian-language edition was published in Kyiv in 1993.

Conquest’s book was reviewed in countless Western publications opening up intellectual discussion about the Holodomor (Sysyn, 2015, 10–13). Conquest had no access to Soviet archives which only became available to historians after 1991 and on the basis of his research calculated that between 5 and 7 million died in Ukraine during the Holodomor. Applebaum’s (2017) book on the Holodomor, published three decades later, had the greater fortune to have access to archives. One of the four “decommunization” laws adopted in May 2015 opened up Ukrainian archives (Vyatroyvych et al., 2016), making them the most open of any former Soviet republic outside the three Baltic States. Thence, the current estimate of those Ukrainians who died during the Holodomor is of 4 million.

Conquest’s book appeared at the same time as many articles were published on the Holodomor in scholarly journals and edited collections (Mace, 1984; Serbyn and Kravchenko, 1986). An exhibition of photographs at Harvard University’s Widener Library in 1983 was published as an album three years later.

The Toronto-based Ukrainian Famine Research Committee was initially launched for the purpose of making a documentary film about the Holodomor. Funding for Harvest of Despair came in the form of contributions from the Ukrainian community and a subsidy from the Federal Government of Canada. Experienced Ukrainian-Canadian film makers Slavko

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1 It was renamed the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre and currently is called the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium.

2 Interviews with Ukrainian Studies Fund Director Roman Procyk, York University Professor Yuriy Darewych, and Bohdan Vitvitsky, October 15, 2016.
Novytski and Yuri Luhovy produced the documentary and filmed interviews with prominent witnesses such as the British author and Guardian newspaper journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, former communist activist (and later dissident) Lev Kopelev and former Soviet General who became a leading dissident Petro Hryshchenko, as well as Western scholars Robert Sullivant, Mace and Conquest. Harvest of Despair premiered in Toronto in 1984 and was shown at documentary film festivals the following year where it won a number of accolades. It was broadcasted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), BBC, Australian BC, and PBS in the USA. The film was dubbed into Ukrainian, French and Spanish.

Inevitably, opposition activists and members of the cultural intelligentsia in Soviet Ukraine came to know about diaspora’s activities on the Holodomor through tourists travelling to Ukraine, the increasing number of Soviet travelers to the West and by listening to Western radio stations. Harvest of Despair was smuggled from the West and Poland into Soviet Ukraine (Kuzio, 2012).

In the first half of the 1980s, Soviet propaganda campaigns had condemned the Ukrainian diaspora’s interest in the Holodomor as inspired and funded by US President Ronald Reagan’s campaign against the “evil empire” and “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists” who sought to conceal their crimes as “Nazi hirielings.” Soviet propaganda placed Harvest of Despair in the same genre as the 1986 movie Rambo about a former US Special Forces officer.

The rank and file of the Canadian Communist Party had always been dominated by Ukrainians where they constituted half of its members and were especially prominent in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. A late attempt by Canadian Communists to counter the Ukrainian diaspora’s successful work on the Holodomor blamed the famine on drought, widespread sabotage of collectivization, bad Soviet planning and Stalinist “excesses” (Tottle, 1987). By the time Douglas Tottle’s book, which was ghost written in Kyiv, was published in Toronto even Ukrainian-Canadian Communists refused to have anything to do with its publication (Sysyn, 2015, 4–5).

History has come full circle. The return to anti-Ukrainian propaganda on Russian television and social media is being accompanied by a return to Soviet arguments last raised in the 1980’s in response to the Ukrainian diaspora’s work on the Holodomor (Kuzio, 2016). In 2015, Sputnik, successor to RIA Novosti, published an article entitled “Holodomor Hoax” with similar arguments to those found in Tottle where the famine is again portrayed as part of the West’s alleged crusade against Russia, as it had been in the 1980s against the USSR (Young, 2015; Luhn, 2016).

4. Independent Russia and Ukraine

The momentum generated in the 1980s firstly by the Ukrainian diaspora and secondly by glasnost in the USSR were dwarfed by the arrival of Ukrainian independence which permitted scholars and activists to work in hitherto secret archives and publish freely. Prominent scholar Yuriy Shapoval (1993, 1994) led the way as a head of the Institute of National Relations which was launched in 1994 as a joint project of the SBU, Institute of History in the National Academy of Sciences, State University.

Any visit to a bookstore in Ukraine will testify to the Holodomor and Stalinist crimes becoming the subject of countless books, memoirs, and collections of documents based upon hitherto closed Communist Party archives (Rudych, Kuras, Panchuk, Pyrih and Soldatenko, 1990; Lialka, 1993; Yashchuk, 1999). A Black Book on Ukraine with 1000 pages of documentary and published.

In independent Ukraine, the Ukrainian diaspora continued to in demand at a time when new histories of Ukraine by Ukrainian historians had still not been written. Paul R. Magocsi, also

4 During a 1994 tour of Ukraine as part of a USAID mission, I witnessed Subtelny’s Russian-language edition of Ukraine. A History being used in Donetsk State University.
Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests.

Ukraine. In May 2009, President Dmitri Medvedev launched a percent of Soviet Ukraine’s population the region suffered from a third of the executions in the Great Terror (Kuromiya, 1998, to it. Although the Donbas (composed of Stalino [Donetsk] and Voroshylovohrad [Luhansk] Ukrainian people “genocide committed against the Ukrainian people. Contrary to widespread misconceptions it was not the color revolutions, he launched new counter-revolutionary policies that included the founding of the Youth Democratic Anti-Spring in communist Czechoslovakia and revolutionary change in the West which had been taking place in the late 1960s. Under Yeltsin and came to an end with the coming to power of Putin in 2000 who set Russia on a course of reviving the Stalin cult that had been promoted from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s during the “era of stagnation.”

In the conservative “era of stagnation,” KPSS leaders had sought to shield Soviet youth from ferment in the 1968 Prague Spring in communist Czechoslovakia and revolutionary change in the West which had been taking place in the late 1960s. Military-Patriotic upbringing and the Great Patriotic War myth and Stalin’s cult was a counter-campaign against international youth culture in the West (Tumarkin, 1994, 133–152). Following the Georgian Rose and Ukrainian Orange Revolutions in 2003–2004, Putin turned to the nationalist right and fearing the spread of what he understood as Western manufactured color revolutions, he launched new counter-revolutionary policies that included the founding of the Youth Democratic Anti-Fascist Movement Nashi (Ours).

Yushchenko’s focus on the Holodomor and rehabilitation of Ukrainian nationalists dominated much of the nation building policies he pursued during his presidency. Yushchenko’s focus on the Holodomor as a genocide was more hardline and single-minded and marginalized and excluded alternative viewpoints (Zhurzhenko, 2011). On November 28, 2006, a law on the Holodomor was adopted with the support of Our Ukraine (Yushchenko’s political force), BYuT (Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko) and the Socialist Party of Ukraine. The KPU again did not support the law but on this occasion, Prime Minister Yanukovich’s Regions of Ukrainian parliament faction gave 21 (out of 44) and 28 (out of 37) respectively for the two votes. Other centrist parties which bases of support lay in eastern Ukraine backed both votes.

In Russia, de-Stalinization was more short-lived and Soviet crimes never became central to the forging of a new national identity in the same manner as it did in Ukraine. Russian leaders, including Yeltsin, were unclear whether they were building a post-Soviet Russian identity or continuing to articulate an eclectic mix of Soviet and Russian identities (Brudny and Finkel, 2011). In the 1996 Russian presidential elections, Yeltsin called for a new union with Belarus in an attempt to take votes from his main rival Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov. De-Stalinization received weaker government and public support under Yeltsin and came to an end with the coming to power of Putin in 2000 who set Russia on a course of reviving the Stalin cult that had been promoted from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s during the “era of stagnation.”

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In 2008, on the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory published a 21-volume National Book of Memory about the famine (each over 1000 pages long) that includes extensive memoirs, analysis, documents, and photographs. Soviet and Nazi crimes in the Donbas and Soviet nationality policies after 1945 changed the national composition of the Donbas with Stalin’s nationality policies resembling a form of “internal colonization” (Snyder 159). The Donetsk region suffered tremendously from the Holodomor and Great Terror and is the only oblast with two volumes devoted to it. Although the Donbas (composed of Stalino [Donetsk] and Voroshilovskyohrad [Luhansk] oblasts) accounted for sixteen percent of Soviet Ukraine’s population the region suffered from a third of the executions in the Great Terror (Kuromiya, 1998, 324).

Official attitude to Stalin and Stalinist crimes in Russia were very different and proceeded to add to the growing rift with Ukraine. In May 2009, President Dmitri Medvedev launched a “Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests.” The Commission pledged to defend Russia against those “who would deny the Soviet contribution to the victory in World War II.” Russian-Ukrainian relations had deteriorated during

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5 In 2012–2013, Magocsi toured every Ukrainian oblast to present the second edition of his translated history to local historians.
Yushchenko’s presidency culminating in the unprecedented expulsion of two Russian diplomats in summer 2009. The expulsions were followed by President Medvedev's undiplomatic open letter to Yushchenko where he complained:

Russian-Ukrainian relations are tested by your administration’s review of our general historical framework, glorification of Nazi collaborators, the exaltation of the role of radical nationalists, and attempts to press the international community in supporting nationalist interpretations of the 1932–1933 famine in the USSR as a “genocide against the Ukrainian people” (Kuzio, 2015, 438–439).

Putin and Medvedev’s strategy of rebuilding Russia as a great power required a cult of Stalin which in turn necessitated the covering up of his crimes. Contemporary Russia’s Great Patriotic War myth “suppress memory of the Gulag” and the “sufferings of the victims of the Soviet system” (Khapaeva, 2009, 369). This creates a “partial amnesia” where historical memory is “strangely selective;” for example, by ignoring or justifying the 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact that divided Poland and annexed the three Baltic states. Those upholding the Great Patriotic War myth and Stalin cult bear no responsibility for his crimes and are told by Putin they have nothing to be ashamed of. "The war myth prevents reflection on the responsibility for Soviet crimes” (Khapaeva, 2009, 369). An older generation Russian Communist activist said, “In my opinion, he didn’t kill enough people” while a younger Russian argued “He wasn’t a dictator or a tyrant. He was the greatest leader of our country. He raised it to incredible heights” (For Some Russians, Stalin ‘Didn’t Kill Enough People,’ 2016).

The growing cult of Stalin leaves no room for his victims and the only museum of Soviet political repressions, housed in the Perm Gulag where many political prisoners died, was closed down in summer 2014 (Mackinnon, 2015; Walker, 2015; Peter, 2015). Collecting information about Stalin’s crimes can lead to political repression in Russia, as seen in false criminal charges launched against Yury Dmitriev, a historian and the head of the Karelia branch of the Russian Memorial Society (Coynash, 2017).

Anti-Ukrainian propaganda in the Russian media has shed a negative light on the incarceration in the Gulag of Ukrainian nationalists and dissidents who are now depicted as having aided “fascists”. Russian vilification of Ukrainian nationalists and the Euromaidan Revolution in the Russian media (Kuzio, 2016) provides arguments that the camps held bona fide “fascist” criminals (Laurence, 2015). In 2016, the Memorial NGO, which since the Gorbachev era has undertaken important work documenting Soviet crimes against humanity, has been declared a “foreign agent” under repressive legislation adopted four years earlier that targeted and sought to halt Western funding of civil society in Russia.

Two decades of state and government support for documenting, researching, publishing and teaching on the Holodomor has influenced popular attitudes and growing numbers of Ukrainians believing the famine was a genocide. If in 2010, 60 percent of Ukrainians believed the Holodomor was a genocide by October 2013, on the eve of the Euromaidan Revolution, this had grown to 66 percent and represented a majority in all of Ukraine’s regions. A year later, following Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine, nearly three quarters (72 percent) of Ukrainians believed it was a genocide. The number of Ukrainians who disagreed declined from 25 to 15 percent. In 2014, in every Ukrainian region a majority believed that the Holodomor was a genocide, ranging from a high of 96 percent in the west of the country to 62 percent in the east and 56 percent in the Donbas (Dynamics of Attitudes to Holodomor, 2014).

Growing public acceptance of the Holodomor as a genocide came together with high negative feelings towards Lenin and Stalin. Two thirds of Ukrainians hold negative views of Stalin and 60 percent of Lenin (Attitude Toward Certain Historical Figures and De-Communization Process in Ukraine, 2016). In 2016, 70 percent of Ukrainians believed Stalin to be a “crue” tyrant” with only 8.7 percent disagreeing (Stavlenyia Ukrayintsv do Postati Stalina, 2016).

These trends in Ukrainian public opinion are diametrically opposite to those that have been taking place in Russia where state control of the media and education process has generated growing positive feelings for Stalin. After thirty-two years in the Soviet and Russian Merchant Navy a Ukrainian who had watched only Russian television on board of the ship said that Stalin and Ivan the Terrible had been great leaders and they should have monuments unveiled to them (Shearlaw, 2016). In a Russian television vote to find the country’s most popular historical figure the producers were embarrassed to find the public had voted for Stalin and they rigged the vote in favor of Aleksander Nevsky (Pomerantsev, 2014, 112).

In a 2015 poll, the Levada Centre found evidence of continued growth in sympathy for Stalin with most Russians holding positive, respectful and sympathetic views of him. In addition, the proportion of Russians who believe Stalin is a “criminal” had declined from one third in 2010 to a quarter while those who believed Stalin’s repression was justified by the goals of industrialization and winning the war had grown from 25 to 45 percent (Stalin i yego Rol v Istorii Strany, 2015). Asked to name the ten most outstanding Russians, Stalin came first ahead of Vladimir Lenin, Peter the Great and other historical figures (Levada, 2017).

Extreme nationalists have remained electorally unpoplar in Ukraine and have only once been elected to the Ukrainian parliament in 2012 when the Svoboda (Freedom) party was elected. Meanwhile, center-right national democrats, with ties to Soviet era dissidents, were only popular in western and central Ukraine. Nevertheless, promotion of Ukrainian national identity, including the issues related to de-Stalinization and the Holodomor, was supported by eastern Ukrainian President Kuchma, his centrist allies and the intelligentsia in higher education and the Academy of Sciences. It is therefore important to understand that this had far broader legitimacy than Yushchenko and de-Stalinization had been supported by four out of five Ukrainian presidents. Prime Minister Yanukovych had not opposed Kuchma’s policies on the Holodomor and these only changed after 2005 when the Party of Regions signed a cooperation agreement with Putin’s United Russia. Kyiv, home to key state institutions, universities and the National Academy of Sciences, has voted along the same lines as western Ukraine and supported the Orange and Euromaidan Revolutions.
Russian nationalists in independent Russia had influence in the rebellious Russian parliament in 1992–1993, in Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic Party, Communist Party, nationalist, Eurasianist and other parties and among the military and security services. From the late 1990s, Dugin, who had been a member of fascist and nationalist groups in the 1980s, taught at Russia’s most prestigious military academy of the General Staff whose patrons assisted him in publishing four editions of The Foundations of Politics in large print runs. Charles Clover (2016, 260) writes that Dugin’s fan club was “in some of the darker recesses of post-Yeltsin Russia.” From the early 1990s, praise of Stalin featured prominently in nationalist publications where he was defended by those who had a visceral hatred for Gorbachev and liberal critics of Stalin whom they accused of destroying the “Russian state” (that is, the USSR) in league with the West and Jews. In the 1990s, Russian nationalists defended Stalin in similar ways to those undertaken in Putin’s Russia by highlighting “mitigating circumstances for Stalin’s misdeeds” and blaming his crimes on foreigners (Laqueur, 1993, 158).

A key component of the Stalin myth is the Great Patriotic War which had become a public holiday in 1965, a year after Brezhnev took power. The following two decades of conservative “era of stagnation” were marked by a thriving Stalin cult which praised his contribution to building an industrialized state and nuclear superpower (Zaslavsky, 1982, 3–9, 20–21). Collectivization was portrayed in a positive light with the famine ignored and “distortions” downplayed. Pre-Soviet Russia was romanticized (Brudny, 1998, 61 and 71). Anti-Semitism was fanned against “cosmopolitan” intellectuals that was officially camouflaged as “anti-Zionism” (Kuzio, 2017b, 118–140). Russian nationalists were provided with outlets to express their views in huge circulation official journals (Nash Sovremenyk, Moskva, Molodaya Gvardiya) and on television and radio. Ukrainian nationalists had no such official outlets.

A “popular Stalinism” emerged during the “era of stagnation” that respected and admired his deeds. In the words of a Russian samizdat document “Stalin is secretly loved by the people at the top and quite openly by people at the bottom.” A scholar Dina Khapaeva (2009, 360) believes a “positive image of Stalinism has been a stable, persistent representation in mass consciousness.” Ordinary people rehabilitated Stalin by putting his picture in car windshields in the USSR, a practice which has continued in contemporary Russia and the Donetsk (DNR) and Luhansk People’s Republics (LNR) (Wishnevsky, 1985, 1986; Karmanau, 2015). New York Times correspondent to the USSR Hedrick Smith (1976, 314) writing in the 1970s found a “huge mass of people dreams of Stalin — his strong power.” Stalin transformed a peasant country that had “made the rest of the world tremble at Soviet power” (Smith, 1976, 330). A DNR separatist with a portrait of Stalin in his windscreen said of the Soviet leader “I have adored him as a man since my childhood. Because he was a real man” (Ukraine’s Fragile Ceasefire, 2015).

In Russia since 2000, Putin has promoted a Stalin’s cult with a “statist interpretation of history and a justification for unaccountability and an absolution of past crimes” (Satter, 2012, 228). This has been accompanied by a deepening of the integration of Soviet and Russian identities with the rehabilitation of the Red Star and Soviet anthem, revival of ties to Soviet allies Vietnam, Iran, Cuba and Syria, and explosion of anti-Western xenophobia and anti-Americanism (Baumgartner, 2015).

The myth of the Great Patriotic War has become a central ideological pillar of Putin’s regime and the forging of a Russian national identity (Nelson, 2015, 61). Sanctification of Stalin’s role “has become the main ideological foundation of Mr. Putin’s velvet Stalinism” (Take care of Russia, 2016).

Under President Petro Poroshenko, de-Stalinization has accelerated following the Euromaidan Revolution and Russia’s aggression. Four laws promoted de-Communization by honoring Ukrainians who had fought for Ukrainian independence, making Nazi and Soviet symbols illegal and changing Soviet and Communist names of towns and streets, replacing the Great Patriotic War with commemoration of World War II (thereby integrating Ukraine into the European practice of celebrating the end of the war on May 8 and not May 9), changing and opening Soviet archives (Olszamski, 2017). The mass dismantling of over 1,500 Lenin monuments in eastern and southern Ukraine had begun in Kyiv during the Euromaidan. From 2015, Ukraine began celebrating the end of World War II as the “Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation.” Ukrainian television showed Ukrainian soldiers telephoning their family members who are Soviet Ukrainian veterans to congratulate them on Victory Day after which the soldiers head into battle to defend Ukraine against a new invader (In New TV Spots, Ukraine Accuses Russia of ‘Misappropriating’ Victory Day, 2015).

Russia’s education system presents an upbeat, positive image of Soviet rule and the Stalin era. Russia’s new Minister of Education Olga Vasilyeva, a “religious nationalist,” praised Stalin for restoring patriotism to the center of Russian history (The battle for Russia’s history. Remember, Remember, 2016).

Russia’s standard school textbook introduced in 2008, The Modern History of Russia: 1945–2006, whiteshales Stalin as an “effective manager,” portrays the USSR as a “besieged fortress,” and praises Stalin as the “most successful leader of the USSR.” The USSR is glorified as an era of Russian greatness and progress and state-driven modernization where Stalin is continuing in the tradition of Russian leaders of building strong states stretching from Muscovy to the Russian Empire and the USSR. Industrialization and winning the war went hand in hand. Russian school textbooks do not use the word totalitarianism, ignore Stalin’s crimes, the Gulag and the famine. “The Terror, and the repressions that came before and after it, are minimized” (Nelson, 2015, 45). Meanwhile, “Stalin’s represions are portrayed as a pragmatic solution to the difficulties the Soviet Union faced in the pre-war years” (Nelson, 2015, 47).

Russia has exported Stalin’s cult to its proxy enclaves DNR and LNR in the Donbas where 1980s-style anti-Holodomor propaganda has found fertile soil. Ekaterina Mihaylova, head of the DNR press office, believes Ukraine should be grateful to Stalin while the millions of deaths were not as important as what he accomplished. Anyway, he was no more ”evil” than US President Franklin D. Roosevelt or British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. She asserted, echoing Tottle three decades earlier,
and contemporary Russian propaganda outlets, “The legend of the Holodomor was created in Canada by fascist Ukrainian exiles” (Judah, 2015, 9–10).

Large banners of Stalin hang in downtown Donetsk and Stalin lapel pins adorn DNR and LNR leaders. Russian Knight Wolves Hells Angels fighting alongside separatist forces have hung up portraits of Stalin in their barracks (Rabas et al., 2016). The security services of the LNR are called the MGB, the name for Stalin’s Ministry for State Security from 1946 to 1953. The LNR symbol is a sheaf of corn and red star. The cult of the 1930s coalmine Alexei Stakhanov is in full swing and youth groups for school children are modelled on the Soviet Pioneers.

5. Conclusions

The seeds of Russia and Ukraine’s divergence over how to approach Stalinism and the Holodomor did not begin during the 2014 crisis or during Yushchenko’s presidency but have been evolving since the early 1980s. Ukrainian national identity has passed through three critical junctures in the 1971–1972 “pohrom,” creation of an independent state in 1991 and Russian aggression in 2014 which on each occasion has radicalized negative attitudes towards Stalinism, the Holodomor and the Soviet state. By 2013, on the eve of Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and hybrid war in the Donbas, a majority of Ukrainians believed the Holodomor was a genocide. Meanwhile, during the same period of time a majority of Russians came to view Stalin in a positive manner.

Ukraine and Russia have both drawn on the Stalin era for their nation building projects but in different ways. The Holodomor and Stalin’s crimes have been used to justify the need for Ukrainian independence to shield Ukrainians from such calamities and to maintain a cultural and geopolitical distance from Russia. In the USSR and independent Russia, the more dominant Russian nationalist and national Bolshevik narratives view Stalin as the father of Soviet and Russian statehood. In Ukraine, condemnation of Soviet crimes has underpinned Ukraine’s nation building, creation of a democratic state and goal of European integration. In Russia, the Stalin cult is central to Russia’s revival as a great, respected and feared powerful state which lies at the center of a Eurasian civilization that rivals the West, as did the Soviet Union.

References


