

## INTRODUCTION

# Into and Beyond the Stalinist Model of Secret Policing

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ON 20 DECEMBER 1917, FELIKS DZERZHINSKII WAS APPOINTED TO THE ALL-Russian Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counterrevolution and Sabotage (VChK). On 19 August 1991, a state of emergency was declared after Vladimir Kriuchkov, chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB), convened other leaders of the abortive August coup in a KGB guesthouse in Moscow. The first date is connected to the birth of the new Soviet regime in 1917, the second to its collapse in 1991, pointing to the outsized role the secret police played in the history of communism at home and abroad. The institution's well-known acronyms—Cheka or VChK, GPU, OGPU, NKVD, NKGB, MGB, MVD, KGB—changed regularly. Its notoriety did not. Over the decades, historians, journalists, and citizens collected a wealth of detailed knowledge and documentation. Windows into its secretive and classified world have been opened in several bodies of literature that have achieved empirical depth and, in a number of cases, conceptual sophistication. At the same time, the state of our knowledge remains highly uneven.

The greatest depth has been concentrated in a group of topics that coincided

with the more general “archival revolution” in the decade and a half after 1991 and that built on older literatures. The topics that commanded by far the most intense historical and political scrutiny involved the role of the secret police in Bolshevik political violence and the crimes of Stalinism. Along the way, we have gained a strong overall grasp of the secret police’s institutional reorganizations and the biographies of its leading personnel.<sup>1</sup> One strand of inquiry focused on the Cheka in the red terror starting in 1918.<sup>2</sup> Another was connected to the creation circa 1930 of the empire of forced labor that became known as the Gulag archipelago.<sup>3</sup> The greatest number of investigations concerned the NKVD’s role as Iosif Stalin’s tool during collectivization, the Great Terror, and other repressive operations throughout the Soviet period.<sup>4</sup> Less voluminous, yet important as prisms into the crucial function of the secret police in information gathering, have been the literatures on domestic surveillance and, more recently, on disinformation and late Soviet “active measures.”<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that numerous annotated collections of documents declassified after 1991 have been published on topics that command broad political and public interest, such as the KGB files on Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn.<sup>6</sup>

From today’s perspective, we can perceive that the first post-1991 archival-historiographical “opening” in the study of the Soviet secret police was not only partial in its focus but largely domestic or national in its preoccupations, as opposed to international, comparative, or transnational.<sup>7</sup> As all-Union Moscow-centrism was supplemented by new national historiographies in the Baltics, Ukraine, and other newly independent states, scholarly fragmentation followed geopolitical division. Speaking more broadly about the communist “second world,” there have certainly been studies in several languages about, for example, cooperation among Soviet and East European security services. But East European archival openings, in particular the intensive study of the East German Stasi, followed different dynamics and directions from the archival revolution in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltics, and other post-Soviet countries. They appear to have experienced cross-fertilization with Soviet studies less in terms of broadly conceptual or comparative interactions than in the footnotes of specialized investigations.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of the secret police on the international stage, quite a lot has been published over the years on Soviet espionage. Works on this topic include frequently cited memoirs and much-discussed documents smuggled out by *émigré* defectors.<sup>9</sup> Collections of online documents have been made available by the National Security Archive, the Cold War International History Project, and, for example, online portals with documents from former KGB archives in Lithuania and Ukraine. The literature on espionage and intelligence is also rife with works of mixed scholarly value or outright sensationalism. As with

the study of Soviet foreign policy in general but even more so, the study of intelligence and espionage proceeded without the extensive archival access that became the norm for other parts of the party-state.<sup>10</sup> The revival of the Soviet public cult of state security in Putin's Russia and the memory wars across Eastern Europe have also led to large-scale publication of genuine yet selectively arranged documentary collections that, because of their slant, represent erudite or quasi-scholarly outposts of information warfare.<sup>11</sup> Even so, documentary publications from the Lubianka archive have included genuinely valuable materials, even as they remain silent about selection criteria and what remains unpublished.<sup>12</sup>

In comparative terms, however, the great deal we learned about the security organs in the wake of the Soviet collapse amounts to relatively little, given the depth of what we know about the Party and the state. The secret police was from 1922 *de jure* subordinate to the Communist Party, and in the Stalin period it was *de facto* subordinate to the general secretary.<sup>13</sup> It was important enough at the center and at every level of the power hierarchy, however, that alongside the Party and the state it can be considered as one of the major institutional pillars of Soviet power. Its centrality to the consolidation of the new regime after 1917 and to Stalinism and its role in terror and forced labor were part of "extraordinary measures" later condemned as "excesses." But even though it crystallized in revolution and civil war and represented the tip of the spear in Stalin's "second revolution," the secret police was never just "extraordinary," in the sense of carrying out emergency measures, suspensions of legality, or "states of exception." It also formed a constituent part of the regular, peacetime penal, penitentiary, and policing systems.<sup>14</sup> The secret police commanded its own economic empire spanning forced labor and sensitive, high-priority sectors of the economy. It was deeply invested in the informational ecosystem, media, and information technology not only for policing but to influence political decision making and "social engineering." It had its own elite security and border troops and special role within the military. Its local, regional, and republican-level branches connected it to every level of the continental, multinational state, and its extensive international operations made it a key part of foreign policy and international relations. Finally, given its formidable and intensively cultivated public image and mass networks of informers, it had a profound cultural and social impact. In sum, as one sprawling pillar of Soviet power, the activities and operations of the secret police should be seen not in terms of a small handful of areas connected to repression and espionage but as ranging widely across state and society, politics and culture, information and economics, art and ideology.

In this sense, the secret police clearly remains the branch of the power

structure that we know by far the least about. Indeed, how central has it been to practitioners and those training to enter the field? It is fair to say that most mainstream historians working in those areas of twentieth-century Russian and Soviet history at the center of the field's attention in the decades surrounding 1991 did not delve into the history of the secret police as an instructive or crucial frontier for their own research.

If the 1990s marked the beginning of the first major phase in the archival study of the secret police, a cardinal new situation emerged after 2015, when the second phase in the study of the Soviet secret police archives began. On 9 April of that year, as part of a package of legislation on history and memory billed as decommunization, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law opening the country's Soviet-era secret police archives. In small but steady numbers, scholars began traveling to Kyiv. The Ukrainian materials, which contain runs of all-Union documentation from the "center" as well as from a key union republic, could then be added to ongoing work in repositories in the Baltics, where Soviet-era materials date to 1939, and, *inter alia*, to those in Georgia, where the bulk of the former KGB archive was destroyed by fire and flood in 1991–1992.<sup>15</sup> Students of these materials had the possibility of connecting to growing bodies of scholarship based in the secret police archives of the former Eastern bloc. But the pioneering, often younger scholars who saw the potential of these repositories and joined the stream of scholars gathering material for their own research were not necessarily historians of intelligence history or secret policing *per se*. Bringing them together to paint a picture of what the new investigations added up to was the motivation behind the 2020 international conference sponsored by the Jacques Rossi Memorial Fund for Gulag Research at Georgetown University that formed the basis for this book.<sup>16</sup>

The second archival period between the 2010s and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 in certain respects was reminiscent of an earlier time in other parts of Russian/Soviet history when the "archival revolution" in the 1990s began to transform the field. Or, put another way, the opening of these repositories could well be seen as a new phase of that archival revolution, which began in the late 1980s in Moscow and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) but by the 2010s had shifted to former union republics that became independent states.

It is characteristic of the present moment that even as new archival sources have opened up because they align with political-historical agendas and archival policies in not so newly independent states, others have been closed down as memory wars and the politicization of history continue apace. Mikhail Nakonechnyi, who used local Gulag archives in his study, has dubbed this an archival counterrevolution. Such reversals, decreasing access,

or reclassifications are phenomena present not only in the Russian Federation. For example, the archive of the biggest forced labor camp outside of Russia proper—the once available Karlag archive in Karaganda, Kazakhstan—is now closed.<sup>17</sup>

In that earlier era of archival openings, Russian and Eurasian historians debated the extent to which new perspectives derive from open archives or whether such openings only reinforce preconceived categories of analysis. As scholars justified or modified old positions or forged careers in renamed, newly accessible repositories, the unconventional and skeptical voices at first seemed to have the upper hand. They convincingly argued that the often uninterrogated purpose and structure of the archival repositories themselves, the search for revelations their opening engenders, and the way fields use them to pour old wine into new bottles make the knowledge they create less than revelatory.<sup>18</sup>

These warning voices from the 1990s remain relevant. A significant infusion of new primary sources in and of itself is not sufficient to produce new analysis. If it is a truism that what we make of archives always depends on how we approach and analyze them, however, it is equally the case that in historical scholarship, evidence and interpretation are intertwined in intricate ways. With the hindsight of over three decades of Soviet history in the archival era, it has become clearer that the availability and allure of new sources have served as a potential, often even necessary impetus to widen and refocus our vision.<sup>19</sup>

The details, nuance, and texture that significant in-depth access provides do add up; quantity eventually turns into quality. Along the way, unexpected finds provoke reassessments and unexpected explorations. This volume demonstrates the sheer breadth and scope of the investigations—ranging across politics and ideology, culture and technology, institutions and practices, as well as domestic, transnational, and international history—that talented scholars began to produce once the series of previously classified secret police archives became relatively accessible. The chapters of this book showcase research conducted in former KGB archives in Ukraine, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as other secret police archives in Germany, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic. They were produced by a remarkably international cast of scholars, from newly minted PhDs to senior professors from almost a dozen countries.

This introduction explores four areas in which the book's chapters make contributions that are at once empirical and conceptual in the study of the

history of the secret police. The first is the internal institutional history of the secret police, about which we still have much to learn, and the long arc of its evolution across the Soviet century. The second, closely related to the first, is the practices of secret policing—methods, operations, approaches, and technologies—that evolved dramatically as the institution changed with the times and the Soviet system itself. A third area has to do with the role of the secret police in the realm of culture—including art, film, photography, information, print media, and technology, all as they intersect with ideology. Along the way, several chapters include transnational and international dimensions, especially in the Soviet Union’s “outer empire” in Eastern Europe, suggesting the many benefits in this field of wide-angle, cross-border approaches that do not segregate the domestic and the international in secret police history. Finally, after exploring these innovations, we turn to a well-worn topic crucial to any student of the twentieth century: perpetrators and victims. It will be, however, to suggest that in this case there is some new wine to be poured into an old bottle. Many of the chapters make contributions to more than one of these four areas, and the goal is neither to produce an exhaustive catalogue nor to treat each author’s work comprehensively. Rather, I illuminate the synergy running through this curated slice of exciting new archival research, suggesting how in my reading the whole appears greater than the sum of its parts.

#### INTERNAL EVOLUTION AND INSTITUTIONAL ARC

The creation in 1922 of the little-known, multiagency Special Assembly (Osoboe soveshchanie) explored by Marc Junge, Andrei Savin, and Aleksei Teplakov is suggestive of consequential institutional twists and turns in the history of the secret police. The Cheka’s powers of summary justice and its network of concentration camps in the period of War Communism had been curtailed and partially dismantled. The turn to the New Economic Policy (NEP) involved a partial retreat—economic-social concessions such as the tax in kind and an emphasis on “socialist legality,” rerouting Bolshevik agendas into state building and political centralization. Stymied in outright socialist offensive, the Party turned to the “third front” of culture and the pursuit of ideological hegemony. The Special Assembly that came to be dominated by the secret police skirted the legal system not through rough-and-ready summary justice or revolutionary tribunals but rather via the administrative measures of an interagency bureaucracy. Its creation was linked to Vladimir Lenin and Lev Trotsky’s determination in 1922 to deport ideologically dissident members of the intelligentsia. But the authors’ research into local Ukrainian militia as well as secret police archives shows that in practice the Special Assembly targeted “socially dangerous elements” such as prostitutes, “hooligans,” and petty

criminals. This extralegal, well-funded bureaucratic body operating under the radar of the legal code, in the authors' interpretation, morphed into a panoply of other special bodies taking "extraordinary measures" administratively during the dislocations of collectivization and the Stalinist 1930s. The authors argue that we must view this lineage as the most important origin of the NKVD's mass operations during the Great Terror, as opposed to a concern circa 1937 with a fifth column in the event of war.<sup>20</sup>

Readers can judge for themselves whether the chapter's argument amplifies as opposed to revises existing interpretations of the Terror.<sup>21</sup> Regardless, it does directly spotlight the institutional interactions between policing and secret policing, judicial and extrajudicial forms of penalty. After all, the Commissariat of Justice was also represented on the Special Assembly, and in the reorganization of 1934 the secret police took over the regular militia.

As the chapters of the book provide successive snapshots over the entire life cycle of the Russian Revolution from youth to old age, a duality in the institutional history of the secret police comes into focus. On the one hand, many chapters add to the initial picture painted by Junge, Savin, and Teplia-kov: the secret police was deeply embedded in the multiagency party-state. It was one of the most powerful of the octopoid arms of a leviathan organism that was evolving within its broader ecosystem across the very different sub-periods of Stalinism and after. On the other hand, the secret police also stood in terrible isolation. Starting in the 1920s, it was empowered at key moments to stand over the Party and the state, and in the late 1930s this became the key institutional mechanism of the Great Terror.

As in any complex bureaucracy, the secret police feuded and fought with rivals; many chapters here show how it also engaged in internal infighting. Mikhail Nakonechnyi's deductions about Gulag mortality statistics were themselves made possible by "poorly researched bureaucratic feuds on the local level of the camp system," as well as the ever-present gulf between top-level officialdom in Moscow and the recipients of its decrees in the far-flung localities. Timothy Blauvelt and David Jishkariani's chapter on Stalinist perpetrators in Georgia during the Great Terror highlights the internal divisiveness and upheaval resulting from Lavrentii Beria's patronage network stretching from Moscow to Tbilisi. The zealous mid-level cadres in Beria's network played a key role in radicalizing the Georgian NKVD and normalizing the use of torture, then became targets in the public prosecution of Beria's group after the secret police chief's ouster and execution in 1953. Molly Pucci's study of the NKVD's role in the Stalinization of the security services of the Eastern bloc centers on a "generational revolution"—the rise of a new cohort with a worldview shaped by the Terror and the fight against fascism—in the

export of the institutional culture of the NKVD to Eastern Europe. But this Stalinist model of secret policing could not last, and not only because of the events of 1953 and 1956. It has been argued that the NKVD's much-practiced organizational, indeed professional expertise in efficiently carrying out mass repressions such as the rapid deportation of entire national groups made it the "cutting edge of Soviet high modernism."<sup>22</sup> But despite this gruesome expertise and the all-powerful reputation of the "organs," the Stalinist model was failing dramatically in many key respects.

Emilia Koustova's study of Sovietization and late Stalinism in Lithuania highlights a shift in institutional focus from 1930s-style mass operations, "the traditional model of mass Stalinist repression," toward new yet partial post-war "trends toward more targeted, individual, judicialized repression based on more sophisticated surveillance and information management." The late Stalinist MGB, far from its all-powerful image, was challenged by severe understaffing, wracked by purges and reorganizations, and drowning in paperwork created by an unsustainable mass network of unreliable informers. It is against this backdrop that we should understand the subsequent, post-Stalinist evolution in the KGB's institutional focus and ethos as it struggled to move beyond the Stalinist paradigm. We get insight into this from Edward Cohn's chapter on *profilaktika*, the method of warning potential transgressors as individuals (as opposed to repressing entire categories as groups), in late Soviet Lithuania. This was one key part of a Thaw-era reorientation after the end of mass terror that, as the chapter shows, itself became routinized in the Brezhnev era. An especially illuminating window into the late Soviet KGB is Joshua Sanborn's chapter on the KGB's troubled lurch toward computerization. Sanborn's comparison of computerization under Iurii Andropov's KGB with J. Edgar Hoover's FBI suggests that "the stumbles of the Second Main Directorate were not the result of backwardness in terms of national computer technologies but derived from the special challenges of creating a counterintelligence computer database." As one of the most successful examples of comparative history in the book, Sanborn's material suggests the potential of targeted comparisons in future research.

When we add up all the chapters, what comes into focus is a long institutional arc that, not unlike the Soviet system itself, can be understood as a trajectory to and from the pathologies of Stalinist mass terror.

### PRACTICES OF SECRET POLICING

This decades-long institutional evolution to and from the Stalinist model of secret policing, as these chapters also clearly show, was intimately intertwined with the practices of Soviet and Soviet-style secret policing. That was because



the Stalinist model crystallized in the period between forced collectivization and mass terror, and it was defined by practices. These were, most notoriously, the sanction of torture during the Great Terror (explored by Blauvelt and Jishkariani) and linking caloric intake and medical treatment to productivity in the Gulag system of slave labor (Nakonechnyi). But there was a panoply of other discrete practices of secret policing associated with the mass repression of entire categories of the population (Junge, Savin, and Tepliakov) via the fabrication of anti-Soviet conspiracies that linked internal and external enemies. That internal-external linkage is such a ubiquitous theme that it is discussed in well over half the chapters ranging across the Soviet period, from Tatiana Vagramenko's exploration of interwar antireligious operations to Douglas Selvage's treatment of active measures against dissidents in the late Soviet years.

While the practices associated with mass repression left a profound impact on the chekist tradition, some of them had roots in the tsarist period or dated to 1918, not 1930 or 1937. Those practices, moreover, hardly shaped all aspects of policing during the entire period between 1929 and 1953. Indeed, a key conceptual difficulty in defining Stalinism is that in many ways it cannot be neatly extracted from Sovietism, and in many ways it was not a coherent phenomenon. Many crucial features of the Stalin period emerged before 1929, and the fundamental structures set up in the 1930s and 1940s survived the death of the *vozhd'*. There were great divergences, moreover, between early and late Stalinism and the different cycles of "socialist offensive" and retrenchment that punctuated and transcended the Stalin period. Even more, in the realm of culture and ideology, there was a major split between the heyday of class-war collectivism in Stalin's "second revolution" and the hierarchical, revolutionary-conservative hybrid of the mature Stalinism that emerged after the mid- to late 1930s.<sup>23</sup> In addition to being lashed to this systemic and evolutionary dynamic, the secret police was a pillar of a regime that intently observed its great-power rivals, represented one distinctive outpost within the international circulation of modern practices, and was itself defined by changing techniques and technologies. Twentieth-century methods of surveillance, organizing and classifying information, managing and centralizing authority and bureaucratic routines, and, of course, contemporary policing were developing rapidly across the decades even as they may have been domesticated in the USSR in distinctive ways.<sup>24</sup>

One set of practices illuminated here might be dubbed "statistical-bureaucratic." Mikhail Nakonechnyi's detective work on "double accounting" in Gulag mortality rates works to establish that Gulag camps and labor colonies released (physically but also "on paper") sick and frequently starving inmates so as to under-report the death rate. His work appears as the opposite

of the “gold rush” manner of cherry-picking sensations from the central archives. Rather, Nakonechnyi mined local records, including those of camp procurators and medical files of regional camp administrations, in an effort to recalculate central statistics in light of the “release-to-die” strategy. In his separately published debate with Stephen Wheatcroft and Golfo Alexopoulos about how regular these practices were beyond the worst crisis periods of cuts in provisions and medicine, particularly in 1942–1943, Nakonechnyi confirmed that his approach relied not only on deciphering statistics and improvised, handwritten abbreviations on local paperwork. He was also guided by more general insights into local authorities in the pressure cooker of the Stalinist bureaucracy.<sup>25</sup> They scrambled at once to conform to and to evade Moscow decrees from on high—such as the central NKVD’s Order no. 0033 from January 1943, signed by Beria himself, to “conserve and improve the physical capability” of zeks. The documents on death statistics, in Nakonechnyi’s words, “reveal an intricate web of conflicting power relations surrounding the mortality of former prisoners at all levels of the bureaucratic ladder,” exemplifying “how the Soviet penal bureaucracy operated as a specific stratum within the Stalinist state apparatus.”

A range of other practices illuminated in several chapters can be termed “informational-analytical.” They have to do not with statistics or paperwork *per se* but with practices related to classifying enemies and categorizing crimes, both for groups and for individuals. Much of Koustova’s chapter on the hunt for “state criminals” in postwar Lithuania, for example, deals with the workings of secret police profiling in the wake of the Sovietization of the Baltics. This brings out the complexity of all the elements that went into profiling enemies: the discussion ranges across surveillance, relations with informers, categories of suspicion and criminality, and construction of the “police identity” of targeted individuals in the files and dossiers. Even as postwar methodologies became more refined in comparison with the mass repressions of the 1930s, Koustova points out, ideological obsessions rampant in the public sphere ran through these clandestine procedures: “A ‘hierarchy of enemies’ emerged, dominated by parachutists—the most fantasized figure in the police imagination in these western territories, where the reality of conflict” with postwar armed insurgencies “was mixed with phobias and suspicions forged in the pure Stalinist tradition.”

Other chapters give insight into interrogations and their role in the compilation of secret police dossiers over many years. Angelina Lucento’s chapter on the Ukrainian school of modernist monumental artists known as the Boichukisty shows that the artists’ NKVD interrogator in 1936, Solomon Gol’dman, had started to collect compromising evidence against Mykhailo Boichuk and

his school a half-decade before, when the Boichukisty reached the height of their influence over the Ukrainization of visual art. Not at all untypically, there was a time lag between the gathering of compromising materials and the persecution of the interrogated. Depositions and interrogations collected over the 1931–1935 period shaped the fabricated case prosecuted in 1936–1937, but that took place in the decidedly different era of the Terror. This phenomenon informs how Lucento reads the case files: it brings into stark relief how the latter round of interrogations took a “surprising and unprecedented turn” in terms of secret police interest in Socialist Realism and the ideology behind the art.

Insight into the gathering and presentation of evidence in a range of other chapters suggests how crucial the linguistic, visual, and technological dimensions of these practices could become. Pucci pays close attention to the language of conspiracy, which had to be translated from the Russian during the Stalinization of East European secret police work. Vagramenko and Cristina Vatulescu, both discussed below, pursue a pioneering angle in decoding the visual language of secret police photography and film. Indeed, even as those chapters highlight practices that also shed light on both secret police record keeping and agents in the field, the techniques they highlight surrounding the injection of political meanings into crime scene photographs and filmic “mug shots” might be classified separately as “aesthetico-representational.”

In his chapter on KGB cybernetics, Sanborn shows how computerization was first pushed in the analysis wing of the KGB under Andropov’s leadership at the very end of the 1960s. In its first phase, this was mainly to create a more efficient and quickly accessible form of electronic database storage than paper files or superpositional punch cards. But it was also part of Andropov’s effort to modernize and bolster the low status and priority placed on “informational-analytical” work. The personnel in newly created, understaffed subdivisions around the country was often female, as opposed to the chekist “field agents who dominated the self-image of the organization.”

In terms of those field agents, a final set of practices illuminated in these chapters could be labeled “agent-operational.” Erik Scott’s chapter, drawing on oversight materials in Kyiv and criminal cases from the Georgian KGB, gives us much insight into the operations of the KGB’s Soviet Border Troops along the Black Sea coast. These outsiders—their leadership was overwhelmingly Slavic rather than Transcaucasian, and the rank and file were drafted from the Soviet interior—patrolled and criminalized movement in forbidden border zones separating the Soviet Union from NATO and extending into the waters of the Black Sea. They launched counterintelligence operations in port cities like Batumi and Odessa, seized contraband, put foreigners and especially

foreign sailors under surveillance, and monitored their Soviet contacts and sexual misbehavior on shore. Intelligence officers capitalized on the global connections of the bustling ports and international resorts such as Yalta to recruit assets and gather intelligence. The dual nature of these operational practices—involving both perceived dangers and opportunities that either shut down or took advantage of cross-border movement—underpins Scott’s overall argument about the Black Sea coast as a unified intelligence landscape encompassing bridges and borders, openings and enclosures.

Cohn’s chapter on the KGB’s tactic of “prophylaxis” gives insight into the methods and reports of agents who conducted warning conversations with recidivists, dissidents, and other targeted members of the population. The KGB pinned great hopes on the approach as an effective post-Stalinist “pedagogical” measure, and its boosters even invested it with the transformative potential to redeem those engaging in antisocial and anti-Soviet behavior. But in practice, Cohn’s examination of the warning chats and post-*profilaktika* surveillance suggests that “KGB officers lacked a strong incentive to provide detailed evidence that offenders had changed their ways.” Hopes for a form of secret police-led social engineering more targeted, individualized, and effective than the Stalinist model foundered not only on perfunctory implementation but on many of the targets’ late Soviet imperviousness to rehabilitation. The reactions of dissidents, religious believers, and women involved with foreigners, Cohn concludes, “cast doubt on the idea that profilaktika could change the attitudes and worldview of KGB targets whose actions were driven by strong beliefs.”

### THE SECRET POLICE AS CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ACTOR

So-called agent-operational measures involving secret cameras, photographs of crime scenes, and displays of confiscated imagery figure in Vagramenko’s chapter on secret police photography from the 1920s to the 1950s. As she discusses, they complemented standard photo lab procedures such as mug shots and preparation of judicial evidence “first developed in Europe in the late nineteenth century and then elaborated in detail in Soviet police manuals.” Looking at the use of photographs in Soviet antireligious operations against primarily rural Orthodox religious movements from 1930 to 1952, Vagramenko’s chapter brings across how the professionalization of criminalistics developed hand in hand with the “manipulative and instrumental” use of visual imagery to present scattered peasant underground religious communities as links in a vast counterrevolutionary conspiracy. In Vagramenko’s material, one finds a complex overlap between regular “police standards of signaletic

photography and crime scene photographic inventories” and politically driven practices of “retouching, photomontage, collage, [and] cropping.”

The widespread use of secret police photography in antireligious propaganda, as this chapter suggests, was deeply grounded in the use of photography in standard Soviet criminal and courtroom procedure. Internal, classified, or top-secret methods had numerous interconnections with the saturation coverage of mass propaganda. The implications of this are important for Vagramenko’s chapter, and they extend well beyond the history of photography. The issue she highlights goes beyond the secret police violating procedure or manipulating evidence. It goes beyond even the question of the degree to which propagandists may or may not believe their own propaganda. Rather, it shows the secret police as a major player in cultural and ideological production. Vagramenko depicts the secret police as standing at the heart of the Soviet “iconographic tradition of visualizing the religious enemy.” Precisely in that overlapping space between internal methodologies and public presentation, it was a core actor in the creation of a new “regime of truth.” Vagramenko calls this criminalization of religion the “production of a new kind of knowledge,” but it could be seen as a key part of ideology—if we conceive the many faces of ideology to include not only codified doctrine but also discourse and worldview.<sup>26</sup>

In Lucento’s chapter, “The NKVD and the Political Origins of Socialist Realism,” Kyiv NKVD Captain Solomon Gol’dman and his colleagues criminalized the previously celebrated modernist monumental artists’ interest in Ukrainian folk motifs as “national fascist” and, significantly, anti-Russian. These secret policemen may have understood little about art, but, in Lucento’s words, they “knew plenty about the power and bureaucratic significance of visual propaganda.” Boichuk and his left-leaning followers had risen to fame in one era of the socialist Ukrainization of culture, championing a brand of internationalism that celebrated aesthetic elements present in Ukraine but also, as Boichuk saw it, in all national forms. They met their downfall during the political-ideological frenzy of the Great Terror, which also coincided with a new era in Soviet nationalities policy and the adoption of Socialist Realism as an official style by the central and regional unions of visual artists around the USSR.

The origins of Socialist Realism, the key doctrine in all the arts in the Soviet Union from the 1930s to the 1950s, has been explored in a large and wide-ranging literature.<sup>27</sup> It has also been portrayed as central far beyond the artistic realm. It can be seen as a core component part of Stalin-era ideology if, again, that is broadly conceived not as doctrine but as worldview. Sheila Fitzpatrick first drew attention to this notion by showing the sheer prevalence

in the Stalinist 1930s of approaching life not as it was, but as it was becoming and should be.<sup>28</sup> But “police aesthetics,” as developed in literature and film representing the secret police and unmasking enemies that were often created or influenced by the secret police itself, reached beyond a future-oriented lens. Police aesthetics taught how vigilantly to penetrate beneath the surface of an ostensibly benevolent reality. This was a mode of representation that unmasked the ideologically true, conspiratorial political essence and thus, in Vatulescu’s words, saw “past the foreground, past the misleading surface of reality, and into its deepest recesses.”<sup>29</sup> It is in this light that we can read a quotation from NKVD Senior Lieutenant Aleksandr Khazan, a Beria client in Tbilisi during the Great Terror, in the chapter by Blauvelt and Jishkariani. At his trial, Khazan attempted to explain the atrocities he had committed: “An extreme suspiciousness developed in me. Any material coming in compelled me to seek out deeper roots.”

Yet the role that the secret police played specifically in the emergence of Socialist Realism, either in the visual arts or as part of this broader ideological construct, has never been explored. As Socialist Realism in the visual arts was defined in Soviet Ukraine, Lucento emphasizes, the Boichukisty themselves were prosecuted and condemned alongside the specific “Ukrainizing forms” in their works. Accordingly, the state that had commissioned their artwork did not only execute the artists but also burned, shredded, or disappeared their works. Of course, as Lucento concludes, the secret police was far from the only player in the construction of Socialist Realism. But to fully grasp how it was established, we must consider the messages sent by this simultaneous physical, material, and ideological execution.

At first glance, Vatulescu’s chapter on secret police aesthetics, focusing on a 1959 feature-length filmic reenactment of a bank heist carried out jointly by the Romanian Securitate and the Documentary Film Studio Sahia, might seem to have only tangential connections with Selvage’s densely documented history of how Andropov’s KGB persecuted human and civil rights activists between 1967 and 1980. Vatulescu draws on film theory and studies in visual culture and communist ideology; Selvage closely reconstructs a chronological narrative of the KGB’s Operation Wedge, so-called active measures against Soviet human-rights activists between 1976 and 1980. Yet the two chapters have much to say to one another.

Vatulescu’s reading of the 1960 film *Reconstituea* (Reenactment) is informed by her immersion in a twenty-seven-volume case file about this aesthetico-political collaboration in the Securitate archives. Vatulescu argues that the film was the most elaborate example of a much broader phenomenon—a secret police “visual pedagogy” that sought to teach a “way of

looking,” vigilance—that was grounded in concrete visual and filmic instantiations of the Stalinist cultural-ideological obsession with masking and unmasking. Selvage documents how Operation Wedge was constructed by KGB counterintelligence officers as a conspiracy narrative, one that linked dissidents to foreign journalists or internal and external enemies in the wake of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. Much of that narrative was constructed by placing KGB disinformation in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the most important cultural journal since the Thaw and a go-to venue for KGB disinformation.

The two chapters demonstrate that the secret police was far from only repressing and suppressing, “arresting” or destroying works of culture. Rather, they show the extent to which it was also a significant player in the cultural realm and in the media, standing at the intersection of cultural production and ideology. For Vatulescu, *Reenactment* was “carefully constructed as a secret police *ars cinemática*, deliberately laying out and putting into practice cinema’s potential uses for policing.” Using this insight, one might infer that the extensive KGB relationship with mass media that Selvage documents displayed a crude literary pedagogy. If so, “active measures” were about more than creating narratives beneficial to the KGB; they were one part of promoting a “way of reading” the news. Selvage’s chapter shows how the deep-seated secret police involvement with the press formed one piece of an entire range of other operational activities in “active measures,” including surveillance, infiltration, entrapment, and espionage. Both chapters stand out for their in-depth attention to the nitty-gritty details of the means and manner by which the secret police acted, in the cultural sphere and otherwise. But how did the audience react? Vatulescu reports that audience response to the filmic reenactment was carefully monitored. But it would require a spoiler alert before I could reveal how the audience affected the film’s “ending.”

### PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS

A final area these chapters illuminate is one about which students of the twentieth century have written libraries: the study of perpetrators and victims. No matter how much has been written, this is a topic that retains urgency for us to understand today. How does new archival evidence in this realm intertwine with the advance of new interpretations?

The chapter on “ordinary perpetrators” by Blauvelt and Jishkariani builds on recent studies of NKVD personnel in Ukraine, which came out of the remarkable trial evidence from the “purge of the purgers” at the end of the Great Terror. Shifting the focus to Tbilisi involves a shift to a different source base: the trials against Beria’s clients conducted by the USSR procurator general after the secret police chief’s ouster and execution in 1953. Focusing on

three mid-level Beria clients at the epicenter of the use of torture in Tbilisi during the Terror, the chapter probes the thorny question of perpetrator motivations. Piecing together trial and other evidence in this chapter explicitly aims to elucidate the interplay among the institutional, national, and biographical contexts in which the perpetrators acted.

Aleksandr Khazan was Jewish and born in Odessa; Nikita Krimian was an ethnic Armenian born in Kars; and Konstantin Savitskii was an ethnic Russian born in Tashkent. All were outsiders not only in national terms but in terms of their lack of “social capital” with the Georgian Bolsheviks, intellectuals, and professionals they purged. “A most dangerous imbalance of authority and esteem may have obtained,” the chapter observes, “when the NKVD investigators found themselves in a position of unrestrained power over arrestees who until very recently had considered themselves to be the investigators’ social betters.” The radicals’ sense of empowerment was reinforced within the Georgian NKVD by their membership in Beria’s patronage network.<sup>30</sup>

Strikingly, however, each zealous perpetrator also stood under a sword of Damocles, compromised, alongside so many other Soviets, by biography and potential guilt by association. Khazan had had ties with Trotsky supporters and relatives abroad. By social origin Savitskii was a minor noble, and his émigré father apparently fought for the Whites. Krimian had been implicated in embezzlement, and his mentor within the NKVD, a virtual father figure, was arrested in 1937. By concealing these dangerous elements of their lives and reinventing themselves as the most zealous perpetrators, the chapter argues, they were at once enacting a very typical Soviet form of imposture and routing out the enemy within themselves, a fundamental aspect of Soviet subjectivity during this period. Even as their outsider status and vulnerability within the concrete context of the NKVD prompted a selective self-presentation, the violence they committed gave them every incentive to internalize the ideology that justified rooting out counterrevolutionaries. The chapter concludes that Stalinist subjectivity, often posited as true belief, and imposture—often conceived as its opposite, contrived conformity—went hand in hand. It was these commonalities with broader Stalinist society that made Khazan, Savitskii, and Krimian at once extraordinary perpetrators and “ordinary” men.

Aigi Rahi-Tamm’s chapter takes us from the interrogation rooms of the secret police in Estonia to the halls of the Tallinn State Conservatory. Walking into that building, which as late as 1948 lacked Soviet-style portraits and slogans, Jaak Ottender, a party member from Moscow arriving as the new chair in Marxism-Leninism, perceived it as completely “not Soviet” even in outward appearance: “It felt as if I had entered some bourgeois institution.” In explaining just how quickly that changed after 1948 both in that key cultural



institution and Estonia itself, Rahi-Tamm's treatment is notable for situating secret police interrogations and arrests in a far broader, long-term context. This includes three phases of the Sovietization of Estonia: 1940–1941, 1946–1948, and the most repressive phase of 1949–1951. It also involves placing the actions of the secret police within the cultural-ideological campaigns of the Zhdanovshchina and the anticosmopolitan campaign. At the center of her discussion is not the mere fact of interrogations, arrests, and deportations. It is the breakdown of “networks of trust” as the crucible of the Stalinist campaigns put into place the rituals and norms of a new political culture. “The way in which people trust or distrust each other,” Geoffrey Hosking has observed, “is part of the deep grammar of any society.” Because the “wildfire spread of generalized social distrust” was both mechanism and consequence of Stalinist terror, the secret police and its operations are a key locus for discussing how networks of trust are broken down—and how difficult they are to rebuild even decades later.<sup>31</sup>

Rahi-Tamm focuses on three prominent musicians and conductors who had been honored in 1947 during the Estonian Song Festival. This was a choral institution dating from 1869 that became a major part of the Estonian national awakening in the nineteenth century and expressions of Estonian national identity in the twentieth. Tuudur Vettik, Riho Päts, and Alfred Karindi were honored as Folk Artists of the Estonian SSR after organizing the festival in 1947; they were arrested in 1950 on its eve. In between lay the heyday of criticism/self-criticism, purging, and institutional reorientation. The interrogations and arrests carried out by the secret police are described as one key piece of a mosaic that involved the party organization of the Tallinn State Conservatory, the Estonian Union of Composers, and the press. The opposite of collegial trust and the old intelligentsia's professional and personal networks was suspicion and conflict, fueled by interpersonal rifts and survival tactics.

Rahi-Tamm's treatment is notable for its attention to the long tail of that secret police repression, combined as it was with trauma and ruined friendships. Its aftereffects were felt long after the secret police reopened old files during the rehabilitations of de-Stalinization, which itself emerged as a complex and divisive process. The secret police's role in this long-term saga appears outwardly successful in spearheading the establishment of elaborate, multi-layered levers of control over cultural institutions and the intelligentsia. Even so, reading Rahi-Tamm's conclusion, it was also marked by failure: “Although Soviet authorities hoped to ‘domesticate’ the song festival for Soviet purposes, they were never able to make the song festival theirs.”

The chapters of this book work together in evidence and interpretation to connect the secret police more closely than ever to the dynamics of Soviet history at home and abroad. How will they fit into the post-Soviet archival study of the secret police? As this volume goes to press in June 2022, Russian forces have retreated from Kyiv but renewed assaults on eastern Ukraine. The future of archival and historical research in our field, along with the entire international order upended by the invasion, is clouded. In these dark days, it seems certain that we have entered a new and very different era, but it is difficult to predict how things will unfold. However, the director of the SBU Archive in Kyiv, reached in Lviv, confirmed that digital records of secret police material made by his agency in recent years were secure and redoubled efforts at preservation are ongoing.<sup>32</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. For example, documentary collections include A. I. Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, *Lubianka: Organy VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917–1991. Spravochnik* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003); and David Shearer and Vladimir Khaustov, *Stalin and the Lubianka: A Documentary History of the Political Police and Security Organs in the Soviet Union, 1922–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), based on a more extensive series of documentary volumes in Russian. Landmark monographs encompassing institutional history include George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police. The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (December 1917 to February 1922)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); David R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and Amy W. Knight, *The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988). Noteworthy studies of leaders and personnel include Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner: People's Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1895–1940* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2002); and Alexander Vatlin, *Agents of Terror: Ordinary Men and Extraordinary Violence in Stalin's Secret Police*, ed. and trans. Seth Bernstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).
2. Documentary collections include V. Vinogradov et al., eds., *Arkhiv VChK: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2007). Secondary studies include I. S. Ratkovskii, *Krasnyi terror i deiatel'nost' VChK v 1918 godu* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2006); and Aleksei Litvin, *Krasnyi i belyi terror v Rossii 1918–1922 gg.* (Moscow: Iauza-EKSMO, 2004).
3. The indispensable collection of documents on the Gulag is Aleksandr Bezborodov et al., eds., *Istoriia stalinskogo GULAGA: Konets 1920-kh–pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov. Sobranie dokumentov*, 7 vols. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004–2005). One of several other landmark documentary collections is Oleg Khlevniuk, V. A. Kozlov, and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Zakliuchennyye na stroikakh kommunizma: GULAG i ob"ekty energetiki v SSSR. Sobranie dokumentov* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008). Noteworthy studies include Michael Jakobson, *Origins of the GULAG: The Soviet Prison Camp System, 1917–1934* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993); Oleg Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Viktor Berdinskikh, *Istoriia odnogo lageria (Viatlag)* (Moscow: AGRAF, 2001); V. N. Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR, 1930–1960 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003); Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Wilson T. Bell, *Stalin's Gulag at War: Forced Labor, Mass Death, and Soviet Victory in the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018);

- and Alan Barenberg, *Gulag Town, Company Town: Forced Labor and Its Legacy in Vorkuta* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).
4. Documentary collections include Viktor Danilov, Roberta Manning, and Linn [Lynne] Viola, eds., *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie. Dokumenty i materialy*, 5 vols. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999); Viola, Mark Lunge [Marc Jungel], and Dzhaffri Rossman [Jeffrey Rossman], eds., *Ekho bol'shogo terrora: Sbornik dokumentov*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Probel, 2017–2018); N. F. Bugai, ed., *L. Beria—I. Stalini: "Soglasno Vashemu ukazaniiu . . ."* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1995); and A. A. Makarov et al., eds., *Vlast' i dissidenty: Iz dokumentov KGB i TsK KPSS* (Moscow: Moskovskaia Khel'sinskaia gruppa, 2006). Monographs include Paul R. Gregory, *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin (An Archival Study)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Pavel Chinsky, *Micro-histoire de la Grande Terreur: La fabrique de culpabilité à l'ère stalinienne* (Paris: Denoël, 2005); Nicolas Werth, *Livrogne et la marchande de fleurs: Autopsie d'un meurtre de masse, 1937–1938* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009); Lunge and Rolf Binner, *Kak terror stal bol'shim: Sekretnyi prikaz no. 00447 i tekhnologiia ego ispolneniia* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2003); and Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial: Scenes from the Great Terror in Soviet Ukraine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
  5. Documentary collections include Andrei Artuzov and Oleg Naumov, eds., *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b), VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike, 1917–1935* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1999); and Nicolas Werth and Gaël Moullec, eds., *Rapports secrets soviétiques: La société russe dans les rapports confidentiels, 1921–1991* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995). Secondary works include Vladlen Izmozik, *Glaza i ushi rezhima: Gosudarstvennyi politicheskii kontrol' za naseleniem sovetskoi Rossii v 1918–1928 godakh* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta ekonomiki i finansov, 1995); Peter Holquist, "Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work: Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 3 (1997): 415–50; James Harris, "Intelligence and Threat Perception: Defending the Revolution, 1917–1937," in *Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin*, ed. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2020).
  6. Joshua Rubenstein and Alexander Gribanov, eds., *The KGB File of Andrei Sakharov*, trans. Ella Shmulevich et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Michael Scammel, ed., *The Solzhenitsyn Files* (Chicago: Edition q, 1995).
  7. A kind of historiographical *summa* of this first archival wave can be found in "La police politique en Union soviétique, 1918–1953," special issue of *Cahiers du monde russe* 42, no. 2–4 (2001).
  8. This is now changing; see Molly Pucci, *Security Empire: The Secret Police in Communist Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).
  9. Perhaps the best known is the collection of the former KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin, now housed at the Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge. See Christopher M. Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); and <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/archives/collections/papers-vasiliy-mitrokhin-1922-2004/>.
  10. For an overview, see Jonathan Haslam, *Near and Distant Neighbors: A New History of Soviet Intelligence* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015).
  11. Julie Fedor, *Russia and the Cult of State Security: The Chekist Tradition from Lenin to Putin* (London: Routledge, 2011); Paula Chan, "Documents Accuse: The Post-Soviet Memory Politics of Genocide," *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 1, no. 2 (2021): 39–57.
  12. For example, see V. S. Khristoforov, ed., *Organy gosbezopasnosti SSSR v 1941–1945 gg.* (Moscow: Glavnoe arkhivnoe upravlenie goroda Moskvyy, 2011), one of over seventy documentary collections edited by a military and intelligence historian who is both a lieutenant general in the Federal Security Service (FSB) and, since 2016, a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.
  13. Vladimir N. Khaustov, "Razvitie sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti," *Cahiers du monde russe* 42, no. 2–4 (2001): 357–74.

14. See the discussion in Wilson T. Bell, "Forced Labor on the Home Front: The Gulag and Total War in Western Siberia, 1940–1945," in *The Soviet Gulag: Evidence, Interpretation, and Comparison*, ed. Michael David-Fox (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 114–35; the phrase comes from Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
15. See Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, [http://archive.security.gov.ge/fond\\_6.html](http://archive.security.gov.ge/fond_6.html).
16. Michael David-Fox, "Conferences, Coronavirus, and the KGB: The Webinar Series on 'The Political Police and the Soviet System: Insights from Newly Opened KGB Archives in the Former Soviet States,'" *NewsNet [ASEEES]* (June 2020): 2–6.
17. Mikhail Nakonechnyi, "'Archival Counterrevolution': Why are GULAG Regional Archives so Important?," *Peripheral Histories*, 6 July 2018, <https://www.peripheralhistories.co.uk/post/archival-counterrevolution-why-are-gulag-regional-archives-so-important>.
18. Mark von Hagen, "The Archival Gold Rush and Historical Agendas in the Post-Soviet Era," *Slavic Review* 52, no. 1 (1993): 96–100; Stephen Kotkin, "The State—Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists," *Russian Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 35–51.
19. Here see Oleg Budnitskii, "A Harvard Project in Reverse: Materials of the Commission of the USSR Academy of Sciences on the History of the Great Patriotic War—Publications and Interpretations," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 19, no. 1 (2018): 175–202; and Michael David-Fox, "Re-Reading Fainsod in Smolensk," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 22, no. 4 (2021): 811–38.
20. The "fifth column" as a trigger of the Great Terror has been emphasized most prominently by Oleg Khlevniuk. See, for example, Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle*, trans. Nora Favorov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
21. In emphasis and argument, the chapter overlaps with Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism*. See also Paul Hagenloh, "'Chekist in Essence, Chekist in Spirit': Regular and Political Police in the 1930s," *Cahiers du monde russe* 42, no. 2–4 (2001): 447–76.
22. Mark Levene, *The Crisis of Genocide, vol. 2: Annihilation: The European Rimlands, 1939–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 316.
23. For my take on these issues, see "Razmyshleniia o stalinizme, voine i nasilii," in *SSSR vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine: Okkupatsiia. Kholokost. Stalinizm*, ed. Oleg Budnitskii and Liudmila Novikova (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2014), 176–95.
24. There is a massive literature on these topics, but in this context see esp. Yves Cohen, *Le siècle des chefs: Une histoire transnationale du commandement et de l'autorité (1890–1940)* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013); Cohen, "Circulatory Localities: The Example of Stalinism in the 1930s," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11, no. 1 (2010): 11–45; and Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926–1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).
25. Nakonechnyi's exchange with Stephen Wheatcroft and Golfo Alexopoulos's commentary are in "Forum: How Deadly Was the Gulag?," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 23, no. 4 (2022).
26. Michael David-Fox, "The Blind Men and the Elephant: Six Faces of Ideology in the Soviet Context," *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015): 75–103.
27. The single most wide-ranging compilation on the topic is Gans Giunter [Hans Günther] and Evgenii Dobrenko, eds., *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000).
28. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste," in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 216–37. This mode of representation had a key international dimension: it was foreshadowed by 1920s practices of presenting the Soviet Union to foreigners that informed Maksim Gor'kii's influential writings after his return in 1928. See Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing*

- the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55, 114, 144–74.
29. Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 112.
  30. For more on Beria's network, see Timothy K. Blauvelt, "March of the Chekists: Beria's Secret Police Patronage Network and Soviet Crypto-Politics," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44, no. 1 (2011): 73–88.
  31. Geoffrey Hosking, "Trust and Distrust in the USSR: An Overview," *Slavonic and East European Review* 91, no. 1 (2013): 1–25.
  32. Correspondence with Andriy Kohut, director, Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhba bezpeky Ukraïni (HDASBU), 6 March 2022; "A Conversation with Andriy Kohut from Lviv," discussion at Georgetown University (via Zoom), 29 March 2022.