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**Creating the Stalinist other:
Anglo-American historiography of Stalin and Stalinism,
1925-2013**

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Declaration:

I declare that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed.....

Abstract

The Western historiography of Stalin and Stalinism produced in the period 1925 to the present day is a strikingly varied body of work in which the nature of Stalin, his regime and his role within his regime have been and continue to be the subject of debate. This characteristic is all the more striking when we consider that from the earliest years of the period under study there has been a general understanding of the nature of the Stalinist regime, and of the policies and leader which have come to define it.

This thesis analyses the principal influences on research which have led to this body of work acquiring such a varied nature, and which have led to an at times profoundly divided Western, and more specifically Anglo-American, scholarship. It argues that the combined impact of three key formative influences on research in the West over the period of study, and their interaction with each other, reveal recurring themes across the whole historiography, while also accounting for the variety of interpretations in evidence. The first impact identified is the lack of accessibility to sources during the Soviet period, which posed a constant and real obstacle to those in the West writing on Stalin and Stalinism, and the impact of the removal of this obstacle in the post-Soviet era. The second is the influence of wider historiographical trends on this body of work, such as the emergence of social history. Finally the thesis argues that evolving Western attitudes to Stalin and Stalinism over this period have played a key role in constructions of Stalin and his regime, demonstrating an on-going historical process of the othering of Russia by the West. The extent and nature of this othering in turn provide a central line of enquiry of the thesis. Tightly intertwined with all three impacts has been the changing global political context over the period in question which provides the evolving and influential contextual backdrop to this study, and which has given this body of work a deeply political and personal character.

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Introduction

1. Western historiography of Stalin and Stalinism: research questions

The Western historiography of Stalin and Stalinism produced in the period from 1925, when Stalin first emerged in an English language work on early Soviet politics, to the present day reveals that research on this subject has generated a strikingly varied body of work in which the nature of Stalin, his regime and his role within his regime have been and continue to be the subject of much debate. This characteristic is all the more striking when we consider that from the earliest years of the period under study, there was a general (if not always entirely specific) understanding of the nature of the Stalinist regime and the policies and leader that to define it.¹ This thesis analyses the principal influences on this historiography, reflective of a varied and at times deeply divided scholarship in the West. In doing so, it assesses the impact of what can be considered key formative influences on research on Stalin and Stalinism in the West over the period of study. Tightly intertwined with these impacts was the changing global political context, which provides the evolving contextual backdrop to this study.

The particularities of the conception of a socialist Soviet Union, Stalin's accession to power and the resulting global political and diplomatic context directly affected many of the lives of those who wrote about Stalin and Stalinism, and these often deeply personal and ideological experiences have provided a central character to the historiography from the outset: the first works published in the West on Stalin and Stalinism were almost without exception written by socialists who had become alienated in some way from the Stalinist

¹ See Chapters 1 and 6 specifically regarding early understanding of the nature of the Stalinist regime.

regime.² Often these were émigrés or exiles from the Soviet Union, such as Leon Trotsky. Later, the experience of the Cold War provided the context for the formation of extreme views on the danger of communism and the ideological and physical threat of the Soviet Union to the Western world. Western Communists on the other hand lived in a world of persecution where their ideological beliefs became their key defining feature, and the absolute epicentre of their lives and identities. The post-Soviet period and the experience of observing Russia's faltering transition towards a capitalist democracy from the West has provided a radically different but no less influential experience to those writing on the Soviet Union at this time.

Within this changing global setting, the first of three major identifiable impacts on the historiography was the lack of accessibility to sources during the Soviet period, which posed a consistent obstacle to those in the West writing on Stalin and Stalinism. For decades information was pieced together from a variety of sources such as the Soviet press, personal testimonies (usually from exiles or escapees) and Soviet foreign policy information, from which more or less could be gleaned on the inner workings of the Stalinist regime and life under it. In a feat of resourcefulness and tenacity this did not deter those who wished to pursue research in this area, and some extraordinarily well-documented pieces of work emerged from the Soviet period despite its source limitations.³

² This is not necessarily unique to this body of work. For example the earliest studies on the Holocaust were written by those who had experienced it, and who based their works on personal experience. Academic scholarship on the subject developed slightly later. With thanks to Pertti Ahonen for his insights on this topic.

³ An obvious example is Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror: Stalin's purge of the thirties* (London, 1968) which was the first major work to detail the great purges and Stalin's terror. Conquest was able to combine two kinds of sources, which he termed 'official' and 'unofficial'. The former were those published in the Soviet Union, such as official comment (the work was published after Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech) and publications, which through their varying levels of concealment and falsification provided a multi-dimensional source, informing Conquest of both facts, and the process of falsification. The latter were testimonies of individuals who had escaped the Soviet Union to the West. These included political defectors who became memoirists for example. Conquest wrote in more detail about his sources and the challenges associated with working with some of these in his bibliographical notes to the book. See R. Conquest, *The Great Terror*, pp.565-571

Nevertheless, there were huge gaps left by the shortage of sources, and this lack of information combined with a degree of conjecture needed to fill in the blanks can account for some of the most important debates in the field that occurred from the 1960s onwards. The confrontational and at times bitter nature of these arguments is further accounted for when we consider that this conjecture was framed by the atmosphere of extreme ideological tension during the Cold War, an event which covers much of the period of study. It was only with the advent of *perestroika* and the eventual ‘archival revolution’ of the post-Soviet era that access to archival and other documentation, as well as people and their histories, became possible.⁴

Simultaneously, writing on Stalin and Stalinism in the West was inevitably influenced by wider historiographical trends. The impact of the emergence of social history from the 1960s, and cultural history in the late 1980s onwards, provoked not only a change in research focus but also deep divisions within the field of Soviet studies as scholars from different generations attempted to come to terms with each others’ methods of research and interpretation. This was particularly well exemplified by the debates that occurred as the revisionists of the 1980s clashed with totalitarian-model scholars and earlier revisionists of the early Cold War period. These historiographical trends manifested themselves not only in writing on Stalinism but also in writing on Stalin himself. The development of psychohistorical writing in the 1970s and wider changes in

⁴ The one archival source which became available to researchers after the Second World War was the Smolensk Archive. This was a collection of documents taken from the Smolensk Party Archive by the Germans after they invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. The USA obtained these documents (about 500 files) during the post-war occupation of Germany. The documents were used by several US government and intelligence agencies before being made available to scholars. Access, when granted, led to some ground-breaking publications such as Merle Fainsod’s *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), which documented the way in which regional leaders disobeyed orders from the Kremlin, arguing that in the regions the regime was disorganised, and faced resistance and rebellion from peasants and workers. This was a radical departure from what had previously been perceived to be a highly efficient and deeply ingrained regime. Despite the so-called ‘archival revolution’, there is still relatively little new information available on the earliest period of Stalin’s life, when he was a child and adolescent (see Chapter 6) or on his personal life and private thoughts.

biographical writing, for instance, all influenced the ways in which Stalin was depicted, and changed ideas about which areas of his life were deemed most interesting or significant. Yet taking into consideration the wider conditions of the creation of the historiography, such as the particularities of source accessibility, for instance, how important were these trends in the formation of the historiography: did they drive it, or did they merely provide an extra push towards political, ideological and interpretative paradigm shifts in a changing global context?

The final impact on this historiography to be analysed in this thesis is one that has been largely neglected as a key formative influence on Western writing on Stalin and Stalinism. One function that the historiography performs is that of a prism through which we are able to observe the evolution of Western attitudes to Stalin and his regime – and to a degree, by extension, Western attitudes towards Russia and the Soviet Union – over the entire period of study. This in turn can lead us to question how the West has constructed Stalin and Stalinism in relation to itself over the period of study and whether we are able to observe the emergence of a Stalinist ‘other’. The process of othering in Western (and especially European) discourse has been particularly studied in colonial and post-colonial studies.⁵ Implicit in the concept of othering is the formation of an identity not only for the ‘other’ but for the ‘self’ too. The latter is what the former is not and is not what the former is: both identities become dependent on these

⁵ On Eurocentrism and othering in colonial and post-colonial studies see for example D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, 2000); H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, 1994) and R. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, (London, 1990). Chakrabarty largely focuses on the impact of Eurocentrism on the social sciences, while Bhabha examines hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and difference in the way the colonised have resisted the coloniser. He argues that hybridisation and colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produced ambivalence in the colonial masters and as such altered the authority of power. Young’s work is a critical analysis of post-colonial theory that asks whether History is simply a history of the West, and whether a non-Eurocentric history is possible.

constructions.⁶ One particularly well-known variant borne from this notion is Orientalism, a term coined by Edward Said in the 1970s to describe the prejudiced ideological construction of the Orient, which he argued had become hegemonic in Western thinking, and from which certain parallels may be able to be drawn in this thesis with Western constructions of Russia and the Soviet Union.⁷ This thesis will consider as a conceptual basis for othering the process through which the West constructs Stalin and Stalinism as its other by highlighting the latter's perceived undesirable and inferior characteristics, be they immoral, threatening, backward or dangerous, for example. As explained by Sybille Reinke de Biutrago, this usually happens through the utilisation of images and various discursive means, typically interwoven. In writing, this is particularly done through stylistic means that are applied to compare, liken or distinguish, to convince, empower or devalue – in short, to construct relations between self and other in various ways.⁸ Reinke de Biutrago also highlights that existing images of the other may be added to and adjusted. New images can also be created, but there must be some link to a memory or to existing perspectives or ideas for those new images to be able to take hold;⁹ this notion is particularly relevant in relation to the process of tracing the evolution of Western representations of Stalin and Stalinism.

⁶ There is a huge theoretical body of work on the other/self nexus across the psychological, historical, philosophical and anthropological disciplines. Iver B. Neumann provides an excellent account of the uses of the other in world politics. He identifies four paths in this usage: the ethnographic path, the psychological path, the continental philosophical path and the 'Eastern excursion'. See I. B. Neumann, *Uses of the other: "the East" in European identity formation* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 1-20.

⁷ E. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978). Three principal patterns were identified by Said in Western discourse on the Orient: the exaggeration of difference, thin and repetitive forms of intellectual analysis based on previously-made prejudiced analysis and assumptions, and the assumption of Western superiority. For an account of the reverse process, that is Russia's othering of Europe, see I. B. Neumann, *Russia and the idea of Europe: a study in identity and international relations* (London, 1996).

⁸ S. Reinke de Biutrago, 'Introduction: Othering in International Relations: Significance and Implications' in S. Reinke de Biutrago (ed.), *Portraying the Other in International Relations: Cases of Othering, Their Dynamics and the Potential for Transformation* (Newcastle, 2012), p. xiv

⁹ Ibid.

2. Russia under Western eyes

Some of the earliest forms of this process in the relationship between Russia and the West can be traced back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the second half of the fifteenth century, faced with the Turkish threat from the East, the term 'Europe' had become a synonym for the Christian world.¹⁰ It was Russia's religious and political affiliations with Islam which led to the emergence of the notion of Russia as a definitive 'other' from Europe, as its Christian status was deemed questionable.¹¹ Iver B. Neumann states that the substitution of the terms 'Scythians', 'Tatars' and 'Kalmyks' for the catch-all term 'Russian' made its debut as part of European constructions of 'Asiatic' and 'barbarous' Russia in this early period.¹² Sixteenth century accounts of English travellers to Russia reinforced the idea of Russian life as crude and inhuman, despite the magnificence of the tsar's court. One British sixteenth century traveller wrote of the 'true and strange face of the tyrannical state...without true knowledge of God, without written law, without common justice', which was 'heavy and grievous to the poor oppressed people'.¹³ Another described how the cruelty of Ivan the Terrible bred 'a general hatred, distress, fear and discontent' throughout Russia.¹⁴ Descriptions of the court's opulence provided a stark contrast: 'our men began to wonder at the majesty of the emperor...having on his head a diadem or crown of gold, appavelled

¹⁰ I. B. Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other* (Florence, 1996), p. 37. This paper gives a concise yet comprehensive account of the evolution of Europe's othering of Russia from the fifteenth century onwards.

¹¹ Gerard Delanty has suggested that this principal political polarisation of Christendom versus Islam had in reality very little to do with the idea of Europe but that it nevertheless influenced the future history of the notion to a great extent. G. Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London, 1995), p.29

¹² Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other*, pp.38-39

¹³ G. Fletcher, 'Of The Russe Commonwealth' in L. E. Berry and R. O. Crummey (eds.), *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers* (Madison, 1968), p.109

¹⁴ J. Horsey, 'Travels' in Berry and Crummey, *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, p.270

with a robe of goldsmith's work, and in his hand he held a sceptre garnished and beset with precious stones'.¹⁵ Another visitor highlighted the lavishness of the royal banquets, describing his 'table served all in gold and silver, and so likewise on other tables there were set bowls of gold set with stone, worth by estimation four hundred pounds sterling one cup.'¹⁶

The eighteenth century saw the regular use of the term 'barbarians' to describe Russians, amid fears that they were 'at the gate' and unlikely to ever be rid of their barbarian state. At the same time, an identity was formed of Russia as a 'learner' from Europe. These two constructions emerged in large part due to Peter the Great, whose behaviour led him to be considered a barbarian but one who nevertheless showed a will to shed his barbarianism and learn from Europe.¹⁷ One British commentator stated that Peter was 'extremely curious and diligent and has further improved his Empire in ten years than any other ever was, in ten times that space.'¹⁸ His successes were seen as all the more admirable when considering the backwardness and barbarity of his subjects, described by one eighteenth century writer as '[c]reatures with the Names of Men but with Qualities rather Brutal than Rational'.¹⁹ A further differentiating construction of this time was the denomination of Russia as 'the North'. Neumann points out that Pushkin's famous 'window on the West' statement about St Petersburg was taken from a letter by Count Francesco Algarotti in 1739 that actually read: 'I am at length going to give you some account of this new city, of this great window lately opened in the north, thro' which Russia looks into Europe.'²⁰ After the Great Northern War of 1700-1721 the defeated Sweden withdrew to Scandinavia and Finland, separating it from Russia and Poland and

¹⁵ R. Chancellor, 'The First Voyage to Russia' in Berry and Crummey, *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, p. 24

¹⁶ A. Jenkinson, 'A Voyage to Russia in 1557' in Berry and Crummey, *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, p.54

¹⁷ Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other*, pp. 25-26

¹⁸ As cited in M. S. Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia, 1553-1815* (London, 1958), p.76

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.79

²⁰ As cited by Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other*, p.27

dissolving the idea of ‘the North’. Russia was thus no longer seen as one of the component of states making up the Baltic region.²¹ This was an important moment as it led to a reconstruction of the coordinates of Europe that eventually resulted in the East/West divide in the following century, a distinction that became and remains hugely significant.²²

Ideas of Russian barbarianism and difference continued to be propagated in the nineteenth century. The best-selling Marquis de Custine’s *Letters from Russia* (also published as *Russia in 1839*) provided damning verdicts that put considerable distance between Russians and Europeans:

I do not blame the Russians for being what they are; I blame them for pretending to be what *we* are. They are still uncultivated and this state at least leaves the ground for clear hope. But I see them constantly possessed by the desire to ape other nations, and they ape as the apes do, mocking what they copy. So I think: these are men who have forsaken savagery and missed civilization, and I remember the pitiless aphorism of Voltaire or Diderot, now forgotten in France: ‘The Russians have gone rotten without ever ripening.’²³

While the Marquis de Custine still referred to Russia as ‘the north’ throughout his letters, he also employed the word ‘Orientals’ to describe Russians, and his usage of both terms could serve to illustrate the nineteenth century transition from the idea of Russia as a

²¹ The Great Northern War was fought by Russia, Denmark-Norway and Saxony - Poland against Sweden, in order to challenge the latter’s supremacy in the Baltic region.

²² Neumann, *Russia as Europe’s Other*, pp.27-28. For a more in depth analysis of the transition between North and East, and Western Enlightenment perceptions of Eastern Europe and the East generally see M. Confino, ‘Re-Inventing the Enlightenment: Western Images of Eastern Realities in the Eighteenth Century’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. 36, Nos. 3-4 (September-December 1994), pp. 505-522.

²³ Marquis de Custine, *Letters from Russia* (London, 1991), p.57. The book is a collection of letters written by Astolphe, Marquis de Custine as he travelled through Russia in the 1830s, published upon his return to France. As Iain Lauchlan points out, the fact that de Custine was a devout Catholic, fervent republican and had been inspired to write the book by Polish émigré nationalists goes some way in explaining the general tone, lack of accuracy and hostility in his descriptions of Russia. See I. Lauchlan, *Russian Hide-and-Seek: The Tsarist Secret Police in St Petersburg, 1906-1914* (Helsinki, 2002), p.34

northern to an Eastern state as a long-term consequence of the Great Northern War. This transition to the Eastern other most closely resembles the constructions of Stalin that emerge in biographical writing on him as an ‘Asiatic’, although in the earlier years these were as often made by Russians as by Westerners.²⁴ As the nineteenth century progressed, strategic tensions were high in Europe, and the key development in Europe’s construction of Russia, through wars such as the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829, was to accept and recognise it as a legitimate power and player in Europe. This meant that on the one hand Russia was seen as a component of Europe. On the other hand,, it was also still considered a barbarian (albeit a powerful one) at the gate, grasping for hegemony while Europe was itself trying to redefine the idea of the European power-balance so that the Europeanness which inclusion in it conferred on Russia could be relativised.²⁵

Following an initially generally positive reaction in the West to the 1917 Revolution in Russia, particularly prominent constructions of the Soviet Union by the West emerged over the course of the twentieth century. In the interwar period, there were three principal influences on these. The first was racialist discourse, which ranked different races against each other. Previously, Russians had been classed as ‘Asiatic’ and thus not European but in the twentieth century a more extreme branch of this discourse developed (and which bore Nazism) that excluded Slavs from humankind altogether.²⁶ The second somewhat different influence looked to Russia as a land of the future. This was particularly well exemplified in the work of the British socialist economists Sydney and Beatrice Webb, who saw the Soviet experiment as an effort to attain a higher

²⁴ See Chapter 6

²⁵ Neumann, *Russia as Europe’s Other*, pp. 15-16. For more on the West’s historical relationship with Russia see M. Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999). Malia traces the relationship between the two from the eighteenth century, aiming to define Russia’s position within Europe, rather than emphasising the polarity between them.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.12-13

level of civilisation, one in which the many problems of the capitalist and Christian West could be eradicated.²⁷ Finally, the USSR's socialist economic organisation was seen as a credible successor to the capitalist economy, as this was still a time when commentators could support capitalism yet acknowledge the possibilities of a socialist alternative. Inter-war Russia was seen as a part of Europe, albeit an errant one.²⁸

The aftermath of the Second World War and the advent of the Cold War led these previous influences on Western constructions of the Soviet Union to be subsumed by two catch-all constructions: the first was the 'authorised' version of USSR, which saw it as an Asiatic and barbarian political power that had availed itself of the opportunity offered by the Second World War to intrude into Europe by military means. The second saw the USSR as the deliverer of Europe from the scourge of Nazism and as a model for Europe to emulate with a politico-economic model that could have an evolutionary, invigorating potential on Europe.²⁹ In both cases, it is clear that these models of the Soviet Union represented what Europe and the West were emphatically not.

Presently, we are observing post-Soviet Russia in transition, though towards what is becoming less and less clear. There has been a resurgence of the 'learner' identity of the Soviet Union in international relations discourse, especially in the decade immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, as the Western world watched expectantly for Russia to make obvious steps towards a

²⁷ For example, see S. Webb and B. Webb, *Is Soviet Communism a New Civilisation?* (London, 1936).

²⁸ Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other*, p.13. Ronald G. Suny also states that through the inter-war years the Soviet Union offered many Western intellectuals a vision of a preferred future outside and beyond capitalism. However, he suggests that within this hope and faith in the USSR and communism, there were already seeds of disillusionment and despair. See R. G. Suny, 'Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century: how the 'West' wrote its history of the USSR' in R. G. Suny (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia: Volume III The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2006), p.12

²⁹ Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other*, pp.8-9

capitalist democracy.³⁰ This has been highlighted by James D. J. Brown, who has argued that there is a clear pattern of Orientalism in contemporary Western discourse on Russia.³¹ In 2013, however, there is an increasing sense that concerns over freedom of speech, human rights, political corruption and the state of democracy in Vladimir Putin's Russia are strengthening rather than weakening the West's construction of Russia as its ideological and political other.

This brief overview of some of the ways in which the West has differentiated itself from Russia and the Soviet Union serves to illustrate that one of the principal themes of this study does not take place in a historical vacuum. This thesis seeks to determine to what extent the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism is a manifestation of this on-going process from the early 1930s onwards, and in what form.

3. Scholarship to date

This study therefore aims to fill a gap in our understanding of the main influences on Western writing on Stalin and Stalinism and to help assess the West's changing attitudes towards it over this period. To date, historiographical studies of this body of work have not examined these three suggested major impacts in conjunction, nor examined their relationship with each other and the wider global context. The majority of the surveys of the historiography currently published are analyses of its *outcomes* rather than of the conditions of its creation, be that through advances in empirical research, or changes in principal areas of research within the field. This approach has often been combined with a particular focus on the totalitarian and revisionist debates of the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, there is

³⁰ Neumann states that this attempted transition would make Russia appear less of a threat. Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other* pp.5-6

³¹ J. D. J. Brown, 'A Stereotype, Wrapped in a Cliché, Inside a Caricature: Russian Foreign Policy and *Orientalism*', *Politics*: 2010 Vol. 30 (3), pp. 149-159

little to present in terms of previous literature relating to the key influences on the creation and evolution of this specific body of work as set out in this thesis.

Instead, an overview of the literature shows that three patterns have emerged in historiographical surveys published to date that, while related to the themes of this thesis, demonstrate the lacuna in analysis of the field that this study aims to fill. The first of these patterns is the aforementioned focus on the outcomes of research. Alter Litvin and John Keep's survey of both Western and Russian historiography of Stalin and Stalinism, for example is a comprehensive summary of the evolution of this body of work and especially how it relates to the release of documentation from the Soviet Union and, later, Russia.³² Focusing largely on the outcome of scholarly investigation into Stalin and his regime, the authors are principally concerned with the current state of knowledge that has resulted from this research to date. Keep, for instance, looks individually at the fruits of research on politics and government, gender and foreign policy. The second part of the work, entitled 'Wrestling with Revisionism: recent Western writing on Stalinism', suggests that those changes that occurred in the field from the 1970s are still having a relevant impact and require our attention. However, they are only addressed in terms of the knowledge produced by research, rather than in the context of its production. Similarly, this approach is employed in the other principal historiographical surveys published to date. David L. Hoffmann's 'Introduction' to *Stalinism: The Essential Readings* deals with 'interpretations of Stalinism' and provides a succinct overview of the principal trends that have dominated the historiography, focusing on the Cold War era, during which he writes that the debates on what caused Stalinism were 'highly politicised', and revisionism gave way to post-revisionism when the historical profession turned away from social history towards cultural history. Yet Hoffman's focus remains largely on the

³² Alter Litvin and John Keep, *Stalinism: Russian and Western views at the turn of the millennium* (Oxon, 2005).

outcomes of these changes rather than the dynamics behind them, exemplified by his emphasis on what recent work on Stalinism has revealed or demonstrated.³³ Similarly, Mark Sandle has provided a detailed historiographical survey of the field in the post-Soviet era through a review of some of the literature published on the Soviet Union since 1985. Once again, there is a clear focus on social and political historical debate and on the outcomes of research. For instance, Sandle suggests that the relationship between state and society stands out as the key issue in post-Soviet historiography, and he examines the relative merits of social history (coinciding with wider historiographical developments), as well as some of the criticisms aimed at social historians.³⁴ Sandle's article stands out for his appraisal of post-Soviet historiography, as yet still a relative rarity, but as with Litvin and Keep, and Hoffman, Sandle's analysis remains focused on the nature of research and interpretation, rather than the influences leading to, and on, that research.

The second theme to emerge is the contextual examination of the creation of the historiography in relation to Western writing on the Soviet Union generally, rather than specifically in relation to Stalin and Stalinism. This is reflected again in Sandle's article, which focuses on the Western historiography of the entire Soviet period. A

³³ D. L. Hoffman, 'Introduction: Interpretations of Stalinism' in David L. Hoffman (ed.), *Stalinism: The Essential Readings* (Oxford, 2003), pp.4-5. The rest of this volume consists of chapters on aspects of Stalinism itself rather than the historiography and are excerpts from publications that Hoffman has collected as the 'essential readings' on Stalin. These include Martin Malia's *The Soviet Tragedy*, Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain*, Sheila Fitzpatrick's *Everyday Stalinism*, and Moshe Lewin's *Grappling with Stalinism*. The choice of extracts also provides an insight into what are considered to be 'essential readings', and therefore those which have contributed particularly salient accounts of different aspects of Stalinism. Hoffman also features Oleg Khlevnyuk's *The Objectives of the Great Terror, 1937-1938*, which is published in J. Cooper, M. Perrie and E. A. Rees (eds.), *Soviet History 1917-53: essays in honour of R. W. Davies* (Basingstoke, 1995). Christopher Read has included a similar historiographical chapter *The Stalin Years: A Reader*. It also provides a brief overview of the principal currents of research and the interpretations and knowledge they have generated. The rest of the volume is a series of excerpts from previous publications, also including Khlevnyuk, Fitzpatrick, and Kotkin, amongst others, writing on a range of topics from industrialisation and collectivisation to the Terror to the early Cold War period. See Christopher Read (ed.), *The Stalin Years: A Reader* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 1-22

³⁴ M. Sandle, 'New Directions, New Approaches, Old Issues. Recent Writing on Soviet History', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.38, No.1, 1995, pp.231-248

much denser and more inclusive account of the development of Western historiography on the Soviet Union has been written by Ronald G. Suny, which looks at the evolution of Western writing over the course of the twentieth century, highlighting the influence of the changing global political context and of evolving historiographical trends of this period.³⁵ Suny, for instance, touches on the question of the West writing about its other, stating that

In the Western academy the Soviet Union was most often imagined to be an aberration of the normal course of modern history, an unfortunate detour from the rise of liberalism that bred its own evil opposite, travelling its very own *Sonderweg* that led eventually (or inevitably) to collapse and ruin.³⁶

He notes the difficulties faced by scholars in trying to write a balanced narrative in those conditions of heightened ideological tensions and suggests that while much valuable research was undertaken during the twentieth century by those either deeply committed to, or deeply against, Soviet communism, ‘a studied neutrality was difficult (though possible) in an environment in which one's work was always subject to political judgement’.³⁷ In this way Suny highlights how important Western attitudes to Soviet communism have been to the changing nature of scholarship on this subject, as well as the impact of the global context on these attitudes. This has been similarly examined in great detail by David C. Engerman, whose book *Know Your Enemy* is a rich and detailed account of the relationship between the US State and academia during this period. It has greatly contributed to our understanding of the

³⁵R. G. Suny, ‘Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century: how the ‘West’ wrote its history of the USSR’ in R. G. Suny (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia: Volume III The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2006). Suny’s introductory article was well-received in the field as a penetrating and insightful overview of this body of work and the conditions of its creation. Mark B. Smith commented that it provides excellent context for readers of the volume ‘while experts have the pleasure of an original literature review’. See M. B. Smith, ‘Review: *The Cambridge History of Russia. Volume 3: The Twentieth Century* by Ronald Grigor Suny’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (July 2009), pp. 564-567, p. 565

³⁶ Suny, ‘Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century’, p.6

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6

intricate and deeply intertwined nature of academia and politics in the USA and the impact of the tense and difficult relationship between the USA and the Soviet Union on the production and outcome of scholarship during the Cold War era.³⁸

The third theme to emerge in previous scholarship relevant to this study relates to Western attitudes to Russia in the field of political science and, more specifically, in the forum of contemporary international relations, where clear othering processes have been identified in Western discourse. Brown's convincing argument that there are clear Orientalist tendencies in mainstream Western discourse on Russian foreign policy suggests that the process of othering Russia is on-going in the West. Brown bases his analysis on the application of three principal tenets of Said's Orientalism to this discourse.³⁹ The first is the amplification of difference between the West and its other through crude stereotypes and caricatures based on ethnic typology. The second is the portrayal of the region as a degenerate divergence from Western norms, most specifically in regard to its people, who are generally seen as backward and inferior.⁴⁰ The West, in turn, sees its own role as that of a committed rectifier of these inferiorities, which it aims to fulfil by imposing its own more advanced socio-economic model on the East. The third feature of Orientalist discourse Brown highlights is that of a thin and oft-repeated form of intellectual analysis, based on a narrow set of convictions that have become the foundation for thinking on the Orient. All analyses of the region have therefore become repetitive and unimaginative.⁴¹ Brown's article demonstrates that applied to Russia rather than the Orient, these patterns are clear in a sizeable amount of Western discourse on

³⁸ D. C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York, 2009).

³⁹ In Said's analysis the other was of course the Orient. The perpetuation of the concept of the 'West' becomes dependent on this stark East-West divide. Brown, 'A Stereotype, Wrapped in a Cliché, Inside a Caricature', p.150

⁴⁰ As well as backward, people from the Orient are presented as prone to irrationality, inefficiency, the inability to learn from mistakes and a chronic inability to govern themselves. As a result, power is the only language they understand. Brown, 'A Stereotype, Wrapped in a Cliché, Inside a Caricature', p.151

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.152

Russian foreign policy. He is able to identify a strong emphasis on the marked difference between Russian and Western foreign policy and on the danger it presents, arguing that, despite the fall of communism in the Soviet Union, Western scholarship continues to represent Russia as a threatening other pursuing a 'qualitatively different mode of behaviour'.⁴² Russia's 'inscrutable foreignness' is then reinforced through the usage of shared language to describe it.⁴³ Brown also demonstrates the West's assumption of its own superiority over Russia when engaging in international politics, and its persistence in seeing Russia as a pupil, which is once again a manifestation of Russia as a 'learner' from Europe.⁴⁴ Finally, Brown suggests that overall very little imaginative or innovative research is undertaken in Western scholarship on this topic and that instead it retains at its core the idea that there is a specifically Russian mind-set or pattern of behaviour to which the country inevitably reverts, guided by 'some primordial instinct that has been indelibly imprinted upon its national character by the weight of geography and history'.⁴⁵ By following the three tenets of Said's Orientalism methodically, Brown has been able to identify clear parallels in Western discourse on Russian foreign policy. Similarly, Neumann has written some excellent work on Russia as Europe's other historically and throughout the twentieth century that has already been drawn upon here to demonstrate the historical manifestation of this process. As a political scientist with a focus on international relations and identity formation, Neumann is principally concerned with the current state of Russo-European

⁴² Ibid., p. 154

⁴³ Brown notes that a striking example of this is the constant re-use of Churchill's statement that Russia's actions are 'a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma' and the use of medical metaphors to describe Russians, such as 'genetically different'. Ibid., p. 154

⁴⁴ Brown recognises the instances when the West's assessments of Russian behaviour and policy have been relatively accurate, though in these cases he takes issue with the method which is employed to describe or assess these. For example, he considers the West's observation that Russia's foreign policy is fixated with security, sovereignty and the pursuit of national interest as legitimate. However, he is 'dubious' about the disparaging suggestions that have described this approach as anachronistic, un-European or so backward that it is rooted in a different historical era. See pp.154-155

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.155

political relations, but the depth of his work on Russia as Europe's other demonstrates that this process is on-going and deserves closer attention in other fields of study.⁴⁶

These books and articles, the most in-depth historiographical analyses published to date, exemplify the lack of investigation into the simultaneous impact of the three key influences – source accessibility, historiographical trends and Western attitudes to Russia, bound together by the larger global context – on the creation of the Western body of work specifically relating to Stalin and Stalinism over the period of study.⁴⁷

4. Thesis structure

This thesis therefore seeks to contribute to our knowledge of this subject by examining the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism 'in practice', that is its interaction with the world around it, in order to

⁴⁶ Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other*

⁴⁷ Other surveys of this kind include David Shearer, 'From Divided Consensus to Creative Disorder: Soviet History in Britain and North America', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, Vol.39, No. 4, (Octobre – Décembre 1998), pp.559-591, which through a chronological examination of the development of the field provides information on shifts in thematic foci of research, highlighting which scholars have focused on which areas. A common form of historiographical survey on this topic is that found at the start of works on Stalin and Stalinism. These differ somewhat from a more general survey in that they serve a specific purpose of framing their authors' research. Examples of this can be found in Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography*, Macmillan, London, 2004; Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin* (Harlow, 2005) and J. Arch Getty, *The Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, 1985). These often brief overviews aim to highlight how the work fits in with the historiography and its contribution to the field. Kuromiya's biography of Stalin, for instance, focuses on what he considers to be the most important aspect of Stalin but one that to date had been neglected by his biographers: that Stalin 'lived by politics alone'. Service provides a brief survey of previous scholarship, particularly the evolution of the biographical aspect of writing on Stalinism, summarising the various approaches to Stalin throughout the period, from the hagiographical accounts of the pre-Cold War period, to the increasingly popular books that focus on the 'psychotic' characteristics of Stalinism. According to Service, his biography of Stalin constitutes a comprehensive account of all facets of Stalin, as 'leader, administrator, theorist, writer, comrade, husband and father'. In his introduction to *The Origins of the Great Purges* Getty examines previous interpretations of the purges, and uses his historiographical survey to introduce a new line of enquiry, one which he writes is 'only one possible unexplored approach to the Great Purges: the structural and factional struggles within the party apparatus in the 1930s.'⁴⁷ In turn, he writes, this should provide a new understanding of the origins of the purges, therefore using (as have Service and Kuromiya) the historiographical overview not only as an introductory tool for the reader, but also most importantly one in which to place their own new research, shaping the survey specifically to frame the subject at hand.

reveal the dynamics, influences and events which have led to its creation.

This thesis does not, and indeed cannot, encompass all of the material relating to Stalin and Stalinism that has been written and published in the West since 1925. It does not intend to be a comprehensive survey of the entirety of this body of work, a task that would be impossible within the time and space limitations of a doctoral thesis.

The most obvious boundary of the thesis is the origins of the material, since it is concerned mostly with Anglo-American scholarship. This is, firstly, due to the size of this body work: it gives ample material from which to undertake detailed historiographical research. Secondly, the particularity of the Anglo-American relationship with the Soviet Union during the twentieth century and beyond has led to a historiography reflective of the deep complexity of relations between the two. As a result, this body of work provides a valuable tool with which to evaluate the extent and nature of othering of the Soviet Union by the West over this period, a principal line of enquiry of this study. However, the boundary is not entirely rigid. Throughout the thesis, where relevant and necessary, works by French and Soviet émigré writers have also been included, such as those of Leon Trotsky, Henri Barbusse and Boris Souvarine. This has mostly occurred when examining the pre-Cold War period, when the majority of foundational writing on Stalin was being published in the West (in English, French and German) by writers of these origins. As the twentieth century progressed, the academic Soviet Studies field in the USA and the UK expanded greatly, resulting in the volume and dominance in the West of Anglo-American writing on this subject.

This study has been constructed as a series of case studies that examine specific areas within the Anglo-American historiography that I have considered either to have been neglected, or that would benefit from review, most notably in relation to the Wests' othering of Stalinism. As a result, the thesis does not deal with some of the more obvious writers, topics and themes that would otherwise be

considered essential to a more general study on Western research and writing on Stalinism. It does not, for example, deal with the literature surrounding Stalin during the Second World War, a vast and complex topic that branches out beyond the more familiar political, social and economic spheres of Stalinism into military and diplomatic history, and that is tightly intertwined with the histories of the other warring nations. Similarly, it does not deal with biographical writing on the adult Stalin in the second half of the twentieth century, instead choosing to focus on biography of the child and adolescent Stalin, an under-researched area which reveals much about changing Western attitudes towards the man and his regime.

Indeed, the thesis examines six areas of the historiography that allow novel insights into the ways in which Stalin has been written about in the West, the conditions of the creation of this writing, and the influences on it. In particular, these areas stand out thanks to their value in helping to assess the extent and nature of the construction of a Stalinist other within this body of work. They have been arranged into a chronological structure, which allows us to observe the evolution of several key aspects of writing on Stalin over the period of study, notably the concept of the Stalinist other and the repercussions of the highly influential shifting global political context.

Chapter 1 focuses on the most influential early works on Stalin in order to determine the initial extent and nature of this othering before the ideological shift of the Cold War, which stretches over much of the rest of the period of study and the extent of whose influence is a question that has dominated many of the historiographical surveys we already have. With many of these works being written by émigré or exiled socialist writers, the conditions under which they emerged provide an illuminating insight into the foundations of Western writing on Stalin and his regime. The analysis of the works in Chapter 2 aims to provide a new angle on ‘totalitarian model’ writing, a phase of early Cold War Soviet Studies that dominates many discussions on past approaches to Stalinism, but

about which there have been few new insights. By focusing on language, the usage of the term ‘totalitarian’ and the concepts on which the constructions of the Stalinist other were hinged at this time, the approach and conclusions presented in this chapter show that there are still important new findings to be discovered from this part of the historiography.

The source material in Chapter 3 departs from what can be considered as scholarly historiography by examining British communist reactions to Stalinism before, during and after Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 ‘secret speech’, as presented in British communist journals, books and press. This departure is justified when we consider that, to date, examinations of Anglo-American writing on Stalin and Stalinism during the early Cold War have been largely confined to those of individuals ideologically opposed to communism. By examining British communist writing on Stalinism in these varied forums, this chapter not only helps to construct a more nuanced and inclusive picture of British writing on this subject during the Cold War, but also allows a unique insight into the emergence and development of an othering process, as British communists reacted to the revelations of Khrushchev’s speech.

As with Chapter 2, Chapter 4 revisits familiar ground in novel ways through its examination of the totalitarian model versus social history debates that occurred in the 1980s. Within the framework of enquiry of this thesis, new insights can be gleaned from these discussions about the changing concepts on which the othering of Stalinism was hinged as the Cold War progressed. Chapter 5 assesses the major themes of post-Soviet writing on Stalinism, a necessary inclusion when we consider the dramatic shift in interpretative paradigms and source accessibility which occurred after the end of the Cold War and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides a case study of biographical writing on Stalin. By focusing specifically on writing on the young Stalin over the entire period of study, this chapter allows us to chart and interpret the shifting Western foci on different aspects of Stalin’s

youth, how these have been linked to his adult personality and leadership, and their part in the construction of Stalin as the other.

As this thesis seeks to understand the creation and evolution of the Western historiography of Stalin and Stalinism, it is helpful to define these terms. ‘Western’ is predominantly used in this study to refer to the large body of work produced by Anglo-American scholarship, but at times will also encompass émigré and other European writing, as well as official Soviet literature on Stalin published in the West, when it has been necessary and relevant to do so.

What is meant by the historiography of ‘Stalin’ himself is largely self-evident: it encompasses biography, both personal and political, but can also refer to any works concerning the interaction between the man and his regime, for example the examination of his correspondence in the post-Soviet era, used to determine his day to day involvement in the running of the regime.⁴⁸ ‘Stalinism’ is a more complex term. At a general level, Stalinism can be understood as the system of governance of all sectors of life put in place by Stalin and with which he governed the Soviet Union while he was Secretary General. However, the intricacies and the complexity of this system, its omnipresence in both the public and private spheres and its deep and wide-ranging consequences make its limitations difficult to identify. Robert C. Tucker has addressed issues with the usage of the term ‘Stalinism’, since he himself was one of the first to employ it. According to Tucker, the most notable (and perhaps most debatable) of these is that it is unclear what the referent to this term is: unlike Lenin, Tucker believed that Stalin did not produce a substantial body of theory which led to the ‘ism’ of Leninism. For Tucker, a politico-cultural approach was the most helpful in defining Stalinism. Firstly, it cannot be separated from the man himself. This does not mean psychologising history but rather illuminating Stalin’s drive for despotic power, the way he went about it and the uses he made of it.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 5

Secondly, Stalinism must be seen in cultural terms: Stalin in the post-Lenin 1920s stood for ‘Russian national Bolshevism’, by which Tucker meant ‘Bolshevik revolutionism in Stalin's special understanding of it and the great Russian chauvinism that Lenin belatedly perceived in him in 1922’.⁴⁹ Finally, while Tucker did not reject a social history of Stalinism, any attempts to understand it had to include all spheres of life (socio-economic, cultural, intellectual and so on) with the state as the prime actor. Without taking into account these elements in this politico-cultural perspective, he suggested that we cannot understand what happened after Stalin took power.⁵⁰ Hoffmann has proposed a more straightforward definition of Stalinism: a set of tenets, policies, and practices instituted by the Soviet government during the years in which Stalin was in power, 1928-1953. It was characterised by ‘extreme coercion employed for the purpose of economic and social transformation’ and the abolition of private ownership and free trade. Hoffmann recognised the complexities of attempting to define it and noted that the range of phenomena included under the name of Stalinism ‘alerts us to the fact that not all aspects of Stalinism can be explained by a single cause’.⁵¹ There are many varying ‘definitions’ and understandings of Stalinism. However, Hoffmann’s provides a good basis for the term, as long as there remains an implicit understanding of its complexities and subtleties, as suggested by both him and Tucker. This thesis therefore considers as ‘historiography of Stalinism’ to be all work concerned with any and all aspects of the regime, its nature, execution and

⁴⁹ R. C. Tucker, ‘The Stalin Period as an Historical Problem’, *The Russian Review*, Vol.46, No. 4, October 1987, pp.424-427, p. 425. Although Tucker doesn’t call for a ‘psychologising’ of history, he has given particular attention in his work to the ‘psychology of power’ as a way of understanding totalitarianism. He felt the study of Stalin as an individual was an essential part of understanding the regime. See, for example, R. C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind: Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change* (London, 1972), especially the chapters ‘The Dictator and Totalitarianism’ and ‘Several Stalins’. Also see ‘The Decisive Trifle’ section in R. C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary 1879-1929: A Study in History and Personality* (London, 1973). Tucker’s politico-cultural approach to Stalinism is particularly in evidence in his book R. C. Tucker, *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1977).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Hoffmann, ‘Introduction’ in Hoffman (ed.), *Stalinism*, pp.1-2

repercussions, across all spheres of life: it is the very variety of definitions and understandings of Stalinism that is at the very centre of this study.

5. Chapter summary

As highlighted in the previous section when addressing the value of each chosen case study, these have been organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 examines the historiography in the period 1925-1947, when the first works on Stalin and his regime began to be published in the West. There was a focus on biographical writing during this period, and this chapter seeks to examine who was writing about Stalin and why. The most comprehensive works published in this period were biographies by Stalin's opponents, notably Boris Souvarine, Leon Trotsky and Isaac Deutscher. Other works, such as those of Henri Barbusse and Bertram D. Wolfe, were important in other ways: for example, Barbusse was a supporter of Stalin and provided an alternative perspective, and Wolfe's work in particular helps us to gauge to what extent the nature of Stalinism was understood in the West at this time. This chapter seeks to define the nature of these earliest constructions of Stalin and Stalinism and what informed them in an era when Stalin was still alive, and before the West and the Soviet Union became embroiled in the Cold War. Further, as many of these works were written by anti-Stalinist socialists estranged from the Soviet Union, it addresses the question of how these early writings presented some of the first forms of othering Stalinism in the West.

Chapter 2 examines a neglected aspect of the creation of the totalitarian-model historiography on Stalin and Stalinism during the early Cold War, in which Stalinism became synonymous with totalitarianism. Moving away from previous analyses of the nature of Soviet totalitarianism and its interpretation in Western scholarship, this chapter seeks to understand specifically how the term

‘totalitarianism’ became central to constructions of the Stalinist and Soviet other during this period, in what ways this manifested itself in writing on Stalinism at this time and the extent to which this tied in with the wider political context and discourse. The chapter explores the method in which certain common ideas, such as that of the ‘two worlds’ of East and West and the danger and deviancy of the Soviet Union, were systematically reinforced across Western scholarship, while simultaneously constructions of totalitarianism as an extension of a Russian tradition of leadership also emerged.

Chapter 3 examines British communist reactions to Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 ‘secret speech’, providing a case study to help our understanding of the development of Western Communist historiography on Stalin during this eventful period. The chapter investigates how Stalin and Stalinism were thought of and written about by British communists before 1956, mainly through portrayals in the *Daily Worker*, the official paper of the communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), but also in works written about Stalin’s Soviet Union by British communists. The chapter goes on to analyse the ways in which British communists related their socialist beliefs, their party and their individual selves to the realities of Stalinism exposed by Khrushchev and how this, in turn, manifested itself in the way in which they wrote about Stalin and his regime. This study sheds new light on a neglected aspect of the historiography and provides an additional dimension to what has historically been a dominant focus on the work of historians and political scientists ideologically opposed to the regime. While much of the writing by Western communists at this time was non-academic, by examining these works, this chapter allows us to build a far more complete and inclusive picture of the way in which Stalin was being written about in the West and to understand the development of the historiography outside of the confines of Cold War Anglo-American academia, and mentality. Through the analysis of the British communist reactions to the 1956 secret speech, the chapter also examines the process through which an ideological alignment became an ideological opposition, as

a particular faction of the CPGB sought to distance and differentiate itself and socialism from what they perceived to be the moral and ideological stain of Stalinism.

Chapter 4 examines the impact of social history's appearance in the field of Soviet studies, and specifically the impact of revisionism on the way in which Stalinism was constructed by scholars during the 1980s. It does so predominantly through an analysis of the debates that occurred in *The Russian Review* in 1986 and 1987, where totalitarian-model scholars and early revisionists, such as Peter Kenez, Stephen F. Cohen and Robert Conquest, as well as later revisionists debated in a lively and at times aggressive manner the role that social history should take in the research and interpretation of Stalinism. A new examination of these debates reveals the centrality of the notions of morality and of the locus of blame, not only in relation to Stalinism itself but also in relation to perceptions of how scholarship on the subject was undertaken. On the surface, the arguments in *The Russian Review* appear to be concerned with the role of social history in the study of Stalinism. However, the dominant themes of the debates were in fact the moral condemnation of Stalinism and the allocation of blame for the regime. This chapter argues that the totalitarian model scholars and early revisionists engaged in these debates were primarily concerned with the importance of highlighting the immoral and evil character of the regime and Stalin's own responsibility for this. The revisionists' reticence to do so with similar determination, and their criticisms of earlier scholarship on this subject, in turn not only led to these arguments acquiring an often bitter nature but also to the revisionists acquiring an immoral quality of their own in the eyes of their earlier counterparts. In this way, this chapter sheds new light on the nature of these debates by revealing both their strongly moral foundations and the nature, resilience and strength of the Stalinist totalitarian other of the early Cold War era.

Chapter 5 examines the changes in research and interpretative frameworks that have occurred in the post-Soviet period, not only due

to the new release of information during the ‘archival revolution’ but also due to the cultural turn in the historical profession that displaced social history, the shifting global context which saw the end of the Cold War, and the Soviet Union becoming a historical notion. This chapter asks whether previous arguments and interpretations of Stalinism have withstood these changes, and while conditions have changed (there is more available information, collaborations with Russian archivists and historians have developed, as has a greater self-awareness in the field of past interpretative patterns, for example), whether many old agendas remain. Similarly it questions whether, despite the advent of social and then cultural history, there has been a return to a politics-centred view of Stalinism, manifested in the large amount of research once again being undertaken on Stalin’s role in his regime, as well as the way in which Stalinism itself was carried out from within the Kremlin. Finally, this chapter assesses whether the end of the Soviet Union has meant that Western scholarship on Stalin and Stalinism still defines them, as it has done both historically and throughout this period of study, as the definitive other to the West.

Finally, Chapter 6 is a case study of biographical writing on Stalin, undertaken through an analysis of writing on the young Stalin (defined as his childhood and adolescence, before he became a revolutionary). This chapter examines the way in which a body of work can develop from scratch, from the first primary sources onwards, providing a detailed example of the evolution of a particular body of work on a specific subject. In this case, it enables us to note the origins of certain depictions of Stalin, such as Trotsky’s famous characterisation of Stalin as ‘mediocre’, and questions whether the way in which the young Stalin was depicted is connected to the way he was perceived as an adult and leader.⁵² At the same time, the evolution of this body of work can help to identify the reflection of changing trends in biographical writing over the course of the period

⁵² The latter having been examined in Chapter 1

of study, such as the development of psychohistory in the 1970s, or the increasing focus on the private lives of individuals as a wider biographical trend. This examination of the historiography of the young Stalin seeks to understand to what extent information from, and characteristics of, Stalin's childhood and adolescence have been used to present or reinforce him as the other, notably in terms of his Georgian ethnicity, and what importance this period and these elements of his life have been given over the period of study in attempts to understand Stalin himself. Finally, the case study aims to illustrate the themes of the thesis over its entire chronological period by assessing how the changing political Soviet and Western context deeply affected the historiography of this part of Stalin's life. It evaluates the impact of the lack of source availability on the development of one body of work and the extent to which personal convictions once again show themselves to be central to its creation and evolution.

Chapter 1

Trotsky versus Stalin: the first Stalinist other, 1925-1946¹

1. Introduction

In 1925, Max Eastman published a book entitled *Since Lenin Died*.² In it Eastman, an American Trotskyist, examined the struggle for power that was occurring within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) after Lenin's death. It was the first publication in the West to deal with Stalin's character and political style: Eastman was one of the only people outside the Soviet Union to get hold of parts of Lenin's so-called 'testament', a letter written before his death in which he had suggested a reorganisation of power within the party, including the removal of Stalin from his position as Secretary General.³ Lenin had, in a post-script to the letter, expressed concern at Stalin's rudeness, and his mishandling of the suppression of Georgian dissent. Consequently Eastman's analysis of the testament and the ensuing struggle necessarily led to him addressing the question of Stalin.

Western-published works focusing predominantly on Stalin started to appear in the period 1930-1932. The first of these was written by Boris Bazhanov, Stalin's assistant in the Politburo from 1923 until 1925, who had escaped the USSR in 1928 and settled in

¹ 1946 marks the end of this particular historiographical period, since the Cold War begins in 1947 and paradigms shift dramatically. However certain books in this chapter were published after this in the late 1940s. There is an inevitable delay between events and experiences, writing about them and eventual publication, which accounts for the occasional overlap in this study of works into the next era as defined by the structure of the thesis.

² M. Eastman, *Since Lenin Died* (London, 1925).

³ Only the Encyclopaedia Britannica online names Eastman as one of the individuals to get hold of the testament outside of the Soviet Union. See (last accessed 29/04/2013): <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/335969/Lenins-Testament>. The Marxist Internet Archive has a short biography for Eastman in their Max Eastman online archive and direct links to many transcripts of his works, including *Since Lenin Died*. See (last accessed 29/04/2013): <http://www.marxists.org/archive/eastman/index.htm>

Paris. Like Eastman, Bazhanov wrote an account of the power struggle and the inner workings of the Politburo in the 1920s, only he focused much more closely on Stalin himself and the direction in which he was taking the Soviet state as early as the late 1920s. It was intended as a warning to the West of the danger of Stalin. The book was first published in French in 1930 under the title *Avec Staline dans le Kremlin*.⁴ In 1931 Lev Nussimbaum, an Azeri Jew by birth, published a biography of Stalin in German under the pseudonym Essad-Bey entitled *Stalin: The Career of a Fanatic*.⁵ Nussimbaum had fled when Bolsheviks overran Baku after the 1917 revolution. He was a renowned fantasist (for example, he regularly altered his own identity: he converted to Islam in Berlin in 1923, and later became sympathetic to the Nazi regime) but his book, and its depiction of the mysterious and dangerous Caucasian Stalin, was popular.⁶ Finally, the most influential work of these years was a memoir written by Stalin's Georgian schoolmate Joseph Iremashvili, entitled *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens*, published in 1932. A first phase of the Western historiography of Stalin and Stalinism began with the publication of these works, and ended when relations between the USSR and the West became so tense as to dramatically impact on Western writing on Stalin and Stalinism for decades thereafter. Common traits emerged in these initial interpretations and approaches, as did patterns in the formative influences on these responses. These traits have been largely understudied and will be assessed here through an analysis of

⁴ D. W. Doyle, *Bazhanov and the Damnation of Stalin* (Athens, Ohio, 1990), pp.vii-viii. *Avec Staline dans le Kremlin* was never translated into English. Towards the end of his life, Bazhanov wrote his memoirs, which were in part an updated, revised and substantially different account of Stalin than the 1930 book, in the sense that Bazhanov no longer had to protect friends inside and outside the USSR and revealed far more detail than he had in the original work. Doyle's book is the only English translation of this later version of the book, already published in Russian, German, Italian and French between 1976 and 1979. The original Russian version was entitled *Vospominaniia byvshevo pomoshnika Stalina* and was published in Germany in 1976.

⁵ Essad-Bey, *Stalin: The Career of a Fanatic* (London, 1932). This is the first English version, with the original German version published a year earlier.

⁶ T. Reiss, *The Orientalist: In Search of a Man Caught Between East and West* (London, 2005), p. xxii. Reiss' biography is the first time Nussimbaum's life has been researched in detail. It uncovers the mystery of his many pseudonyms and identities.

writing on Stalin himself and on 'Stalinism' both as a term and as a regime.

There were many works written in the West on Stalin during this period, with a noticeable increase in numbers during and after the Second World War when Stalin's relevance to the West increased dramatically, and many of these will be examined to a greater or lesser extent in this chapter. However, there are but a few which have remained particularly historically significant for their influential interpretations of Stalin and Stalinism, and as important sources for their depth and scope of analysis, are still used as references today. As a result, they provide several new insights into why and how Stalin and Stalinism were being written about in this period. These are principally the works of Boris Souvarine, Isaac Deutscher and Leon Trotsky.

2. Machiavellian, brutal and crude: depictions of Stalin

Part of the interest of the works of this period lies in the ways in which these authors wrote about Stalin himself, since these were men who had followed Lenin but now found themselves estranged from the socialist nation they had supported and of which Stalin was now leader. Through their respective descriptions of Stalin key common characteristics emerged and, in turn, an analysis of these depictions of Stalin reveals a pattern of othering in which Stalin was systematically differentiated from, and subordinated to, the authors.

This first process becomes apparent by the authors' repeated derogatory depictions of Stalin as a method of differentiating themselves from him. They most notably do this by highlighting his mediocre and unremarkable, yet deceitful and sly, character. The first instances of this can be found in Eastman's work: the speeches and articles of Stalin, Bukharin, Kamenev and Zinoviev denouncing Trotsky would be 'thrown out of a prize essay contest in a school for

defective children'.⁷ This idea was also particularly well exemplified by Trotsky, whose interpretation of Stalin's character is clear even from the index of the book: 'vindictiveness of', 'domineering will of', 'provincialism', 'not an orator', 'not a writer'.⁸ Trotsky wrote throughout his book extensively and derisively on Stalin's character: 'Koba's political provincialism is most instructively exemplified by his relations with the foreign centre, or rather, by the absence of any relations at all with it'⁹, 'Articles under Stalin's signature do not arrest anyone's attention: they are devoid of personality, barring crudity of exposition'¹⁰, 'Such attributes of character as slyness, faithlessness, the ability to exploit the lowest instincts of human nature are developed to an extraordinary degree in Stalin and, considering his strong character, represent mighty weapons in a struggle'.¹¹ Similarly Souvarine's Stalin was defined by four main characteristics: his 'will to power' was disproportionate to his 'will to know' (the same expression is used by Trotsky), his 'narrow realism', combined with a lack of appreciation of theory or general ideas, a religious education 'overlaid with a travesty of Marxism' and lastly an oriental dexterity in 'intrigue, unscrupulousness, lack of sensitiveness in personal relations, and scorn of men and human life'.¹² Souvarine's Stalin was extremely close to Trotsky's: he was not a man of ideas but one with 'small aptitude for intellectual work'. He was neither sophisticated nor refined and throughout his revolutionary years 'he remained provincial'.¹³ Deutscher similarly highlighted Stalin's lack of remarkability, stating from the start that 'What was striking in the General Secretary was that there was nothing striking about him' and that he had an 'almost impersonal personality'.¹⁴ These

⁷ Eastman, *Since Lenin Died*, p.51

⁸ L. Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence* (London, 1947), p. 509

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 40

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 183

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.393

¹² B. Souvarine, *Stalin. A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* (London, 1939), p. 115

¹³ *Ibid.* p.34

¹⁴ I. Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (London, 1949), p.273. This is something that Tucker has suggested was a case of mistaking historical appearance

characterisations of Stalin may owe something to Karl Marx's similar description of Napoleon III: 'the class war in France created circumstances and relationships that enabled a grotesque mediocrity to strut about in a hero's garb.'¹⁵

However, for Deutscher this apparent nature of Stalin was part of an image that was cultivated and whose purpose was to conceal the real character, thoughts and intentions of the man. This is made apparent by Deutscher's repeated implications that Stalin's outward persona was a deception: 'His bearing seemed of the utmost modesty', 'This [his ability to listen] was one of his qualities which seemed to indicate any lack of egotism', 'In the Politburo when matters of high policy were under debate, he never seemed to impose his views on his colleagues', and finally:

To party audiences he appeared as a man without personal grudge and rancour, as a detached Leninist, a guardian of the doctrine who criticised others only for the sake of the cause. He gave this impression even when he spoke behind the closed doors of the Politbureau.¹⁶

Indeed, the reinforcement of Stalin's lack of remarkability and his general inferiority was matched only by the emphasis on his cruelty and duplicity, highlighting his danger and untrustworthiness. Eastman described Stalin's approach to discrediting Trotsky during the battle for power as a campaign of falsification where Trotsky's words were 'snatched violently out of context' and in which he had figuratively 'walked up and hit Trotsky over the head with a club'. He was 'dishonest' and he 'fell back upon brutality in order to beat Trotsky's clear arguments'.¹⁷ Trotsky's own descriptions included 'Undoubtedly characteristic of Stalin is personal, physical cruelty,

for reality, since Stalin had his own political and theoretical ideas, and some personal qualities that affected his political style and policies, which were 'out of the ordinary'. See R. C. Tucker, 'Several Stalins' in R. C. Tucker (ed.), *The Soviet Political Mind: Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change* (London, 1972), p.110.

Nevertheless, this was Deutscher's Stalin from the vantage point of the late 1940s before the benefit of historical distance might influence him otherwise.

¹⁵ K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (London, 1926), p. 17

¹⁶ Deutscher, *Stalin*, pp.274-275

¹⁷ Eastman, *Since Lenin Died*, pp. 57-60

what is usually called sadism'¹⁸, 'complaints about his 'poisonous cynicism', his rudeness and his vengefulness, occur many, many times during Koba's life'.¹⁹ Stalin's ethnicity was in large part to blame for what Trotsky saw as distinctly non- Russian characteristics.²⁰ Souvarine drew direct comparisons between Stalin and Machiavelli, referring to the cheating and duplicity which characterised them both: 'On all points an intuitive Machiavellism guided him, often in its lowest form. The art of disguising his thoughts has no more secrets for him, his power of dissimulation equals his knowledge of provocation'.²¹ Souvarine's Stalin was Machiavellian, brutal and crude. For Deutscher, as for Souvarine and Trotsky, Stalin was deceitful, untrustworthy and insecure. He used 'chicanery and trickery' to rule and aspired to be the sole spiritual leader of his generation, in part 'because his vanity had been hurt by the intellectual elite not noticing him' from the off.²²

Key characteristics were therefore identified and repeatedly reinforced by each author: Stalin was determined, sly, bold and ambitious. These facets of his personality were as close as the authors got to conceding any qualities to Stalin. More prominent was Stalin as a spiteful, provincial, unrefined and mediocre bureaucrat.²³ In this way, they explicitly differentiated Stalin from themselves and from the intended path of socialism in the Soviet Union. In Trotsky's case especially Stalin was repeatedly subordinated: Trotsky wrote that Stalin's 'intellect remained immeasurably inferior to his will'²⁴, with this point of intellect seemingly crucial. His repeated attacks on Stalin's shortcomings in these areas provided a method by which to

¹⁸ Trotsky, *Stalin.*, p. 414

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 18. 'Koba' was Stalin's revolutionary pseudonym.

²⁰ Ibid., p.3. For how Stalin's ethnic origins have been treated in the historiography see Chapter 6.

²¹ Ibid., p.585

²² Ibid., p.361 and p.364

²³ Tucker recognised the bureaucrat Stalin as the most famous and influential counter-representation of the man, although believes that Trotsky made a mistake: according to Tucker, Stalin was able to recognise the rising of the bureaucracy and carve out an essential place for himself within it. This, he says, is the sign of 'formidable political talent'. Tucker, 'Several Stalins', p.107

²⁴ Trotsky, *Stalin.*, p.51

elevate himself above Stalin, despite having lost against him in the power struggle. Trotsky appeared to ask his reader to not only ask but to be outraged at how an unsophisticated, unintelligent job such as Stalin – ‘[h]is thinking is too slow, his associations too single-tracked... When he desires to produce forceful effect he resorts to vile expressions’²⁵ – could have taken a place that was, in Trotsky’s opinion, rightfully his. This replicated the emphasis on these traits in Deutscher and Souvarine’s works, and this implicitly but clearly differentiated Stalin not from only the author but also from Lenin and socialism.

The second strand of othering in evidence more closely resembles the Orientalist model and its tendency to emphasise specific national or regional traits perceived as innate and unchanging. It is predominantly present in Deutscher’s systematic comparisons of Stalin to previous Russian leaders. Writing towards the end of Stalin’s life in 1949, and with the majority of the Stalinist regime to reflect upon, Deutscher found similarities in the autocratic rule and characteristics of many of them, including Nicholas I, Peter the Great, Alexander I, and Ivan the Terrible.²⁶ He likened, for example, the Stalin of the Second World War years to ‘Ivan the Terrible raging against the *boyars*’, whereas the earlier industrialisation push made him look ‘more like Peter the Great’s direct descendant: was he not building industrial Russia in a way similar to that in which Peter the Great built his St Petersburg, on the swamps and on the bones of the builders?’²⁷ He remarked on the similarity of Stalin’s ‘ferocious spirit of empire building’ to that of the early tsars and believed that events now followed a path ‘familiar from the history of Russian autocracy’.²⁸ These comparisons suggest that Deutscher’s Stalin was not a historical aberration but a continuation of a Russian political tradition of leadership largely disconnected from the socialist revolution he was meant to be the

²⁵ Ibid., p.66

²⁶ Deutscher, *Stalin*, pp.355-361

²⁷ Ibid. p.360

²⁸ Ibid. p.360 and p.355

vanguard of. As Tucker has pointed out, Deutscher's Stalin was not a Marxist theorist or a man of ideas. He was principally a pragmatist concerned with making things work.²⁹ This did not mean that Deutscher maintained a neutral stand regarding Stalin's character. Despite the unremarkable nature of his private life, 'beyond reproach or suspicion'³⁰, Deutscher's Stalin was hardly inoffensive, not least due to these perceived similarities with some of Russia's past leaders. Deutscher, however, clearly expressed that Stalin was not a surprise, nor someone out of the ordinary: for example, 'his chicanery and trickery' were the methods by which 'rulers of all ages and countries had held their people in subjection'.³¹ Stalin was not unique; he was an almost predictable leader of Russia.³²

Deutscher, Trotsky and Souvarine were not alone in writing on Stalin in the West during this period and so not all works were written by anti-Stalinists or socialists who were trying to distance themselves from his regime. On the pro-Stalin front there were a number of publications, such as that of the French communist writer Henri Barbusse, which conveyed adoration of their subject, providing a striking contrast to the anti-Stalinists and a revelatory insight into the way in which Soviet sympathisers and loyal communists viewed Stalin at this time: Stalin was a man of simple and humble needs and manner, who was kind and gentle, but also brilliant.³³ In this way we see what the anti-Stalinists perceived as Stalin's provincialism and mediocrity depicted instead as desirable traits of simplicity and humility. His deceitfulness and slyness became cleverness and brilliance. Barbusse's text, for instance, was dense with these alternative depictions: the young revolutionary Stalin was able, through his simple manner, to relate to, and talk with, the workers around him: 'This sort of genius of his for putting himself on a level

²⁹ Tucker, 'Several Stalins', p.108.

³⁰ Deutscher, *Stalin*, p. 274

³¹ *Ibid.* p.361

³² See Chapter 6 for comment on the works that discuss Stalin's Georgianness in biographical writing.

³³ Official Soviet biographies and works on Stalin and Stalinism were also being published in the West during this period. See Chapter 6.

with his audience is the real reason for the confidence which he inspired in the people'.³⁴ Yet 'putting oneself on a level does not mean lowering oneself or humbling oneself or becoming stupidly familiar. Very far from it.'³⁵ He was softly spoken – 'violent language was for him a prohibited weapon'³⁶ – with 'a wonderful intuition'³⁷, loved to laugh and was a family man. According to Barbusse, Stalin laughed like a child, concluding that '[p]eople who laugh like children love children'.³⁸ Thus Barbusse's Stalin was intelligent and humorous, but also modest and low-key.

Barbusse did acknowledge that Stalin could be 'severe, even ruthless, towards incompetence and inexorable in dealing with treachery or sabotage'. As with the other seemingly undesirable characteristics, this intolerance was presented as more of a virtue than a fault and as a necessary trait in a great leader. Indeed, the statement was immediately followed by a 'but': 'But a whole series of cases may be quoted in which he warmly intervened in favour of men who seemed to him to have been accused without sufficient proof'.³⁹ Barbusse responded to critics of Stalin by stating that the case was simply that 'He is leader for the same reason that he is successful: because he is right' and recounted telling Stalin that in some countries he was seen as acting 'merely according to his fancy' and as a 'bloody tyrant'. Stalin's response was to lean back in his chair and 'burst into his hearty working-man's laugh'.⁴⁰ Barbusse's Stalin was so definitively not the tyrant he had been portrayed to be that it was veritably hilarious to claim otherwise.

Somewhere between the anti-Stalinists and Barbusse were authors such as Bertram D. Wolfe, who was an American scholar of German origin and who, for the first half of his adult life, was a

³⁴ H. Barbusse, *Stalin: A new world seen through one man* (London, 1935), p.11. Quotes will be taken from this, the first English edition, unless stated otherwise.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.11

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 12

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.19

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.292

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.86

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.157

socialist and supporter of the Bolsheviks as well as a founding member of the American Communist Party. Later in life he drifted right and became a leading anti-communist during the Cold War.⁴¹ However, at the time he wrote his book *Three Who Made a Revolution*, the Second World War had just ended and he sought to understand the three personalities at the centre of events in the USSR: Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky. The book was first published in 1948 and represented a turning point in the historiography of Stalin: after Trotsky's book, it was the first to systematically compare and critically examine previous historiography in order to consolidate the information into the most valid picture possible. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that when it came to Stalin's personality, Wolfe was somewhat defeated by the lack of information available to him. His research into Stalin's character was 'beset with obscurities and contradictions at every step', and he remarked that:

When one writes of a still living man it would surely seem a simple matter to put moot points up to him, and then, since no man is to be fully trusted as to his own opinion of himself, to check his answers against records, the testimony of neighbours, friends, associates, opponents. But in Stalin's case this is not as simple as it sounds. The versions he himself has dictated sometimes contradict each other concerning even elementary facts.⁴²

Despite these obstacles, Wolfe conducted a thorough analysis of the works that were more readily available to him, such as the Stalin biographies that had been written to date (official and authorised works, as well as those of the Georgian memoirists), which led him to exclaim: 'Strange fact: in none of Stalin's biographies does he come to life!'⁴³ A description of Stalin's personality was confined to the statement that he was the subject of an 'amazing cult that leaves no room for fallibility, or common humanity', though Wolfe was still left

⁴¹ See Wolfe's biography B. D. Wolfe, *A Life In Two Centuries: an autobiography* (New York, 1981).

⁴² B. D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made A Revolution – A Biographical History* (New York, 1948), p. 405

⁴³ Wolfe, *Three Who Made A Revolution*, p. 405

confused by the overall portrait of Stalin the man and found the mystery surrounding him ever thickening.⁴⁴ This sentiment was in fact replicated in much of the war and post-war Western biographical writing on Stalin. While Wolfe had been a socialist, Stalin's increased direct relevance to the West as a result of the war generated a spate of writing in which Westerners became concerned with trying to understand exactly who he was. The biographical writings of the time betrayed a residual wartime anxiety and the unease of the West with the rising power of the Soviet Union and with the man at its helm. These works were attempts to decipher who Stalin was, what drove him, and what his intentions were. In the simplest of terms, they were trying to ascertain whether he was a goody or a baddy.⁴⁵

The variety of the content of these works demonstrates that in this period in the West Stalin could still be both hero and villain. It is clear through Barbusse's work that supporters of the Soviet Union saw Stalin as a heroic figure and to some he was even a kind of demi-God.⁴⁶ This was perfectly illustrated in the closing sentences of Barbusse's 'The Man at the Wheel' chapter, which were heavily laden with religious terminology:

Although you do not know him, he knows you and is thinking of you. Whoever you may be, the finest part of your destiny is in the hands of that other man, who also watches over you, and who works for you – the man with a scholar's mind, a workman's face, and the dress of a private soldier.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp.405-406

⁴⁵ See for instance, D. M. Cole, *Josef Stalin: Man of Steel* (London, 1942) H. C. O'Neill, *Men of Destiny - Being studies of the Four who rode the War and made this precarious landfall* (London, 1953); Duranty, *Stalin & Co: The Politburo – the Men who run Russia* (London, 1949); J. T. Murphy, *Stalin: 1879-1944* (London, 1945); Y. Delbars, *The Real Stalin* (London, 1953) F. Owen, *The Three Dictators: Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler* (London, 1940).

⁴⁶ See Chapter 3 for a closer analysis of communist writing on Stalin in the West and specifically in Great Britain.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.297. Aside from the official works published abroad there are other Western examples of pro-Stalin writings from this period, although they differ stylistically from Barbusse. For example see B. Webb and S. Webb, *Soviet Communism: dictatorship or democracy?* (London, 1936) and by the same authors *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation* (London, 1935). See also J. T. Murphy, *Stalin: 1879-1944*.

Building on Reinke de Buitrago's identification of positive elements in othering, Barbusse's work can be seen to manifest 'positive othering', a process whereby positive content far outweighs, or entirely eclipses, negative content. Barbusse, for instance explicitly elevated Stalin above any other being, differentiating him and giving him, as we have seen, an almost divine status, the distinction being therefore that Stalin possessed such a wealth of positive attributes (and nearly none that were negative) that he was also unlike the self.

⁴⁸ In this way, the negative aspects highlighted in conventional othering are replaced by their opposite, yet there remains a key differentiation between the self and the other. Barbusse did not in any respect liken himself to Stalin or claim to possess similar traits but instead reinforced Stalin's extra-ordinary skills and character: 'This leader, who had fathomed the secrets of success and had brought them to such a pitch of perfection'⁴⁹, '[Stalin's] lightening-like promptness and sureness of action', as well as the God-like attributes that have already been quoted.⁵⁰

All of these depictions of Stalin suggest that the most decisive anti-Stalinists of this period were those who were or had been sympathetic to Trotsky. Wolfe, whose own political views were ambivalent, wavered noticeably in the middle, unable to decipher the true character of the man. For Souvarine and Deutscher, however, Trotsky provided first-hand experience of Stalin, as well as his close relations with, and in-depth knowledge of, the Soviet political scene. They, in turn, used this to propagate and develop those ideas of Stalin not only as a mediocrity but also as a brutal, untrustworthy and destructive leader. In doing so, Stalin as the ideological and

⁴⁸ Indeed a cult of personality could be understood as an extreme form of positive othering.

⁴⁹ Barbusse, *Stalin*, p. 86

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.86. Jean Relinger, a biographer of Barbusse's wrote that from their very first meeting Barbusse was won over by Stalin, using the word 'conquis': Barbusse was conquered by Stalin. This indeed seems accurate if only by the ensuing tone of Barbusse's book, which at times reads like a romantic ode to Stalin. See J. Relinger, *Henri Barbusse: écrivain combattant* (Paris, 1994), p.208

intellectual other formed the basis of these three historically influential works.

Nevertheless, it was not only the works by the anti-Stalinists that demonstrated othering of Stalin by the West. As highlighted by Reinke de Buitrago, othering is not solely manifested through negative representations: the difference between the self and the other 'can also be described with more positive content, such as admiration for certain achievements, or at least some level of recognition and toleration. Positive and negative content can vary, and many cases show a *mélange* of elements in a complex relationship'.⁵¹ This mix was in particular reflected in the wartime and post-war literature, through which we understand that the experiences of the war and the decade following led Stalin to be seen as a component part of an impressive and powerful, although not yet necessarily highly threatening, other (the Soviet Union). H.C. O'Neill, David M. Cole, Walter Duranty and Wolfe were all concerned with the little-known man at the head of the Soviet Union and, in turn, were both positive and negative in their assessments of him. Duranty, for example, described Stalin at once as 'hard and cruel' as well as patient, determined and eager.⁵² Cole described him on the one hand as a 'loyal friend and generous colleague', yet acknowledged that 'Woe betide them if they do not [work for the general good of the State]; a former friendship with Stalin will not save them from trial and the firing squad'.⁵³

3. On Stalinism

An analysis of how these works approached Stalinism as a regime reveals further patterns of othering, some of which again contain elements of Orientalist discourse. In the first instance, the most often repeated characterisation of Stalinism was as a break from Marxism-

⁵¹ Reinke de Buitrago, 'Introduction: Othering in International Relations: Significance and Implications', p.xv

⁵² Duranty, *Stalin & Co.*, pp.36-38

⁵³ Cole, *Josef Stalin*, p. 129

Leninism, and from Trotskyism, and these are particularly well reflected in the works of Souvarine, Wolfe and Trotsky. Souvarine, for instance, explicitly stated this by describing Stalin's leadership as a 'travesty of Marxism', but also expressed it in the way he wrote about the purges, the scale of persecution by the regime and the development of the cult of personality. Souvarine's biography of Stalin was first published in French in 1935, with the first English edition appearing in 1939. The English edition contained a post-script that dealt with events up to 1937, to the extent to which Souvarine was able to observe them.⁵⁴ From his vantage point Souvarine stated that 'the year 1937 will be less held in honour as the twentieth anniversary of October and the conclusion of the second Five Year Plan than in dishonour as the culminating phase of an autocratic terror unprecedented in human memory'.⁵⁵ Despite the closeness of these events, Souvarine was able to offer his own analysis of the situation. He did so in part by noting several key phases in the rise of Stalin: the political defeats of Trotsky in 1923, of Zinoviev in 1925, of their coalition in 1927, of Bukharin in 1929. He believed that these all strengthened the dictatorship although, according to him, these defeats, which were followed by harsh reprisals against any remaining opponents, were the culmination of earlier developments.⁵⁶ Souvarine saw the Kirov murder as a turning point, believing Stalin to be responsible though also stating it was an accidental outcome of a conflict between factions in high Soviet society, a 'rivalry between two cliques, one of which had been able to arm or guide the hand of a

⁵⁴ This is in contrast to Deutscher's later work in which the purges and Stalinism were extensively examined.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.598. Even at this early stage Souvarine was able to identify a scale of persecution that is surprising, in part thanks to a pamphlet that had been published (and then swiftly removed from circulation) revealing the number of condemnations made by tribunals up until 1929. Speculating on the figures beyond this, and with the help of estimations by escaped prisoner I. Solonevich, (who counted a minimum of five million people detained in concentration camps, without including those in the prisons, exiled or banished) Souvarine estimates that approximately ten million people were at that time suffering punishment at the hands of the regime, 'to speak only of the living'. See Souvarine, *Staline*, 1935, p. 534

⁵⁶ Souvarine, *Stalin*, p. 597

young and fanatical communist.⁵⁷ For Souvarine, the point at which the nature of the leadership was no longer the one that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had worked towards was Stalin's fiftieth birthday celebrations on the 21st December 1929. He described the extraordinary spectacle:

According to the incense burners of his entourage, all human and some superhuman virtues were incarnate in Stalin. His modesty, courage and devotion were paralleled by his knowledge and wisdom. He was the organiser of the Bolshevik Party, the leader of the October Revolution, the head of the Red Army, and victor in the Civil War as well as in foreign war. He was moreover, the leader of the world proletariat. The man of action proved himself as great as the theorist, and both are infallible; there is no instance of a mistake made by Stalin.⁵⁸

Souvarine observed these developments: the changes in attitude towards the leader, the propagation of cult-like literature, the giving of the name of Stalin to not only towns, but now also countless schools, factories and barracks.⁵⁹ He repeated those qualities afforded to Stalin with irony and in inverted commas throughout the book: 'The 117 executions ordered by the 'great and beloved leader' after the crime...' 'Stalin 'the adored' ...', 'But during the interval 'the greatest man of our planet' as he is pleased to hear himself called...'.⁶⁰ Souvarine's awareness of the cultish nature of Stalin's regime is clear. As for the changes occurring, he remarked that ten years previously

⁵⁷ Ibid. pp.598-599. The apparition of this theory here is noteworthy since the idea of the origins of the purges being found in the struggles and factions within the party is later developed by the revisionist J. Arch Getty. However, for Souvarine the purges originated in circumstances of inside squabbling with Stalin still being held directly responsible for the Kirov murder, for the mass killings and for the repressions that followed, whereas in Getty's work Stalin's direct responsibility was diminished. See J. A. Getty, *The Origins of The Great Purges - The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, 1985).

⁵⁸ Souvarine, *Stalin*, p.xiii. Souvarine also indicates a notable change from 1928 of the biographical information released in official Soviet literature. For example, instead of Stalin's father being a peasant from the village of Didi-Lolo, he becomes a 'boot operative' from Tiflis and the information was elaborated to portray Stalin as a 'writer, politician, soldier, statesman and even as a thinker and theorist'. See p.xii

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.xiii

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp.598-599

there had been celebrations to mark the jubilee of Lenin, the ‘real initiator of Bolshevism, the actual founder of the Communist Party, the authentic victor of October, the true creator of the Soviet State’.⁶¹ It was an intimate gathering, the record of it a ‘modest pamphlet’ of 30 pages. Souvarine’s reporting of these events is important to understanding his Stalinism: it stood well apart from Lenin and Bolshevism. It was not a natural continuation of what Lenin had started: ‘between 1920 and 1930 a profound change had come over the Russian Revolution’.⁶² Souvarine believed Stalinism to be a radical departure from what came before, and Stalin himself was at the centre of it. This idea was echoed in the other works. For example, according to Wolfe, the decisive turning points of the regime that distanced it from the revolution were all marked by changes in the way in which the history of the revolution, the Soviet Union and Stalin were reported. As Souvarine had, he marked 1929 as the first year of Stalin’s absolute rule, the beginning of the cult ‘which required the bringing of every moment of his past into accord with his present infinite glory’. This was followed by 1935, the year when Beria, then head of the Georgian Secret Police, went to work on the ‘streamlining of the new history’⁶³, then by the aforementioned purge years of 1936-1938, which altered the way in which memoirs were written. The next watershed was the year 1938, when Stalin himself took over the task of writing history in the originally anonymous official *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, which now forms Volume XV of Stalin's *Collected Works*; and the year 1946, when those *Collected Works* began to appear with biographical and other notes under Stalin's own supervision.

⁶¹ Ibid. p.xiv

⁶² Ibid. p.xiv

⁶³ When writing about ‘streamlining the new history’ Wolfe was referring to Beria’s *On the History of the Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia*, which rewrote this history to give Stalin a leading role in the development of the Transcaucasian social democratic movement. On this subject and the notion of rewriting history to glorify Stalin, see A. Knight, ‘Beria and the Cult of Stalin: Rewriting Transcaucasian Party History’, *Soviet Studies*, Vol.43, No.4, 1991, pp. 749-763

Wolfe's Stalinism shows awareness, even before Stalin's death, of the extent to which the Soviet government was reworking and rewriting the history of its leader, and of its revolution. His Stalinism was one of deceit, with an almighty cult at its centre which cultivated falsity and brutality. For Wolfe, as we understand through his use of Abel Enukidze's story, these two elements were completely intertwined: the epicentre of Stalinism was the desperation of Stalin to be more than he was.⁶⁴ This, in turn, led to the desperation of those around him to offer alternative histories, to glorify their leader far beyond that which was natural, with no guarantee whatsoever that this would save them from meeting an untimely end. It was this historiographical break, which Wolfe termed 'How History is Made' that provided the first decisive break from Lenin, stating that all memoirs, Party documents and reports of pre-revolutionary days that were written while Lenin was alive 'have had to be ignored, explained away, supplanted, suppressed, destroyed, before a new version could be established.'⁶⁵

Trotsky's use of the term 'Stalinism' in his biography of Stalin - written during the 1940s, in the last few years of his life when he had watched the Stalinist regime unfold - can help to understand one of the most influential ways in which the regime has been interpreted. It provided an efficient method by which Trotsky was also able to distance Stalinism from Leninism, Marxism and Trotskyism. Throughout the book, the term Stalinism was often used to compare the regime with other political regimes or theories – a trend repeated in the other works examined in this chapter – and most

⁶⁴ Following the enumeration of these historiographical milestones, Wolfe illustrated 'in human terms' the significance of these events through the fate of Abel Enukidze, an old friend and colleague of Stalin's. After an ill-fated but well intentioned effort at a biography of Stalin in celebration of the leader's fiftieth birthday, Enukidze found himself on trial for (correctly, it seems) implying that Stalin's role in the Baku underground social democratic movement in Georgia was not as important or as influential as Stalin had apparently desired it to be portrayed as. He was obliged to retract his memoirs, and to 'admit' them to be incorrect. Beria accused him of falsifying the history of the Bolshevik organisations in Transcaucasia 'deliberately and with hostile intent'. Less than three years later Enukidze was shot for being a 'mortal enemy of the people'. See Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, p.444

⁶⁵ Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, p.437

often in relation or in contrast to Trotskyism. In the book index, Stalinism is solely referenced in the format of ‘Stalinism and Bolshevism’, ‘Stalinism and Fascism’ or ‘Stalinism and Trotskyism’ and finally for Stalinism the reader should see ‘Stalin’.⁶⁶ In the context of these comparisons Stalinism was ultimately pitched against Bolshevism: one either supported one or the other since Trotsky saw Stalin as executing a ‘triumph’ over Bolshevism. It was following this triumph that those who had previously been critical of Bolshevism, ‘such as the Webbs, the Wellses and the Laskis’, had now become ‘fellow - travellers of Stalinism’.⁶⁷ For Trotsky adhering to Stalinism required turning your back on Bolshevism: the former was not a theoretical continuation of the latter, nor were there fundamental similarities between Stalinism, Fascism and Nazism. Indeed, Trotsky stated that the difference between the ‘social base of Stalin’s counter revolution’ and the ‘social base of the reactionary movements headed by Mussolini and Hitler’ ran parallel to the difference between dictatorships of the proletariat, ‘however distorted by Thermidorean bureaucracy’ and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the ‘difference between a worker’s state and a capitalist state’.⁶⁸ As for comparisons between Lenin and Stalin these were, he wrote, ‘simply indecent’.⁶⁹ The differences Trotsky established between Trotskyism and Stalinism in his writings indicate that he fundamentally disagreed with most, if not all, aspects of Stalinism. He was theoretically opposed to the notion of Socialism in One Country and the rise of the bureaucracy as a ruling class, and he believed Stalin to be an inferior politician, intellectual and man. The differences between Trotskyism and Stalinism were the essence of Trotsky’s writings. Outside of the

⁶⁶ Trotsky, *Stalin*, p. 511

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.335. Beatrice and Sidney Webb were British economists and socialists who were lifelong supporters of the USSR. Herbert George Wells was an English author, socialist and pacifist, who met with Stalin and who supported some of the work occurring in the Soviet Union. Harold Laski was also a British economist and a Marxist who defended the Soviet Union. All were involved in the British Labour Party.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.336

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p.336

context of differentiation, the word Stalinism was barely used: Stalinism was the ultimate other.

Yet for all their similarities, there were some notable differences between Trotsky's and Deutscher's interpretations of Stalinism, and it was these that led Deutscher to conclusions that eventually isolated him from the Trotskyists and pro-Stalinists alike. Deutscher, while starting out a Trotskyist, came to see Stalinism differently. After objecting to Trotsky's 1938 attempt to launch a successor to the 'morally dead' Third International, he began searching for the answer to why Stalin had succeeded in acquiring power and why history had taken the course it had⁷⁰. Deutscher concluded that the degeneration of the revolution had been present already when Lenin and Trotsky were in positions of leadership and power. Further, and even more controversially, he did not see Stalinism as a 'Thermidorian bureaucracy' - as it was described by Trotsky - subverting and arresting the revolutionary development but as a bureaucratised revolution itself carrying through that development 'though in distorted form, with the barbarous means and semi-primitive outlook of its native surroundings'.⁷¹ It was through the development of these theories that Deutscher became so isolated during the first decade of the Cold War: the Stalinists damned him for maintaining his Marxist ideals and views on the debasement of the revolution. The Trotskyists denounced Deutscher for stating that however truncated and disfigured they were, the brutally realised achievements of Stalin were in fact revolutionary.⁷²

Deutscher's tracing of the evolution of the purges and his search to understand how they were able to occur are one of the first instances in the historiography of an attempt to understand the

⁷⁰ D. Horowitz, 'Introduction', in D. Horowitz (ed.), *Isaac Deutscher: the Man and His Work* (London, 1971), p.11 This book is a collection of articles on the life and work of Isaac Deutscher, written by close friends and colleagues, and his wife Tamara Deutscher.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12

⁷² *Ibid.* p.12

process itself, and it created links between Stalinism and Leninism.⁷³ Tracing the origins of the purges back to the early 1920s before Stalin was even in power clarified one of the ways in which Deutscher deviated from the Trotskyists: for him the concept of ‘purging’ the party was not a creation of Stalin’s, even if he ultimately changed its nature dramatically and gave the concept an entirely new meaning. The consequence of this was to give Lenin and Trotsky a certain amount of responsibility for what came after. In this sense, he saw Stalinism as a deviation from Leninism but did not construct it as the definitive other. However, by looking at differences between Stalinism and Trotskyism, the traditional socialist perspective and Nazism, Deutscher more explicitly summarised Stalin’s departure from the traditional Marxist outlook:

It is easy to see how far Stalin drifted away from what had hitherto been the main stream of Socialist and Marxist thought. What his socialism had in common with the new society, as it had been imagined by Socialists of nearly all shades, was public ownership of the means of production and planning. It differed in the degradation to which it subjected some sections of the community and also in the recrudescence of glaring social inequalities amid the poverty which the revolution inherited from the past. But the root difference between Stalinism and the traditional Socialist outlook lay in their respective attitudes towards the role in the transformation of society.⁷⁴

On the other hand, we have seen that Deutscher drew repeated comparisons between Stalin and past Russian leaders. This demonstrates a dual othering process: firstly, Stalin himself was also compared with previous leaders, indicating an Orientalist tendency in

⁷³ Amongst the works of this period it is Deutscher’s which provides the most thorough examination of the process through which the purges developed, looking back to 1921 to determine their origins and applying his idea of the degeneration of the revolution occurring when Lenin and Trotsky were still in a position of leadership and power. Deutscher identifies five key moments which led to the ultimate purges of the late 1930s. See Deutscher, *Stalin: 1921 origins of the purges*, pp.233-234; in 1923, p.259; on the eve of collectivisation, p.313, pp.316-317; in the early thirties, p.350; after the assassination of Kirov, p.357. Deutscher also dedicates over ten pages to the purges of 1936-1937, pp.372-385.

⁷⁴ Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, p. 343

Deutscher's analysis.⁷⁵ In Said's *Orientalism* this is represented by historical generalisations based on a common character, which do not account for unique contexts and individuals, and by the idea of the Orient being unchanging and unchangeable. As a result of this, the West has no need to alter its own intellectual models of interpretation.⁷⁶ Deutscher's comparisons suggest that there was a general Russian style of leadership and that it was unlikely to change, repeating itself through time, right up to and including Stalin. Secondly, Deutscher's theoretical analysis of Stalinism led him to a systematic differentiation of Stalinism from Marxism, if not to a certain degree from Leninism. This reinforcement of the idea of the other's deviation from the better self (here understood as Marxist or Bolshevik) therefore rendered it at once inferior and dangerous. This was a process which replicated two of the main 'dogmas' of *Orientalism*, as defined by Said, in which the Orient was firstly systematically defined as the 'aberrant, undeveloped, inferior' other to the 'rational, developed, humane, superior' West, and secondly that the Orient, as a result of its inferior, backward and unchanging nature, was fundamentally something to either 'be feared...or to be controlled.'⁷⁷

In one sense, this first Stalinist other emerged still connected to Bolshevism and Marxism, since it was often expressed as a deviation from these ideologies rather an entity with which they had no common ground. However, Trotsky, Souvarine and Deutscher all explicitly distinguished Stalin and Stalinism from these. Their understanding of the regime enabled them to draw comparisons with their own ideological beliefs, and their aversion to Stalin led them to construct him as an other. The process through which they achieved this has manifested itself in the constant reassertion of his inferior and

⁷⁵ Deutscher himself was after all not Russian and in this sense may have differentiated himself from Stalin not only ideologically but also through national identity.

⁷⁶ See Brown, 'A Stereotype, Wrapped in a Cliché, Inside a Caricature', p. 152 and Said, *Orientalism*, p. 72, pp.104-105 and especially pp.239-240

⁷⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, p.300 and p.301

undesirable traits, and of his break from Marxism and Leninism in theoretical matters and matters of practical leadership.

As well as these individuals distancing themselves from Stalin, by highlighting the economic and industrial successes of Stalin's Soviet Union, other works of this time demonstrated othering of Stalinism. However, these were more consistent with the constructions identified by Neumann in Western othering of Russia during this period, notably as a legitimate consideration for a post-capitalist world. There was a radical chic in celebrating Russia, perhaps best exemplified by the British socialist economists Sydney and Beatrice Webb in their works on Stalinist Soviet Union: 'We do not think that the Party is governed by the will of a single person; or that Stalin is the sort of person to claim or desire such a position'⁷⁸, 'Stalin is now universally considered to have justified his leadership by success; first by overcoming the very real difficulties of 1925; then in surmounting the obstacle of the peasant recalcitrance in 1930-1933; and finally in the successive triumphs of the Five-Year plan'. The Webbs celebrated the Soviet Union as a progressive land of plenty.⁷⁹ Walter Duranty, the Anglo-American journalist and great supporter of Stalin, also wrote of Stalinism's success: 'the fact remains that the [First Five-Year] plan laid the firm foundation of a large-scale modern industry in Russia'⁸⁰. David M. Cole summarised these varying interpretations of early Stalinism of this period particularly well, stating that 'The future historians of twentieth-century Russia will characterize the years 1928-1934 as the "era of Socialist Construction" or as the "age of Bolshevik ruthlessness", according to their own political convictions'⁸¹.

⁷⁸ Beatrice Webb and Sydney Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*, Third Edition (London, 1944), p. 334

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 340

⁸⁰ Duranty *Stalin & Co.*, p. 61. Duranty was the New York Times' Moscow correspondent in the 1920s and 1930s. He was pro-Stalin and is known for whitewashing the regime, ignoring the famine and the show trials in his reporting. See S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty – the New York Times' man in Moscow* (New York, 1990).

⁸¹ Cole, *Josef Stalin*, p.71

4. Exiles and émigrés: writing on Stalinism in the 1930s and 1940s

Cole's statement was apt. Indeed, the first and most striking common aspect of the works written on Stalin during this period relates to their authors and their experiences with the 1917 revolution and the Soviet Union, revealing much about the motives impelling these men to write about Stalin. The earliest example of this is Eastman, who at the time of writing *Since Lenin Died* had spent the two years leading up to Lenin's death in the Soviet Union.⁸² Bazhanov had escaped the USSR, but his activities were closely watched by Stalin. He was the victim of several assassination attempts during his life and never married, fearing his frequent denunciations of the Stalinist regime would leave either him or his wife without a spouse, victims of the Stalin's vengeance.⁸³ Bazhanov's entire life, and his writings, were dedicated to raising awareness of the horrors of Stalinism and its threat to the West.⁸⁴ Nussimbaum's mother had been part of the underground social democratic movements in Baku before the 1917 revolution, the very same movement that Stalin had been a key provocateur in. Nussimbaum was bitter towards his mother, who he felt had 'poisoned' his life. However, many of his personal letters reveal a displaced bitterness expressed instead towards Stalin: 'He took my homeland away from me, the house, everything'.⁸⁵ Souvarine's, Deutscher's and Trotsky's political lives were also inextricably linked to the Soviet Union. Souvarine was born in Kiev in 1895 but his family moved to Paris, and he later became a

⁸² See the Max Eastman online archive:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/eastman/index.htm>

⁸³ Doyle, *Bazhanov and the Damnation of Stalin*, pp.viii-ix

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.ix. For example in 1940 Bazhanov spent time in Finland raising a small force of Russian prisoners to help the Finnish army fight off the Red Army.

⁸⁵ As quoted in Reiss, *The Orientalist*, p. 21

journalist for the socialist Press. He was actively involved in the Comintern: in 1919 he became secretary to the Committee of the third International, and a year later became a member of the Comintern. He travelled to Moscow and stayed there for several years until he was expelled in 1924 because he aligned himself with Trotsky. When he returned to Paris the next year, he set up an oppositional communist group but eventually also came into conflict with Trotsky, and broke with him in 1929.⁸⁶ Trotsky, possibly the most high profile and outspoken anti-Stalinist of the time, and indeed the most recognisable anti-Stalinist in history, was also a Socialist, Bolshevik and Leninist, who was exiled abroad after losing the battle for power against Stalin. Trotsky eventually settled in Mexico where he continued to write on his nemesis and his regime before his assassination in 1940. Trotsky, as Stalin's opponent in the struggle for power after Lenin's death, has continued to be at the forefront of debate and interest not only due to his role and activities during the 1917 Revolution but also thanks to his prolific writing.⁸⁷ Deutscher too was directly involved in Soviet communism. Around 1926, at the age of nineteen, he joined the Polish Communist Party, but he began to voice criticisms of the Party's programme and role as he grew uneasy with the state of the revolution in Russia, which he felt was succumbing to the chauvinism and backwardness of its national environment. He was expelled from the party in 1932, and during the next year he joined the Trotskyist

⁸⁶ Dekker & Nordemann BV, *The Two Russian Revolutions: The Libraries of Leon Bernstein and Boris Souvarine*, Catalogue 26, Dekker & Nordemann BV (Amsterdam, 1980), p.9

⁸⁷ Indeed, interest in Trotsky's life and works is in evidence through the volume of works dedicated to Trotsky and his ideas: some of the earliest works on Trotsky can be dated back to as early as 1920 - Roger Lévy's *Trotsky* for example - right up to the most recent by Robert Service See R. Lévy, *Trotsky*, (Paris, 1920) and R. Service, *Trotsky* (London 2009). Lévy's book is a history of the Marxist revolution in Russia from 1877 until 1919 and Trotsky's role within it. Lévy was a Socialist and supporter of Trotsky, who Lévy here described as an energetic and distinguished but perhaps idealistic intellectual. Interest does not seem to have waned: we can infer from the blurb of Service's book, inviting his reader to discover a new Trotsky, one who was not only a persecuted victim of Stalin but a 'Revolutionary practitioner, theorist, factional chief, sparkling writer, 'ladies' man' (e.g., his affair with Frieda Kahlo), icon of the Revolution, anti-Jewish Jew, philosopher of everyday life, grand seigneur of his household, father and hunted victim', that Trotsky re-examined, reinterpreted and to an extent rebranded is just as engaging for a modern audience.

opposition, attempting to generate resistance on the left to the trials and terror occurring in Soviet Russia.⁸⁸

All three wrote their works on Stalin only after they had become estranged from the regime. Souvarine withdrew from politics and in 1935 published one of the earliest and most influential works published on Stalin in the West in French under the title *Staline: Aperçu historique du bolchévisme*.⁸⁹ Souvarine's book is a particularly interesting historiographical work because it was written after the beginnings of collectivisation and the Five Year Plans, but before the Great Purges of the late 1930s and the rolling momentum of the public trials. It is one of the pioneering works on Stalin for the wealth of information it contains and for being one of the first complete works on the man, his career and his regime.⁹⁰ Trotsky too was abroad, exiled in Mexico, as he wrote his biography of Stalin. First published in 1947, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence* had still been a work in progress when Trotsky was assassinated in 1940 by an apparent courier who stabbed him with a pick axe. There was a tragic symbolism, Deutscher said, in the fact that the blood from Trotsky's head splattered the sheets of paper on which he had written his account of Stalin's career.⁹¹ By the time he came to write about Stalin, Deutscher too had become politically remote. Despite having left the Party, when it came to joining Trotsky's calls for a Fourth International in 1938, Deutscher had balked. His rejection of Stalinism and his divergence from Trotskyism led him to be an isolated but eventually influential historian. He wrote his biography of Stalin in the late 1940s, and it was eventually published in 1949.

There are two principal ways in which the works of these authors are unique in the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism. The first is that these writers were publishing works while the regime was

⁸⁸ Horowitz, 'Introduction', p.11

⁸⁹ Dekker & Nordemann BV, *The Two Russian Revolutions*, p.9

⁹⁰ Duranty described Souvarine as one of Stalin's 'least friendly' biographers. See Duranty, *Stalin & Co*, p.34

⁹¹ Deutscher, *Stalin*, p. 385

still in existence, and quite aside from the way in which they are analysed in this study, they are an indication of the remarkable awareness that those who had been involved in the Soviet Union had of events within it once Stalin's regime gained momentum. Secondly, these writers were not historians, nor political scientists by profession. Rather, they were spurred on to research and write on Stalin by the evolution of their own experiences and political convictions, moulded by their reactions to the Stalinist regime and drawing on those sources and resources that they could access in order to write their histories. As a result, their source material almost all stems from personal experience and direct access to people, events and literature from within the Soviet Union. Trotsky, for instance, mostly drew on first-hand experience. He knew Stalin, Lenin and all of the Bolsheviks and Party members well. He had attended meetings up until the late 1920s, and he understood the dynamics of the party.⁹² As Peter Beilharz highlights, Trotsky relied heavily on personal reminiscences and employed the first person throughout the book, underlining his personal involvement and familiarity with the subject at hand. In fact, the depth of Trotsky's knowledge led him to provide excessive detail on quite trivial matters, which often overpower the narrative and his analysis.⁹³

The young Isaac Deutscher was regarded by the Polish Communist Party of which he was a member as a rising star, an intellectual with a firm grip of theory, destined to be a key figure in the party. As part of the grooming process he was sent to visit Moscow in 1931. But rather than strengthening his dedication to communism, the trip weakened it. Deutscher had already developed some misgivings about trends and practices within his own party. When he arrived in Moscow and spent time with party members there, he was able to grasp the extent of the 'passion and bitterness' of the inner party struggle. Furthermore, in visiting Russia in the

⁹² Trotsky was expelled from the Politburo in 1926 and from the Party in 1928.

⁹³ P. Beilharz, 'Trotsky as Historian', *History Workshop*, No. 20 (Autumn, 1985), pp.36-55 p. 46

aftermath of collectivisation, Deutscher became dimly aware of acute social tensions.⁹⁴ A biographical article on Deutscher stated that ‘even before the Russian journey he had started to gather material for his first book.’⁹⁵ This was not the Stalin biography but a publication on the Jozef Pilsudski regime, and it suggests that Deutscher was ‘gathering’ sources both in Poland and on his first trip to Russia. In Poland he read the opposition paper which Trotsky had begun publishing in 1929, the *Bulletin Oppozitsii*, in which he found his own apprehensions about Stalin being echoed. David Singer dates the start of Deutscher’s admiration for Trotsky to this period.⁹⁶ For a brief period in the mid-1930s, just around the time that the public trials began in Russia, Deutscher joined the Polish Socialist Party, anti-Stalinists who fought hard to denounce the regime. Deutscher was living and fighting against Stalinism as it occurred, aware of what was happening inside the Soviet Union. In 1939 he left Poland and settled in London.

It was not until 1947 that he began the manuscript for his Stalin biography, but it was finished only eighteen months later. It had been so quick to write because Deutscher had all the data at his fingertips. He had been in the thick of opposition in Poland and had remained acutely aware of all the events in the Soviet Union, their scale and significance. Like Trotsky, Deutscher’s sources were his own experiences and involvement in the events themselves, his extensive theoretical knowledge and his wide reading. His bibliography contains many secondary sources of political histories of the Second World War and of the nations involved. He read memoirs, the Soviet press and court reports from the trials. The amalgamation

⁹⁴ D. Singer, ‘Armed with a Pen’ in D. Horowitz (ed.), *Isaac Deutscher: the Man and His Work*, (London, 1971), pp.27-28. Unfortunately, Deutscher did not leave much in the way of autobiography or memoirs. However, the essays in this book provide a clear and reliable account of his life, as told by those closest to him.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* pp.28-29

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.31

of this information allowed him to write one of the most comprehensive pre- Cold War works on Stalin and Stalinism.⁹⁷

Souvarine's work was also informed by direct involvement with the Communist party. After the First World War, Souvarine became the international affairs secretary to the Committee for the Third International. Souvarine was thorough in his bibliographical references. The first French edition of his work on Stalin contained a bibliography of no less than twenty five pages containing hundreds of sources from inside and outside the Soviet Union. Yet this did not even include the sources he used relating to general history and pre-Bolshevik theoretical works. Nor did it contain the biographies of revolutionaries of other schools of thought, nor statistical information, diplomatic texts, legislative documentation, monographs, nor the 'innumerable pamphlets, journal and press articles which were of use to the author'.⁹⁸ While Trotsky had not yet written his biography of Stalin, Souvarine referenced many of his articles published from the early 1920s through to the 1930s, which covered Trotsky's time as a member and then non-member of the party.⁹⁹ Souvarine's bibliography indicates that he read as widely and as thoroughly as it was possible. The sheer volume of his named sources indicates that he was able to access the information he needed at this time in order

⁹⁷ Deutscher, *Stalin*, pp.571-575. The bibliography notes only the sources to which Deutscher directly refers to in the text.

⁹⁸ B. Souvarine, *Staline: Aperçu Historique Du Bolchévisme* (Paris, 1935), p. 545. The bibliography is a mix of primary and secondary sources: he referenced hundreds of press and journal articles from, among many others *Pravda*, *Leningradskaja Pravda*, *Isvestia* and *Troud* in the Soviet Union, and the *New York Times Magazine* and *Foreign Affairs*, *The Asiatic Review* and *L'Europe Nouvelle* journals. He used the Baku police records detailing Stalin's arrests, *Bakinski Rabochi*, and articles published in honour of Stalin's fiftieth birthday. His secondary sources were equally varied and numerous: they ranged from theoretical works, such as Lenin's complete *Works* (which Souvarine describes as the main source for the study of Bolshevism), to memoirs of Stalin's old Georgian schoolmates, such as those of Joseph Iremashvili, *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens*, perhaps the most important source for information regarding Stalin's early life.

⁹⁹ These include articles from *Pravda*, *Bulletin de l'Opposition* and *Bulletin Communiste*, as well as works such as his *Works*, *Ma Vie – Essai d'autobiographie* [*My Life – Autobiographical Essay*] (1930) and *La Revolution Permanente* [*The Permanent Revolution*] (1931). See Souvarine's bibliography in the 1935 French edition, pp.545-574

to produce one of the earliest complete Western works on Stalin and Stalinism.¹⁰⁰

It is clear then that at this stage the major works being published in the West were being written by individuals who were in some way ideologically or personally invested in the Soviet Union. This is also true of other notable works on Stalin which emerged during this period, although this personal affiliation was not always the result of alienation or opposition. Henri Barbusse was at the opposite end of the spectrum to Souvarine and Trotsky. A French novelist, journalist and left-wing activist who rose to fame after the publication of his graphic anti-war novel *Le Feu*, which Barbusse based on his own experiences fighting in the First World War. He also became known for his tireless and vocal defence of the Stalinist regime. He joined the Bolshevik Party in Moscow, and later became a member of the French Communist Party. A long standing supporter of Stalin and the Soviet Union, where he spent a considerable amount of time, his biography of Stalin *Staline: Un Monde Nouveau Vu A Travers Un Homme* was published in 1935, the year he died.¹⁰¹ Barbusse and the previous three authors represent the extremes of pro- and anti-Stalinism, and yet they share the common characteristic of being ideologically and politically tied to Stalin and his regime.

¹⁰⁰ Souvarine., *Staline* , pp. 545-574.

¹⁰¹ There are two good biographies of Barbusse in French. The first is written in a style not dissimilar to that which Barbusse uses in his Stalin biography, and is highly sympathetic to the author: P. Baudorre, *Barbusse: Le Pourfendeur de la Grande Guerre* (Paris, 1995). The second is a more objective work: J. Relinger, *Henri Barbusse: écrivain combattant* (Paris, 1994). Additionally Annette Vidal, Barbusse's faithful secretary, penned her memoirs in A. Vidal, *Henri Barbusse – Soldat de la Paix* (Paris, 1953). It is not surprising that Barbusse's admiration for Stalin and the Soviet Union only grew with each visit: as Relinger and Baudorre report, and as verified by Vidal's memoirs, at each visit he was treated like a guest of the highest order; he was granted repeated access to the highest ranked members of the Party, Stalin included. Inevitably this adoration meant that Barbusse simply repeated what he was being told, and as a result he became one of the most vocal and passionate representatives of Stalinism in the West. However, as Relinger highlights, this does not mean that Barbusse's work lacks historical significance: in seeking to disprove the accusations of the West against Stalinism, and especially those of France, his writings give an invaluable insight into the dialogue, or at least the sentiment, in the West towards the Soviet Union at this time. See Relinger, *Henri Barbusse*, p.109.

5. Conclusion: Trotskyism and the Stalinist other

We have seen that in most of the cases examined here these early works on Stalin stemmed from personal political conviction rather than academic exercise or wider international political issues, although the latter do start to play a certain part in writing on Stalin after the Second World War. Trotsky, Souvarine and Deutscher all began by supporting the Bolsheviki, yet Trotsky's loss of power and the anti-Stalinism that followed provided those who developed doubts about Stalin with an alternative belief to follow, which, importantly, did not require a total break from socialism. *Since Lenin Died* was a denunciation of Stalin and defence of Trotsky. Eastman believed that Stalin's actions in the power struggle could be explained by Stalin's own awareness of his lack of Trotsky's many desirable traits. He saw Trotsky bringing to the battle 'all the powers of his personality, his art of objective and concise thinking, his mastery of Marxism, and of the method of Lenin, his sensitivity to political facts, and his great literary skill'.¹⁰² In the face of this, Stalin's only weapon was his 'brutality', and he used it to deceive and ultimately defeat Trotsky.¹⁰³ In later years, Trotskyism became central to constructions of the Stalinist other in the works of Souvarine and Deutscher. Although Souvarine wrote his book on Stalin before Trotsky, we know that he initially adhered to Trotskyism, and through the depth of his research was able to expose the problems with Stalinism as early as 1935, before even the most intense period of the purges had occurred. Deutscher's reflective effort to understand the success of Stalin eventually led to his isolation from both Marxists and Trotskyists, but it was Trotsky who allowed him to place his early apprehension about Stalinism into an interpretative and conceptual framework. The evolution of Wolfe's feelings towards Stalin was clearer by the time he came to write *Three Who Made a Revolution*: he was a communist still, but he had turned away from the Soviet Union.

¹⁰² Eastman, *Since Lenin Died*, p.59

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Thus, Souvarine' and Deutscher's stance, which produced two of the most influential Western works on Stalin and Stalinism of this period, stemmed from the opportunity presented to them by Trotsky's theoretical distancing from Stalinism, even if they later diverged from one another. Wolfe's work also came from a deviation from his original ideological stance. He did not suggest a particular allegiance to Trotsky; nevertheless, Trotsky's works were heavily referenced in his book as he sought to expose the problems of Stalinism. It was therefore Trotsky's thought and work which provided the basis for the first 'self' to the Stalinist other in Western publications. For Souvarine, Deutscher and Trotsky, Stalin and his regime epitomised everything which they were not and did not believe in, and their reassertions of his personal and political deviancy, inferiority and threat represented a clear process of this othering. In the Stalinist camp, Barbusse's and the Webbs' positive othering also constructed Stalin as an other, only in this case one that could be elevated to a higher, godlike plane: he was a dynamic, positive and benevolent force who not only watched over his people and protected them, but who also drove his country forwards.

Ultimately all of the individuals writing at this time were in some way directly affected by Stalin and his regime, and many were above all immeasurably bound in their writings by their own personal, political and theoretical engagement with Stalin and Stalinism. It is through these very first works that the Stalinist other first emerged in Western historiography: Stalin was mediocre and unremarkable, yet also Machiavellian, cunning and cruel. There was already an awareness of the violent and tyrannical nature of his regime, which was presented as a gross deviation from Leninism and one which bore little resemblance to the socialism that he had envisaged. This emergent basic understanding of the nature of Stalinism as brutal and repressive and headed by a sly and ruthless leader has largely remained intact. Yet with the advent of the Cold War in 1947, the terms within which Stalin and his regime were researched and constructed in the West began to shift dramatically.

Chapter 2

Conflict of the Two Worlds: Stalinism as the totalitarian other in the early Cold War¹

1. Introduction: the Cold War

From the end of the Second World War, the foundations of Western scholarship on Stalin and Stalinism altered radically. The key to understanding the resulting shift in the basis of the constructions of Stalin and his regime from the period covered in the previous chapter can predominantly be found in the impact of the unique context provided by the ensuing Cold War. There have been some thorough evaluations of the ways in which the notion of totalitarianism has been used by scholars in the West in their assessments of the how and why of Stalinism during the Cold War, notably by David D. Roberts and Abbott Gleason. Roberts, for instance, explored at length the variety of ways in which Stalinist totalitarianism has been interpreted in relation to Marxism, Leninism and a specific Russian model of history, while Gleason similarly looked at the interaction of Western scholars with this term, providing a more succinct summary of the evolution of this process over the Cold War period.² Ronald Suny has also given a concise assessment of the impact of the Cold War and the simultaneous emergence of modernisation theory on the field during this period.³ Further, there exists a vast body of work dedicated to the

¹ “Conflict of the ‘Two Worlds’” is the title of George Kennan’s first chapter in *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin*, in which he examined how the Soviet Union and Western countries were focused on entirely different conflicts in 1917 and 1918. In the Soviet Union the Bolsheviks were concerned with the Revolution, whereas the Western nations were entirely consumed by the First World War. See G. Kennan, *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin* (London, 1961).

² D. R. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the poverty of great politics* (New York, 2006), pp. 213-270 and A. Gleason *Totalitarianism: the Inner History of the Cold War* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 121-142

³ Suny, ‘Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the Twentieth Century’, pp. 28-32

notion of totalitarianism itself that explores its contexts and meanings, which have evolved over the twentieth century and beyond. With these assessments already providing a vast and rich source of information on Cold War totalitarian historiography, this chapter aims to shed light on one specific aspect of it within the field of Soviet studies: the construction of Stalinism as the ‘totalitarian other’.

2. The totalitarian other

The construction of the totalitarian other, Stalinist or otherwise, did not begin in the West with the advent of the Cold War. At least a decade earlier there were manifestations of this process in other forms. For example, Philip Williamson’s analysis of English Christian responses to totalitarianism in the 1933-1940 period demonstrates how in public political and religious discourse in pre-wartime Britain the possibility of subordination to totalitarianism (here principally Nazism) was seen by many influential conservative Christians as unchristian, weak and morally wrong. This, in turn, hugely influenced popular opinion towards supporting the war, suggesting that well before the Cold War the idea and threat of the totalitarian other was being constructed and deployed to strong effect.⁴ Later, during the war, Winston Churchill also pitched the fight against totalitarianism as the fight for Christian civilisation, in terms reminiscent of some of the earliest forms of othering of Russia by Christian Europe outlined in the Introduction: ‘Here in this strong City of Refuge which enshrines the title-deeds of human progress and is of deep consequence to Christian civilisation. . . ; here ... we await undismayed the impending assault’.⁵ Tom Lawson’s study of the response of the Church of England to Nazism highlights, too, how Nazism and Soviet communism were already in the 1930s seen as innately similar in their ‘totalitarian brutality’ and as a threat to the

⁴ P. Williamson, ‘Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge, 1933-40’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No. 462 (Jun., 2000), pp. 607-642

⁵ As quoted by Williamson in ‘Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge, 1933-40’, p.607

Christian world. The war with Nazism ‘was a war for Christianity’ and, as a result, so was war against Stalinism.⁶

From the 1940s to the 1960s, however, a political and ideological concept of totalitarianism came to the fore and became embedded in Western scholarship, framing how Stalinism would be studied and interpreted; this was reflected in an exclusive focus on the political sphere, named the ‘totalitarian-model’ of interpretation. The opening line of Abbott Gleason’s *Totalitarianism* stated that ‘Totalitarianism was the great mobilizing and unifying concept of the Cold War’.⁷ Implicit in this statement was that the West was being mobilized and unified against the great totalitarian other, exemplified in many of the works on totalitarianism published in the Cold War era, which strove to highlight the striking differences between totalitarianism and Western liberal democracy. An example of this can be found in *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952), where Israeli historian Jacob Talmon coined the terms ‘totalitarian democracy’ and ‘political Messianism’. Talmon defined the totalitarian democratic school as based upon the assumption of a sole and exclusive truth in politics. He called this ‘political Messianism’ because it suggested a preordained, harmonious and perfect scheme of things to which men are irresistibly driven and at which they are bound to arrive. It recognises ultimately only the political sphere of existence, and widens the scope of politics to embrace the whole of human existence. It treats all human thought and action as having social significance and therefore as falling within the orbit of political action. Its political ideas are not a set of pragmatic precepts or a body of devices applicable to a ‘special branch of human endeavour’. They are an integral part of an all-embracing and coherent philosophy. As a

⁶ T. Lawson, *The Church of England and the Holocaust: Christianity, Memory and Nazism*, (Woodbridge, 2006), p.6. Lawson explains that, as it was in the 1950s, the totalitarian concept was employed by inter-war Anglicans as a means of equating the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships as the epitome of all that was abhorred in the modern world. The British Christian community had had a diverse reaction to the 1917 Revolution, but Stalinism’s naked atheism nevertheless remained its most significant feature, and as a result it created considerable alarm. See Lawson, *The Church of England and the Holocaust*, p.46

⁷ Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, p.3

result, 'politics is defined as the art of applying this philosophy to the organization of society, and the final purpose of politics is only achieved when this philosophy reigns supreme over all fields of life'.⁸ Talmon clearly differentiated this from Western liberal democracy, which, on the other hand, assumes politics to be a matter of 'trial and error, and regards political systems as pragmatic contrivances of human ingenuity and spontaneity.' It also recognises a variety of levels of personal and collective endeavour, which are altogether outside the sphere of politics. The difference between the two is how they think of politics. Both 'affirm the supreme value of liberty'. But whereas one (liberal democracy) finds the essence of freedom in spontaneity and the absence of coercion, the other (totalitarian democracy) believes it to be realised only in the pursuit and attainment of an absolute collective purpose. According to Talmon, the problem that arises for totalitarian democracy is the paradox of freedom, and he questioned whether human freedom is compatible with an exclusive pattern of social existence, even if this pattern aims at the maximum of social justice and security. The paradox of totalitarian democracy, which is not present in liberal democracy, was 'in its insistence that they are compatible.'⁹

In 1951, Hannah Arendt, a German Jewish intellectual who had escaped to New York at the start of the war, argued in her hugely influential book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that totalitarianism had been borne of the collapse of the fabric of 19th century society, replaced by a mass society in which the state emerged as the only force that exerted influence on it. Arendt argued that the taste for freedom and striving for distinctive identity has been lost in modern society, making it susceptible to the extremes of totalitarianism. What characterised the masses from whom totalitarian leaders derived their support was their lack of political commitment and what Arendt called their 'radical loss of self-interest'.¹⁰ Totalitarian parties

⁸ J. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London, 1952), pp. 1-2

⁹ Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, p.2

¹⁰ H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1967), p.316

exploited the desire for unity and economic advantage, along with the pathologies of isolation and superfluity, and employed terror to destroy any lived relations outside the totalitarian web. The most extreme version of this world, in which associations and relationships between individuals (be they affective, political, economic or otherwise) were entirely obliterated and replaced by the sole relationship between the individual and the state, were concentration camps.¹¹

Though highly influential, Arendt's model did not fit the Soviet example particularly well. In 1956 Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski offered a new definition of totalitarianism in which they attempted to adapt Arendt's ideas to the Soviet variant, basing their notion of Soviet totalitarianism on the Stalinist regime. Friedrich himself had previously defined totalitarian society as resting on five key principles in a seminal essay in 1953, described by Engerman as a 'touchstone for future scholarship'.¹² These five aspects were an official ideology, a single mass party consisting of a relatively small percentage of the total population passionately dedicated to the ideology, a monopoly of means of combat, a monopoly of all means of mass communication and finally a system of 'terroristic police control'.¹³ This definition was later elaborated when Friedrich collaborated with his student Zbigniew Brzezinski. Total control over the economy was added as a sixth element, constituting what was referred to as the 'six-point syndrome'.¹⁴ Friedrich and Brzezinski's conclusions came from an analysis of the world around them, and their theory of totalitarianism was founded on

¹¹ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.392. For a summary of Arendt's main points see J. McGowan, *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, 1998), pp.15-18

¹² Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, p.207

¹³ C. J. Friedrich, 'The Unique Character of Totalitarian Society', in C. J. Friedrich (ed.), *Totalitarianism: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences March 1953* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp.52-53

¹⁴ C. J. Friedrich and Z. K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp.11-10. Leonard Schapiro wrote that 'syndrome' was an apt term 'for a syndrome, in its normal meaning, signifies the concurrence of certain symptoms which together constitute the disease'. See L. Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (London, 1972), p.18

their observations of Italian, German and Soviet societies under the inter-war and wartime regimes and, in regards to the USSR, also during the post-war years. Despite the totalitarian umbrella, Friedrich and Brzezinski did not equate fascism with communism, making the distinction that while the two were ‘basically alike’, ‘they are obviously not wholly alike.’¹⁵ Nevertheless, they recognised these six fundamental, defining characteristics that were distinctive not only for the fact of their symbiotic existence in these societies, but for their presence in all three, which had emerged in this unprecedented and unique form during the same period. Totalitarianism was depicted as a static state, in which society was non-existent. While this theorisation was resisted by many for its lack of accounting for clear societal dynamics and, in the case of the USSR, the changes occurring after Stalin’s death that contested the idea of a static and unchangeable system, it nevertheless had a huge impact on Cold War scholarship on the Soviet Union.

This makes their construction of the totalitarian other particularly relevant to this study. Friedrich and Brzezinski highlighted the extent to which totalitarianism was entirely different from Western democratic models, remarking that even in diplomatic behaviour ‘the democratic states are thus confronted with a pattern of behaviour completely at variance with their own’ and suggesting that totalitarianism was so pervasive and wide-reaching as to alter the norms by which individuals of totalitarian states interacted with others.¹⁶ For Friedrich and Brzezinski there could be no peaceful coexistence of a totalitarian dictatorial regime and the rest of the world since one principal threat of these regimes was their expansionism and their aspirations to a world-wide proletarian revolution: ‘peaceful coexistence of the nations peopling this world presupposes the disappearance of the totalitarian dictatorships...any

¹⁵ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, p.7

¹⁶ They were referring specifically here to Ribbentrop greeting George VI with a resounding ‘Heil Hitler!’ and the distribution by the Soviet contingent of revolutionary literature to military German bystanders at Brest-Litovsk. Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, p.58

relaxation of the vigilance required to face such ideological imperialists as the totalitarians is likely to result in disasters such as the Second World War or worse.’¹⁷ In Friedrich and Brzezinski’s work, totalitarian regimes were not only excluded from ‘the world’, but they also removed the possibility of peace. This suggests that it was the elimination of these regimes – deemed expansionist and aggressive – on which peace depended, with no allowances being made for the role of the formation and repercussions of Western foreign policy.

During this period therefore – and with some manifestations in the wartime period – both public and academic discourse on totalitarianism used many of the same terms to highlight notions central to totalitarianism, most notably coercion, terror, threat and danger as the opposite of the Western liberal democratic model and its basic tenets of freedom, peace and democracy. In this way they provided a theoretical and conceptual basis for the othering of the Stalinist Soviet Union on which totalitarian-model Sovietologists were able to build.

3. Scholarship and politics: writing on Stalinism in a Cold War context

As the world emerged from the Second World War, political tensions between the West and the Soviet Union became a dominant influence on the foundations of scholarship on Stalin and Stalinism, dramatically shifting those on which Trotsky and his contemporaries had built their work. With the collapse of the Grand Alliance, wartime support and sympathy for the USSR had given way to a powerful idea of the danger of communism, and the notion of ‘totalitarianism’ entered everyday public and political discourse. On March 12th 1947, US president Harold Truman enunciated the Truman Doctrine, in which he asked Congress to come to the aid of Greece. It was this

¹⁷ Ibid., p.68

speech that also ensured that the term ‘totalitarian’ became entrenched not only in American foreign and political policy, as a key notion in setting the terms of U.S global interest, but also in Western consciousness.¹⁸

To ensure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations. The United Nations is designed to make possible lasting freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes. This is no more than a frank recognition that totalitarian regimes imposed upon free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace, and hence the security of the United States.¹⁹

Earlier in the speech, Truman had also stated that the very existence of the Greek state was threatened by ‘the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority at a number of points, particularly along the northern boundaries’. This speech in effect marked the beginning of the Cold War, which over the next four decades saw the relationship between the Eastern Bloc and the Western democracies stretched to breaking point. The notion of ‘totalitarianism’, as set out by Truman, and elaborated by historical and political theorists, became the foundation on which scholarship on Stalin and Stalinism was built and defined for many years to come: the formative influences on publications in the West became increasingly politicised, and scholarship was no

¹⁸ Prior to this, the term had been coined by Benito Mussolini describing his aspirations for the Fascist Party’s control over Italy, but by the 1930s it was being used to describe not only Italy’s but also Germany and Russia’s goal of extinguishing private life beyond state control. It was then used by the Frankfurt School to enumerate totalitarian tendencies in modern capitalist societies, but when certain members of the school emigrated to the United States, they found that their definition competed with a staunchly anti-Soviet one promoted by the anti-Stalinist Left. It was only with the Truman Doctrine that the term moved beyond the precincts of the left and into the public sphere. See Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, pp.206-207

¹⁹ Transcript of the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine (last accessed 30/04/2013): <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/harrystrumantrumandocctrine.html>

longer predominantly written by exiled Socialists but by professional Sovietologists living and working in a world of acute ideological and political tensions between the Soviet Union and the West.²⁰

As in the previous period, the scholars whose works feature in this chapter were writers of their time and were deeply affected by the political climate in which they lived and worked. For example, many of the most influential individuals in the study of totalitarianism and the Soviet Union were European Jews who had been persecuted, and who had often been displaced, fleeing their home towns and countries. Arendt was a German Jew born in Hanover in 1906. She, her mother and her husband had made a long and extremely difficult journey to New York to escape Jewish persecution in Europe in 1941. It was the discovery two years later of the horrors of Auschwitz and her search to understand how it could have occurred that eventually resulted in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951 after six years of research and writing.²¹ Talmon, born in 1916, described the experience of growing up as a Polish Jew in the border town of Rypin as a unique context in which he was differentiated in terms of his religion, yet shared the same nationalist desires of his non-Jewish neighbours for a Poland free of German occupation. The influence of this time on Talmon's later writing on political Messianism is most strikingly in evidence when he described the particular condition of Rypin's Jews pushing them increasingly towards political awareness and even radicalisation: 'They [the Jews] were caught between two Messianic flames, one blowing from Moscow, the other from

²⁰ In his analysis, Lawson suggested that after the German surrender Nazism was swiftly replaced by Stalinism as the enemy of Christian civilisation. This did not require a reconceptualization of the enemy: Stalin replaced Hitler, and the similarity between the two regimes was such for the Anglican Church that even their emblematic institutions were directly compared: the Soviet state was seen to rest on the 'methods of the Gestapo'. See Lawson, *The Church of England and the Holocaust*, p.134

²¹ J. McGowan, *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, 1998), pp. 1-8

Jerusalem, the vision of world revolution and the myth of the nation’.²²

In Sovietology, the convergence of these troubled and often traumatic personal lives with the increasing Cold War tension led to a scholarship defined both by individual experience and political context. Alfred G. Meyer wrote that it was difficult for the later revisionists in Soviet history to understand the ‘profound’ effect that the hysteria of the Cold War of the 1940s and 1950s had on the profession at this time. Teaching was highly politically charged, and it was a time when scholars self-censored their facts, findings and conclusions, not because they doubted their own work, but in order not to discredit themselves politically.²³ One of the principal critiques by the late revisionists of the totalitarian model was this political bias: they felt that to the old Sovietologists, scholarship had become more about fulfilling the needs of the US government (who pumped research funding into Soviet studies) by turning out the necessary anti-communist propaganda, than about providing truthful and objective research on the subject.²⁴ It is perhaps too strong to call the early works on Stalinism Western propaganda, yet it is beyond doubt evident that the impact of the Cold War on Western governments and academic institutions helped to create a rigid interpretative framework within which scholarship on Stalinism developed.²⁵

Within this context, the lines between state and academia repeatedly became blurred, and there were instances of scholars simultaneously occupying roles in both spheres. There are several examples of this: George Kennan established the first US

²² As quoted by A. Dubnov, ‘Priest or Jester? Jacob L. Talmon (1916-1980) on history and intellectual engagement’, *History of European Ideas*, Vol.34, No. 2, June 2008, pp. 133-145, p. 135

²³ A. G. Meyer, ‘Coming to Terms with the Past...And with One's Older Colleagues’, *The Russian Review*, Vol.45, Issue 4, October 1986, pp.401-408, pp.403-404

²⁴ S. Fitzpatrick, ‘Revisionism in Soviet History’, *History and Theory*, Vol.46, Issue 4, pp.77-91, pp.80-81

²⁵ Nevertheless, despite the dominance of the totalitarian model of scholarship in the period 1947-1970, there was never one entirely unifying thought in the West. E.H. Carr for instance was uncomfortable with much of the work of his contemporaries. See Chapter 4.

ambassadorship in Moscow in the 1930s and later, through an article entitled 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct' published in the *Foreign Affairs* journal, he effectively spelled out what would become the US 'containment' strategy in regards to the USSR. This remained at the centre of Western Cold War policy for the next 40 years and became central to scholarship on the Soviet Union. While he was active on the US diplomatic and political scene, he was also an academic and was a founding member of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, established in the 1970s, a component of the Wilson Centre. The institute itself, however, was constantly pulled between scholarship and relevance.²⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski also occupied dual roles in academia and politics. Born into a family of the Polish nobility, Brzezinski was deeply influenced by the rise of the Nazis and the Second World War, after which his family could no longer safely return to Soviet-rule Poland. Indeed, he has said that 'The extraordinary violence that was perpetrated against Poland did affect my perception of the world, and made me much more sensitive to the fact that a great deal of world politics is a fundamental struggle'.²⁷ A Sovietologist at Colombia from the 1960s, Brzezinski's policy work eventually took over from his academic work: by the mid-1970s he had become a policy pundit, before being recruited as an advisor by Jimmy Carter, writing policies which mainly focused on increasing the stresses on the Soviet system.²⁸

From the 1970s onwards, Richard Pipes too was heavily involved in US government consultations on the Soviet Union, leading part of a competitive analysis project commissioned by the CIA, 'Team B'. It set out to evaluate 'conflicting interpretations of

²⁶ Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, pp.249-250. Engerman writes that the institute had partly been intended to celebrate the 'broad humanistic study' of Russia, but there was little in the way of humanistic orientation in the early years: the first conferences and visiting fellows tended to be made up of historians and social scientists whose research themes and discussions leant heavily towards policy.

²⁷ Al Jazeera, 'One on One: Zbigniew Brzezinski' (last accessed 8/07/2013): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03ApSE6mgHE>

²⁸ Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, p. 5 and p.263. For a closer look at Brzezinski's work with Carter see G. A. Andrianopoulos, *Kissinger and Brzezinski: The NSC and the Struggle for Control of US National Security Policy* (London, 1991).

the Soviet stance in the world today', and, in particular in Pipes' case, Soviet strategic objectives.²⁹ Later, when Ronald Reagan became president, he recruited Pipes as his Soviet expert on the National Security Council staff. Pipes' role lasted two years, during which his work made a considerable impact: he contributed, for instance, to parts of Reagan's Westminister Speech, most notably, he says himself, the passage on Marxism in which Reagan described the situation in the USSR:

I sent essentially one paragraph about Marxism to explain what was happening in the Soviet Union. I was astonished when it was used because somehow you didn't expect Ronald Reagan to say yes, Marx was right. But he was right in a certain sense, (and these phrases are in the speech) that when the political system is out of step with the socio-economic base you'll find yourself in a revolutionary situation and you face a great crisis; but this applies to them and not to us.³⁰

There was a clear interaction between the US state, academic interests and work on the USSR. The situation in the USA at this time demonstrates an extreme example of the strong mutual influence that can occur between state and academia. Its complexity was symptomatic of the world in which it occurred, its repercussions wide-ranging and deep for the field of Soviet studies as well as for US policy, since who the State recruited (for instance, Pipes and his anti-

²⁹ Ibid., pp.279-280

³⁰ R. Pipes, 'Ash Heap of History: President Reagan's Westminister Address 20 Years Later - Remarks by Dr. Richard Pipes', 3 June 2002 (last accessed 29/05/2012):

http://www.reagansheritage.org/reagan/html/reagan_panel_pipes.shtml. The passage from Reagan's speech that Pipes was referring to was: 'In an ironic sense Karl Marx was right. We are witnessing today a great revolutionary crisis, a crisis where the demands of the economic order are conflicting directly with those of the political order. But the crisis is happening not in the free, non-Marxist West, but in the home of Marxist-Leninism, the Soviet Union. It is the Soviet Union that runs against the tide of history by denying human freedom and human dignity to its citizens. It also is in deep economic difficulty. The rate of growth in the national product has been steadily declining since the fifties and is less than half of what it was then.' See R. W. Reagan, 'Address to Members of the British Parliament', June 8 1982 as cited on '20 Years Later: Reagan's Westminister Speech' (last accessed 29/05/2012): <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2002/06/reagans-westminister-speech>

Soviet stance) in turn influenced policy.³¹ Pipes, like Arendt and Talmon, was Jewish. His family fled occupied Poland and the Nazis in 1939, arriving in the USA in 1940, where they settled indefinitely. Pipes himself attributes this experience as one of the most formative of his life.³² What is most striking about Pipes' influence on policy at this time is his default anti-Russian stance. Pipes himself acknowledges that he has often been accused of 'Russophobia'. Defending himself against this, he has stated that he has immense respect for Russian intellectuals and for Russian culture, arguing that 'I would hardly have devoted my life to studying a people I disliked'.³³ However, his view on Russian political life, most influential in his dealings with the US government on their Soviet policy as well as being the subject of his academic work, was that 'Russians are an intensely personal people who have never succeeded in translating their warm human feelings into the impersonal relations required for the effective functioning of social and political institutions'.³⁴ Hence he believes that they 'require a "strong hand" to regulate their public lives'.³⁵ He dislikes this feature of Russian life and dislikes 'the people who implement it', including Russians 'who hold a public post'.³⁶

In the UK, while the links between academia and state were not so deeply politicised, there are also examples of crossovers between the spheres. For instance, Robert Conquest studied at Oxford during the 1930s after which he crossed over into the governmental sphere.³⁷ His career has been varied and his activities have been both

³¹ This has been exemplified brilliantly in Engerman's *Know Your Enemy*, the focus of which is the dynamics between US state policy and its demands on academic research on the USSR during this period and beyond.

³² R. Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (New Haven, 2003), pp.33-41

³³ *Ibid.*, p.63

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.62

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.62

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.62

³⁷ As with Harvard, Oxford had traditionally been a stronghold for more traditional forms of Sovietology. For example, Leonard Schapiro attended around the same time as Conquest. Conquest's work, however, was a particular strand of totalitarian model scholarship, one which he dubbed 'Kremlinology': the study of personal politics in the highest reaches of the Soviet party and government, as opposed to political science. In focusing on power and leadership, Conquest purposefully and

governmental and academic: during the Second World War he worked for the British military intelligence, and after the war he worked in the secret Information Research Department, a major front in the propaganda war against the Soviets. It was only after this, in 1956, that Conquest started working as a freelance historian and writer, during which time he wrote his most recognised and influential work *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*.³⁸

At the same time as the Cold War developed, another historiographical trend influenced Western thought: the modernisation paradigm. Modernisation theory proposed that societies would progressively assume greater control over nature and human suffering through developments in science, technology, mass education, economic growth and urbanisation. 'Liberal modernisation theory' was elaborated in the West in opposition to Marxism and claimed that the best road to modernity lay through capitalism, with no necessary transcendence to post-capitalist socialism.³⁹ While the modernisation paradigm proposed a universal developmental pattern, it differed from the totalitarian model scholarship, which was built on clear differences between Stalinism and liberal democracies. As a result, it provoked a less drastic opposition to Soviet communism, which despite its totalitarian characteristics displayed high levels of industrialisation, and health and educational improvements. In this sense, it at times provided a kind of moderator to the sometimes extreme othering of the totalitarian-model scholarship, and its influence can be seen in many of the works that even through the othering process recognised the successes of Stalinism.⁴⁰

determinedly did not dwell on social dimensions, a process criticised by the first wave of revisionists emerging simultaneously during 1960s.

³⁸ A. Brown, 'Poet and Scourge', *The Guardian*, Saturday 15 February 2003. This is the most extensive biographical account of Conquest currently to be found. However, as a press article it lacks references, and in an interview with RFE/RL radio on 10 December 2008 Conquest stated that in the article Brown had 'made quite a lot of mistakes', but made no indication of what these were.

³⁹ Suny, 'Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century', p.29. As Suny points out, Marxism may also be understood as a theory of modernisation, complete with its own theory of history that reached beyond capitalism to socialism.

⁴⁰ Again, this is an example of Reinke de Biutrago's suggestion that the process of othering does not necessarily indicate the absence of the attribution of positive

This multi-faceted context is crucial to understanding how Western writing on Stalin shifted from the previous period: from the late 1930s onwards totalitarianism as a concept and as a reality was at the forefront of Western consciousness. It presented a direct threat, both ideologically and physically, to Western nations, and with such strong links between academia and government, especially in the United States, it became the linchpin of othering of the Soviet Union by the West.

4. The Stalinist totalitarian other in Western historiography

The period 1947-1953, which Engerman describes as ‘the heyday of totalitarianism’ in public political discourse, marked the birth of totalitarian-model scholarship in the Soviet studies field.⁴¹ The USSR’s actions during this period – the cultural rejection of anything non-Soviet, the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe and the creation of the People’s Republic of China (for which Stalin was widely credited), for example – reinforced the notion that the USSR was a totalitarian state: it could not be changed from within, it was a direct threat to global security and US interests, the state dominated and even effaced society, and it was expansionist.⁴² While politicians clearly had need for this term, it quickly became as crucial to academic writing on the Soviet Union. While even after Stalin’s death it remained a central term in policy discussions, the Soviet totalitarianism being referred to was largely that of the Stalinist

characteristics to the other, and indeed this can go so far as to express admiration of the other in certain situations. In this case, the totalitarian-model scholars recognise and admire many of the industrial, educational and health-sector developments under Stalin, which ties in with the modernisation paradigm and suggests it was one, although not the dominating, influence on this historiography.

⁴¹ Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, p. 206

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.206. Suny also points out that the usual language used by Americans to describe the other great superpower was consistently negative: aggressive, expansionist, paranoid, corrupt, brutal, monolithic and stagnant. Exchange students going to the USSR for a year of study routinely spoke of ‘going into’ and ‘out of’ the Soviet Union, as if into and out of a prison, instead of the conventional ‘to’ and ‘from’ used for travel to other countries. Suny suggests that language itself ‘reproduced the sense of Russia’s alien nature, its inaccessibility and opaqueness’. Suny, ‘Reading Russia and the Soviet Union’, p.38

regime.⁴³ As a result, usage of the term ‘totalitarianism’ became a tool with which to construct the Stalinist other in Western scholarship during this period.

The two principal interpretations of the origins of Stalinist totalitarianism that emerged during this period stated that it was either a complete break from what came before 1917 (and stemming from this are two further interpretations that see Stalin as either a continuation or a break from Bolshevism/Leninism) or that Stalin’s regime was a continuation of a previous Russian tradition of leadership. Despite the debates that occurred around these issues, both interpretations contain common points on which othering was hinged.

A common theme across both interpretations was the depiction of the Soviet Union and the West as ‘two worlds’. George Kennan’s *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin* (1961) exemplified a clear pattern of this method of othering and was replicated in many works of this period. In this study of Russian and Western relations in the period 1917-1945, Kennan was clear that Stalin and his regime represented a definitive other to the West. He reinforced this otherness by making systematic reference to the ‘two worlds’, communist and non-communist and, like Friedrich and Brzezinski, isolated Stalinist Soviet Union from the rest of the world. The repeated use of this concept reinforced the idea of it being an outsider, and distinctly separate from the West: ‘rendered even more difficult the problem which Soviet power in Russia presented for the outside world’, ‘Against this background [of Stalin’s lack of transparency in foreign relations], even the nature of the antagonism between the two worlds tended to become blurred’, ‘It has been my hope that ... [these] general reflections would help us to understand what it was that happened in the relations between Soviet Russia and the outside world, and how all this operated to produce the enormous disharmony of the present day which we refer to as “the cold war”’.

⁴³ R. Dallek, ‘How We See the Soviets’ in M. Garrison and A. Gleason (eds.), *Shared Destiny: Fifty Years of Soviet-American Relations* (Boston, 1985), p. 93

⁴⁴ Kennan's preoccupation lay with harmonious relations with the Soviet Union, deemed impossible with Stalin due to his Machiavellian and duplicitous character. Kennan's Stalin was close to Trotsky's: he was insecure, vain, jealous and vengeful, yet also manipulative, shrewd and clever, and the combination of these traits led Stalin to become the leader he was. Kennan, however, also stated that Stalin's character was characteristic of the 'Caucasian mountain race', which gave him 'an inordinate touchiness, an endless vindictiveness, and inability of ever forgetting an insult or a slight, but great patience and power of dissimulation in selecting and preparing the moment to settle the score'.⁴⁵ This kind of regional generalisation is reminiscent of Said's Orientalism, and since the totalitarian-model of interpretation placed the responsibility for Stalin's regime largely in his own hands, this characterisation was central to Kennan's construction of the Stalinist other.

Nevertheless, unlike Friedrich and Brzezinski, just a few years later Kennan suggested that coexistence should be encouraged and that it should be the West's goal to find ways to live with the Soviet Union, 'influencing it, even if this has to be done at the expense of our chances for destroying it entirely'.⁴⁶ Robert Conquest similarly stated that while it could not be said that political democracy or freedom of thought in the Western model were flourishing in the Soviet Union, there was still hope that it might evolve in the 'right' direction.⁴⁷ This Orientalist construction of the West as reformer of the Soviet Union suggested that Western liberal democracies considered themselves a superior system that could influence or rectify the deviant Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Western observers of the early Cold War period still clearly implied that the ideal solution would be its destruction.

⁴⁴ Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, p. 258 and p. 260

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.248

⁴⁶ G. Kennan, *On Dealing with the Communist World* (New York), 1964, p. 5. While this was published ten years after Stalin's death, Kennan associates some of the most difficult aspects of dealing with the Soviet Union to the Stalinist era.

⁴⁷ R. Conquest, *Common Sense About Russia* (London, 1960), p.16

The distinction between a necessary peaceful coexistence of these ‘two worlds’ – within which a certain level of containment of the USSR was nonetheless desired – was repeated regularly in other works of this period. Sigmund Neumann partially blamed Europe for ‘having pushed Russia out of the Western world’ and described the Soviet Union and the West as ‘two worlds’.⁴⁸ Merle Fainsod also referred to the West as the ‘outside’ world, and in Adam Ulam’s work the ‘confines of the free world’ must be protected, since this was where the ‘proper’ aims of politics and freedom had been developed.⁴⁹

Ulam also emphasised the vast space between Western and Stalinist realities: such were the horrors of Stalinism that they could not even be adequately described or imagined by ‘even the most arduous Western attempts to depict [them]’. These attempts to do so had been rendered ‘feeble and ineffective’ by the 1956 revelations.⁵⁰ This was echoed by Conquest who highlighted the ‘*differences*’ (Conquest’s emphasis) between Soviet and Western political life as of the ‘utmost importance’ in any attempt to understand Soviet life. Without them, Western observers were likely to fall into ‘democratic reflexes’, as a result of which their work would be ‘practically worthless because of this imaginative failure’.⁵¹

A more obvious method of othering can be found in Fainsod’s *How Russia is Ruled*, a cornerstone for the totalitarian-model scholarship for its rigorous account of the totalitarian regime in place under Stalin. Here the otherness of the Stalinist regime was systematically reinforced by differentiation through comparison to Western democracies and their methods of administration and governance: ‘Soviet public administration exhibits attributes which sharply differentiate it from the administrative systems prevailing in

⁴⁸ S. Neumann, *Permanent Revolution: Totalitarianism in the Age of International Civil War*, Second Edition (London, 1965), p.11

⁴⁹ M. Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p.115; A. Ulam, *The New Face of Soviet Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp.65-67

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.183. Ulam also states that ‘Stalinism is the clear antithesis of liberalism’. See Ulam, *The New Face of Soviet Totalitarianism*, p. 44

⁵¹ Conquest, *Common Sense About Russia*, p.71

Western constitutional democracies’, ‘The problem of erecting safeguards against the abuse of administrative power is therefore conceived differently from its counterpart in Anglo-American constitutional systems with their heritage of devotion to personal liberty’, ‘Soviet public administration replaces Western constitutional restraints on administration by a formidable proliferation of central controls of a variety and on a scale without parallel in the West’, ‘The Soviet collective labor agreement is a very different instrument from its Western counterpart’.⁵²

However, even more noticeable in Fainsod’s work was the profoundly *Russian* character of this Soviet totalitarianism, which is much more closely connected to the historical othering of Russia by the West, as set out in the Introduction, and to the Orientalist approach. For all of Fainsod’s insights into the subtleties and particularities of how communism developed under Stalin, he ultimately believed that Stalinism was more or less born of the tsarist forms of leadership. Fainsod himself stated that it would be erroneous and ‘shallow’ to say that the Russian is ‘congenitally destined to be governed despotically or that there is some mystic substance in the Russian soul which breeds submission before authority’.⁵³ Yet in the following paragraph he went on to state that ‘the frame of analysis must include as well those distinctive characteristics of the Russian historical legacy that have left the Russian people badly prepared for self-government’.⁵⁴ Indeed, Fainsod’s account of Stalinist totalitarianism was deeply historical: it took root in the method of rule established by the tsars, on which the Bolsheviks then built their own organisational and leadership structure. In examining the early pre-1917 organisation of Bolshevism, Fainsod suggested that the organisational conception that embodied Bolshevism was an incarnation of the ‘elitist ideal’, which had been created by the tsarist system and that now manifested itself in a kind of upside-down mirror

⁵² Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled*, pp.327-329 and p.433

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4

image of the tsarist autocracy: by the time the revolution came about, the small proletariat was dominated by an even smaller Marxist intelligentsia, which was highly authoritarian and elitist, and it was from here that communist totalitarianism stemmed. For Fainsod, the experience of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union had fundamentally Russian origins.⁵⁵

While not a direct replication of the Orientalist strand present in Deutscher's systematic comparison of Stalin's leadership to that of the Russian tsars, Fainsod's insistence that Bolshevism was based on the same elitist principles of tsarist rule and that this itself led to full-blown totalitarianism indicates a common strand of thought, only now constructed around the more contextually relevant issue of totalitarianism. In turn, this was a strong assertion by Fainsod of the unchanging character of Russian leadership: while tsarism, Bolshevism and Stalin's totalitarianism could be clearly defined by varying characteristics and historical contexts, the latter two only existed as a germination of the former, evolved within a specific context. While early on in the book he remarked that Kennan was right to suggest that totalitarianism was a 'disease to which all humanity is in some degree vulnerable', Fainsod also admitted to insisting that 'Bolshevism has an organic connection with the Russian past'.⁵⁶ Despite his statement that 'cultural determinism carries the same dangers as other forms of determinism',⁵⁷ this specifically Russian connection was what led Fainsod to construct and reinforce Stalinist totalitarianism as a clear other to the West, both historically and politically.

The idea of Bolshevism mimicking tsarism and eventually leading to Stalinist totalitarianism showed up in many Cold War

⁵⁵ See Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled*, especially the chapter entitled 'Bolshevism before 1917' where Fainsod concluded that it was from this elitist tradition that totalitarianism emerged in the Soviet Union. Gleason gave an excellent summary of this point in Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, pp.122-123, highlighting that Fainsod came close to stating that 'Communism is [Tsarism] turned upside down' or that 'tsarist maximalism created Bolshevism.'

⁵⁶ Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled*, p.3

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3

publications. Sigmund Neumann, for instance, suggested that ‘in many respects, Soviet Russia was czarism, its symbols reversed and its ruling elite changed – a pyramid upside down’ and that it inherited the Okhrana of imperial rule and ‘its general Asiatic feature’.⁵⁸ Neumann’s work was overall in keeping with historical and Orientalist constructions of Russia, in particular regarding the character of Soviet totalitarianism as rooted in ‘the peculiar conditions of Eurasian Russia’ possessing a fundamentally Asiatic character, ensuring that ‘the centuries-old dualism of western and eastern influences is still alive’. In the 1930s, Neumann wrote, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia still preserved her ‘oriental character’.⁵⁹ Richard Pipes, too, argued that there was economic, social, and political continuity in Russia from the fifteenth century through to the Soviet Union. This was exemplified in *Russia Under the Old Regime* where Pipes’ analysis of the tsarist system led him to Bolshevism and then eventually Stalinist totalitarianism. For instance, he believed that the tsarist model of a police state was put together by the Bolsheviks as soon as they took power and that it was progressively perfected as a tool for repression. Eventually under Stalin’s dictatorship ‘it attained a level of wanton destructiveness never before experienced in human history.’⁶⁰ Earlier in the twentieth century certain experimental policies by the tsarist government had even ‘overstepped the boundaries of police regime and moved into the even more sinister realm of totalitarianism.’⁶¹ Walt W. Rostow also saw a Russian character consistent in both tsarist and Stalinist rule which, he suggested, existed because ‘the national characteristics of a society, created by a very long process, are bound to leave their mark on its political techniques – even when political rule is arbitrarily imposed’.⁶² While he differed from the Orientalist model in that he

⁵⁸ Neumann, *Permanent Revolution*, p.11

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11

⁶⁰ R. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (London, 1974), pp.317-318

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.312

⁶² W. W. Rostow, in collaboration with Alfred Levin, and with the assistance of others at the Centre for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *The Dynamics of Soviet Society* (London, 1953), p.126.

saw the possibility for change, and did not consider Russian history to be static, he saw Stalinism as an extreme version of autocracy in which analogies between Stalin, Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible were ‘real enough’.⁶³

It is therefore evident that the interpretative model which suggested that Stalinism was a natural successor to tsarism presented a tool for reinforcing Stalinism and the Soviet Union as the other. The model that saw Stalinism as a break also demonstrated a form of othering, although not as strongly. This was exemplified in the work of Harvard teacher Michael Karpovich, who taught Russian intellectual history at Harvard from 1927 until his retirement in 1957.⁶⁴ He focused on pre-1917 history, regarding what had followed 1917 as unfamiliar, too contemporary for historical judgement and lacking in reliable sources.⁶⁵ For Karpovich, Russian history as he knew and taught it ended in 1917: the Soviet Union was not a continuation of what had come before. He believed in a difference between authoritarianism and totalitarianism: the former being the kind of regime found in tsarist Russia, and the latter being the Soviet regime. The difference was to be found in the attempt by the Soviet state to usurp the inner life of its subjects. It wanted not only their external acquiescence, but also that of their minds and hearts, an ‘unprecedented’ dimension (as were many other dimensions of the Soviet regime) in the governing of Russia. Karpovich also articulated a key theory of the totalitarian model scholarship: that the Soviet government was a direct extension of Bolshevik ideology, which itself represented a qualitative break from the previous Russian

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.130. This is the closest interpretation to Deutscher’s in this respect.

⁶⁴ Between 1940 and 1958 Karpovich supervised thirty PhDs amongst which, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, were Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, Robert V. Daniels, Richard Pipes and Martin Malia – some of the leading Sovietologists of the Cold War era. N. G. O Pereira, ‘The Thought and Teachings of Michael Karpovich’, *Russian History*, Vol. 36, 2009, pp. 254-277, pp.269-270

⁶⁵ Pereira, ‘The Thought and Teachings of Michael Karpovich’, p.257. The influence of Karpovich on his favourite student Martin Malia is also evident in Malia’s work, which echoes this notion. Although a prominent Cold War Sovietologist who taught at Harvard and then Berkeley, Malia’s most significant work was not published until the 1990s. See Chapter 5.

intellectual history.⁶⁶ Stalinism and Bolshevism were a new, *totalitarian* (not authoritarian) other, not just of Europe but also of pre-1917 Russia.

But it was the reinforcement of the notion of Stalinism as an extreme version of tsarist autocracy (leading to totalitarianism) - as barbaric and threatening, and as being of another world - that bore striking similarities to the historical processes of Western othering of Russia highlighted in the Introduction.⁶⁷ For Pipes, as for Fainsod, Conquest, Deutscher and Neumann, this distinctly Russian Stalinist totalitarianism left an enduring stain on the Soviet Union, enabling them to continue to other it long after Stalinism had come to an end.⁶⁸

5. Conclusion

It is clear, then, that expressed both explicitly and implicitly many of the works published during the early Cold War period systematically presented Stalinist totalitarianism as the other, reflecting both the political and personal experiences of many of the individuals writing at this time. The works of this era focused particularly on the coercive and terroristic methods of communist rule under Stalin, as well as the threat of such a state, constructing and reinforcing the notion of the 'two worlds', opposites and opponents. The basis for these constructions can be found in writings on totalitarianism around this period, such as those of Talmon and Brzezinski, but also in the general political context which had immeasurable influence on

⁶⁶ Pereira, 'The Thought and Teachings of Michael Karpovich', p.267 and p.268

⁶⁷ This was also represented in the admiration that many travellers of previous centuries felt when visiting Russia, where they were impressed by the tsarist palaces, finery and so on. In relation to Stalinism, this became admiration for industrial and educational successes.

⁶⁸ Kennan, Pipes and Conquest all saw Stalinism as an enduring and key component part of Soviet communism, and as a result the Soviet Union still manifested a milder form of this 'affliction' and could never be trusted, or be an ally of the West, such were their differences. This was the dominant theme of articles they wrote and lectures they gave especially in the late 1960s when there were moves towards détente. In Pipes' case this was also true in his advisory roles to the US government. For examples of this see Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, pp.271-276. For an overview of debates on whether the post-Stalinism Soviet Union was authoritarian or totalitarian, see Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, pp. 205-208

scholarship on Stalinism around this period, particularly in the USA. At the same time, the development of the idea of Stalinism as a continuation of a Russian tradition of leadership demonstrates a pattern of Orientalist-style analysis, reinforcing the notion of the unchanging national Russian character. More specifically, the suggestion by some scholars that Bolshevism and eventually totalitarian Stalinism were in fact tsarism turned ‘upside-down’ reveals the extent of this perceived similitude. During this era, totalitarianism represented the ultimate antithesis to the West, and in Western historiography on Stalin and Stalinism, totalitarianism provided a new tool with which Western scholars were able to construct the Stalinist and Soviet other.⁶⁹

While the basis of these othering constructions shifted considerably since the pre- Cold War period, there was continuity in the strong personal links between those writing and their subject matter that provided a central character to the historiography. The previous chapter highlighted the way in which Trotsky’ and his peers’ work was informed by their theoretical isolation from Stalin, and estrangement from the Soviet Union (or in the case of pro-Stalinists, such as Barbusse, their strong personal allegiance). In the early 1950s and 1960s, many writers on totalitarianism – such as Talmon, Brzezinski and Arendt, for example – were informed by their own personal trauma borne of the Second World War and Jewish persecution, and their many social, cultural, economic and political repercussions. These soon collided with the Western anti-Soviet mentality of the Cold War era, and in the USA especially, as academics and politicians worked side by side on foreign policy, the resulting scholarship on the Soviet Union become deeply intertwined with political discourse on totalitarianism and its Soviet variant. This explains why, while in the wider profession social history was beginning to take hold from the 1960s, the focus in Sovietology

⁶⁹ This is not to say this was a one-way process. Indeed both blocs sought to differentiate themselves from one another during the Soviet, and especially the Cold War, periods.

remained firmly on the political sphere for around another decade, rendering temporarily powerless wider historiographical trends as a key formative influence on scholarship, evidence of the strength of the influence of political life on academia at this time. This has given scholarship on Stalinism of this time a unique and complex nature, highlighting once again the deep roots of this historiography and the construction of the Stalinist other in the most momentous events of the twentieth century and in the experiences of those who lived through them.

Chapter 3

The God that Failed: Khrushchev's 'secret speech' and British communist historiography of Stalin and Stalinism¹

1. British communists in context: the rise and fall of the CPGB

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was established in London in the summer of 1920, merging several smaller Marxist groups together. One of the major components of the new party was the British Socialist Party, the largest Marxist group before the Russian Revolution that had been affiliated with the Labour Party. With the support of the Comintern, the CPGB tried to affiliate with the Labour Party several times in its history and, although coming close to achieving this in 1945, was always unsuccessful.² Supported by Lenin, the CPGB functioned as a section of the Comintern, from which it drew large amounts of funding.³

The CPGB adhered to the Comintern's 'Moscow line' and by doing so accepted a practice of democratic centralism in which the authority of the international over its constituent parties was explicitly established. This was most obvious during the Second World War when the CPGB reversed its policy several times as the war

¹ The expression 'The God that Failed' is used by Hobsbawm in his autobiography, in which he wrote that he was repelled by ex-communists who after 1956 turned 'The God that Failed' into Satan in order to free themselves from his service. He was alluding to the collection of essays by the same name, published in 1949, of six Western communists who charted their conversion to, and subsequent rejection of, communism. See E. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London, 2003), p. 217 and A. Koestler et al., *The God That Failed*, edited by R. Crossman (New York, 1972).

² 'Communist Party of Great Britain History Section', Marxists Internet Archive (last accessed 09/07/2013):
<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/history.htm>

³ Communist Party of Great Britain Archive, (last accessed 09/07/2013) :
<http://www.comunistpartyarchive.org.uk/9781851171354.php>

progressed, first strongly opposing the war and then, upon the German invasion of the Soviet Union, reversing this stance on the premise that this was now a war between Fascism and the Soviet Union.⁴

After the war, the CPGB suffered greatly from the revelations of Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech, losing thousands of members and eventually irreparably splitting through the creation of the New Left.⁵ In its latter years and most notably due to the politics of the Cold War, the CPGB suffered a number of crises in which members were strongly divided over Soviet national and international policy. Following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and amongst growing fractiousness the CPGB was dissolved at the 43rd Party Congress in November 1991. Its largest component, the Eurocommunists (who had sought to develop communism in ways more aligned with Western countries and less with the desires and goals of the Soviet Union), went on to form an alternative to the communist political party, the think tank Democratic Left.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ There is a substantial body of work on the creation of the New Left which was an important development in British Communist (and general British) history and political thinking, and which came about as a result of the speech. After the split in reactions to the 1956 secret speech within the CPGB, the New Left movement was born. Individuals adhering to the New Left were socialists with no official fixed agenda but who called for an array of reforms that were all intended to help make socialism a living force in Britain. There are several excellent accounts of the crisis within the CPGB which led to the creation of the New Left and an exploration of what it signified to former members of the CPGB. See for example: M. Kenny, 'Communism and the New Left' in G. Andrews, N. Fishman and K. Morgan (eds), *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism*, Pluto (London, 1995); J. Saville, 'The 20th Congress and the British Communist Party', *Socialist Register*, 1976, pp.1-23; W. Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991* (London, 1992), pp.108-111; M. Kenny, *The First New Left - British Intellectuals After Stalin* (London, 1995). Especially useful is the chapter 'The Rise and Fall of the First New Left'. Finally, Margot Heinemann gave a succinct survey of the events of 1956 as seen from within the Party in M. Heinemann, '1956 and the Communist Party', *The Socialist Register*, 1976, pp.43-57.

⁶ Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, pp. 215-217. Additional useful histories of the CPGB include H. Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile* (London, 1975); J. Eaden and D. Renton, *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920* (Basingstoke, 2002).

2. The 'secret speech' and the creation of a Stalinist other

When Nikita Khrushchev delivered his 'secret speech' to a closed room at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956 the repercussions for the Soviet Union and communists worldwide were severe. For the first time it was acknowledged that there had been grave errors committed by Stalin and by those working close to him for the duration of the Stalinist regime, most notably during the trials and purges of the 1930s. Collective leadership had been abandoned, and a 'cult of the individual' had developed in its place. Khrushchev's speech seemed to pave the way for change in the Soviet Union and initiated a period of 'de-Stalinisation', which sought to rectify some of the errors of the past. Wrongly convicted 'enemies of the state' were released from camps and exile, and the government endeavoured to once again establish a genuine socialist leadership.

The Western capitalist nations felt vindicated: communism was indeed the evil other they had supposed it to be.⁷ But there were severe repercussions for the lives of non-Soviet communists, living in countries where their political and ideological convictions were deemed dangerous and worthy of persecution and where they themselves represented the other. This chapter analyses how this affected the way in which Stalin and Stalinism were written about by non-Soviet communists, and specifically by British communists in the period immediately after the speech, in order to provide a more complete and inclusive assessment of Western writing on Stalin and Stalinism during this period than is possible by solely examining Cold War scholarship. In particular it aims to answer the question of whether in this aspect of the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism an othering process begins in the aftermath of 1956, as some British

⁷ One British Communist reported that his neighbours were 'laughing their heads off' at the revelations. Another, a university lecturer from Scotland, replied when asked about his colleagues' reaction to the 'Stalin business' that 'They're not saying much, but they're all thinking: "Let's see you talk yourself out of this one."' See 'The Case for Socialism', *The Reasoner*, Second Number, September 1956, p.2

communists attempted to distance themselves from the regime they had once supported.

Examining the reaction of British communists to the revelations of Khrushchev's speech within the context of this thesis provides a fresh insight into what has been a well-documented crisis within the British left. Indeed, placed within the conceptual framework of the Western othering of Stalinism, exploring the nature of British communist alignment with Stalin before 1956, the immediate response to the 'secret speech' and its aftermath allows us to gain increased understanding of the ways in which Stalin and his regime were othered by those who had been ideologically aligned with him. In a first instance, and as the following section will demonstrate, through analyses of not only books but also press materials, this was a case of positive othering. From 1956 however, examining British communist work as well as press materials allows us to chart the evolution of this othering from a form of adulation to one of opposition. It provides a unique opportunity to observe the process through which Stalin became the other in the eyes of those who had previously aligned themselves with him. It further allows us to build a more complete picture of Western othering of Stalin during this period by broadening the scope of enquiry beyond those ideologically opposed to communism, providing a more nuanced and inclusive account of Western attitudes towards Stalin and Stalinism during this period.

3. Before 1956: Stalin and Stalinism through British communist eyes

There is surprisingly little academic, historical or even contemporary writing published on Stalin by CPGB members in the period prior to

1956.⁸ In order to understand the nature of British communist interpretations of Stalin and Stalinism before 1956 – and therefore understand how these interpretations evolved after 1956 – works principally relating to the trials of the 1930s are particularly informative, as are articles from the daily newspaper of the CPGB, the *Daily Worker*. This paper was originally set up as the official organ of the CPGB in 1930. In 1946, ownership was formally transferred to a non-party cooperative, the People's Press Printing Society (PPPS). The paper nevertheless remained the acknowledged voice of the CPGB until after the fall of the Soviet Union.⁹ It provides valuable insight on CPGB members' views on Stalin and Stalinism, which often were not being put to paper in published works. The departure from only examining what might be considered historiography proper is justified when we consider that by providing access to otherwise largely unpublished opinions, the *Daily Worker*

⁸ Most of the professional academic historians of the CPGB were part of the 'Historians' Group of the Communist Party, and were historians of Britain making huge headway on subjects such as British labour history, the social history of the British Revolution in the seventeenth century and the social history of ideas, namely plebeian ideology. Hobsbawm summed up well what he saw as the particular achievements of this group of historians in E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party' in M. Conforth (ed.), *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton* (London, 1978), pp.44-45. In an interview in 1978 for *Visions in History* Hobsbawm also explained how constrained Communist historians were by the twentieth century, and how this affected what they researched: 'Before '56, we were obviously very constrained about twentieth-century history, and most of us didn't tackle it. I'll tell you honestly that one reason I'm primarily a nineteenth century historian and have been very careful not to push even my labor history much beyond 1914 is that when I became a labor historian you couldn't really be an orthodox Communist and write publicly about, say, the period when the Communist party was active because there was an orthodox belief that everything had changed in 1920 with the founding of the CP.' See P. Thane and E. Lunbeck, 'Interview with Eric Hobsbawm' in H. Abelove, B. Blackmar, P. Dimock and J. Schneer (eds.), *Visions of History by MARHO, The Radical Historians Organization* (Manchester, 1983), pp.33-34. Hobsbawm went on to say, however, that he had not actually believed everything had changed in 1920, but it was probably impolite and possibly unwise to say so in public, and the only significant constraints were probably internal, moral ones. See Thane and Lunbeck, 'Interview with Eric Hobsbawm', p.34

⁹ See K. Morgan, 'The Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* 1930-56' in G. Andrews, N. Fishman and K. Morgan (eds), *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism* (London, 1995), p. 142. Morgan considered it to be an 'incomparable source for the party's day-to-day outlook and political culture.'

constitutes a vital element of the British communist historiography of Stalin and Stalinism.¹⁰

Daily Worker articles of the 1930s, the defining decade of Stalinism, are revelatory about British communist perceptions of the USSR. In 1936 the Soviet Union, with the second Five Year Plan over halfway along, continued its impressive and relentless drive towards becoming a powerful, industrialised super-power. Simultaneously the purges and show trials were approaching their apex. Nevertheless, coverage on Stalin at this time was entirely positive and focused on industrial, economic and standard of life achievements. Keen to show the benefits of socialism, advances in industrialisation and quality of life in the Soviet Union were widely reported in the *Daily Worker*. This is exemplified, for instance, by articles reporting that a British delegation who had visited the USSR was ‘particularly astounded with what the Soviet Union is doing for children’¹¹, or attributing excellent harvests to the success of collective farming.¹² Other articles reported on working conditions - a testimonial from a British print worker who went to Russia as part of the Trade Union delegation stated that ‘Actual monetary wages compare very favourably with the wages of London print workers, at 400-450 roubles a month’ and suggested that working conditions in the Soviet Union were as good, or better than those found in London.¹³ To the CPGB it was becoming ‘more and more clear every day how well people live in the country of the Soviets’.¹⁴

¹⁰ At the height of its popularity, the circulation figures for the paper were 120 000 but they declined steadily to 63 000 by April 1956. Morgan, ‘The Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* 1930-56’, p.152. This article gives an excellent appraisal of the lifecycle of the paper, and the dynamics between its staff, its readers and the CPGB.

¹¹ ‘Russia’s Work on Child Health ‘Best in World’’, *Daily Worker*, Thursday 2 July 1936, p.5

¹² ‘Bumper Harvest in Russia ‘Granary’’, *Daily Worker*, Saturday 11 July 1936, p.5

¹³ J. A. Course, ‘Printing in Russia As I Saw It’, *Daily Worker*, Friday 23 October 1936, p.7

¹⁴ ‘Moscow A Blaze of Light’, *Daily Worker*, Saturday 7 November 1936, p.1. This article, relating the mood and state of the USSR, was published on the eve of the nineteenth anniversary of the Revolution. It stated that ‘a happy bustle is evident everywhere in the country’ and that it was no surprise that every Soviet ‘wants to celebrate the October festival as his own personal and most beloved holiday.’

Other British communist publications similarly focused on the successes of Stalinism. Early in Stalin's rule, for example, Andrew Rothstein (another founding and prominent member of the CPGB) had published a pamphlet entitled *Russia's Socialist Triumph* in which he extolled the virtues of the Five Year Plans. For Rothstein, while there were many reasons to admire the achievements of Soviet Russia 'which even the capitalists are forced to acknowledge', the most 'wonderful' reason of all was the way in which Russian workers 'rebuilt production and economic life generally' to pre-war levels with hardly any outside help.¹⁵ To Rothstein, as to most communists, perhaps the most impressive aspect of the Stalinist Soviet Union was the huge technological and industrial advances being made and the perceived success of the economy. Rothstein's pamphlet is awash with tables and figures detailing investments, national income, metallurgy, transport, education and literacy levels.

As well as the industrial and economic successes of Stalinism, *The Daily Worker* and other British communist publications also reflected British communists' perceptions of the trials at this time. Harry Pollitt, then Secretary of the CPGB, wrote:

This is not time for sentiment - the sacrifices of certain leaders before the Revolution are nothing to the sacrifices of the people of the Soviet Union to build a Socialist State as a bulwark of peace for the people of the world (...) In the face of unparalleled sacrifice the Russian people have established their power, have achieved miracles in Socialist construction that have aroused the admiration of the world. And all the time in their midst a poisonous gang, lustful for power to wreck Socialism has been at work. (...) It is not a question of what these men did in 1905, it is what they were doing in 1936 - conspiring with Hitler, Fascist agents, fomenters of the assassination of the best sons of the Soviet Union.¹⁶

Another article referred to the judicial system of the Soviet Union as 'mild' for letting Trotsky escape abroad and not face the

¹⁵ A. Rothstein, *Russia's Socialist Triumph: The Exposition of the Soviet Five Year Plan of Socialist Construction* (London, 1929), p.5

¹⁶ 'No Time Now For Sentiment - Sacrifices of the People', *Daily Worker*, Friday 28 August 1936, p. 3

consequences of his actions, as well as those for whom he was the ‘whipper-in’: Zinoviev and Kamenev.¹⁷ And when in November 1936 Stalin gave a speech on the new constitution for the Soviet Union (to be adopted that December), the *Daily Worker* reported that ‘It was a speech that will live through history. It showed clearly the shallow nature of many of the criticisms from bourgeois observers’. For the Soviets and for the rest of the world it opened up ‘new perspectives of democracy and freedom’.¹⁸ The content of these articles was mirrored by British communist books of the time. Barrister Dudley Collard, for example, wrote an account of Karl Radek’s trial as witnessed by Collard himself, who had travelled to the Soviet Union.¹⁹ Despite stating his intention to provide an impartial account of the trial, Collard nevertheless wrote that he ‘wanted to clear up the misunderstandings which have arisen about the conduct of political trials in the Soviet Union, and which are so detrimental to the good relations which should exist between this country and the U.S.S.R.’.²⁰ He believed that the principal reason why many Britons felt unease at these trials was due to the way in which they were reported by the British press and that many accounts were ‘entirely distorted’, perhaps due to miscommunications, but also due to hostility towards the Soviet Union, and to the ‘taste of the Press for sensationalism’.²¹

J. R. Campbell, another prominent and public face of the CPGB, similarly regarded the representation of the Soviet Union as a dictatorship of the Party as ‘a travesty which is unfortunately accepted

¹⁷ K. Radek, ‘How Trotsky’s “terror centre” was started’, *Daily Worker*, Friday 4 September 1936, p.7

¹⁸ ‘Stalin Speech: Constitution is a Beacon For All’, *Daily Worker*, Friday 27 November 1936, p.1

¹⁹ Radek was tried along with several others, as part of the ‘Trial of the Sixteen’ in January 1937. It was the second show trial, following that of Zinoviev and Kamenev.

²⁰ D. Collard, *Soviet Justice and the Trial of Radek and Others* (London, 1937), pp.9-10. Collard was leader of the CPGB’s Legal Group during the 1930s.

²¹ Collard, *Soviet Justice and the Trial of Radek and Others*, p.83. Collard then gave an account of some of the British reporting of the trial, including quotes by the *Morning Post*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Daily Herald*, and the *Daily Express*, which all reported the trial extremely negatively, alluding to raised voices, harsh methods of investigation and high emotion. Collard stated that none of these events occurred as described by the Press, if they occurred at all. See pp.83-85

by friends, as well as enemies'.²² He extolled the virtues of the Soviet Socialist state: 'planned economy has eliminated unemployment', 'State medical service is the admiration of doctors all over the world', and the 'educational system has evoked the enthusiasm of all who are interested in progressive educational developments'.²³ He believed that it was 'undoubtedly correct' that those on trial had betrayed the revolution.²⁴

Like Campbell and Collard, Rothstein also wrote about the trials though most specifically on those of 1930-31, when the Mensheviks were tried for 'counter-revolution'. Rothstein's *Wreckers on Trial* gave another insight into how early the CPGB toed the Soviet Party line, and he made his stance clear: the Mensheviks had 'degenerated' into 'espionage, corruption, wrecking and sabotage', a fact which was revealed in 'all its ugly details' through the trials.²⁵ In the end Rothstein warned: 'The pages which follow throw a flood of light on the bitter and relentless hostility of the Imperialists to the U.S.S.R. All friends of the Soviet Union, and in the first instance the working-class, dare not forget this.'²⁶ Later, Willie Thompson recounted how the CPGB expressed its 'collective approbation and enthusiasm for these proceedings, illustrated by representative quotes from the *Daily Worker*, and one from *Russia Today*: 'No true friend of the Soviet Union...can feel other than a sense of satisfaction'.²⁷

Articles on Stalin's death in 1953 provide insight into how Stalin was seen and written about as a man and as a leader. When news of Stalin's illness first reached the public sphere, the *Daily Worker*'s headlines reflected the worry and anxiety with which

²² J. R. Campbell, *Soviet Policy and Its Critics* (London, 1939), p.15

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.273

²⁵ A. Rothstein, 'Foreword' in A. Rothstein (ed.), *Wreckers on Trial: A Record of the Trial of the Industrial Party, held in Moscow, Nov.-Dec. 1930* (London, 1931), p.VI. With the exception of Rothstein's Foreword, the book is a day-by-day account of the statements given by the defendants (Ramzin, Laritchev, Kalinnikov, Charnovsky, Kuprianov, Fyedotov, Ochkin, Sitnin), comments from Rothstein on their appearance and manner, as well as the final verdict and sentencing

²⁶ Rothstein, 'Foreword' in Rothstein, (ed.), *Wreckers on Trial*, p.VIII

²⁷ The two *Daily Worker* quotes are: 'The criminals have received their well-merited sentences' and 'It is the enemies of socialism and peace who have perished. We should not mourn'. Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, pp.59-60

communists worldwide met the news. On the front page, an editorial from the 5th March 1953 entitled 'May He Recover' stated that 'In all countries of the world, peace loving people are fervently hoping that Joseph Stalin will completely recover from the grave illness with which he is now stricken.'²⁸

While the possibility of the death of Stalin himself formed part of the dismay, this was also a particularly politically unstable time when many had been awaiting peaceful discussions to take place between Churchill, Stalin and Eisenhower: Stalin had, in the previous few months, agreed to meet with the two Western leaders in order to discuss a peace agreement between the three powers. So recently after the Second World War the repeated references to Stalin's role during the war suggest that in 1953 his position as a leader was steeped in memories of the conflict and its resolution. Stalin was not simply a socialist hero, but also a war hero. This idea was particularly well illustrated by this editorial, which, after announcing Stalin's illness, moved on to predominantly report on the importance of his role in the war:

Because in the end, the Soviet army smashed the Nazis utterly, the war was shortened by many months, if not by years. Hundreds of thousands of Britons are alive today because the Soviet army 'tore the guts out of the German army', as Mr Churchill expressed it.²⁹

It is clear that for the British communists Stalin's positive role was only cemented by the Second World War, intensifying their admiration for him and leading them to further negate any claims of wrongdoing, brutality and coercion. This was highlighted in the same editorial: 'For in spite of the violent propaganda of hate which the capitalist Press directed against the Soviet leader, the average man rejects as bogus the cunningly built-up picture of Stalin as a would-be world conqueror.'³⁰

²⁸ 'May He Recover', *Daily Worker*, Thursday 5 March 1936, p.1

²⁹ 'May He Recover', *Daily Worker*, Thursday 5 March 1936, p.1

³⁰ 'May He Recover', *Daily Worker*, Thursday 5 March 1936, p.1. This was also reflected in some of the quotes printed by the *Daily Worker*, as spoken by British

Upon Stalin's death, the tone of adulation persisted. The *Daily Worker* dedicated a two page supplement to Stalin, a biography not dissimilar in tone and content to the official Soviet biographies detailing Stalin's illustrious life as revolutionary and leader.³¹ On the same day that the biographical supplement was published, Pollitt himself wrote an article for the *Daily Worker* entitled 'Eternal Glory to Stalin!', the final paragraph of which concluded with an emotional goodbye to Stalin:

With tear-blinded eyes and a grief we have not the language at our command to describe, we swear that our Communist Party, and our Daily Worker, will do all in their power to pick up that banner of national independence that Comrade Stalin spoke about in his speech to the 19th Congress, hold it proudly aloft, and never allow it to be sullied by any power in the world. ETERNAL GLORY TO THE MEMORY OF JOSEPH STALIN!³²

This statement contained language similar to that found in Soviet press, literature and propaganda, and it is undoubtedly surprising to witness such emotive language laden with religious connotations coming from British communists. This suggests a level of absorption of Soviet official language and methods of expression in regards to Stalin that provides a stark contrast to other sections of the historiography, emphasised by the communists being ideologically diametrically opposed to the totalitarian-model writers also publishing at this time.³³

workers, on Stalin's illness and subsequent death: 'I am shocked and grieved at the news of Stalin's illness, especially at a time when the peace of the world is in balance and when Stalin's Christmas offer for a peace meeting with the Three Powers seems to be getting a response', was the reaction of a shop steward from Motherwell. See 'All Walks of Life Saddened at the News', *Daily Worker*, Thursday 5 March 1936, p.1

³¹ A. Rothstein,, 'Stalin: Story of a Great Servant of Mankind who Belongs to the Ages', *Daily Worker*, Saturday 7 March 1936, Supplement II. Rothstein was a relatively prolific writer on the USSR and Stalin during the Soviet period, especially when compared to the scarcity of other CPGB members' historical or contemporary writings on Stalin and Stalinism during the Soviet period.

³² H. Pollitt, 'Eternal Glory to Stalin!', *Daily Worker*, Saturday 7 March 1953, p.2

³³ Other headlines and articles from *Daily Worker* provide us with further insight into the esteem in which Stalin was held by the CPGB: 'Stalin's Name will Live in Men's Hearts', 'Mourning in Factories' and 'When he Saved Britain'. In this last

It also represents a form of the positive othering process, an example of which can be found in the works of Barbusse a few years earlier. Stalin was elevated to a status which set him apart from other men, and the Soviet Union was often represented as a superior nation to Great Britain. This has been exemplified by the comparisons in worker pay and conditions, and by the very fact of it being a socialist state. Writing about the experience of being a communist in the 1940s, Eric Hobsbawm explained these apparently extreme sentiments, highlighting how, as for the writers of the pre-Cold War era, their lives were inextricably bound to Stalin's Soviet Union:

At the time it would not have struck any of us as surprising that the last words of a dying Party member should be for the Party, for Stalin and for the comrades (in those days among foreign communists the thought of Stalin was as sincere, unforced, unsullied by knowledge and universal as the genuine grief most of us felt in 1953 at the death of a man whom no Soviet citizen would have wanted, or dared, to call by a pet name like 'Uncle Joe' in Britain or 'Big whiskers' [*baffone*] in Italy.).³⁴

Similarly John Saville explained that socialism in the USSR and the Stalinist regime became so attractive over the decades following the 1917 revolution because of the establishment of the Comintern in which a shared belief was developed that communists were part of a world movement that would achieve, through disciplined leadership, revolutionary goals and aims. As time progressed and Stalin's Five Year Plans were underway with positive results yielded, 'there was much which could support these ideas and ideals'.³⁵ According to Saville, there was a low level of awareness of the true nature of the Stalinist regime because there were so few Trotskyists in Great

article Stalin is again credited with saving the lives of Britons: 'But for Stalin a great many of us might be dead. And it may be we owe him our freedom'. All three are headlines from *Daily Worker*, Saturday 7 March 1953, pp. 2-3. From the 9th of March onwards there is a column dedicated to Stalin that appears on and off eight times over the following weeks, entitled 'What Stalin Meant to Humanity'. The first of these was called 'Man Who Set Women Free'.³³ It is clear from these articles that Stalin enjoyed the same level of public, and private, adulation that he had come to expect and require from his own people.

³⁴ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 134

³⁵ Saville, 'The Communist Experience: A Personal Appraisal', *Socialist Register*, 1991, pp.1-27, pp.3-4

Britain and those that were there were ‘intellectually feeble’. Consequently, there were very few within the labour movement who appreciated what was happening inside the USSR. Saville believed that if war hadn’t arrived in 1939, debates over the trials of 1936-8 would have led to ‘a clearer understanding of the oppressive and bloody regime that Stalin presided over’.³⁶ As it was, however, the CPGB continued to support and admire the Stalinist regime throughout the 1930s and the war years up to, and in some cases beyond, the 1956 secret speech.

The *Daily Worker* articles present the reality of British communist belief in Stalin, and Stalinism, at the very apex of his power. They provide an insight into how different aspects of Stalinism were all seen through the same positive and adulatory lens: Stalin himself, healthcare, education, working conditions, collectivisation, the general mood and happiness of the population, perceived popular support for the Stalinist regime and finally the very basis of the political system, the constitution. There is not a large body of work by British communists on Stalinism in this period, but these few we have together with the *Daily Worker* articles, provide a realistic record of how Stalin and Stalinism were thought about and written about at this time, and constitute an important part of the Western historiography of Stalin and Stalinism.

This British communist historiography in the period before 1956 was therefore largely based on the Party political line: under the umbrella of the Comintern, the CPGB supported everything that Stalin did. It promoted him and his regime not only through the works of members of the CPGB, but also through the *Daily Worker*. Stalinism was not only the realisation of a socialist state: it was an enormously successful one to be admired, and whose enemies it was right to destroy. In the post-war years, Stalin was seen as the architect of this admirable nation but also a saviour and a hero whose death provoked grief as well as fear for a peaceful future. It is these

³⁶ Ibid., p.4

ideological and practical elements which drove the pre-1956 British communist historiography of Stalin and Stalinism to take shape as what was a clear opposite to the Anglo-American Sovietological works being simultaneously published at this time.

4. ‘True democracy has been restored’: the CPGB responds to the 20th Congress

The 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union took place in late February 1956, and its impact on supporters of Soviet communism was huge. A British communist wrote in July 1956 that ‘The 20th Congress and the no-longer secret report of Khrushchev has given rise to the greatest crisis of Socialist thought since the birth of Marxism’.³⁷ The party lost thousands of members in its immediate aftermath, some of whom for which the speech not only led them to re-evaluate Stalinism, but also to radically change their ideological and political positions.³⁸

Yet the CPGB failed to engage in honest discussion about the revelations. In the public sessions of the Congress, Khrushchev and Anastas Mikoyan had already addressed the negative impact of the ‘cult of the individual’ and the lack of collective leadership under Stalin. The general understanding gained from these sessions was that de-Stalinisation was an active and important process and that the ‘mistakes and errors’ of the Stalin years were responsible for the repressive acts that had so outraged the non-communist world.³⁹ These were already important developments and paved the way for all communists to begin reassessing their interpretations of Stalinism. Nevertheless, the *Daily Worker* put a positive spin on things and reported on these initial speeches with enthusiasm and positivity.

³⁷ K. Hughes, ‘Where Do We Stand Now?’, *The Reasoner*, First Number, July 1956, p.20

³⁸ Willie Thompson believed that the numerical loss of members was not the greatest blow to the CPGB – it was in fact the loss of some of its most energetic and imaginative talents in both the trade union and the intellectual spheres. Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p.110

³⁹ Saville, ‘The 20th Century Congress and the British Communist Party’, pp.1-2

They were something to be proud of in the face of capitalist criticism. Writing on the 25th February, George Matthews published an article in the *Daily Worker* entitled 'It's Not a Sign of Weakness to Admit Mistakes', in which he declared that rather than indicate the weakness of the CPSU, the admission of mistakes pointed to a strong party and one which could only be strengthened by the publicising of past mistakes and by the effort made to correct them. In the end, he concluded, 'There is not the faintest shadow of a doubt that after the 20th Congress the Soviet people and the Party which leads them will astonish the world with their deeds.'⁴⁰ Acknowledgement of these public speeches and the information they contained about Stalin was therefore immediate, as was acceptance of their content. Writing in 1976, Saville still did not know whether the leaders of the CPGB knew the content of the secret speech in the days immediately after it took place although he suspected that they must have, since other foreign delegates did.⁴¹ Matthews' article certainly showed an unwillingness to engage with the real issue at hand: not whether the CPSU was stronger for admitting its mistakes but what the true nature of Stalinism was, as revealed by Khrushchev. How had it been able to occur, and how could the CPGB have unquestionably supported it?

In the weeks that followed, nothing much was made by the official CPGB channels of the contents of the secret speech, creating the catalyst for the eventual Party split. On March 13th the *Daily Worker* printed a transcript of a speech Pollitt had just made on the 20th Congress, in which he acknowledged that some CPGB members were concerned about Stalin. He addressed this issue by stating that it

⁴⁰ G. Matthews, 'It's Not a Sign of Weakness to Admit Mistakes', *Daily Worker*, Saturday 25 February 1956,

p.2

⁴¹ Indeed he wrote that it was clear that some foreign delegates knew about the secret speech and its content before or soon after they returned home. He added that there 'is no doubt at all' that leading members of the CPGB knew the main facts of the secret speech by the middle of April at the latest. See Saville, 'The 20th Century Congress and the British Communist Party', p.2. This article also provides a useful account of how quickly the content of the speech was reported in foreign press, notably in Germany and in Russia itself. By the very beginning of March for instance, the East German vice-premier Walter Ulbricht was already stating that Stalin had done 'severe damage' to the Soviet state and CPSU.

was certain that Stalin made mistakes in judgement and policy; however, ‘only a man who does nothing never makes mistakes, but this does not mean Comrade Stalin did not make a leading contribution in peace and war alike, to the development of the Soviet Union.’⁴² A few days later, on March 19th, an article entitled ‘That Khrushchov Speech’ may have led readers to believe the secret speech was finally to be acknowledged and addressed. In fact the article principally referred to meetings throughout the Soviet Union being held to help respond to some of the problems highlighted by the 20th Congress. It addressed the secret speech, but only insofar as it was acknowledged as having raised issues about the cult of the individual and lack of collective leadership, with some (vaguely alluded to) undesirable outcomes:

This period of arbitrary rule resulted in many serious mistakes and injustices. It led to the Soviet Union being unprepared for the Nazi attack. Steps have now been taken to restore justice. Innocent people who had been convicted have been rehabilitated, while proper control by the Party and the Government has been established over the work of the State security agencies (...) And whatever the hostile capitalist Press may say, this frank discussion of past mistakes is the triumphant proof of the soundness of the Soviet Union and that, after a lapse of 20 years, true democracy has been restored.⁴³

It was here that the problems of the CPGB truly began. There is little doubt that by this point the leaders of the CPGB had a good idea of the contents of the secret speech, and they were not being addressed in a way which was felt to be adequate by many members. It became increasingly apparent to many of these members that there was a crucial and critical moral and political problem with many layers and dimensions that needed to be engaged with by communist parties everywhere. Yet this problem was not being engaged with

⁴² ‘Pollitt: Soviet Congress has Helped Peace’, *Daily Worker*, Tuesday 13 March 1956, p.1 – continued on p.3

⁴³ S. Russell, ‘That Khrushchov Speech’, *Daily Worker*, Monday 19 March 1956, p.1- continued on p.3

within the principal forum for discussion that the CPGB possessed.⁴⁴ By the summer of 1956, with discontent growing among members and still no adequate public discussion on the contents of the speech, it became increasingly obvious to Thompson, Saville and others that there was never going to be a serious debate permitted within the confines of party publications and forums.⁴⁵ This ended up being the catalyst for change, at least for Thompson and Saville. In July of that year, Thompson and Saville launched the first of three issues of a discussion journal called *The Reasoner*. It was considered sin to discuss party matters in non-official channels, and the publication of this unauthorised discussion journal was met with the extreme disapproval of CPGB leaders. Eventually it led to Thompson and Saville resigning after multiple discussions with the leaders confirmed to them that free discussion was not going to be permitted, that critical letters were being refused publication in Party publications and that the crisis of the Party would go on. They felt the Party, then, was ‘wholly discredited’.⁴⁶

5. ‘To leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality’:⁴⁷
The Reasoner

As a result of the creation of *The Reasoner*, British communist historiography of Stalin and Stalinism greatly evolved over a relatively short period of time in the months immediately following Khrushchev’s speech. The responses recorded within the journal, and

⁴⁴ Saville provides a good account of this period, and the issues it contained for CPGB members in Saville, ‘The 20th Congress and the British Communist Party’.

⁴⁵ Saville, ‘The 20th Congress and the British Communist Party’, pp.5-6

⁴⁶ See Saville, ‘The 20th Congress and the British Communist Party’. Later, as Thompson looked back on his membership, he said that he, like many others at the time, had a paradoxical relationship to the party: while he adhered to its ideology, he was also repelled by the alien and schematic manner and matter of its thinking. For him at least (as for Saville), leaving it did not induce the total, intellectual and psychic rupture it did for some. See Kenny, ‘Communism and the New Left’, p.197

⁴⁷ This Marx quote is used as an epigraph on the front page of each issue of *The Reasoner*.

indeed the very fact of its creation, allow us to identify and understand how an othering process of Stalinism by British communists developed and evolved during this period. The principal purpose of *The Reasoner* was to provide the opportunity to discuss revelations about Stalinism. Through the letters and articles published within it, it is clear that this led to a deviation from the positive othering of Stalinism displayed by the *Daily Worker* and other publications before 1956, and in its immediate aftermath.

The othering of Stalinism began to manifest itself in the letters and articles published in the first issue of *The Reasoner*. In this edition there began the identification of the negative aspects of Stalinism, of the gulf between myth and reality and of Stalinism as a deviant form of socialism.⁴⁸ Most strikingly, notions of morality, responsibility and blame were prominent from the outset: ‘our moral and political reactions have been so feeble....the weakening of the moral basis of our political life necessarily makes less vigorous our practical judgements and our practical activity’, ‘the shock and moral turmoil engendered by the revelations were the result of our general failure to apply a Marxist analysis...’, ‘our irrational approach to the Soviet Union ...have brought some socialists to the point of doubting our integrity’.⁴⁹ By highlighting the moral shortcomings of these individuals manifested through their support of Stalinism, these self-flagellating statements implied the moral deviancy of Stalinism itself.

This was further exemplified by a letter from the first issue in which the author focused on the relationship of the CPGB to Stalinism, both before and since 1956. Having himself resigned from the party after not being able to ‘stomach the Stalinist methods of leadership of the post-war period’, he heavily criticised the CPGB’s members’ relationship with Stalinism: ‘you became a generation of irresponsible political innocents, relying on the loyalty of your members and the solidarity of the working-class to cover your political nakedness when you made nonsense of all previous analyses

⁴⁸ ‘Taking Stock’, *The Reasoner*, First Number, July 1956, pp. 4-5

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4

and policies by overnight changes in the 'line'; 'You saw every question through Stalinist blinkers and presented every situation in the same way' and 'Worst of all, you tampered with your own conscience so that honest human dealings with political opponents and even with your friends - indeed the very idea of 'conscience' itself - appeared to you to be 'bourgeois claptrap''.⁵⁰

These damning words were exactly the kind of honest and open correspondence that the editors of *The Reasoner* had wanted to encourage. Emerging alongside more direct references to morality, responsibility and blame was the notion that Stalinism was now inextricably linked to the very meaning of what it was to be, and to have been, a communist (British or otherwise) at this time: 'Stalinism was not 'wrong things' about which 'we could not know', but distorted theories and degenerate practices about which we knew something'.⁵¹ Similarly, other articles highlighted where the responsibility of the Party as a whole, and most especially of its leadership, lay in 'the Stalin business'.⁵² It was blamed for not being vigilant and attentive enough to the problems of Stalinism and for not being self-critical enough.⁵³ It was also responsible for seeming to represent Russian rather than British interests,⁵⁴ and some called for a new kind of party altogether to avoid similar situations in the future: 'Plain English, common-sense, the right of publication within the party, differing views: a Communist Party of a new type – that's what's needed'.⁵⁵ The notion of apportioning blame, either to themselves or the Party, was a central theme in the content of *The Reasoner*. Implicit in this process was the notion that supporting

⁵⁰ J. McLeish, 'An Open Letter from a 'Premature Anti-Stalinist'', *The Reasoner*, First Number, July 1956, p.19

⁵¹ E. P. Thompson, 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', *The Reasoner*. Final Number, November 1956, Supplement pp.6-7

⁵² This term was used regularly in inverted commas in many of the articles and letters across the three editions of *The Reasoner*, suggesting that this is how it was referred to within the party.

⁵³ R. L. Meek, 'What Should We Do About 'The Reasoner'', *The Reasoner*, Second Number, September 1956, pp.8-9

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.8

⁵⁵ R. Cocker, 'Needed – A Party of a New Type', *The Reasoner*, First Number, July 1956, p.32

Stalinism was wrong, morally questionable and against the values for which they stood and for which someone must be held responsible. In this way, for the first time, the British communists writing in *The Reasoner* attempted to place themselves not only as different and apart from Stalinism, but also as against it.

Across all three editions, more familiar patterns of othering emerge including the emphasis on Stalinism as a theoretical deviation from socialism. Stalinism was seen as the corrupter of British communism, which had accepted it and welcomed it into its fold.⁵⁶ Measures had to be taken, Thompson wrote, to eradicate Stalin's degenerate theory and practice from the CPGB, which had lost the 'ingredient of humanity'.⁵⁷ It was the destroyer of the first Socialist Revolution, thanks to the 'torture, death and slander [of] many of its own best sons'.⁵⁸ An American socialist assessment of Stalinism stated that it was 'quite incompatible' with socialism,⁵⁹ and while Thompson wrote that Stalinism was not 'wrong things', he nonetheless listed all of the things that were indeed 'wrong' with it: the theory of the intensification of the class struggle, the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the military vocabulary employed, the attitude to discussion, the theory of the Party and the mechanical theory of human consciousness.⁶⁰

Within this, an emphasis on the differences between Russian and British communism emerged. For example, regret was expressed that the CPGB did not root itself more deeply in British life and 'interpret creatively' British democratic traditions and that it confused the true principles of internationalism with a servile attitude to the

⁵⁶ J. McLeish, 'An Open Letter from a 'Premature Anti-Stalinist'', *The Reasoner*, First Number, July 1956, p.19

⁵⁷ E. P. Thompson, 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', *The Reasoner*, Final Number, November 1956, Supplement p.1 and pp.4-5 and p.6

⁵⁸ 'The Case for Socialism', *The Reasoner*, Second Number, September 1956, p.5

⁵⁹ 'After the Twentieth Congress', *American Socialist Journal*, July-August 1956, as reproduced in 'An American Assessment of the Stalin Era', *The Reasoner*, Second Number, September 1956, p. 38

⁶⁰ Thompson, 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', pp. 5-6. Thompson writes that while 'all these theories are not altogether wrong (...) they are wrong enough to have brought our movement into international crisis'.

Soviet Union.⁶¹ Thompson described the military language of Stalinism as ‘strange and offensive’ to the ears of the British working class.⁶² John McLeish wrote that British communists had been compromised and even humiliated by ‘the exposure of Stalinism in our midst’ and that a large number of party members were waiting for a public disavowal of Stalinism ‘in our Party’ before applying for re-admission.⁶³ The emphasis on ‘our’ enabled McLeish to stress the importance of creating separate, incompatible identities for British communism and Stalinism, with the latter as an intruder in, and infector of, the former. Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly in this context, there is one strong example of Orientalist-style othering in the American assessment of Stalinism, which stated that Stalinism incorporated methods of oriental despotism – ‘murder, mendacity, duplicity, brutality, and above all arbitrariness’, a fact that was no accident in the governing apparatus of a ‘backward, primitive society’.⁶⁴

In 1956 the *Daily Worker* and *The Reasoner* represented the opposite of one another. The on-going official stance of the CPGB was expressed in the *Daily Worker*: it ignored the need for discussion and refused to acknowledge the need to understand deeply and thoroughly the events of the last decades which had occurred in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, *The Reasoner* provided a platform for discussion, as it sought to understand Stalinism: understand its theoretical and practical dimensions and how it went wrong. Perhaps most importantly, its readers sought to acknowledge their own personal shortcomings in supporting the regime and the CPGB leadership. In this way, it began to distance itself from Stalinism, and through the publication of letters and articles over the course of its three issues, a construction of Stalin as a moral and theoretical other emerged. Most strikingly within this, and what the very existence of

⁶¹ E. P. Thompson, ‘Reply to George Matthews’, *The Reasoner*, First Number, July 1956, p.12

⁶² Thompson, ‘Through the Smoke of Budapest’, p.5

⁶³ McLeish, ‘An Open Letter from a ‘Premature Anti-Stalinist’, pp.18-19

⁶⁴ ‘After the Twentieth Congress’, pp.38-39

The Reasoner demonstrates, is that for the British communists Stalinism was inextricably linked with their own individual selves. Their desire to understand, write about, question and debate the nature of Stalinism came from a personal need to comprehend how they could have followed such a regime with approval and remained in a Party despite some of their own, albeit deeply buried, reservations.⁶⁵ The writings of some British communists, and in particular Saville, Thompson and Hobsbawm, indeed suggest that being a communist in Great Britain in the 1950s was a deeply personal affair. For example, Hobsbawm felt it was in some ways a personal destiny:

Some of us even felt that it [communism] had recruited us as individuals. Where would we, as intellectuals, have been, what would have become of us, but for the experiences of war, revolution and depression, fascism and anti-fascism, which surrounded us in our youth?⁶⁶

In a world where tensions between communist and capitalist states were acute, conviction and steely determination had been required to stand one's communist ground. As a result, when Khrushchev's speech came to light, the implications for these British communists were enormous, and during the year following the speech, they 'lived on the edge of the political equivalent of a collective nervous breakdown'.⁶⁷ There are numerous accounts of the dramatic split of the CPGB after the speech not only because for many it delegitimized

⁶⁵ Hobsbawm noted that from time to time there were ideological and intellectual disagreements between the Party's leadership and its members but he also suggested that all efforts were made to either ignore or overcome these differences. See Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p.134. The fact that some British communists may have at times had doubts about Stalin's leadership was also highlighted by a letter from Doris Lessing published in *The Reasoner* in which she wrote that 'The facts are that, up to the 20th Congress, if those of us who knew what was going on – and it was perfectly possible to know if one kept one's mind open and read the plentiful evidence available – if we had said what we thought, in the only place open to us, the capitalist press, we would have been cast out by the party and branded as traitors, and inevitably isolated by bitterness and recrimination from a world movement in which we believed and of which we wished to remain a part.' D. Lessing, 'A Letter To The Editors', *The Reasoner*, September 1956, p.12

⁶⁶ Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', p.26

⁶⁷ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 206. This quote comes from a section where Hobsbawm described the memory and the mood of that period, 'the pain of losing it and the pain of clinging to it'. See pp.203-208.

belief in communism, but also because of the way this development was handled by the CPGB. The Party lost over 7,000 members, and these events changed the way in which Stalin was written about by these and other British communists.⁶⁸

It is clear from their subsequent writing that until the 1956 speech Thompson, Saville and Hobsbawm's ideas on Stalin and Stalinism were largely aligned to those of the CPGB, as manifested in the *Daily Worker* and other non-press publications. Indeed, all three have written of their allegiance and adherence to party principles prior to the speech. For Saville, it was:

an organisation one was proud to belong to...I was fortunate enough to be of the generation that established the Communist historians' group and for ten years we exchanged ideas and developed our Marxism into what we hoped were creative channels.⁶⁹

He and Thompson, close friends, allies and eventual co-editors of *The Reasoner* were deeply committed party members.⁷⁰ Hobsbawm perhaps best summed up the centrality of the CPGB in the lives of its members:

The Party (we always thought of it in capital letters) had the first, or more precisely the only real claim on our lives. Its demands had absolutely priority. We accepted its discipline and hierarchy. We accepted the absolute obligation to follow 'the line' it proposed to us, even when we disagreed with it, although we made heroic efforts to convince ourselves of its intellectual and political 'correctness' in order to 'defend it', as we were expected to.⁷¹

Consequently, the 1956 historiography was partly an attempt by these individuals to atone for their actions by engaging in a thorough

⁶⁸ Saville, 'The 20th Congress and the British Communist Party', p.16.

⁶⁹ Saville, 'The Communist Experience: A Personal Appraisal', p.21

⁷⁰ Saville, 'The 20th Century Congress and the British Communist Party', p.7

⁷¹ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p.134

analysis of how Stalinism, and their support of it, were able to occur. It is a historiography of personal convictions and ideological belief, and in the end for some it appears also to have been a catharsis. *The Reasoner* was borne of Saville and Thompson's own desire to understand what went wrong and to provide a platform for others to do so also. They were not atoning for their belief in socialism, for this remained their ideological position (and this fact only deepened the necessity for understanding), but for belief in the leadership of their Party, and in Stalinism, and to this end they constructed Stalinism as the other of their own socialism.

6. Beyond 1956

In the years following 1956, there is evidence to suggest that the notions of morality and deviancy from socialism remained central to British communist writing on Stalin and Stalinism. There are examples of this in articles published in *The New Reasoner*, the British journal that took over from *The Reasoner*.⁷² Saville himself continued to write of the 'intellectual degeneracy' of Stalinism,⁷³ and much later he wrote that in its Anglo-Saxon version, 'Marxism...is a morality that does not accept ethical justification for unpleasant deeds that have to be done.'⁷⁴ Another article in *The New Reasoner* written as a letter to Thompson spoke of the moral revulsion the author felt towards the Party.⁷⁵ The resilience of the moral question was further demonstrated in the publication by the journal of a 1955 internal party memorandum by Imre Nagy, the Hungarian communist politician executed by the Soviets for treason in 1958. In it he wrote that it was not compatible with 'public morality' to have in positions of leadership individuals who had been responsible for the torture and murder of innocent people and asked 'Can one speak of the morality

⁷² *The New Reasoner* was published 1957-1959 and was also edited by Thompson and Saville.

⁷³ J. Saville, 'A Note on Dogmatism', *The New Reasoner*, Volume One, Number 1, Summer 1957, pp. 78-82, p. 78

⁷⁴ Saville, 'The Communist Experience: A Personal Appraisal', p. 20

⁷⁵ H. Hanson, 'An Open Letter to Edward Thompson', *The New Reasoner*, Volume One, Number 2, Autumn 1957, pp.79-91, pp.79-80

of public life when the ‘battle of opinions’ is waged with such depraved tools...’.⁷⁶ Twenty years later Malcolm MacEwan, former *Daily Worker* features editor, wrote of members being unable to ‘stomach’ passing off the “mistakes of Stalinism as the ‘cult of the individual’”,⁷⁷ while Margot Heinemann wrote of the Stalinist perversion of socialism.⁷⁸ Much later again, in the 1990s, Hobsbawm wrote that Lenin, the older Bolsheviks and ‘not to mention Marx’ would have been ‘outraged’ at the kind of system Stalin had been trying to achieve.⁷⁹ Hobsbawm also demonstrated the strength of the memory of the events of 1956. In 2002 he described the year of 1956 as ‘traumatic’, writing that:

Even after practically half a century my throat contracted as I recall the almost intolerable tensions under which we lived month after month, the unending moments of decision about what to say and do on which our future lives seemed to depend, the friends now clinging together or facing one another bitterly as adversaries, the sense of lurching, unwillingly but irreversibly, down the scree towards the fatal rock-face.⁸⁰

Referring to the way in which the CPGB had revered Stalin, Willie Thompson, historian and CPGB member, wrote in 1992 that

At a distance of more than fifty years it is impossible to read this material - and the Left Book Club examples were more restrained than the newspaper articles and pamphlets - without a feeling of shame that individuals who were in other aspects of their lives humane and upright could have lent their intelligence and energies to such abomination.⁸¹

⁷⁶ I. Nagy, internal party memorandum, autumn 1955, published in ‘On Communism’, pp.54-55 as cited in *The New Reasoner*, Volume One, Number 5, p. 88. The extract bears the heading ‘Imre Nagy: Murdered, June, 1958’.

⁷⁷ M. MacEwan, ‘The Day The Party Had To Stop’, *The Socialist Register*, 1976, pp.24-42. p.26

⁷⁸ M. Heinemann, ‘1956 and the Communist Party’, p. 56

⁷⁹ E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London, 1994), p. 393

⁸⁰ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p.205

⁸¹ Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, pp.60-61

More recent Marxist historians in the West have continued to strongly differentiate Stalinism from socialism. For example, Tony Cliff's theory of 'state capitalism' suggests that Stalinism was not socialism, but in fact a form of capitalism,⁸² and Chris Harman distinguished between socialism as embodied by Stalinism, and that of classical Marxism.⁸³ The necessity for socialists to distinguish themselves from the Stalinist other has continued to strongly prevail.

7. Conclusion

The articles and works examined in this chapter demonstrate how Khrushchev's 1956 'secret speech' precipitated a fast and dramatic evolution of British communist writing on Stalin and Stalinism, from the positive othering of the pre-1956 era in the *Daily Worker* and other works to the split in the Party as many members attempted to come to terms with the revelations of the speech. While this split has been well documented, the analysis in this chapter of the evolving way in which Stalin and his regime were conceptualised and redefined by British communists during this period has shed a new, more encompassing light on Western attitudes towards Stalin.

Without examining these accounts, an analysis of Western othering of Stalinism would, as other surveys of Western attitudes to Russia have previously done, remain largely confined to that of anti-communist individuals, neglecting the important and relevant information that can be found within the materials examined in this chapter. Most specifically, it has highlighted that notions of morality and deviancy became central to the way in which many British communists attempted to come to terms with Stalinism and with their own actions

⁸² See T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia* (Chicago, 1988). Cliff believed that in order to fulfil his desire to overtake Western powers, Stalin effectively closely copied capitalist methods, making Stalinism much closer to capitalism than to socialism, suggesting that it was in fact a form of capitalism.

⁸³ C. Harman, 'The Twentieth Century: An Age of Extremes or An Age of Possibilities' in K. Flett and D. Renton (eds.), *The Twentieth Century: A Century of Wars and Revolutions?* (London, 2000), p. 225.

and beliefs. This was manifested in the othering of Stalinism, only as opposed to the works examined in the other chapters of this study, this occurred within a socialist framework through a reinforcement of the idea of it as a deviant and degenerate form of socialism, instead of a deviancy from capitalist democracy. The question of personal moral responsibility both implicitly and explicitly suggested that Stalinism was immoral, dangerous and wrong and that coming to terms with their own shortcomings was a process through which British communists hoped to erase from themselves and socialism the stain of Stalinism.

These writings also demonstrate the deep chasm between the works of the Western Sovietologists and those of British communists, made especially striking by the fact of them being written during the same period.⁸⁴ And while the two may seem to operate and develop independently of each other, the works of these British communists would in fact deeply affect the totalitarian-model school in other ways, impacting on the direction in which Western scholarship on Stalin and Stalinism would develop. Indeed, the gulf between British communist writing and that of the totalitarian model scholars becomes all the more relevant to the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism when we consider the future impact on the field of British communist historians' work on social history. Hobsbawm highlighted the huge leaps forward they had made in this area, and for him there was little doubt that they can largely be credited with the rise of 'social history' in Britain as a field of study, especially with what is

⁸⁴ This is well exemplified by Hobsbawm later arguing that Stalinism was not totalitarian. Totalitarianism, as defined by Hobsbawm, was that it stood for an all-embracing centralised system that not only imposed total physical control over its population but, by means of its monopoly of propaganda and education, actually succeeded in getting its people to internalise its values. He stated that the sense of establishing a form of deification of the leader Stalin was certainly to an extent successful. In every other respect, however, the regime was not totalitarian: 'It did not exercise effective 'thought control', let alone ensure 'thought conversion', but in fact depoliticised the citizenry to an astonishing degree'. He felt that the majority of the population was left 'untouched by Marxist-Leninist official doctrine since it had 'no apparent relevance to them'. See Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, pp.393-394

termed 'history from below'.⁸⁵ In particular, they were greatly concerned with plebeian ideology, the theory underlying the actions of social movements: it was, wrote Hobsbawm, 'still largely identified with historians of this provenance, for the social history of *ideas* was always (thanks largely to Hill) one of our main preoccupations'.⁸⁶ The origins of the work and thought of the displacers of the totalitarian-model vision in the field of Soviet studies in the West – the social historians and their revisionism – can be found in the works of the Marxist historians of the 1950s and 1960s, which provided radically new interpretative frameworks within which all future social historians could work.

⁸⁵ In particular he gives the examples of Hilton, Hill, George Rude, E.P. Thompson, Raphael Samuel and himself.

⁸⁶ Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', p.44

Chapter 4

Morality and blame: the revisionist debates of the 1980s

1. Introduction: the rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s

The first two decades of the Cold War had seen the emergence of a public political and academic discourse focused on the totalitarian nature of Stalinism that had set the Soviet Union apart from the Western democracies. By the mid-1960s, however, the post-war generation of baby boomers had grown up into adolescence and young adulthood in a world of nuclear and ideological threat – one in which Soviet communism was evil and Western countries were the defenders of freedom and democracy. However, a consequence of living with constant reminders of ideological as well as physical threat was the emergence of a largely anti-war generation and one which eventually would turn on its governments to fight for exactly what their states were fighting against: where Soviet communism had been seen as the ultimate threat, it was now being perceived by some as an alternative way of coping with the problems that the West was dealing with at this time.

Increasing doubts about the purpose of the Vietnam War and the way in which the USA carried it out also came to the fore during this period, and there were, in particular, two significant issues for its critics: the first was that no one ever had a clear or credible idea of why the United States was so committed to it. Secondly, it appeared to show the US as an aggressor, not as a country that only responded to direct threats to its existence, as standard Cold War ideas suggested.¹ This was especially exemplified by the student unrest of

¹ C. Read, *The Stalin Years: A Reader* (Basingstoke, 2003), p.13

1968, itself a symptom of a wider generational malaise.² This malaise spread through all spheres of life, but most of all through those areas which were particularly politicised, notably academia.

One way in which this manifested itself was in a new focus on the social sciences.³ Despite originating in the nineteenth century, the social sciences, and especially their role in historiography, did not come to the fore until after the Second World War.⁴ The disasters of the first four decades of the twentieth century compelled scholars to attempt an understanding of these crises that ranged across not only the political but also social, economic and culturally orientated disciplines.⁵ One of the most influential of the academic journals which emerged in the twentieth century was the French *Annales*, which had been founded by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in 1929.

² For a social and political history of the 1968 revolts see M. Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (London, 2005). For a transnational history perspective on the events of 1968 in Europe see M. Klimke and J. Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (New York, 2008). For a month by month account of events around the world in 1968 with accompanying photographs see T. Ali and S. Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, (London, 1998). Richard Pipes gives an account of how this malaise manifested itself at Harvard in his memoirs; his disapproval of the unrest and resulting changes at the institution is tangible. See R. Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (New Haven and London, 2003), pp.107-110

³ An early example of this is the work of E. H. Carr. Although a scholar of the early Cold War era, Carr differed from the Sovietologists of his era in his interpretations of Soviet communism in that he was uncomfortable with the wider political and academic discourse on the Soviet Union occurring around this time. Carr's political stance was quite clearly far more aligned with the mood of the 1960s and the changes in approach in Soviet studies. Carr was committed to democratic socialism, to greater equality than was found in most capitalist societies and believed in public control and planning of the economic process and a stronger state exercising remedial and constructive functions. See Suny, 'Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century', p. 33. In an article on Carr, Isaac Deutscher wrote: 'If he had chosen to epitomize his work in some epigrammatic motto he might have opened his History in the Churchillian manner with the following text: 'How Russian Society Collapsed Through the Folly and Ineptitude of its Old Ruling Classes and Through the Utopian Dreams of its Bolshevik Revolutionaries, and How These Revolutionaries in The End saved Russia by Giving up Their Quixotic Delusions and Learning Arduously and Painfully the ABC of Statecraft.' See I. Deutscher, 'Mr. E. H. Carr as Historian of Soviet Russia', *Soviet Studies*, Vol.6, No. 4, April 1955, pp. 337-350, p. 340. Despite being so often described as a *Realpolitiker par excellence*, his ideas led him to his own Utopia, albeit a vague, undefined one, of which he said: 'I suppose I should call it 'socialist''. See T. Deutscher, 'E. H. Carr – A Personal Memoir', *New Left Review* 137 (Jan. – Feb 1983), pp.78-86, p.86

⁴ For an overview of the emergence of the social sciences during the Enlightenment see J. Harvey, 'History and the social sciences' in S. Berger, H. Feldner and K. Passmore, (eds.), *Writing History: Theory and Practise* (London, 2010), p.82

⁵ Harvey, 'History and the social sciences', p.100

In the Preface to the first issue addressed to their readers, Febvre and Bloch stated ‘we have long been aware of the wrongs that can be caused by a divorce that has now become conventional... We aim to challenge these very devastating schisms’.⁶ The divorce to which they referred was the separation of different disciplines in the study of the past: their principal concern with the historical profession was the overwhelming majority of historians placing the state, politics and great men at the centre of research of the past without drawing on other equally relevant disciplines, such as economics, geography, anthropology, or sociology, for instance.⁷ The promotion of social sciences was far reaching and finally gave a voice to social history in a traditionally political history and political science dominated sphere.

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s, however, that social history truly came into its own with the appearance of academic journals such as *The Journal of Social History* (1967), *Social History* (1974), German *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* [History and Society] (1975), and *History Workshop Journal* (1976).⁸ The rise of the social sciences meant that there was increasing academic interest in moving away from traditional narrative orientated, state-focused studies of the past, as had been exemplified in Soviet studies by the totalitarian-model of interpretation.

In the 1960s, the increasing general focus on the social sciences took hold of the *Annales*, and more generally historians increasingly looked upon history as a science, one that could be studied, like all sciences, quantitatively.⁹ Within this new focus on

⁶ M. Bloch and L. Febvre, ‘Preface: To Our Readers’ *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale* 1 (1929), 1-2 as cited in A. Budd (ed.), *The Modern Historiography Reader: Western Sources* (London, 2009), pp.188-189

⁷ The *Annales* historians advocated not only an international, multidisciplinary approach to history but also more radically one that was a break from the traditional view of history as moving across a one-dimensional time from the past to the future. As an alternative, they stressed the relativity and multi-layering of time. See G. G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, 1997), p.51

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.100

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.59-60. Prominent *Annalistes* of this period include Jacques Le Goff, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Georges Duby and François Furet. For a comment on the role of the social sciences in the historical profession around this time, see J. Le

data, results and the desire to approach history as a pure science, an important concept was implicit: that it was possible for the practice of writing history to be relatively objective and be a documentation of the facts of the past as presented by scientific quantitative research.¹⁰

2. Revisionism and the 'new cohort' in the study of Stalinism

In the field of Soviet studies, the rise of social history in the wider profession and the changing global context manifested themselves through a rejection of the Cold War totalitarian-model paradigm and through a reassessment of interpretations: firstly of the 1917 Russian Revolution and then of Stalinism.¹¹ It was becoming clear that the totalitarian model of interpretation could not account for the dramatic changes to the Soviet system that occurred under Nikita Khrushchev. These changes, which traditional Sovietology could not have expected nor predicted, forced the profession to re-evaluate its previously established conventional wisdom. From the late 1960s

Goff, 'Is Politics Still the Backbone of History?' in F. Gilbert and S. R. Graubard, *Historical Studies Today* (New York, 1972), p.338

¹⁰ This kind of research had a primarily social science focus, with the use of demographic data becoming more widespread, for instance. For an example of this in studies on Stalinism see Sheila Fitzpatrick's extensive use of data, and literature relating to data and quantitative research in S. Fitzpatrick, *Education and social mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934* (Cambridge, 1979). This may help to explain Fitzpatrick's call for objectivity in the field in the 1980s. See, for example S. Fitzpatrick, 'Afterword: Revisionism Revisited', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, October 1986, pp. 409-413. On the nature of social history more specifically, see E. J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society' in F. Gilbert, and S. R. Graubard, *Historical Studies Today* (New York, 1972), p. 3. Incidentally, Hobsbawm here also quoted G. M. Trevelyan's expression 'History with the politics left out', referring to the second type of social history Hobsbawm identified, which also appears in the title of Geoff Eley's *Russian Review* article cited in this chapter. See G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London, 1944), as quoted by Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society', p.3

¹¹ Read states that the underlying reassessment of the Russian revolution centred on suggesting that the October revolution was not a simple coup from above and that Lenin and the Bolsheviks did have a certain amount of popular support. The deformations of the early Soviet regime were thought by some to not be the inevitable result of the application of Marxist principles but the result of the conditions under which the regime was born, notable economic collapse, civil war and political intervention by all of Russia's neighbours and all the great powers. Most revisionists challenged the continuity theory and were careful to distinguish Leninism from Stalinism. See Read, *The Stalin Years*, p.13

significant modifications in interpretation were underway.¹² These were the beginnings of ‘revisionism’.

Advocating a social history based approach, the revisionist movement in the Western historiography of Stalinism took place predominantly in the 1970s and 1980s and provoked the most impassioned, lively and at times aggressive debates observed in the field to date. The debates centred on the question of the place and prominence of politics and society in the study of Stalinism. Where Sovietologists had focused exclusively on the primacy of the state as an organ that exercised complete control and terror over the dominated masses, revisionists called for increased research into social processes and dynamics and into the interaction of state and society, arguing that the latter was far from an inert mass but in fact a complex and dynamic body.

Two waves of revisionism can be identified. ‘First generation’ revisionists included Moshe Lewin, Stephen F. Cohen, Alec Nove and Robert C. Tucker. While they still supported the centrality of politics and ideology to the study of Stalinism, they called for greater breadth in the field and highlighted the necessity for studies of Soviet society. It is Lewin who is often regarded as the doyen of the first wave of revisionism. Discussing the publication of Lewin’s first work in the 1960s after the domination of the totalitarian model, Nick Lampert described it as having ‘the quality of a revelation’. Lewin’s works enabled readers to understand, for the first time, the complex nature of the relationship between political and social developments in the Soviet Union. They were appreciated not only for these revelations after years of Sovietology dominated by political bias (and, as Lampert points out, the prevailing ignorance of the West about Soviet society) but also for the multi-dimensionality of his research and publications.¹³

¹² Stephen F. Cohen, an early revisionist himself, provides a short history of the emergence of revisionism in Soviet history in S. F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience - Politics and History Since 1917* (Oxford, 1985).

¹³ See N. Lampert, ‘Preface’ in N. Lampert, and G. T. Rittersporn, *Stalinism: Its Nature and Aftermath. Essays in Honour of Moshe Lewin* (London, 1992), p.ix

For example, Lewin's collection of essays *The Making of the Soviet System* was an in-depth exploration of the Soviet life examining aspects of Soviet society that had largely been unaddressed. It attempted to piece together the lives and times of the Soviet people in ways that had not been done before. Despite this being one of Lewin's social-history orientated works, its multi-dimensionality is evident. While pleading for increased scholarship on the social history of the Soviet Union, Lewin did not discount the importance of political history in Soviet and Stalinist history:

The Soviet social system and its political regime are far from being sufficiently well known or understood. Facile assessments abound but too many errors are being committed, too many assessments were and are shallow, not just for the good of scholarship but also for the good of politics and for the well-being of our little planet.¹⁴

Both Lewin and Cohen argued against the continuity between Bolshevism and Stalinism, and Tucker's analysis of the reality and depth of post-Stalin change led him to conclude that Bolshevism had no longer existed in the Soviet Union since Stalin's ascent to power and that post-Stalin change had in fact been a 'movement to reconstitute the political system of Bolshevism'.¹⁵

The 'second generation' revisionists were lumped into a group widely referred to as the 'new cohort', a term coined by Sheila Fitzpatrick in 1986 that caught on despite being largely rejected by those who were meant to be a part of it.¹⁶ This was mainly because

¹⁴ See M. Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays In The Social History of Interwar Russia* (London, 1985), p.4

¹⁵ Lewin was the first revisionist to challenge the idea of continuity between Leninism and Stalinism, arguing that Stalinism was a system in its own right because it radically reformulated the aims and strategies of the original founders to form something new. See M. Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (London, 1969); S. F. Cohen, 'Bolshevism and Stalinism' in R. C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1977) and Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, p. ix. For Tucker's work on the importance of Stalin's personality to Stalinism see R. C. Tucker, 'The Decisive Trifle' in C. Ward (ed.), *The Stalinist Dictatorship* (London, 1998). See also S. F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience* for first-generation revisionism.

¹⁶ 'Second generation' revisionists include Sheila Fitzpatrick, J. Arch Getty, Roberta Manning, Lynne Viola and Gábor T. Rittersporn. While their research

between them they held a variety of stances on the question of how research in the field should proceed.¹⁷ Indeed, a generally-applied term such as ‘revisionist’ was in this case misleading. It suggested a uniform interpretation of a revised area of scholarship by a group of historians unified in their interpretation and conclusions. In the case of the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism, this could not have been further from the truth. Certainly, this revisionism had been true to its name: it had in every case been a reappraisal and reinterpretation of previous scholarship, its methods and ideas. However, beyond this it was so diverse that it acquired many subdivisions advocating different methodologies and interpretations.

The term ‘revisionist’ has tended to denote anyone who was not of the totalitarian model school, a large umbrella under which smaller clusters, or individual scholars, must be sought out.¹⁸

Nowhere was this lack of cohesion more obvious than in the 1986 and 1987 discussions which took place in *The Russian Review*.¹⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick’s article ‘New Perspectives on Stalinism’, which suggested removing politics from the study of Stalinist society,

agendas varied, they extended the questioning of the totalitarian model to the prewar Stalin era, to include the period of the purges, and advocated a ‘politically disengaged scholarship’. See R. Manning, ‘State and Society in Stalinist Russia’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 407-411, p. 408

¹⁷ Fitzpatrick first used it in the article which provoked such lively discussion in the two *Russian Review* issues. See S. Fitzpatrick, ‘New Perspectives on Stalinism’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, October 1986, pp. 357-373

¹⁸ There are some identifiable groups within the ‘new cohort’ scholars. Getty, for instance, chose to go to Boston because Manning, one of the earlier second wave revisionists, was working there. Getty has said that she encouraged him to think outside of the box and have the confidence to say whatever it was he had to say and ‘see what happens’. See ‘Interview with Professor J. Arch Getty by Dr James Harris’, The History Faculty website,

<http://www.thehistoryfaculty.com/Audio/hfc0034jag002.mp3>. Manning and Getty later edited a book together which examined the social dimensions of key events. See J. A. Getty and R. Manning, (eds.), *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1993).

¹⁹ These two issues of *The Russian Review* have acquired a certain notoriety. Engerman notes that ‘Fitzpatrick’s article became a lightning rod for criticism from all sides’, the result of which was to produce few new perspectives; instead it deepened political divisions with the field. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, pp.306-307. Matthew Rendle has called the debates ‘infamous’ and ‘bitter’. See M. Rendle, ‘Post-Revisionism: the Continuing Debate on Stalinism’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3, June 2010, pp.370–388, p.372. Mark Sandle stated that the discussion was ‘prolonged, and at times heated’. Sandle, ‘New Directions, New Approaches, Old Issues’, p.232

provoked a lively, impassioned and at times belligerent discussion between a number of prominent scholars of the field.²⁰ These discussions provide an illuminating and accurate representation of the state of flux of, and the conflict in, the field at this time.²¹ While each of the participants found some points in common with a colleague - if not so often with Fitzpatrick - these sixteen articles demonstrated the variety of positions held during this period on the subject of research into Stalinism. The historians themselves addressed this issue in the 1987 edition of *The Russian Review*. Roberta Manning and Jerry F. Hough, for instance, highlighted the varying interpretations of Stalinism present not only in the debates between totalitarian-model historians, but equally between those within the revisionist movement.²² Hough identified five separate types of attacks on the totalitarian model, highlighting the contrasts and similarities between them, while Manning examined the differences between the first and second generation revisionists.²³ Here she drew attention to the relative ideological proximity held by the first-generation revisionists

²⁰ The article in question is Fitzpatrick, 'New Perspectives on Stalinism'. Fitzpatrick's line of scholarship can to an extent be linked to her upbringing and postgraduate years. Indeed, it is not surprising that Sheila Fitzpatrick felt underwhelmed by her time as a postgraduate at Oxford, formerly a stronghold of totalitarian-model scholarship. The daughter of a radical journalist and historian, she counts her father as the most influential person in her life. Fitzpatrick met E.H. Carr in the late 1960s and, though he was in Cambridge, he became a sort of mentor to her, though she does not credit him with influencing her work. Instead, it is given to her upbringing, for having already instilled in her by the time she met him her 'anti-anti-communist and anti-moralising' stance. Leonard Schapiro, another influential totalitarian-model scholar, became more of a mentor to her during her Oxford years, but later became a critic of her work, deeming her 'not anti-Soviet enough'. See M. David-Fox, P. Holquist, A. M. Martin, S. Fitzpatrick, 'From the Editors: An Interview with Sheila Fitzpatrick', *Kritika*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Summer 2007, pp.479-286, pp.. 480-481.

²¹ As well as Fitzpatrick, taking part in the discussions were, with greatly varying views on the how research into Stalinism should proceed, Stephen F. Cohen, Alfred G. Meyer, Peter Kenez, and Geoff Eley (providing an immediate response to Fitzpatrick's article in the 1986 volume); and Gábor T. Rittersporn, J. Arch Getty, Roberta T. Manning, William Chase, Robert Conquest, Alec Nove, Hiroaki Kuromiya, Daniel R. Brower, Robert C. Tucker, Lynne Viola and Jerry F. Hough (providing comment on Fitzpatrick's article as well as the other four 1986 articles, in the 1987 volume). See *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, October 1986 and *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987.

²² J. F. Hough, 'The "Dark Forces", the Totalitarian Model, and Soviet History', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 397-403.

²³ Hough, 'The "Dark Forces", the Totalitarian Model, and Soviet History', pp.398-400

such as Lewin, Cohen and Tucker to the traditional Sovietologists (they continued to use a ‘top-down’ interpretative framework) as compared with the later second-generation revisionists, of which she considered herself part, and who were by now beginning to produce a much more ‘detailed, complex, and nuanced view of Stalinism’.²⁴

Those named as members of the ‘new cohort’ were keen to point out the lack of accuracy in placing them all under the same umbrella. William Chase rejected the suggestion that he was part of this group at all, rebuking Peter Kenez for having stated in 1986 that he was, and for being a ‘critic of the revisionist school [who] does not know who belongs to the group’.²⁵ Hiroaki Kuromiya noted that ‘insofar as I can judge, no single view on Stalinism unites the new cohort’ and that some of the commentators on Fitzpatrick’s article had misrepresented the cohort as a ‘cabal of Fitzpatrickists’. He commented that she would have legitimate reason to declare ‘à la Marx that she was not a Fitzpatrickist’.²⁶ Manning also stated that the second generation of revisionists were by no means confined to the ‘new cohort’ named in the 1986 discussions and that in fact many disagreed with Fitzpatrick’s suggestion of practising pure social history in research on Stalinism.²⁷ Finally, Lynne Viola found herself surprised to learn that she was part of this cohort and rejected her apparent membership on the grounds that there was ‘no clearly identifiable cohort’ and that she agreed with some of the previous criticism levelled against it in the 1986 discussions.²⁸

²⁴ R. Manning, ‘State and Society in Stalinist Russia’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 407-411, p. 408

²⁵ W. Chase, ‘Social History and Revisionism of the Stalinist Era’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp.382-385, p. 382. Peter Kenez had stated that Chase was one of the ‘self-consciously revisionist group of historians of the Stalin era’. See P. Kenez, ‘Stalinism as Humdrum Politics’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, October 1986, pp.395-400, p.395

²⁶ H. Kuromiya, ‘Stalinism and Historical Research’, *The Russian Review*, Vol.46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 404-406, p.404

²⁷ Manning, ‘State and Society in Stalinist Russia’, pp. 407-408

²⁸ L. Viola, ‘In Search of Young Revisionists’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp.428-431. The editor of the journal also highlighted that of the six supposed members of the ‘new cohort’ every single one was quick to point out that they did not belong to any cohort, whilst perhaps forgetting that a cohort is often a grouping associated with age rather than an association that ‘one may or may not

Aside from a manifest disapproval of the term ‘new cohort’, there was a striking and as yet unstudied feature of the discussions found in the two issues of *The Russian Review* that was concerned not with the content of work published in this period but rather the way in which the ‘new cohort’s’ work was received by older scholars. Indeed, the overtly negative and at times hostile reactions to the new revisionist agenda suggest that these debates provided a vector through which notions of responsibility, blame and morality were able to be both implicitly and explicitly expressed in relation to both Stalin and his regime and new scholarship on Stalinism.

3. History with the politics left out?²⁹

The question at the centre of these articles appeared to be, on the surface at least, based on the role, scope and nature of social history in the context of research on Stalin and Stalinism, constructed as responses to Fitzpatrick’s article in the 1986 issue. This was exemplified in a first instance by the immediate responses to the article in the same issue.³⁰ Stephen F. Cohen, for example, was deeply concerned that Fitzpatrick’s suggested new agenda would lead to the ‘new cohort’ ‘closing one or both eyes to a major dimension of that social reality – the prolonged mass terror of the Stalin years’,³¹ stating that that Terror was also a social phenomenon, from which social processes associated with collectivization, industrialisation, urbanization, and upward mobility could not be separated.³² Geoff Eley too was concerned that ‘the desire of revisionists to drive a

chose to join’. See From the Editor, ‘More Controversy’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 375-378, p. 375

²⁹ This is taken from the title of Geoff Eley’s article in the 1986 issue of *The Russian Review*. See G. Eley, ‘History With The Politics Left Out – Again?’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No.4, October 1986, pp. 385-394

³⁰ The editor had invited the responses of the other four scholars for them to be published alongside Fitzpatrick’s article. See From the Editor, ‘Controversy’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, October 1986, p. v

³¹ S. F. Cohen, ‘Stalin’s Terror as Social History’, *The Russian Review*, Vol.45, No. 4, October 1986, pp.375-384, p. 378

³² *Ibid.*, pp.380-381

polemical wedge between themselves and the older literature threatens to close their access to some basic insights' and suggested that by neglecting the overall context of the coercive state and political culture of Stalinism revisionists would be discarding 'the baby of analysis with the bathwater of the model'.³³ He concluded that unless Fitzpatrick and her revisionists came to terms with the fact that the social history of Stalinism begins in the 'explosive juncture' of cultural archaism, societal transformation and statist bureaucratisation, then the idea that Stalinism had some social as well as political dynamics would remain a 'banal discovery'.³⁴ Peter Kenez stated that the revisionists' view of Stalinism as 'humdrum politics' and of the Soviet government being just like any other government operating in difficult circumstances was 'utterly contrary to all evidence'.³⁵ He concluded his damning assessment of revisionism by stating '[t]o me, the revisionists' views are so outlandish that I wonder what makes them see the past the way they do. To that I have no answer at all.'³⁶

The 1987 issue produced a greater balance of responses, at the centre of which remained the question of the place and scope of social history in the study of Stalinism. Daniel R. Brower, for example, suggested that 'the methods of structural social history ought to remain secondary in the study of that period'.³⁷ William Chase focused on the problem of producing pure social history on a period where any studies on societal changes and social mores, attitudes, behaviours and relations must necessarily deal with state policies and politics in general. As a result, despite his support for the introduction of social history to the field, Chase had 'trouble supporting Fitzpatrick's desire to see scholars write social history devoid of politics.'³⁸ Robert Conquest discussed the 'implicit distortion of the

³³ Eley, 'History With the Politics Left Out – Again?', p.390

³⁴ Ibid., p.394

³⁵ Kenez, 'Stalinism as Humdrum Politics', pp.396-397

³⁶ Ibid., p. 400

³⁷ D. R. Brower, 'Stalinism and the 'View from Below'', *The Russian Review*, Vol.46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 379-381, p. 380

³⁸ Chase, 'Social History and Revisionism of the Stalinist Era', pp. 383-384

broader picture' engendered through neglecting politics and more specifically the Terror, and J. Arch Getty asked how social historians could possibly neglect the state and still produce a reliable picture of society.³⁹ Hiroaki Kuromiya discussed the importance of the Terror to the study of Stalinism, agreeing to its centrality while stating that he was 'inspired' by Fitzpatrick's research agenda.⁴⁰ Similarly, Manning and Viola advocated a social history approach that did not neglect politics or the Terror.⁴¹ Gábor T. Rittersporn provided a defence of Fitzpatrick's work against Cohen' and Kenez's critical articles, asking 'What is the context of terror if not the working of the system – the ultimate subject of the 'new cohort'?'⁴² Chase best expressed the crux of the debate when he stated that

Getty, Rittersporn, Manning, Solomon, Viola and Fitzpatrick do not write social history as that term is understood and applied by historians of western Europe and America. Fitzpatrick's work on cultural revolution and on education and social mobility are often cited as examples of social history, but in reality they are studies of selected socio-political processes and the attendant state-society relationships.⁴³

The apparent principal drive of these articles, and a common point to all, was therefore the discussion of the extent to which politics could be left out of the study of Stalinism, with the majority of the participants suggesting that while a social history of Stalinism was undoubtedly necessary, as was an eventual revisionism in the field in the years following traditional Sovietology, it was necessary that politics and the Terror remain part of that history.⁴⁴

³⁹ R. Conquest, 'Revisionizing Stalin's Russia', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 386-390 and J. A. Getty, 'State, Society and Superstition', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 391-396

⁴⁰ Kuromiya, *Stalinism and Historical Research*. p. 404

⁴¹ Manning, 'State and Society in Stalinist Russia', pp. 418-420 and Viola, 'In Search of Young Revisionists', pp. 428-431.

⁴² G. T. Rittersporn, 'History, Commemoration and Hectoring Rhetoric', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1987, pp. 418-423, p. 422

⁴³ Chase, 'Social History and Revisionism of the Stalinist Era', p. 383

⁴⁴ The problem of creating stringent separations between types of history, especially when examining a phenomenon with such wide ranging impacts as Stalinism, has been highlighted for example by Ludmila Jordanova when discussing the difficulties we face when attempting to divide history: 'Do we regard these as levels

4. Whose fault? Stalinism and the locus of blame

These articles, however, suggest more than just concern with defining the interpretative framework for scholarship on Stalinism: the responses to a suggested removal or subordination of politics in social history research unveiled a clear and fundamental moral dimension to the argument.

In a first instance, this was manifested by unease with where to place responsibility and blame for Stalinism if Stalin, politics and the Terror were to be removed from consideration.⁴⁵ Kenez, for instance, suggested that the revisionists' claim that - because the Bolsheviks possessed neither a well-functioning Party machinery nor an extensive coercive apparatus - society consented to this form of government was an extraordinary leap which 'absolve[s] the leadership from responsibility for mass murder.'⁴⁶ He argued that, whatever the factions and disorganisation within the Party apparatus, these were 'hardly an excuse' for the millions that were murdered, suggesting that according to him the appropriate placing of blame was an endeavour more important than finding a possible explanation for the Terror.⁴⁷ In 1987 Alec Nove, too, discussed the question of Stalin's responsibility, arguing that while he most likely did not will

of analysis, as complimentary aspects of a society or as distinct phenomena? What do you do about the fact that the boundaries between them are evidently blurred, and yet they seem to be 'right', or 'natural' or 'obvious' categories?'. See L.

Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London, 1996), p. 41

⁴⁵ Work on Stalinism before the arrival of the 'new cohort' demonstrates why totalitarian model scholars or first generation revisionists had so much trouble with the new directions suggested. See, for example, R. C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1977). Although the first wave of revisionism was well underway by this stage, the chapters in Tucker's volume demonstrate the centrality of Stalin himself, and the politics he practised, to conceptualisations of Stalinism in the 1960s and 1970s. Other examples include Conquest, who saw Stalin's personal motives as explanation for the purges. See R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purges of the Thirties* (London, 1968).

⁴⁶ Kenez, 'Stalinism as Humdrum Politics', p.397. Here Kenez is particularly referring to an article by Manning in which she concluded that in 1937 in Belyi rayon (a Russian district) the state government of the countryside was dependent on the consent of the governed.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.397

the Terror and that he could not have been personally involved in every single daily decision made by the Kremlin, Getty was wrong to suggest that Stalin was not involved with the arrests of Politburo members.⁴⁸ He concluded that while social history research into the 1930s was highly desirable, the field must not ‘turn the revolution from above into a revolution by consent, or Stalin into a pawn of “radicals”, or caricature the past efforts of historians to understand the complexities’ of this period.⁴⁹ Tucker too was cautious about removing Stalin’s role from Stalinism. Discussing the difficulties of using the term ‘Stalinism’, he asked whether it signified the sum of Stalin’s deeds while in power, or the events of his time in power.⁵⁰ This concern with defining Stalinism points to another instance of questioning where the blame for it lay. Tucker suggested that Stalin himself could not be removed from the equation: his character was central to the regime. To take it into account was to ‘illuminate the man’s drive for despotic power, the ways he went about obtaining it, and the uses he made of it.’⁵¹ To omit Stalin would be a sure formula for blundering in the ‘forest of facts’ of the 1930s and beyond, including Cold War and post-war foreign relations.⁵²

Providing the most balanced and least combative response of the 1986 articles to Fitzpatrick’s article, Alfred G. Meyer highlighted this preoccupation in placing the blame for Stalinism in the correct place. Stating that all attempts to exorcise the past or part of it implied ‘celebrating, glorifying or whitewashing’ some part of it, he addressed the locus of blame in regards to émigré and *samizdat* writers, Khrushchev’s discourse on Stalin and Stalinism, and Solzhenitsyn’s work, which he suggested all in some way attempted to free a certain party from guilt.⁵³ The revisionists presented

⁴⁸ A. Nove, ‘Stalinism: Revisionism Reconsidered’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No.4, pp.412-417, p.416

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 417

⁵⁰ R. C. Tucker, ‘The Stalin Period as an Historical Problem’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, pp. 424-427, p. 425

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 425

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 425

⁵³ For instance, in the case of Khrushchev, Meyer stated that in blaming Stalin for excesses he sought to exculpate the Party. If the Party is accused, it takes blame

‘something of a mirror image’ to these: by demonstrating that Stalin was not as much in control as the totalitarianism school asserted, they were ‘to some extent absolving him from blame for some of the cruellest episodes of the Stalinist era. This does not, of course, lessen the pains of these episodes, but places the blame elsewhere’.⁵⁴ Meyer recognised that neither the totalitarian school nor the revisionists denied that terrible things had happened under Stalin; their argument was ‘only over who is to be blamed for them’.⁵⁵

The defensive responses of the revisionists in the face of Kenez’s criticism in particular demonstrate the contentiousness of this issue. Getty pointed out that ‘as early as page 9 of my book, I gave Stalin “primary responsibility” for these events [the Terror and the purges]. No western scholarship has suggested otherwise’.⁵⁶ Kuromiya stated that ‘[o]f course, Stalin is to be blamed’; however revisionist research was less concerned with blaming Stalin than with explaining how and why ‘dreadful things’ happened and in what contexts.⁵⁷ He concluded by asking ‘[d]oes such an interest stem from the concern to whitewash Stalinist politics or “exorcise the ghost of Stalin?” I think not’.⁵⁸ Rittersporn warned of the limits of ‘commemorative historiography’, noting that every commentator on the Fitzpatrick article in 1986 had suggested that writing on the 1930s must preserve the memory of the epoch’s atrocities and ‘condemn’ those who perpetrated them.⁵⁹ Manning commented that by extending the questioning of the totalitarian thesis to the pre-war Stalin era, including the period of the purges, revisionists eschewed the political goals espoused by many American Soviet specialists ‘who are unable

away from the people. When Solzhenitsyn accused ‘ethnic aliens’, it freed Russian people of guilt. Finally, whenever Soviet émigré or *samizdat* attempted to come to terms with the various horrors of Stalinism (the purges, collectivisation etc), they identified a culprit and implicitly excused someone else. A. G. Meyer, ‘Coming to Terms with the Past...And with One’s Older Colleagues’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No.5, October 1986, pp.401-408, p. 404

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.405

⁵⁶ Getty, ‘State, Society, and Superstition’, p.394

⁵⁷ Kuromiya, ‘Stalinism and Historical Research’, p.406

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.406

⁵⁹ Rittersporn, ‘History, Commemoration and Hectoring Rhetoric’, p. 418

to conceive of scholarship other than an enterprise undertaken to “indict” and/or “rehabilitate” particular individuals or movements’.⁶⁰ Manning also criticised Fitzpatrick for suggesting that only the state or society were capable of shaping the historical process, therefore implying that responsibility for the regime could only lie in one of those two places.⁶¹ She defended second generation revisionists against accusations of seeking to ‘rehabilitate’ Stalin, arguing that only by adequately and thoroughly testing the totalitarian model in detailed studies of events, social strata and levels of government could it be determined whether Stalin ‘all by himself in all instances determined everything’.⁶² Finally, Viola responded to accusations of absolving Stalin by stating that not only was she ‘not in the business of absolution’, but she also had not worked on the era of the purges.⁶³

A central characteristic of the debate on social history was therefore an urgent concern with the question of whether or not the revisionists’ work would in some way absolve the political leadership, and Stalin himself, of the horrors of Stalinism, and the revisionists’ responses to this concern.

5. Blame and the moral dimension of the revisionist debates

What does this preoccupation with the locus of blame tell us about the nature of these discussions? Writing on the concept of blame, D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini suggest that blaming involves evaluating. When we blame others, we see them as having dropped below some standard that we accept (or perhaps that we think they should accept), whether of excellence, morality or respectful relationships. Coates and Tognazzini note that the judgements made are ‘tinged with normativity’ and because of this they carry a certain force: they are the sorts of judgements we would rather not have made

⁶⁰ Manning, ‘State and Society in Stalinist Russia’, pp. 407-408

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.409

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.410

⁶³ Viola, ‘In Search of Young Revisionists’, p.430

about us.⁶⁴ The moral character of blame has been highlighted by others. T. M. Scanlon defined blame as an action taken to indicate something about the person being blamed that impairs one's relationship with them, and to understand that relationship in a way that reflects this impairment. In most cases, to decide that a person is worthy of blame, they must have behaved wrongly and in a way that is considered to fall below normative moral standards.⁶⁵ Angela M. Smith supported this idea when she argued that moral protest is the crucial element of blame, suggesting that there are two distinct but related aims to it: the first is to register the fact that the person wronged did not deserve to be treated in this way by challenging the moral claim implicit in the wrong-doer's action. The second is to prompt moral recognition and acknowledgement of this fact on the part of the wrong-doer and/or the moral community.⁶⁶ Finally, George Sher has also emphasised the primacy of the moral dimension in placing blame, arguing that when we blame someone we imply that their actions have been morally defective.⁶⁷

The moral character of allocating blame and its centrality to that process is clearly manifested in these debates, both in regards to Stalin and to the work of the revisionists. This was firstly exemplified by those concerned with the 'whitewashing' of Stalin's regime by the 'new cohort'.⁶⁸ Kenez suggested, for instance, that denying the

⁶⁴ D. J. Coates and N. A. Tognazzini, 'The Contours of Blame' in D. J. Coates and N. A. Tognazzini (eds), *Blame: Its Nature and Norms* (New York, 2013).

⁶⁵ T. M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2008), pp.122-124

⁶⁶ A. M. Smith, 'Moral Blame and Moral Protest' in Coates and Tognazzini (eds.), *Blame*, p. 41, p.43

⁶⁷ G. Sher, *In Praise of Blame* (New York, 2006). Sher highlights however that there is also a type of nonmoral blame, such as when we blame the collapse of a bridge on rusted support beams for instance. Moral and nonmoral blame can also overlap, for instance when we blame a student for their bad grades or a reckless driver for their own injuries. This involves a criticism, which is both similar and different to moral blame. See Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, p.ix.

⁶⁸ The anthropologist Mary Douglas made an interesting point on general 1950s mentality, which could perhaps in be some part related to the use of blame in the articles of the totalitarian model and first generation revisionists and the defence of their own objectivity (see Kenez's article for instance). She suggested that in the late 1950s there was a mood of rejoicing that nuclear power would usher in permanent prosperity for the world, and this mood accounted for why the difference between them and us appeared to be a cognitive problem, a matter of knowing the

importance of state intervention in the life of society meant that, consciously or unconsciously, they ‘de-demonize Stalin and his Politburo’.⁶⁹ On the subject of the ‘inevitable’ moral dimension of research on Stalinism, he went on to question the moral integrity of the revisionists, commenting that ‘[i]f the stress on terror betrays a certain moral sensibility, so does the denial of its significance’.⁷⁰ In our understanding of the attribution of blame, Cohen and Meyer’s accusations of revisionism ‘obscuring and minimizing’ the Terror and placing the blame elsewhere than on Stalin implied that not only was Stalin to blame for the horrors of Stalinism, and therefore morally defective, but the revisionists themselves were too for ‘absolving’ him.⁷¹ The choice to publish these frank and at times bitter criticisms of Fitzpatrick and the ‘new cohort’ also suggests that they sought recognition from, and a challenge by the field of these shortcomings, constituting an appeal to the ‘moral community’, as described by Smith.

In their application to both Stalinism and to revisionist scholarship, the dual dimensions of morality and blame continued to manifest themselves in the responses to the 1986 articles. On the one hand, we have seen that the ‘new cohort’ were quick to reject any claims that they were removing responsibility from Stalin, thereby refuting the inferiority of their own moral standards. On the other

real causes of things. Science meant that people felt able to recognise real danger, backed by the authority of valid experiment and theory. Because of this, blaming behaviour went to the real causes instead of being deflected to the constitution-supporting function it performed elsewhere. The line of reasoning implied ‘real blaming’ was possible. As a result real blame was so guaranteed by its objective basis in knowledge that it ‘could not be harnessed to the sordid work of ideology’. M. Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (London and New York, 1992), p.7

⁶⁹ Kenez, ‘Stalinism as Humdrum Politics’, p. 396

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 399

⁷¹ Cohen, ‘Stalin’s Terror as Social History’, p. 378 and Meyer, ‘Coming to Terms with the Past... And with One’s Older Colleagues’, p.404. Cohen had earlier been more explicit in his moral condemnation of the second generation of revisionists, writing that ‘Probably it is best to leave final moral judgement to Soviet writers (...) But for Western historians now to obscure those profound and enduring tragedies, however admirable their scholarship (...) is to return to the anticold-war but deeply flawed scholarship of E. H. Carr, the British historian whose voluminous and valuable writings grew into tacit justification for the whole Stalin era’. See Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, p.34

hand, they were highly critical of the moralising tendency present in the criticisms of their work. In her immediate response to the 1986 critics, for instance, Fitzpatrick commented that one of the ways in which dealing with the Terror should be avoided was the repetition of familiar data cited from familiar secondary sources, ‘framed by restatement of familiar moral judgements that might as well also be put in quotation marks. There is something of this in Cohen’s commentary’.⁷² She also noted the problems with ‘counter-moralizing’, meaning a consistent but generally unacknowledged effort to divert blame for terror from the regime. Acknowledging that counter-moralising was a trap for revisionists, she highlighted that it implied acceptance of the terms of debate set by the moralisers (presumably here she is referring to Cohen and Kenez in particular), ‘together with a degree of cautious defiance of their intimidatory tone’. This was no-win situation for the revisionists and ‘no good for scholarship in general’. What was important was making the distinction between counter-moralising and the critical examination of sources and data.⁷³ In 1987 Chase also turned accusations of scholarly shortcomings back on the critics, suggesting that since Cohen and Kenez misrepresented the revisionists’ work ‘one must conclude that

⁷² Fitzpatrick, ‘Afterword: Revisionism Revisited’. This reply to the 1986 responses on her original article was invited by the editor, and published in the same issue. Fitzpatrick was invited to provide another response to the 1987 articles, but she chose to let her original article stand for itself. See From the Editor, ‘More Controversy’, p. 378.

⁷³ Fitzpatrick, ‘Afterword: Revisionism Revisited’, pp.410-411. Fitzpatrick noted that she was not referring to the work of Theodore von Laue, the only revisionist scholar whose argument dealt primarily and directly with the question of blame in connection with Stalin. von Laue was indignant at the judgements made of Stalin by the West, and was keen to find the correct moral place of Stalin. See T. H. von Laue, *Why Lenin? Why Stalin? A Reappraisal of the Russian Revolution, 1900-1930* (London, 1966) and especially T. H. von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective* (New York, 1987). Here von Laue stressed the importance of trying to understand Stalinism despite its horrors. To do this, he wanted to understand whether Stalin’s crimes (which he places in inverted commas) were all his own responsibility, or whether they were the responsibility of ‘all the forces at work during his lifetime’. See von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization*, p.101. Paul Hollander has also suggested that von Laue’s vision of Stalin was inseparable from his view of Russia as the underdog and eternal victim, which produced Stalin as a ‘tough-minded redeemer of his victimized nation’. See P. Hollander, *The Survival of the Adversary Culture: Social Criticism and Political: Social Criticism and Political Escapism in American Society* (New Brunswick, 1991), pp. 61-62

what they were really doing was using their commentaries to reaffirm their hatred of Stalinism and sublimating their moral indignation with that system into an unjust condemnation of those who seek to clarify our understanding'.⁷⁴ Referring to Cohen's criticisms, Getty commented that it was surely possible to write about important specialised subjects, such as education, factory workers, social mobility and even the workings of Party organisations, without 'putting statements of moral outrage, however justified, on every page and without making these topics mere subsets of the Great Terror'.⁷⁵ Getty reserved his harshest criticisms for Kenez, however, the 'most frightening parts' of whose remarks were his defence of demonology as a historical method and his 'explicit proposal for an ethics test in Soviet history', concluding that 'one does not need demonology to comprehend history and society'.⁷⁶ Kuromiya similarly stated that Kenez clearly demonstrated his wish to keep the study of Stalinist politics in the realm of demonology, revealing his desire to impose his own interests and interpretations upon other histories.⁷⁷ 'Even more alarming' than this however was what Getty termed Kenez's 'obsession' with measuring the moral quality of authors and their studies of the Stalin era, finding his remarks 'offensive, insulting, and unscholarly'.⁷⁸ On the same subject, Kuromiya noted that while it was necessary to be sensitive to the moral dimensions of the subject, 'such an unwarranted allegation on the part of well-established senior scholars would only help intimidate the less established historians and drive them out of the field'.⁷⁹

Stemming from the debate on the role of social history in studies of Stalinism, the notion of morality thus became central to these arguments on two levels. Firstly it related to the immorality of Stalinism and the need for its recognition, without which Stalin and

⁷⁴ Chase, 'Social History and Revisionism of the Stalinist Era', p. 385

⁷⁵ Getty, 'State, Society, and Superstition', p.394

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.395

⁷⁷ Kuromiya, 'Stalinism and Historical Research', p.405

⁷⁸ Getty, 'State, Society, and Superstition', p.395

⁷⁹ He likened it to re-creating the 'self-dekulakisation' of non-kulaks on the 'academic front'. Kuromiya, 'Stalinism and Historical Research', p. 406

the leadership would be absolved of responsibility. Secondly, it related to the immorality of the revisionists' work in reducing or removing the focus from the political dimensions of Stalinism, and the Terror. In turn, the revisionists' responses to this accusation also acquired morality as a central theme.

6. Conclusion: the revisionist debates and Western attitudes towards Stalin and Stalinism

As Rittersporn pointed out, 'To a large extent, this debate is not about Soviet history, but about Western *mentalités*'⁸⁰; indeed, these debates are revelatory about the way in which Stalin and Stalinism were viewed at this time. In a wider sense, these articles are an insight into shifting definitions of the nature, and level of responsibility, of something deemed 'bad' or 'evil' at this time. The introduction of revisionist ideas in which Stalin himself might not be solely responsible for the dynamics and actions of the Stalinist state and for which bureaucratic forces and tensions could partly be to blame (as Getty was arguing in *The Origins of the Great Purges*⁸¹) were reminiscent of the idea of the 'banality of evil' Hannah Arendt had controversially expressed in 1963 after witnessing the trial of Adolph Eichmann, an SS officer whose job it had been to organise the deportation and evacuation of many European Jews under Nazi rule.⁸² For Arendt, Eichmann had been a totally ordinary man fulfilling his role as a functionary. He became so involved in the task at hand and the daily banality of completing this task that he completely lost track of what was right and wrong.⁸³ Eichmann's evil was banal because it was borne of completely mundane anxieties and considerations. Arendt argued that Himmler had capitalised on this particular kind of

⁸⁰ Rittersporn, 'History, Commemoration and Hectoring Rhetoric', p. 420.

⁸¹ J. A. Getty, *The Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938*, (Cambridge, 1985).

⁸² H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London, 1963).

⁸³ McGowan, *Hannah Arendt*, pp.9-10

individual: an ordinary man who would sacrifice ‘his beliefs, his honor, and his human dignity’ in order to protect his wife, children, salary and pension.⁸⁴ The problem for those judging Eichmann at his trial was that he was not an obvious monster: ‘the trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terrifyingly normal.’⁸⁵ In the early 1970s, the notion of the ordinary individual being capable in certain circumstances of abhorrent acts had been exemplified in the astounding results of Philip Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment which highlighted how quickly notions of human compassion and equality could disintegrate.⁸⁶ None of the revisionists claimed that Stalin was an ordinary man, yet the idea that multiple processes, stresses, tensions and dynamics at work in the Party and the leadership led to the Terror, the purges and the extreme nature of Stalinism share common ground with Arendt’s analysis of the banality of evil, and the results of the Zimbardo’s experiment. Shifting notions of where the responsibility for violence and coercion lay, and the responses to these shifts, were at the heart of the *Russian Review* debates.

We have seen in the previous chapters that the concepts of inferiority, danger, difference, deviancy, and indeed morality had all been central to the constructions of the Stalinist other. Thanks to the debates in the *Russian Review* examined here, we can see that through the clashes between scholarly generations it generated, the period of revisionism produced a construction of the Stalinist other in which morality and blame became the dominant hinges on which this construction was made. This has been exemplified in this chapter in two ways. The first, representing a typical pattern of othering, was the recognition and reinforcement by all, revisionists and non-revisionists alike, that there were undeniable and grave moral failings in the Stalinist regime and that Stalin himself was at least largely if not

⁸⁴ McGowan, *Hannah Arendt*, p.10

⁸⁵ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p.253

⁸⁶ See the official website for the experiment: <http://www.prisonexp.org/>

entirely responsible for these. Stalinism remained the other in this period through its failure to live up to the West's moral standards and was universally reinforced as such in the debates.

An unexpected outcome of this was that by diminishing Stalin's responsibility, or seeming to neglect these grave moral failings, the 'new cohort' revisionists by extension also took on an immoral quality in the eyes of their critics. Their neglect or refusal to attribute the locus of blame to where the older scholars demanded it be placed meant that they, as well as Stalinism, were presented as the other in these debates. For example, Cohen, Kenez, Meyer and Conquest were at pains to point out the differences between their own research agendas, interpretative paradigms and moral integrity, and those of the revisionists. It is a most striking characteristic of these debates that the same concepts of morality and blame were used to construct both Stalin and Stalinism, and the 'new cohort' revisionists. This demonstrates how significant the Western construction of the Stalinist other was to the totalitarian model scholars and some first generation revisionists, as well as the deep effects of the global context of this period, itself once again in a state of change and upheaval. It is for this reason that what began as a discussion on the place of social history in the field of Soviet studies acquired such a passionate, argumentative, controversial and at times bitter nature.

As social history became displaced by cultural history in the wider profession from the late 1980s onwards, and as the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, to what extent have these themes, and

those of the previous periods examined in this thesis, persisted in post-Soviet writing on Stalin and Stalinism?⁸⁷

⁸⁷ From the 1980s onwards, the revisionists faced another external challenge as historiography as a whole experienced the ‘cultural turn’. This movement, which took hold from the 1980s, first came to the fore in the 1960s when it was suggested that historical research could benefit from the integration of anthropological dimensions. This meant including subjects that historians had hitherto taken for granted, but studied little: the family, children’s education, attitudes to birth, adolescence and death, for example. One of the first historians to use anthropological approaches in their research, Keith Thomas, suggested that this, together with an enhanced method of historical explanation that would provide historians with new techniques, would allow a historian ‘to ask intelligent questions of his material and more likely come up with intelligent answers’. As quoted in D. Gentilgore, ‘Anthropological Approaches’ in S. Berger, H. Feldner, and K. Passmore (eds.), *Writing History: Theory and Practise* (London, 2010) p.166. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a paradigm shift had taken place in historiography where cultural history became the most desirable and acceptable way to practice history. The kind of social history practiced by the revisionists (and by social science historians within the historical profession), which investigated social processes such as social mobility and group dynamics, often with the use of quantitative data alongside empirical research, was no longer deemed sufficient. Historians were now working on incorporating anthropological dimensions into their research. In her article on history and anthropology in the 1980s, Natalie Z. Davis identifies four ways in which anthropological works can be of use to historians: ‘close observation of living processes of social interaction; interesting ways of interpreting symbolic behavior; suggestions about how the parts of a social system fit together; and material from cultures very different from those which historians are used to studying’. See N. Z. Davis, ‘The Possibilities of the Past’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, *The New History: The 1980s and beyond* (II) (Autumn, 1981), pp. 267-275, p. 267. Putting into practice these benefits, history writing began to focus on the smaller details of everyday life and the anthropological origins of these elements: this also became known as ‘microhistory’. The microhistorians had several methodological criticisms of social science history, namely that the latter deprived the past of its qualitative aspects and left it without a human face. In an attempt to remedy this, microhistorians rejected the social sciences’ focus on anonymous structures and processes. See Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, pp.116-117. Gentilgore states that if we consider previous kinds of dominant histories, such as economic, political or social as macrohistory, microhistory provided a way of small-scale data, now considered to be a necessary part of the historiography of a subject, to relate to the larger-scale – macrohistory. Furthermore it allowed a new way of describing and analysing the micro-macro link. See Gentilgore, ‘Anthropological Approaches’, p.178.

Chapter 5

Friction in the archives: revolutions and counter-revolutions in the post-Soviet historiography of Stalin and Stalinism

1. The 'Archival Revolution'

The advent of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the late 1980s and the eventual demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 created several important interpretative and contextual shifts which impacted the Western historiography of Stalin and Stalinism.¹ Firstly, the end of the Cold War meant the end of the ideological warfare between Russia and the West which had become so central to scholarship on Stalin and Stalinism, and on the Soviet Union. Secondly, the opening of the Soviet archives provided researchers of Russia and of the Soviet bloc with access to documentation on a level that had been until then unfathomable. Thirdly, there was now an end to Soviet communism, creating a closed rather than continuous historical narrative.²

¹ From the Russian perspective, Mark Sandle noted that it was the advent of *glasnost* which 'sparked off the first sustained public questioning of the Stalinist orthodox interpretation of Russian and Soviet history in the Soviet Union'. M. Sandle, 'New Directions, New Approaches, Old Issues: Recent Writings on Soviet History', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.38, Issue 1, 1995, pp.231-348, p.231

² For writing on post-Soviet Russian historiography of Stalin and Stalinism, John Keep has written particularly incisively. See, for instance, A. Litvin, and J. Keep, *Stalinism: Russian and Western views at the turn of the millennium* (New York, 2005), which provides an excellent survey of much of past and present Soviet and Western historiography on Stalinism; J. Keep, 'Stalinism in Post-Soviet Historical Writing' in K. McDermott, and J. Morison (eds.), *Politics and Society Under the Bolsheviks: Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies* (Warsaw, 1995), which looks at thematic developments in Russian historiography of Stalinism, such as foreign policy, social history and political history. Another article of note is that of Andreas Langenohl, which discusses themes of interaction between historiography, public discourse and expectation in Russia around the archival revolution. See A. Langenohl, 'History between Politics and Public: Historiography, Collective Memory, and the 'Archival Revolution' in Russia', *Kritika*, Vol.1, No. 3, Summer 2000 (New Series), pp. 559-569. For further reading on the subject of Russian historiography of Stalinism from the Gorbachev era onwards, the following books and articles have been of use: O.

An assessment of publications since 1991 suggests the emergence of some general themes in the structure and production of works on Stalinism. In the first instance, sudden access to vast amounts of documentation has changed the way in which works on Stalin and Stalinism have been formatted, placing the document as the central element to the work, rather than the scholarly argument. Secondly, the collaboration of Russian and Western scholars and Western institutional collaboration with the archives themselves have emerged as significant trends, as exemplified by the works published in the *Annals of Communism* series.³ This series exemplifies both trends but is especially useful in demonstrating the new usage of documents. Many of the books contain an introduction in which the editors set out contexts and questions as well as their own conclusions as to what the documents demonstrate; the documents are only accompanied by short explanatory paragraphs. While the introductions set out specifically what the editors believe can be gained from the documents, and while they may not alter the actual concepts and ideas being discussed, these works provide an illustration of the development of a noticeable trend of using the documents as the principal actor. This to a certain extent can remove from focus the main ideas and arguments that to date had been the most prominent elements of the works, suggesting that access to these documents has

Khlevniuk, 'Stalinism and the Period after the 'Archival Revolution'', *Kritika*, Vol.2, No.2, Spring 2001 (New Series), pp. 319-327; A. Nove, *Glasnost' in Action – Cultural Renaissance In Russia* (Chicago, 1989); R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (London, 1989); J. Shapiro, 'The Perestroika of History in the Soviet Union', *Slovo*, Vol.2.1, 1989; P. Boué, 'Gorbachev and History' in S. White, (ed.), *New Directions in Soviet History* (Cambridge, 1991); C. Merridale, 'Redesigning History in Contemporary Russia', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.38, No.1, Redesigning the Past (Jan., 2003), pp.13-28.

³ The *Annals of Communism* series encapsulates all of these new trends. It is a long-term project by Yale University Press aiming to publish selected and previously inaccessible documents from the state and party archives 'in a narrative that develops a particular topic in the history of Soviet and international communism'. The idea is that these documents are not chosen for their support of a particular interpretation but for 'their particular historical importance or their general value in deepening understanding and facilitating discussion'. See the 'About the Series' blurb found on the inside of each *Annals of Communism* book. The series is also built on collaboration between Western and Russian scholars and between Yale and the Russian archives. Finally, it demonstrates an on-going diversity of topics. For a candid account of the birth of this project see J. Brent, *Inside the Stalin archives: discovering the new Russia* (Melbourne, 2008).

in some cases allowed historians to strip back on argumentative content, to present the documents, comment on them, but ultimately let them speak for themselves.⁴ Since there had been little accessible archival data, and little scholarly interaction between Russia and the West until *glasnost*, these were all radically new ways of acquiring and publishing information from the Soviet era in the post-Soviet world, and they help us to understand to what ends this documentation has been used and the variety of research the archives have enabled.

The 'archival revolution' refers not only to the gradual opening of the Russian state archives from the late 1980s onwards but also to the general increase in access to local records, oral testimonies, and private documents throughout the Soviet Union.⁵ Since the early 1990s, part of Stalin's personal collection, fond 558, has been made available in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI) and more recently online in the form of the Stalin Digital Archive (SDA). The variety and volume of official papers in this fond

⁴ For example, in *Stalinism as a Way of Life* Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov intend the documents to illustrate that while the State certainly coerced society, the action also occurred in reverse. See L. Siegelbaum and A. Sokolov, (eds.), *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven, 2000), p.26. In *Soviet Culture and Power*, Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko state that the documents call for a reassessment of the role of the Politburo in the cultural sphere, arguing that it occupied a much greater role than has been previously suggested. See K. Clark, and E. Dobrenko (eds.), *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (New Haven, 2007), p.x. Works dealing with correspondence also demonstrate this pattern; see, for example, R. W. Davies, O. V. Khlevniuk, E. A. Rees, L. P. Kosholeva and L. A. Rogovaya (eds.), *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36* (New Haven, 2003); A. Dallin and F. I. Firsov (eds.), *Dimitrov and Stalin 1934-1943. Letters from the Soviet Archives* (New Haven, 2000) and L.T. Lih, O.V. Naumov and O. V. Khlevniuk (eds.), *Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925-1936* (New Haven, 1995). Outside of the *Annals* series, there are similar examples of this structure. See for example P. R. Gregory, *Lenin's Brain and Other Tale from the Secret Soviet Archives* (Stanford, 2008) and P. Boobyer, *The Stalin Era* (London, 2000).

⁵ There are several useful accounts of the process of opening the archives. See, for example, A. Litvin, 'Coping with the Legacy of Stalinism: recent Russian Writing' in A. Litvin and J. Keep, *Stalinism: Russian and Western views at the turn of the millennium* (New York, 2005), pp.3-31 which gives an excellent overview of the chronology of the archival revolution and an overview of some of the kinds of documents that became available. Also see J. Keep, 'Stalinism in Post-Soviet Historical Writing' in K. McDermott and J. Morison, *Politics and Society Under the Bolsheviks: Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies* (Warsaw, 1995) and R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (Basingstoke and New York, 1997), especially pp. 90-95

have revolutionised research on Stalin's leadership. They document his foreign policy, his industrialisation and collectivisation policies, and his economic policy over the course of his time in power. Correspondence between Stalin and his closest colleagues – Lazar Kaganovich, Lavrenti Beria, Nikolai Yezhov and Vyacheslav Molotov, for example – reveal the communications which decided arrests, torture, and executions during the period of the purges.⁶ The documents also include hundreds of annotated memos, manuscripts and speeches passed between Stalin and his colleagues, which have helped to understand the extent of Stalin's decision-making in all matters of government over the course of the regime.⁷ Some files of the NKVD were also declassified in the State Archive for the Russian Federation (GARF), allowing access to hundreds of thousands of documents on the organisation, deployment and action of the police over the course of the Soviet period.

As well as allowing access to the information contained in fond 558, the accessibility of a huge variety of documents in the many Soviet archives, both in Moscow and locally, have allowed research to occur on all aspects of life under Stalinism, from local party activity to music and film. The displacement of social history by cultural history in the wider historical profession has been facilitated in the field of Soviet studies by the declassification of personal records, such as memoirs, diaries and correspondence that have

⁶ Revelations included, for example, confirmation that Stalin and the Politburo had orchestrated the Katyn massacre. The most crucial discovery relating to the purges, however, was the NKVD order no. 0047 of July 30, 1937, which revealed that it was indeed Stalin who had ordered the arrest, imprisonment and execution of tens of thousands of 'criminals' and kulaks. Nicolas Werth has written a thorough account of the context, content and repercussions of order no.0047. See N. Werth, 'The NKVD Mass Secret Operation n° 00447 (August 1937 – November 1938)', *Online Encyclopaedia of Mass Violence*, 24 May 2010 (last accessed 19/03/2013): <http://www.massviolence.org/The-NKVD-Mass-Secret-Operation-no-00447-August-1937>

⁷ See J. A. Getty's introduction to, and information on, the Stalin Digital Archive site itself: www.stalindigitalarchive.com. The RGASPI archive contains tens of thousands of documents relating to all aspects of Stalin's leadership (the SDA alone currently contains 28 000 documents), as well as biographical information and 300 books from Stalin's personal library, many of which are annotated by him. The SDA has also made available on the site works from the *Annals of Communism* series, which have all been born from access to the new documentation available in the Russian archives.

enabled researchers to begin to construct a picture of ‘everyday’ Stalinism: the reality of life during the Stalinist regime, how Soviet citizens lived, worked and played, as well as how they viewed and interacted with the state.⁸

There have been some thorough surveys of the theoretical and methodological changes in research on Stalinism resulting from the archival revolution.⁹ Yet there are questions which have emerged from the analysis of the impact of this event on post-Soviet historiography that require further attention: what hopes were established by scholars for the field at the outset of this event? How have works on Stalin and Stalinism changed since the archival revolution? Have the archives allowed for a greater diversification of the field, and has a new common research agenda emerged in the twenty years since the collapse of the Soviet Union? And, finally, what does post-Soviet research tell us about Western attitudes towards Stalin and Stalinism?

2. The conceptual counter-revolution and its critics

Writing from the early post-Soviet period shows that the archival revolution encouraged retrospective, and introspective, tendencies, as scholars reflected on the state of their field. These tendencies are most noticeable in the 1990s when some scholars sought to revisit the past historiography. In anticipation - and sometimes trepidation - of the potential revelations that might arise from the archives, they

⁸ John Keep has written on the value and some of the revelations of each of these categories in Litvin and Keep, *Stalinism*, pp. 17-26

⁹ Particularly useful of these surveys are: D. Shearer, ‘From Divided Consensus to Creative Disorder: Soviet History in Britain and North America’, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, Vol.39, Nbr.4, Octobre - Decembre 1998, pp. 559-591, which provides an extremely thorough survey of the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism up to 1998, including examining emerging themes such as nationality and ethnicity. Also see D. Beer, ‘Origins, Modernity and Resistance in the Historiography of Stalinism’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.40, No. 2, April 2005, pp.363-379, which is a review article dealing with conceptual issues of modernity and resistance. Finally Kuromiya provides some insights into post-archival revolution historiography on three areas (Stalin and the Terror, Stalin and ideology and Stalin and society) in H. Kuromiya, ‘Stalin and his Era’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol.50, No.3, 2007, pp.711-724. For a particularly comprehensive account, see Suny, ‘Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century’, pp. 5-64

questioned the direction in which it would travel in a post-Soviet era. Previously central notions such as morality and the use of the totalitarian model of interpretation in the study of Stalinism remained, for a time at least, at the fore, while alongside them new issues relating to the usage of archival material emerged.

The concern with the moral issue was exemplified in Catherine Merridale's survey of developments in the field between 1989 and 1991 in which she suggested that the principal issue in the field in 1993 was that it was still impossible to not find oneself in a 'moral swamp' when discussing the purges.¹⁰ In the works she had reviewed for the article, Merridale noted that the Stalinist period emerged as one of 'total gloom' under which nothing was gained. While this notion lent itself to popular acceptance, the question at hand was in fact much more difficult. The question of morality, passionately debated in the 1986 and 1987 *Russian Review* articles, remained for Merridale the most important and largest obstacle for the field to overcome. For the future she predicted that many 'Stalinisms' would emerge, as historians battled to understand it. Merridale hoped above all for scholarly integrity, that 'historians of Russia will at last enter a debate with their colleagues which is not overwhelmingly predicated on judgements about good and evil, individual dictatorship and totalitarianism.'¹¹ The resilient contentiousness of this issue was demonstrated when over a decade later Conquest stated that "One of the strangest notions put forward about Stalinism is that, in the interests of 'objectivity' we must be – wait for it – 'non-judgemental'. But to ignore or downplay the realities of Soviet history is itself a

¹⁰ In this article she focuses predominantly on works by Tucker, Roy Medvedev and Walter Laqueur. Although these works were not based on archival documents, they used as source material privately held papers and memoirs which until *glasnost* had remained hidden. The works Merridale reviews are J. Hughes, *Stalin, Siberia and the crisis of the New Economic Policy* (Cambridge, 1991); W. Laqueur, *The Glasnost Revelations* (London, 1991); R. Medvedev, *Let History Judge: the origins and consequences of Stalinism*, Revised and expanded edition. Edited and translated by George Shriver (New York, 1989); Y. Rapoport, *The Doctor's Plot: Stalin's Last Crime* (London, 1991); R. C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution From Above 1928-1941* (London, 1991) and A. Wood, *Stalin and Stalinism* (London, 1991).

¹¹ C. Merridale, 'Review: Glasnost and Stalin: New Material, Old Questions', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 31, Issue 1, March 1993, pp.233-243, p.240

judgement and a very misleading one.”¹² In his memoirs, Richard Pipes also defiantly stated that he felt no need to apologise for having expressed judgement of historical phenomena since he was not dealing ‘with inevitable natural phenomena but with the consequences of deliberate human actions that, as such, were open to moral condemnation.’¹³

As well as underlining the on-going moral issue, the opening of the archives at once reignited arguments for and against totalitarian-model frameworks, and produced hopes for a new kind of scholarship that would turn its back on the old totalitarian versus revisionist argument. Steve Smith highlighted this in 1994 when he criticised the field for being largely - indeed ‘depressingly’ - unadventurous, returning time and time again to the same questions.¹⁴ This situation had been created by a desire to debunk myths of Sovietology and pressure to produce research and publications to specific institutional requirements in the quest for tenure and high ratings in research assessment rankings.¹⁵ Stephen Kotkin, having noted a post-Soviet return to politics-focused research, also wanted the ‘blunt instrument’ of the totalitarian model to be cast aside in order to be able to study ‘how the goals and techniques of social welfare, as well as their accompanying terrain of social identities, helped constitute forms of power and resistance that existed under a variety of political regimes’.¹⁶ For Kotkin, Stalinism was more than simply a history of dictatorship and non-capitalism, and he suggested that the ‘microstructures and microprocesses’ of welfare needed to be

¹² R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London, 2008), p. xxviii

¹³ R. Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (New Haven, 2003), pp.242-243

¹⁴ S. Smith, ‘Writing the History of the Russian Revolution after the Fall of Communism’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.46, no. 4, 1994, pp.563-578. The article predominantly focuses on interpretations of the Russian Revolution in Anglo-American scholarship, but a number of Smith’s comments about the use of documentation, and the historiographical developments of the study of the Russian Revolution, can be applied to the study of the Soviet era, including Stalinism, as a whole.

¹⁵ Smith, ‘Writing the History of the Russian Revolution after the Fall of Communism’, p.425

¹⁶ S. Kotkin, ‘1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks’, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 7, No.2, June 1998, pp.384-425, p. 425

examined with finer analytical tools than those used to date.¹⁷

Merridale too criticised writing on Stalinism for remaining as yet too focused on the Terror: whatever the focus of the historian, ‘the purges themselves remain a major obstacle to lucid analysis’.¹⁸

Yet despite the call to abandon totalitarian and politics-focused research, the opening of the archives has also led some scholars to debate the problems associated with the usage of social history. In particular, the issue of ‘fragmentation’ in historiography has emerged as an on-going concern. The term can be understood as the process in which cultural and social historians overspecialise and fragment histories, which leads to ‘breaking things down’. This results in very specialised and specific studies, the idea being that eventually, accumulated, these would piece together to create the bigger picture. Criticism of this process suggested that this method of analysis leads to the existence of social history for its own sake and that by removing it from the larger structural context it becomes peripheral and, while interesting, unable to engage with the wider, more substantive issues: ‘For some, social or cultural histories have missed the point; in looking for the needle, they have missed the haystack. Omitting or ignoring the state, politics, and ideology distorts the picture and creates a one-sided, deficient picture of what happened.’¹⁹

The issue of fragmentation (although not necessarily referred to using this specific term) had already been addressed in the *Russian Review* debates of 1986 and 1987 when many scholars reacted strongly against the notion of studying Soviet society without taking into account the influence of the state.²⁰ In the post-Soviet period, these concerns endured. For example, while introducing an article by

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Merridale, ‘Review: Glasnost and Stalin: New Material, Old Questions’, p.240

¹⁹ Sandle, ‘New Directions, New Approaches, Old Issues. Recent Writings on Soviet History’, p. 232. Sandle points to the *Russian Review* debates of 1986 and 1987 as an example of this.

²⁰ See Chapter 4. This was particularly evident in the articles by Geoff Eley, Robert Conquest, William Chase, Daniel R. Brower, Peter Kenez, Stephen F. Cohen. See *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, October 1986 and *Russian Review*, Vol.46, No. 4, October 1987.

Sheila Fitzpatrick in 1993, the editor of the *Russian Review* revisited the debates of the late 1980s, attempting to ascertain whether they continued to be relevant.²¹ The place and the limitations of social history in the study of Stalinism remained at the forefront:

‘Fitzpatrick's findings do not negate all previous scholarship on the politics of Stalinism, they simply put it in a much more complex setting and remind us that "society" develops with laws of its own even when the heavy hand of the state asserts itself most vigorously’.

²² In the same year, writing on post-Soviet scholarship on the Soviet Union, Dominic Lieven also broached the issue, writing that ‘as with most historical schools, the social historians provide many new and useful insights. The danger only comes if they threaten to monopolize the field.’²³ Mark Sandle also questioned whether it was right that social and cultural historians had been criticised for generating the fragmentation process and whether these ‘new directions’ (i.e. studies of history from below) ‘illuminate or obfuscate’ research. According to Sandle’s conclusion, one of the most positive outcomes to date (1995) was the willingness of researchers to use the vast new variety of sources available to them, not only from the national archives and national press but also from local archives, local press, interviews, songs, folklore and cinema. This compelled historians to ‘re-examine and rethink the old politico-historical narratives, and to consider how far existing interpretations were generated in the knowledge of later events’.²⁴

The trepidation demonstrated by some in the face of the archival revolution has also manifested itself through the issue of

²¹ This time the article in question was S. Fitzpatrick, ‘How the Mice Buried the Cat: Scenes from the Great Purges of 1937 in the *Russian Provinces*’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 52, No. 3, July 1993, pp.299-320

²² A. W., ‘From the Editor: Is a Social History of Stalinist Russia Possible?’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 52, No. 3, July 1993, pp.1-3, p. 3

²³ D. Lieven, ‘Western Scholarship on the Rise and Fall of the Soviet Regime: The View from 1993’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.29, No.2, April 1994, pp. 195-227, p. 200

²⁴ Sandle, ‘New Directions, New Approaches, Old Issues. Recent Writings on Soviet History’, p.248. Sandle writes that this is especially relevant to interpretations of NEP, widely viewed as a relatively pluralistic and liberal calm before the Stalinist storm.

‘archival fetishism’.²⁵ For example, Getty noted that while it helps the historian that the Soviet government recorded everything they did, the official language of these texts does not begin to illuminate the cruelty and suffering inflicted on the Soviet people, meaning we are always at risk ‘of presenting a terrible human drama in humdrum bureaucratic language’.²⁶ Getty set out another ‘less obvious’ issue: that the move from a paucity to an embarrassment of riches for the historians of the Soviet era has meant that historians have had to pick and choose which documents they use and run the risk of leaving something important out. Indeed for Getty, the main obstacle with the publication of *The Road to Terror*, for instance, was whether they would publish, and then find a vital piece of information that either supported or contradicted their findings.²⁷ However, Getty did not mention the principal problem highlighted by many others: the reliability of the sources. Alter Litvin and John Keep have noted that one of the key problems of historians working with the Soviet documents is to determine how reliable and authentic they are, and this view is echoed around the field through a general awareness that the content of the sources should not and cannot be taken at face value. Smith was already warning of this fetishisation in 1994, although for him it was more a question of restricting creativity and innovative thinking in the field rather than a question of reliability of the sources.²⁸ Kotkin also referred to the retreat into ‘archival fetishism’ as one of the two paths younger scholars in the field have taken, the other being that of the familiar polemics of totalitarian versus revisionist models, or social versus political history.²⁹ It is noteworthy, however, that while in 2007 Hiroaki Kuromiya still identified taking archival documents at face value as a real problem

²⁵ Kotkin, ‘1991 and the Russian Revolution’, p.387

²⁶ J. A. Getty and O. V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven, 1999), p. xi

²⁷ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. xi-xii

²⁸ Smith, ‘Writing the History of the Russian Revolution after the Fall of Communism’, p.567. Smith wrote that in the face of this archival revolution it was time to turn away from the inevitably influential master narrative.

²⁹ Kotkin, ‘1991 and the Russian Revolution’, p.387

within the field, in 2001 Oleg Khlevniuk felt that researchers had already overcome their main obstacle: to remove unrealistically high expectations of what would be found in the archives, suggesting that this ability to have overcome archival 'over-expectation' and to use these sources as historians would have used previously accessible sources 'has to be considered one of the most important results of the decade.'³⁰

Therefore in the early post-91 period the balance between careful use of documentation, social and political history, their interpretative frameworks and their limitations proved central to reactions to the archival revolution in the 1990s and to the suggestion of possible directions for future research on Stalinism.

3. New era, old agendas? Soviet-era scholarship in a post-Soviet world

While the archival revolution has had a clear and tangible impact on the way in which works on Stalin and Stalinism have been researched and structured, the question of the evolution of interpretative paradigms in the post-Soviet era remains complex. Smith, Kotkin and Merridale called for a move away from old arguments between social and political historians. But have old agendas and research themes persisted? And if so, have new ones been able to emerge alongside them? Access to documentation might have been expected to displace some previously made assertions about the Stalinist regime, such were the varying and at times radically different interpretations put forward during the Soviet era. In fact, the post-1991 pattern largely suggests that, far from forcing some scholars to abandon earlier conclusions, the new source material has in part been used to reinforce old agendas.

In works where the document has taken precedence, this idea leads to the question of the extent to which the editors were also the

³⁰ H. Kuromiya, 'Stalin and his Era', pp.722-724 and Khlevniuk, 'Stalinism and the Period after the 'Archival Revolution'', pp.319-320

secondary ‘authors’ of these works. As editors themselves have pointed out, due to the enormous volume of information now available, they are obliged to be selective. Nevertheless, the notion that using archival documents helps to remove the possibility of bias or agenda-pushing is deeply questionable. The problem lies in whether the documents dictate the content and direction of the edited volume, or if it is the editors’ careful choices which reflect the realities which they are hoping to demonstrate. The claim, for example, by the *Annals of Communism* series that it does not promote certain interpretations is reflected in the variety of subjects on which it has published and of editors who have contributed to the collection. At the same time, amongst works from both within and out-with this series, there are examples of the editors clearly using documents to promote the same arguments they had in the Soviet period. For example, in his 1985 work *The Origins of the Great Purges* Getty made what were perceived as controversial claims that the Terror was not minutely planned by Stalin but was in fact the result of bureaucratic tensions within the Party that led to many unanticipated outcomes. After his post-1991 archival research, Getty identified some errors from his previous analysis. In an interview in 2009 he stated that he was wrong to suggest that there was no communication between local police and the State. He in fact found that not only did they interact, but they also competed for power.³¹ However, it is clear from the *The Road to Terror*, that Getty used the archival documents that became available to him to further develop the ideas he presented in *Origins*. In *The Road to Terror* Getty states that allocating all blame on Stalin for the Terror, as had been widely done until that point, amounted to coming ‘perilously close to falling into the literary genre of fairytales, complete with an evil and all-powerful sorcerer

³¹ Interview with Professor J. Arch Getty by Dr James Harris, The History Faculty website. The interview is broadcast as an audio recording (last accessed 02/03/2013). HTML: <http://thehistoryfaculty.podbean.com/2009/08/13/interview-with-professor-j-arch-getty/>

working against virtuous but powerless victims'.³² According to Getty, it was not only a top-down police operation but a question of people denouncing those all around them: while Stalin certainly started the violence, he could not be seen as the sole causing factor.³³

To what extent does this suggest Getty has used the archives to continue to push his argument? According to Getty, 'because of the nature of the sources', the book focuses on the Politburo and the nomenklatura elite that supported it.³⁴ These selected documents certainly support Getty's argument: they are chosen from plenum speeches of the Central Committee, Politburo and nomenklatura correspondence, but also suicide notes from denounced party members, Politburo resolutions, Stalin speeches, and arrest orders of Party members. They reflect well the tensions within the party. This is particularly well exemplified by the Secret Central Committee letter on the Kirov assassination, dated 18th January 1935. For Getty, despite the fact that it 'turned the heat up on present and former dissidents', the letter was not a call for terror.³⁵ Getty suggests instead

³² Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p.570. Getty and Naumov did not want to ask 'what caused the terror?', since they believed this would invite simplified answers, pointing towards a type of causality which makes the event seem preordained. Rather, wrote Getty, the questions they have asked in this work are: What made the terror possible, and what did they think they were doing? He believed the documents provide solid evidence of the many facets of the phenomenon, 'including the tradition of party discipline, corporate mentality and self-interest of the nomenklatura elite, political relations and struggles among numerous groups within the party, elite anxiety and perceptions of state-society relations, and, last but not least, the 'Stalin factor'. See Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p.571

³³ *Ibid.*, p.571

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.583. The archival sources used by Getty and Naumov in this book are principally from the Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Recent History (RTsKhIDNI), which was the former Central Party Archive of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (TsPA IML pri TsKhSD). As a result, the majority of the sources here are internal political records of the upper Communist Party (which as a result do not deal comprehensively for example with foreign policy, agricultural or industrial affairs or cultural matters). See p. 27

³⁵ For instance, it states that 'The teaching of party history to members of the party ought to be raised to a level worthy of the party. This includes the study of each and every antiparty group in the history of our party, its methods of struggling against the party line, its tactics, and – all the more so – the study of the tactics and fighting methods of our party in its struggle against antiparty groups, tactics and methods which made it possible for our party to overcome and crush these groups.' See Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, pp.148-150. This is taken from Document 28: 'Secret Central Committee letter on the Kirov assassination, 18 January 1935.'

that this document implies that Kirov's alleged assassins (Zinoviev and his followers) had been captured and had therefore been dealt with. Further, he notes that a party purge did not happen until nearly five months later.³⁶ A letter relating to an incident which might otherwise be thought of as a vital piece of documentation regarding the start of the Terror is used by Getty to demonstrate why it is not.³⁷

There are similar instances of pre-1991 agendas being continued in Fitzpatrick's *Everyday Stalinism*. Fitzpatrick's Soviet era work centred on the notion that society was not an inert mass, terrorised and suppressed by the Stalinist regime. While she agreed that there were many victims of the regime, Soviet society was also dynamic, responsive and interactive, and many benefited from the Stalinist state. Her most controversial notion, perceived by some as reducing the significance of coercion and the Terror, was that certain social elements – such as grievances, pressures, sources of support and response – must have shaped the State's policy, put it under pressure, constrained and modified some its actions.³⁸

In her later post-Soviet work there is a continuation of these ideas, supported by the documentation she found in the archives. *Everyday Stalinism*, for instance, examines the daily lives of those living in the USSR of the 1930s. It is not a study of how or why the Terror occurred; its focus is entirely on the daily experiences of the 'Homo Sovieticus' who emerged during the Stalinist era, and specifically during the era of the Terror. The complexity of life at this time, illuminated by Fitzpatrick's research, helps to support her earlier interpretations of life under Stalinism. Indeed, Fitzpatrick

³⁶ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p.150

³⁷ Indeed, if one were arguing for Stalin's involvement in the murder, some contents of the document could clearly be interpreted differently: for example, only five months later a purge of the party began, a close enough proximity to establish a possible link between Stalin orchestrating the Kirov murder in order to begin the purge. While Getty does state that the leadership chose to politicise the murder and to interpret it as a political conspiracy, it is clear from the use of this document that its purpose is to support Getty's argument that Stalin was not involved with the Kirov assassination, and one of the repercussions of this was that Stalin was not solely responsible for the Terror. This suggests that the editor's agenda provided the interpretative framework for the archival material, rather than the other way around.

³⁸ Fitzpatrick, 'New Perspectives on Stalinism', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 45, No.4, October 1986, pp.357-353

seeks to understand what ‘normal’ (for, she says, it was neither normal by their or our standards) life was in Stalinist 1930s. The picture she has built throughout the work, thanks to archival materials, demonstrates the complexity of this society, a far cry from the inert, brutalised masses the totalitarian-model school had depicted.

While her account undoubtedly highlighted the extreme difficulties of life under Stalinism (and this indeed was part of the aim of the work) Fitzpatrick’s sources – archival documents, press articles, interviews³⁹ – also bring to life the society she had determinedly argued existed, in the face of much criticism, in the 1980s, supporting her previous assertion that there was more to the state-society relationship than Cold War Sovietology had suggested.⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick’s research into these many layers of societal activity, and the picture she constructs of society under Stalin demonstrate how she has utilised the archival revolution to develop and strengthen her argument that the interaction between state and society was not only a one way, top down persecution (though it was this too), but that society could exert influence on, and provoke anxiety for the State itself, even if at the origin the State had created the conditions for this to occur.

³⁹ In *Everyday Stalinism*, Fitzpatrick has used information from archival documentation from RGASPI and GARF, other state archives, such as RGAE (which deals with documentation relating to the economy) and RGVA (which deals with war documentation), as well as some local archives, such as those in Novosibirsk and Sverdlovsk. She has also drawn on many Russian newspapers and journals of the 1930s.

⁴⁰ For instance, her depictions of the many people who were obliged to live a double life in order to conceal any potentially damaging aspects of their past help to demonstrate this: these individuals constructed separate private and public personas, but the lines were blurred, and the desire to become the public persona could result in the internalisation of that persona. The efforts, strategies, denunciations and fears of discovery associated with this process created a whole sub-culture of its own: the building of a new life, wrote Fitzpatrick, was sometimes ‘a complex effort of the whole family, using many different ploys’, and the psychological strain of concealment has often been emphasized by those who took part in it. For Fitzpatrick, the most important consequence for the state of having so many potential ‘enemies’ stigmatised for a variety of reasons was the concealment on a large scale of social origin and identity. This, she said, was the aspect that weighed most heavily on the political leadership, who assumed that a person stigmatized was automatically the enemy. See S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1999), pp.132-138

It was not only the revisionists who continued to argue their Soviet-era positions, and indeed the totalitarian-model scholars also continued to fight their corner. For example, Robert Conquest has continued to develop his earlier account and interpretation of Stalinism. His influential 1968 book *The Great Terror* had interpreted the purges as a means for Stalin to acquire absolute power. He did so by using a particular, specific form of despotism, sacrificing the nation and the Party.⁴¹ With the opening of the archives, and the end of the Soviet Union, Conquest published a 40th anniversary edition of the book. It is clear not only from his suggestion for an updated title for the new edition ('I told you so, you fucking fools'⁴²), but also from its content that Conquest remains dedicated to his initial findings: 'though inviting some amendments on a few points, the period's history as given here has been substantially validated'.⁴³ He defended his position that Stalin was the principal architect of the terror:

the nature of the whole purge depends in the last analysis on the personal and political drives of Stalin...If Stalin's personal drives were the motive force of the Purge, it is also true that his ability to conceal his nature was the rock on which all resistance to the Purge foundered. His opponents could not believe that he would either wish to, or be able to, do what he did.⁴⁴

For Conquest, the new documentation only confirmed that 'the revolution of the Purges still remains, however we judge it, above all Stalin's personal achievement'.⁴⁵

Martin Malia too stuck to his long-held views on the centrality of ideology to the Stalinist regime. In 1990 Malia had published an

⁴¹ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p.479

⁴² Brown, 'Scourge and Poet'. It is unknown whether this anecdote was one of the 'many' mistakes Brown made in his article. (see Chapter 2, footnote 38)

⁴³ R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, p.vii

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.53

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.70. It is interesting, however, that Conquest does not use any archival documentation directly in the 2008 edition of the book, despite it having an additional select bibliography. This bibliography instead mainly cites works published after 1991, many of which have themselves made use of the archives.

article anonymously in the American journal *Daedalus* which predicted that the Soviet Union could not survive *perestroika* and *glasnost*. He argued that in a system such as the Soviet one ideology was the key:⁴⁶ Once this ideology is fundamentally questioned by the elite, the regime cannot survive. Malia likened the ideological belief in the Soviet Union by its ruling elite to myth-making, suggesting that once the mythical foundations were questioned, the regime collapsed.⁴⁷ Eschewing the opposing view of many revisionists, Malia was one of few in the field who emphatically believed that reform was not possible. Demonstrating the tenacity of the idea of the centrality of ideology, he noted that ‘communism is not reforming, it is disintegrating’.⁴⁸ One of his major works, *The Soviet Tragedy*, not published until 1994, was the long-awaited result of a lifetime’s work.⁴⁹ It reflected what Malia had fundamentally felt throughout his life and career and was the result of a long development of his own theory on the nature and course of Russian and European history: the key to understanding the Soviet regime was ideology, and especially the primacy of ideology and politics over social and economic factors. Like Karpovich, as well as Pipes and other totalitarian-model scholars, he believed Stalinism to be the natural successor to

⁴⁶ Z., ‘To The Stalin Mausoleum’, *Daedalus*, Vol. 119, No. 1, Eastern Europe... Central Europe... Europe (Winter, 1990), pp.295-344

⁴⁷ V. Tismaneanu, ‘Tyranny and Myth’, *Journal of Democracy* 6.1 (1995), pp.169-173, pp.169-170. Tismaneanu uses the term ‘mythocracy’ to describe myth as the basis of the Soviet system.

⁴⁸ Z., ‘To The Stalin Mausoleum’, p.336

⁴⁹ Malia’s research was partly influenced by his first early encounters with Russians while in the US Navy language school during the Second World War. Thanks to the specific wartime conditions, he was able to engage in frank conversation – often helped, he said, by a certain amount of vodka – with the Soviet officers he met. It was they who told him about the events occurring in the Soviet Union, such as the forced labour camps, and the terror. As a result ‘before he had seriously studied Russian history, Martin was well insulated against any illusions about Soviet realities’. After demobilisation, Malia began his postgraduate study at Harvard, where his chief mentor was Michael Karpovich, and the primacy of ideology in Malia’s work is a legacy of Karpovich’s teaching. See N. Riasanovksy, D. Engerman and H. McLean, ‘In memoriam: Martin E. Malia, Professor of History, Emeritus, Berkeley, 1924-2004’ (last accessed 01/03/2013): <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/inmemoriam/martinemalia.htm>

Bolshevism.⁵⁰ In the opening sentences of *The Soviet Tragedy* he stated that

The negative fact of Sovietism emerged only progressively, as the dictatorship of the proletariat turned first into the dictatorship of the Party and then into the dictatorship of Stalin, and finally as the resulting totalitarian system expanded into a global, threatening super-power⁵¹

Richard Pipes similarly continued to argue for the continuity between Leninism and Stalinism, with the latter being an unavoidable product of the former, the two retaining the same ideological and political foundations. Pipes' work on the Soviet Union began in the fifties, but it was not until the early nineties that he published a two-volume history of the Russian revolution. Here, in the face of years of revisionism in the field, Pipes stood his ground. In his 2005 book *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* he stated:⁵²

In theory, one can conceive a Trotsky, Bukharin, or Zinoviev grasping the torch from the dying Lenin and leading the Soviet Union in a different direction than Stalin. What one cannot conceive is how they could have been in a position to do so, given the realities of the power structure at the time of Lenin's illness. By throttling democratic impulses in the Party in order to protect his dictatorship, and by imposing on the Party a top-heavy command structure, Lenin ensured that the

⁵⁰ Pereira, 'The Thought and Teachings of Michael Karpovich', p.272. See also M. E. Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991*, The Free Press, New York, 1994. Pereira highlights that Malia was Karpovich's favourite student and this respect and affection was reciprocated: after Karpovich's death, Malia referred to him as his 'beloved master' who would be 'long and deeply mourned'. This affection towards Karpovich as a teacher and a scholar was shared by many of his doctoral students, with many descriptions highlighting his fairness, balance, gentle liberalism and high level of involvement and support of his students' work to be found. See Pereira, 'The Thought and Teachings of Michael Karpovich', p.272 and P.E. Mosely, M. E. Malia, W. H. Chamberlin and D. von Mohrenschildt, 'Michael Karpovich, 1888-1959', *The Russian Review*, Vol.19, No.1, January 1960, pp.56-76. There is a similar tone in Pereira, 'The Thought and Teachings of Michael Karpovich'.

⁵¹ M. Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991* (New York, 1994), p.2

⁵² See Pipes' two-volume history of the Russian Revolution: R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution 1899-1919* (London, 1990) and R. Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime 1919-1924* (London, 1994). There is also his précis of the works: R. Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1995). For a specific example, see his defence of the continuity theory on pp.400-402.

man who controlled the central party apparatus controlled the Party and through it the state. And that man was Stalin.⁵³

Writing about the unlikelihood of a ‘new orthodoxy’ based on the work of social and cultural historians gaining any funding or patronage leverage in American institutions, Dominic Lieven aptly summed up Pipes’ position when he commented that ‘from behind Harvard’s mighty ramparts Richard Pipes, formidable scholar and crusader, can thunder his message with complete disdain for the pressures of government and fashionable opinion.’⁵⁴

It is clear, then, that regardless of all the research directions this new era might have afforded researchers, old constructions, interpretations and agendas remain. The works of these scholars, whose careers have spanned both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, demonstrate the tenacity of pre-archival revolution, and pre-revisionism, interpretations of Stalinism. They have utilised new access to source material not to radically reassess their findings, but to consolidate them and push them forwards into the new era.

4. History with the politics left in: post-Soviet scholarship on Stalin and the Terror

As exemplified by writing in the early 1990s, some scholars had been concerned that too much attention was still being given to the Terror in the late 1980s and very early 1990s, yet in 2011 Oleg Khlevniuk wrote that in the post-Soviet period ‘The history of terror and the Gulag deserves detailed analysis, as it occupies the most significant place in the historiography of Stalinism’.⁵⁵ As a project that sets out to publish on diverse and wide-ranging topics, the *Annals of Communism* series can help to assess whether the field has moved away from terror-centric research. Out of the 30 published or soon to

⁵³ Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, p.402

⁵⁴ Lieven, ‘Western Scholarship on the Rise and Fall of the Soviet Regime: The View from 1993’, p.201

⁵⁵ O. Khlevniuk, ‘Stalinism and the Stalin Period after the “Archival Revolution”’, p. 322

be published works of the *Annals of Communism* series, over half (18) relate to the Stalinist period.⁵⁶ This is not necessarily surprising: after all, the Stalinist regime was in place for the majority of the Soviet period and has as a period arguably elicited the most interest. Are post-Soviet works principally concerned with the Terror within a totalitarian model framework, as feared by Merridale and Smith in the early 1990s? There is undoubtedly still a certain amount of focus on the Terror, on Stalin himself and his leadership, which is evident in several ways.⁵⁷

Firstly, the opening of the archives has allowed prominent topics such as the Terror to be reassessed more accurately, justifying a continuing focus on them in research. This has been particularly well exemplified by the work of Paul Gregory and Stephen Wheatcroft. Gregory's re-examination of Stalinist state organisation has allowed a far more accurate and complete understanding of the way in which the dictatorship orchestrated repression and the Terror than had been previously possible. Thanks to the archival revolution 'there are now enough chinks in this armour [the unavailability of sources] to write such an account'.⁵⁸ Wheatcroft too has challenged previous scholarship on Stalinism through new information found in the archives, stating that when secret archives become available for the first time 'it would be remarkable indeed if there were no radical challenges to the traditional view of history'.⁵⁹ For example, Wheatcroft has argued that archival materials demonstrate that the 1932-1933 famine was not provoked by the Soviet authorities and that the suggestion that they had not taken any steps to improve the

⁵⁶ See the *Annals of Communism* website which give details of the projects: <http://www.yale.edu/annals/index.htm>

⁵⁸ P. R. Gregory, *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin (An Archival Study)* (New Haven and London, 2009), p.3. See also P. Gregory, P. Schröder and K. Sonin, *Dictators, Repression and the Medien Citizen: An "Eliminations model" of Stalin's Terror (Data from the NKVD Archives)* (London, 2006) and P. R. Gregory and N. Naimark (eds.), *The Lost Politburo Transcripts: From Collective Rule to Stalin's Dictatorship* (New Haven and London, 2008).

⁵⁹ S. G. Wheatcroft (ed.), *Challenging Traditional Views of Russian History* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), p. 3. This volume is a series of essays which challenge traditional approaches to topics relating to pre-revolutionary, Stalinist and post-Stalinist Russia.

situation was incorrect. Indeed, through newly acquired data on grain harvests at this time, he and Robert Davies argue that it was the amount of grain available in those years, rather than its distribution, that was the immediate cause of the famine. This challenged the traditional view that Stalin deliberately withheld grain, and especially Conquest's argument that the famine of 1933 was deliberately carried out by terror as demonstrated by 'the figures on the millions of tons of available grain reserves'.⁶⁰

Correspondence made available from the opening of the archives has also been widely used – especially in the *Annals* series – to attempt to determine the nature and scope of Stalin's leadership. This has been done by using the letters and telegrams written between Stalin and some of his colleagues. For instance, *Dimitrov and Stalin 1934-1943: Letters from the Soviet Archives* examines Stalin's role in the Comintern, where Dimitrov was Secretary General from 1934 until 1943. It concludes that overall Stalin was a 'sphinx' in the affairs of the Comintern: the highest authority, but who was often brief in his attentions to Comintern business, delegating decisions to others or making short scribbling instructions, even where major policy change was occurring.⁶¹ *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36* examines correspondence between Stalin and Lazar Kaganovich, one of Stalin's most highly trusted deputies. This project aims to understand the dynamics of power, and how Stalin governed his country through the watershed years of collectivisation, mass industrialisation, and the beginnings of repression. Finally, *Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925-1936* similarly seeks to examine the dynamics between Stalin and his colleagues, as well as the scope and nature of the role he actually played in the running of the Soviet Union at this time. From Stalin's correspondence with Molotov, the editors conclude that Stalin was

⁶⁰ As cited in R. W. Davies and S. G. Wheatcroft, 'The Soviet Famine of 1932-33 and the Crisis in Agriculture' in Wheatcroft, *Challenging Traditional Views of Russian History*, p. 69.

⁶¹ Davies et al. (eds.), *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36* (New Haven, 2003).

completely engrossed in foreign affairs during this period and was generally totally consumed by politics.⁶²

As well as through the continuing volume of research being done on the Terror and Stalin's leadership, the focus on the political aspect of Stalinism has also manifested itself in an interest in Stalinist ideology, rejecting the argument that Stalin had little political thought worth writing home about – a tendency which is also a manifestation of the influence of the cultural historical approach, as it seeks to understand the way in which Stalin *thought*. Erik van Ree, for instance, has argued that, far from having no doctrine at all, Stalinist ideology contained 'a strong inner coherence' that ultimately took the form of a 'curious brand of revolutionary patriotism' in which Stalinism remained part of the Marxist and revolutionary nationalist universe imported from Western Europe in the nineteenth century.⁶³ David Brandenberger too has looked at the primacy of ideology in Stalinism, arguing that Stalin used Russian national heroes, myths and imagery to mobilize popular support during the Second World War. This 'national bolshevism' ended up eclipsing proletarian internationalism as the central tenet of Stalinist ideology. The most intriguing repercussion of this, argued Brandenberger, was that this 'ideological coup' was the catalyst for the formation of a mass sense of national identity within Russian-speaking society between the late 1930s and early 1950s, 'the most cruel and difficult years of the Soviet period', but which has also persisted throughout and beyond the Soviet era.⁶⁴

The interest in Stalin himself has also acquired renewed vibrancy, with the publication of several biographies of Stalin which emphasise his centrality to the regime, as well as the idea of him as an evil and

⁶² The view of Stalin as entirely consumed by politics was echoed a couple of years later by Hiroaki Kuromiya in his short biography of Stalin. See H. Kuromiya, *Stalin* (Harlow, 2005). Kuromiya also used new archival documents, including those relating to the Stalin-Kaganovich correspondence, in his source material.

⁶³ E. van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin* (London, 2002), p. 17

⁶⁴ D. Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2002), p.2 and p.9

all-powerful leader. The overall concern with understanding the nature and scope of Stalin's role in the running of the regime indicates that Stalin himself, both on a professional and personal level, is still considered by many to be central to the history of this period and that the appetite for research into this topic has not waned despite the advent of social and cultural history. For example, Simon Sebag Montefiore's bestseller *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* portrays Stalin as the evil 'red tsar': brutal, cruel, yet fascinating, idiosyncratic and enigmatic. He was a man who played sinister psychological games with his 'courtiers' and the architect of the horrors of his regime. In a somewhat paradoxical juxtaposition, the archives have at once allowed Montefiore to engage with the 'everyday' tendency of cultural history (in this case relating to the Kremlin and its most central characters) while promoting an image of Stalin borrowed from the pre-revisionist era.⁶⁵ Robert Service's Stalin biography similarly depicts Stalin as the evil genius, a despot and 'warlord' who was also intellectually adept, and who, for example, at times had challenged Lenin and who was a voracious reader.⁶⁶ There is perhaps something to be said for the commercial value of these Stalin-centric works, and the general public's fascination with 'horrible histories', and with cruel, 'evil' leaders. What makes them tick? What unusual foibles or *faiblesses* of the terrible dictators can we uncover? Montefiore's book was perhaps so commercially successful thanks to all the small, unlikely, curious human pieces of information it offered.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ S. S. Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London, 2003). Montefiore's sources are predominantly from the RGASPI fond 558 Stalin archive, and from GARF. From these he has especially drawn on the correspondence and diaries of many of the characters which made up Stalin's 'court'. He has also used materials from NKVD confessions and testimonies and his own interviews with some of these characters and their families and friends.

⁶⁶ R. Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (London, 2004). See for example p. 94 where Service states that Stalin was not a 'blindly obedient Leninist' while Lenin was alive, and pp. 560-570 where Service details some of Stalin's many intellectual interests.

⁶⁷ Montefiore's book is packed full of human detail. See, for example, the candid picture of a shirtless Molotov holding a tennis racket, accompanied by a caption explaining that, the second most important leader after Stalin, he was dominated by his wife, to whom he wrote passionate love letters (p. 135). Stalin is revealed as 'green-fingered' (p.107) and sometimes affectionate (here in particular relating to a letter to Molotov in which he wrote 'I could cover you with kisses in gratitude', this

And yet, despite this wealth of new material helping researchers to construct a more complete version of Joseph Stalin, there have been no startling new revelations about his life or character, nor any radical departures from the Stalin depicted in the first biographies of the 1930s and 1940s. Stalin remains an enigma, since he left no personal diaries or particularly personal correspondence. He also remains the powerful, brutal, mysterious and unforgiving leader he has always been portrayed to be. These characteristics are so ingrained that they have not been revised nor challenged in the post-Soviet era, only built upon, expanded and brought to life with those everyday details that have more recently become available. The focus on different aspects of Stalin's life may have shifted in this era, but the fundamental interpretation of Stalin's character has remained largely static.⁶⁸ The release of Stalin's correspondence, of the documents detailing the minutiae of his leadership and of the memoirs and diaries of those around him have ensured a renewed focus on Stalin and his leadership by scholars of the post-Soviet era. This demonstrates the resilience of some of the characteristics of the totalitarian-model, although the issue of morality seems largely to have been removed in favour of a more candid and/or documentary-

for his action in Ukraine during collectivisation. p.39). Yezhov is described in the book blurb as a 'murderous bisexual dwarf' who receives a colourful description pp.150-151, and who has part four of the book – relating to the purges – assigned to him through the title 'Slaughter: Yezhov the Poison Dwarf, 1937-1939 (p. 173). The depiction of Stalin as the brilliant but evil leader is also present in his book *Monsters* in which 101 'sinister individuals' are presented. Stalin, along with Henry VII, Lucrezia Borgia and Hitler, is on the front cover. He is described as 'A master of brutal repression, subtle conspiracy and political manipulation, this cobbler's son became both the supreme pontiff of international Marxism and the most successful Tsar in history. Stalin and the Bolsheviks, along with his great foes Hitler and the Nazis, brought more misery and tragedy to more people than anyone else in history'. S. S. Montefiore, *Monsters: History's Most Evil Men and Women* (London, 2008), p. 206

⁶⁸As well as the works by Service and Montefiore, Hiroaki Kuromiya and Miklós Kun have both written biographies of Stalin, and works on Stalin and his inner circle include those by Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk. The book on the Stalin-Kaganovich correspondence also contains an analysis of Stalin's personality and leadership style. It stated that he was one dimensionally emotional (angry), and had uncommon leadership capability. Robert C. Tucker, who wrote the forward for this volume concluded that what ignited Stalin's anger was when a speech or action, directly or indirectly, negated Stalin's lifelong search for glory: this contradicted his image of himself as the leader of genius that he needed to be, and not the catastrophic one that he was. See Davies et al. (eds), *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, p.xiii

style approach to the details of Stalin's leadership and political regime.

One notable exception to this is *The Black Book of Communism*, which has examined in small and torturous detail the crimes committed in the name of communism, arguing that the level of its criminality and destruction have been diminished due to the shadow of Hitler's Nazism.⁶⁹ In his foreword to the book, Martin Malia suggested that a moral approach focused on the criminality of Soviet communism was now needed in order to yield a truer understanding of it, an approach endorsed and adopted by the book's lead author Stéphane Courtois, giving the book a strong tone of moral indignation and judgement.⁷⁰

Yet despite the tenacity of some aspects of the totalitarian-model of interpretation and of pre-Soviet era revisionist agendas, there has unquestionably been a vast increase in the scope of research. While the focus remains to an extent on Stalin and the advent of the Terror, its wider social and cultural repercussions and dynamics are also now being given due attention. There has been, for example, a noticeable increase in ethnicity, nationality and regional studies of societies within the USSR.⁷¹ There has also been a notable growth in research on everyday life under Stalinism, a result of the increasing influence of cultural history. While we have seen that Fitzpatrick had long argued the existence of a dynamic and deeply complex society during this period, this was one of the areas most lacking in our understanding of Stalinism, especially regarding the interaction of

⁶⁹ S. Courtois, 'Introduction: the crimes of communism' in S. Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999), p. 3 and p. 27. Courtois is the lead author of the book.

⁷⁰ Ibid., and M. Malia, 'Foreword' in Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism*, p. v. Kuromiya has noted that Nicholas Werth, a major contributor to the book who wrote the section on Soviet communism, 'publicly disassociated' himself from some of the conclusions drawn by Courtois. See H. Kuromiya, 'Review Article: Communism and Terror', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), pp. 191-201, p. 192.

⁷¹ Khlevniuk gives a comprehensive summary of these in Khlevniuk, 'Stalinism and the Stalin Period after the "Archival Revolution"', p. 322. In 2001 Rittersporn also suggested additional future areas that would benefit from research, notably Stalinist penal policy and concepts of crime and criminality, and the framework of Soviet violence. See G. Rittersporn, 'New Horizons: Conceptualizing the Soviet 1930s', *Kritika*, Vol.2, No.2, Spring 2001 (New Series), pp.307-318, p. 310-311

state and society. Since the archival revolution, it is one which has been developed considerably: Orlando Figes, Fitzpatrick and Lynne Viola have all published works detailing 'everyday' Stalinism, examining the reality of life under the regime, its impact on individuals and social groups and the way in which these groups themselves reacted to Stalinism.⁷² The archival revolution has therefore also allowed historians to fulfil some of what Merridale and Smith had hoped for: an increase in research on Stalinism that does not focus solely on the Terror or on the political leadership.⁷³

5. Stalin and the West in the post-Soviet world: the modernity debate

Over the course of the Soviet period, clear patterns have emerged that suggest that Western writers and scholars used various concepts on which to hinge their constructions of the Stalinist, and Soviet, other. Since the Soviet Union became a historical object as of 1991,

⁷² See O. Figes, *The Whisperers: private life in Stalin's Russia* (London, 2007); S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (Oxford, 1994); S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, (Oxford, 1999); L. Viola (ed.), *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet power & popular resistance in the 1930s* (Ithica, 2002); S. Davies and J. Harris (eds.), *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁷³ There are still opposing views as to the nature of state-society interaction borne from evidence found in the archives. This is highlighted by Hiroaki Kuromiya who stated that this new research (that of Fitzpatrick, Viola and Davies, for example) has meant that the concepts of resistance to and rebellion against the Stalinist state have become legitimate parts of the history of this era, and they reflect the apparent realities described in newly available documentation. However, others (for example Jochen Hellbeck, Igal Halpin and especially Kotkin's work *Magnitogorsk, Magnetic Mountain*. See also further along in this chapter) have found that many Soviet citizens strove towards the true Soviet identity as prescribed by the Stalinist regime that was dedicated to the good of the public, and to the extinction of a private sphere independent of the public. This means that the regime had achieved what it desired: there was no longer a private sphere as the Soviet citizen was incorporated 'heart and mind' into the public sphere. The Soviet citizen learnt how to speak, act, look and importantly *think* Bolshevik. These two interpretations have been termed, respectively, the 'resistance school' and the 'subjective school'. See Kuromiya, 'Stalin and his era', pp.722-723. These are of course two extremes of interpretation, and Kuromiya admits so himself: applied to specific aspects of the state-society relationship, they can seem apt, but to apply them to the general makes them less useful and less representative. Nevertheless, the emergence of such schools demonstrates that research into this area has grown so much as to necessitate nomenclature to distinguish between schools of thought.

however, it has become more difficult to identify patterns of othering specific to Stalin and Stalinism in Western historiography. Constructions of the Stalinist other have at times become absorbed in the umbrella terms of ‘Soviet Communism’ or the ‘Soviet system’ that encompass the revolution, Stalinism and its legacy as scholars moved beyond trying to understand what Stalinism was to understanding how it happened.⁷⁴

For example, replacing ‘totalitarianism’ as the key characteristic of the Soviet Union, Pipes’ post-Soviet work on the Revolution highlighted the centrality of the notions of ‘failure’ and ‘tragedy’. He articulated the idea of Soviet communism as a fundamentally flawed system when he wrote of the ‘incontrovertible failure’ of the Russian Revolution in 1991 and the ‘unfolding tragedy’ borne of the 1917 Revolution.⁷⁵ Pipes felt many times that he wanted to ‘admonish’ the protagonists of this revolution and make them stop and think as they rushed towards catastrophe.⁷⁶ The notion of tragedy was so central to Malia’s thinking that his history of socialism in Russia is entitled *The Soviet Tragedy*. He emphasised that rather than ‘going wrong’ at any given point, such as at Stalin’s accession to power, the revolution was doomed to fail from the very beginning: indeed, he suggested that scholars had been asking futile and misguided questions as to how and when the revolution had gone wrong, when in fact it had been wrong from the start.⁷⁷ However, Malia’s work has also shown the resilience of a more obvious pattern of othering the Soviet Union when he emphasised the primacy of ideology in building the socialist state: the ideological basis of Soviet

⁷⁴Oleg Khlevniuk suggests that in attempting to answer this question scholars now concentrate on ‘the development of functional theoretical insights that can mesh with concrete historical research’. See Khlevniuk, ‘Stalinism and the Stalin Period after the “Archival Revolution”’, p.321

⁷⁵R. Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, p.xvi. It seems implicit that while the Leninist origins of the ‘failure’ and ‘tragedy’ of the Soviet experiment may in some interpretations be highlighted, these two terms largely relate to the Stalinist period. Indeed, Suny states that post-Soviet scholars and journalists looking back on seventy four years of Soviet socialism tend to see the horrors of Stalinism as the emblem of the Leninist hubris. See Suny, ‘Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century’, p.62

⁷⁶Ibid., p.xvi

⁷⁷Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991*, p.10

socialism was that it should be in every respect non-capitalist. This interpretation set Stalinism, and the resulting Soviet system, as the clear inferior and antithesis of Western capitalism. For Malia, this meant that Stalinism produced a sickly, grim version of modernity and one that was ‘a very poor imitation of the real thing’, counterproductive in almost every sphere: economically, culturally and morally.⁷⁸ As a result, today’s Russia might be industrial and urban but this did not mean it partook in the ‘full complex of modernity’, describing Russia’s industrial sector as being ‘essentially non-competitive in the modern world market’ and comparing it to ‘some Third world country’ exporting raw materials.⁷⁹

The question of the nature of Stalinist modernity is at the centre of two of the strongest trends in post-91 writing on Stalinism. On the one hand, ‘neo-traditionalist’ scholars argue that Stalinism was an alternative form of modernity based on ‘archaicizing’ phenomena, such as petitioning, patron-client networks, the mystification of power and its projection through display, although this was not a return to ‘traditional’ Russian aspects of society and state.⁸⁰

On the other hand, the question of Stalinist modernity has at times led to a kind of *rapprochement* between Stalinism and the

⁷⁸ M. Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p. 511. Malia gives a damning criticism of his field throughout the book for repeatedly emphasising social elements to the detriment of the centrality of ideology, and therefore misunderstanding the Soviet system. See Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, in particular pp.7-14

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.509

⁸⁰ See S. Fitzpatrick, ‘Introduction’ in S. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New directions* (London, 2000), p.11. For an excellent example of discussion on this question and of neo-traditionalist analysis, see Terry Martin’s article on Soviet primordialism and nationality, T. Martin, ‘Modernization or Neo-traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism’ in D. L. Hoffman and Y. Kotsonis (eds.), *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practises* (Basingstoke, 2000). An edited version of this article also appears in S. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New directions* (London, 2000). Michael David-Fox has also analysed the nature and terms of the debates between the neo-traditionalists and modernity school scholars, suggesting that a way past the current impasse between the two would be a transnational history approach to the question of Soviet modernity. In post-Soviet Western scholarship, he links the neo-traditional approach to Fitzpatrick’s earlier social history based revisionism, while suggesting that the modernity group’s preoccupation with ideology and politics has created a break from social history as understood in the 1970s and 1980s. See M. David-Fox, ‘Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Bd. 54, H. 4 (2006), pp. 535-555, p.549

West, characterised by arguments of the ‘modernity school’ (this school, represented by scholars such as Kotkin and Hoffmann for example, generally suggests that the stereotype of modernity based exclusively on Western experience is inadequate, and points to the Soviet example as an important alternative form), which have suggested similarities between Stalinism and Western capitalism. Like Malia, Kotkin has placed ideology at the centre of the Soviet socialist experiment. Kotkin’s study of Magnitogorsk led him to believe that Stalinism had constructed a socialism that was the ‘anti-world to capitalism’.⁸¹ Socialism derived its entire identity from capitalism and competed with it in every sphere, even when the USSR started to be at a disadvantage. Socialism’s attempts to match capitalist modernity failed, and it was this which propelled it towards its ‘own, dramatic, self-liquidation’.⁸² In this sense, Stalinism was clearly an other of the capitalist democracies. However, Kotkin also highlights that the construction of Magnitogorsk in particular, and Stalinism more generally, nevertheless demonstrated a way of thinking and a set of practices that shared ‘a great deal’ with other industrial countries, all of which developed forms of social regulation and the welfare state.⁸³

Similarly, David L. Hoffmann has argued that while the history of modern Russia has been written as a ‘history distinct from that of the West’⁸⁴, not all elements of Stalinist culture were derived from socialist ideology, suggesting that Stalinist culture contained ideas, concerns and debates that were common to modern European culture more generally. In fact, he wrote, ‘the very notion of reshaping societies was a defining feature of European modernity’.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as civilization* (Berkeley, 1995), p. 360

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., p.366

⁸⁴ D. L. Hoffman, ‘European Modernity and Soviet Socialism’ in D. L. Hoffman and Y. Kotsonis (eds.), *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practises* (Basingstoke, 2000), p.245

⁸⁵ D. L. Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1949* (Ithaca, 2003), p.7. Hoffman suggests that many features of Stalinist culture reflected the ambitions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century leaders and social reformers to manage and mobilize their populations in ways unique to the modern

Arguing against the primacy of ideology, as suggested by Malia and Kotkin, Hoffmann stated that it would be wrong to draw too sharp a distinction between modern politics and socialist ideology since socialism itself was one of the many ideological products of European modernity.⁸⁶

These perceived similarities between Soviet and Western modernity are illustrative of a change in which a comparative framework with the West can provide the possibility for a deeper, more encompassing but not necessarily differentiating analysis of the Soviet system, and they are unique to the post-Soviet era. This can be related to the Soviet Union becoming a historical notion, leading to a fundamental change in the context of Western-Soviet relations. The historiographical trends that have emerged in the post-Cold War era leading to works such as Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* or Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, for instance, focus on 'civilisations' and the ways in which they are relating to, and interacting with, each other in the current era.⁸⁷ The scholarship produced since the end of the Cold War and the demise of Soviet socialism suggests there has been little need to continue to reinforce Stalinism, totalitarianism and socialism as the other in Western historical writing. While in a post-9/11 world we might have expected the kinds of ideas on clashing civilisations present in Huntington's work to resonate more loudly, trends in writing on Stalin and Stalinism are in fact more reflective of Fukuyama's argument that liberal democracy would become the only form of government for all states. Indeed, politicisation of scholarship on Stalin and his regime had become redundant in a world where the West has been awaiting

era. Examples of this include the spread of bureaucracy and state control, efforts to manage and mobilise the population, scientism and attempts to rationalise and categorise society, and the rise of mass politics. See Hoffman, 'European Modernity and Soviet Socialism', p.245

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.257

⁸⁷ F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (London, 1992) and S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London, 1996).

Russia's own transition to this method of government. New discussions on Stalinist modernity relate to this idea too: they are now less about the clash of civilisations, and more about the demise of a previously othered civilisation and the effects of this demise on a relationship which had previously been based on a clash. However, as Putin's Russia looks increasingly unlikely to adopt a liberal democracy in line with the West's expectations in terms of freedom of speech and human rights, for instance, there is a real possibility that the notion of clashing civilisations may once again become central and, in turn, shift the focus of writing on Stalinism and the entire Soviet era in coming years.

The emergence of the term 'civilisation' applied to Stalinism highlights the cultural, rather than political or social, approach to Stalinism that has appeared since 1991. For example, both Kotkin and Igal Halfin look closely at the *culture* of Stalinist 'civilisation', and it is this cultural historical approach that has allowed them to argue for the importance of *mentalities*, belief systems and self-identity formation in shaping the experience of the Terror and of the Stalinist regime.⁸⁸ For example, Kotkin suggested in *Magnetic Mountain* that Stalinism 'was not just a political system, let alone the rule of an individual. It was a set of values, a social identity, a way of life'.⁸⁹ He exemplified this most saliently in his chapter 'Speaking Bolshevik', in which he demonstrated the extent to which this act had become second nature to Soviet citizens.⁹⁰ Knowing how to 'speak Bolshevik' – to publicly display loyalty to the state at all times – was the only way to succeed, or even get by under Stalinism. Without this ability, Soviets were 'functionally "illiterate"', and living under Stalinist rule

⁸⁸ The roots of the kind of emphasis on mentalities exemplified by Halfin and Kotkin can be found in the work of *Annales* school historians (see Chapter 4) who researched the 'history of mentalities' in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Rather than emphasising the impact of events and processes on history, they considered the attitudes of ordinary people towards everyday life – *mentalités* – to be equally if not more influential on history as economic, social and environmental structures. See P. H. Hutton, 'The History of Mentalities: The New Map of Cultural History' in S. Clark (ed.), *The Annales School: Critical Assessments*, Vol. II (London, 1999).

⁸⁹ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, p.23

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-237

would be difficult and dangerous.⁹¹ Halfin has used a similar approach, focusing on the notions of identity and culture in his examination of the ways in which the identity of Soviet communists was so invested and imbedded in the Soviet experiment that they became complicit in their own demise under Stalin. Through his analysis of the autobiographies of communists on trial in the Soviet Union during the show trials, Halfin argues that, once embedded in the tissue of power, the ‘messianic dreams that structured the Communist discourse and provided it a frame of moral reference that set standards of conformity could not be easily curbed’, even when their most horrific implications began to assert themselves.⁹²

This new focus in research on Stalin goes beyond the examination of political and social systems, and even beyond outward social behaviours and the ‘everyday Stalinism’ that, for example, Fitzpatrick had revealed. These attempts at defining the belief systems, identities and culture attached to Stalinism are an attempt to get inside the communist ‘soul’ (a term Halfin uses in his work) in order to understand how it was perceived, understood, experienced, supported, survived (or not) and resisted by those who lived through it. This, in turn, leads to a far greater understanding of how the Stalinist regime was able both to function in an everyday capacity, and to become what it did.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp.219-220

⁹² I. Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2003), p.6. See also his later work I. Halfin, *Red Autobiographies: Initiating the Bolshevik Self* (Seattle, 2011), on self-representation in Bolshevik culture. For a further examination of the importance of *mentalité* and culture under Stalinism and during the Terror, see I. Lauchlan, ‘Checkist *Mentalité* and the Origins of the Great Terror’ in J. Harris (ed), *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin* (Oxford, 2013) in which Lauchlan examines the political police as a the source of a belief system oriented to the defence of the revolution. He argues that the ‘cultic’ nature of the Cheka, combined with popular participation in the struggle against the enemy, produced the sort of ‘centrally directed mob rule’ of the 1936-1938 Terror.

6. Conclusion

Writing in 1995, Mark Sandle observed that despite the intense activity around the archives, no dominant paradigm in writing on Stalin and Stalinism had yet emerged. From 2013 it seems that this is also largely the case. There are several reasons why this may be: firstly, scholars who passionately defended their interpretations of Stalinism during the Soviet period have continued to do so well after the opening of the archives, using new documentation carefully to support their ideas, be they Sovietologists or revisionists.

While there has been a continued focus on the Terror and Stalin's role in the running of the regime, the new post-91 generation of researchers of Stalinism have used the vast amounts of information released from the archives to research such a wide range of aspects of it, and achieved such an expansion of our knowledge and understanding of these aspects, that it would be impossible to state that an identifiable orthodoxy on the question of 'what happened' during Stalin's reign has emerged. The breadth of expansion of the field has, for now at least, precluded the possibilities for a consensus, as the realities of 'everyday' Stalinism, nationality, ethnicity, economy, culture and modernity and all other aspects of life under the Stalinist regime are being vigorously investigated, thanks to the documentation released during the archival revolution.

As the Soviet Union became a historical notion, so the context of Western-Soviet relations changed. The scholarship produced since the end of the Cold War and the demise of Soviet socialism suggests there has been little need to reinforce Stalinism, totalitarianism and socialism as the other in historical writing, since such politicisation of scholarship has become redundant. Iver B. Neumann's identification of a political 'learner' identity constructed by Europe for Russia in the post-Soviet era, and Brown's identification of strong Orientalist

tendencies in Western international relations discourse on Russia, are not replicated as clearly in historical writing.⁹³

Nevertheless, some resilient patterns of othering remain. In some cases they seem to be a hangover from the Cold War era (as we have seen, for example, in the works of Malia, Pipes and Conquest). In other cases, the demise of the Soviet Union has made way for similar 'learner' identity writing as proposed by Neumann, although in the case of historians of the Soviet Union its central character seems not to patronise, but rather to analyse why the democratisation process has been so problematic, often highlighting the negative role the imposition of Western values and expectations has played in international relations and in Russia, both during and after the Soviet period.⁹⁴

Therefore, twenty years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the field of Soviet studies, and specifically that of research into Stalin and Stalinism, presents itself as a field in which a multitude of interpretations, approaches and agendas are developing. Although there has been some clarity reached on certain issues thanks to the opening of the archives (for instance, there is a general understanding thanks to the NKVD order no. 00447 that Stalin ordered the purges), what has emerged from the archival revolution is a field of ever expanding scope in which individual scholars are able to pursue research on virtually any aspect of Stalinism they choose. This accounts for both the tenacity of Soviet-era agendas and the continued focus on the Terror, Stalin and his leadership, as well as the diversification of the field into new areas of cultural history, social history, nationality and ethnicity.

⁹³ Neumann, *Russia as Europe's Other* and Brown, 'A Stereotype, Wrapped in a Cliché, Inside a Caricature'.

⁹⁴ See, for example, R. Service, *Russia: Experiment with a people* (London, 2002). Service's analysis partly concludes that 'democracy and marketisation have spectacularly failed the Russians' (p.336). See also D. Priestland, *The Red Flag: Communism and the Making of the Modern World* (London, 2010). For a post-91 analysis, see especially pp. 556-575.

Set against the backdrop of the previous periods examined in this study, the historiography of this period demonstrates at once a continuation of, and a break from, what came before. Where in the previous periods clear trends in writing and interpretation emerged that were hinged on Western perceptions of Stalin and Stalinism, the post-Soviet era proposes a multitude of foci, interpretations and accounts of Stalinism, suggesting a confused, or at least disjointed, perception of Stalinism by the West. On the one hand, it remains for some the Stalinist totalitarian other, whilst to others it more closely resembled Western capitalist modernity. Yet what is striking about this period is that despite the huge wealth of information now available relating to Stalin and his regime, and the variety of explorations constantly adding layers and nuances to our understanding of them, our very basic perception of their nature has not shifted. There has been very little alteration since those first publications in the 1930s to the basic facts that the regime was coercive and violent, and that Stalin himself – an enigmatic and ruthless leader - was in large part, if not entirely, responsible for it. This has persisted in the post-Soviet era. As a result, the continued and indeed revived research on Stalin and his leadership and this largely universal acceptance of the nature of his regime suggest that previous perceptions of Stalin and Stalinism as the immoral, deviant, dangerous antithetical others of the West persist. However, the commonalities in the articulation of these perceptions in the new scholarship still remain to be seen.

Chapter 6

Stalin in biographical writing 1932-2013: a case study of the historiography of the young Stalin

1. Introduction: official Soviet versions of Stalin's youth published in the West

It is perhaps because Stalin was already 46 when he came to power that the study of his very early life, before his days as a revolutionary in Georgia when he was a young boy and an adolescent, may seem a comparatively poor historiographical area. In fact, a closer examination of biographical works published on Stalin in the West from the early 1930s until the present day does much to displace this assumption: the historiography surrounding Stalin's early life is rich and varied and often full of conflicting information. This is particularly evident when comparing both official and unofficial versions of Stalin's youth published in the West.

Official Soviet versions of Stalin's life were published by the Kremlin while Stalin was in power, and they serve as a useful basis for comparison with what was being published inside and outside of the Soviet Union. They also provided information for Western writers on Stalin and Stalinism, if only at times through their lack of accuracy and transparency, and indeed were often referred to in these terms by those writers. In 1938 Stalin's first official biography was produced and published by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.¹ His early life was covered in the two short opening paragraphs of the book. It stated his date of birth, the name, social status and professions of his parents

¹ The Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow was founded in 1919 under the instruction of Lenin. It housed books, documents and archival materials relating to Marxism. In 1931 it was merged with the Lenin Institute, and became the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, which then became the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. Today it is absorbed into the RGASPI archive in Moscow.

and the dates at which he began and finished the various stages of his education.² While the biography went on to thoroughly recount his adult life as a revolutionary and politician, any further details of his childhood were omitted. This official biography was not the only work to keep the subject of Stalin's early life to a minimum: it is difficult to find anything written or approved by Stalin that addressed his youth in any depth. In the instances where it was written about, there are large discrepancies between what was being stated and what we now know about Stalin's early life in Gori and in the Theological Seminary of Tiflis.

Stalin's own and approved accounts of his childhood depict a poor but stable and contented early life: he was born Joseph Vissarionovich Djughashvili on 21 December 1879 in the Georgian town of Gori. His father Vissarion (Beso) was a Georgian cobbler, and his mother Ekaterina (Keke) came from a family of bound peasants. Together the three of them lived a simple, poor and relatively quiet life.³ The official biographies were highly representative of the regime during which they were written. There are common characteristics amongst them: the information they contained about Stalin's childhood was sparse, although unsurprisingly more plentiful regarding his Seminary days since it was then that he discovered Marxism. They all stated the same key dates and basic facts about Stalin's birth date and place and provided only the most basic information about his parents. The work of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, *Joseph Stalin – A Short Biography*, and the earlier pamphlet put together by several of Stalin's colleagues (Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Ordzhonikidze and Erukidze) under the title *The Life of Stalin – A Symposium*, are especially sparse on information regarding Stalin's early life. Similarly to the Marx-

² The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, *Joseph Stalin – A Short Biography* (London, 1940), p.9

³ See The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, *Joseph Stalin – A Short Biography* (London, 1940), p.9 ; Various, *The Life of Stalin – A Symposium* (London, 1930), p.1; J. Stalin, *Works*, v.1 (Moscow, 1952), p.415

Engels-Lenin Institute biography, *The Life of Stalin*'s first page simply states:

Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (Djugashvili), Georgian by nationality, was born in 1879 in the town of Gori, Tiflis Province. His father, of peasant origin from the Didi-Lilo village, Tiflis Province, was a worker in the Adelkhanov boot factory in Tiflis.⁴

Stalin and his sympathisers rarely elaborated beyond this, and it was just as rare that anyone should press him on the subject. The only recorded occasion of him addressing the question of his childhood directly was during his interview with the German journalist Emil Ludwig. At a time when all information about Stalin was heavily checked and edited by his entourage and by himself, the Ludwig interview was published almost exactly as it had happened, with only a couple of minor stylistic corrections.⁵ This work is of particular relevance in the historiography of Stalin's childhood because it was the only time he was questioned directly in a public forum about his early youth. Ludwig asked him: 'What led you to become a rebel? Was it, perhaps, because your parents treated you so badly?' Stalin, somewhat surprisingly, did not dodge the question:

No. My parents were uneducated people, but they did not treat me badly by any means. It was different in the theological seminary of which I was then a student. In protest against the humiliating regime and the Jesuitical methods that prevailed in the seminary, I was ready to become, and eventually did become, a revolutionary, a believer in Marxism as the only genuinely revolutionary doctrine.⁶

It was no accident that so little information was offered: throughout his entire life, Stalin barely revealed any details of his childhood, though the reasons for this can still only be speculative. Public

⁴ Various, *The Life of Stalin*, p.1

⁵ M. Kun, *Stalin: An Unknown Portrait* (Budapest, 2003), p.45. Kun states that Stalin had enjoyed the interview and for this reason it remained largely unedited, making it the best of his interviews.

⁶ Joseph Stalin, *An Interview with the German author Emil Ludwig* (Moscow, 1932), p.11

knowledge of an unhappy childhood, and the psychological damage it may have done to him, could have given him a vulnerability or inspired a loss of confidence he did not want and could ill afford. Aside from the difficulties of his family life, Stalin might have further wanted to conceal the fact that his upbringing and education were entirely based around the Orthodox Church. Although it was no secret that his mother was religious, he never publicly alluded to the faith he had as a boy.⁷ This aspect of his childhood was certainly glossed over in the official biographies. For example, in both *Life of Stalin*, and *Joseph Stalin: A Short Biography* Stalin's attendance to the Church School in Gori was only mentioned within a biographical chronology detailing key dates of his early life, and no further details were given.⁸

It was only when describing Stalin's time at the Theological Seminary of Tiflis that the official biographers gave more detail, since this was the time that marked the beginning of Stalin's life as a Marxist and a revolutionary. Stalin himself described life in the Seminary as his reason for joining the Georgian social-democratic circles, and this is reflected in these official biographies. Where his childhood was only afforded a few sentences, his time in the Seminary was highlighted: it did not touch on the more personal aspects of his youth, but instead highlighted in Soso Djughashvili the virtues that the Soviet people would want out of their leader and successor to Lenin: belief in Marxism and rejection of the Church and Imperial institutions. The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute dedicated two pages to life in the Seminary, emphasising that it was a hotbed of underground political activity and that 'The Jesuitical regime in the seminary aroused in Stalin a burning sense of protest, which intensified his revolutionary sentiments, so that at the age of fifteen he became a revolutionary.'⁹ It described how in 1897 Stalin became

⁷ Robert Service also suggests that Stalin was fastidious in the extreme about ensuring no details of his childhood be made public, on account of not wanting to shine a light on his Georgian origins, nor on his unhappy childhood and religious upbringing. See Service, *Stalin*, p.13

⁸ See Various, *The Life of Stalin*, p.1 and The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, *Joseph Stalin*, p. 9

⁹ The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, *Joseph Stalin*, p.10

the leader of the Marxist circles in the Seminary and how in August 1898 he officially joined the Tiflis organisation of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, becoming a member of the Messameh Dassy Group, the first Georgian Social-Democratic organisation, which in the period between 1893 and 1898 played a ‘certain positive part’ in the propagation of Marxist ideas.¹⁰ Once again, the Emil Ludwig interview was quoted, in which Stalin asserted that he joined the revolutionary movement at the age of fifteen, having become acquainted with the works of Marx and Engels.¹¹ The work written by Stalin’s colleagues also goes into slightly more depth, although does not date the beginning of Stalin’s interest in Marxism until 1897, which is no doubt closer to the truth.¹² Indeed, aged fifteen Stalin was, depending on whose dates you followed, either still at Gori Church School or in his first year of the Seminary. Miklós Kun suggests that at this point Stalin had not even taken the entrance exam for the Tiflis Seminary and that there is ‘not a single’ authentic source verifying that Soso had been in any way connected to the small group of Russian Marxists working in Georgia before his arrival in Tiflis.¹³ This certainly seems to be the case: there were no references in the Georgian memoirs of the young Soso having any links outside of Gori or his small group of friends from the town, and no biographers since have unearthed any information proving otherwise. At this time, the works of Darwin, Marx and Plekhanov were incredibly difficult to acquire and the works of Lenin almost impossible to come by. Furthermore, fellow Seminarists, such as Iremashvili, indicated that from his third year onwards at the Seminary, Soso began to voraciously devour all kinds of books on nature, politics, economics and history, which he had smuggled into the seminary and read by candlelight. Prior to this period, however, there is no evidence of this kind of activity.¹⁴ Yet, as Kun highlighted, these small issues were of

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.10-11

¹¹ Joseph Stalin, *Stalin’s Kampf*, p.18

¹² Various, *The Life of Stalin*, p.1

¹³ Kun, *Stalin*, p.37

¹⁴ Ibid., p.37

no concern to the official Stalin historian: their aim was not to recount a truer version of events, but to create a myth that would strengthen Stalin and his regime.¹⁵ In both the official works mentioned above, Stalin was expelled from the Seminary for propagating Marxism.

How far were these biographical writings not only influenced by the particularities of the Stalinist regime, but also by wider trends in biographical writing? The official and sympathetic biographies published on Stalin in the West are reminiscent of ‘ur-biographies’, as described by Hermione Lee.¹⁶ These ‘primal forms’ of biography, such as biblical stories and other very early accounts of lives, contain all the information about births, dates, lives and deaths of subjects and emphasise certain features while entirely ignoring others. They often present amazing ‘facts’ without any qualification or demurrals, and they want to impress the reader with the sense of a personality or an event of importance. All are interested in the effects of a life on others, whether disciples, victims, a nation, or posterity.¹⁷ Equally, such ‘facts’ and omissions were present in the official Stalin biographies: there was a clear lack of information on family life, yet a high emphasis on revolutionary activity at a young age. For example, Lavrenti Beria stated that Stalin led eight revolutionary circles while still a teenager, but no explanation of how he achieved this under the conditions at the Seminary was given. The hugely varying official accounts of Stalin’s early revolutionary activities all hoped to impress a sense of his heavy involvement in the social-democratic circles during this period.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., p.37

¹⁶ H. Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2009), p.21

¹⁷ Lee, *Biography*, pp.19-22

¹⁸ See L. Beria, *On the History of the Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia* (London, 1939). As well as the official Soviet biographical information published on Stalin, sympathisers of Stalin’s also wrote biographies that similarly emphasised his happy childhood and high level of revolutionary activity during his Seminary days. See, for example, E. Yaroslavsky, *Landmarks in the Life of Stalin* (London, 1942); I. Montagu, *Stalin: A Short Biography* (London, 1942), which was published by the Communist Party of Great Britain. In Montagu’s work Soso was a very happy, handsome and clever child. See also H. Barbusse, *Staline: Un Monde Nouveau Vu A Travers Un Homme* (Paris, 1935) in which the Djughashvili are all flatteringly, if not romantically, depicted. Stalin’s mother is described as having a ‘beautiful, serious face and black eyes, so black that they seemed to overflow into

However, it is the unofficial versions of Stalin's life which reveal much about the lives and times of those writing about Stalin and the changing Western approaches to him as a man and as a leader. The examination of the evolution of the Western historiography of the young Stalin provides a case study for biographical writing on Stalin over the whole period of study that assesses the changing ways in which Stalin himself has been viewed by the West. Within this, the extent of the impacts of the key influences on writing set in this thesis can also be evaluated.

2. The two Sosos

The historiography of the young Stalin begins with the publication in Germany in 1932 of Joseph Iremashvili's book *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens*, which provided the most vital of the early sources of biographical information on Stalin specifically relating to his very early years, and which became a foundation for the biographical works which came later.¹⁹ Iremashvili was born in Gori

dark bruises on the skin around them' (p.11) and his father as 'a good man...he did really everything he possibly could for him [Stalin]' (p.11). The adolescent Stalin '[when he] grew taller, he was rather frail in appearance; his features were very delicate and he had an intellectual head with abundant thick hair, as black as ink. The slimness of youth accentuated the Georgian oval of his face and the somewhat languid eye of his race. This young militant presented a mixture curious enough because it was almost perfect, of the intellectual and the worker. Not very tall, narrow-shouldered, with a long face, a small beard, rather heavy eyes and a thin straight nose, and with his flat cap worn a little to one side on his plentiful black hair - that is what he was like then, this conqueror of multitudes, this upsetter of worlds.' (p. 18).

¹⁹Joseph Iremashvili, *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens* (Berlin, 1932). Despite Iremashvili's deportation, his account of his and Stalin's childhood and adolescence is relatively measured. However, despite appearing objective and balanced, it must be viewed with the conditions of its creation in mind. Boris Souvarine, for example, states that the book is often contradictory and untrue although it is noteworthy that he nevertheless still uses *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens* as a source on Stalin's childhood. Iremashvili's book has only been translated into Russian from the German. Otherwise comprehensive referencing and sizeable quotations can be found in English in the following works: Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and his Influence* (London, 1947); H. Montgomery Hyde, *Stalin: The History of A Dictator* (London, 1971); E. Ellis Smith, *The Young Stalin: The Early Years of an Elusive Revolutionary* (London, 1968)

around the same time as Stalin, and they became friends and playmates from a young age. Keke, Stalin's mother, even went so far as to call him her 'other Soso', because he was such a frequent a visitor to the Djugashvili home.²⁰ The two Sosos went to the same school, sang in the same choir, and eventually both of them ended up at the Theological Seminary of Tiflis. Having been firm friends in their childhood, the young men continued to be on amicable terms throughout their time at the Seminary. Afterwards, Iremashvili became a schoolteacher, as Stalin embarked upon his revolutionary career. Edward Ellis Smith claimed that Iremashvili even ended up teaching Stalin's firstborn son, Yasha, before the 1917 Revolution.²¹ Yet even the oldest of his friends could not escape Stalin's persecutions: as early as May 20th 1921, Iremashvili was arrested by the Bolshevik secret police operating in the Caucasus under Stalin's direction. Later, Iremashvili's sister Aneta personally saw Stalin on the matter of her brother's imprisonment, and in one of his few acts of compassion Stalin released his old friend. However, this was not the end of the affair: Stalin then despatched another old schoolmate to try and recruit Iremashvili to the Bolshevik cause. He refused and, along with sixty-one other Georgian prisoners, was subsequently deported to Germany on October 11, 1922.²²

Iremashvili's account was a detailed look at the Djugashvili household and gave unparalleled insight into what life there might have been like. Iremashvili was warm about Ekaterina (Keke), Stalin's mother: he described her as a loving and attentive mother and friendly to Stalin's schoolmates. Soso was lanky, sinewy and freckled, with an aquiline nose. His face was narrow, elongated and pockmarked. His eyes were dark, bold and vivid. He was also a

²⁰Iremashvili, *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens*, p.10. Soso was the young Joseph Djugashvili's nickname.

²¹ Ellis Smith, *The Young Stalin*, p.25. Smith's book continued the work of Wolfe and his contemporaries by critically analysing the available primary sources. Through his own assumptions and judgements he managed to produce an entire volume on the young Stalin. However, it was very similar to what had come before and did not provide any vital new information.

²² Ellis Smith, *The Young Stalin*, pp.24-25

typical school bully: he was physically stronger than other boys and confident that he would win any fist fight. He dared his fellow pupils to disagree with him.²³ Of Vissarion (Beso), Stalin's father, he gave a rare physical description: he was a heavy-set man of imposing appearance, with thick black eyebrows and a black bristling moustache, who habitually wore the conventional Georgian *tchoka*, blue trousers thrust into knee-length boots, and a fur cap. He described him as heartless, violent and a drunk. Beso habitually drank away his wages, so much so that the responsibility of the rent as well as supporting the family as a whole eventually fell solely upon Keke. He mercilessly beat his son and wife.²⁴

Along with this rare insight into the Djugashvili home, one of the most important contributions that Iremashvili's work made to knowledge of this time of Stalin's life was by giving account of life in the Seminary at the very time when Soso was evolving into a young Marxist revolutionary. Iremashvili's recollections of the monotony and austerity of those days has provided a vivid image of what life was like within the Seminary walls and how such an atmosphere was conducive to Stalin becoming involved in the underground social-democratic movement. Seminary life was sad and monotonous. The Seminarists felt like prisoners and were despondent and sullen. Whenever 'youthful temperament' manifested itself, it was swiftly suppressed by the monks. There was a strong anti-Georgian feeling instated by the Rectors: all Georgian literature and newspapers were forbidden, and the Tsarist police often carried out inspections to ensure this rule was being adhered to.²⁵ This period of Stalin's life, and specifically the elements that characterised his time in the Seminary, are of particular significance since it was this experience that actively drove him into the arms of the Marxist underground movement:

²³ Iremashvili, *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens*, pp.11-12

²⁴ Iremashvili, *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens*, p.12

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17. We can only speculate as to whether this anti-Georgian feeling initiated Stalin's later own apparent desire to suppress his Georgian-ness.

In protest against the humiliating regime and the Jesuitical methods that prevailed in the seminary, I was ready to become, and eventually did become, a revolutionary, a believer in Marxism as the only genuinely revolutionary doctrine.²⁶

For its ground-breaking insight into the Djugashvili household and life at the Theological Seminary, and also because of his credentials as a contemporary of Stalin, Iremashvili's memoir has been used in the works of a range of biographers from the 1930s until the present day. Even after the opening of the archives in the 1990s, this important testimony of Stalin's early life by his childhood friend has remained a vital and irreplaceable primary source. Given Stalin's later extreme reticence to make any of these details public, this memoir has been a rare and essential source to those investigating Stalin's youth, and the detail with which it reported was in stark contrast to the official publications that were being released inside and outside of the Soviet Union while Stalin was in power.²⁷

3. Emigrés, exiles and socialists: the early works, 1932-1947

Iremashvili's book was especially significant in this historiography as from it there stemmed several other accounts of Stalin's early years in the period preceding the Cold War. Reflecting the trend in the larger historiography, those writing about the young Stalin in this era, and especially in the period preceding the Second World War, were émigrés, exiles, escapees and socialists who had become estranged from Stalin's Soviet Union. Focusing specifically on Stalin's youth reveals the way in which this particular facet of biography on Stalin

²⁶ Stalin, *An Interview with the German author Emil Ludwig*, p.11. This is also in Stalin, *Stalin's Kampf*, p.19

²⁷ Iremashvili was not the only classmate of Stalin's to publish a memoir in this early period: Gori classmate Domentii Gogokhia and Seminary classmate Gregorii Glurdzhidze also wrote about Stalin's childhood, and these accounts are used by Emilian Yaroslavsky, Eugene Lyons, Leon Trotsky, Boris Souvarine and Bertram D. Wolfe. However, copies of these works are impossible to come by in the UK, and there are no copies in the Lenin Library in Moscow, nor in the Hoover Institution.

was built upon from the small amounts of information offered by Iremashvili and the other Georgian memoirs over the course of the period of study. As the period moved through and beyond the Second World War, an increasing number of Western socialist and non-socialist writers also began writing on Stalin. As this thesis has already shown, this was largely due to an increased concern with the nature of Stalin as leader of the USSR.

The first issue faced by writers on Stalin in the West in this period, and one replicated throughout the majority of the period of study, was the problem of source accessibility and reliability, with the only available sources being the Georgian memoirs and the official biographies. Leon Trotsky and Bertram D. Wolfe were the first to employ a systematic and productive analysis of these few first-hand sources available to them in order to construct an accurate picture of Stalin's childhood. Trotsky's writings make an important contribution to the historiography of Stalin's childhood, principally because his method for examining the facts around Stalin's childhood provided a comprehensive comparison of sources. Trotsky himself remarked of this method that while it may have been an inconvenient way of doing things, the 'epoch of lies' in which he found himself left him no choice: one of the principal aims of the 'gigantic factory of lies' that was the Kremlin was to manufacture a new biography for Stalin, and as a result all sources had to be held up for analysis.²⁸ Trotsky did this by referencing, amongst others, the official biographies, Iremashvili's and other Georgian memoirs, Boris Souvarine and Emil Ludwig, relying heavily on Iremashvili, who he believed to provide the most reliable and complete source of information.²⁹ Boris Souvarine too referenced Iremashvili and the accounts of a couple more of Stalin's schoolmates, but was similarly disparaging about them. Iremashvili's book, for instance, was 'too suspect to be accepted by serious persons without confirmation of the contents'.³⁰ As a result, his chapters on

²⁸ Trotsky, *Stalin*, p.xiv

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.5

³⁰ Souvarine, *Stalin*, p.3

the young Soso in Gori and at the Theological Seminary were short and did not provide any new information.

Similarly, Bertram D. Wolfe's later biography was, after Trotsky's, the earliest example of a consolidation of all previous historiography, which was critically examined in detail in order to attempt to construct the most likely version of the events of Stalin's childhood and youth. Wolfe also directly tackled the question of the highly conflicting information found in official and non-official literature, explaining where the methodological difficulties lay in trying to piece together this part of Stalin's life (or indeed any part of his personal life). He called all previous works – those of Trotsky, Lavrenti Beria, Emilian Yaroslavsky and the Georgian memoirists – 'shadowy and insubstantial'³¹ and believed the official biographies were more notable for what they left out than what they put in. Wolfe was one of the first writers on Stalin's life to acknowledge the problem of sources in the Soviet Union, identifying one of the principal challenges facing the historian of the Soviet Union as finding relevant documentation that had not been locked away or destroyed; the 'mountains of documents, general histories, party histories, memoirs' that Wolfe described as banned or burnt.³² He tackled another main challenge to the historian:

In the Soviet Union, state agencies are the sole publisher, entrust the task, direct the writing, dictate the approach, the conclusions, censor, edit, correct, publish, market at wholesale and retail, purchase for schools, libraries and institutions, reward, recall, condemn, replace, destroy. Account after account has received the imprimatur and been declared official, only to be publicly denounced, or quietly withdrawn in favour of a different version within a year.³³

This is a valuable insight into the ever increasing awareness in the West of the nature of the Stalinist regime. Wolfe was writing in the 1940s, after the Second World War, after the Terror and not so long

³¹ Wolfe, *Three Who Made A Revolution*, p. 405

³² Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, p.405

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 406

before Stalin's death. His book suggests that by this time for writers who had links with the Soviet Union, who had researched, lived or worked there, the mystery surrounding the nature of the regime had started to lose its hold. Wolfe's acknowledgement of the difficulties facing a biographer of Stalin is the first example of a Western-born historian engaging with this historiography and its context. His analysis was deepened by his attempt to construct a complete picture of Stalin's childhood and youth, not simply by picking the parts out of biographies to whose authors he was politically sympathetic, but by holding all the accounts up against each other, and trying to deduce the most likely version of events. In this way, he analysed the accounts of Trotsky, Iremashvili, Ludwig, Yaroslavsky, Beria, Barbusse, The Marx-Lenin-Engels Institute, the various authors of *Life of Stalin – A Symposium*, as well as other Georgian memoirists and Stalin's own *Collected Works*. Wolfe's deductions are mostly expected: he discounted, or used highly selectively and cautiously, those accounts that were clearly extensively edited and severely biased, and ended up largely relying on Iremashvili.

Wolfe's early foray into a critical analysis of the historiography of Stalin's youth provided a key turning point in reporting this period of Stalin's life: no longer would a simple collation of all the primary sources be adequate. They would have to be analysed, compared, and assessed for bias, editing and censorship. An analysis of Stalin and his rule began to take shape, not simply as a statement of facts, but as a line of questioning as to how and why this man came to be the type of leader he was. Here, in effect, we see the apparition of the secondary sources on Stalin's early life, and key themes emerged in the depiction of Stalin during this period. These emergent themes demonstrate the continuity between constructions of Stalin as an adult and as a child in this era. As highlighted in Chapter 1, the adult Stalin was at once mediocre, coarse, unsophisticated, yet also sly, Machiavellian, determined and cruel. These themes were repeated in writing on Soso as a schoolboy and young Seminarist, who was in turn unremarkable, a bully, and in whom was deeply

ingrained the sense of inferiority and resentment of the Georgian people.

Trotsky's influential construction, for example, of Stalin as dull, talentless and mediocre was at the centre of his biographical writing, and this method of constructing Stalin as the inferior other manifested itself just as clearly in his writing on the young Soso Djughashvili as it did on the adult Stalin: according to Trotsky, far from the brilliant young boy his sympathisers chose to portray him as, he was in fact neither the talented singer, artist, sportsman or student he had been claimed to be, and he went on to become none of these in his adult life.³⁴ He was, in actual fact, an entirely average schoolboy. Robert Service suggested that these ideas were in fact commonplace amongst Stalin's political opponents at the time – Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries – many of whom could see nothing more to Stalin than his adequate administration skills.³⁵ Similarly, as a supporter of Trotsky's theory regarding Stalin's mediocrity, Souvarine had also developed this angle in his writing on the young Stalin: 'His reading and the teaching at school provided him with the rudiments of education: neither have left visible traces in his writings and speeches. In that, he was unlike any other notable revolutionary of modern times'.³⁶ Souvarine went on to assert that there was no great mystery to Stalin, and certainly nothing of interest hidden in his childhood. The regime he went on to create was not the fruit of 'early meditation, or of a great premeditated plan'.³⁷

Iremashvili was the first to note how Beso's brutality affected the young Soso: the boy soon began to extend his hatred and thirst for vengeance against his father to all those who had, or could have, any power over him.³⁸ During the 1940s, further interpretations of Stalin's early life, and the role that it might have played in his adult character

³⁴ Trotsky, *Stalin*, p.11

³⁵ Service, *Stalin*, p.4

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.5

³⁸ Iremashvili, *Stalin Und Die Tragödie Georgiens*, p.12

and the nature of his regime, also began to emerge. For instance, Eugene Lyons wrote in 1940:

Consider how many torturing resentments young Soso had been born into and acquired. He was in the lowest stratum of a conquered and despised race. As soon as they were old enough to know anything, boys in Transcaucasia knew that they hated the Russian gendarmes, soldiers, and gold-braided officers. These Russians personified oppression.³⁹

Throughout his chapter on Stalin's youth, Lyons accentuated these feelings of hatred and frustration, which were bred in Georgian boys like Soso, describing the feuds and vendettas they were constantly involved in, even within their own families. He wrote that, in a culture of 'fierce resentments', young boys cultivated an inner pride, 'the secret pride of persecuted people', which sustained them. To this must be added Soso's private hatred of his unhappy home, of his father's brutality, of his own crippled arm and of his mediocrity in school.⁴⁰ In this way Lyons' consolidation of all the negative elements of Soso's young life were for the first time brought together with the intention of demonstrating that Stalin's psychological tendencies could possibly have their roots in this early part of his life. Deutscher similarly provided an early amateur psychoanalysis, though he focused on the social aspect of Soso's negative feelings. Soso's sense of inferiority, against which, according to Lyons, he cultivated his 'secret pride of persecuted people', was what shaped him and later spurred him on: Soso felt socially inferior and, though bright and with common sense, he was not refined, imaginative or an intellectual. In this way, wrote Deutscher, he differed from his peers, such as Lenin and Trotsky. Soso was the son of peasants, and even in the Church he would not have climbed far. He took this sense of inferiority with him to the Socialist underground and beyond.⁴¹

³⁹ E. Lyons, *Stalin: Czar of All The Russias* (London, 1940), p. 27

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27

⁴¹ Deutscher, *Stalin*, p.26

Many of these works are also the first references to Stalin's physical deformities, such as his pockmarked face and withered arm. Trotsky noted his pockmarks, webbed toes and withered left arm, as recorded by Souvarine and some official police records, although surprisingly found these of little interest.⁴² Deutscher also pointed out the childhood origins of these physical attributes, writing that after falling ill with smallpox at the age of six 'his face remained pockmarked' and, shortly after developing an ulcer on his left hand, he could no longer 'bend his arm at the elbow'.⁴³ Lyons depicted him as 'the unhandsome, sulking, handicapped boy' of Keke's heart.⁴⁴ Wolfe wrote that the smallpox attack left Stalin's 'swarthy skin oily and pockmarked' and that his other distinctive marks were the 'joining together of two toes of one foot', and some accounts reported that his left arm was 'slightly atrophied'.⁴⁵ Trotsky and Wolfe disagreed on the origins of the withered arm. Trotsky believed it to be the result of 'alcoholic heredity on his father's side', further proven by the webbed toes.⁴⁶ Wolfe disagreed, calling this statement 'pure speculation', suggesting instead that it was only mildly incapacitated, probably due to a childhood attack of 'infantile paralysis'.⁴⁷ In yet another suggestion, Deutscher attributed it to blood poisoning resulting in an ulcer on his left hand, an illness which, like the smallpox, had nearly killed the young Soso.⁴⁸ Lyons claimed Stalin 'was born with his left arm partially paralysed and two toes grown together unnaturally'.⁴⁹ Yet while all these works refer to Stalin's deformities, they are not given extensive attention and do not seem to form a key part of the construction of the young Stalin.

⁴² Trotsky, *Stalin*, p.6. These deformities might have been expected to provide Trotsky with another point on which to belittle Stalin. However, he remarked that they are 'scarcely of passing interest' and that the atmosphere of his home, and his parents' characters were much more important.

⁴³ Deutscher, *Stalin*, p.3

⁴⁴ Lyons, *Stalin*, p.24

⁴⁵ Wolfe, *Three Who Made A Revolution*, 408.

⁴⁶ Trotsky, *Stalin*,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.408

⁴⁸ Deutscher, *Stalin*, pp. 2-3

⁴⁹ Lyons, *Stalin*, pp.22-23

Much more prominent is the way in which, by its inevitable focus on his ethnic origins, the historiography of Stalin's childhood also relates to the constructions of Stalin as the Georgian, Asiatic or non-Russian other. In this period, Trotsky, for instance, saw little of the Georgians' 'gaiety, sociability and forthrightness' in Stalin's character.⁵⁰ Instead, he considered the notion of 'Asiatic' as applied to Stalin, stating that Leonid Krasin, the first to call Stalin an 'Asiatic', was referring to 'that blending of grit, shrewdness, craftiness and cruelty which has been considered characteristic of the statesmen of Asia.' Bukharin, he wrote, later shortened this appellation to 'Genghis Khan'.⁵¹ However, Trotsky stated that due to its location, Gori and therefore Stalin were not technically Asiatic, despite the latter's propensity towards those characteristics deemed typical. Instead, Trotsky likened Stalin's temperament to that found in the Mediterranean countries and the Balkans, characterised by a rare combination of the more common 'lazy shiftlessness and explosive irascibility' with the more uncommon 'cold natures, in whom phlegm is combined with stubbornness and slyness'.⁵² In this respect, Stalin may not have been Asiatic, but he was certainly not Russian. Later in the book, however, Trotsky described Stalin's method of rule (specifically relating to the cult of personality) as demonstrating that 'his ambition had acquired an untutored Asiatic cast intensified by European technique', again removing any Russianness from Stalin's method of leadership.⁵³ Deutscher too highlighted Stalin's Eastern origins, even if he later compared Stalin to previous Russian leaders.⁵⁴ Keke, for example, 'possessed the infinite patience and submissiveness of the eastern peasant woman'⁵⁵ and Gori was a place where both in legend and in reality Georgians had fought against Russians.⁵⁶ Eugene Lyons presents the clearest example of depicting

⁵⁰ Trotsky, *Stalin*, p.3

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.393

⁵⁴ See Chapter 1.

⁵⁵ Trotsky, *Stalin*, p.5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5

Stalin through emphasis on his Asiatic character, stating that ‘A dark-visaged, pock-marked, slow-moving Asiatic dominates the landscape of world affairs to-day’.⁵⁷ He was further described as an ‘Asiatic despot’, although for Lyons this meant he remained ‘true to the ancient Russian pattern’, rather than differentiating him from Russians,⁵⁸ and Stalin’s Georgian heritage meant he had been born into a ‘slothful society shot through with hatreds’.⁵⁹ The Georgians were ‘tough, crafty, patient’, and their historical submission to the ‘despised Russians’ was deeply ingrained in Stalin’s whole personality.⁶⁰

As well as demonstrating these common themes in biographical writing on the child and adult Stalin, these biographies also demonstrate a turn away from the ur-biographical style of the official publications, more in keeping with wider historiographical trends of the twentieth century. The twentieth century’s overarching trend in biographical writing distanced itself from the earlier kind of eulogistic account based on highly selective and often inaccurate information. In the previous century, the biographer’s task had been to narrate a great life. He or she was an ally of reputation, and even of legend, something distinctly recognisable in the official works. However, non-official works during the Soviet period worked to establish a more reliable and complete picture of Stalin and were consequently more aligned with biographical trends. This was partly due, in the first half of the twentieth century at least, to a notably adverse reaction to Victorianism: an age of anti-heroism that aimed to

⁵⁷ Lyons, *Stalin*, p.13

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.15

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.25

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31. In these biographies there is also some discussion about whether one of Stalin’s parents was in fact Ossetian. Lyons, for instance, claimed that it was Stalin’s mother who was Ossetian, whereas Trotsky suggested it was more likely his father, the latter being the more common suggestion. In both cases it is made clear that this could be where Stalin’s bad temperament came from, as the Ossetians were seen to be not Georgian and therefore possessing none of their good qualities. Instead they were seen as coarse and uncouth mountain people. See Lyons, *Stalin*, p. 29 and Trotsky, *Stalin*, p. 3. Service also mentions the possibility of Beso being Ossetian in Service, *Stalin*, p. 18 as does Kun in Kun, *Stalin*, p. 10. Montefiore suggests Beso was indeed Ossetian. See S. S. Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (London, 2007), pp.16-17.

expose a subject's most innermost life and thoughts and with it their weaknesses.⁶¹ This was manifested in these biographies by attempts to understand Stalin's nature and temperament by delving into his youth. There was also a moral dimension to biographical writing in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, which saw an emphasis on the strengths and failings of personalities, in a way which seeks to allocate blame for certain events or decisions.⁶² This tendency is clearly present in biographical writing on the young Stalin, where Trotsky, Deutscher and their contemporaries have identified in Soso the same characteristics they ascribed to the adult Stalin in their damning assessments of his personality, ideology, leadership and regime.

4. From the Cold War to Perestroika

The period from 1947 to *perestroika* encompassed enormous changes within the Soviet Union, as well as in terms of its relations with the West. Yet Stalin's death in 1953 at the height of the Cold War, the ensuing process of de-Stalinisation, the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras and the Cold War itself in fact had little impact on the historiography of Stalin's youth. This for the most part did not stop Western historians and political scientists from tackling the issue of Stalin and Stalinism. However, the global political context meant that during the Cold War the focus shifted strongly towards understanding the nature of Stalinism as a regime, the Stalinist leadership and Soviet communism more generally. This was exemplified by the extreme politicisation of the field in the early Cold War era, its focus on Stalinism as totalitarianism and the later debates within the field relating to the nature of the regime and its leadership that emerged from the revisionist challenge.⁶³

⁶¹ M. Pachter, 'The Biographer Himself: An Introduction' in M. Pachter (ed.), *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art* (Washington, 1979), p.13

⁶² B. Caine, *Biography and History* (London, 2010), p. 41

⁶³ An exception to this was Edward Ellis Smith who attempted to piece together Stalin's early life. Yet despite Smith's efforts resulting in an entire volume on the

As a result, there were only three notable works relating to the biography of the young Stalin (and indeed of the adult Stalin) published throughout this whole period. The first two were those of Svetlana Allilueva, Stalin's daughter. *Twenty Letters to A Friend* and *Only One Year*, which provided for the first time in thirty or so years a relatively viable primary source on Stalin's childhood.⁶⁴ Allilueva's works have been used extensively as sources by historians since their publication, as they gave an unprecedented first-hand, candid account of the man behind the politician: not Stalin as a leader so much as Stalin as a father, husband, son and friend. Svetlana's accounts were, apart from the Ludwig interview, the only record of Stalin himself referring to his parents:

He sometimes told me about his childhood. Fights, coarseness, were not unusual in the poor, half literate family, in which the head of the household drank. The mother would beat the boy, her husband would beat her.⁶⁵

Perhaps her most valuable contribution to the development of ideas surrounding her father's youth, however, was her claim that he was never religious, even as a youngster and that the result of this was that the effects that his religious education had on him were the reverse of those intended: 'extreme scepticism of everything "heavenly", of everything "sublime"'. The result was total materialism, the cynical realism of an "earthly", "sober", practical and low view of life'.⁶⁶ Allilueva believed that, instead of acquiring faith, Stalin came to be two-faced, a hypocrite and a bigot, and it is to his religious education that she linked much of what came later:

young Stalin, it failed to offer any new information or methods not already present in the works that had been published in the pre-Cold War era. See Ellis Smith, *The Young Stalin*.

⁶⁴ S. Allilueva, *Only One Year* (London, 1969) and *Twenty Letters To A Friend* (London, 1968). Allilueva escaped the Soviet Union and only published her memoirs once she was safely in the United States.

⁶⁵ Allilueva, *Only One Year*, p.340

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.341

I am convinced the parochial schools in which he spent more than ten years played an immense role, setting my father's character for the rest of his life, strengthening and intensifying inborn traits.⁶⁷

The accounts of Stalin's innermost family life that were offered by Allilueva in both her books and her own interpretation of the role of his youth in the formation of his character were key contributions to this historiography. Her recollections of her father's few stories of his childhood helped to legitimise the memories of the Georgian memoirists and provided a rare account of Stalin himself speaking, to the best of our knowledge, truthfully about his parents.

In addition to Allilueva's books, a Georgian memoir on Stalin's childhood was published in Paris in 1979: Joseph Davrichewy's *Ah! Ce qu'on rigolait bien avec mon copain Staline*. Davrichewy provided an invaluable source for many of the same reasons as Iremashvili had: he grew up with Soso Djughashvili in Gori, went to school with him, played with him and knew the Djughashvili family well. His memoirs also contained an added layer of interest: Davrichewy's father Damian, the police chief of Gori when the boys were young, had been rumoured to be Stalin's biological father.⁶⁸ Davrichewy addressed this issue early on in his book, stating that he could neither confirm nor deny the claims and that it remained Keke's secret. He did state, however, that it was 'more than intimate relations which linked my father to the very pretty Kato Djughashvili, who, by the way, was no man-eater'.⁶⁹ It is clear that Davrichewy was not ashamed of the possibility that he might be Stalin's half-brother: he happily entertained the claims, and perhaps through this cryptic sentence about Keke and Damian's relations he hoped to continue to propagate the mystery, as well as the second-hand fame it afforded him. This suggestion is further supported by Davrichewy highlighting

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.341

⁶⁸ For more recent writing on the question of Stalin's paternity, see for example Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, pp. 20-22 and Service, *Stalin*, p.17

⁶⁹ J. Davrichewy, *Ah! Ce qu'on rigolait bien avec mon copain Staline* (Paris, 1979), p. 11

how different Beso and Soso were, heavily hinting that something was amiss. He wrote of their opposite personalities and physical appearance - weak and bland versus strong and measured - and Beso's rumoured impotence, concluding that 'never before have we seen a sheep father a lion. It was a mystery, and it still remains unexplained...'.⁷⁰ His overall description of Beso was as a 'puny, brutal little man, insipid, with a temper, and most especially, jealous'.⁷¹ As with Iremashvili, Davrichewy described the heavy drinking and the beatings that characterised Beso's interactions with his family. As for Soso, Davrichewy depicted him as a typical young boy who enjoyed romping around with his friends and being mischievous, but also recounted how pious, though also volatile, Soso was.⁷² Physically, he was described only in terms of not resembling his father.

Allilueva' and Davrichewy's new insights into Stalin's early life helped to complete a picture otherwise completely hidden by Stalin himself and to corroborate Iremashvili depictions of Beso's brutality. Assuming their accuracy, they also exposed Stalin's lie to Ludwig that his parents did not mistreat him. The tracing of this one element from Stalin's childhood – his father's brutality – provided a highly illustrative and summarising example of the influence and challenges presented by the drip feed of information from the Soviet Union. From Iremashvili to Allilueva, it took forty years filled with conjecture and conflicting information to corroborate just one key fact from Stalin's childhood.⁷³

The trend for employing psychohistory in historical writing that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s is also reflected in the historiography

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 28

⁷¹ Ibid., p.26

⁷² Ibid., p.47: 'He was very religious....Sometimes, after committing a bad deed or blaspheming, as he often did, he would spend hours being silent and still. In these moments, we preferred to leave him alone as at the slightest joke he would become angry and fight.'

⁷³ One other work of note published in the late 1970s was Boris Bazhanov's memoirs (see Chapter 1), which were a more complete account of the early Stalinist regime than he had previously written in his 1930 book *Avec Staline dans le Kremlin*. See Doyle, *Bazhanov and the Damnation of Stalin*.

of this period.⁷⁴ As we have seen, Lyons and Deutscher made some of these first forays into Stalin's psychology, but it was not until 1974 that Robert C. Tucker's *Stalin as Revolutionary* made a first concerted attempt to understand Stalin's mind and the origins of the brutality of his rule. Tucker suggested that it was in response to Beso's drunken violence that Stalin developed the 'vindictiveness that would characterize him later in life'⁷⁵ and that Keke's unconditional admiration for her son meant that Soso grew up 'taking such admiration as his due, expecting to be idolized and to be worthy of it.'⁷⁶ Tucker believed that comprehending Stalin meant understanding that for him people were classed either as friends or enemies. If a given individual was neither friend nor foe, he was still potentially one or the other, and for Stalin this was always a fact of 'cardinal significance'.⁷⁷ The roots of this defining feature of Stalin's 'mental world' were to be found in his childhood. According to Tucker, character and culture coalesced and reinforced each other in this way of perceiving others: Soso was a 'gifted and unusually sensitive' boy who had been scarred by early experiences, including his father's brutality. He had emerged as a 'hardened, vigilant youngster with a self-idealizing tendency, on the one hand, and a vengeful streak and indomitable will to fight and to win, on the other.'⁷⁸ Combined with the Georgian setting of his childhood and its 'Russifying overseers', these elements gave Stalin a 'ready-made hostile division of people into friends and enemies, together with such cultural traditions as the blood feud'.⁷⁹

Tucker also highlighted that in his adult life Stalin actively tried to repress his Georgian mannerisms. He did this, for instance, by

⁷⁴ See, for example, B. B. Wolman (ed.), *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History* (New York, 1971), which exemplifies this trend in a series of essays which tackle specific historical subjects through a psychoanalytical approach (including Stalin), as well as the challenges of merging the historical and psychoanalytic disciplines.

⁷⁵ R. C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary 1879-1929: A Study in History and Personality* (London, 1974), p. 73

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.76

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.425

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.425

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.425

speaking Russian in a low, monotonous voice, which he further softened at points when his Georgian accent would be the most noticeable.⁸⁰ It was perhaps his attitude towards Yakov, his son from his first marriage, which showed most explicitly how little he enjoyed being reminded of his Georgian origins. When Yakov arrived in Moscow and joined his father's household in the 1920s after being brought up in Georgia, he was a living reminder of Stalin's past. He looked and dressed like a Georgian and had trouble speaking Russian. Probably for this reason Stalin disapproved of him, and of him coming to Moscow. He was so contemptuous of him that when Yakov, in despair over his father's hostility, attempted to commit suicide, Stalin ridiculed him for bungling the attempt, exclaiming: 'Ha! He couldn't even shoot straight!'.⁸¹ Tucker's psychological analysis of Stalin attributed this contempt towards Yakov as a manifestation of the repressed feelings of shame and self-contempt that he felt about being Georgian, feelings that he could not bear to feel in regards to himself and so experienced as disdain for his son.⁸²

Daniel Rancour-Laferriere similarly took a psychohistorical approach, describing his study of Stalin as a 'psychoanalytic investigation of selected and attested behaviors in Stalin, from childhood to old age'.⁸³ Searching Stalin's childhood for clues to his later personality, Rancour-Laferriere identified a fascination with the idea of 'beating' as central to Stalin's psychology and leadership. He recognised this as a lifelong need to *beat* his opponents, which stemmed from the beatings inflicted on him by his father.⁸⁴ This manifested itself, for example, in Stalin's fascination with Lenin's formulaic question 'Who will beat whom?', as well as in the 'beat the

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.432

⁸¹ As quoted in Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, p.433. Allilueva also writes of this episode, stating that 'My nurse later told me that my father treated him worse than ever before, heaping contempt on him for being a 'weakling.'" Allilueva, *Twenty letters to a friend*, p.170

⁸² Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, p.434

⁸³ D. Rancour-Lafferiere, *The Mind of Stalin: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Ann Arbor, 1988), p.7

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 36-40

kulak' mentality which he 'enthusiastically' took up.⁸⁵ Rancour-Laferriere believed that Stalin's literal and metaphorical obsession with beatings was a clear example of 'displacement of private motives from family objects to public objects'.⁸⁶ Philip Pomper also employed a psychohistorical approach to Stalin's childhood, suggesting that he was a 'compound social victim', thanks to being a member of a humiliated minority in the Russian Empire, the son of a useless father and downtrodden mother, a 'dutiful and gifted' child suffocated by the Seminary and a 'romantic youth' who looked to the past for his value but who 'ultimately was forced to choose the future'.⁸⁷

Psychiatrists such as Gustav Bychowski gave weight to these psychohistorical interpretations. Bychowski, for instance, suggested that due to his 'crude and tyrannical' father Stalin had learned early 'how to hate and how to suppress hostility until the opportune moment' and that his suppressed hatred for his father 'transferred itself to persons in power and to all authority'.⁸⁸ He highlighted how Stalin's physical ailments would have added to his sense of inferiority and that the domination of Russians over Georgians would have added further 'mortifications'.⁸⁹ Stalin's time at the Seminary drove him to further develop a personality in which 'dissimulating his hatred, and biding his time in anticipation of revenge in the future, became dominant features'.⁹⁰ Thus, while Alliluyeva and Davrichewy offered the only factual information about the young Stalin during the Cold War period, a psychohistorical approach allowed new links to be created between Stalin's childhood and his later psychology.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 38

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.39

⁸⁷ P. Pomper, *Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin: the intelligentsia and power* (New York, 1990), pp.154-155. See pp.153-164 for Pomper's full analysis of the psychological effects of Stalin's childhood.

⁸⁸ G. Bychowski, 'Joseph V. Stalin: Paranoia and Dictatorship' in Wolman, *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History*, p.125

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.125. Citing Alfred Adler, Bychowski suggested that Stalin's physical disabilities could be seen as an organic inferiority that played an important part in distortion of personality through the mechanics of psychological overcompensation.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.126

5. The young Stalin in the post-Soviet era

Like all aspects of research on Stalin and Stalinism, writing on Stalin's youth has benefited from the opening of the archives, allowing the picture to become ever more complete. The detailed, animated and occasionally humorous accounts we find today of Stalin's youth, such as that of Simon Sebag Montefiore's *Young Stalin*, are in some ways not so far removed from those of Davrichewy and Iremashvili who, drawing on personal experiences, were able to write lively and accessible works.⁹¹

There has been a notable shift away from dwelling on the young Soso's physical attributes, or his 'Asiatic' character. Instead, and perhaps due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and an increasing awareness of the many nationalities which composed it, post-Soviet biography of Stalin points towards a renewed interest in Stalin's Georgian origins and how they might have accounted for his character and style of leadership. It is impossible to know Stalin's feelings on his origins since he never revealed them, though accounts of those around him, and Tucker's earlier analysis, suggest that he seemed concerned not to make them a defining characteristic. Lavrenti Beria's son, Sergo, for instance, recalled in his 2001 memoir that while Stalin liked Georgian songs – and indeed often sang them in the company of other Politburo members – read Georgian and knew the country's history well, he had in fact ceased to love Georgia. Sergo Beria believed that Stalin saw himself in the lineage of Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible and ostentatiously emphasised the priority of Russia and his reverence for Russian history. Beria also pointed out that Stalin chose traditional Russian names for his children:⁹² Yakov, Vassili, and Svetlana.

In 1991 Ronald G. Suny published a probing article that reviewed the psychohistorical evaluations of Stalin published to date in which

⁹¹ See Montefiore, *Young Stalin*. This is also true of the chapters dealing with Stalin's childhood and adolescence in recent biographies. See for example Service, *Stalin*, pp.13-42; Kun, *Stalin*, pp.3-36

⁹² S. Beria, *Beria, My Father: Inside Stalin's Kremlin* (London, 2001), p.137

he suggested that by the time Stalin entered the revolutionary movement he was not a fully formed figure capable of carrying out the purges or the Terror. However, he had

acquired deep social hostilities to the repression that hindered his advance, a determination to resist what he perceived as injustice, and the ability to create a tight, loyal following around him. Other contexts and experiences would intervene to shape and reshape the young Georgian rebel into the Russified author of Stalinism.⁹³

Similarly, maintaining a focus on the importance of Stalin's ethnicity to his later leadership, Alfred Rieber has used literature on identity formation in order to explore the relationship between Stalin's struggle to transform and present his own self and his solution to the central problem of the Bolshevik revolution: how to construct a centralized polyethnic state on a proletarian class base. Rieber has constructed Stalin as a 'man of the borderlands' in order to do this, examining Stalin's representation of self and identity formation during his early years, and ways in which the specific social and cultural conditions of the Caucasus may have shaped his beliefs, attitudes and politics in those formative years. In addition to these two aspects, Rieber also undertook a rereading of his political writings as a function of the transformation of his persona within the revolutionary movement in order to gain insights into his subsequent policies as the leader of the Soviet Union. It is the concept of Stalin as a 'man of the borderlands' that Rieber uses as the unifying theme to link these three aspects of his approach to the question.⁹⁴ The importance of Stalin's early years and Georgian origins is key to Rieber's understanding of Stalin as a leader, and he suggested that Stalin created the state in his own image, and as an extension of himself, with the three aspects represented as the proletariat as the dominant class, the ethno-cultural region as the territorial unit, and

⁹³ R. G. Suny, 'Beyond Psychohistory: the young Stalin in Georgia', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 48-58, p. 58

⁹⁴ A. J. Rieber, 'Stalin, Man of the Borderlands', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 5 (Dec., 2001), pp. 1651-1691, p. 1654.

Great Russia as the political centre of the state. Only Stalin, through his own personal understanding of the interaction between these three, could control, adjust and run this state.⁹⁵ Erik van Ree too has highlighted the importance of those formative years in Georgia to Stalin's later political doctrine, and especially his nationalities policy, having become 'acquainted with the milieu of Georgian revival even before he moved to Tbilisi', during his years as a young boy in Gori.⁹⁶

Similarly to the focus his ethnicity, writing in the post-Soviet era has shown a continuing interest in the direct links between the psychology of Stalin, his method of rule and their relation to his childhood experiences through the continued practice of psychohistory. This has been done by directly linking Stalin's violent, difficult and at times religious upbringing to his later career. For instance, Montefiore stated that Stalin had learnt violence from an early age at home, in the face of his father's behaviour,⁹⁷ and Kuromiya has highlighted the similarities between the young Soso and adult Stalin, notably his patience and hard work, but also his lack of capability for kindness or compassion towards others or animals, and his inability to accept authority.⁹⁸ Kun suggested that in terms of psychology, the blame for Stalin's sudden and dramatic changes of mood between depression and euphoria in adulthood lies with the use of 'slapping as a pedagogical device' as used not only by Beso, but also by Keke.⁹⁹ Service noted that 'He had known no fairness from his father; he would show none to those contemporaries who got in

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 1691

⁹⁶ van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, pp. 58-72 The Georgian revival, championed by the Georgian writer Ilya Chavchavadze, aimed for the rebirth of Georgia as a cultural nation which in the long run would create the conditions for Georgian independence. Chavchavadze believed all Georgians regardless of social class should be moulded into a homogenous community, structured around an axis of shared cultural values. Van Ree suggests that while still living in Gori, Stalin was a frequent visitor to a bookshop owned by a member of Chavchavadze's society, and that by publishing his own writing in Chavchavadze's journal *Iveria* Stalin demonstrated that he felt close to the former's brand of nationalism. See van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, p.59

⁹⁷ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, p.23

⁹⁸ Kuromiya, *Stalin*, p. 2

⁹⁹ Kun, *Stalin*, p.12

his way.¹⁰⁰ While Service stated that Stalin's upbringing did not determine his career, and a lot more had to happen before 'psychological settlement' occurred, he nevertheless suggested that 'without the childhood experienced by Joseph there would have been no Stalin. For the tree to grow there had to be a seed'.¹⁰¹

These shifts in emphasis in writing also reflect wider biographical trends which came to the fore in the 1990s. Indeed these trends proposed that far greater understanding of particular institutions and forms of social change could be gained by analysing how they had been understood and negotiated by particular individuals. For many historians, therefore, biography has been increasingly seen to provide a unique lens through which the relative power of political, economic, cultural, social and generational processes on the life chances of individuals could be assessed, or to provide a prism that enabled later historians to see how particular individuals understood and constructed themselves and made sense of their lives and their society.¹⁰² This is particularly well reflected in the case of Rieber and his search of Stalin's childhood for an explanation of the way in which Stalin viewed Soviet communism and his role within it.

The moral dimension of earlier twentieth century biography, which sought to identify strengths and failings of individuals, has also given way to a more encompassing form of analysis that focuses on 'personality' rather than 'character'. The idea of character had previously provided a framework for allocating praise or blame in accordance with the behaviour and the underlying characteristics of a person. It also suggested the possibility of emulation. Personality, by contrast, involves a far stronger emphasis on intellectual and emotional qualities and suggests the possibility of a psychological rather than a moral approach.¹⁰³ As with the wider historiography of Stalin and Stalinism, the centrality of morality in writing on Stalin himself decreased significantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union,

¹⁰⁰ Service, *Stalin*, p.21

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.21-22

¹⁰² Caine, *Biography and History*, p.23

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 42

and a psychohistorical-type approach to his youth and ethnic origins has instead acquired prominence.

6. Young Stalin and the West

How does the evolution of the historiography of the young Stalin reflect the changing Western attitudes towards Stalin and Stalinism identified in the previous chapters? The historiography of Stalin written in the West in the period prior to the Cold War was primarily concerned with Stalin's suitability as a successor to Lenin, and this trend was reflected in both the official and non-official works on the young Stalin examined in this chapter. The official works published in the West sought to conceal an unhappy childhood and elevate Stalin's credentials as a revolutionary and Marxist-Leninist by focusing only on these parts of his career. Sympathetic biographers such as Barbusse romanticised Stalin's childhood while also reinforcing his Soviet communist leadership qualifications. However, the non-official works published in the West on the young Stalin were almost all written by individuals who had in some way become alienated from the Soviet Union and who were writing biographical works on Stalin's whole life to date. This was certainly the case for Trotsky, Souvarine and Deutscher. As a result, most works published on Stalin in the West at this time were by émigré, exiled or disenchanted socialists and were largely exercises in assessing Stalin's suitability, or lack thereof, as successor to Lenin. There was very little middle ground: those writing about Stalin were either unwaveringly supportive or anti-Stalinist socialists. It was these same authors who wrote about Stalin's childhood, as they attempted to create a complete biographical work on Stalin, and similar themes on personality emerged in both their constructions of the young and adult Stalin. In these, he continued to be their other, intellectually, ideologically physically and ethnically.

The intense anti-Soviet drive of the Cold War era writing on the Soviet Union and Stalinism meant the focus shifted away from

Stalin as a man and onto the nature of Stalinism as a system and as a regime. Stalin himself did remain central to scholarship, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, but the emphasis moved primarily onto the level of his control and involvement in governing the Soviet Union. After Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech, this was especially true regarding his role in the purges and the Terror. This shift was reflected in the lack of biographical writings on Stalin during this period and in the vast amount of scholarship published on Stalinism generally at this time, especially in the USA. The revisionist movement of the late 1960s, and overall Western scholarship to the end of the Cold War, continued this trend: any major shifts in focus occurred within the parameters of the study of Stalinism and Stalin's involvement in it but did not reignite an interest in the life of Stalin. This made all the more uncharacteristic of this era the appearance of two first-hand accounts of Stalin's life, including references to his childhood by his daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva and Joseph Davrichewy. For the first time in decades further corroboration of stories of Stalin's troubled upbringing and loathing for the Seminary had become possible.

In the post-Soviet era, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and access to new archival documentation have engendered a revival in Stalin-centric works. In biographical writing on the young Stalin, the most noticeable trend has been in searching Stalin's Georgian origins for insights into his later political policies and practices. While this has not been so evident in more general writing on Stalin and Stalinism in this era, it nonetheless ties in with the larger trend identified in writing on Stalin, which stems from the archival revolution, focusing on his method of leadership.

7. Conclusion

This biographical body of work is informative and representative both of biographical writing on Stalin and of the wider historiography of Stalin and Stalinism, in several ways. The historiography of Stalin's

early years is composed of works by professional historians as well as memoirists, journalists and biographers whose lives and times were strongly reflected in the way the historiography developed over the Soviet period and beyond. These accounts demonstrate how the historiography of the young Stalin has evolved through the gradual release of information, wider biographical trends and changing Western attitudes towards Stalin and Stalinism. The lack of new and/or verifiable information on Stalin's youth over the course of the Soviet period has resulted in one of the key characteristics of this part of the historiography: most accounts written during the Soviet period are at best tentative, and at worst entirely contradictory. Until the 1960s, there was only one primary source – Joseph Iremashvili's memoir - which gave a detailed and first-hand account of Stalin's early life; everything that followed either worked to try and establish how much of this was accurate, or worked to present an altogether different picture. The issue of source availability in writing on Stalinism during the Soviet period is saliently represented in the evolution of the historiography of the young Stalin.

Western attitudes to Stalin have again been central to the creation and development of writing in this area. Trends in biographical writing have also been reflected throughout the period of study, though perhaps not as strongly as they might due to the high impact of the lack of sources and the changing global context which compelled Western writers to delve into Stalin's childhood. In the post-Soviet period, there is still a demand for more information on Stalin, not only as a politician but also as a man. As a result, there is a continuing interest in researching and writing on this subject, reflected in the large amount of on-going research into all aspects of the Stalinist era. And yet it cannot be said that a radically new, different or amended Stalin - or Stalins - has emerged since the opening of the archives. Rather, there has been a piecing together of a more complete Stalin. This is also represented in writing on the young Stalin: it has taken seventy odd years for a relatively realistic and

corroborated, but not dramatically altered, account of the life of the young Soso, and of the significance of this time, to emerge.

Conclusion

Initial historical interpretations and approaches to Stalin and Stalinism emerged in the period 1925-1947, while Stalin was still alive and before the Cold War began. In the 1920s and 1930s analyses stemmed from personal political convictions, rather than academic exercise or wider international political issues, although the latter started to play a certain part in writing on Stalin after the Second World War. Leon Trotsky, Boris Souvarine and Isaac Deutscher all began by supporting the Bolsheviks, yet it became clear that Trotsky's loss of power combined with his hostility towards Stalin offered similarly disillusioned communists with an alternative belief to follow and one which crucially did not require an ideological break from socialism. It was Trotsky's thought and work that provided the basis for the first 'self' to the Stalinist other in Western publications by presenting Stalin and Stalinism as a personal and ideological other. For many of the writers in this period, Stalin and his regime epitomised everything that they were not, and their reassertions of his personal and political deviancy, inferiority and threat presented a clear process of this othering. On the other hand, the positive accounts by writers such as Barbusse also constructed Stalin as an other, only in this case he was to be elevated to God-like status: he was a dynamic, positive and benevolent force who not only watched over his people and protected them, but who also drove his country forward. All of the individuals writing at this time were in some way directly affected by Stalin and his regime, and they were above all bound inextricably in their writings by their own personal, political and theoretical engagement with Stalin and Stalinism. It was in these works that the Stalinist other first emerged in Western historiography.

From the late 1940s, the foundations of Western scholarship on Stalin and Stalinism altered radically, and the notion of 'totalitarianism' occupied centre stage. There have been some thorough evaluations of the ways in which the notion of

totalitarianism has been used by scholars in the West in their assessments of the how and why of Stalinism during the Cold War, notably by David D. Roberts and Abbott Gleason, and there exists a vast body of work dedicated to the notion of totalitarianism itself, which explores its contexts and meanings, evolved over the twentieth century and beyond. With these assessments already providing a vast and rich source of information on Cold War totalitarian historiography, this thesis aimed to shed light on one specific aspect of this within the field of Soviet studies, arguing that, in both explicit and implicit ways, many of the works published during the early Cold War period systematically presented Stalinist totalitarianism as the other, which, in turn, provided an additional tool with which to other Soviet communism. The works of this era focused particularly on the coercive and terroristic methods of communist rule under Stalin, as well as the threat of such a nation, constructing and reinforcing the notion of the 'two worlds': East and West, opposites and opponents. The basis for these constructions is found in writings on totalitarianism around this period, such as those of Jacob Talmon and Zbigniew Brzezinski, but also in the general political context which had immeasurable influence on scholarship on Stalinism, particularly in the USA. At the same time, the simultaneous development of the idea of Stalinism as a continuation of a Russian tradition of leadership showed a pattern of Orientalist-style analysis, reinforcing the notion of the unchanging national Russian character. More specifically, the suggestion by some scholars that Bolshevism and eventually totalitarian Stalinism were in fact tsarism turned 'upside-down' demonstrated the extent of this perceived similitude. During this era, totalitarianism represented the ultimate other to the West, and in Western historiography on Stalin and Stalinism totalitarianism provided a new tool with which Western scholars were able to construct the Stalinist, and Soviet, other.

In the same period, Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech had severe repercussions for the lives of Western communists living in countries where their political and ideological convictions were

deemed dangerous and worthy of persecution and where they themselves represented the other. This study has examined the impact of this event on the way in which Stalin and Stalinism were written about by non-Soviet communists in the West and specifically by British communists in the period immediately after the speech. The analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrated how Khrushchev's speech precipitated a fast and dramatic evolution of British communist writing on Stalin and Stalinism, from the positive othering of the pre-1956 era in the *Daily Worker* newspaper and other works, to the split in the Party, as many members attempted to come to terms with the revelations of the speech. The notions of morality and deviancy were central to the way in which many British communists attempted to deal with the revelations about Stalinism and with their own actions and beliefs. This manifested itself through distancing their own beliefs from Stalinism within a socialist framework, through a reinforcement of the idea of Stalinism as a deviant and degenerate form of socialism. The prominence of the notion of personal moral responsibility in this section of the historiography both implicitly and explicitly suggested that Stalinism was immoral, dangerous and ideologically erroneous and that coming to terms with their own shortcomings was a process through which British communists hoped to erase the stain of Stalinism from both themselves and from socialism.

A public political and academic discourse focusing on the totalitarian nature of Stalinism, setting the Soviet Union apart from the Western democracies, emerged in the first two decades of the Cold War. As the Cold War progressed and social history acquired increased prominence, the conflict over the validity of revisionism in the *Russian Review* editions examined in Chapter 4 suggests that the concepts of 'morality' and 'blame' dominated the process of construction of the Stalinist other at this time. This was exemplified in two ways: firstly through a typical pattern of othering based on the recognition and reinforcement by all, revisionists and non-revisionists alike, that there were undeniable and grave moral failings in the

Stalinist regime and that Stalin himself was at least largely if not entirely responsible for these. Stalinism remained the other in this period through its failure to live up to the West's moral standards and was universally reinforced as such in the debates. An unexpected secondary outcome of this was that by being seen to diminish Stalin's responsibility, or seeming to neglect these moral failings, the 'new cohort' revisionists by extension also took on an immoral quality in the eyes of their critics. Their neglect or refusal to attribute the locus of blame for Stalinism to where the older scholars demanded it be placed meant that they, as well as Stalinism, were presented as immoral in these debates. Stephen Cohen, Peter Kenez, Alfred Meyer and Robert Conquest, for example, were at pains to point out the differences between their own research agendas, interpretative paradigms and moral integrity, and those of the revisionists. The most striking characteristic of these debates uncovered in this chapter was therefore that the same concepts of morality and blame were used to define Stalin, Stalinism and the 'new cohort' revisionists. This demonstrated how significant the Western construction of the Stalinist other was to the totalitarian model scholars, and some first generation revisionists, as well as the deep effects of the global context of this period, once again in a state of change and upheaval.

The advent of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the late 1980s, and the eventual demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, created several important interpretative and contextual shifts that impacted the Western historiography of Stalin and Stalinism. While there has been a continued focus on the Terror and Stalin's role in the running of the regime, the new post-91 generation of researchers of Stalinism have used the vast amounts of information released from the archives to research such a wide range of aspects, and achieved such a diverse expansion of our knowledge and understanding of these aspects, that it is impossible to state that an identifiable orthodoxy on the question of 'what happened' during Stalinism has emerged. This study has suggested that the breadth of this expansion of research has, for now at least, precluded the possibilities for a consensus on the realities of

'everyday' Stalinism, as nationality, ethnicity, economy, culture and modernity and all other aspects of life under the Stalinist regime are being vigorously investigated, thanks to the documentation released during the archival revolution. The principal character of the post-Soviet historiography is that for the time being it has none: set against the backdrop of the previous periods examined in this study, it demonstrates both continuity and change. Where in the previous periods clear trends in writing and interpretation emerged that were hinged on Western perceptions of Stalin and Stalinism, the post-Soviet era proposes a multitude of foci, interpretations and accounts of Stalinism, suggesting, in turn, a multitude of perceptions of Stalinism by the West. On the one hand, it remains for certain scholars the Stalinist totalitarian other, while for others it more closely resembled Western capitalist modernity. For some it is neither of these. Nevertheless, this thesis suggests that continued and indeed revived research on Stalin himself and his leadership, and the largely universal acceptance of the nature of Stalin's regime, indicates that previous perceptions of Stalin and Stalinism as the immoral, deviant, dangerous antithetical others of the West do in fact persist, only the common nature of their articulation across the new scholarship still remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, these interpretations do highlight two current trends which are particularly relevant to the West's construction of the Stalinist other. The first, with its roots in the totalitarian era, and more latterly expressed by the neo-traditionalist school, suggests that the study of Stalinism is important because the West needs to understand the enemy other in order to protect itself from it and in order to define itself against it. The second trend can be linked back to Arendt's notion of the banality of evil, then the work of the revisionists on the role of social and bureaucratic pressures on the course Stalinism took, and finally the modernity school's argument of similarities between capitalism and Stalinism. In this case, it is not only the enemy the West must be vigilant of: it must also be aware of itself and the dangers inherent in its own cultures, societies and

polities. Both cases demonstrate the on-going relevance of research on Stalinism to the West: in the former, the identification and understanding of the Stalinist other is a necessary tool in identity formation, as well as in protecting the Western way of life. The latter allows the West to acknowledge its own weaknesses and internal threats and to work towards preventing any potential deviation from the course of liberal democracy.

In consolidating these era-specific findings, themes common to the entire historiography have emerged. Firstly, this study suggests that Western attitudes to Stalin and Stalinism have been central to the creation of this historiography. Throughout the Soviet period, Western constructions have been hinged on specific concepts which, in turn, have been used to create the Stalin(ist) other, demonstrating a clear continuation of the historical process of othering outlined in the Introduction. In the era leading up to the Cold War, Stalin and Stalinism were held up against socialism and Marxism-Leninism and were depicted as the most deviant form of these. In the Cold War period, a fresh angle on the old 'totalitarian' debate revealed that the term itself, and its usage as the defining characteristic of Stalinism, were systematically used to create a great distance between Stalinism, the Soviet Union and the West and to render Stalinism inferior and deviant in comparison to Western liberal democracy. Even within the socialist world, once the facts of Stalinism emerged from Khrushchev's speech, it was during this period defined as deviant and immoral, both in relation to its actions in the name of socialism and in relation to its general character. In the later Cold War period, morality and blame became the central concepts on which debates as to the nature of Stalinism were hinged and allowed totalitarian-model scholars to continue constructing Stalin and Stalinism as the evil totalitarian other. In the post-Soviet era, however, there has been a break from this pattern, with no clear identifiable method of othering Stalinism in relation to the West, demonstrating the impact of the end of the Cold War and the removal of the perceived Soviet threat on writing on Stalin and Stalinism. This aspect of the historiography has,

in effect, provided a prism through which Western attitudes to Russia, the Soviet Union, Stalin and his regime have been measured throughout the period of study. This, in turn, has shown that the historical process of othering Russia by Europe and later by the USA outlined in the Introduction had continued throughout the twentieth century.

A principal characteristic of this overarching trend in writing has been the use of key concepts when discussing Stalin and Stalinism in the West. Across the entire period of study, notions of immorality, deviancy and difference have been crucial to the way in which Stalin and Stalinism have been constructed by the West. As exemplified by the analysis in this thesis of both Soviet and British socialists writing on Stalin and his regime, the idea of Stalinism being a deviant or degenerate form of Socialism, for instance, prevailed in writing by socialists, whether they were writing in the 1930s and 1940s or in the second half of the century. Writers of the totalitarian-model persuasion saw Stalinism as morally degenerate and as a deviant form of civilisation in the face of Western liberal democracy. This was reflected in both their writings during the early years of the Cold War and in the revisionist period, where their argument acquired such strength as to attribute these characteristics by extension to the revisionists themselves. In this latter period, the question of the locus of blame for Stalinism also became central to the question of morality. In the post-Soviet period morality and moral judgements have appeared less central to writing on Stalin and Stalinism, although, as Kershaw suggested in the case of Nazism, it is difficult to write about the realities of Stalinism without some level of moral engagement, often manifested through the use of words such as ‘criminality’ or ‘barbarous’.¹ One, albeit extreme, example of this

¹ Ian Kershaw suggests that while the explicit extreme morality present in early post-war writing on Nazism is no longer in evidence, there has remained a latent moral element to scholarship on the subject. This, he says, is present in the works of all serious scholars on the subject (and Germans above all) and is manifested by the language they employ: terms such as ‘criminality’ and ‘barbarity’ demonstrate their detestation for Nazism. Kershaw also raises an important point, which could well be applied to scholarship on Stalinism: while historians generally try, with varying

resilience of moral judgement in writing on Stalinism can be found in *The Black Book of Communism*, which bases its entire analysis on moral and criminal judgement.²

This commonality helps to explain the lack of major alterations to Western understanding of Stalin and Stalinism throughout the period of study. Neither a new Stalin nor a new Stalinism have emerged, including in the post-Soviet period when the field of Soviet studies acquired a renewed vibrancy thanks to the opening of the archives. These continuities are striking and remarkable in a body of work whose dominant characteristic is its hugely diverse and at times contradictory nature. Instead a more complete, but not radically altered, picture of the man and his regime has emerged. This thesis shows that our basic perception of the nature of Stalin and Stalinism has not dramatically shifted since the first substantial works of the 1930s. Throughout the entire period of study it has remained consistent: Stalinism was coercive and violent, but also vigorously productive. Its immorality and deviancy too have been central to this characterisation. This is not to say there have not been vast leaps made in the depth of our knowledge. What was learnt, especially in the latter half of the period of study, thanks to the revisionists' work, for example, was that society under Stalinism was far more dynamic and complex than had previously been assumed. Our knowledge of Stalinism has acquired many layers of detail and

degrees of success, to eschew moral judgement, doing so with Nazism and Hitler is 'clearly an impossibility'. See I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, 1993), pp.14-16. There is a body of work dedicated to the study of Hitler, Stalin and their regimes in a comparative perspective. See, for example, Alan Bullock's biographical work on the two leaders: A. Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London, 1998), and his lecture for the German Historical Institute London Annual Lecture, A. Bullock, *Personality and Power: The Strange Case of Hitler and Stalin* (London, 1995). See also M. Geyer and S. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (New York, 2009); I. Kershaw and M. Lewin, *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge, 1977). Edward Acton has also questioned whether there is a case for comparing the two and given a thorough overview of the historiography of the subject in E. Acton, *Nazism and Stalinism: A Suitable Case for Comparison?* (Shaftesbury, 1998). All of these works commonly argue that there is much to contrast as well as to compare between the two regimes; however, there was enough common to both to have generated a need for comparison.

² Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism*. See Chapter 5.

nuance, and the scope of research continues to grow. Yet these basic characteristics of the regime itself, and Stalin's role within it, have remained largely constant and unchallenged, continuing to provide the common foundations of even greatly varying interpretations of its more complex characteristics. Where challenges have been made, such as J. Arch Getty's argument that the purges were a largely bureaucratic phenomenon, for instance, they have not become the accepted version of events by the majority, even if debates are ongoing as to the scope of Stalin's responsibility for key crimes.³

Stalin himself has remained an enigma, but the fundamental perception of his character has not changed since the 1930s: he was brutal, crude and sly, and the principal architect of his eponymous regime. We now know more about how his childhood may have affected him psychologically, about his daily life in the Kremlin and his relationships with the rest of the leadership; yet core conceptions of his private and political personality have remained unchanged. Instead, these basic characteristics of both the man and his regime have been used in changing ways by the West as the foundations on which to construct the Stalinist other. This has been illustrated in particular in this thesis through the case study of biographical writing on the young Stalin: over the course of 70 years, the young Soso and the basic facts and questions around his early life have remained largely unchanged. It is only the changing focus of Western scholarship on different aspects of his early life – his relationship with parents and his Georgian origins for example – which has led to a wider variety of interpretations on the significance of his youth and ethnic origins. This lack of radical new interpretations of Stalin himself seems unlikely to change, since all evidence presented to date

³ See Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges* for his examination of the Terror and purges as a bureaucratic phenomenon. For arguments about Stalin's role in the Kirov murder, for example, see R. Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder* (London, 1989) and A. Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery* (New York, 1999) who both argue that Stalin was the primary culprit, and entirely complicit. For arguments that suggest that Stalin did not order the murder (but did use it to his advantage) see M. E. Leno, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven and London, 2010) and Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, pp. 72-76

suggests that these perceptions are accurate. Yet there are still many unknowns: with little personal correspondence, no memoirs or diaries, it is difficult to unearth new information that might enlighten us further, if indeed at all, on his private experiences, feelings and thoughts about his life, his regime and the world around him.

Wider historiographical trends have also shown themselves to be important to the creation of this historiography. The evolution of biography as a genre and the advent of social history, for instance, have impacted on the way in which Stalin and Stalinism have been depicted. Indeed, by tracing research on the life of young Stalin, it has become clear that despite all the particularities of source accessibility and Western attitudes, trends in biographical writing nevertheless manifested themselves throughout the period of study: from early eulogistic accounts, to the anti-hero depictions, to psychohistorical investigations, leading finally into the contemporary style which aims to expose all facets of an individual, from their public lives to the most intimate parts of their private lives. From the 1970s, the increasing prominence of social history in the wider profession found its way into the field of Soviet studies and provoked the most passionate debates in the field to date, as old and new scholarship came to blows over the very nature of Stalinism, and Stalin's role within it. In the post-Soviet period, the everyday detail of cultural history has remained a focus in writing on Stalin and Stalinism. Yet there also seems to be an incidental character to the presence of these trends in the historiography during the Stalinist and early Cold War periods: this thesis has clearly demonstrated that those writing about Stalin and Stalinism in those eras were strongly compelled to do so by personal and political motivations, and the changing interpretations and representations of Stalin and his regime have been largely explained by the circumstances in which that writing occurred.

However, the development of psychohistory had a clear impact on biographical writing on Stalin during the later Soviet period and laid the foundations for strong connections between his early years and his later policies to be made in the post-Soviet era.

Similarly important was the rise of social and cultural history, whose impact on research into Stalin and his regime has been immeasurable.

A more consistent and sustained impact has been the lack of source accessibility over the course of the Soviet period, and the elimination of this obstacle in the post-Soviet era. As highlighted in the Introduction, there was during the majority of the period under study virtually no new release of information from the Soviet Union, and the information which did become available did so extremely gradually and irregularly. The first primary source on Stalin himself was Joseph Iremashvili's memoir, and, aside from the Smolensk Archive acquired after the Second World War, sources on the inner workings of the Stalinist regime thereafter largely came in a drip-feed of newspaper articles, testimonies of escapees, foreign policy observations and the reworking and reinterpretation of these same bits of information. Once again, the young Stalin case study has highlighted this trend, bringing to the fore not only the impact of the lack of source accessibility, but also of the problem of the accuracy, reliability and corroboration of the sources that did become available in a drip-feed from the Soviet Union.

This partly explains why accounts and interpretations of Stalinism vary so noticeably during the Soviet period: a little conjecture was necessary in order to complete the picture, and this conjecture could take many forms. A statement made by Conquest exemplifies this. Made within the context of a criticism of the revisionists' use of sources, and what he perceived to be their unwillingness to engage with any sources they considered to be 'anti-Stalinist', Conquest suggested that writing about Soviet history was a case of wringing out the truth from the sources:

It relies on attention to detail, on common sense reasoning, on a developed 'feel' for history and chronology, on familiarity with human behaviour, and on ever enlarging stores of information. The crux is: 'judgement' is needed, it is a delicate

matter, and no simple or mechanical criteria for validating or rejecting evidence are of any real use.⁴

With this degree of rather subjective ‘feel’, common sense and intuition required in the place of solid evidence, it is clear why Western historiography on Stalin and Stalinism developed such varying interpretations of the regime. This thesis has demonstrated that these interpretations have been so resilient as to be largely unaffected by the eventual release of large amounts of documentation from the archives in the post-Soviet period, and in this way have continued to be central to the way in which Stalin and Stalinism are currently interpreted and written about in the West.

On the other hand, the now vast amount of information available to researchers of Stalin and Stalinism has broken the pattern that saw specific interpretative trends emerging periodically throughout the twentieth century. Twenty years after the opening of the archives, and aside from a general acceptance of the nature of Stalin’s regime, there has been no overall orthodoxy to emerge. Nevertheless, after the rise of social and cultural history and their impact on research on Stalinism from the 1970s onwards, this thesis has shown that there has been a renewed focus on the political aspects of Stalinism, notably the role of Stalin himself and the nature of his leadership. Similarly, research has increased on the way in which the regime functioned, and how decisions were made, most especially during the defining eras of Stalinism, such as industrialisation, collectivisation and the Terror.

All three of these influences – Western attitudes to Russia, historiographical trends and source accessibility – reflect the huge impact of the changing global political context on writing on Stalin and Stalinism over the course of the period of study. The twentieth century was awash with events that constantly changed and challenged the relationship between the two blocs. Stalin’s rise to power and his ensuing regime, the Second World War, the Cold War

⁴ Conquest, ‘Revisionizing Stalin’s Russia’, p.388

and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union each provided shifting interpretative frameworks within which observers, researchers and writers in the West placed their writing on Stalin and his regime. This thesis suggests that Western attitudes to Stalin and Stalinism were immeasurably shaped by the political context at any given time over the period of study. In the 1930s and 1940s, Stalinism had alienated many socialists, both Soviet and Western, and those who ended up outside of the Soviet Union were able to publish works on Stalin and his regime that otherwise would not have been able to be published while he was still alive. For instance, this was the case for Iremashvili, Deutscher and Trotsky.

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, there was an increase in writing on Stalin in the West that was mainly concerned with his life and character and that reflected a growing curiosity and concern with the man at the helm of this emergent super-power. When the post-war climate evolved into the Cold War, the global political context became the most influential determinant of Western attitudes to the Soviet Union, and to writing on Stalinism. The academic and political worlds became tightly intertwined, especially in the USA, and the totalitarianism of Soviet communism and its threat to Western liberal capitalist democracy became central to research.

Yet, as the Cold War progressed through the era of the Vietnam War, the context shifted, and the notion of capitalism as the only viable ideological position was increasingly challenged in the West. This malaise spread through all spheres of life, and in different forms, and was most notably publicly manifested in the 1968 student uprisings. In the academic world, this expressed itself with a retreat from politics-centred research and a vastly increased focus on the social sciences. In the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism, the impact of this change was considerable. Social historians challenged the totalitarian-model scholars and called for new ways of examining Stalinism, leading to intense debates steeped in moral judgement. Despite these difficult times in scholarship on Stalin and his regime,

the advent of social and then cultural history greatly expanded the breadth of knowledge and research in the field.

And yet, within all these changes, one constant remained, itself also a product of the particularities of the Soviet Union and its relationship not only with the West, but also with its own past: source access remained strictly limited, not only in terms of archival document access, but also in terms of access to the Soviet Union itself and its people. So while interpretative frameworks changed greatly over the course of the period of study, the information available to researchers itself changed very little during the Soviet period. It was not until the Soviet Union collapsed that both of these elements shifted into new territory: Soviet communism, and with it the Cold War, came to an end – and this final shift of political context in this period of study led to the long hoped-for ‘archival revolution’.

In attempting to answer how these contexts, and their direct impact on individuals writing on Stalin and Stalinism, manifested themselves in the historiography, this thesis has highlighted certain aspects of the ‘politics of knowledge’ of this field: the contexts, arguments, conflicts and processes which affect the production, dissemination and reception of knowledge in a field or discipline.⁵ This notion is in itself not universally accepted, and there have been scholars across many fields and disciplines who reject it, arguing that their work is the fruit of their own scholarly impartiality, critical faculty, good judgement and the usage of tried-and-tested scholarly methods.⁶ However, it is clear that the field of Soviet studies has been particularly susceptible to the emergence of a politics of knowledge, the considerable impact of which on the historiography of Stalin and Stalinism has formed a principal line of enquiry in this study. This study has highlighted that this politics of knowledge is manifested in the overall historiography by a continuous othering of

⁵ Zachary Lockman gives a concise introduction to the concept of the politics of knowledge in his examination of Orientalism in studies of the Middle East. See Z. Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.2-7

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4

Stalin and Stalinism by the West, but is expressed in different forms, and is based on different premises, as we move through the period of study. As a result of these various and varying experiences and contexts, and while the Stalinist regime has been on a basic level understood as repressive and violent, there has been and remains a high level of lively debate relating to key elements of Stalin and Stalinism, such as the nature of the regime and Stalin's role within it.

More questions have inevitably arisen from this study, in particular relating to the West's constructions of Stalin as the other. A line of enquiry that deserves closer attention is how Stalin might have been used as a proxy for representing other forms of Western anxiety in the evolving global context. In the early years of writing on Stalin by the backward-looking Trotsky school, was Stalin simply a contemporary Napoleon, betrayer of the revolution, yet still a legitimate hero to some? Did the totalitarian-model scholars see him as another Hitler, the embodiment of pure evil and a much more disturbing figure than the tinpot dictator of the previous era? In today's post-9/11 world, could links be made between neo-traditionalist constructions of Stalin as the true believer, the sincerity of evil and the Wests' anxieties about religious fundamentalism? Is Stalin the Bin Laden of current Western scholarship? An answer to these questions would require a systematic and comparative analysis of scholarship on all the personalities and themes they concern. The conclusions of this potential line of enquiry may help us to further understand how the West has viewed and defined the Russian, Soviet and Stalinist other.⁷ Furthermore, a wider, complementary and comparative analysis of Western historiography which is neither American nor British would help to develop a wider-reaching and more nuanced understanding of the West's othering of Russia.

⁷ With thanks to Iain Lauchlan for sharing his thoughts on this matter from his current research: I. Lauchlan, 'Seven Psychopaths: Joseph Stalin and the Personification of Evil' (unpublished work in progress, 2013).

In the meantime, the purpose of this thesis has been to shed new light on the conditions that led to the emergence of trends, themes and patterns in the large and varied body of work we now have on Stalin and Stalinism in the West. In this way it hopes to have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the complex ways in which the West has constructed and continues to construct Stalin and Stalinism in scholarship, both in relation to its own identity and to the changing historical, political and historiographical context in which it has found itself over the period of study, and in which it continues to find itself today.

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