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The Post-Stalin Era

De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent

Miriam Dobson

In the first decade after the opening of the Soviet archives, scholars' focus—both east and west of where the "iron curtain" once hung—largely centered on the most dramatic and violent period of Soviet history: the 1930s. Groundbreaking studies of the purges, collectivization, and daily life in both the new industrial cities and the socialized countryside all transformed the way Soviet history was conceived and taught in universities across the world. In contrast, the postwar, and post-Stalin, years seemed relatively virgin territory, at least in terms of archive-based research; and in the late 1990s, historians, particularly graduate students, turned their focus to these later periods. Perhaps in part this younger generation wanted to carve out its own territory, but there was more to the new trend than simple careerism: new interpretations of the 1930s had raised fascinating questions for the decades after 1953. What impact did the leader's death and his subsequent discrediting have on the life stories of those who had seen their lives transformed in the 1930s (through migration to the city, acquisition of literacy, engagement in mass politics)? How did citizens who had, in Stephen Kotkin's terms, started to "speak Bolshevik" negotiate the sudden shifts in rhetoric introduced when Khrushchev attacked the "cult of personality"? What impact did the renunciation of terror have on relations between government and society, and how were the legacies of Stalinist violence to be handled? Growing scholarly interest in World War II and its aftermath began to pose additional, and important, questions for the post-1953 period, particularly with regard to veterans' expectations for a better life, the demographic shortfall and gender imbalance, and the conflicting emotions of pride and grief generated by the victories and losses of 1941–45.

Broader developments within academia also played their part—in particular the "cultural turn," which dramatically expanded the issues, methodologies,

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and sources with which historians engaged. The poetry, paintings, and films of the "thaw" period had long aroused interest abroad (particularly works deemed transgressive or subversive), but now scholars began to explore not only the politics of production and dissemination but also the wider reception of these works. Researchers also turned their attention to the domestic sphere, which under Khrushchev became the focus of architects, designers, and party officials who ushered in what Susan Reid and David Crowley have called a "self-conscious rejuvenation of the material world."[1] The period—once largely the domain of political scientists and literary scholars—became ever more interdisciplinary, with fruitful cross-fertilization among history, art history, film studies, literary criticism, anthropology, and historical sociology.

In this essay I identify three key topics that are emerging as focal points of scholarly interest: popular reactions to various reforms often grouped under the label "de-Stalinization"; the particular significance of *byt* under Khrushchev; and the nature and scale of dissent in the post-Stalin era. In concentrating on these three themes, this essay is, perhaps inevitably, partial and selective, and a few qualifications are necessary. First, the focus is Russia and the European areas of the Soviet Union, in part because the non-European republics are as yet understudied for the post-Stalin era, particularly in comparison with the recent work on the early decades of Soviet power in Central Asia and the Caucasus.[2] Second, my attention centers on social and cultural history rather than high politics. Again this largely reflects the state of the field—and the difficulties of archive access to Presidium/Politburo materials—though it is worth noting William Taubman's political biography of Khrushchev and Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk's project on regional politics, as well as several studies on the foreign policy of this period.[3]

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[1] David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, "Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Crowley and Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 1–24, here 3.

[2] Exceptions include D. Gasanly, *Khrushchevskaia "ottepel'" i natsional'nyi vopros v Azerbaidzhane (1954–1959)* (Moscow: Flinta, 2009); El'dar Ismailov, *Azerbaidzhan: 1953–1956 gg. Pervye gody "ottepeli"* (Baku: Adil'ogly, 2006); Maike Lehmann, "Bargaining Armenian-ness: National Politics of Identity in the Soviet Union after 1945," in *Representations on the Margins of Europe: Politics and Identity in the Baltic and South Caucasian States*, ed. Tsypylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2007), 166–89.

[3] William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (London: Free Press, 2003); Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, 2 (1998): 163–214; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006). For more information about Gorlizki and Khlevniuk's project "Networks and Hierarchies in the Soviet Provinces, 1945–1970" (see www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/disciplines/politics/research/SovietProvinces, accessed 5 January 2011); and O. V. Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia

De-Stalinization: Popular Reactions

During the Cold War, many Western commentators focused on the Kremlin power struggles or on the world of high culture, especially the contests among writers, artists, and party leaders over the course of cultural policy. Such works tended to posit the existence of discrete factions: liberals or reformers battled against conservatives, "friends" of change were pitted against its "foes."[4] In keeping with the shift toward cultural history, and capitalizing on the new materials available to them since 1991, researchers are now increasingly interested in charting broader societal responses to the changes occurring. In 1993, Elena Zubkova's pioneering *Obshchestvo i reformy, 1945–-1964* (Society and Reforms, 1945–64) drew scholars' attention to the existence of a range of archival sources that would allow them to explore popular opinion; and others have since taken her lead, tackling in more depth some of the issues her wide-ranging book raised.[5] This new body of work posits the complex nature of popular reactions to de-Stalinization, which did not always fit neatly into the binary categories that once prevailed.

The most famous event of the period is without doubt Khrushchev's final address at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. The first secretary enumerated several major character flaws and failings in the deceased dictator, attacking his revolutionary reputation and wartime record, as well as indicating his culpability in the purges. Although dubbed the "Secret Speech" and excised from the published records of the congress, it was a badly kept secret: the main content of the address was relayed to party and Komsomol members and soon leaked out to the wider public. Using transcripts of these meetings, reports on the popular mood, and letters addressed to party leaders and newspaper editors, several historians have tried to map out the diverse ways in which the public responded.[6] Some people were passionately opposed to the toppling

vlast´ v SSSR v 1953–kontse 1950-kh gg.: Ustoichivost´ i konflikty," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 3 (2007): 31–49.

[4] Priscilla Johnson, for example, describes the conflicts between "liberals" and "conservatives" in the cultural field. In a seminal 1979 article, Stephen Cohen warned against oversimplifying the reformist position by painting those in favor of change as being supporters of "liberalization" or "democratization" in "our sense of these words"; instead he preferred to speak of "reformers" and "conservatives." See Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962–64* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965); and Stephen F. Cohen, "The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union," *Slavic Review* 38, 2 (1979): 187–202, here 189.

[5] E. Iu. Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy, 1945–1964* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1993).

[6] Polly Jones, "From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin: Real and Ideal Responses to De-Stalinization," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Jones (London: Routledge, 2006), 41–63; Cynthia Hooper, "What Can and Cannot Be Said: Between the Stalinist Past and New Soviet Future," *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, 2 (2008): 306–27; Karl E. Loewenstein, "Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech," *Europe–Asia*

of a cherished idol; others rushed to condemn the tyrant, even calling for more far-reaching changes. For many, however, the issue was not so clear-cut. Repeated calls for further information and clarification were perhaps the most common response, and a sense of confusion prevailed. Khrushchev's criticism of the errors of the past also spilled out into the present: many ordinary Communists began to attack the corruption of local elites and to question the behavior of party leaders in Moscow. Faced with a barrage of conflicting responses in 1956, the party leadership seemed to retreat from "radicalism" and, even as it made what seemed like a more public and complete attempt at de-Stalinization at the 22nd Party Congress, imposed firmer restrictions on public discussion and stifled popular iconoclasm.[7] Condemning Stalin and the purges he had overseen was, perhaps inevitably, problematic: first, because repudiating terror raised the practical question of how to treat those who had been its victims; second, because condemning Stalin and the terror compelled society to rethink the way it understood its own recent, and very bloody, past—and by extension how people were now to relate to their own life stories.

The release of prisoners began just a few weeks after Stalin's death, with the amnesty decree of March 1953, and over the next five years four million prisoners exited the camps and colonies as a result of various decrees and commissions.[8] The great, and diverse, camp exodus caused a range of different problems. Nanci Adler's monograph shows how former political prisoners often faced ingrained hostility upon their return, which made it difficult to reintegrate into normal life.[9] My own study of the camp exodus, which incorporates nonpoliticals, also suggests that many ex-*zek*s were marginalized and that fears regarding rising crime, for which they were often

Studies 58, 8 (2006): 1329–45; Iu. V. Aksiutin, *Khrushchevskaia "Ottepel'" i obshchestvennye nastroeniia v SSSR v 1953–1964 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), 154–98; Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 79–105; Benjamin K. Tromly, "Re-Imagining the Soviet Intelligentsia: Student Politics and University Life, 1948–1964" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2007), 206–58.

[7] Jones, "From the Secret Speech."

[8] A statistical report sent from the MVD to the Central Committee in December 1958 suggested that between the beginning of 1953 and September 1958, 4,118,414 prisoners were released from the corrective-labor camps and colonies. These releases were the result of Supreme Soviet decrees and the work of the commissions described earlier, as well as prisoners simply finishing their sentences (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii f. 9401, op. 2, d. 500, ll. 316–20). It is worth noting that this figure also includes a significant number of prisoners sentenced after 1953, not just Stalin-era inmates.

[9] Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002).

blamed, generated rumor and anxiety.[10] In a chapter of his *Homosexual Desire*, Dan Healey explores how visions of the Gulag as a site "for mutual sexual cruelty" led some people to fear returnees were bringing "perversions" back into mainstream society.[11] A slightly different perspective is provided by Alan Barenberg's study of Vorkuta, a city deep within the Gulag empire: here, where the boundaries between civilian and camp life had long been porous, and where manpower was in short supply, former prisoners were in a far stronger position, though they did still have to weather periodic attempts by the local authorities to demote them from more influential posts.[12]

The difficulties generated by the camp exodus—even if they varied from region to region—seem to have played into a more general crisis about how to speak about the violence and suffering inflicted under Stalin. Although many societies have struggled to come to terms with a violent, traumatic past, these difficulties were amplified in the Soviet Union, where the same party-state which had overseen terror now sought to distance itself from its earlier crimes. Moreover, the metanarrative of progress which underlay Soviet culture made it difficult to find an appropriate model to explain the less than uplifting nature of recent history. By the early 1960s, writers were trying to make sense of the country's troubled past without crossing inadvertently into the realm of "what could not be said." According to Polly Jones, they had some scope to explore the mental trauma and emotional suffering generated by terror, but the pain always had to be overcome and vanquished by the end of the work.[13] This did not necessarily satisfy all readers. Denis Kozlov's detailed study of letters sent to the editors of literary journals, particularly *Novyi mir*, suggests that although in the 1950s many subscribers continued to express themselves using Stalinist concepts and practices, particularly scapegoating, by the early 1960s the mood was rather different: following the publication of works by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Il´ia Erenburg, Kozlov contends, readers were desperate for the chance to reflect critically on the terror.[14]

[10] Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer,* 21–49, 109–32. See also Marc Elie, "Les politiques à l'égard des libérés du Goulag: Amnistiés et réhabilités dans la région de Novosibirsk, 1953–1960," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 1–2 (2006): 327–48; and Amir Weiner, "The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics," *Journal of Modern History* 78, 2 (2006): 333–76.

[11] Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 229–44.

[12] Alan Barenberg, "From Prison Camp to Mining Town: The Gulag and Its Legacy in Vorkuta, 1938–1965" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2007), 350–402.

[13] Polly Jones, "Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma, and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw," *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, 2 (2008): 346–71.

[14] Denis Kozlov, " 'I Have Not Read, but I Will Say': Soviet Literary Audiences and Changing Ideas of Social Membership, 1958–1966," *Kritika* 7, 3 (2006): 557–97; Kozlov, "Naming the Social Evil: The Readers of *Novyi mir* and Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone,* 1956–1959 and Beyond," in *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 80–98; Kozlov, "The Readers of *Novyi*

If the opening up of the symbolic border to the East (the frontier between the "big zone" of Soviet society and the "little zone" of the Gulag) played a role in shaping discussion of the Soviet past and present, so too did increasing exposure to the West.[15] Greater numbers of people came into contact with non-Soviet people, foreign works of art and literature, and exotic consumer goods (including Pepsi); some even traveled abroad.[16] Describing the "cultural" nature of Western attempts to win the Cold War, Walter Hixson and Yale Richmond suggest that luring Soviet citizens with consumerist delights and "Western values" ultimately proved successful.[17] Others, however, maintain that Soviet interactions with the "West"—and indeed with other parts of the globe—were rather less straightforward, at least in the 1950s and 1960s.[18] Perhaps the most celebrated, and truly international, event of the period was the 1957 Youth Festival held in Moscow, which saw more than 30,000 foreigners from across the world take to the capital's streets for a two-week-long carnival. According to Kristin Roth-Ey, it generated ambivalent feelings, and alongside the excitement about illicit contact with "capitalist lips" there were concerns about young women behaving "dishonourably."[19] The "presence of foreigners in Soviet space," she writes, "upset the balance of social and moral order," exhilarating some, but worrying others.[20] In a recent

Mir, 1945–1970: Twentieth-Century Experience and Soviet Historical Consciousness" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2005), 218–361.

[15] On the zones, see Nanci Adler, "Life in the 'Big Zone': The Fate of Returnees in the Aftermath of Stalinist Repression," *Europe–Asia Studies* 51, 1 (1999): 5–19.

[16] On tourism, see Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, eds., *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); on visitor responses to foreign art exhibitions, see Eleonory Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw Culture," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 1–2 (2006): 65–108; on student reactions to the avant-garde music of Western composers, see Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, if Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 27–66.

[17] Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1997), 230–31; Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), xiii–xiv.

[18] On the Soviet–African encounter, see Constantin Katsakioris, "L'Union soviétique et les intellectuels africains: Internationalisme, panafricanisme et négritude pendant les années de la decolonisation, 1955–1964," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 1–2 (2006): 15–32; and Julie Hessler, "Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics, and the Cold War," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 1–2 (2006): 33–64. On contacts with the "socialist countries" of Eastern Europe, see Anne Gorsuch, "Time Travelers: Soviet Tourists to Eastern Europe," in *Turizm*, 205–26.

[19] Evgenii Evtushenko reminisced in an interview: "[At] the [1957] Moscow Youth Festival, for the first time in my life, my socialist lips touched so-called 'capitalist lips,' because I kissed one American girl, breaking any Cold War rules." See *The National Security Archive*, interview with Evgenii Evtushenko (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-14/yevtushenko1.html, accessed 2 September 2010).

[20] Kristin Roth-Ey, "'Loose Girls' on the Loose: Sex, Propaganda, and the 1957 Youth Festival," in *Women in the Khrushchev Era,* ed. Susan E. Reid, Melanie Ilič, and Lynne

article on the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow, Susan Reid also posits ambivalence toward the West. While visitors were often, though not universally, impressed by the consumer comforts of the American home on display, they did not necessarily conclude that the capitalist system was best, or that the Soviet economy could not—given time to recover from the devastation of the war—also provide similar or better living conditions for its citizens.[21] Stephen Bittner's exploration of de-Stalinization in a central district of Moscow, long the hub of artistic and cultural life, also suggests that the process of reform in the 1950s and 1960s generated varied responses both to Western culture, and indeed to the revival of pre-Stalinist traditions.[22]

The Khrushchev era is increasingly seen as one of flux: people did not have to approve all that was new, or denigrate everything from the past; and they might use the opportunity created by one feature of de-Stalinization to discuss another that was to them more pressing. Debate could thus be unpredictable and heated but was quickly checked when anxious leaders and officials—whose own positions were often uncertain or inconsistent—sensed it might undermine fundamental aspects of the communist project. The period remains, in the words of Roth-Ey, a time of "contestation and change, but not in the familiar liberal–conservative mold."[23] With time, differences in interpretation will no doubt emerge more clearly. Zubkova's monograph suggests that when Stalin died, many hoped for and even expected substantial change, even if some felt trepidation at the prospect. In the wake of Khrushchev's Secret Speech, she argued, widespread optimism and hope prevailed, only to be dashed by the government's refusal to introduce more radical change, leading to a real breach by the 1960s between the leaders' limited ideas of reform and the aspirations of the educated public.[24] In the body of recent scholarship, however, some see the uncertainties and anxieties generated by changes of the 1950s as more substantial than Zubkova

Attwood (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 75–93. See also Pia Koivunen, "The 1957 Moscow Youth Festival: Propagating a New, Peaceful Image of the Soviet Union," in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilič and Jeremy Smith (London: Routledge, 2009), 46–65; and Richmond, *Cultural Exchange*, 11–13.

[21] Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika* 9, 4 (2008): 855–904. On more general attitudes toward the United States, see Rósa Magnúsdóttir, "'Be Careful in America, Premier Khrushchev!': Soviet Perceptions of Peaceful Coexistence with the United States in 1959," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 1–2 (2006): 109–30.

[22] Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[23] Kristin Roth-Ey, review of Bittner's *Many Lives*, in *Journal of Modern History* 82, 1 (2010): 251–53.

[24] Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy*. A. V. Pyzhikov also posits a shift from optimism in the 1950s to a more pessimistic mindset in the early 1960s, which he relates to rising food prices (*Khrushchevskaia "ottepel'"* [Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002], 261–74).

suggests, particularly outside intelligentsia circles.[25] Others maintain that while attitudes and beliefs nurtured under Stalin may have initially been hard to shed, a real shift in thinking *was* possible by the mid-1960s and that, while wrestling with the meaning and legacies of the terror, people were beginning to set themselves free from its hold.[26] The extent to which individuals felt comfortable reading, digesting, and critiquing literary and journalistic texts may have played a part in shaping their experience of de-Stalinization and, difficult though the existing records make such a task, one of the challenges ahead may be for us to begin delineating more precisely the ways in which educational and social background—we might call it class—shaped responses to the political and discursive shifts occurring in these years.

Daily Life: Intervention, Control, and Contestation

Landmark political events such as the Secret Speech or the 22nd Party Congress produced moments of heightened political engagement, at least for those who attended party or Komsomol meetings and probably for those who heard, and spread, rumors. But how did Stalin's death affect citizens in terms of the more routine business of daily life?

In the 1980s, the émigré sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh argued that since the late 1950s the Soviet people had "diverted their interests from the state to their primary groups (family, friends, and lovers)." The pursuit of personal satisfaction, he argued, even hedonism, had become widespread.[27] In a more recent work, Greg Castillo states that "rather than producing citizens committed to living out that role in the public realm," separate apartments became insular outposts of a "niche society."[28] Both works suggest that the end of terror enabled people to withdraw into a discrete and protected private sphere.

Yet de-Stalinization was not meant as a retreat—in fact, quite the opposite. In reviving Lenin and promising the imminence of communism, Khrushchev hoped to reengage the Soviet public in the party's mission to create a better world. In the 1950s, various policies (the onslaught against religion, reform in education, and the campaign to cultivate the "virgin lands" of the steppe) were all conceived as means of revitalizing the revolutionary cause.[29] So

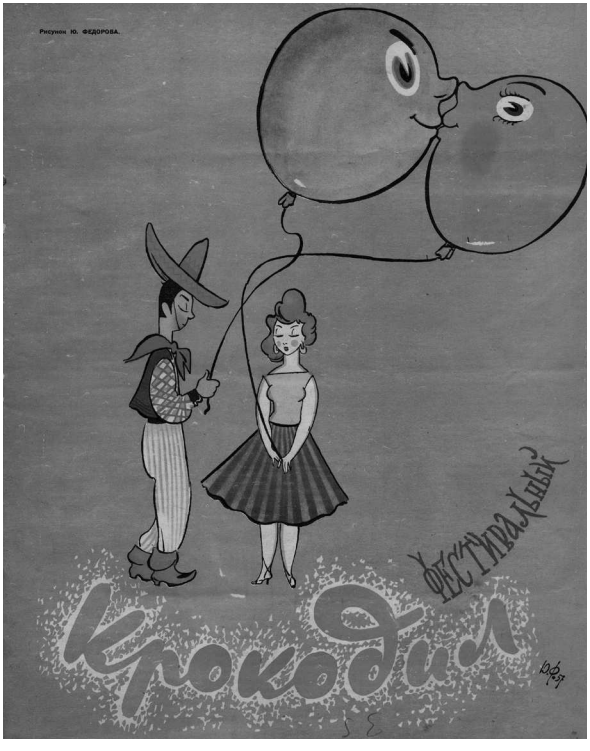
[25] Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*.

[26] See, for example, the changes described in the work of Denis Kozlov.

[27] Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13; Shlapentokh, *Love, Marriage, and Friendship in the Soviet Union: Ideals and Practices* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

[28] Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 206.

[29] For recent work on the atheist campaigns, see Irina Paert, "Demystifying the Heavens: Women's Religion and Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Campaign, 1954–1964," in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 203–21; Andrew B. Stone, "'Overcoming Peasant Backwardness: The



Iu. Fedorov, "Festival Crocodile," magazine graphic
Krokodil, no. 21 30 July 1957 cover
Ne boltai! Collection, Prague

too was the party's crusade to instill Soviet morality into its citizens: if communism was to be built, and the use of repressive measures reduced, new tactics for shaping the "new Soviet person" were needed. As a result, scholars identify the *byt* campaigns as a central element of the first post-Stalin decade. In 1999, Oleg Kharkhordin's *The Collective and the Individual* offered a provocative interpretation of such trends. "Stalin's successors," he argued, "sought to create a system which was more meticulous and thorough in its attention to each individual than the more openly repressive Stalinist

Khrushchev Antireligious Campaign and the Rural Soviet Union," *Russian Review* 67, 2 (2008): 296–320; and Tatiana A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia, 1941–1961: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, trans. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002). On education, see Laurent Coumel, "The Scientist, the Pedagogue, and the Party Official: Interest Groups, Public Opinion, and Decision-Making in the 1958 Education Reform," in *Soviet State and Society*, 66–85; and Michael Froggatt, "Renouncing Dogma, Teaching Utopia: Science in Schools under Khrushchev," in *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 250–66. On the virgin lands, see Michaela Pohl, "Women and Girls in the Virgin Lands," in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 52–74.

one it replaced."[30] Such a radical reinterpretation of the "thaw"—as a time of growing control and intervention rather than relaxation and retreat into the private—has proven highly stimulating. Big questions remain, however: Was the goal of "mutual surveillance" of which Kharkhordin spoke actually achieved? Did the "disciplinary grid" become "faultless and ubiquitous" as he contended? Recent research on various issues (crime and punishment, family and gender roles, housing and domestic design) engages with Kharkhordin's ideas but often highlights the inconsistent or unanticipated ways the new crusade worked out in practice.

Let us first turn to crime and punishment. As the government tried to reduce its reliance on the prison-camp model, it experimented with other techniques that were meant to improve law and order in all realms of life. One of these initiatives was the campaign against "hooliganism," an offense which was now reconstituted—not without controversy—to include domestic violence.[31] Another was the creation of Komsomol brigades which patrolled the city streets. As Juliane Fürst shows, however, the results were not always the heightened social control desired: for example, raiding crime hotspots might be popular among Komsomol activists but often resulted in fights and brawls erupting between those policing and those being policed.[32] The fears about crime described above in relation to the Gulag releases suggest that some citizens at least were skeptical that the perfect "disciplinary grid" had been created.[33]

Second, let us consider family and gender roles. The government may have decriminalized abortion in 1954 but, as under Stalin, it promoted family unity, now with even greater tenacity, assiduously dispensing advice on good parenting practices.[34] Aims and results could diverge, however. Although the government wanted the nuclear family to remain intact and opposed divorce on principle, Deborah Field argues, courts actually proved relatively lenient toward estranged couples, even before the law was revised in 1965. Judges seem to have accepted that relations between men and women were complicated and "their feelings for one another mutable."[35] Although

[30] Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 287.

[31] Brian LaPierre, "Private Matters or Public Crimes: The Emergence of Domestic Hooliganism in the Soviet Union, 1939–1966," in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*, ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 191–207.

[32] Juliane Fürst, "The Arrival of Spring? Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev," in *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 135–53, here 136.

[33] Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 133–85.

[34] Melanie Ilič, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the *Zhensovety*," in *Soviet State and Society*, 104–21, here 116.

[35] Deborah Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 71.

the press was full of advice about family relationships, the image of the ideal woman was highly contradictory: *byt* remained a female domain, but a woman who devoted herself entirely to the domestic sphere and fussed over her children was the object of scorn.[36] In practice, sexual and marital patterns started to change rapidly in this period, despite all the government's propagandizing of stable family life: more men remained single; the abortion rate skyrocketed; premarital sexuality became more socially acceptable; and divorce rates rose rapidly.[37]

Third is housing and domestic design. Kharkhordin's work has been particularly stimulating with regard to one of the most important Khrushchev-era developments: the 1957 promise to end the housing shortage within ten years. Given the extent of the problem in the postwar years, such a goal was not achievable, but it nonetheless led to a massive construction project that provided separate apartments for millions of families. The project was typical of the era: it was about exploiting new technological capacities; providing better welfare for citizens; and building the communist future.[38] It was also a perplexing development. As Steven Harris has argued, the commitment to the single-occupancy abode reversed a long-standing, if inconsistent, championing of the communal apartment.[39] Yet the party-state did not necessarily conceive of the separate apartment as private space; and in line with Kharkhordin's arguments, scholars are exploring the myriad ways that outside agencies tried to direct and shape behaviors within the domestic sphere, including advice literature, housekeeping lessons, and competitions for the best-maintained apartments.[40] But they also examine how, in practice, these attempts to shape citizens' behavior proved rather more complicated. Families, once installed in their new homes, reacted selectively to the advice

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[36] Mariia Antonova, "Satira kak instrument distsipliny tela v epokhu khrushchevskikh reform: Formirovanie identichnosti sovetskoi zhenshchiny v 1950–1960-e gody," in *Sovetskaia sotsial'naia politika: Stseny i deistvuiushchie litsa, 1940–1985,* ed. Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Pavel Romanov (Moscow: Variant, 2008), 290–312.

[37] Field, *Private Life*, 63–68. See also Igor S. Kon, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia from the Age of Czars to Today*, trans. James Riordan (New York: Free Press, 1995), 68–70.

[38] Susan E. Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific–Technological Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 2 (2005): 289–316; Christine Varga-Harris, "Home-Making and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home during the Khrushchev Era," *Journal of Social History* 31, 1 (2008): 561–89; Lynne Attwood, "Housing in the Khrushchev Era," in *Women under Khrushchev*, 177–202; Mark B. Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

[39] Steven E. Harris, "In Search of 'Ordinary' Russia: Everyday Life in the NEP, the Thaw, and the Communal Apartment," *Kritika* 6, 3 (2005), 583–614, here 612.

[40] Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 321–67; Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 165–71.

showered on them. Although the experts preached aesthetic "unity," for example, in reality people might mix new, contemporary furniture with older items, either because of shortages or simply because they cherished possessions which held important emotional associations and memories.[41] People often had clear expectations regarding their new life. At meetings organized at a local level for residents to voice complaints, and in the many letters citizens wrote on the subject of housing, people were willing to criticize architects and officials alike.[42] Yet they were also ready to invoke state agencies as allies in their quest to achieve their own goals: for example, an official "war against noise" was launched, Harris suggests, in response to requests for the state to help silence raucous neighbors.[43]

Later the butt of jokes, the *khrushcheby* in fact represented important aspects of the first post-Stalin decade: the attempt to meet citizens' long-cherished hopes of a better life converged with the desires of architects and designers, influenced by modernism, to create an aesthetically pleasing, rationalized, and modern home in which Soviet workers could rest and relax in a cultured manner. But even as the authorities shipped citizens into their new homes, they gave out mixed messages. The regime was ambivalent about the extent to which it wanted citizens to prove active in the job of furnishing and decorating their new homes, fearful of raising expectations that could not be met and perhaps wary of entirely abandoning the revolution's asceticism.[44] Citizens were encouraged to take pride in their new homes, but warned against "irrational materialism."[45] In Reid and Crowley's formulation, "austere consumerism" prevailed.[46]

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[41] Susan E. Reid, "Communist Comfort: Socialist Modernism and the Making of Cosy Homes in the Khrushchev Era," *Gender and History* 21, 3 (2009): 465–98; Varga-Harris, "Home-Making."

[42] Christine Varga-Harris, "Forging Citizenship on the Home Front: Reviving the Socialist Contract and Constructing Soviet Identity during the Thaw," in *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 101–16; Mark B. Smith, "Khrushchev's Promise to Eliminate the Urban Housing Shortage: Rights, Rationality, and the Communist Future," in *Soviet State and Society*, 26–45, esp. 38–41.

[43] Steven E. Harris, "'I Know All the Secrets of My Neighbors': The Quest for Privacy in the Era of the Separate Apartment," in *Borders of Socialism*, 171–90.

[44] Susan E. Reid, "Destalinization and Taste, 1953–1963," *Journal of Design History* 10, 2 (1997): 177–201; Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211–52; Varga-Harris, "Home-Making"; Kelly, *Refining Russia*, 315; Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710–2000* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 184–85.

[45] Varga-Harris, "Home-Making," 573.

[46] Reid and Crowley, "Style and Socialism," 12. On consumption in post-Stalinist life, see also Ol′ga Gurova, "The Life Span of Things in Soviet Society: Notes on the Sociology of Underwear," *Russian Studies in History* 48, 1 (2009): 46–57; and Ekaterina Gerasimova and Sof′ia Chuikina, "The Repair Society," *Russian Studies in History* 48, 1 (2009): 58–74.

Recent research thus explores how individuals and families engaged with public agencies and discourses but did so in a way that was often unpredictable and diverged from official aims, themselves at times ambiguous and contested. In the same year as Kharkhordin published his stimulating claims about the Khrushchev era, Victor Buchli, an anthropologist whose work pointed in a similar direction, spoke of the Khrushchev era as a "second cultural revolution."[47] Perhaps this term is appropriate, but only if we recognize that revolutions rarely follow their leaders' blueprint.

Dissent: Toward the Collapse?

At the end of the 1990s, Anna Krylova criticized the hangover of Cold War thinking that left American scholarship still searching for a "liberal subject" ready to rebel against the Soviet system.[48] The urge to locate resistance, dissimulation, and counterculture has perhaps even grown since the end of the Cold War, certainly within Russia. 1991 casts a long shadow, tempting us to look for early signs of the impending collapse. Yet Nikolai Mitrokhin has explicitly argued against such a position: "In my opinion," he writes, "the notion that the conditions for the collapse of the USSR had ripened by the middle of the 1980s is a political construct, formulated and propagandized by former political leaders of the USSR-Russia from the late 1980s–90s and their associates. In actual fact, no visible preconditions were noted in the mid-1980s."[49]

Paradoxically, perhaps, a work which could be characterized as the first major study of protest under Khrushchev itself questions the paradigm. When it was translated in 2002, Vladimir Kozlov's *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve* was given the English title *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, which, as one reviewer astutely noted, emphasized ideas of confrontation and conflict notably missing from the Russian "mass disturbances."[50] Drawing on extensive archival materials, Kozlov studies incidents of civil unrest that occurred in the Khrushchev era, exploring the conditions that provoked these violent eruptions, but rather than seeing these moments as popular protest against the regime, he argues that violence was a way for ordinary people to communicate their difficulties to the country's leaders, suggesting that they were angry with "bad Party

[47] Buchli, *Archaeology of Socialism,* 137.

[48] Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika* 1, 1 (2000): 19–46.

[49] Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Apparat TSK KPSS v 1953–1985 godakh kak primer 'zakrytogo' obshchestva," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie,* no. 100 (2009) (www.nlobooks.ru/rus/magazines/nlo/196/1641/1677, accessed 12 January 2011).

[50] Vladimir Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, trans. Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002); Donald Filtzer, review of *Mass Uprisings*, *Europe–Asia Studies* 56, 2 (2004): 318–20.

bureaucrats" and still cherished key Soviet values. In a similar vein, Steven Barnes argues that riots in the prison camps of Kengir during 1954 found protesters portraying themselves as good citizens and presenting their appeals as legitimate complaints against corrupt camp officials.[51] Even though the Secret Speech produced much questioning and debate, it did not seem to provoke the degree of revolutionary sentiment that erupted in Hungary (although Politburo members were fearful that it might).[52] On university campuses "isolated protests" occurred in the second half of 1956, particularly as a result of events in Eastern Europe, but, Benjamin Tromly argues, the generation coming through higher-education institutes in these years was by no means as oppositional or monolithic as retrospective narratives often claim. Even the most radical youths, for all their criticism of the country's leaders and bureaucracy, remained "highly committed to Soviet socialism" in 1956–57.[53] An exception to this pattern is perhaps offered by Amir Weiner's study of the western frontier (Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldavia, and the Baltic states), where the impact of the Hungarian and Polish uprisings, coupled with the return of nationalists from the Gulag, created a significant (though not deadly) crisis. Here, especially in the territories acquired during and after World War II, "the remnants of opposition forces in the Soviet Union" still challenged "the fundamentals of the system" and sought to replace it.[54]

If, at least away from the borderlands, the 1950s did not produce anti-state or anti-Soviet rebellions as such—despite the upheavals, doubts, and uncertainties—then the question remains whether this changed in the following decade. One of the most interesting findings of Kozlov's work is that despite a burst of unrest in the early 1960s (including the famous Novocherkassk strike), there was a marked decline in civil unrest in the mid- to late 1960s.[55] Though citing a range of factors (including more effective policing, increases in wages, and tolerance of the black market), Kozlov primarily argues that the unrest subsided "when communist ideals were practically squeezed out of mass consciousness by the conformism, consumerism, and individualism of the Brezhnev era."[56] Even on the more volatile western frontier studied by

[51] Steven A. Barnes, "'In a Manner Befitting Soviet Citizens': An Uprising in the Post-Stalin Gulag," *Slavic Review* 64, 4 (2005): 823–50, here 849.

[52] Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises," 195–98.

[53] Tromly, "Re-Imagining the Soviet Intelligentsia," 292. Fürst makes a similar argument, noting that most young people were content to ask questions, rather than formulate their own programmatic positions. Fürst, "Arrival of Spring?" 140.

[54] Weiner, "Empires Pay a Visit."

[55] Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings*. See also Robert Hornsby, "Voicing Discontent: Political Dissent from the Secret Speech to Khrushchev's Ouster," in *Soviet State and Society*, 162–80; and Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherskassk, 1962* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[56] Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings*, 313–14.

Weiner the atmosphere calmed: the Prague Spring of 1968 sparked rumors and expressions of nationalist anger, but the era of large, political protests seemed to have ended, and reactions were less violent than 12 years earlier.[57] On the basis of current research, then, it seems that the Soviet Union of the 1960s experienced *less* overt conflict between state and society than elsewhere in the industrialized world: Moscow was no Paris, and students did not storm MGU or bring the capital to a standstill.[58]

Political protest in the USSR may have been less dramatic than in certain other parts of the industrialized world, but the "sixties" have been similarly mythologized as a transformative moment in which young intellectuals—the *shestidesiatniki* (sixties generation)—began to think more critically, to establish new, more open friendships, and to rediscover artistic and scientific inspiration.[59] The Russian sociologist Boris Firsov recently identified the first two postwar decades as a period in which a younger generation, having escaped the direct impact of Stalinist terror, developed new morals and values, including greater individualism, climaxing by the 1960s in a generation who were able to hold different opinions.[60] Sheila Fitzpatrick has suggested that although the period is yet to be fully researched, the indications are that by the 1960s the "whole Soviet idiom and persona" had become a cliché which generated "both parody and rejection."[61] But how widespread were such sentiments, and what was their political significance? Was the dissident movement, initiated by the most radical of the *shestidesiatniki*, the tip of a much larger—and from the regime's perspective lethal—iceberg?

In his *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More*, the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak directly interrogated these issues and argued that it was only in the late 1980s that people began to claim—retrospectively—their alienation from "official" language.[62] Unlike Kozlov, Yurchak does not interpret the lack of protest in the USSR's final decades as a sign of society's "conformism, consumerism, and individualism," but neither does he follow Kharkhordin

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[57] Amir Weiner, "Déjà Vu All Over Again: Prague Spring, Romanian Summer, and Soviet Autumn on the Soviet Western Frontier," *Contemporary European History* 15, 2 (2006): 159–94.

[58] Alexander Daniel, "1968 in Moscow: A Beginning," *Eurozine* (www.eurozine.com/articles/article_2008-09-02-daniel-en.html, accessed 5 January 2011).

[59] Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2009); Petr Vail′ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1988).

[60] B. M. Firsov, *Raznomyslie v SSSR: 1940–1960-e gody: Istoriia, teoriia i praktika* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge and Evropeiskii dom, 2008), 455–57.

[61] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25.

[62] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 7.

E. Ivanov and Veniamin Briskin, *Sixth International Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship,* 1957
Postcard, Ne boltai! Collection, Prague

in viewing late Soviet citizens as dissimulators, who acted differently in the "official public" and the "hidden intimate."[63] Instead Yurchak argues that citizens were not necessarily either for or against "official" values: "depending on the context they might reject a certain meaning, norm, or value, be apathetic about another, continue actively subscribing to a third, creatively reinterpret a fourth, and so on. These dispositions were emergent, not static."[64] In Yurchak's interpretation, even the widespread practice of joke telling, which relied on the absurdities and ironies of late Soviet life (the food shortages, the aging leadership, the repetitions of the press), in the end allowed these problems to remain "relatively unarticulated in any more explicit critical analysis."[65] Yurchak's work has already stimulated considerable discussion. In an article devoted to the issues he raises, Benjamin Nathans and Kevin Platt argue that the questions that concerned dissidents also mattered to many citizens and that the disjuncture between public discourses and private life was more

[63] Ibid., 17; Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings*, 313–14; Kharkhordin, *The Collective*, 316–17.

[64] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 28–29.

[65] Ibid., 290.

painful than Yurchak concedes.[66] In *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*, one of the first archive-based monographs to explore this period, Sergei Zhuk argues that Yurchak's work underestimates the degree of conflict, particularly the importance of the KGB and police interference "in the cultural consumption of late socialism."[67]

The discussions stimulated by Yurchak's work suggest that questions of identity, subjectivity, and language, a key facet of recent scholarship on Stalinism, will remain important as researchers begin writing the social and cultural history of the 1960s and 1970s. One possible approach to these issues might lie with microhistory. Mitrokhin has argued that distinct and "closed" social groups, often based on a shared workplace, emerged in late Soviet society with their own distinctive social, educational, mental, and linguistic norms.[68] He shows how this worked through a close study of the cultural practices developed among party workers at the Central Committee headquarters on Moscow's Old Square. Similar approaches to other less privileged communities could help us develop a deeper understanding of how Soviet citizens related not only to the Soviet "regime" (which easily slips into some of the binaries critiqued by Yurchak) but also to their work and hobbies; their cities, neighborhoods, and apartments; their colleagues, family, lovers, and friends—revealing their attitudes to a whole host of issues from fashion to food, romance to religion. Mitrokhin, like many other historians and anthropologists working on this period, uses interviews, a methodology that seems to bring us enticingly close to the Brezhnevian subject. Yet, though oral history has the potential to make scholarship of the late Soviet era distinct and exciting, the question of how historians deal with the imprint that post-Soviet life inescapably leaves on interview transcripts is one that still demands careful consideration.

Conclusion

How does the research discussed here impact on existing paradigms? The "thaw" concept has long prevailed as a metaphor for the period, but it has also provoked significant discussion, not least because its meaning is ambiguous:

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[66] Kevin M. F. Platt and Bendzhamin Natans [Benjamin Nathans], "Sotsialisticheskaia po forme, neopredelennaia po soderzhaniiu: Pozdnesovetskaia kul´tura i kniga Alekseia Iurchaka "Vse bylo navechno, poka ne konchilos´," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie,* no. 101 (2010) (www.nlobooks.ru/rus/magazines/nlo/196/1717/1724, accessed 12 January 2011). The relationship between emotions and political action is also explored in Glennys Young, "Emotions, Contentious Politics, and Empire: Some Thoughts about the Soviet Case," *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2007): 113–50.

[67] Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 14.

[68] Mitrokhin, "Apparat TsK KPSS."

does the "thaw" refer to the warmth and light of spring, or does it instead evoke the filth and dirt exposed as the winter snows melt?[69] Should the emphasis be on the new life it brings, or on its temporary nature, its vulnerability to new freezes?[70] In the light of recent research some scholars question whether—at least in the commonly held sense of a time when the Stalinist "winter" began to melt—the metaphor adequately reflects the period, and whether all Soviet citizens would have characterized their lives in the 1950s and 1960s in these terms.[71] Others continue to find it stimulating, but take a probing approach: Bittner, for example, insists on the metaphor's multiple meanings and teases out the differences between the way the Moscow intelligentsia experienced the period and the way they remembered it.[72]

Perhaps *because* of its multiple meanings, and certainly because of its ongoing resonance in Russia's cultural memory, the "thaw" will surely continue to be invoked. It is, however, worth considering other possibilities. With regard to the postwar experience of Western Europe and North America, we tend to think in terms of decades, each one assigned its own specific characteristics. This is perhaps most true of the 1960s, which, in the popular imagination, symbolize radical change: the "swinging sixties" were the era of second-wave feminism, sexual emancipation, protest movements, and subversive youth culture.[73] Disentangling myth is a difficult task for historians of the 1960s on either side of the east–west divide, and in both cases the question of how widespread the social changes were, and how long-lasting their effect, remains open to debate. As noted earlier, some recent scholarship has suggested that social changes were occurring throughout Soviet society—for example, marital and sexual habits appear to be in flux in these years.[74] Roth-Ey's new monograph argues that television, radio, magazines, and increased leisure time transformed urban society, and that as people became avid consumers of the mass media, social habits shifted in important ways.[75]

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[69] Vail′ and Genis noted that synonyms for the thaw were "slush" (*sliakot'*) or "spring," depending on the perspective taken (*60-e*, 32–33).

[70] D. M. Magomedova, "O genezise literaturno-politicheskoi metafory 'ottepeli,'" in *Sotsiokul'turnyi fenomen shestidesiatykh*, ed. V. I. Tiupa and O. V. Fedunina (Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2008), 79–83.

[71] Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 15; Smith, *Property of Communists,* 12.

[72] Bittner, *Many Lives*.

[73] The classic work is Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958–c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). For an exploration of how different characterizations of the 1950s and 1960s have evolved, see Marcus Daniel, *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and the Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

[74] Shlapentokh, *Love, Marriage;* Kon**,** *Sexual Revolution;* Field, *Private Life*.

[75] Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

Less obvious, perhaps, might be parallels with the experience of the 1950s in other industrialized countries, particularly the United States. Although—at least for American conservatives—the 1950s have been remembered as a haven of innocence before the decadence of the 1960s, the scholarship of the last 20 years has suggested that this was an "age of anxiety" in the face of the Cold War threat. In the historiography of the United States, the glorification of motherhood, the fear of sexual deviancy and crime, and the quest for conformity have all been read as responses to the apocalyptic fears generated by the bomb, as well as to the social upheaval wrought by World War II.[76] Similar patterns might be discernible in the Soviet Union: Field, for example, notes that, like American anticommunists, Soviet officials linked homosexuality to the Cold War enemy,[77] while other scholars note "moral panics" regarding crime and youth fashions in the 1950s.[78] The impact of both war trauma and nuclear fear on the collective psyche are topics that perhaps deserve greater attention.

Thinking in terms of the characteristics of a decade is inevitably reductive and feeds on retrospective mythologization. As a thought exercise, however, it might at least remind us to consider phenomena that transcend national boundaries (including the aftermath of war, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and the transformations to culture and domestic life created by technological advances). It also brings to light certain differences between the 1950s and the 1960s and thus between the early and the late years of the "thaw." In pointing to the diverse nature of the "thaw" experience, recent research has effectively highlighted the difficulty in identifying a single cut-off point. In the field of Gulag reform and criminal justice policy some of the more utopian projects were abandoned as early as 1960;[79] but in terms of high

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[76] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988). See also Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), particularly the essays by Joanne Meyerowitz and Jane Sherron De Hart.

[77] Field, *Private Life*, 56.

[78] The *stiliagi* in particular seem to have caused moral panic. See Kharkhordin, *The Collective*, 290–91; and Mark Edele, "Strange Young Men in Stalin's Moscow: The Birth and the Life of the Stiliagi, 1945–53," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50, 1 (2002): 37–61.

[79] In an article on prison reform, Marc Elie describes a "conservative shift" taking place from 1960 to 1964. See his "Khrushchev's Gulag: Camps, Colonies, and Prisons in the USSR, 1953–1964," paper presented at "The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s," University of California, Berkeley, 12–15 May 2005. In her work on the KGB, Julie Elkner argues that the security services had largely been rehabilitated by the end of the 1950s ("The Changing Face of Repression under Khrushchev," in *Soviet State and Society*, 142–61). On the increased readiness to brand deviant behavior as "criminal" by the early 1960s, see Nataliia Lebina, "Antimiry: Printsipy konstruirovaniia anomalii, 1950–1960-gody," in *Sovetskaia sotsial'naia politika*, 255–65, here 264; and Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 189–214.

culture, particularly literature and film, the years following the 22nd Party Congress were perhaps the most innovative (and contested).[80] Moreover, if welfare provision, rising living standards, and the growth of a more complex and diverse mass culture are incorporated into our understanding of the "thaw," then imposing a distinct end date becomes even more challenging. Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova, Pavel Romanov, and Nataliia Lebina recently identified the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s as the "prime years" (*rastsvet*) of the Soviet system, in terms of its progress in home building, medical provision, education, and welfare.[81]

A certain degree of teleology is inescapable, but we perhaps need to look not only to 1991 but also beyond. The end of communist power was, without doubt, a radical break; the pace of change encouraged, and was driven by, people's ability to think about the old way of life as abnormal, impossible, absurd. Yet, to my mind, the rise of nostalgia and the contested nature of historical memory in Russia today also point to the conflicting and ambiguous emotions, beliefs, and experiences that the Soviet project engendered and sustained throughout the 74 years of its existence, including the post-Stalin era. For the journal reader carefully composing her letter to the editor, the government minister drafting measures to improve living conditions, and the friends socializing around the new kitchen table, what was perhaps unique about the Khrushchev era was the intensity, unpredictability, and relative freedom with which both the Soviet past and future could be contemplated and discussed.

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[80] See Kozlov, "Remembering and Explaining the Terror"; Jones, "Memories of Terror"; and Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts*.

[81] Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova, Pavel Romanov, and Nataliia Lebina, "Sovetskaia sotsial´naia politika i povsednevnost´, 1940–1985," in *Sovetskaia sotsial´naia politika*, 7–32, here 23.