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The Culture of Complaint: Morality and Intimacy in the USSR, 1953-Present

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Abstract

The Culture of Complaint: Morality and Intimacy in the USSR, 1953-Present

Andrei Teacenco

My research looks at Soviet republics outside the Russian Federation such as the Ukrainian and Moldavian SSRs, and takes a more localized approach to understanding the state's campaigns to produce a moral Soviet citizen during the Late Socialist period of Soviet history. I look at how interactions between Soviet citizens in the periphery and Central Party organs resulted in a dynamic, negotiated understanding of socialist morality and concepts of the New Socialist Person in new discursive spaces of home entertainment, especially television and radio. Soviet citizens utilized mass media to spark debates about the meaning of Soviet identity, nationalism and morality, and sometimes to express outright hostility toward the Soviet state.

The appropriation of official Soviet language in the periphery led to the creation of new, unpredictable meanings in Soviet discourse. I show that some former Soviet citizens often viewed their national identity as a form of resistance to the Soviet state, while others saw little contradiction between their national and Soviet identities. This paradox is central to my project, as I aim to explore the fluidity, ambiguity, and variation of national and Soviet identity. Ultimately, I argue that the conversations and arguments surrounding morality led to the collapse of the Soviet Union by December 1991.

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¹ Despite the fact that many Russian, American, and British publications use the Russified names of Ukrainian cities, at the behest of my Ukrainian language instructors and with accordance with current Ukrainian language norms I will use the Ukrainian spelling.

My family and family friends have been a consistent source of support, especially my mother and grandmother—Antonina Wright and Liudmila Cojuhari. I would also like to thank my family in Russia, including Sasha, Maxim, Vadim, Galina, and Veronika Tarasov, as well as Sergey Ivanovich Rusakov and Lyudmila Fiks, without whose love and help I would not have completed my research. I am also grateful to my family and family friends in Moldova, including my sister Julia Tcacenco, Boris Vasilyevich Babich, Svitlana, Konstanin, and Sergei Banari, Sergei Olenyk, Inga Malev, and Zhenia, Valentin, Olia, and Irina Kovzachinski. My partner, Stephanie M. Montgomery, was a constant source of inspiration, support, empathy, and suggestions throughout my graduate career.

Introduction

The first line of a 1985 Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) handbook titled *Vladimir I. Lenin on Communist Morality (V.I. Lenin o kommunisticheskoi npravstvennosti)* declares, “The most important program of the CPSU is the formation of the new person, a harmoniously developed individual.”¹ The Soviet project to create the new Socialist Man and Woman was not new in the Perestroika era (1985-1991), yet as this line reveals, the “New Soviet Person” had failed to materialize, despite more than seventy years of Soviet state socialism. The publication of this handbook thus underscored lingering anxieties and tensions during the last years of the Soviet Union about the failures of the Soviet state to fulfill its promises of creating a society of selfless and sober socialist citizens.²

For many early communist philosophers of morality, this failure would have come as a surprise, considering the rosy predictions of inevitable communist revolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Across Europe, communist theorists, including Karl Kautsky, Georg Lukacs, Werner Sombart, and

¹ V.T. Efimov, G.I. Makerin, M.E. Obratsova, P.A. Tsupurov, *V.I. Lenin o kommunisticheskoi morali* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1985), 5. While the book was published for an academic audience of university scholars and professors, it nevertheless was an edited volume of Lenin's speeches and writings. Only the introduction, from which I am quoting, was written by an academic.

² The campaign to create the New Socialist Person began with the end of the Russian Revolution in the 1920s and 30s but continued throughout the Soviet period. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick in *Everyday Stalinism, Homo Sovieticus* represented a distinctly Soviet kind of animal attempting to survive in the so-called Soviet jungle. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Letter as a Work of Art: A Housing Claim in the Style of an Anketa,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 24:1-2 (Spring-Summer 1997), 189-202; idem., “Readers' Letters to *Krestianskaia gazeta*, 1938,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 24:1-2 (Spring-Summer 1997), 149-170; *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Vladimir Lenin had predicted that a successful socialist revolution would resolve any societal contradictions created by capitalist society, paving the way for a stateless communist society. According to these predictions, the dissolution of class antagonisms under socialism would obviate the need for coercive state mechanisms such as the police and legal systems, as the New Person would *a priori* comport themselves in a communal manner which aligned the individual's interests with their class interests.

Communist Promises and Moral Questions

When the ideal communist citizen failed to naturally materialize by the Late Socialist period, as was predicted by Marxist scholars, the Soviet state began to take active steps in building this "moral communist." In official discourse, the project to build the New Socialist Person was inextricably tied to the construction of a stateless communist society. According to Party theoreticians, the altruistic New Socialist Person was to represent the pinnacle of human social evolution, standing in sharp contrast to supposedly outdated social Darwinian models in the West of capitalist subjects driven by competition, greed, and the need for religion.

Yet the inability of state socialism in the Soviet Union to reconcile class and individual interests, combined with the state's continued use of courts, the KGB, and the police to enforce proper forms of behavior, undermined socialism's legitimacy in the eyes of many Soviet citizens. When the state did not "wither away", as predicted by Friedrich Engels and echoed by Lenin in his *State and Revolution*, neither did coercive state organs, whose existence continued to be justified by the failure of the

New Socialist Person to emerge. The fact that as late as 1985, one of the most important stated goals of the CPSU remained the construction of the New Socialist Person suggested a failure of the Soviet project to construct moral communists. As I show, by the 1960s the project to build a moral citizen became a substitute for building a truly egalitarian communist society. In reaction to the Soviet Union's failure to move toward the promised communist utopia in a meaningful way, Party officials scapegoated criminals and transgressors of communist morality, blaming individual faults and character flaws. The debates over how to punish transgressors of communist morals in Late Socialist Soviet society reflected the growing anxieties over the widespread feeling that a transition to communism was an increasingly unobtainable goal.³

In contrast to the Late Socialist period, the early years of the Soviet effort to construct a New Socialist Person have attracted a good deal of scholarly attention. Many scholars, for instance, have explored the creation of a uniquely Soviet subjectivity beginning in the 1930s under Iosef Stalin. According to historian Sheila Fitzpatrick, the Soviet state of the 1930s even gave rise to a uniquely Soviet animal, *Homo Sovieticus*, able to survive in the new Soviet "jungle."⁴ Stephen Kotkin, Igal Halfin, Jochen Hellbeck and Oleg Kharhordin argued that the early Soviet period was the first time many Soviet citizens learned to read and write, self-fashioning their

³ As Alexei Yurchak points out, the espousing of official discourse by the 1970s was largely performative and carried little meaningful ideological substance. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*.

subjectivities within the socialist educational system and its ideological frameworks. For these scholars, the mass mobilization campaigns to create the New Socialist Person created not only uniquely Soviet socialist citizens who “spoke Bolshevik” in their daily lives, but even an idiosyncratically Soviet form of morality.⁵ This new generation of individuals shaped by Stalinist society was a first step in the formation of the so-called New Person. For Stalin himself, the Second World War was the first major test of this Soviet system and its citizenry, a test which Soviet citizens were able to overcome in no small part due to the fortitude of so-called “Soviet people.”⁶

This dissertation traces the project to create the New Socialist Person through an examination of the discourse of communist morality during the period from Stalin’s death in 1953 to the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, a period generally referred to as Late Socialism. While the period of Late Socialism was not characterized by the revolutionary, mass-mobilizational campaigns of the decades immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the post-Stalin period is in fact a particularly fascinating period for this inquiry. In the 1950s, Soviet communist philosophers argued that in the decades after the revolution, the creation of a socialist base, including the abolition of private property and dismantling of the capitalist class

⁵ For example: Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009); Igal Halpin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

⁶ Julie deGraffenreid, *Sacrificing Childhood: Children and the Soviet State in the Great Patriotic War* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2014); Richard Overy, *Russia’s War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941-1945* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997); James Barros and Richard Gregor, *Double Deception: Stalin, Hitler, and the Invasion of Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995).

system, had created the necessary preconditions for transition to the hallowed communist stateless society. For many Soviet Party leaders and dedicated communists, the dismantling of the capitalist class system, combined with the Soviet system's ability to withstand the challenge of the Second World War, was evidence of the viability of the socialist system. At the same time, however, the lack of any demonstrated transition to communism proved to be the real test of the viability of the Soviet socialist project from the 1950s onward, as these decades represented the culmination of over a century of debate on how to create a uniquely communist kind of moral citizen. New Party programs such as the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism and the Anti-Parasite Law of 1961 were manifestations of the anxieties and debates over how exactly to transition from a state socialist society to a classless communist one. The Soviet state's oscillation between leniency and tough punishments for criminals reflected the Party leadership's own uncertainty over the correct path to communism.

The project to create the New Socialist Person must also be understood within the context of the Cold War. Unlike the 1930s, when capitalism seemed to be on the decline, the global backdrop of the Cold War and the seeming re-entrenchment of global capitalism in the West, combined with rising crime rates in the Soviet Union, created fears and anxieties that Marx's and Lenin's predictions of a global communist world would fail to materialize. The tensions within the communist world, such as the Sino-Soviet split, the Soviet Union's feud with Tito's Yugoslavia, and the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, undermined the Soviet Union's claim that

its brand of state socialism was uniquely tailored to lead the socialist world.⁷ While the Soviet Union failed to win many hearts and minds abroad, even within Soviet society Party authorities were unable to explain away social deviancy in the context of an ostensibly classless society, further undermining the project to build the New Socialist Person in the eyes of Soviet citizens. I argue that this is a fundamental tension of Soviet society during Late Socialism, as the relative stability and necessary material conditions for Late Socialism continued to fail to yield the predicted transition to communism and creation of moral communist citizens, exposing the internal contradictions of Soviet society.

Some scholars have portrayed the period of Late Socialism under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev – often referred to as “the Thaw” (1956-64) – as a time of relaxation of censorship and liberalization in Soviet society, ushered in by Stalin’s death in 1953. Drawing on primary sources produced by intellectuals, historians such as Susan Reid, Lynne Attwood, and Polly Jones have argued that Khrushchev’s “de-Stalinization” campaign in the late 1950s led to a relaxation of state surveillance and punishment, as Khrushchev and the CPSU sought to dismantle the Stalinist system of secret courts and prisons, while preserving the legitimacy of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party itself.⁸ While these scholars pointed out

⁷ Jeremy Friedman explores the tensions and rivalries within the communist bloc, including the competition between the People’s Republic of China and the USSR for the hearts and minds of the so-called “Third World.” Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

⁸ Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002); Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-1970* (New Haven: Yale University

the anxieties and tensions of the Thaw and de-Stalinization, they portrayed it as a comparatively vibrant and liberal period of Soviet history.

In contrast, scholars such as Brian Lapierre, Edward Cohn, and Oleg Kharkhordin have argued that despite the end of mass repressions after Stalin's death, the Khrushchev period was even more repressive than the Stalin era. In reaction to the popularity of Western jazz and rock music, as well as increasing public drunkenness and crime, new Soviet laws such as the Anti-Parasite Law and the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, both promulgated in 1961, created entirely new categories of criminality during an ostensibly liberal "Thaw" period. Far from the relaxation suggested by the metaphor of a thaw, the USSR after Stalin underwent a tightening of social discipline, where neighborhood councils, so-called "comrade courts," and ideologically driven groups of volunteers enforced a strict and repressive code of socialist morality onto friends, neighbors, and coworkers. These scholars thus argue that the post-Stalin Soviet regime was characterized by a more meticulous and thorough system of mass surveillance, in which ordinary citizens, in conjunction with state authorities and the KGB, policed each other's behaviors.⁹

Press, 2013); Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory on Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Melanie Ilič, Susan Reid, Lynne Attwood, *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁹ Brian LaPierre, *Hooligan's in Khrushchev's Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance During the Thaw* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Edward Cohn, *The High Title of a Communist: Postwar Party Discipline and the Values of the Soviet Regime* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015).

This dissertation builds on this understanding of the so-called “Thaw” by examining how the Soviet state simultaneously utilized Party organizations and citizen-led institutions to expand its reach into the most intimate spaces, such as the home and interpersonal relationships – including romantic entanglements – in the continuation of its quest to create the “New Socialist Person”, or *Homo Sovieticus*. In the Late Socialist period, *Homo Sovieticus* not only survived the “jungle” of the 1930s, but by the 1960s pushed their worldview and way of life onto their peers. Unlike the Stalin period, when clandestine state organs such as the secret police arrested and tried suspected “criminals,” during Late Socialism Soviet citizens were put on trial by their neighbors and friends, who often knew the most intimate details about their neighbors’ lives. Ironically, in these situations traditionally coercive and clandestine state organizations such as the KGB sometimes stepped in as a moderating force, when neighbors terrorized neighbors and decades-long feuds between friends culminated in state-sanctioned public trials.

Starting during Khrushchev’s “Thaw,” the state also used mass media to expand its reach into the Soviet home. By the 1970s, Soviet television and radio programming had become much more than mass entertainment, with local TV and radio stations often taking an active role in Soviet citizens’ lives, advocating on behalf of letter writers and callers, and sometimes even going as far as brokering divorces or allocating housing for families. With much fanfare, these official media drew the attention of both Central Party organs and Soviet citizens to various social issues. The state’s ideological agenda to create the moral socialist citizen as a

necessary step in the transition from socialism to communism sparked earnest discussions in television and radio mail programs, as ordinary citizens wrote letters discussing models of the New Socialist Person in everyday life. Using such letters as evidence, I argue that for many Soviet citizens, the Soviet state's ideological goals did not always overlap with citizens' ideas about communist morality, sparking arguments on television and radio, as well as in the press. I argue that this process was especially pronounced in the Western peripheries of the Soviet Union, in places such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs), where the universalist project to create the New Socialist Person clashed with local political and linguistic identities, sparking a divergence between official discourse on the universalist New Socialist Person and the identities of ordinary citizens.¹⁰

As well as exploring the role of neighborhood policing and the media, this dissertation examines the intersection of morality policing with the Soviet criminal justice system. Scholars such as Deborah Field, Christine Varga-Harris, and Leon Aron have explored morality discourses during Late Socialism in the private spheres of Soviet life.¹¹ Building on this work, my dissertation links these discourses to larger

¹⁰ The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) was the official name of the republic between 1940 and 1990. From June 5, 1990 until the country's independence from the Soviet Union in August 1991, the republic was officially known as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (SSR Moldova), in accordance with the Romanian-language naming of the republic. Today, the use of the term Moldavia vs. Moldova is a display of a particular worldview. Ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Moldovans call the country Moldavia, while Romanian speakers call it Moldova. The official name, however, is the Republic of Moldova. I will use the correct name when discussing the respective temporal periods.

¹¹ Deborah Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007); Leon Aron, *Roads to Temple: Truth, Memory, and Ideals in the Making of the Russian Revolution: 1987-1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

questions within the teleological framework of Marxism-Leninism, arguing that the anxieties and moral concerns of Late Socialism must be understood within the context of Marxist theory. While Soviet crime and youthful transgressions undoubtedly sparked concerns in Soviet society, I argue that the Soviet state's inability to transition from a Late Socialist to a communist society was inextricably tied to moral and ethical debates in the Soviet Union. Using letters, complaints, and court documents, my dissertation delves into the details of everyday interactions between ordinary Soviet citizens and the state, in order to highlight the ambiguities and complexities within these moral and ethical debates. Furthermore, I argue that the discursive and physical spaces of the courtroom and the media were public battlegrounds on the definitions of morality, as ordinary Soviet citizens used court appearances, letters to the editor, and complaints to Party organs to argue over definitions of the strict norms of communist morality and how to implement them into daily life. I argue that the Marxist ideological and historical project to create the New Socialist Person often clashed with subjective notions of communist morality, creating arguments, tensions, and confusion not only among Soviet citizens, but within Party organs as well.

Morality on the Western Periphery

This instability of the discourse on communist morality was particularly apparent in republics outside of the Russian Federation, such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs. While the existing scholarly literature on Soviet morality focuses on communist ethics in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), I

argue that the ambiguity of official discourse was especially apparent on the Soviet periphery. In contrast to the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which for the most part unambiguously rejected the Soviet past, Moldova and Ukraine have a contentious relationship with their Soviet legacy, evidenced by conflicts over Soviet history and identity in the eastern regions of both countries today.¹² As a result, their populations are starkly split between positive and negative remembrances of the Soviet past, making these republics fascinating case studies for examining the successes and failures of the Soviet project.

Building on the work of scholars of Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia, such as Annette Bohr and Douglas Northrop, this dissertation explores the variations and idiosyncrasies of creating the New Socialist Person outside of ethnically Russian areas in geographically peripheral regions of the Soviet Union.¹³ I argue that throughout the period of Late Socialism, nationalism and local identities on the Soviet periphery often impeded the Soviet state's efforts to promote a unitary vision of socialist morality. In the Ukrainian and Moldavian SSRs, campaigns to create the

¹² Both countries today are facing frozen and active military conflicts in their eastern regions. While the Ukrainian military fights pro-Russian separatists in the Donbass region, the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic retains the symbolism and imagery of the Soviet past, obstructing Moldova's attempts at European integration.

¹³ Annette Bohr, "Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Uzbekistan," in Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, Edward Allworth, eds., *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 197-223; Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1863-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

New Socialist Person undertaken by the Soviet state from the 1950s onward clashed with competing, and even anti-Soviet, definitions of socialist morality – often shrouded in nationalist discourse – offered by local populations and regional Party cadres.

Although historians such as Serhii Plokhii and Michael Bruchis have explored the nationalist movements of the Late Socialist period in the Ukrainian and Moldavian SSRs, none have linked these movements to local interpretations of morality and the New Socialist Person.¹⁴ What did a distinctly socialist morality mean for citizens of the Ukrainian and Moldavian SSRs? This dissertation looks at how interactions in new discursive spaces of television and radio between central Party organs, on the one hand, and Soviet citizens on the Western periphery, on the other, resulted in a dynamic, negotiated understanding of socialist morality. In these Western peripheries, for instance, on-air telephone calls and letters to TV stations took on a different tone from those in ethnically Russian regions, as television programs sparked debates not only about the meaning of Soviet identity, but also about the relationship between nationalism and morality. In these peripheries, some Soviet citizens saw little contradiction between their national identity and their ability to be a good communist, while others drew on nationalism as a way to undermine the universalist project of the New Socialist Person.

¹⁴ Serhii Plokhii, *The Gates of Europe: The History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Michael Bruchis, *The History of Moldavia: From the Collapse of the Soviet Union to the Restoration of the Russian Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Sergei Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk 1960-1985* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010).

Archival collections such as the documents of the Ministry of Communications of the Moldavian SSR suggest that on the peripheries, definitions of Soviet morality were highly unstable and ambiguous, leading to frequent clashes between Soviet citizens and central Party organs over competing definitions of morality, with local TV and radio stations often serving as intermediaries in these disputes.¹⁵ In both Moldova and Ukraine, Soviet documents reveal that morality and nationalism were often linked to one another; many complaints regarding immoral behavior, for instance, accused the transgressors of “immoral manifestations of anti-Soviet nationalism.”¹⁶ Such denunciations and complaints were highly localized, drawing on local and national identities on the Western periphery, rather than appealing to universalist notions of the new Socialist Person. In these regions, ordinary Soviet citizens latched onto the ambiguous discourse of morality to promote state-sanctioned, but ultimately subjective, views of morality, right up until the Soviet collapse.

Morality, Perestroika, and Collapse

The last chapters of this dissertation build on the already vast and interdisciplinary literature on the collapse of the Soviet Union. While historians and political scientists such as Ronald Suny and Mark Beissinger have argued that nationalism was the chief cause for the collapse of the USSR, political scientists and economists such as Yegor Gaidar have claimed that the Soviet system was

¹⁵ Moldovan National Archive, Fond R-3343, Opisi 1-15. Hereafter, “Fond” will be abbreviated as “f.,” “Opis” as “op.,” “Delo” as “d.,” and page as “l.,” in accordance with convention.

¹⁶ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 43, op. 3, d. 311, l. 100.

fundamentally unstable and would have inevitably collapsed under its own weight.¹⁷ Meanwhile, other scholars such as Archie Brown and Stephen Kotkin have argued over the importance of the “Gorbachev factor” – that is, whether Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s personal role was essential in the dissolution of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Taken together, this historiography argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union was structurally inevitable. I show this not to be the case; rather, the state was dismantled from the periphery by zealous political activists. I argue that discourses on morality and the Soviet state’s crisis of legitimacy proved pivotal in the 1991 collapse, as millions of Soviet citizens questioned the ethical foundation of the socialist project.

In the Soviet periphery, conversations and debates about communist morality reached a breaking point in the 1980s during Perestroika, as Soviet citizens in places such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs seized the opportunities presented by Gorbachev’s reforms to promote nationalist, anti-Soviet agendas. As Courtney

¹⁷Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*; Ronald Suny, *Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Rasma Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and Transition to Democracy: The Collapse of the USSR and Latvia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania Awakening* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Thane Gustafson, *Crisis Amid Plenty: The Politics of Soviet Energy under Brezhnev and Gorbachev* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Peter Boettke, *Why Perestroika Failed: The Politics and Economics of Socialist Transition* (London: Routledge Publishers, 1993); Dimitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire: The Seven Leaders who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Archie Brown, *Seven Years That Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); idem., *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Linda J. Cook, “Brezhnev’s ‘Social Contract’ and Gorbachev’s Reforms,” in *Soviet Studies* 44, no. 1 (1992), 37-56; Anthony Deluca, *Gandhi, Mao, Mandela, and Gorbachev: Studies in Personality, Power and Politics* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000).

Doucette argues in her dissertation, in many ways the Perestroika period was a time of renewed interest in the ideals of communist morality, as well as a newfound enthusiasm for the Soviet socialist project.¹⁹ Soviet intellectuals and even ordinary Soviet citizens viewed the early years of Perestroika as an opportunity to re-legitimize the Soviet socialist project, while calls for reform once again exposed the tensions within the Soviet system and the ongoing project to create the New Socialist Person. However, not all Soviet citizens shared this enthusiasm for reforming Soviet state socialism. National Front groups across the Soviet Union, including the Baltics and the Caucuses, for instance, pushed for the total dismantlement of the Soviet Union. Such groups appropriated the discourses on communist morality not to praise the superiority of the Soviet system, but to promote their own personal and political goals. As nationalist activists exploited the restrictions on press censorship that came with Glasnost' (openness, transparency) to push for the dissolution of the Soviet Union, they utilized state discourses to portray the Soviet state itself as in violation of norms of communist ethics. Ultimately, I argue that while the moral reawakening in Soviet society was a catalyst for Perestroika, it was this awakening which ultimately laid the groundwork for the dissolution of the USSR in 1991.

Methodology and Organization

To complete this dissertation, I conducted research in a multitude of archives and libraries across the Western borderlands of the former Soviet Union, as well as in

¹⁹ Courtney Doucette, "Perestroika: The Last Attempt to Create the New Soviet Person," PhD diss., Rutgers State University of New Jersey, 2017.

Russia and the United States. As a result, this work is based on a variety of published and unpublished materials, private correspondences and letters to Party organs primarily from Chisinau, L'viv, Moscow, Kyiv, and Odessa. During my research in Ukraine, I was able to obtain access to the KGB archives and to collections declassified only three years ago, providing me with a uniquely local perspective on Soviet history in Moldova and Ukraine.²⁰ I also consulted Russian, Ukrainian, and Moldovan language sources to avoid the typically myopic Russian-centered view of Soviet history. These different languages uncovered the multifaceted nature of the Soviet socialist project, as well as the often vastly different priorities of Soviet bureaucrats and ordinary citizens across different Soviet republics.

The dissertation is divided into a total of five chapters. Chapter One, “Revolutionary Morality and Communist Theory,” explores the moral anxieties of the Late Socialist period within the context of larger, century-old debates on what it meant to be an ethical communist. This chapter uncovers the continuities between nineteenth-century communist moral philosophy and Soviet-era thinkers.

Chapter Two, “Socialist Children and Communist Morality,” explores the implementation of these discourses on communist morality onto the youngest members of Soviet society. I argue that Soviet youth were most often perceived to be transgressors of communist ethics, always the first to be blamed for undermining the socialist project to build the New Socialist Person. I explore how Party officials and

²⁰ Unfortunately, KGB documents containing information on the Russian Soviet Republic remain classified in Moscow to this day.

parents spent decades arguing about how to raise the next moral generation of Soviet citizens.

Chapter Three, “Communist Morality, Late Socialism, and Crime,” uncovers the role Soviet courts played in enforcing strict norms of communist morality. Since Soviet authorities viewed the courts as guardians of morality, the court system simultaneously played a punitive and a didactic role in the daily life of Soviet citizens by acting as an intermediary between prison and coerced educational programs for former criminals.

Chapter Four, “Morality, Moral Awakening, and Early Perestroika,” explores the discourses on communist morality in the last decade of the Soviet Union, specifically focusing on the period from 1985 to 1989. Drawing on literature on Chernobyl, I explore how the Soviet state lost its moral legitimacy in the eyes of Soviet citizens. At the same time, I argue that Perestroika was a time of moral awakening in the Soviet Union, as Soviet citizens displayed renewed interest in official state ideology and discourses on communist morality.

Chapter Five, “Perestroika, *Vospitanie*, and the Soviet Collapse” takes an intimate and local look at the intersection of everyday nationalism and moral discourses on the periphery during the final years of the USSR, 1990 and 1991. I argue that the nationalist appropriation of discourses on communist morality led to the destabilization of this language in the periphery, culminating in separatist movements in Moldova and Ukraine, leading the final collapse in 1991.

Finally, the epilogue examines Soviet legacies in Ukraine and Moldova today. The Transnistrian Moldavian Republic, which in the early 1990s fought a short war of independence from the newly formed Republic of Moldova with the help of the Russian military, did not undergo de-communization following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The official emblem of the Transnistrian government today is the sickle and hammer, and the unrecognized republic still bears the old flag of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. Its western counterpart, the Republic of Moldova, however, rejected its Soviet past and aligned itself with NATO and the West.

Post-Soviet Moldova is only one example of the tensions between the Soviet past and the post-socialist present. The Ukrainian government today is also undergoing de-Sovietization and is currently fighting Russian-backed separatists in its eastern region who look favorably upon the Soviet past. Observers have drawn clear parallels between the political situations in Eastern Moldova and Eastern Ukraine, with some even calling Transnistria the “Moldovan Crimea.”²¹ These historical tensions at the center of my inquiry can help to explain why hundreds of former Soviet citizens continue to fight to preserve the historical vestiges of the Soviet Union in Ukraine and Moldova today.

²¹ Vladimir Bukarskii, “Transnistria on the Verge of War,” *ukraina.ru* (April 26, 2014), accessed June 30, 2020, <http://ukraina.ru/analytics/20140826/1010287489.html>.

Chapter One

Revolutionary Morality and Communist Theory

Werner Sombart, a nineteenth-century German Marxist economist and acquaintance of Marx and Engels, once wrote that “Marxism is distinguished from all other socialist systems by its anti-ethical tendency. In all of Marxism from beginning to end, there is not a grain of ethics, and consequently no more of an ethical judgment than an ethical postulate.”¹ To Sombart, and other Marxists such as Antonio Gramsci, ethics was a product of capitalistic superstructures, imposed to placate the substructure, or the base.² While Marx displayed aversion to using the words “ethics” or “morality,” he frequently invoked moralistic language to condemn capitalism.³ In the Communist Manifesto from 1848, for instance, Marx described the working class as the “most suffering class.”⁴ In *Capital*, Marx condemned the conditions of the capitalist factory and described the “growing horror in which the working-people hold the slavery of the workhouse, that place of punishment for misery.”⁵ After visiting his own father’s factories in England in 1845, Friedrich Engels wrote that

¹ Kenin Malik, *The Quest for a Moral Compass: The Global History of Ethics* (New York: Melville House Books, 2015), 230.

² Antonio Gramsci referred to civil society as part of the superstructure which creates consent, or hegemony. To Gramsci, ideology, law, and art, among other things, are part of the superstructure essential to the process of hegemony.

³ It is important here to distinguish between morality and ethics. Ethics is often a code of conduct imposed on the individual by an outside organization or structure which determines what is right and what is wrong. Morality, on the other hand, is an individual and personal code of conduct. While sometimes morality and ethics can be at odds with one another, later communist thinkers argued that under communism, morality and ethics would be aligned.

⁴ Karl Marx and Frederic Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch03.htm>

⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, Ch. 25, Section 5A, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm>

“the brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together.”⁶ Engels went on to say that “the dissolution of mankind into monads, where each one has a separate principle and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme.”⁷ However, while Marx and Engels had plenty of strong words for the moral depravity of the labor conditions of the working class under capitalism, neither of them had a model for communist ethics, nor did they provide examples of behavior and comportment required of a model moral communist. The task of establishing the definition of communist morality and ethics was left to their successors, who struggled to come to a consensus on the subject.

This chapter explores the arguments and problems of creating a new kind of morality in the world’s first socialist state. Unlike in the following chapters, which explore how ordinary citizens shaped discourses on communist morality, this chapter surveys the disagreements and debates among communist intellectuals, with a particular focus on the pre-revolutionary and early Soviet period. As I will show, the debates surrounding communist morality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to inform arguments on communist morality more than a century later, during the Late Socialist period in the Soviet Union.

The goal of communist thinkers was to create an idiosyncratically communist kind of morality and a new kind of communist subjectivity, which was to stand in

⁶ Fredrich Engels, “The Great Towns,” in *Condition of the Working Class in England*, (Moscow: Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 1969), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/condition-working-class/ch04.htm>.

⁷ Ibid.

sharp opposition to the exploitative universalist “classed” morality of capitalist societies. This New Socialist Person would represent the zenith of human social evolution, paving the way for the promised communist utopia. Marxist thinkers from all over Europe argued that the dissolution of class antagonisms would erase any societal contradictions, as workers’ collectives would reconcile any individual and class discord. This paradigm utilized class as the sole lens of historical and economic analysis, portraying gender, race, and ethnicity as largely irrelevant to historical progress. As I will show in the later chapters, the inability of Marxist scholars to see beyond their analysis of class as the sole driver of history would lead to problems with the Soviet socialist experiment, as the Soviet system was ideologically incapable of responding to various non-class-based challenges to the socialist superstructure.

The vast majority of literature on communist morality focuses on communist ethics during Late Socialism (1950s-1980s). Historians such as Stephen Bittner, Deborah Field, and Leon Aron have explored the importance of communist morality to the communist project during Late Socialism, with a particular focus on the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR).⁸ While the period of Late Socialism is the main focus of this dissertation, this chapter locates the origins of communist morality in conversations taking place at the end of the nineteenth century, as these debates around communist morality are essential for understanding the Late Socialist period in the Soviet Union.

⁸ Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory on Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Deborah Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007); Aron, *Roads to Temple*.

Marxism, Production, and Morality

Even before the official establishment of the USSR in 1922, communist philosophers argued that morality was based on class and its relationship to the material means of production. According to the Marxist principles of dialectical materialism, capitalist moral subjectivity was a result of class conflict, rather than an inculcated set of Christian ethical values. In his 1879 work *Women and Socialism*, for instance, German social democrat August Bebel wrote that “just as every society has its own relationship to the means of production, it also has its own moral code, which is simply a reflection of the means of production.”⁹ In other words, morality is simply an outgrowth of social relations, and moral values are determined by the class structure of each respective society.¹⁰

Echoing these sentiments, in his 1884 work *The Economic Materialism of Karl Marx*, French journalist, communist philosopher, and Karl Marx’s nephew Paul Lafargue argued that “morality, much like all other things in human society, is subject to the laws of economic materialism, explained by Marx in the following sense: the material means of production determines the social, political, and even spiritual processes in life.”¹¹ As Lafargue pointed out, the social progress of society from capitalism to communism would abolish social, moral, and class antagonisms. He

⁹ August Bebel, *Women and Socialism* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1959), http://leftinmsu.narod.ru/polit_files/books/bebel_woman.html.

¹⁰ While Bebel argued that women’s emancipation from domestic subjugation was essential to the success of communism, his analysis of gender was largely overshadowed by a class analysis of gender relations.

¹¹ Paul Lafargue, *Le Matérialisme économique de Karx Marx: cours d'économie sociale* (Paris, 1884), <https://www.marxists.org/francais/lafargue/works/1884/00/materialisme.htm>.

argued that “understandings of equality and justice, which have shaped the minds of people since the invention of private property will disappear forever, like dark spirits who visited and haunted human society during [our] ‘civilized period.’”¹² To nineteenth-century Marxist philosophers, morality was exclusively an outgrowth of economic relations in a given society, not a product of religious education. The dialectical process of competing class interests created an idiosyncratically proletarian morality, a more progressive and more perfect code of ethics, which would inevitably triumph over bourgeois class morality.

Austrian communist philosopher Karl Kautsky argued that morality is largely shaped by material conditions and social relations, while also claiming that morality is an inherent quality of human beings. In his 1906 work *Ethics and a Materialist Understanding of History*, Kautsky pointed out that “[Darwin] has shown that altruistic feelings are not only limited to the human race but are also common in the animal world.”¹³ He went on to say that “to change the nature of society, to destroy its class antagonisms, means simultaneously creating the necessary conditions for shaping morality. Only the proletariat can solve this problem.”¹⁴ Alluding to Darwin, Kautsky stressed the universality of altruism and argued that “thanks to Darwin, the last division between humans has been erased.”¹⁵ Much like animals, the physiological purpose of humanity is grounded in altruism and mutual aid, as “all

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Karl Kautsky, *Etika i materialisticheskoe ponimanie istorii* (1906), https://www.esperanto.mv.ru/Marksismo/Kautsky_Etika/etika.html, 63.

¹⁴ Ibid., 123.

¹⁵ Ibid., 45.

organs of the body have evolved to have their purpose, to serve the whole, the body.”¹⁶ Building on this ingrained sense of moral purpose, Kautsky stressed that in order to fight capitalist exploitation, the proletariat would already have to possess a strong ethical compass before the revolution. “[I]n order to act with the accordance of these [Marxist] laws,” he wrote, “the working class needs a solid moral foundation to wage class war.”¹⁷ While Kautsky’s argument that morality was inherent in all human beings differentiated him from other communist philosophers, early theoreticians of communist morality were in consensus that proletarian communist morality was the next step in the development of humanity. Furthermore, scholars such as Kautsky argued that altruism is inherent not only to humans, as these instincts of mutual aid are built into the physiological mechanisms of humans and all other animals. Following this line of logic, Kautsky stressed that much like animals, humans have evolved to have inherent altruistic traits which make them inherently predisposed to life in socialist society.

According to this Marxian logic of social evolution, the abolition of social and class inequality would render the calls for “good” behavior and the need for punishment redundant, as moral communists would *a priori* know how to comport themselves without the threat of violence or public sanctions. Echoing Engels’s argument that early human societies resembled a sort of “primitive communism,” Kautsky’s argument implied that capitalism, with its individualist values and

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 126.

cutthroat competition, had artificially interrupted the natural human drive to help one another.¹⁸ For Kautsky, socialism would restore society to its “natural” evolutionary state of cooperation and collective help. Kautsky argued that Darwin’s work proved that socialism, in comparison to capitalism, is more consistent with the evolutionary mechanisms that have evolved in all animals, as all animal societies have been constructed on cooperation and mutual aid.¹⁹ In other words, morality was inherent to all creatures, its potential could be “unlocked” by “objective” historical processes, while the relationship to the means of production determined the idiosyncratic manifestation of inherent altruistic qualities within any given society. Within this framework, socialist and communist societies workers would instinctually know how to properly behave in a world which encouraged cooperation and altruism.

Religion, Kantian Ethics, and Bourgeois Morality

While communist thinkers formed a consensus on the dialectical nature of ethics, they largely agreed in their condemnation of the universal ethical axioms of Kantian deontology and Christianity. In an essay from the 1878 titled “Morality and Individual Rights: Eternal Truths” from his work *Anti-Dühring*, Engels wrote that “we reject any attempt to promote morality as an eternal, unchanging, final form and force under the pretense that the world is built on foundational and unchanging principles which stand above history and national differences.”²⁰ In this critique of

¹⁸ Friedrich Engels, *On the Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), <https://archive.org/details/AndreyevOriginFamilyPropertyState>.

¹⁹ Again, Kautsky is echoing Engels here.

²⁰ Friedrich Engels, “Moral i pravo,” in *F. Engels and K. Marx: sochinenia* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1961), 95-96, <https://www.marxists.org/russkij/marx/cw/t20.pdf>. The citation is from a Soviet anthology of Engels’s and Marx’s works, the original being published in 1878.

religious morality Engels rejected universalist tenets of morality, arguing that the ahistoricism of religion and its belief in unshakeable and unchanging moral foundations divorced it from the material dialectic of history. In other words, much like universalist Kantian morality, religious morality was not relevant for societies in constant motion and flux.

Engels's comments were a sharp rebuke of both religious morality and Enlightenment-era rationalist morality. In his 1785 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant had argued that when viewed through the lens of the categorical imperative, all immoral actions are irrational; all moral acts and obligations, in contrast, are derived from reason. Furthermore, Kant wrote, "Only act in accordance to that maxim which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction."²¹ In other words, Kant argued that a moral act is an act which could become a universal axiom of human behavior. For example, according to Kant it is immoral to steal because it would be impossible to live in a society where everyone steals. Kant's morality is a form of universal morality, as Kant argues that all humans must follow an identical moral code, regardless of class, race, or sex. Kant's form of morality is inherently classless, ahistorical, and inflexible. To Engels, these sorts of universalist ethics were redundant, as they were not grounded in the changing material realities of human existence.

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 55.

Other communist thinkers were equally critical of the universal tenets of Christian morality, which they saw as equally outdated. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx wrote, “Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man’s ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man’s consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?”²² To communist theoreticians, morality was always in flux, separate from universalist and timeless conceptualizations of morality. True to Marxist dialectics, Marx argued against the theory of Natural Law – the idea that morality is constant and divorced from historical change. These communist thinkers’ ideas thus stood in sharp contrast to 18th century Enlightenment thought, which postulated that universal human morality is innate.

For other communist thinkers, religion and religious morality merely served the interests of the capitalist class. In his 1905 essay “Socialism and Religion” Lenin wrote that:

Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth, and to take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward. But those who live by the labor of others are taught by religion to practice charity while on earth, thus offering them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and selling them at a moderate price tickets to well-being in heaven.²³

²² Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Ch. 2, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>

²³ V.I. Lenin, “Socialism and Religion,” in *Novaia zhizn'* (December 3, 1905), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/dec/03.htm> .

Echoing Marx, Lenin wrote that “religion is the opium of the people,” unambiguously expressing his belief that “the yoke of religion that weighs upon mankind is merely a product and reflection of the economic yoke within society.”²⁴ In other words, religion was merely a tool of capitalists, a way to subjugate workers by promising them a payoff in another life. Religion was a justification for workers’ suffering at the hands of capitalists and a way to lower wages.

To Lenin, religion was also merely a reaction to the miserable working conditions of ordinary workers, a product of the exploitative relations between workers and their employers. In his 1909 essay “The Attitude of the Workers’ Party to Religion,” Lenin wrote that “no educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of masses who are crushed by capitalist hard labor, and who are at the mercy of the blind destructive forces of capitalism.”²⁵ Lenin argued that the existence of religion had a historical context, as it provided workers with a way to explain and justify their suffering under horrific material conditions. Rather than merely serving as comfort to workers, religion was a result of exploitation, a consequence of objective historical processes. This implied that once class conflicts were abolished under socialism, religion would wither away along with the state and the coercive state structures needed to implement discipline within the working class. The pining for religion would be replaced by moral, atheist communists who would act in accordance with their own class interests.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ V.I. Lenin, “The Attitude of the Workers’ Party to Religion,” in *Proletary* (May 13, 1909), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1909/may/13.htm>.

Like Lenin, Leon Trotsky also argued for a unique kind of communist morality in opposition to a timeless, but ahistorical religious and bourgeois morality. In his 1939 article titled “Their Morals and Ours,” Trotsky wrote that “supra-class morality inevitably leads to the acknowledgment of a special substance, of a ‘moral sense’, ‘conscience’, some kind of absolute which is nothing more than the philosophic-cowardly pseudonym for god.”²⁶ Trotsky went on to say that “morality more than any other form of ideology has a class character.... Norms ‘obligatory upon all’ become the less forceful the sharper the character assumed by the class struggle. The highest pitch of the class struggle is civil war which explodes into mid-air all moral ties between the hostile classes.”²⁷ Finally, Trotsky was critical of Enlightenment-era universalizing principles of moral philosophy, arguing that things such as common sense ignore the class-based principles of communist morality. As he put it, “The third suffering martyr is ‘universal’ common sense. No more than a simple capitalist crisis brings common sense to an *impasse*; and before such catastrophes as revolution, counter-revolution and war, common sense proves a perfect fool.”²⁸ Trotsky’s argument relies on the core tenet of Hegelian dialectics, the argument that human history is in a constant state of flux and change based on variations in material circumstances. As a result, communists must reject all forms of universal morality, as Christian and Kantian ethics do not account for historical change and transition, serving instead the interests of conservatives and capitalists.

²⁶ Leon Trotsky, “Their Morals and Ours,”
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/morals/morals.htm>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Coercion, Morality, and Communism

In comparison to Christian morality, which promoted universalist ethical principles such as “thou shalt not kill,” Communist moralists did not shy away from revolutionary violence to establish communist regimes. In the last lines of the Communist Manifesto Marx wrote that “the Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions,” a call to violence which many Enlightenment-era thinkers would deem unethical.²⁹ In his 1906 work “Lessons of the Moscow Uprising,” Lenin wrote, “The masses must know that they are entering upon an armed, bloody and desperate struggle.... the ruthless extermination of the enemy will be their [i.e., the workers’] task.”³⁰ In contrast to universal notions of Biblical and Kantian deontology, Communist morality deemed an action moral as long as it promotes the dictatorship of the proletariat.³¹ To Marxists, revolutionary struggle and revolutionary violence are justified if they help to establish a more just communist system.³² In other words, the creation of a stateless society without coercive institutions would initially require wide-ranging state violence, seen as a tool necessary to create a moral world.

²⁹ Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, Ch. 4. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch04.htm>

³⁰ Vladimir Lenin, “Lessons of the Moscow Uprising” in *Lenin: Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 178. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/aug/29.htm>

³¹ Deontological ethics is based on the idea that morality and actions should be judged based on sets of rules, rather than outcomes. Kant argues that the intention of an action is irrelevant, as positive outcomes may happen by accident. Consequently, Kant says that one’s act is moral if the individual committing that act wishes it to become universal law. In other words, Kant would say that an act can be moral if it can be applied as a universal axiom.

³² This line of argument was used to justify Soviet state-sanctioned violence ranging from the Stalinist Terror to Soviet repression of anti-Soviet political movements.

It is unsurprising then, that the question regarding the need for violence was pertinent to many communist thinkers. Some early twentieth-century communist philosophers argued that under communism, the coercive machinery of the capitalist state, such as prisons and courts, would wither away. In socialist societies, ordinary citizens would learn proper forms of behavior without the perpetual implicit threat of state violence. In a 1919 essay titled “The Role of Morality in Communist Production,” written one year after the failure of the socialist revolution in Hungary, Hungarian Communist philosopher Georg Lukacs argued, “The ultimate objective of communism is the construction of a society in which freedom of morality will take the place of legal compulsion in the regulation of all behavior. Such a society necessarily presupposes, as every Marxist knows, the end of class divisions.”³³ Lukacs stressed that “As long as there are different classes, therefore, it is inevitable that the function of regulating social behavior will be fulfilled by law, and not by morality.”³⁴ In other words, Lukacs argued that coercion is an inherent component of capitalist systems, as contradicting class interests inevitably create social discord, crime, and other forms of immoral behavior. With the abolition under communism of the class system and its contradictions, ordinary citizens would achieve the zenith of their social evolution, essentially displaying proper forms of behavior without any form of compulsion.

³³ Georg Lukacs, “The Role of Morality in Communist Production,” *Szocialis Termeles* (January 11, 1919), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1919/morality.htm>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Scholars such as Lukacs used class as the only lens of analysis, arguing that interests are determined solely by the individual's relationships to the means of production. According to Lukacs, individual interests are largely irrelevant, as all forms of behavior are largely dictated by class interests. Lukacs argued that "the interest of the individual proletarian cannot be realized in its abstract potentiality, but only in reality itself through the victory of his class interests."³⁵ He went on to say that "the victory of the idea over the egoistic will of individual human beings is of course clearly implicit in the class-dominating nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat; it is possible that the immediate aim of the proletariat is likewise a class hegemony."³⁶ Lukacs concludes that:

The consistent implementation of the dictatorship of the proletariat can only end with the democracy of the proletariat absorbing the dictatorship and making it superfluous. After classes have ceased to exist, dictatorship can no longer be exercised against anybody. The state, the chief cause of the exercise of legal compulsion, the cause whose removal Engels had in mind when he said that 'the state withers away', thereby ceases to exist.... The gulf between behavior based on merely selfish interests and pure morality is bridged by class morality, which will lead humanity into a new spiritual whole, into, as Engels says, the 'realm of freedom.'³⁷

In other words, Lukacs argued that since morality is shaped by class consciousness, conflicts over improper forms of behavior are caused by class conflict within bourgeois society. The triumph of socialism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat would dissipate those conflicts and contradictions, paving the way

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

for the creation of moral communist citizens. Ultimately, even the so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat” would become redundant, as a society comprised of only the working class would eliminate any individual conflict within society, “as all individuals belonging to the proletariat can subordinate themselves to the interests of their class without detriment to their personal interests.”³⁸ This communist society would reach the zenith of its social evolution within the framework of Marxist political theory, reaching the promised communist utopia and “the end of history.”³⁹

However, Lukacs’s essay exposed the tension between individual interests, class morality, and the need for coercion, as the boundary between collective and coercive punishment was largely ambiguous. While Lukacs claimed that the victory of the proletariat in the class struggle would lead to the disappearance of immoral behavior, he still conceded that in a communist society some individuals could manifest behavior that contradicted their class interests. In the same article he argued, “For, after the victory of the proletariat, compulsion will be necessary within the working class only insofar as individuals are unable or unwilling to act in accordance with their own interests.”⁴⁰ Lukacs went on to say that:

Either the individuals who constitute the proletariat realize that they can help themselves only by voluntarily setting about the strengthening of labor discipline and thereby raising productivity; or, where they as individuals are incapable of doing so, they create institutions which are in a position to carry out this necessary function. In the latter case they create for themselves a legal order by means of which the proletariat

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ As Marx pointed out, the achievement of a communist stateless society would be the end of historical evolution and historical progress, as communism was the ultimate stage of historical progress.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

compels its individual members, the proletarians, to act in accordance with their class interests. The proletariat then exercises dictatorship even against itself. Where the interests of the class are not correctly perceived and voluntarily adhered to, such measures are necessary if the proletariat is to survive.⁴¹

Finally, Lukacs stressed that “if the labor system of the proletarian state is built on a moral basis; then the external compulsion of the law will automatically cease with the abolition of the class structure of society. In other words, the state will wither away.”⁴²

These prescient passages from Lukacs’s essay hint at the problems the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was to encounter during the later period of Soviet history, as it struggled to reconcile the promise of a stateless communist society with the need for punitive state mechanisms. Despite promising that a legal structure would be unnecessary under communism, Lukacs conceded that even under communism, some workers would need to be compelled to behave morally. When workers behaved against “their own class interests” proletarian legal structures would be necessary to punish the proletariat, despite the ostensible disappearance of conflict within society after the dissolution of social classes. These passages also foreshadowed the use of state violence against Soviet citizens, as the Soviet state often resorted to coercion to implement the state’s social agenda of creating moral Soviet citizens. As I will show later, the exercise of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” against itself exposed the contradictions within the Soviet socialist

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

project, as the state solidified its grip on Soviet society in order to fulfill the promise of a stateless, moral communist society.

Lukacs's article warned, however, that legal structures might obstruct the progress toward communism. As he put it, "If, on the other hand, the proletariat adopts a different course, it will be obliged to create for itself a legal order which cannot be abolished automatically through historical progress. In that case a tendency could evolve which would endanger both the physiognomy and the achievability of the ultimate objective."⁴³ Lukacs went on to say that "if the proletariat is compelled to create a legal order in this way, that legal order must itself be overthrown – and who can tell what convulsions and sufferings will be caused by the transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom via such a circuitous path?"⁴⁴ This passage epitomizes the irony of an institutionalized legal system enforcing communist morality in the name of building a stateless communist utopia.

The question of to what extent state mechanisms might be required to create a society of communist citizens acting in their own interests became apparent during the revolutions in Eastern Europe, especially in Hungary, where Lukacs served as the Hungarian Minister of Culture during the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. One of the engineers of the Hungarian Red Terror, Lukacs wrote in the social-democratic newspaper *Népszava* ("The People's Voice") in 1919 that "the possession of the power of the state is also a moment for the destruction of the oppressing

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

classes. A moment which we have to take advantage of.”⁴⁵ He published his essay on morality a few months later, yet the revolution in Hungary had already exposed the limits of communist idealism, as communist thinkers, faced with the failure to materialize of promises of class solidarity, turned to state violence and tools of repression to preserve the revolution.

Such tactics were adopted in Russia as well by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who encountered many of the same problems as their Hungarian comrades. In attempting to build the world’s first socialist state, Soviet leaders encountered the paradox of utilizing state power to create the New Socialist Person, as prior to the withering away of the state, powerful state institutions seemed necessary to enforce strict norms of behavior and communist morality. The creation during the Russian revolution of the Cheka (Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage) – the forerunner of the Soviet secret police – as well as the reinstatement of military hierarchies within the Soviet Red Army in 1918 showed that the lofty promises of communism could not be immediately fulfilled, as the project to create moral communists would continue under already existing socialism. Despite Lenin’s promises of the abolition of the police, the army, and the Tsarist bureaucracy in his “April Thesis” in April 1917, by 1918 the realities of the Russian Revolution forced the Bolsheviks to utilize the same machinery of state violence used by the Tsar.⁴⁶

Morality, Violence and the Russian Civil War

⁴⁵ Georg Lukacs, “On the Red Terror,” *Népszava*, April 15th, 1919, 4, https://adtpplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/Nepszava_1919_04/?pg=0&layout=s

⁴⁶ V.I. Lenin, “The April Thesis,” *Pravda* no. 26, April 7th, 1917. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm>.

The promises of a global communist revolution failed to materialize immediately following the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917, and even after the Bolshevik seizure of power in October of that year. The undemocratic and violent methods of the Bolsheviks were a subject of criticism from foreign communists, including Karl Kautsky, as European Social-Democratic parties refused to support the new Bolshevik government in Russia.⁴⁷ In his 1918 pamphlet “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” Kautsky criticized the Bolsheviks’ suspension of democratic elections and use of state violence, writing that “Under democracy, by virtue of which the majority of the people rule, Socialism can only be brought about when a majority in its favor is gained. A long and tedious way.”⁴⁸ Kautsky also wrote that “Democracy is the essential basis for building up a Socialist system of production.... Marx had unfortunately omitted to specify more exactly what he conceived this dictatorship to be. Taken literally, the word signifies the suspension of democracy. But taken literally it also means the sovereignty of a single person, who is bound by no laws.”⁴⁹ Kautsky concluded that “The revolution brings us a bloody terrorism carried out by Socialist governments. The Bolsheviks in Russia first stepped on to this path, and were, consequently, sternly condemned by all Socialists who had not adopted the Bolshevik point of view, including the Socialists of the German

⁴⁷ It is important to note that until 1918, the Bolsheviks were a group within the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, which was itself within the larger framework of European Social Democratic parties. In 1918, Lenin renamed the Russian Party to the “All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks” to break with the European Parties who refused to support the new Bolshevik government.

⁴⁸ Karl Kautsky, *Dictatorship of the Proletarian* (Vienna, 1918), Chapter VIII, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1918/dictprole/index.htm>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter V.

Majority.”⁵⁰ In other words, Kautsky argued that the Bolsheviks had deviated from the intended Marxist path of social development, stating that the Bolsheviks interpreted the word “dictatorship” from the term “dictatorship of the proletariat” much too literally. To scholars such as Kautsky, the Bolsheviks’ suspension of democratic elections, as well as the creation of the Bolshevik secret police, ran counter to lofty promises of democracy, peace, and freedom.

Kautsky’s piece reflected an unease within European Communist parties regarding the Red Terror and the Bolsheviks’ use of mass violence during the Russian Civil War. After an attempt on Lenin’s life in August of 1918, combined with the successful assassination of the Petrograd Bolshevik Secret Police (Cheka) head, Moisei Uritsky, Lenin callously instructed that “It is necessary to secretly – and urgently – prepare for terror.”⁵¹ In the same order, he wrote: “hang no fewer than one hundred known *kulaks* [rich peasants], rich men, bloodsuckers, and publish their names.”⁵² On September 5, 1918, the Soviet of People’s Commissars, of which Lenin was the head, published an edict titled “Regarding the Red Terror,” which stated that “it is necessary to secure the Soviet Republic from class enemies by way of isolating them in concentration camps, that all people are to be executed by fire squad who are connected with the White Guard organizations, conspiracies and mutinies, that it is necessary to publicize the names of the executed as well as the reasons of applying to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jonathan Brent, “The Order of Lenin: ‘Find Some Truly Hard People,’” *New York Times* (May 22, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/22/opinion/lenin-stalin-bolshevism-soviet-russia.html>.

⁵² Ibid.

them that measure.”⁵³ Lenin’s orders symbolized the beginning of the Red Terror, during which the Bolsheviks and the Red Army executed between 100,000 and 200,000 soldiers and civilians, despite promises of “peace, land, and bread” for the vast majority of the Russian Empire’s population.⁵⁴ The lofty ideals of proletarian morality fell by the wayside, as the new Soviet state relied on the secret police, concentration camps, and state violence to suppress political opposition.

The Bolsheviks, however, vigorously defended such actions. Kautsky’s pamphlet, for instance, drew sharp criticism from Soviet leaders, including both Lenin and Trotsky. In direct response to Kautsky, in his 1918 pamphlet titled “The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky,” Lenin wrote, “Dictatorship is rule based directly upon force and unrestricted by any laws. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws.”⁵⁵ Closely echoing Lenin, in his 1920 work titled *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky*, the commander of the newly formed Red Army Leon Trotsky wrote:

But, in that case, in what do your tactics differ from the tactics of Tsarism? – we are asked, by the high priests of Liberalism and Kautskianism. You do not understand this, holy men? We shall explain to you. The terror of Tsarism was directed against

⁵³ “Postanovlenie o krasnom terrore” (September 5, 1918), <http://doc.histrf.ru/20/postanovlenie-soveta-narodnykh-komissarov-o-krasnom-terrore/>.

⁵⁴ The literature on the Red Terror (and the White Terror), as well as the violence and famine of the Russian Civil War is vast. See, for instance, Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996); Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution: 1899-1918* (New York City: Vintage Books, 1991); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution: 1917-1932* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); James Ryan, *Lenin’s Terror: The Ideological Origins of Early Soviet State Violence* (London: Routledge Publishing, 2014).

⁵⁵ Vladimir Lenin, “How Kautsky Turned Marx Into a Common Liberal” in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (Moscow: Communist Publishers, 1918), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/prrk/>.

the proletariat. The gendarmerie of Tsarism throttled the workers who were fighting for the Socialist order. Our Extraordinary Commissions [Cheka] shoot landlords, capitalists, and generals who are striving to restore the capitalist order. Do you grasp this ... distinction? Yes? For us Communists it is quite sufficient.⁵⁶

Trotsky went on to say that “The working class, which seized power in battle, had as its object and its duty to establish that power unshakably, to guarantee its own supremacy beyond question, to destroy its enemies’ hankering for a new revolution, and thereby to make sure of carrying out Socialist reforms. Otherwise there would be no point in seizing power.” While not all communists agreed that state terror was necessary for the survival of the young Russian Soviet republic, Soviet leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky argued that violence was an inextricable part of the revolutionary project. Compared to the Tsarist secret police, Lenin and Trotsky argued that their use of violence was righteous and moral, as their aim was to liberate the working masses from oppression. According to revolutionary leaders, that sort of violence was morally justified and could not be restricted by laws.

Georg Lukacs also seemed to side with the Russian revolutionaries, suggesting that state violence was necessary to the survival of the young Soviet republic. In his 1920 work titled “The Moral Mission of the Communist Party,” Lukacs wrote that “Genuine revolutionaries, and above all Lenin, distinguish themselves from petty-bourgeois utopianism by their lack of illusions.”⁵⁷ Praising the

⁵⁶ Leon Trotsky, “Terrorism” in *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (New York: Workers Party of America), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1920/terrcomm/index.htm>.

⁵⁷ Georg Lukacs, “The Moral Mission of the Communist Party,” *Kommunismus* (January 16, 1920), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1920/moral-mission.htm>.

Russian Communist Party, he argued that “the European communist parties either cannot or will not examine the true sources of the Russian movement’s strength – and even when some of the lessons strike home they cannot raise the necessary strength to translate them into action.” Lukacs went on to say that:

The [Russian] Communist Party, as the vanguard of the revolution, should always be at least one step ahead of the development of the masses. Just as the Communist Party was already conscious of the necessity of revolution at a time when the broad masses felt at most a vague dissatisfaction with their situation, so consciousness of the realm of freedom ought already to be a vital factor in the various communist parties and a decisive influence on their actions, particularly if the masses who follow them are not yet in a position to tear themselves free ideologically from the corrupt matrix of capitalism.

Borrowing from Lenin’s 1902 pamphlet “What is to Be Done?”, Lukacs argued that the vanguard of the Party must seize the historical momentum to push the slumbering masses into the communist future. Even after the mass violence of the Red Terror and the Revolution, Lukacs praised the methods of the Russian communists, arguing that European Communist Parties must emulate the methods of the Bolsheviks. While it is unclear whether Lenin read Lukacs’s piece, Lukacs was a part of the conversation regarding the necessity of state violence during revolution. The use of violence was clearly a point of contention, as suggested by Lenin and Trotsky’s vitriolic rebuke of their former Austrian colleague Karl Kautsky.

Morality, the State, and the Early Soviet Period

Following the mass violence of the Russian Civil War and the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922, Soviet leaders began to argue over how to best

implement communist moral principles in the daily lives of the millions of Soviet citizens living in the world's first socialist state. Immediately after the end of the Russian Civil War, communist leaders such as the People's Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoli Lunacharsky, and Aleksandr Bogdanov established the so-called "Proletkult," an acronym meaning "Proletarian Culture," aimed at the creation of a working-class culture and a proletarian consciousness through the use of art and literature. However, Proletkult faced the challenge of defining working-class culture and identity, concepts which remained vague and unclear, since Soviet leaders only prescribed general solutions and ideals such as "education" and "collectivism." The creation of Proletkult was also a tacit concession that the moral socialist worker would not simply appear under socialism; rather, workers would have to be shaped and built by Soviet institutions.

The goal of creating a uniquely working-class subjectivity was reflected in Lunacharsky's 1925 monograph titled *Morality from the Marxist Perspective*. In this monograph, Lunacharsky wrote that "morality is a natural thing, but in bourgeois society it takes an unnatural form... as the bourgeois soul is split into two, just like in Goethe's *Faust* – it is the soul of a landlord and predator."⁵⁸ In contrast, Lunacharsky argued, under a society in transition to communism:

The proletarian warrior... cannot say that he does not think of the wellbeing of society.... He is poor, ignorant, and exploited, and as an individual he is as pathetic and alone as a single atom.... He feels that there are many other workers like him, and when the exploited workers unite under the banner

⁵⁸ Anatoli Lunacharsky, *Morality from a Marxist Perspective* (Sevastopol: Proletariy, 1925), 4. <https://dlib.rsl.ru/viewer/01008013897#?page=4>

“Proletariat of all countries unite!” they become a great power, and they understand that they are the saviors of the world. The worker’s collective responsibility grows in his heart, and he is ready to sacrifice his personal happiness for the collective good... he is aware of the powerful happiness that comes with the feeling of solidarity.... The prospective victories of humanity soothe his sorrowful life. As his personal life is sad and mournful, the celebratory collective becomes the foundation of his life, it becomes a dominant force in his soul. This helps him ascertain a morally correct worldview.⁵⁹

Lunacharsky argued that, in contrast to the “egotistical” morality of the bourgeoisie, working class morality is more noble, selfless, and progressive. The communist subjectivity formed by decades of misery and exploitation by the capitalist class created an individual whose life is sad and meaningless. However, the collective struggle of workers under capitalism created a collective morality which would ultimately become the ultimate force for good in the world. This noble form of communist morality would be humanity’s salvation, as individuals would forego their egotistical needs in favor of collective good. This proletarian collective would be the foundation of communist morality and communist subjectivity, as it shaped a new kind of communist worker, or New Socialist Person.

Lunacharsky’s work echoed Lenin’s view on morality as expressed in a publication five years earlier, which had called for young Soviet people to submit their interests to the collective.⁶⁰ In his 1920 speech to the Third Congress of the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁰ It is important to note, however, that Anatoli Lunacharsky and Lenin were not always on the same page. As historian Richard Stites points out, Lunacharsky had ties to the “Godbuilding movement” which searched for ways to make God compatible with socialism. As Stites argues, Lunacharsky “envisioned a future world of dreams and myths, of sounds, and rituals that would elevate humanity to the status of divinity.” This sort of thinking enraged Lenin, driving a schism between the two thinkers.

Komsomol titled “The Task of the Youth Leagues,” Vladimir Lenin asked, “Is there such a thing as communist morality? Is there such a thing as communist ethics? Of course, there is.” Lenin went on to say, “the entire purpose of training, educating, and teaching the youth of today should be to imbue them with communist ethics.... To us, morality is subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle.”⁶¹ To Lenin, the education of moral communists was indispensable to the ultimate goal of building communism in the future. Furthermore, Lenin’s idea of morality, like Lunacharsky’s, was not grounded in individual behavior, but rather in an individual’s relationship to the collective. Lenin did not envision individual moral communists, as the New Socialist Person was only one member of a coherent, educated group, united by education and common understanding of collectivism and ethics. Much like Lukacs’s arguments, this logic implied that individuals would submit themselves to the collective class interest, rather than succumbing to individual desires. When this failed to happen, at least during the Russian Revolution and ensuing Civil War, Soviet citizens faced the wrath of state violence and corporal punishment. While this piece lacked any allusions to revolutionary violence, the supremacy of collective interest foreshadowed the continued use of state violence to promote collective goals, as communist thinkers argued that individual interest must be subjected to the collective.

Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁶¹ V.I. Lenin, “The Task of the Youth Leagues,” *Pravda* no. 221, October 2nd, 1920. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/oct/02.htm>. Hereafter I will refer to the Communist Youth Leagues as the Komsomol.

Similarly ignoring the use of state violence to implement state socialism in the USSR, Nadezhda Krupskaya, communist thinker and Lenin's life partner, supported Lenin's views at the Third Congress of the Young Communist League, claiming that "Vladimir Ilyich...gave simple, concrete examples to explain the essence of communist morality. He told his audience that feudal and bourgeois morality is downright deception, the hoodwinking and befooling of workers and peasants in the interests of the landlords and capitalists; and that communist morality derives from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat."⁶² Krupskaya went on to say that "communist morality should aim at raising human society to a higher level, getting rid of the exploitation of labor. At the root of communist morality lies the struggle to strengthen and finally achieve communism."⁶³ While communist leaders such as Lenin and Krupskaya both espoused lofty ideals on communist morality, their implementation of these principles was largely nebulous, as the goal of "raising human society to a higher level" contained within itself few details on how to implement this new version of communist morality if not dictated by compulsion.

Communist leaders themselves, including Krupskaya and People's Commissar for Welfare Alexandra Kollontai, sought to navigate the boundaries of communist morality in private life following the October Revolution. In her 1920 work "Communism and the Family," Kollontai argued that the nuclear family is a remnant of the capitalist mode of production and private property, and that women should

⁶² Nadezhda Krupskaya, "Lenin on Communist Morality," <https://www.marxists.org/archive/krupskaya/works/ethics.htm>

⁶³ Ibid.

abandon the bourgeois family structure in favor of a more open, comradely love.⁶⁴

Krupskaya, on the other hand, was more conservative. While she emphasized in a speech to the Sixth Congress of the Komsomol on July 12th, 1924 that “We should try to link our personal lives with the cause for which we struggle, with the cause of building communism,”⁶⁵ she also was careful to explain this further:

[T]his, of course, does not mean that we should renounce our personal life. The Party of communism is not a sect, and so such asceticism should not be advocated. At a factory, I once heard a woman addressing her workmates say: ‘Comrade working women, you should remember that once you join the Party you have to give up husband and children.’ To know how to merge one's life with work for communism, with the work and struggle of the working people to build communism, is one of the tasks that face us. You, young people, are only just starting out on your lives, and you can build them so that there is no gap between your personal life and that of society.⁶⁶

Krupskaya’s comments epitomized the early tensions in communist morality, as Soviet revolutionaries struggled to explain how Soviet citizens could simultaneously devote themselves to creating a society with an elevated socialist consciousness while maintaining their own personal relationships. Krupskaya avoided Kollontai’s take on free love altogether by suggesting that the only way to merge personal life with the construction of communism was to adopt asceticism rather than through a rejection of bourgeois marriage and family structures.

⁶⁴ Alexandra Kollontai, “Communism and the Family,” *Komunistka* no. 2, 1920.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1920/communism-family.htm>

⁶⁵ Nadezhda Krupskaya, “Excerpts from The Speech at the Sixth Congress of the Russian Leninist Youth Communist League,” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/krupskaya/works/ethics.htm>

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Krupskaya's and Kollontai's works both represented the ambivalence surrounding morality, the family, and the vision for the future of Soviet society. While they called for a coupling of personal life and communist morality, it was not immediately clear whether this morality would inform interpersonal relationships or domestic partnerships and what these partnerships would look like outside of the bourgeois nuclear family. The rift between theory and practice of communist morality became apparent in the early period of Soviet history, as the lofty goals of communism did not mesh with arguments over the limits of personal behavior and family life. For Soviet leaders such as Krupskaya, moral behavior seemed to some extent to be rooted in bourgeois family structures, with heterosexual monogamous relationships continuing to dominate in the sphere of public life.

Krupskaya's and Kollontai's thoughts reflected the anxieties of other Soviet moral philosophers, suggesting they were both part of larger conversations on communist morality during the early Soviet period. In *Marksizm i etika (Marxism and Ethics)*, an academic edited volume from 1925 for Party members trying to figure out how to apply Marxist theories to reality, Soviet moral philosopher Y. Rozanova wrote that "the construction of a new way of life has created a series of theoretical and practical problems, the solution to which is an important prerequisite for the creation of a real socialist culture. Life is giving the proletariat a new moral consciousness, but this process must be systematized."⁶⁷ In other words, this edited volume called for a

⁶⁷ Y. Rozanova, Mering, Kautsky, Lafarg, *Marksizm i etika*, (Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo Ukrainy, 1925), 40.

more systemic, theoretical approach to communist morality, while simultaneously admitting that at its current stage, this new morality was a nebulous amalgamation of political and social ideals. Marxist theoreticians were convinced that communism and the formation of the New Person were inevitable, yet the lack of defined directions from Marx and Engels proved troublesome. Soviet philosophers in the 1920s struggled to create concrete tenets and define the boundaries of communist morality, as visions for what an ideal and moral society would look like under communism were contentious and opaque.

Stalinist Morality

Starting in the late 1920s, Stalin's mass-mobilization campaigns for industrialization and collectivization – the so-called “Revolution from Above” – aimed to hasten the establishment of state socialism in the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ As Sheila Fitzpatrick points out in *Stalin's Peasants* and *Everyday Stalinism*, the targeting of groups such as the so-called “Kulaks” (land-owning peasants) and “bourgeois specialists,” as well as the efforts to force farmers into agricultural collective farms represented a push not only to build socialism in the USSR, but also to create a uniquely Soviet, working-class subjectivity.⁶⁹ However, the “Revolution from Above” was quickly followed by a so-called “Great Retreat” from revolutionary

While I was unable to find a lot of information about Y. Rozanova, the publication of her works alongside big names such as Kautsky and Lafargue suggests that she was a part of larger conversations on communist morality.

⁶⁸ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990).

⁶⁹ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants; Everyday Stalinism*. By bourgeois specialists, I meant the educated class of engineers and civil servants from the Tsarist period and from the West who were hired by the Soviet government to help industrialize the USSR in the 1930s.

values and a re-entrenchment of bourgeois ways of life, as well as the establishment of a new Soviet elite who enjoyed many of the same privileges as their Tsarist aristocratic predecessors.⁷⁰ The simultaneous coexistence of these contradictory impulses reflected the disagreements over how to construct an egalitarian communist future for Soviet citizens.⁷¹ In the late 1920s and 1930s, the attempts to create a more just world where collective interests dominated individual ones often seemed to require widespread use of force by the Soviet state, and the creation of communist subjects was often attempted through arrest and coerced labor.⁷²

The so-called “Great Retreat” represented a significant change from the revolutionary ideals in the sphere of family life and education, which in turn had implications for ideas about communist morality. While some communist scholars such as Kollontai and Engels had predicted that the nuclear family would wither away under socialism, in 1936 the Soviet state imposed a ban on abortion, made divorce more difficult, and instituted capital punishment for non-payment for alimony. The

⁷⁰ Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1946); Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939 – 1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 2006.

⁷¹ As scholars such as Francine Hirsch and Douglas Northrop pointed out, the Great Retreat also represented a shift in Soviet nationality policy. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the Soviet state pursued a policy of *korenizatsiia*, or *nativization*, which encouraged Soviet citizens in non-Russian Soviet republics to pursue education in their own native languages. By the late 1930s, however, *nativization* was replaced with the trope of “the friendship of the peoples” in which the Russians were the elder brothers leading other more “backward” national groups toward communism. As I will show, by the Late Socialist period, the importance of the Russian language represented the continuity between the colonizing trope of Russians as the elder brother between the 1930s and the importance of Russian language education in the 1970s. Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*.

⁷² The literature on the Gulag, the Soviet secret police under Stalin, and the Stalinist terror is overwhelming, and I will not go into Stalinist state terror in my dissertation. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

re-entrenchment of the family and patriarchal gender norms during the Stalin period represented a retreat from utopian ideas of the 1920s, according to which society and state institutions were expected to raise children in place of traditional families. However, despite the conservative cultural retreat of the 1930s, communist scholars argued that the task of educating moral communists and shaping the next Soviet generation fell not just to families, but to every aspect of Soviet society, including factories, collectives, and schools.

In a letter to working women at the Trekhgornaya Manufaktura Mills in 1935, Krupskaya wrote that “Working men and women need to get closer to the school, to take a deeper interest in its work. They can help a great deal in the teaching work and in communist education.”⁷³ She also warned of the importance of keeping children in schools, stating that:

Children spend the greater part of their time outside of school. Here they come under the influence of the street and, frequently, of hostile hooligan elements. Questions concerning the organization of the children's out-of-school hours, the Young Pioneer movement, the provision of libraries and workshops and social work for the children, are of tremendous importance. Here, working men and women can do a very great deal.

In other words, by the 1930s, every facet of Soviet society was responsible for shaping the consciousness of young communists, and every Soviet organization ranging from schools to public libraries had the task of shaping proper forms of behavior. For Soviet thinkers, the cultivation of a distinctly proletarian moral culture

⁷³ Nadezhda Krupskaya, “Letter to Working Men and Women at the Trekhgornaya Manufaktura Mills,” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/krupskaya/works/ethics.htm>

in the Soviet Union was inextricable from the project of building a communist future. The necessity of building new communist citizens and a communist society implied the creation of a certain mode of thought and comportment, as the promised communist future hinged on the existence of moral communists.⁷⁴

The Soviet family still had an important role to play in creating these moral communists. Not only did the Soviet family and “bourgeois” marriage not wither away, but in the 1930s the nuclear family household instead became a physical and discursive space in which both women and men were to educate Soviet communists.

A 1936 *Pravda* article argued that:

The Soviet marriage opens up the truly spiritual side of marriage, its moral beauty is beyond the reach of capitalist society. It reveals man striving for the development of the better sides of his personality. And without deep and serious love, without the bliss of motherhood and fatherhood, the personality of both individual and society is incomplete. Communism makes for whole and happy men.⁷⁵

The article also stated that “to strengthen and develop the Soviet family is one of the main tasks of Soviet democracy. People who think that by relieving the father of his former slave-driving rights [of capitalist societies] the Socialist Revolution has at the same time relieved him of his duties towards the family, of his responsibility for the family, are completely in the grip of bourgeois notions.” Much like earlier communist philosophers of morality, this article argued that socialism had created opportunities

⁷⁴ Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Conscience, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

⁷⁵ “Fatherhood,” *Pravda* (May 28 and June 9, 1936), <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1936-2/abolition-of-legal-abortion/abolition-of-legal-abortion-texts/fatherhood-2/>.

for social evolution which would have been previously impossible in capitalist societies. In other words, Soviet society transcended the emotional and spiritual boundaries imposed by patriarchal capitalist marriage. Once marriages stopped being based on property rights and access to wealth, Soviet citizens would be able to shape a new kind of communist subjectivity, one whose worldview transcended the parochial, bourgeois ideals of social relations. According to the guidelines of Marxist historical progress, the transition from capitalism to socialism would create the necessary moral subjectivity to finally achieve communism. In the dialectical process of Marxist theory, the transformation of the means of production in Soviet society laid the groundwork to build this kind of uniquely communist moral subjectivity which would usher forth the hallowed communist future. While the achievement of Soviet socialism was an essential first step in the fundamental transformation of social relations and subjectivities in the early 1930s, the re-entrenchment of the family and social hierarchies within the context of the Great Retreat indicated the limits of building an entirely new kind of society. This tension would carry over into the Late Socialist period, as Soviet scholars argued over how to create a moral Soviet citizen during a more stable and peaceful time in Soviet history.

Morality and the State After Stalin's death

While the Second World War was a true test of the Soviet system, the relative calm of the Late Socialist period presented an opportunity for the Soviet state to continue its project to create the New Socialist Person, with a special focus on schools and children. In conjunction with this renewed interest in creating the New

Socialist Person, the period after Stalin's death in 1953 also saw a resurgence of discourses on morality and. In particular, the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, introduced by the CPSU in 1961, represented a way to continue the revolutionary struggle in the less repressive post-Stalinist period of Soviet history. At the same time, the Moral Code, with its emphasis on a uniquely communist morality, represented a tool to aid the transition from state socialism to full-blown communism, since the Code was meant to help transform the Soviet citizen into an individual socialized into communist labor discipline. The Code also elevated the communal over the individual interest, calling for "an acute awareness of the common duty and an intolerance towards the transgressions of common interests." The Code focused on communal and useful labor over individual accumulation and called for "Honest labor for the good of society: he who does not work does not eat." Finally, the Code still called for individual morality: "Honesty and truthfulness, moral cleanliness, simplicity and modesty in the public as well as the private life."⁷⁶

At the 22nd Party Congress in 1961, Nikita Khrushchev stated that "In the period of transition to communism, the role of morality is becoming more important in the life of society, and subsequently the role of the state's administrative control over people's relations with one another has diminished."⁷⁷ To the Communist Party, the new Moral Code represented the transition from "socialist statehood [*sotsialisticheskoi gosudarstvennosti*] to communist self-government

⁷⁶ *Materials of the 22nd Party Congress* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1961)ю

⁷⁷ *Moral'nyi kodeks stroitel'ia kommunizma*, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1965), 5.

[*kommunisticheskoe samoupravlenie*],”⁷⁸ a fulfillment of the promises of socialism and a bridge between state socialism and future stateless communism. Unlike other forms of morality, the very first tenet of the Moral Code was “loyalty to communism and the love of the socialist Motherland.” It also called for “intolerance for the enemies of communism.” Indeed, as a Communist Party guidebook to the Moral Code from 1965 emphasized, “at the foundation of all principles of the Moral Code is the principle of the struggle for communism.”⁷⁹ To Khrushchev, the creation of a moral subject was the first and foremost goal on the road to communism, as the creation of the individual who consistently acted in accordance with the collective interest was the formative step to a stateless society.

Without the threat of revolutionary struggle, and with Khrushchev calling for “peaceful coexistence” with Western capitalist powers, the struggle to achieve a more moral society, as laid out in the Moral Code, represented a way to continue the revolutionary cause in the Soviet Union. In 1961, Khrushchev stated that “Our cause is sacred. He whose hand will tremble, who will stop midway, whose knees will shake before he destroys tens and hundreds of enemies, he will lead the revolution into danger. Whoever will spare the few lives of enemies, will pay for it with hundreds and thousands of lives of the better sons of our fathers.”⁸⁰ Despite the relative stability of the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, Khrushchev’s use of this kind of violent language echoed earlier writings by Lenin and Trotsky, who argued that

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁰ Nikita Khrushchev, *Ukrainian Bulletin* (August 1-15, 1960), 12, quoted in James Bales, *Communism and the Reality of Natural Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1969), 121.

violence and revolution were necessary components of building socialism. This kind of language also aimed to mobilize Soviet citizens into actively shaping their society and acted as a reminder of the continued importance of the project to create a New Person and a more just, egalitarian society.

In contrast to other forms of morality, the Moral Code grounded morality by placing Soviet citizens in relation to Soviet society, rather than prescribing individual behavioral mandates. Echoing earlier scholars such as Krupskaya, the Moral Code called for every aspect of Soviet society to be involved in the construction of the New Socialist Person, seeking to better individuals as a part of a collective. The Moral Code did not exhort Soviet citizens not to steal, kill, or bear false witness. Instead, the Code called for “higher consciousness of social responsibilities,” as well as for “honesty and ethical cleanliness.” Rather than providing directives for individual comportment, the Moral Code was a set on ethical directives grounded in social relations. A Communist Party reading guide on the Moral Code from 1965 explained that “The especially important tenets of the Moral Code are those which explore the individual’s relationship to society....”⁸¹ Rather than social punishment, the Code emphasized social responsibility to society. Yet the Moral Code did not explicitly forbid killing, suggesting that violence in the name of communism was morally justifiable.

Following the guidelines of communist morality set out in the Moral Code, Soviet publications portrayed communist morality as an outgrowth of social

⁸¹ *Moral’niy Kodeks Stroitel’ya Kommunizma*, 28.

responsibility and collective belonging. The same reading guide from 1965 noted that “All for one and one for all is a manifestation of the priority of social, collective interests over individual ones.... Our society is composed of many collectives, small and big, industrial and social, material and family. And our own society is one big collective.”⁸² According to the guide, morality is gauged in terms of social relations and citizens’ relationship to the means of production. The triumph of collective values of morality echoes earlier writings on communist morality, in which communist philosophers argued that the dissolution of the capitalist class structure would cause citizens of socialist states to act in accordance with their own class interests, foregoing their individual desires. The formation of a society of collectives harkened back to theoreticians such as Kautsky, Lukacs, and Lunacharsky, who argued that the collective interest would supersede individual desires in socialist and communist society.

According to Late Socialist communist theoreticians, the Moral Code was the groundbreaking pathway to the future of communism in the Soviet Union. The 1965 guide to the code assured its readers that “during the period of communism, the state will wither away, but morality will continue to develop... and during communism members of society will make decisions with a high level of social awareness and discipline.”⁸³ To Soviet leaders of the 1960s, the Moral Code represented a fulfillment of Lenin’s promise from *The State and Revolution* that:

⁸² Ibid., 59.

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

The state will be able to wither away completely when society adopts the rule: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs', i.e., when people have become so accustomed to observing the fundamental rules of social intercourse and when their labor has become so productive that they will voluntarily work according to their ability.⁸⁴

In a more stark reminder to Soviet citizens that they had a moral obligation to work for the good of the collective, the Moral Code explicitly echoed Lenin when it stated that "He who does not work does not eat."

Another publication from 1964 echoed both Lenin's sentiments on morality and the Marxist view of history in its statement that "Organized collectivist lifestyles correspond to objective requirements of the socialist lifestyle, creating norms of individual behavior in accordance with progressive historical progress."⁸⁵ According to this philosophy, an internalized and implicit understanding of the Moral Code was essential to a communist future in which no state was to exist to enforce ethics. To communist theoreticians, moral behavior was not simply ethical; it pushed the historical evolution of humanity toward communism.

Conclusion

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the question of communist morality and communist ethics came to the forefront of conversations on communist revolution and the future of early socialist states. Communist thinkers such as Karl Kautsky, Vladimir Lenin, Georg Lukacs, and others argued that

⁸⁴ V.I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Ch. 4, "The Higher Phase of Communist Society," <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch05.htm>

⁸⁵ L.I. Nedelia, *Nravstvennye osnovy sotsialisticheskoi morali*, 50.

communist morality was inextricably tied to the construction of a communist society, as communist morality represented the next step in the evolution of ethics, one which was intimately and directly tied to class relations. This paradigm stressed the importance of each class's relationship to the means of production and how each class's morality was determined by material conditions and control over the means of production. These philosophers rejected universalist notions of Christian morality and the Kantian categorical imperative, stressing the importance of class as a framework of ethics. At the same time, the Russian Revolution, as well as failed socialist revolutions in Europe, sparked debates over the place of violence within the communist project. Communist thinkers such as Lenin argued that within the framework of communist ethics, violence was not only necessary, but moral. The death and arrest of the few was ethically justified in order to guarantee freedom and prosperity for the many.

In the 1920s, Soviet philosophers agreed on the importance of communist morality, but struggled to implement it into daily life. The project to construct the New Socialist Person in the wake of revolution put collective interest over the individual, setting the groundwork for state surveillance and repression. In this sense, the Stalinist terror and mass arrests of the 1930s represented a continuation of the project to build socialist subjects and create a more perfect society. As I show in the next chapter, in the time after Stalin's death, the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism represented a new frontier within the struggle to build a stateless communist society, a new opportunity to continue the revolutionary struggle during

the relative stability of the post-Stalin era, and to carry out Lenin's legacy. Yet despite the Moral Code's provision of clear guidelines for personal and collective improvement, the Soviet state continued to rely on coercive state structures to promote collective interests and create the New Socialist Person. A particular focus of this project to create the New Socialist Person continued to be Soviet child-rearing, as Soviet youth raised under socialism represented the pinnacle of socialist moral education in the Soviet Union.

Chapter Two

Socialist Children and Communist Morality

In 1970, during the spring semester of classes at the L'viv Polytechnic University in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), a group of young students formed a co-called "Hippie Freedom Party" and set up Party headquarters in the basement of one of the students' houses.¹ The L'viv hippies hosted multiple parties inside their headquarters, often well attended by local university students and *Komsomol* (Communist Youth) members, and featuring drunken orgies, consumption of homemade alcohol, and song-singing.² After a short investigation by the Communist Party of Ukraine, investigators determined that the university's *Komsomol* collective had failed to stop or discourage manifestations of "breakdowns of discipline, class skipping, drinking, and hooliganism."³ The investigation also concluded that the reason for the formation of the Hippie Freedom Party, with its manifestations of "bourgeois ideology," was "an incorrect family atmosphere and bad child-rearing practices in the families of the Party's founders."⁴ The report also implied that these Soviet youth may have been influenced by "immature and morally weak individuals."⁵ Ultimately, the local L'viv Soviet expelled the founders of the Hippie Party from the university and even sent some members to labor colonies for

¹ "Pis'ma i dokumenty iz KPU o alkogolizme," Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine [hereafter TsDAGO], Kyiv, Ukraine, f. 1, op. 25, d. 297, l. 38.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

Soviet youth. Many other students were expelled from both the Komsomol and the university “for violating the norms of communist behavior” by partaking in the activities of the L’viv hippies.⁶

Such anxieties around communist behavior, morality, family atmosphere, and the breakdown of social norms suggest a larger panic around the creation of moral Soviet children in the decades after Stalin’s death, in spite of the guidance theoretically provided by the 1961 Moral Code of the Builder of Communism. Since Soviet leaders viewed children and young adults as the future of the Soviet socialist project, this chapter argues that Soviet youth and university students were often the predominant topic of conversations on socialist morality. Soviet youth were also most often perceived to be transgressors of communist ethics, always the first to be blamed for undermining the project to build the New Socialist Person by listening to Western music and by wearing ostentatious clothing.

While the Moral Code seemed to spell out communist morality in simple tenets, these debates over Soviet youth revealed a surprising amount of ambiguity in the implementation of the Moral Code. As Nadezhda Krupskaya’s emphasis on communist society’s responsibility to create moral citizens demonstrates, communist education (*kommunisticheskoe vospitanie*) was not just a task for schools; it was something in which all aspects of Soviet society, including families and courts, were actively involved. I also argue that the importance of collective child-rearing in the Soviet Union suggests that despite the disappearance of utopian ideas about new

⁶ Ibid., 41.

kinds of family roles during the so-called Great Retreat of the 1930s, communist ideals regarding communal responsibility and the withering away of the family still had some merit during Late Socialism. In some ways, building the moral communist subject became a substitute for building a truly equal communist society, as communist tenets such as the Moral Code represented a way to continue the revolutionary struggle without meaningful structural change within Party organs and other state institutions.

In this chapter I also show that discourses and practices of communist morality underwent significant shifts during the Late Socialist Period. With the transition to so-called “Developed Socialism” in the late 1960s under Leonid Brezhnev, the overarching message of the Soviet state stressed that while communism would eventually arrive, mature socialism was here to stay for the foreseeable future. During this period, the state took a step back from building communism, forcing individual workplaces and other citizen collectives to carry a disproportionate burden of creating moral citizens. As a result, I argue that morality during the Late Socialist period became highly individualized and subjective, as the state relied on ordinary collectives and schools to become the arbitrators of law and morality, as predicted by earlier communist philosophers.

In an attempt to justify the lack of social progress, Soviet publications argued that during the era of so-called “mature socialism,” the construction of the socialist superstructure was already complete. As a result, the state had met all the necessary prerequisites for creating a moral atmosphere, and Soviet citizens had every

opportunity to behave accordingly. This sort of language suggested that during the era of mature socialism, the state had reached the zenith of moral development, and individuals needed to acclimate themselves to the new moral atmosphere. As Soviet society failed to make meaningful progress toward the promised utopian communist future, many Soviet citizens viewed the next generation of Soviet youth as the final hope of achieving communism. Yet many of these youth exhibited alarming – even seemingly immoral – behaviors that did not align with official visions of the New Soviet Person. Consequently, I trace the tensions and shifts in the role of the state in *vospitanie* (education) and show that the contradictions and paradoxes of Late Socialism frequently manifested themselves in arguments over child-rearing, as the relative stability of the Late Socialist period in the Soviet Union created anxieties that Soviet citizens were too comfortable and complacent to continue the revolutionary struggle of building communism.

Educating Soviet Youth

Within the context of the Soviet Union, a combination of discursive practices and spaces, didactic texts, and mutual and state surveillance culminated in a set of practices known as *vospitanie*. *Vospitanie* does not have an English equivalent, but roughly translates to education or upbringing. However, in the Soviet Union *vospitanie* did not refer only to children; *vospitanie* of Soviet adults through collectives, courts, and prisons was also common. In contrast to education and upbringing in the capitalist West, *vospitanie* in the Soviet Union was intrinsically tied to communist ideology, the collective, and communist morality, as Soviet collectives,

schools, and courts sought to enforce the strict norms of communist morality onto Soviet society through the set of practices known of *vospitanie*. This chapter will explore what this repertoire of practices looked like in daily life and how Soviet parents, educators, and children, in particular, viewed the state's lofty discourses on communist morality deployed in the name of creating the New Soviet Person.

This chapter draws on other literature which has explored the formation of a new Soviet person. In his work *From Darkness to Light* (1999), for instance, Igal Halfin argued that for Marxists, historical time had a clearly demarcated end through the creation of the harmonious man who would bring about the emergence of a classless society and the promised salvation. As in the discourses on morality discussed in Chapter One, this linear conception of time, according to Halfin, was closely tied to other Christian, Western discourses. Furthermore, Halfin's monograph explored the so called "epistemological context" of discursive practices within Soviet universities of the 1920s and '30s, where the language of class politics was inculcated among young students, leading to the creation of an idiosyncratically Soviet culture within the new proletarian intelligentsia. This new language of proletarian class consciousness combined with networks of peer surveillance throughout the 1930s, as Oleg Kharkhordin argued in *The Collective and the Individual in Russia* (2000), leading to collective self-fashioning within the Soviet *kollektiv*. As Kharkhordin showed, the Soviet collective had strict rules of comportment and behavior among its members, and self-fashioning led to even more strict and authoritarian mutual surveillance during the post-Stalin period. As I show, this what we might call neo-

totalitarian shift during Late Socialism affected child-rearing practices, as individual families and collectives readily embraced their role of educating the next communist generation.⁷

In doing so, Soviet citizens under Late Socialism took up a project of transforming Soviet youth begun by the Soviet state in the 1920s. In her book *Youth in Revolutionary Russia* (2000), Anne Gorsuch shows how in the 1920s the transformation of Soviet youth into communists under the new Soviet regime exposed the underlying anxieties and tensions of building a socialist society. Her book also explores the varieties within Soviet youth culture – ranging from those who eagerly identified with communist discourse to those who pursued popular pleasures such as the so-called “flapper lifestyle,” and ending with those who opposed the communist project. Furthermore, Gorsuch also explores the creation of what she calls Bolshevik “moralists,” Soviet social scientists whose job was to study leisure and daily life of Soviet youth and to provide didactic recommendations. Building on this, in *The Teachers of Stalinism* (2002) E. Thomas Ewing shows that throughout the 1930s, Soviet teachers functioned as intermediaries between state and society, often functioning as both intermediaries and scapegoats in the project of the construction (*vospitanie*) of the “New Man” and the “New Woman” in the USSR. This chapter

⁷ By neo-totalitarian, I mean the more intimate and individualized nature of totalitarianism in the USSR after Stalin’s death. Rather than focusing on oppressive state structures such as the secret police and GULAGs, neo-totalitarian historiography, much like historians of the totalitarian school of thought, explores the atomization of Soviet citizens, as neighbors, friends, and coworkers, instead of the state, monitored and enforced norms of behavior. Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*.

draws continuities between the discourses of *vospitanie* of the 1920s and '30s and those of the post-Stalin period by exploring this project in the period after Stalin's death in 1953.⁸

The Moral Code and Official Discourse Under Late Socialism

In a resolution from the 22nd Communist Party Congress on October 31, 1961, the Central Committee of the CPSU declared that one of the foremost goals of the party was “the education of working people in the spirit of benevolent moral principles, embodied in the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism,” a set of behavior guidelines for Soviet citizens.⁹ Echoing this sentiment, Frol Kozlov, one of the secretaries of the Central Committee, stated that “the Party will only be able to fulfill its great goals if it educates all of its members and all Soviet people in the spirit of communist morality.... The Moral Code of the Builder of Communism plays an enormous role in this.”¹⁰ With regard to Soviet youth, Kozlov went on to say that “The Komsomol is called upon to help the Party raise the youth in the spirit of communism, educate them on constructing a new society... where people will live, work, and go about their affairs under communism.”¹¹ At the same congress, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev stated that “the generation which will live under communism has to be formed from a young age... we have to take great care to

⁸ Anne Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); E. Thomas Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice, and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2002).

⁹ “Postanovleniia i rezoliutsii TK KPSS,” *Materials from the Twenty-Second Party Congress* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1962), 224.

¹⁰ *Doklad F. Kozlova*, from *Materials from the Twenty-Second Party Congress*, 26.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

prevent the formation of people who are morally handicapped. If the planting of young, fruitful trees is somehow interrupted, no amount of work will straighten them back out.”¹² On a discursive level, these speeches laid out the priorities of the Soviet Communist Party in the early 1960s. Communist morality was not simply the next step in the evolution of socialism, but a critical foundation to the construction of a future communist society. These anxieties around behavior and morality also touched upon conversations surrounding children and child rearing and put the burden on creating moral communists on the Soviet family, state organs, and Soviet citizens.

Soviet educators enthusiastically promoted discourses on communist morality in the USSR. Only six months after the 22nd Party Congress, Soviet publications such as *Soviet Pedagogy* [*Sovetskaia pedagogika*], a didactic journal aimed at educators and parents published by the Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, called for applications of the Moral Code in daily life, claiming that the Code represented the next step in the Soviet Union’s transition to communism. One article from March 1962 stated, “The program of the CPSU calls for the creation of a new person who combines spiritual richness, moral cleanliness, and physical perfection as one of the indispensable preconditions for the transition from socialism to communism. Moral characteristics of the builder of communism are laid out in the twelve tenets of the Code.”¹³ Some Soviet citizens agreed with this sentiment, including a worker from the Ukrainian SSR, who exclaimed, “[I]t is good that the

¹² N. Boldyrev, “Moral’nyi kodeks stroitel’ia kommunizma - osnova nraivstvennogo vospitaniia molodogo pokoleniia,” *Sovetskaia pedagogika* No. 6 (1962), 14.

¹³ V.G. Ivanov, “Nekotorye voprosy nraivstvennogo vospitaniia podrostka v dukhe Moral’nogo kodeksa stroitel’ia kommunizma,” *Sovetskaia pedagogika* No 3 (1962), 69.

Party is paying so much attention to the youth, we are relying on them, as in the future the youth will be an active contributor to building communism.”¹⁴ However, as another article from *Soviet Pedagogy* pointed out, this morality differed from communist *ethics*, in that the Moral Code simply represented “general norms of behavior, which we call moral principles, which are not administered from above, are not established in an administrative manner.”¹⁵ In other words, Soviet leaders intended for ordinary citizens to individually accept notions of communist morality, paradoxically making morality simultaneously personal and intimate, as well as collective and public.

In reaction to the 22nd Party Congress and the official adoption of the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, Soviet psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, and educators convened in Moscow in February 1963 at the All-Union Congress on the Problems of Communist Morality. The congress, organized over the span of an entire week, featured panels on child rearing, education, fashion, culture, and the role of media in the construction of moral communists. The goal was to discuss the implementation of communist morality in various spheres of Soviet society. Highlighting the importance of this new morality to the progress of Soviet society, one speaker stated that “we are talking about a system of principles of the moral code, as this is a new system of moral principles with a central core, a central

¹⁴ “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie” (October 1979), Ukrainian State Security Archive [hereafter SBU Archive], Kyiv, Ukraine, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1061, l. 74.

¹⁵ Boldyrev, “Moralnyi kodeks stroitelia kommunizma - osnova npravstvennogo vospitaniia molodogo pokoleniia,” 18.

foundation... its own structure.”¹⁶ To differentiate this system from a strictly religious structure, the speaker went on to say, “I will not talk about religion... [T]he idea that adherence to our class principles [of morality] is its own sort of subjectivism... does not reflect reality.” Another speaker echoed this sentiment, stating that “principles of morality... are the main force behind individual comportment and are based on scientific knowledge.”¹⁷ The organization of conferences such as this All-Union assembly suggests that, at least in the 1960s, the debates and conversations on communist morality resonated among the intellectual class of Soviet society, as the question of raising a moral communist generation brought together specialists from all over the USSR.

Moral Panic and Soviet Youth

Conferences such as the one mentioned above must be understood within the context of the rising popularity of Western music and dress. Soviet publications and Soviet citizens alike lamented the moral decay and lack of discipline among Soviet teens and young adults. At the same all-union conference, Party member and youth leader M. Zhuvarkova, discussing the drawbacks of the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, lamented that, “Some poets, in support of the decadent behavior of the regressive (*otstalykh*) masses of Soviet youth, have started to think that the fight for communism and love for socialism are superficial concepts and that our youth does not care for them. Based on this, Soviet youth try to discover some sort of abstract

¹⁶ “Vsesoiuznyi kongress po teme problem kommunisticheskoi morali” (February 1963), State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereafter GARF), Moscow, Russia, F. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1311, l. 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

form of morality.”¹⁸ The speaker went on to say that “we cannot have this kind of morality. Our morality is class morality and is not subjective.” Specifically referring to university students, the speaker went on to say:

This is important when talking about the youth, and especially the ‘creative youth.’ We have to literally force this idea into these people’s consciousness, that any attempt to deviate from the Moral Code, any attempt to find some higher, more abstract principles, means to deviate from the objective understanding of the nature of social relations to the subjective perversion [of morality]. Subjectivism in our time is the weapon of the bourgeoisie... subjectivism allows the individual to accept any lie, liquidate any ethical values, and replace the beauty of humanity with amorality.¹⁹

This speaker directly alluded to the perceived decadence of Soviet youth, and the fear that young Soviet citizens were slowly falling prey to the amoral, leisurely, bourgeois lifestyle depicted in many Soviet publications and films of the Khrushchev era. While the speaker claimed that communist morality was objective, her anxiety surrounding the topic reflects worries about the prominence of competing sets of moral principles in the Soviet Union, including lingering ideas about religious morality, as well as new kinds of Western influence.

With regard to Western influence in particular, Soviet radio listeners openly expressed similar anxieties, writing letters to radio programs asking why Soviet youth seemed so susceptible to Western values and Western propaganda. In a 1969 letter to a radio program called “The Problems of Foreign Broadcasting,” one citizen asked,

¹⁸ When referring to some poets, this person was most likely referring to the poet Brodsky, who was convicted for performing so-called socially “unuseful labor”, such as writing poetry and music, only a year before. GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1311, l. 27.

¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

“Are Soviet youth compromised by changes in fashion? I mean, specifically, the influence of bourgeois morality, bourgeois ideology, which Western mass media is spreading in the USSR.”²⁰ Another concerned Soviet citizen wrote to the Ministry of Communications, imploring the state to create television and radio programs for fifteen- to seventeen-year-olds to “combat harmful bourgeois influences permeating Soviet society from the West.”²¹ Finally, another letter writer to the popular program “Man and the Law” (*Chelovek i zakon*) wrote in 1968 that “we need a program on how to raise children properly.”²² The constant stream of letters from concerned Soviet citizens suggests that many Soviet citizens were concerned both about Soviet youth, as well as the infiltration of bourgeois ideas, music, and customs into Soviet society. The moral panic around *Stilyagi*, or young Soviet “hipsters” of the 1950s, continued well into the 1970s, as the Soviet state looked for ways to curb the perceived narcissism and self-indulgence of young Soviet citizens.²³

Soviet security organs seemed to agree with the conclusions made by Soviet letter writers. An internal KGB memo from 1979 reported that “during the last couple of years, enemy propaganda has sought to inculcate individual values such as egoism, greed, consumerism, and to sow doubts among the youth about the moral and

²⁰ GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 83, l. 44.

²¹ GARF, f. R-6903, op. 10, d. 44, l. 6.

²² GARF, f. R-6903, op. 10, d. 75, l. 17.

²³ Historians such as Juliane Furst argue that the moral panic surrounding Soviet youth began as early as the immediate Postwar period rather than the Thaw, as returning World War Two veterans created several nonconformist youth subcultures outside of the strict norms of the Soviet state. Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

political values of socialism.”²⁴ The memo went on to say that “Under the influence of enemy ideological diversions, immature young people become sick with pessimism... and praise the Western lifestyle and attempt to look like bourgeois hippies.... These hippies do not participate in socially useful labor, [they] try to challenge ethical norms of Soviet people... and undermine communist morality”²⁵

This internal memo suggests that KGB organs were concerned with the rising popularity of Western culture throughout the 1960s and ‘70s within the context of the Cold War, fearing that the influence of Western music and so-called hippie lifestyles were undermining communist morality and the legitimacy of Soviet ideology.

The moral panic around youth and Western influence was especially acute in places where Soviet citizens had frequent contact with foreigners, such as Crimea. One internal memo from the Ukrainian SSR from 1969 noted with alarm the increasing arrival of foreigners into the Crimean region: “In 1954, 112 foreigners visited the region, ten thousand in 1960, and twenty-nine thousand in 1968.”²⁶ The memo also expressed concern regarding foreigners – and in particular foreign youth – moving to Crimea permanently, stating that “During the last ten years, we have an unprecedented arrival of foreign students for education and permanent residence, with roughly two thousand living in Crimea.”²⁷ According to the memo, within these groups of foreigners “are often individuals from foreign ideological centers, who

²⁴ “Dokladnaia zapiska” (October 11, 1979), SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1162, l. 116.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “O ser’eznykh nedostatkakh v deiatel’nosti militsii” (September 24, 1969), TsDAGO archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 209, l. 94.

²⁷ Ibid., 95.

underwent special preparation on how to commit subversive ideological acts.”²⁸ At the same time, the memo noted Crimea’s proximity to the USSR’s ideological enemies, stating that “the geographical position of our area... as well as the closeness of Turkey, a member of the hostile NATO bloc, and the presence of a US naval fleet... has complicated the situation in the region.”²⁹ Finally, the memo stated, “As a result of the spread of bourgeois propaganda in Crimea, we have seen an increase in manifestations of hostile ideas... among the youth.”³⁰ This memo represented the intersection of multiple Soviet Cold War-era anxieties, including Soviet youth, xenophobia, and regional military tensions. The distrust of foreigners from capitalist countries overlapped with Crimea’s status as an international trade hub and the nearby presence of the Soviet border, heightening anxieties about the influence of Western bourgeois ideas in Soviet youth culture and communist morality.

In Kyiv, the capital of the Ukrainian SSR, Soviet authorities were also worried about the growing contact between the local population and foreign tourists. One internal party memo stated that “it is especially important to note the presence of certain groups of people, predominantly young people, who are involved in illegal currency conversions, prostitution, and theft.”³¹ In response to this situation, according to the memo, one American tourist on holiday in the USSR noted that “after fifty-four years of revolution... teenagers... working on the black market

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 93.

³⁰ Ibid., 95.

³¹ “O merakh po organizatsii perezovspitaniia nesovershennoletnikh devochek” (December 3, 1973), TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 25, d. 889, l. 37.

openly declare their admiration of the West and are not afraid of anyone.”³² Another tourist from the US remarked that “the presence of all these black markets is evidence of the ‘bourgeoisisation’ of Soviet society,” while a tourist from Italy noted his surprise at the fact that “while this was all happening, the police stood idly by, despite clearly understanding what was going on.”³³ To the writers of this particular memo, any interactions with tourists brought out the unsavory elements of Soviet society, sparking worries of bourgeois influence in the “daily reality of Soviet socialism.”

The moral outrage around young people was especially apparent in discussions of the rapid rise of dance halls and discotheques in the USSR in the 1960s and ‘70s. One letter writer to the journal *Molodoi kommunist* from 1977 expressed concern about improper forms of behavior among the Soviet youth and wrote, “The problem of the discotheque is that young people have an underdeveloped worldview which makes them vulnerable to abnormal influences on their behavior.... We have to intervene in these youth collectives and teach them proper morality and behavior.”³⁴ Lamenting young people’s dance collectives, another CPSU member wrote in 1965:

These debates over dances are silly... We cannot forget that exactly twenty years ago the US dropped an atomic bomb on the peaceful town of Hiroshima... then the Americans started the war in Korea and destroyed that country. And now the Americans are destroying the free people of Vietnam. And now, as a communist, I cannot understand – how is it that Soviet youth, raised

³² Ibid., 38.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Andrei Duginev, “Opasnyi vozrast,” *Molodoi Kommunist* (December 1977), 66.

on the values of the Pioneers and the Komsomol, can dance American dances?³⁵

Another internal Party memo from the Moldavian SSR's city of Tiraspol shared the concerns of this Soviet citizen. It stated, "The youth commit many crimes. We put big hopes on the youth.... But they need to have fun. Just take a look at the dancing halls, they look like a zoo."³⁶ The concern about the decadence and moral corruption of Soviet youth was closely linked to the dance hall, a place which some Soviet citizens perceived to be a breeding ground of immoral behavior.

Internal KGB memos suggested that the influence of Western ideas, radio programs, and literature had concrete effects on the behavior of Soviet teenagers and students. For example, in April of 1979, two former university students, both of whom were Komsomol members at Kyiv State University, were arrested for "espousing libelous ideas against lived Soviet reality and for planning to defect from the Soviet Union... [They] even took concrete steps to obtain money and weapons to complete this task." The investigation concluded that the two students "did not work and lived an amoral life.... encouraging other students to take drugs, to drink, and to engage in sexual debauchery."³⁷ The memo attributed the "ideologically incorrect" leanings of these two students to "systematic listening of foreign radio stations and reactionary foreign students [living in the USSR]."³⁸ Finally, the report stated that "the infiltration of these ideas can be attributed to the fact that after getting expelled

³⁵ Viktor Mal'tsev, "Tot kto tantsuet tvist, tuneiadets i imperialist," <https://altyn73.livejournal.com/779903.html> .

³⁶ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 32, op. 5, d. 256, l. 75.

³⁷ "Dokladnaya zapiska KGB," SBU Archive, f. 16, Op. 1, d. 1577, ll. 83-84.

³⁸ Ibid.

from the university, these two individuals found themselves outside of the positive influence of Komsomol organizations and student collectives.”³⁹ This KGB memo suggests that the influences of Western radio stations and culture were not simply superficial influences, but instead drove some young Soviet citizens to take radical measures such as defection. Furthermore, the memo implies that the university collective could have intervened to prevent the moral failures of these two students, suggesting that these collectives were preventative institutions similar to families, schools, and the courts.

The Soviet Family

To combat the allure of Western influence and bourgeois capitalism, Soviet families were expected to play an enormous part in shaping the minds of young communists. Unsurprisingly, improper behavior such as partying, forming Hippy parties, and listening to Western music was blamed on bad parenting and lack of parental role models. Even before the implementation of the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, Soviet Party organs displayed extreme dissatisfaction with parents who failed to properly raise their offspring. Party memos, for instance, often complained about the indifference among parents to the transgressions of their children. According to a memo from L’viv written during the months of May and June of 1955, local police arrested twenty-eight minors, most of whom lived with their parents.⁴⁰ The memo unequivocally stated that “the majority of parents of these

³⁹ Ibid., 85

⁴⁰ “Spravki rabotnikov po L’vovu i o bor’be s prestupnost’iu” (December 3rd, 1956), L’viv Oblast Archive, L’viv, Ukraine, f. P-3, op. 5, d. 448, l. 52.

minors could have prevented the crimes of their children, but failed to do so.”⁴¹ In this case, after a group of young thieves were found guilty of multiple nighttime muggings, the memo stated that “none of the parents of these criminals received punishments for the irresponsible child-rearing, despite the fact that some of the parents were members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and were overall responsible workers.”⁴² This internal Party memo drew a direct connection between child-rearing, the family atmosphere, and criminality. According to the memo, parents, especially parents who were members of the Communist Party and who were held to a higher standard, needed to be punished for the crimes of their children.

Despite this, local collectives made up of concerned parents and other adults were sometimes reluctant to intervene in the lives of Soviet teenagers. An internal Party memo from Ukraine written in 1956 lamented that “in the evenings in downtown L’viv, especially near movie theaters and stores, one often comes across young children without parents. The adult population of the city not only fails to bring these children to the nearest police station, but in some cases, adults bought illegal movie tickets from these children.”⁴³ The memo went on to say that “the majority of the population does not care about manifestation of hooliganism committed by minors in public streets and on public transit. In some cases, some adults even prevent police officers from arresting and taking minors to the police station.”⁴⁴ These internal memos suggest that despite the rosy images of Soviet

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 52-53.

⁴³ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

childhood in the press, the reality on the ground was often much more convoluted. Soviet adults were not always keen to intervene in immoral behavior, and sometimes seemed indifferent, even obstructive, to educating Soviet youth in proper behavior, thus interfering with the work of Party organs.

Fascinatingly, Soviet publications and Party workers did not always exaggerate improper behavior among the youth, as sometimes even young Komsomol members truly did encourage each other to ignore or undermine norms of communist morality. In a letter from a sister to her brother written in 1957, for instance, the sister encouraged her brother to “not take too closely to heart all the lectures about morality you hear from the older folks.”⁴⁵ Another, later, letter between the same two individuals stated, “[J]ust worry about yourself, and do not concern yourself with lofty moral principles, none of that is worth a rotten egg. Ignore those who accuse you of... individualism, as the world works on the slogan: ‘every man for himself.’”⁴⁶ These letters suggest that for some young adults, high-minded discourses on morality were irrelevant and even misleading to their daily lives. The fact that these Communist Youth members joined the organization despite their true feelings about the collective reveals that these organizations perhaps attracted citizens for reasons other than building a bright communist future, such as career advancement. However, these students were not very successful in using Komsomol membership to advance their careers; displaying such reckless disregard for communist morality brought

⁴⁵ “O rabote kul'turologov i ideologicheskoi rabote” (September 1957), TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4608, l. 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 17.

thorough sanctions by Party organs. After having their letters read out loud by senior Party members at the local Party meetings, both the writer and the recipient were excluded from university, as well as the Komsomol, suggesting that Party organs did not take transgressions of morality lightly.⁴⁷ These trends continued long after Nikita Khrushchev stepped down as the Soviet premier, showing that these anxieties and concerns over Soviet youth transcended political dynasties in the USSR.

Youth, Morality, and Family Under Brezhnev

Under Leonid Brezhnev, who succeeded Khrushchev as leader of the Soviet Union in 1964, statutory laws supplemented the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, in an attempt to strengthen the role of the family in the educating of moral, obedient communist children. In conjunction with the Code's calls for respect within the family, the Law Regarding Marriage and the Family, from June 27, 1968, sought to strengthen the moral atmosphere of the Soviet family. According to Article 1 of the legislation, one of the foremost goals of the law on marriage and the family was the further strengthening of the Soviet family using the principles of Communist Morality.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Article 6.1 mandated that Soviet citizens simultaneously "follow the laws and moral principles of socialist society."⁴⁹ During the drafting of this legislation, internal Communist Party memos stressed that considerations surrounding morality must be at the forefront of the legislative process, since "the project foregrounds equality of rights and obligations of both parents with regard to

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "The Foundation of Legislation of the USSR on Marriage and Family," <http://pravo.levonevsky.org/baza/soviet/sssr5292.htm>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

their children, centering the obligations of parents to raise their children in the spirit of communist morality.”⁵⁰ The memos also emphasized that “communist childrearing is the most important function of the family.... [t]o prepare children for active participation in the construction of a communist society.”⁵¹ While this legislation echoed earlier Stalin-era Family Codes from 1936 and 1944, which also called for the strengthening of the Soviet family, the focus on morality, rather than labor and reproduction, suggested a shift away from Stalin-era tropes regarding the family toward a more harmonious, moral, and kind family structure.

Instead of discourses on reproduction, tropes of the home and domesticity came to dominate official discourse on the family by the 1970s, a time of increased prosperity and stability in the USSR. A 1972 pamphlet from the Ukrainian SSR argued that, “A child who has appeared in this world immediately becomes a member of the family collective (*semeinyi kollektiv*), even without realizing it.... And labor in this collective is essential for forming a moral person.”⁵² Echoing this sentiment, a 1984 family pamphlet from the Kazakh SSR stated that “The Soviet family has many resources to resolve the questions of raising a new moral generation.... A new type of social relations has changed society and created equality in the family.”⁵³ The pamphlet went on to say that “the modern family gives children their first

⁵⁰ “Regarding the Legislation of the USSR and Allied Republics about Marriage and the Family” (February 2, 1968), TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 25, d. 58, l. 58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁵² O. Kurin, *My prodolivaem sebia v detiakh* (Kyiv: Radians’ka shkola, 1972), 134-135. The article seems to imply the important value of reproductive labor by both parents here.

⁵³ G. Baidel’dinova, *Semia i shkola* (Alma-Ata: Mektep, 1984), 6-7. The article implied that the modern Soviet family had many resources for childrearing available to them, such as child psychologists, free healthcare for children, and free education.

understanding of the norms of communist morality.”⁵⁴ It even went as far as to say that the child does not completely belong to his parents, but society at large: “The child belongs not only to the family – as they grow up, they belong to different organizations, including kindergarten, school, the Pioneers, etc.... School, Pioneer organizations, and the Komsomol value the importance of this pattern.”⁵⁵ While the Soviet family was the cornerstone of childrearing, it was only one component of the larger collectivist project to shape moral Soviet citizens. Furthermore, the publication of this pamphlet in the Kazakh SSR suggests that the topic of morality received attention all over the Soviet Union, as this universalizing discourse was meant to override any cultural attitudes about the relationship between parents and children.

Yet in spite of the importance of collectives, Soviet documentary films, such as *The Parental Word* (1978), argued that the family was to be the primary guardian of communist moral values. The film opened with a monologue stating that “the home, the family, the surroundings of a growing person is the beginning of beginnings, and regardless of which kinds of scientific theories on morality we promote, everything begins in the home.”⁵⁶ According to the film, “the family is the first social cell where the identity of new members of society is formed....

Specifically, problems in the family can deform the moral identity of a minor, and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 134. The Pioneers were youth organizations of young communists, consisting of young school-age kids between the ages of nine and fourteen. After the age of fifteen, these children could join the Komsomol, a youth organization for young adults from the ages of fifteen to twenty-eight.

⁵⁶ Typescript of documentary film *Roditel'skoe slovo* (1977-1978), National Archive of Moldova, Chisinau, Moldova, f. R-3343, op. 2, d. 29, l. 2.

other times these problems directly push them to break rules of our society.”⁵⁷ In conjunction with written publications, such Soviet televised films, produced by Soviet TV studios at the behest of the Ministry of Education, also played an important, didactic role for Soviet families. However, these films also stood in sharp contrast to the way in which early Soviet thinkers such as Alexandra Kollontai, who had predicted that the family would wither away and that Soviet children would be raised by larger societal structures, had envisioned communism in the years after the Russian revolution. The re-entrenchment of the family during Late Socialism represented yet another shift in discourses on families under communism.

To Soviet authorities, harmonious and loving domestic relationships, were central to implementing socialist morality. In March 1971, *Soviet Pedagogy* argued that “modern children observe how their parents participate in the construction of communism, and how they bring new ways of communist being into daily life.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, Soviet publications stressed the importance of harmonious, loving relationships between parents as a prerequisite for raising good communists. Condemning the two-facedness of some Soviet citizens, one 1963 article titled “Moral Complex” from a journal titled *Young Communist* [*Molodoi kommunist*], a journal for Soviet teenagers, stated that “Lenin condemned men who acted in an upstanding manner around their comrades, but are completely careless about the domestic duties carried out by their wives.”⁵⁹ Echoing tenets of the Moral Code, the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ M.S. Vasilieva, “Obshchestvenno-politicheskoe vospitanie mladshikh shkol’nikov na urokakh chteniia,” *Sovietskaia pedagogika* 3 (1971), 47.

⁵⁹ V. Razumnevich, “Nravstvennyi kompleks,” *Molodoi kommunist* No. 8 (August 1963), 72.

article similarly condemned couples not in loving intimate relationships, stating that “[A] family will only become strong if it lives in agreement and mutual help. In a family where everyone lives ‘by themselves,’ there is no spiritual closeness and ideological growth.”⁶⁰ This article’s explicit linking of Soviet families to a family collective and tying their ideological growth to familial love and intimacy suggests that the state viewed the space of the family as a space for state intervention. Finally, the focus on emotion and intimate love within the family and its link to communist morality suggests a shift from the earlier Stalin-era focus on stability and strengthening the family to promotion of a more loving and intimate domestic atmosphere.

In fact, happiness and happy familial relations became a politicized space for instituting communist morality. Quoting Engels, the same article from *Young Communist* stated that “If a moral marriage is based on love, marriage only stays moral if love continues to exist.”⁶¹ With the purpose of giving advice to young men and women thinking of dating and marriage, the article’s author argued that marital jealousy was incompatible with communist ideology. Warning women to avoid jealous husbands, the author wrote, “A jealous person... sees another person as his private property. We do not need those kinds of views in our socialist society!”⁶² The explicit link between the success of socialist society and the success of individual marriages became a prominent discourse during the 1960s and ‘70s in the USSR,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 73.

⁶² Ibid.

resulting in an explosion of conversations around childrearing and the moral Soviet family. A book by child psychologist L. Ostrovskaia, for instance, called for an “emotionally moral atmosphere (*emotsional'no-nravstvennaia atmosfera*) in the Soviet home.”⁶³ Equating morality and a moral atmosphere with love represented a new development in the discourse of Soviet morality, one not necessarily tied to class or political affiliation and more connected to emotions and feelings. Compared to the coerced loyalty of Stalinist period, the invocation of emotion and morality represented a shift to much more intimate, rather than strictly coercive relations between Soviet citizens and the state.

When collective child-rearing and positive encouragement failed, publications such as didactic monographs, pamphlets, and newspaper articles encouraged more punitive measures and shamed parents who behaved improperly in front of their kids. One didactic manual for parents from the Moldavian SSR from 1979 recounted an example where, “A woman with her little daughter walked into a store, pointed to the bread and stated: ‘That’s bread?! You should throw it away,’ and then her daughter did the same, imitating her mother. It is easy to see the moral damage this caused on the child.”⁶⁴ Many similar articles implied that improperly raised children were not the fault of the state, but instead the fault of the parental figures who did not take proper advantage of the resources available to them in a mature socialist society.

⁶³ L. Ostrovskaia, *Vospitanie i nravstvennost'* (Moscow: Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, 1975), 82.

⁶⁴ M. Ionko, *Kakim ty budesh?* (Kishinev: Karta Moldovenyaska, 1979), 41.

According to such Soviet publications, public shame and exposure were effective tools in weeding out immorality and improper behavior. Educational pamphlets, too, blamed the excesses created by Late Socialism on the moral degradation of children. The Kazakh family education pamphlet from 1984, for instance, stated that “comfortable material conditions can create their own difficulties... causing a fetishization of things and possessions. Like rust, this eats away at the family, insulating them in their own world with values foreign to our larger social principles.”⁶⁵ The pamphlet warns that a child raised in such a family would face social ostracism from his peers, and admonished Soviet parents to condemn any manifestation of avarice within the family. The author’s argument implied that the stability and prosperity of developed socialism may have come with a price, namely that the newly available comforts of daily life were making Soviet citizens complacent, unwilling to work and to struggle toward a bright communist future.⁶⁶

In general, mothers received a disproportionate amount of the blame if their children committed immoral acts despite official claims of gender equality within the home. One court memo stated that “an absence of a father, but especially when it is combined with an uneducated mother and her employment outside the home... increases the risk of childhood crime.”⁶⁷ The memo implies that children whose mothers worked outside the home had a higher chance of being criminals, suggesting

⁶⁵ Baidel’dinova, *Sem’ia i shkola*, 13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ “Protokoly Verhovnogo suda SSSR,” GARF, f. 9474, op. 1, d. 499, l. 105.

that women were typically seen as bearing more responsibility for the upbringing of children and the transmission of communist moral and cultural values.⁶⁸ Since the task of raising moral communists often fell to women, they were also called upon to sacrifice their careers to spend more time at home with their children. Official Soviet publications echoed the dangers of single-parent homes by warning families against the dangers of divorce. The Kazakh family education pamphlet from 1984, for instance, stated that “an absence of an intimate and warm relationship between the parents causes the child physical and emotional discomfort...leading to a different kind of child-rearing.”⁶⁹ This pamphlet shared the concern of many court documents from the 1970s, which blamed broken families on the rise in crime in the Soviet Union.

Soviet films such as the abovementioned *Parental Word* (1977) supported these assertions about single motherhood. One of the scenes of the film depicted a crying single mother at her own son’s trial, lamenting that she had overlooked his transgressions. The narrator went on to say that “nature itself has ensured that the woman not only has the right to bring a child into this world, but has also to teach them the most basic concepts of good and evil, basic justice. She failed to notice how little arguments (*malen’kie pochemushki*) turned him into a ten-year old brat.... She hoped to raise a good person.... But now they do not even share a wall together.”⁷⁰ At

⁶⁸ While this is true not only of socialist societies, the disproportionate burden that fell on women with regard to childrearing was a retreat from the revolutionary ideals on gender norms from the 1920s.

⁶⁹ Baidel’dinova, *Sem’ia i shkola*, 15.

⁷⁰ Typescript of documentary film *Roditel’skoe slovo* (1977-1978), 2. The implication of the last statement was that that it was directly the mother’s fault that her son was now in prison.

the trial in the film, the prosecutor states that “children are a reflection of relations within the family, and from the child’s actions we can always glean insight into the family atmosphere.”⁷¹ By indicating that if a child becomes a criminal the mother is directly responsible, the first implication of the film is that mothers carried a disproportionate burden in child-rearing. The film’s essentialist arguments completely overlooked the role of the father in the family, ultimately conflating the family with the mother. Secondly, the film suggests that if Soviet parents did not divorce and acted morally, their children could become upstanding Soviet citizens, rather than sitting in a prison cell.

A Moral Education

When Soviet children left the family nest and began their education, Soviet schools were expected to play an integral role in the creation of moral communists, as educational collectives were also expected to step in to prevent potential transgressions of communist morality.⁷² At the 22nd Party Congress in 1961, Nikita Khrushchev stated that “in order for students to be educated in the spirit of communism, schools must enforce the best qualities and habits, prepare students for honest labor... [and] teach unwavering adherence to norms of communist morality

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² As scholars such as Lisa Kirschenbaum, E. Thomas Ewing, and Michael David-Fox have pointed out, schools were an instrumental discursive space for creating model communists during the Stalin period, since the discursive space of the classroom presented an opportunity to create a proletarian culture. Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning Among the Bolsheviks: 1918-1929* (American Council of Learned Societies, 1997); Lisa Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2001); E. Thomas Ewing, *Separate Schools: Gender, Policy, and Practice in Postwar Soviet Education* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

and rules of communal living.”⁷³ Echoing Khrushchev’s calls, a June 1962 article from *Soviet Pedagogy* argued that “the rebuilding (*perestroika*) of schools on the foundation of interconnectedness with daily life is fostering communist attitudes regarding labor for the good of society. Basing ourselves on the principles of the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, our schools have started to pay much more attention to the preservation and expansion of our moral heritage.”⁷⁴ As a result, school collectives consisting of educators and parents were to play an indispensable role in shaping Soviet citizens. The same article argued that “bourgeois theories on childrearing think of the child as a self-determined individual. Soviet pedagogy, in contrast, with regard to questions of consciousness or childrearing of the student collective, is based on Marxist-Leninist theories on interconnectedness of the individual and the collective.”⁷⁵ The article even went on to say that, “In modern conditions it is especially important to expand the sphere of influence of moral factors in school life.”⁷⁶ In other words, Soviet schools represented the new frontier in the fight to create moral Soviet citizens. Rather than simply teaching students arithmetic and literature, schools fulfilled an important social role, in which the classroom space represented a daily opportunity to indoctrinate and to shape Soviet children, and Soviet schools could thus easily incorporate the moral code into their mission.

Some publications and official discourses even compared Soviet teachers to revolutionary fighters from the October Revolution, soldiers on the barricades of

⁷³ Ivanov, “Nekotorye voprosy nraivstvennogo vospitaniia podrostka,” 70.

⁷⁴ Boldyrev, “Moral’nyi kodeks stroitelia kommunizma,” 16.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

building a new society. At a 1966 regional conference on communist *vospitanie* in the city of Sverdlovsk in the Russian Soviet Republic (RSFSR), the opening speaker invoked revolutionary imagery when she declared that “there are barricades with every task – in the task of creating the new person, the frontline presents its idiosyncratic difficulties.”⁷⁷ Quoting a poem from the 1920s written by Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, the speaker declared that, “On the third front/ standing up as tall as a mountain/ On the front of education/ On the front of books/ The teacher - an equal to the warrior-soldier/ is much like the revolutionary frontline combatant.”⁷⁸ Besides indicating that Soviet schools of the 1960s were continuing the work of the Soviet educational system from earlier periods in Soviet history, the invocation of a Soviet poet from the 1920s, and the use of such martial metaphors in the context of Late Socialist education, suggested that Soviet teachers were carrying on the revolutionary legacy during a time of relative stability in Soviet history. The speaker suggested that the creation of the new person through education was the new revolutionary frontier and the future of the battle for communism.

This education was not confined to the classroom alone. Informal collectives, often consisting of parents, neighbors, and teachers, were expected to play a disproportionate role in raising moral communists. In an article published in *Soviet Pedagogy* in 1962, the author stated that “in those cases in which the teacher is aware of the domestic circumstances of the child, both the collective and the pedagogue can

⁷⁷ A.A. Anfurieva, “Obrashenie ko vsem uchiteliam, komsomol’skim organizatsiiam i predpriiateliam Sverdlovskoi Oblasti” in *Materialy oblastnoi konferentsii na temy kommunisticheskogo vospitaniia i printsipy organizatsii vnechebnogo vremeni* (Sverdlovsk: Sverdlovskii Oblastnoi Institut, 1967), 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

combat negative influences. In these cases, communist morality wins out in the end.”⁷⁹ In other words, school and family collectives had overlapping responsibility in the task of raising moral communists, as pedagogues had a duty not only to educate Soviet children, but also to know the domestic atmosphere and circumstances of every student. As they had in the Stalinist period, pedagogues and school instructors functioned as intermediaries between state and society, often serving as the vessels of state discourse on morality.

Much like in the 1930s, teachers and school counselors were on the frontlines of *vospitanie*. Some articles called for school psychologists and pedagogues to go so far as to psychoanalyze Soviet children and their families to assure their moral development in a “mature socialist society.” In a 1977 article, the journal *Preschool Education* [*Doshkol’noe vospitanie*] called for school counselors to “analyze how parents react when you talk about their kids... If they are interested in their child, they will talk about them enthusiastically.... Small things such as a lack of toys, tone of voice, and the level of engagement can say a lot for an experienced counselor.... The counselor must keep in mind that the approaches to the formation of moral communists must be highly individualized.”⁸⁰ Another article from *Soviet Pedagogy* from March 1971 stated that “life has shown that the efficacy of the collective depends on the qualifications of the pedagogue.”⁸¹ By following these articles’ suggestions that school counselors had a moral duty to report immoral parents by

⁷⁹ Ivanov, “Nekotorye voprosy nravstvennogo vospitaniia podrostka,” 71.

⁸⁰ L. Fedoseeva, “Pedagog v sem’e vospitannika,” *Doshkol’noe vospitanie* 9 (1974), 24.

⁸¹ R. Shakurov, “Psikhologicheskie trebovaniia i lichnosti direktora shkoly,” *Sovetskaia pedagogika* 3 (1971), 55.

analyzing their body language, some school representatives may have acted as unwitting agents of the state to penetrate the ostensibly private sphere of the Soviet home.

Soviet universities also had an important didactic role, apart from educating the next generation of Soviet workers.⁸² At a conference on the problems of communist education (*vospitaniie*) of university students in the Kazakh SSR in 1973, one of the speakers declared that “institutions of higher learning are on the frontlines of the fight to create the New Person.”⁸³ The same speaker went on to say that:

Our students, who received essential specialized skills, as well as a good communist education, now become organizers and educators in various collectives.... Their task now is to become educators themselves, forming the consciousness, political views, and moral traits of the builders of communism. All these qualities, indispensable to a young person, must be taught during the student’s education at university. The communist education of students in student life are one of the most important tasks for university collectives as well as Party and state organs.⁸⁴

⁸² As scholars such as Benjamin Tromly, Michael David-Fox, and Philip Boobbyer have pointed out, Russian and Soviet intelligentsia, as well as the university itself, were hotbeds of radicalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the young educated people and the Soviet intelligentsia were not always willing participants in the Soviet socialist project, these scholars have pointed out that the Soviet intelligentsia did not always share the radical impulse to transform society of their Western counterparts. Benjamin Tromly, *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Intellectual Life under Stalin and Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Michael David-Fox, “The Assault on the Universities and the Dynamics of Stalin’s ‘Great Break,’ 1928–1932,” in Michael David-Fox and György Péteri (eds.), *Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2000), 73–104; Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁸³ Kh. Arystanbekov, “Introduction” in *Materialy naucho-teoreticheskoi konferentsii po probleme kommunisticheskogo vospitaniia studentov*, ed. Kh.A Arystanbekov, S.I. Karamendin, Z. Zhumadilov (Alma-Ata: Kazakhskii Sel’skokhoziaistvennyi Institut, 1973), 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

University administrators and professors took their task seriously. For instance, in the few years before this conference, the committee on social sciences of this particular university created a collaborative research project on the communist education of the student body.⁸⁵ In the Soviet Union under Late Socialism, while education and *vospitanie* took place both in the classroom and outside of it, adults could not become good educators of communist morality without having the proper education and training themselves in their youth. However, by the admission of the speaker it was important to discuss “the various idiosyncrasies of communist education of youth in the context of multinational Soviet republics,” suggesting that universal discourses on morality were not always applicable in the circumstances of non-Russian Soviet republics.⁸⁶

Factors such as a lack of knowledge of the Russian language seemed to be an obstacle in the creation of moral communists on the Soviet periphery. As late as 1970, at a conference on communist education of youth at the Tashkent People’s Institute of Agriculture (*Institut sel’skogo khoziaistva*) in the Uzbek SSR, an ethnically Russian associate professor of Russian literature stated that “Russian language teachers have a big educational role among students, their main goal is to educate the youth in the spirit of communist morality. Learning the Russian language also has an important internationalist component.”⁸⁷ The professor went on to say that “learning the Russian

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. I will discuss the nationalist tensions within the Soviet Union in more detail in Chapter 5.

⁸⁷ N.A. Bayazitova, “Iz opyta vospitatel’noi raboty sredi studenchestva nerusskoi natsional’nosti pri obuchenii russkomu iazyku” in *Tezisy dokladov iz soobshchenii na respublikanskoi mezhvuzovoi konferentsii po probleme kommunisticheskogo vospitaniia molodezhi posviashchennoi 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Lenina* (Tashkent: Ministry of Higher Education of the Uzbek SSR, 1970), 142.

language among non-Russian groups presents educators with more opportunities for educating students in the spirit of the Marxist-Leninist worldview, collectivism, comradely mutual assistance, honesty, and fairness,”⁸⁸ arguing that students who lacked fluency in Russian could not fully achieve their integration into Soviet society and could not become a complete moral Soviet citizen. The importance of universal Russian fluency represented a continuation of the Stalin-era trope of Russians as the elder brother leading other groups toward communism. Arguing that the Russian language could teach non-Russian students honesty and fairness also showed that outside of the ethnically Russian core, use of the Russian language had insidious moralizing, colonizing and universalizing undertones, as Russian educators aimed to impose a universal standard of communist subjecthood across the Soviet Union.

In contrast, other Soviet intellectuals utilized Cold War political binaries in the quest to create a universalist communist citizen. At a speech at the 1973 conference in the Kazakh SSR on the problems of communist education, the ethnically Russian dean of the economics department stated that, “Becoming a specialist is not simply a process of acquiring knowledge, abilities, and skills. It is also the birth of a new person with the highest moral qualities, a brave warrior for communist ideals.... The education (*vospitanie*) of this person is the task of the university collective.”⁸⁹ Echoing this sentiment, another speaker from the conference warned that a specialist who is not educated to be a good communist runs the risk of

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ S.E. Karamendin, “Rol’ perspektivnogo planirovaniia politiko-vospitatel’noi raboty v formirovanii ideinykh vzgliadov studentov” in *Materialy naucho-teoreticheskoi konferentsii po probleme kommunisticheskogo vospitaniia studentov*, 12.

“becoming a citizen of the American type,” who “normally performs well on their tasks... but will only serve those who pay the best.”⁹⁰ This comparison was a value judgment on the capitalist American citizen-specialist, who, though competent and capable, is also amoral and driven by the profit motive. Juxtaposed to American technocrats, Soviet specialists were driven not by greed, but by a sense of social duty, making the Soviet worker more moral, altruistic, and humane, especially within the Cold War ideological competition for hearts and minds in the so-called Third World. Finally, this educator did not see the need to explore the idiosyncrasies of various nationalities in the USSR, instead folding these identities into a universal Soviet identity which stood in sharp opposition to the morally bankrupt capitalist West.

School and Public Collectives

Specific collectives embedded within the school and university structure played an indispensable role in shaping Soviet youth.⁹¹ Soviet publications implied that different collectives had different obligations in the project to create the New Socialist Person. In contrast to family collectives, so-called “child collectives” formed in Soviet schools had a moral obligation to support their peers in difficult times. A Soviet family pamphlet from 1971 stated:

Something bad happened in the family of your son’s comrade. How will his friends respond to this? Will they notice their friend’s sour mood, will they share his grief? Or will they not care and just laugh? Your son will receive a lesson in either

⁹⁰ K.E. Shiianova, “Osobennosti planirovaniia i provedeniia politiko-vospitatel’noi raboty na 1-m kurse” in *Materialy naucho-teoreticheskoi konferentsii po probleme kommunisticheskogo vospitania studentov*, 19

⁹¹ As Igal Halfin pointed out, collective education and collective pressures were essential for the formation of a distinct Soviet subjectivity in the 1930s, as the collective shaped individual desires and consciousness. Halfin, *Darkness to Light*.

humanism or in callousness. The atmosphere in the little child collective which your son inhabits affects the formation of this young person. In conclusion, what your child experiences in the child collective is a powerful force... to make him more personable, humane, and spiritually enriched.⁹²

The pamphlet implied that each collective had its own respective responsibility to raise moral Soviet citizens. Furthermore, the pamphlet put the burden of raising moral Soviet children on children as well as adults. Rather than being passive agents in the construction of the New Socialist Person, children were expected to be active participants, helping shape an understanding of their obligation to their peers and to Soviet society. Instead of simply being a disciplinary tool to control Soviet children, morality and collectivism functioned as a guide to the positive duties of Soviet people, echoing the sixth tenet of the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism: “one human being is a friend, a comrade and a brother to another human being.”⁹³

It seemed that different collectives had different obligations to Soviet children and young adults. An article from *Soviet Pedagogy* from 1971 argued that “all youth collectives are different, and as a result they all have different functions. School collectives, Pioneer and Komsomol collectives.... contain within themselves functional, administrative, and psycho-ethical tasks. All collectives are a sort of social organism.”⁹⁴ Echoing Khrushchev’s tree-planting metaphors of nurturing plants from

⁹² Shakurov, R. “psihologicheskie trebovania i lichnosti direktora shkoly” *Sovetskaia pedagogika* 3 (1971), 136.

⁹³ I am invoking the term “positive obligation” from human rights law, which denotes positive obligation as the state’s duty to secure a fundamental right, rather than a classical negative obligation to abstain from human rights violations.

⁹⁴ L.P. Bueva, “Problema formirovaniia garmonicheskoi lichnosti,” *Sovetskaia pedagogika* 1 (1971), 38.

the 1960s, this argument implied that every collective has its own “ecology” and environment conducive to shaping certain aspects of a child’s personality.

Despite calls for youth collectives to create moral, upstanding Soviet citizens, Soviet officials understood that not all collectives positively influenced Soviet youth. One Party memo from 1962 stated that “grown criminals are making their way into the child collectives and exerting a unique kind of influence on the children, rendering all work by educators in the colony null and void.”⁹⁵ In an article from *Soviet Pedagogy* from 1971, the author wrote that “not all [collectives] are always positive, and everything depends on the social characteristics of the collective.... If a person associates themselves with a collective with antisocial values, this undermines the educational process.”⁹⁶ An article from the same journal from 1986 echoed this sentiment, arguing that “moral wandering among Soviet youth manifests itself in antisocial ways. Missteps in child-rearing have caused the rise of youth groups such as punks, rockers, metalheads, and others.”⁹⁷ According to this article, certain collectives could steer Soviet youth in the wrong direction, suggesting that both the creation of antisocial behavior and the struggle against it were often collective tasks. The importance of collectives in the education of Soviet youth also reflected larger anxieties over how Soviet citizens would raise children without the paternalistic presence of the state.

⁹⁵ “O proisshestviiakh i o rabote detskikh vospitatel’nykh kolonii” (February 1962) TsDAGO f. 1, op. 24, d. 5509, l. 47.

⁹⁶ Bueva, “Problema formirovaniia garmonicheskoi lichnosti,” 39.

⁹⁷ A.V. Dmitriev, P.P. Lopata, V.S. Lipitsky, “Sotsial’naia sfera i ee vozrastaiushie znacheniiia v zhizni sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva,” *Sovetskaia pedagogika* 1 (1987), 88.

When education and child-rearing in collectives failed, school and university collectives sometimes demanded the toughest possible punishments against young transgressors. On February 12, 1962, for instance, a former student who was expelled from Odessa State University walked into the rector's office demanding to be reinstated as a student in the Economics department. After a short conversation, the former student stabbed the rector multiple times in the head and the face, nearly killing them; the student later stated that the attempted murder was a result of his expulsion from the university.⁹⁸ Despite the fact that the rector survived the assault, the university collective demanded the toughest punishment for the transgressor. In an open letter signed by multiple students, proctors, the department chair, and even the dean, the collective demanded that the local court punish the aggressor by executing him by firing squad, citing the fact that the attacker had carried out an assault on a "patriotic communist."⁹⁹ The open letter described the rector as "someone who was always eager to work... combined with an intimate knowledge of each member of the collective," traits which were juxtaposed against the alleged criminal, whom the letter described as "an already-formed type of bandit, to whom any concepts of conscientiousness, honor and duty are completely foreign."¹⁰⁰ The open letter suggested that this particular individual was beyond reeducation by the university collective. By describing the accused as a "formed bandit," the writers implied that

⁹⁸ "O prioshestviyah i o rabote detskih vospitatel'nyh kolonii." February 1962. TsDAGO Arhive, f. 1, op. 24, d. 5509, ll. 114-115.
114-115.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

this particular person was beyond saving and thus the only logical conclusion was to execute him. The students and the dean appealed to the language of collectivism and communism to demand the toughest possible punishment, suggesting that collectives could both reeducate Soviet citizens and demand their physical death.

When collective intervention failed altogether, official publications called on ordinary citizens and the public to intervene when they witnessed immoral behavior. In a newspaper article titled “Morality and Money” in *Evening Kishinev* [*Vechernii Kishinev*] from February 1968, M. Berezikov wrote that “the question of raising children starts not in the classroom, but on every square meter of this earth!... Today the child takes one ruble from the bus fare box, but tomorrow,” Berezikov warned, “he will take ten....” Soviet morality under late socialism implied that individuals who were allowed to commit minor societal transgressions would go on to commit major ones. As Berezikov put it, “Let us assume that we let a child ride on the bus for free.... Then the child grows up and does the same thing, leaving us wondering what happened.”¹⁰¹ A speaker at the all-union congress of communist morality in 1963 had similarly argued that when a young person fails to give up their seat on a bus to an elderly person, “this young person is an egoist... who must do everything to make life pleasant for themselves, but not for others.... They are an egoist- and that character trait is not an accident. It is impossible that this person is an egoist only on buses and nowhere else in life.”¹⁰² Both these scenarios suggested that even the smallest

¹⁰¹ M. Berezikov, “Na temu morali,” *Vecherniy Kishinev* no. 38 (February 14, 1968), 2.

¹⁰² “O provedenii vsesoiuznoi konferentsii po problemam kommunisticheskoi morali,” GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1213, l. 134.

transgressions needed to be immediately confronted and stopped to prevent to the spread of more serious kinds of crime.

To combat these kinds of behavior, ordinary Soviet citizens were even expected to take on the role of police. Another speaker at the all-union conference on communist morality argued that “we often incorrectly assess the work of our Party organs, demanding from them the impossible. If we have an increase in hooliganism somewhere, it is not only the courts and the police who are to blame. First and foremost, we should blame society.”¹⁰³ The speaker claimed that it is society’s duty to prevent crime among youth, as the judicial system often only works in a reactionary manner. “[W]e often see a person who is on a slippery slope, who will certainly commit a crime,” the speaker went on to say, “but the courts cannot do anything... as he has not broken any laws.... Only when we enlist society’s help to eradicate crime can we be successful.”¹⁰⁴ The speaker suggested that Soviet society as a whole, not only the courts, had a moral responsibility to prevent crime and to fight against indifference among certain layers of Soviet citizens, hearkening back to Lenin’s promises from *The State and Revolution* that communist society would police itself without a need for a militia, army or even laws.¹⁰⁵

All of these critics implied that the imagined space of interpersonal relationships, including the relationships between parents and children, was a space of state intervention and moral education and that small, seemingly insignificant

¹⁰³“Po problemam moral’nogo kodeksa stroitelia kommunizma” (February 7, 1963), GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d., 1311, l. 206.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ V. Lenin, *State and Revolution*.

transgressions were usually signs of much larger and more serious moral character flaws. The concern over the transgressions of a few supposedly flawed individuals reflected a larger anxiety surrounding behavior norms during Late Socialism, as according to official discourse, communism was unachievable as long as Soviet society had any kind of crime or immoral comportment. For Soviet society to move forward in a meaningful way, every Soviet citizen needed to be taught to behave correctly, whether through voluntary education or compulsion.

Morality, Childhood, and the Penal System

When *vospitanie* in families, schools, and collectives failed, and young Soviet citizens broke the law and violated notions of communist morality, the judicial system and the police primarily blamed bad parenting and the absence of positive parental role models in the family.¹⁰⁶ Unsurprisingly, Soviet court documents often blamed either a lack of parental supervision or apathy within local collectives for misbehaving and criminal children. One court audit from the RSFSR, for instance, stated that “one of the main reasons for the growth of statutory or child rape cases in the republic is the lack of parental guidance and parental supervision.”¹⁰⁷ Parents were often blamed even when their children were victims of violent crimes. One 1963

¹⁰⁶ As scholars such as Jeff Hardy and Yana Skorobogatov point out, the reforms of the post-Stalin legal system included better treatment of inmates, focus on rehabilitation, a larger focus on “socialist legality” and an end to the wanton use of executions and state violence against prisoners. At the same time, as Miriam Dobson points out in her monograph, the Khrushchev period saw anxieties over the rise in crime, as rehabilitated Gulag prisoners returned home from Siberian Gulags in the late 1950s. Jeff Hardy, *The Gulag After Stalin: Redefining Punishment in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union, 1953-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform After Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Yana Skorobogatov, “Killing the Soviet Man: The Death Penalty in the Soviet Union, 1945-1991” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2018).

¹⁰⁷ GARF, f. A-353, op. 15, d. 71, l. 9.

court case record from the city of Ostrogozhsk in the RSFSR lamented that parents were too busy with work and left their kids with no supervision, leading their neighbor to “do whatever he wanted with their children.”¹⁰⁸ The court records showed no sympathy for the material situation of the parents, both of whom worked to support the family. Some philosophers of communist morality also blamed lazy parenting and parents who were not engaged enough with their children. Rather than suggesting an improvement in local policing and state-owned daycare organizations, the courts shifted the blame to the parents and their lack of responsibility.

As a result, local city soviets (councils) sometimes held lectures and evenings for parents on how to prevent and combat crime and absenteeism among Soviet youth. On January 1, 1966, a local collective in the city of L’viv in Western Ukraine held a meeting for local city residents, which included “conferences for parents on how to weed out and prevent crime committed by minors, conferences on questions of child-rearing and the enforcement of Soviet laws.”¹⁰⁹ The soviet also created a list of all unemployed teenagers and found employment for them, even assigning youth activists and *druzhiny* volunteers to watch over the teenagers and to ensure the teenagers attended their assigned jobs.¹¹⁰ The multiple seminars, meetings, and conferences, created and financed by local police and KGB organs suggest that local Party organs took seriously the task of eradicating crime among minors, going so far as to make direct interventions into the lives of Soviet teenagers and young adults.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “O merakh po usileniu bor’by s prestupnost’iu” (January 1, 1966), L’viv Oblast Archive f. R-3, op. 9, d. 226, l. 52.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 53.

Furthermore, *vospitanie* and child-rearing were the responsibility of multiple aspects of Soviet society, and state security organs such as the KGB sometimes worked with parents and teachers to shape young communists.

When collectives, educators, and parents all failed to do their job, the KGB, the police, and the courts worked as a last line of defense to steer children on the path of morality. Even before the introduction of the Moral Code, the courts, the police, and state security organs played an essential role in educating moral communists. Despite their ominous reputation, even state institutions such as the KGB sometimes saw themselves as benevolent educators doing many of the same tasks as doting teachers and parents. A KGB memo from October 14, 1959 from the city of Vinnitsia in the Ukrainian SSR stated that:

KGB organs are increasingly turning to prophylactic gatherings of an educational nature (*vospitatel'nogo obraza*) for Soviet citizens, who as a result of their immaturity commit anti-social, anti-state, and other incorrect deeds. These gatherings play a positive role from the perspective of reeducating the citizenry while simultaneously elevating the status of the KGB, whom the public now sees not only as a punisher, but as an educator.¹¹¹

The memo shows that the KGB served in more than an investigative and punitive role, arguing that KGB organs had an obligation to step in to educate the Soviet citizenry and to convince them to view the KGB as another tool in the education of Soviet children. The use of the language of immaturity demonstrates that to KGB organs, many young Soviet criminals were simply misguided and misled, waiting for the proper intervention of state security officials to set them on the correct path in life.

¹¹¹ “O profilaktike” (October 14, 1959), SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 926, l. 339.

Furthermore, the memo suggests that Soviet *vospitanie* simultaneously had both an educative, as well as a re-educative role for criminals.

The same memo even provided a concrete example of cases where the KGB could step in to prevent young Soviet citizens from making serious mistakes, such as the case of four Soviet teenagers whom the KGB arrested for conspiring to defect from the USSR. The KGB's investigation concluded that these teenagers were living an "amoral lifestyle... without any supervision from their parents." After the arrest, the eighteen-year-old organizer of the group stated, "I do not know what led me to almost make such a vile choice.... I really do recognize my mistake... but thanks to state security organs I am doing everything I can to fix it."¹¹² Although it is unclear whether the teenager was coerced into writing this note, its mention in internal KGB memos suggest that some KGB agents, at least, believed in the state apparatus and its ability to benevolently reeducate young Soviet citizens.

Other times, the rise in crime was blamed on the fact that children simply did not receive enough lectures on communist morality in school or at work. With regard to one case from Arkhangelsk involving two teenagers accused of assault, a court memo from 1964 from the Supreme Court of the RSFSR stated that "one colleague from the Arkhangelsk local court admitted that... neither the logging factory, nor the school which the two teenagers attended... had any lectures on the topic of the moral comportment of young Soviet people." While it is unlikely that lectures on communist morality alone would have prevented this crime, the court memo suggests

¹¹² Ibid., 340-341.

that prosecutors believed in the efficacy of these lectures to transform Soviet people into model communist citizens.¹¹³ Furthermore, the memo implied that in addition to schools and the courts, workplaces were also spaces for educating citizens in communist morality. When schools, families, and employers all failed to do their job, the state would finally step in to correct these collective mistakes. In other words, courts and the KGB were the final line of defense in rectifying mistakes in *vospitanie* and the project to create the New Socialist Person.

However, families, educators and workplace collectives had roles to play even within the criminal justice system. According to a memo from the Supreme Court of the USSR, “when courts consider cases in which a minor committed a crime, they do not pay enough attention to the educational aspect of the judicial process. Prosecutors do not call parents or factory collectives as witnesses in the case.”¹¹⁴ The memo not only suggests that the judicial system itself could play a didactic role in young Soviet citizens’ lives, but that various kinds of collectives continued to play an integral part in educating transgressors of morality within the criminal justice system. Some courts took this role seriously and even formed schools for teenage criminals. In the city of Dushanbe in the Tajik SSR, for instance, the local city court formed a so-called re-educational school for young transgressors where the students were taught how to become upstanding, moral communists.¹¹⁵ In the RSFSR, some courts assigned individual social workers to young criminals, who would be sure to apply “proper

¹¹³ GARF, f. A-353, op. 15, d. 71, l. 25.

¹¹⁴ GARF, f. R-9474, op. 1, d. 499, l. 5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

child-rearing strategies or other forced educational measures,” including forced internment in prison colonies for youths.¹¹⁶ Soviet courts would sometimes even take coercive steps to reeducate and rehabilitate young transgressors, suggesting that the notion of Soviet *vospitanie* was something in which all aspects of Soviet society, including the judicial process could be involved.

When young criminals were released from prisons or camps at the end of their sentence, collectives were expected to step in to ease each citizen’s transition into a more moral way of life and to prevent recidivism. In a memo from the Supreme Court from 1968, lawyers of the court wrote that “there are many cases in which the behavior of a teenager who received a suspended sentence was monitored by the courts, the underage crime division inspector of the police, a representative of the housing committee, and by work collectives... but circumstances which exert a negative influence on teenagers remained unchanged and often served as an impetus for repeat transgressions.”¹¹⁷ The memo implied that the recidivism of the teenager in question was not only the fault of the individual, but of the various collectives responsible for him. An article titled “How to Prevent Recidivism” published in the journal *Soviet Police* [*Sovetskaia militsiia*] in 1977 gave the example of a teenager named Sasha who was released on a suspended sentence while both of his parents were in prison. After being picked up by his parole officer, Sasha was taken to communal housing staffed with “people preoccupied with his wellbeing.”¹¹⁸ After

¹¹⁶ GARF, f. R-9474, op. 1, d. 499, l. 99.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹¹⁸ N. Iskrina, L. Grecheva, “Chtoby ne dopustit’ retsidiva,” *Sovetskaia militsiia* 5 (1977): 54.

receiving a job as a machinist, the workers of the local factory trained Sasha “as if he were their own son,” securing his position in the factory collective. According to the article, after Sasha’s father returned from prison, drunk and looking for his son, Sasha kicked his father out of the public house personally.¹¹⁹ The article implied that with the effort of multiple collectives – the police, along with housing and factory collectives – Sasha received the opportunity to become an upstanding member of Soviet society. The metaphor of family suggests that other collectives and social organizations could replace the family and would step in to positively shape Soviet young adults when biological parents were incapable of caring for or unable to properly raise their children. These notions of collective child-rearing further suggest that despite the disappearance of utopian ideals about replacements for the bourgeois family during the so-called Great Retreat of the 1930s, communist ideals regarding communal responsibility for tasks once confined to the domestic household still had some merit during the Late Socialist period.

Conclusion

In Soviet society of the 1950s through the 1970s, the anxieties surrounding the education of children and young adults into moral, upstanding communists reflected the paradoxes and contradictions of Late Socialist Soviet society. Soviet parents and Party members, many of whom had survived the trials and tribulations of the Second World War, perceived the stability and increased prosperity under Late Socialism as incompatible with the revolutionary struggle needed to bring about the promise of a

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

utopian communist future. As the Soviet Union failed to make any meaningful progress toward communism, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Soviet parents scapegoated the influence of Western media, bad parenting, or inadequate schooling for their children's perceived lack of revolutionary zeal. As a result, the Soviet state, with the help of committed Soviet citizens and informal collectives of neighbors and friends, sought to penetrate every intimate space of social relations such as the Soviet home and the family to implement strict norms of communist behavior. The goal of state institutions and these informal collectives was to weed out any sort of criminality or moral transgressions. Any small wrongdoing, however insignificant, needed to be rectified or punished in order to create citizens whose comportment and internal subjectivity were consistent with strict norms of communist morality. By this time, the project to create the New Socialist Person represented a substitute for building a truly communist society, as Soviet authorities and ordinary citizens worried that their countrymen were too lazy or complacent to take the project of building communism seriously. Ultimately, these tensions were a Late Socialist manifestation of much larger theoretical debates over how to build a communist society and how to transition from socialism to stateless communism. The shifts in discourse over the role of the family under communism from the utopian 1920s to the conservative "Great Retreat" of the 1930s and finally to the contradictions of developed socialism epitomized the anxieties over the lack of a clear path toward building a classless communist utopia where Soviet citizens would behave altruistically and morally without the coercive machinery of the state. This

contradictions in the Soviet system under Late Socialism manifested themselves in the Soviet judicial system as well, as I show in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Communist Morality, Late Socialism, and Crime

The 1969 film *The Diamond Arm* starts with the boss of a black-market criminal ring who attempts to smuggle jewelry into the USSR from abroad by hiding the illegal diamonds inside a cast. Through a series of comical mix-ups, an upstanding Soviet citizen, Semyon Gorbunkov, who is abroad for the first time, receives the cast with the diamonds. Upon discovering the illicit diamonds, Gorbunkov promptly calls the police and even aids with the investigation, ultimately facilitating the capture of the criminals alongside Soviet police. The comedic film, the plot of which resembles Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, became an instant hit in the USSR, ultimately selling more than seventy-six million tickets and becoming the second most-watched Soviet film of all time. Despite the humorous nature of the film, the message was clear: any Soviet citizen had a moral obligation not only to report crimes to Soviet police, but also to help with the investigation. The movie also implied that travel outside of the Soviet Union was filled with criminals, chaos and unforeseen dangers. In many ways, as I will show, the film reflected the expectations that Soviet authorities had for their citizens. Each citizen of the Soviet Union was called upon to defend Soviet morals and Soviet laws in the home, the workplace, the streets, and the courts.

This chapter explores the role of the correctional system in creating moral communists and argues that among adults, more so than among children, the Soviet court and prison systems played a key role in the construction of the new Soviet

person. After Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet leaders sought to preserve the legitimacy of the Soviet legal system after the Stalinist terror through the notion of "Socialist legality." These reforms, which included more transparency in the legal system and the end of clandestine arrests, aimed to create a more humane legal system in the USSR. As other scholars have shown, however, these reforms clashed with the anxieties over rising drunkenness and crime in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 60s.¹

These anxieties manifested themselves at the 22nd Party Congress in 1961. Having introduced the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism as well as the law "On Strengthening the Struggle with Persons Avoiding Socially Useful Work and Leading an Anti-Social, Parasitic Way of Life" on May 4 of that year, Nikita Khrushchev declared that "the formation of a new person happens not only under the educational influence of the Party, the Soviet state, labor unions... but also from the judicial system."² According to the Communist Party program published that year, "A society in the midst of building communism should not have crime and law-breaking. But since we do still have manifestations of crime, we must do all we can to punish people who commit actions dangerous to society."³ Such punishment enabled "the maintenance of socialist public order," which in turn "aids in the construction of a

¹ Nancy Adler, *Keeping Faith with the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*; Stephen F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin* (Exeter, NH: Publishing Works, 2010); Amir Weiner, "The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics," *Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 2 (June 2006): 333–76.

² "Foreword," *Bulletin of the Supreme Court of the USSR* 3 (1962), 7.

³ Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *22nd Communist Party Congress*, Volume 3 (Moscow: 1961), 307.

communist future.”⁴ These Communist Party directives focused not only on building moral communists, but punishing those who failed to produce “socially useful work” and were “parasites” and “freeloaders” who lived off the labor of their fellow Soviet citizens.

As a result, while *vospitanie* played an important role in the construction of new Soviet citizens, the courts were expected to play a decisive role in the reeducation (*perevospitanie*) of adults and the process of shaping them into moral communists. In some cases, this was the only way to rehabilitate criminals from their erroneous ways and prepare them for life in a communist society. As a monthly bulletin from the Supreme Court of the USSR from 1963 put it, “The judicial system and the courts are especially important in the context of the construction of communism.... For the expansion of communist consciousness and the liquidation of remnants of bourgeois psychology and morality... we must use the legal system.”⁵ The courts and prisons served as vanguards of communist morality, meant to simultaneously punish and educate transgressors of these norms.

In this chapter, building on the evidence presented in Chapter Two about the role of collectives in court cases involving Soviet youth, I argue that the boundaries between the formal and informal legal systems within the Soviet Union were often blurry, as citizens’ organizations and local collectives cooperated with legal structures to punish transgressions of communist morality. Using the legal and the penal

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Foreword,” *Bulletin of the Supreme Court of the USSR*, 7.

systems, I trace the oscillations within discourses of punishment and morality, exposing the contradictions of using state structures to build a stateless society. While the use of collectives to punish criminals aligned with Marxist ideology, the continued presence of crime undermined Soviet citizens' efficacy in the socialist project's ability to eradicate crime after fifty years of state socialism. Furthermore, the Soviet state could not reach consensus on a coherent policy on fighting crime, pivoting between more humanist notions of rehabilitation and promises of severe punishment for crime. As a result, I trace both the continuities and breaks within the project to create the New Socialist Person under Late Socialism, as the Soviet state's fluctuations between different approaches to punishment reflected its inability to move forward toward a communist society in a meaningful way.

Finally, I explore the tense dynamic between individual and collective interests in this chapter, arguing that lack of meaningful social progress toward a bright communist future led to ambiguities surrounding the role of the individual and the collective in constructing a moral subject. Individuals within collectives bickered over the extent of their interventions into the daily lives of ordinary citizens. While some zealously participated in collective meetings and criminal court trials, others scoffed at the notion that they had a moral obligation to reeducate Soviet citizens, suggesting that decades of state socialism did not always lead citizens to put the collective interest over personal needs. This tension between the individual and the collective epitomized Late Socialist anxieties about the role of the state in the daily lives of Soviet citizens and the ability of the Soviet state to muster its citizens to build

communism. As multifaceted reforms of the Soviet legal system, including both “tough on crime” reforms, as well as more “humanistic” approaches, failed to completely eradicate crime, Soviet citizens and Party members began to worry that crime was an inherent part of the Soviet socialist system. The reliance on collectives, as well as the lack of clear guidance on how to fight crime from Party organs lead to ambiguity and disagreements over proper forms of behavior, as not all Soviet citizens were equally enthusiastic in enforcing the norms of proper behavior. For many Soviet citizens, the continued presence of crime and immoral behavior epitomized the lack of any meaningful momentum toward communism, as predicted in Lenin’s *The State and Revolution*, a work read by millions of Soviet citizens.⁶

Structure and Philosophy of Soviet Law

Unlike the Western capitalist system, the Soviet legal system predicted that one day humanity will no longer need coercion and state violence, once society has achieved communism. As Lenin wrote in *The State and Revolution*:

Only in Communist Society, when the resistance of the capitalists has finally been broken, when the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no longer any classes, only then does the State disappear, and one can speak of freedom. . . from capitalist slavery... people will gradually become accustomed to the observance of elementary rules of social life, known for centuries, repeated for thousands of years in all sermons. They will become accustomed to their observance without force,

⁶ As Rhiannon Lee Dowling pointed out in her dissertation, Brezhnev’s so-called “War on Crime” failed to eradicate crime in Soviet society, creating worries that during Late Socialism, crime was an extricable reflection of the faults of Soviet society. Rhiannon Lee Dowling, “Brezhnev’s War on Crime: The Criminal in Soviet Society, 1963-1984 (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2017).

without constraint, without subjugation, without the special apparatus of compulsion called the State.⁷

In other words, Lenin argued that in a communist society, humans will internalize communist ideals and obviate the need for any punitive political structures. The role of the socialist judicial system then was to educate Soviet citizens and prepare them to voluntarily act on communist principles without the threat of coercion. According to official ideology, if the judicial system played its role accordingly, much like the state, the legal system would eventually fulfill its destiny of planned obsolescence.

Communist philosophers of morality claimed that the ultimate goal of a socialist legal system was to create moral citizens for the construction of a utopian society; its purpose thus deviated significantly from its capitalist counterpart. As Soviet historian Richard Pipes argued in his 2001 work *Communism: A Brief History*, the Soviet legal system was an arm of the Party, and courts were often an extension of the Soviet government.⁸ By this definition, crime was not an infraction of the law, but any action which could threaten the Soviet state. As a result, Soviet public trials were yet another forum for agitation and propaganda of official Soviet ideology, and Soviet courts meted out harsh punishments for seemingly benign crimes. such as hooliganism, which were viewed as a threat to the larger project of constructing moral Soviet citizens.

⁷ V.I. Lenin, Chapter 5 in *State and Revolution* (Lenin Internet Archive, 1991), <https://www.marxists.org/ebooks/lenin/state-and-revolution.pdf> .

⁸ Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History* (New York: Modern Library Chronicles, 2003).

Before I delve further into the topic of crime in the USSR, it is first necessary to explain the structure of Soviet courts. As American legal scholar Albert Robbins argued in 1933, in comparison to the Western legal system, the crux of which is founded on the principles of ownership and private property, the Soviet legal system ostensibly did away with injustices based on ownership of land.⁹ He went on to say that the “Marxian conception of law is that it is an instrument of control in the hands of the ruling class. It is considered that in capitalistic countries the law is one of the means by which the property-owning and exploiting class protects its privileges.” The author went on to say that, “In Russia, both in theory and in practice, law is an instrument of control for and by the proletariat. Law and courts become class weapons.”¹⁰ While Robbins doubted the impartiality of the Soviet court system, his analysis of the political purpose of Soviet justice was consistent with Soviet legal writings—the source basis of his information. In theory, Soviet courts sought to serve proletarian justice, based on class principles in Marxist political theory. However, this was not always the reality.¹¹

The Soviet legal system consisted of a multitude of courts of different levels. By the 1950s, at the lowest levels comrade courts punished minor transgressions such as petty theft and public drunkenness. These courts were largely informal, often consisted of coworkers and neighbors, and mostly had the power to shame criminals

⁹ Albert Robbins, “The Soviet Legal System,” *American Bar Association Journal* 19, no. 11 (1933), 657.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Despite the fact that the Soviet legal code underwent significant reform during the 1960s to curtail the power of clandestine Stalin-era courts and the secret police, within official discourse Soviet courts continued to be proletarian, communist courts.

and issue small fines. As one internal Party memo from L'viv in the Ukrainian SSR described them in 1961, "Comrade courts in the factories, Party organizations, institutes and collective farms... contribute to the education of the citizenry in the spirit of communist love for labor... create a feeling of collectivism and comradely mutual assistance.... Employees of the prosecutor's office constantly help with the work of these comrade courts."¹²

Within the formal legal system, the people's courts, usually staffed by Party members and Soviet intelligentsia with law degrees, were the courts of first instance and handled the vast majority of criminal and civil offenses. These courts doled out punishment and sentencing, ranging from fines to long-term incarceration. The structure of the higher courts was similar to the people's courts, and appeals were first referred to the regional court (*Oblastnoi Sud*), then to the Supreme Court of each respective republic, and finally to the Soviet Supreme Court in Moscow. However, the boundary between work collectives, comrade courts, and official Soviet courts was often blurry, as these official and unofficial institutions worked in tandem.

Official Discourses and Late Socialist Criminality

Within the framework of earlier Marxist discourses on communist morality, amorality and criminality were inseparably interlinked, since the legal system was to help create the moral communists who would guide the way for a stateless communist society. However, following Lenin, the legal system itself – at least its coercive functions – was only a temporary measure on the road to communism. As a

¹² L'viv Oblast Archive, f. R-3, op. 8, d. 266, l. 88.

Philosophy PhD candidate from the Gorky Ural State University in Sverdlovsk in the RSFSR argued in a 1963 dissertation, “Morality and the law have separate futures. Communism, which is currently being successfully built in our country, assumes the creation of subjects for whom the fulfillment of their communal duties is an internal need, a habit. Under communism, coercion will cease to become a necessity. Morality, however, will only reach its zenith under communism.”¹³ The author went on to say that “The connection which exists between morality and the law is not a simple one. It is an interplay of the two factors where we not only see the influence of morality on the law, but the impact of law on morality.”¹⁴ According to this particular philosophy student, the link between the legal system and communist morality was an indispensable aspect of Soviet law. This law based on communist morality stood in sharp contrast to the bourgeois legal system, which often ignored the class element of morality and law. In agreement with Marx, the student argued that the class element of a bourgeois capitalist society meant that any legal process was systematically discriminatory against the lower classes of society, who were sometimes reduced to stealing and crime as a result of their socio-economic position.¹⁵ According to this particular student, the creation of a moral subject was an essential part of building communism, as only when Soviet citizens fully internalized the main tenets of the Moral Code would Soviet society be able to advance to the next stage of communist historical development.

¹³ N.A. Trofimov, “Moral’ i pravo v ikh sootnoshenii pri sotsializme,” (PhD diss., Ural State University, 1963), 6.

¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

In the meantime, however, directives from the Soviet Supreme Court and the Supreme Soviet often called for tough punishments for criminals as a stopgap solution for the continuing presence of amorality in Soviet society. A 1966 directive from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR stated that “in the context of the expansive construction of communism, manifestations of anti-social behavior such as hooliganism become more intolerable.... We need to create an atmosphere in which each case of hooliganism is decisively punished by state organs and Soviet society.”¹⁶ In response to this directive, the Supreme Court issued a statement stating that “Soviet citizens, who are in the process of constructing a communist society, call for the abolition of crime and demand that all state and social organizations fight crime and criminals.”¹⁷ In comparison to discourses on crime before the Russian Revolution, the primacy of the courts in eradicating crime in Soviet society suggested a retreat not only from revolutionary ideals of the 1920s, but also spoke to social anxieties over crime in the USSR during Late Socialism. Crime was not simply a manifestation of anti-social behavior, but an affront to the Marxist-Leninist project of creating an egalitarian, classless society. Ultimately, crimes such as hooliganism and anti-social behavior were politically indistinguishable, as both endangered the state’s project to build a bright communist future and a new socialist person.

¹⁶ “Ukaz verkhovnogo prezidiuma SSSR ob usilenii otvetstvennosti za khuliganstvo,” *Bulletin of the Supreme Court of the USSR* 4 (1966), 7.

¹⁷ “Za dal’neishee povyshenie urovnia sudebnoi deiatel’nosti,” *Bulletin of the Supreme Court of the USSR* 5 (1966), 3.

Punishment, Morality, and the Socialist Collective Under Khrushchev

Soviet courts and Party organs believed in the efficacy and the ability of the communist collective to re-educate the individual, often placing the burden of reintegrating adult transgressors into Soviet society onto neighborhood committees and ordinary workers. An internal memo from the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1960 stated that “in order to educate Soviet citizens in the spirit of social duty and an undeviating commitment to communist morality.... Society has self-made organs [neighborhood collectives, informal organizations], which are playing an increasingly more important role.”¹⁸ The memo went on to say that, “as experience has shown, the practice of handing criminals over for reeducation by their peers has proven useful, as an overwhelming number of these criminals have not committed any other crimes.”¹⁹ In other words, Soviet party organs and the courts entrusted local collectives and unofficial organizations with the project of shaping moral communists, working with local collectives to create a symbiotic relationship between official and unofficial organs. This collaboration between the courts and collectives under Late Socialism represented a departure from the clandestine courts of the Stalin period, as Khrushchev-era notions of “socialist legality” meant simultaneously active participation of citizens in enforcing the law through attendance of trials and neighborhood patrols.

¹⁸ GARF, f. A-353, op. 15, d. 60, l. 42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43

However, despite calls for “socialist legality” during the Khrushchev period, Soviet authorities harshly condemned any manifestations of immoral behavior, using the Anti-Parasite Law of 1961 to sentence individuals convicted of crimes such as hooliganism and public drunkenness to serve time in a penal colony.²⁰ For instance, in 1961, after a man was arrested for failing to perform “socially useful labor” in the city of Drogobich in Ukraine, local authorities conducted a re-education of local “parasites and freeloaders” after “judicial petitions and notes from meetings from workers demanding criminal punishment for freeloaders.” One of these so-called freeloaders was accused “of failing to work, drinking, beating his wife and children, and terrorizing his neighbors,” while another “drank and lived a hooligan lifestyle.” At a community meeting following the arrest, which according to the document was attended by over five hundred people, community members “condemned the parasites and decided to ask the prosecutor’s office to prosecute these criminals to the full extent of the law. [These individuals] were subsequently arrested and handed over to the court.”²¹ In an ominous and quasi-religious reaction to this trial, the local town newspaper *Soviet Word (Radians’ke slovo)* even published an article titled “Let the Earth Burn Underneath the Feet of the Parasites,” condemning the immoral actions of

²⁰ Again, as Jeff Hardy, Miriam Dobson, and Brian Lapierre pointed out, the reform of the penal system under Khrushchev meant not only a focus on a more human punitive structure, but also worries over the increasing crime rates and the need for tougher punishments for so-called “freeloaders” and “parasites.” Hardy, *The Gulag After Stalin*; Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer*; Lapierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia*.

²¹ Lviv Oblast Archive, f. R-3, op. 8, d. 266, l. 92. As scholars such as Alexei Yurchak have noted, high turnout for these meetings may have had a performative function. However, these performative functions reinforced the logic and mechanism of state institutions, reifying them in the subjectivities of Soviet citizens. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*.

these individuals.²² The author of this article praised the work of the local police, writing that “while investigating criminal matters, investigators in the L’viv oblast paid special attention to crimes committed by individuals who fail to perform socially useful labor.”²³ Despite this, the author stressed that “we are doing important work in the reeducation (*perevospitaniie*) of those individuals who, despite living a parasitical lifestyle... can be straightened out under the influence of the collective.”²⁴ It seems that re-education in this case could mean anything from public lectures to time served in a penal colony, giving the authorities a wide array of tools to punish “parasites.” The dramatic language of the publications in response to the arrests suggests an anxiety surrounding the drunkenness and crime of the early 1960s in the Soviet Union, serving as a warning for other so-called “parasites.”

The outrage surrounding so-called hooligan behavior, parasitism, and drinking were emblematic of the anxieties of Late Socialism, when crimes such as public drunkenness and lack of “socially useful employment” were equated to other more serious transgressions such as rape and murder, as both threatened progress toward a communist utopia. As all kinds of crime were equally obstructive to communist historical progress, the use of collectives and city soviets to dole out punishment, rather than the courts, was consistent with socialist goals of having society undertake collective punishment and social reeducation. At the same time, during the Khrushchev period the courts only took recommendations from collectives into

²² Lviv Oblast Archive, f. R-3, op. 8, d. 266, l. 92.

²³ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94

consideration, ultimately using the court's own authority to sentence Soviet citizens to prison time in state correctional facilities. During the Khrushchev period, calls for socialist legality still resulted in tough punishments for criminal and immoral behavior, albeit in an ostensibly more transparent manner than under Stalin, one which conscripted both willing and unwilling members of Soviet society into the process of doling out punishment.

Within the context of the Moral Code and the Anti-Parasite Law, transgressions ranging from selling shoes to crimes as serious as rape were treated as a failing of communist morality and were included on the spectrum of social parasitism, or failing to have a so-called "meaningful job." In the city of Strii in Western Ukraine in 1961, for instance, a woman was condemned by her factory collective for "speculating" and for living a "parasitical and antisocial lifestyle" after she resold some shoes and household items which she had bought in another town.²⁵ In L'viv, a forty-four-year-old woman was convicted and tried by a comrade court for living a life of debauchery and lascivious behavior.²⁶ Even very serious crimes such as rape were often blamed on the fact that the individuals who committed them were not given enough lectures on morality and on communist political theory. When some construction workers raped a woman on the way home from the movie theater in May of 1960 in Kyiv, the subsequent investigation determined that the young men who committed the crime "lacked discipline and moral character... as well as political

²⁵ Ibid., 92.

²⁶ Ibid., 93.

education.”²⁷ After a short trial and a letter condemning the men’s actions from their respective work collective, all the men involved were sentenced to ten years in a penal colony. While crimes such as re-selling shoes and rape are not comparable, in the Soviet legal system they all fell on the spectrum of transgressions of communist morality and social parasitism to be resolved by reeducation (*perevospitanie*) through punitive or collective means. While the speculator presumably did not serve ten years in a prison colony, the trial itself suggests that the authorities took crimes such as speculation, which was seen as a remnant of “bourgeois, capitalist ideology” as a serious threat to the establishment of a communist moral order. Before taking a more detailed look at the Late Socialist legal and penal systems, however, it is important to take a look at the changes under Brezhnev and the shifts under discourses of so-called “mature socialism” and “humanist socialism.”

Developed Socialism and Humanist Socialism

The term “mature socialism” (*razvitoi sotsializm*) first appeared in *Pravda* on December 21, 1966, one year before the 50th anniversary of the Russian revolution. In an article titled “Regarding the construction of a developed socialist society,” Soviet writer Fedor Burlatskii stated that “the construction of developed socialism represents an important step toward the construction of communism.”²⁸ Burlatskii criticized other communist states such as the People’s Republic of China for “forcing the transition to communism without undergoing the necessary transitional

²⁷ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 397, l. 57

²⁸ Fedor Burlatskii, “O stroitel’stve razvitoi sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva,” *Pravda* No. 355 (December 21, 1966), 4.

periods.”²⁹ On an official level, in the mid to late 1960s mature socialism also meant a more friendly, humanist socialism without the mass surveillance and arrests of the Stalin and Khrushchev periods. Despite the article’s proclaimed loyalties to the ideas of Marx and Lenin, the overall message of Burlatskii’s article was clear: while communism would happen eventually, mature socialism was here to stay for the foreseeable future. Conveniently ignoring Khrushchev’s six-year-old promise of building communism by 1980, by the 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 1967, the Soviet state was firmly entrenched in the period of “mature” or “developed” socialism. Instead of communism, authorities now promised a more “humane” and “friendly” socialism after the Stalinist mass terrors and mutual surveillance under Khrushchev.

Despite the declared shifts, Brezhnev-era morality continued to draw on the guidelines established by the Moral Code and the Anti-Parasite law. Furthermore, communist morality under Brezhnev became a substitute for building a truly communist society. The apparent lack of progress toward the construction of a communist society coincided with increased concerns around building a moral society. An article from 1967 from the newspaper *Soviet Moldavia* called for “new moral forms of behavior must contain a sense of social responsibility, mutual help, and comradely help in struggle.”³⁰ Another Communist Party memo from October 1977 from the Moldavian SSR supported Brezhnev’s calls for reaffirming communist

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ M. Zhuravkov, “Sovetskii chelovek,” *Sovetskaia Moldaviia* (November 24, 1967), 2-3.

morality. Just like Brezhnev, the memo called for the 14th Party Congress of the Moldavian SSR to implement “collectivism” and “humanist socialism.”³¹ Despite the ostensible turn away from punitive state measures, Brezhnev-era morality continued to borrow from the Moral Code and its calls for social responsibility and altruism.

As the discourse of a bright communist future in the USSR was quickly replaced by the language of the developed socialist present, Soviet publications shifted from promising communism by 1980 to praising the achievements of already existing socialism. In the Moldavian newspaper *Kishinev at Night*, an article published in 1968 titled “Cultural Revolution” argued that “socialism has opened a new page in the in the history of world culture.... Now all the achievements of technology and societal advancements have become the common property of the people.”³² In a 1975 article in *Moldavian Communist*, Soviet pedagogue L. Chuguevskaia wrote, “In a society building socialism and communism which has created a classless social structure, there are no objective reasons for conflict between different generations of workers.”³³ In *Soviet Moldavia*, Soviet journalist M. Zhuravkov stated that, “In a society which has finally achieved collectivism, where collectivism is manifested everywhere, separate individuals have all kinds of opportunities for personal growth.”³⁴ The article called for the “self-affirmation of morality,” stating that “in our country, the model for this moral person already

³¹ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 45, d. 61, l. 8.

³² K. Bronich, “Kulturnaia revoliutsiia,” *Vecherniy Kishinev* no. 31 (February 6, 1968), 2.

³³ L. Chuguevskaia, “Klassovoe vospitanie molodezhi,” *Moldavskii kommunist* No. 11 (November 1975), 57.

³⁴ M. Zhuravkov, “Sovetskii chelovek,” 2-3.

exists.”³⁵ The use of the past tense in this passage suggests that many of the promises of the Soviet state had already been achieved. Instead of promising further achievements and further forms of social progress, the newspaper article was celebrating the achievements of already-existing socialism. Furthermore, the invocation of the language of collectivism, rather than socialism, suggests a new stage in the evolution of Soviet society in which Soviet citizens were finally one step closer to communism.

The shift to so-called developed or mature socialism resulted in only slight changes to the discourses on communist morality, as the Soviet state oscillated between the so-called “war on crime” and a more humane approach to punishment.³⁶ On the one hand, Brezhnev called for fundamentally new tenets of morality, arguing for “collectivist socialism,” a collectivist and social understanding of morality. To Brezhnev, collectivist socialism meant “the increased responsibility of the individual before the collective, and an increased responsibility of the collective toward each individual member.”³⁷ While this may seem similar to Khrushchev’s Moral Code, collectivist socialism implied fewer punitive punishments than those doled out by the comrade courts of the Khrushchev period. Furthermore, Brezhnev also called for a “humanist socialism,” a term which has been associated largely with Gorbachev’s Perestroika period of the 1980s.³⁸ In the 1970s, Brezhnev’s promises of humanist socialism meant “the fight against any manifestations of injustice... and creating a

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Dowling, “Brezhnev’s War on Crime.”

³⁷ Vladimir Golikov, *The Soviet Union- an Informational Guide* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1975), 375.

³⁸ Ibid.

political and moral atmosphere of trust toward the individual,” ideals which stood in sharp contrast to the suspicion and mass arrests of the earlier Soviet period.³⁹

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Brezhnev attempted to reconcile Khrushchev’s strict laws on parasitism and freeloading with a more just, humanist socialism, according to which the state and state organs took a more lenient perspective on Soviet citizens and their everyday transgressions. To Brezhnev, this suggested a departure from mass arrests, comrade courts, and mutual suspicion among Soviet citizens. While the legal system would continue to play an integral part in the construction of communism, Brezhnev sought to create a more trusting, humane, and more optimistic society based on a more positive relationship between the citizens and the state.⁴⁰ Brezhnev also seemed to call for an end to progress at the expense of human lives and human suffering, with a focus on the individual and individual needs. However, official publications reveal the tensions of Late Socialist Soviet society, simultaneously endorsing a more humane Soviet socialism, while also arguing for a stricter enforcement of Soviet law by the courts and the police when Brezhnev called for tougher punishments for criminals and “parasites”.

Soviet publications sought to portray humanist socialism as a natural outgrowth of the social relations under developed socialism. In 1977, *Soviet Police* stated that, “The sixty-year old history of the Soviet Union is a history of humanist deeds. The abolition of private property, the end of all types of exploitation, the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Despite Brezhnev’s promises, the USSR under his tenure went in another direction, with the rehabilitation of Stalin and the suppression of dissidents.

institutionalization of common ownership of property and goods, and liquidation of material wants... are the brightest examples of humanism.”⁴¹ The article went on to say that “Socialism has given real guarantees to human existence: the right to work, rest, education, free medical help, and social benefits. From these material conditions we have the essence of humanist relations in society... where citizens are judged [not by class], but by their adherence to norms of humanist morality and their contribution to society.”⁴² According to this publication, a just, humanist society could only exist under conditions provided by developed socialism. Furthermore, in Soviet publications, the inherently just world of socialism was juxtaposed to the capitalist world, which by default was epitomized by exploitation and inequality.

To reconcile the contradictions of the continued need for punitive legal structures with the calls for humanist socialism, some publications even blamed the restlessness and misbehavior of Soviet youth on the successes of developed socialism. An article from *Moldavian Communist* from 1975 stated that “the youth living in a period of mature socialism from birth regards the high living standard and social opportunities of our socialist society as a given.... With this, some youth are becoming... egotistical, entitled, and unable to value the labor of parents.”⁴³ This suggests that during the late socialist period, the moral failings of the socialist state were paradoxically blamed on the successes of Soviet society and developed socialism. While this may signify a lack of self-awareness on the part of Soviet

⁴¹ V. Diunin, “Real’nyi gumanizm,” *Sovetskaia militsiia* no. 5 (May 1977), 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Chuguevskaia, “Klassovoe vospitanie molodezhi,” 59.

authorities, blaming moral failures on the success, rather than failure, of the Soviet state was consistent with the ideology of developed socialism. Many government officials argued that during developed socialism the state could no longer be culpable for the moral failings of its citizens. These sorts of arguments resembled the predictions made by early communist scholars, who argued that the transformation in the means of production would eradicate crime. Following this kind of logic, Soviet scholars argued that crime and immoral behavior could not be the fault of state organs or the Party apparatus, but rather that some individuals had failed to transform themselves enough under socialism.

In Late Socialist Soviet society any moral transgressions were therefore blamed on the individual, on local collectives, or on the remnants of the capitalist past. In court memos from the RSFSR, a clerk for the Supreme Soviet wrote that “as court practice has shown with regard to these things [sex crimes, rape, theft], the remnants of the past (*perezhitki proshlogo*) in the consciousness of the people in our country are the main reason we see crimes such as rape.”⁴⁴ In cases of serious crimes such as theft, rape, and murder, parents, collectives, and sometimes even victims themselves were often blamed before the state took any responsibility. This suggests a significant ideological shift, where Soviet citizens and their collectives were now solely responsible for moral comportment and behavior.

Conversations on how to eradicate crime extended into university conferences, where participants took part in the calls for tougher punishments for

⁴⁴ GARF, f. A-353, op. 15, d. 71, l. 4.

criminals. At a conference titled “Communist Morality and the Rule of Law” in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1979, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, Haidar Aliev, declared that “lawlessness, rule-breaking, and the fight to combat crime are not only judicial questions. These are simultaneously social and moral questions, because at the end of the day the conversation is about the fight for the individual.”⁴⁵ At the same conference, First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Yuri Churbanov echoed this sentiment when he stated that “the new type of Soviet person, their communist morality and worldview, are reaffirmed in a constant and uncompromising battle against remnants of the past and with antipodes of communist morality.”⁴⁶ The First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court of the USSR, S.I. Gusev, also spoke out in support of Churbanov, stating that “in the formation of a socialist consciousness, without which it is impossible to imagine the life of Soviet people, the inculcation of respect toward the law holds a special place, fostering a culture of uncompromising obedience toward the law.... The best tool to build a socialist consciousness is the public responsibility of the courts.”⁴⁷ The speaker went on to say that “through the trial process it is not only possible to rectify the crime, but to demonstrate the democratic character of Soviet laws, to show their impartiality and high level of morality and the deep connection between law and communist morality.”⁴⁸ In other words, trials were not simply an opportunity to punish

⁴⁵ Iu. Churbanov, “Povyshat’ effektivnost’ bor’by s antipodami kommunisticheskoi nravstvennosti,” *Kommunisticheskaiia nravstvennost’ i pravoporiadok* (Moskva: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1979), 9-10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

transgressors of morality, but also to advertise the benevolence and fairness of Soviet courts and of the Soviet political system. The presence at this conference of high-ranking Party members, along with the content of their reports, suggests that Soviet law, crime, and communist morality were all seen as interlinked, and that moral Soviet citizens were expected to unquestioningly follow the law. The use of the language of punishment and obedience at a conference on communist morality epitomized the tensions within the project to create the New Soviet Person, clearly contradicting earlier Marxist claims that the need for any sort of coercion would dissipate under both socialism and communism. By the 1970s, the Soviet state struggled to synthesize two contradictory ideas: the need to severely punish any form of crime hampering the pursuit of a stateless communist future while promoting a more humane form of socialism.

While Brezhnev called for more humane treatment of prisoners, he also argued for tough punishments for transgressors. In a speech to the 24th Party Congress of the CPSU in 1971, he stated that “it is impossible to make advances in the great task of building communism... without advancing the person themselves.”⁴⁹ At the same time, however, Brezhnev pointed out that, “Without a high level of culture, education, social consciousness and personal maturity, communism is impossible.”⁵⁰ Drawing on Khrushchev-era language on parasitism and freeloading, Brezhnev stated that, “Communist morality and the communist worldview manifest themselves in a

⁴⁹ Golikov, *The Soviet Union*, 366.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

constant fight with the remnants of the past. We cannot have a victory of communist morality without destroying greediness, bribery, and freeloading (*stiazhatel'stvo, vziatochnichestvo, i tuneyadstvo*).”⁵¹ The martial language suggested that the process of building communism and the New Person would require destruction through the use of coercive state structures.

Popular media such as film often delved into topics of building the New Socialist Person. A 1977 televised documentary film from the Moldavian SSR asked: “How do we make a moral person?” Arguing that social relations in Soviet society determine a person’s character, the movie also asked, “Where, in our humanist society, do we find moral freaks (*nравstvennye urody*)?”⁵² The directors of this documentary stated that the goal of the film was to explore when a person’s individual morality (*nравstvennost'*) forms, and the interventions society can take to form a righteous individual. The continued presence of so-called “moral freaks” during the Late Socialist period might point to the failures of the Soviet system to shape the consciousness of Soviet citizens, as the rising rates of crime in the Soviet Union throughout the 1970s were seen as largely incompatible with the socialist system. Brezhnev’s punitive language, however, also reflects deeper tensions and anxieties regarding the shortcomings of Soviet state socialism, as fifty years after the establishment of the Soviet Union, the USSR was not any closer to the promised communist utopia. Furthermore, the oscillations between promises of humanist

⁵¹ Materials from the 24th Party Congress (Moscow: Politizdat, 1971), 109, http://istmat.info/files/uploads/52749/24_sezd_chast_1_1971.pdf

⁵² Moldovan Archive of National History, f. R-3343, op. 2, d. 29, l. 2.

socialism and threats of tough punishments for criminals suggest a lack of meaningful ideological policy on the part of state authorities. Party leaders could not create a coherent approach on how to create moral communists while simultaneously eradicating transgressors of communist morality; in the process, they revealed a lack of any meaningful social progress toward communism in Soviet society.

Despite this, Soviet publications continued to explain the persistent presence of crime as individual failures, rather than a failure of the Soviet state. In an article from 1973, the Soviet Communist Party newspaper *Pravda* argued, “With the victory of socialism we have eradicated the core reasons for crime, such as the exploitation of one individual by another, [material] deprivation of the masses, and anti-human bourgeois ideology.”⁵³ The article went on to say that “under socialism, crime is not a form of social rebellion against the status quo, but is instead a result of a moral deformation of the individual or lack of awareness.” In other words, individuals who committed crimes were either simply ignorant or morally disfigured. According to Soviet publications, unlike capitalist societies, in which crime was a direct result of the class system, manifestations of crime under socialism were incompatible with official ideology. At the same time, the continued presence of crime continued to present a concrete ideological problem to Soviet authorities and threatened to undermine promises of a transition to a stateless, harmonious society.

The Brezhnev Collective and Punishment as Public Spectacle

⁵³ N. Shelkov, “Na storone poriadka,” *Pravda* no. 76 (March 13, 1973), 3.

Factory, school, and village collectives were encouraged to dole out punishments and to eradicate these “moral freaks.” When Soviet citizens were convicted for anti-Soviet agitation and for expressing dissatisfaction with Soviet power, many of their peers expressed jubilation upon the conviction of the transgressors, suggesting that humanist socialism. In the city of Lutsk in Western Ukraine in 1965, for instance, two former educators at the Lutsk Pediatric Institute were arrested and convicted at a public trial for spreading anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation. In subsequent interviews with the KGB, one doctor present at the trial stated that “it is difficult to imagine that in 1965, people who were raised and educated by Soviet power occupy themselves with anti-Soviet activities, instead of expressing their gratitude [toward Soviet power]. These scoundrels must be punished.”⁵⁴ Some citizens present at the trial also expressed their discontent, stating that “the fault here lies not only with the Party organization, where they [the educators] work, but the entire institute collective. Many members of the collective knew about the illegal activities of their peers but failed to act.”⁵⁵ These KGB memos suggest that some Soviet citizens expected tough punishments for those who criticized the Soviet Union. The responses from trial witnesses suggest that the collective could have intervened to prevent the incorrect behavior of the two educators. Furthermore, some Soviet citizens viewed crime as the failure of an entire collective, and not of simply a particular individual, suggesting that humanist

⁵⁴ SBU Archive, Kyiv, Ukraine, f. 16, op. 1, d. 954, l. 89.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

socialism was not always a priority for ordinary citizens, who demanded tough punishment for criminals and transgressors.

Courts often consulted collectives when doling out punishments for transgressors. In the village of Duba in Western Ukraine, for instance, a former teacher named V. was arrested in 1966 for anti-Soviet agitation and for spreading anti-Soviet literature.⁵⁶ Upon arrest, the local KGB organs decided to try the accused with the active participation of the local collective, rather than trying him in a closed Soviet court.⁵⁷ The internal KGB memo stated that, “with the permission of the Ivano-Frankovsk regional committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Duba village club conducted a mass meeting with 400 residents of the community.”⁵⁸ After condemning V.’s actions and declaring his guilt in front of his peers, the local prosecutor declared to the local villagers that, “the Party and the government stress the importance of society and peers in reeducation (*perevospitanie*) of citizens... because of this it is important to know the opinion of the collective where the transgressor lived and worked before doling out the appropriate punishment.”⁵⁹ During the trial, the local community leaders, teachers, and even the transgressor’s own father spoke out against the “anti-Soviet, bourgeois nationalist conduct” of V., stressing the importance of the friendship of the peoples of the USSR and the need for education of Soviet youth in the spirit of Soviet patriotism.⁶⁰ Another villager

⁵⁶ Ibid., 248.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 250.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

critiqued V. for his selfishness and his supposedly conceited behavior, stating that, “By going on this path, V did not think that he would have to stand in front of people and defend himself. Furthermore, he forgot that at home, his grandmother, mother, and father are waiting for him to bring home bread... I think that after today, V. will turn a new page in his life and will live like millions of our Soviet people.”⁶¹ In support, another local school teacher declared that “in a time when our collective strives to educate the young generation in the spirit of communism, V. was thinking of something else. He has forgotten what he was taught in Soviet school.”⁶² During Late Socialism, trials became public affairs, with entire villages invited to participate. Party organs, the KGB, and the courts were more than willing to turn transgressors over to the collectives for a more personal and ultimately invasive trial, where a person’s character, past behavior, and moral characteristics were explored by peers, co-workers, and neighbors. In some ways, the collective trial of this citizen aligned with Marxist predictions of collective punishment and the blurring of lines between official and unofficial aspects of the legal system. At the same time, the continued presence of crime and the severe punishment suggested that the lack of a coherent message on how to punish transgressors from Moscow led ordinary collectives to enact their own draconian forms of punishments without any meaningful guidance.

While local collectives could punish, they also had the capacity to forgive, and the ability to bring transgressors into the fold of ordinary “Soviet people.” In the case

⁶¹ Ibid., 251

⁶² Ibid., 252

mentioned above, after V. displayed his sincere regret before the community, the village collective requested that V. not be arrested and officially tried within a People's Court, a request which the KGB granted. The local villagers agreed to social reeducation (*obshchestvennoe perevospitanie*) of the transgressor under the condition that if he were to commit another crime, he would be tried for all his previous crimes as well. The KGB memo concluded that "the facts laid out before us are evidence of the positive educational nature of social gatherings with regard to the arrestee... and the humanism of Soviet structures of power."⁶³ In other words, the local village collective could potentially rescue transgressors from the punitive power of Soviet courts and Soviet penitentiaries, as long as the arrestee displayed sincere regret during the public "trial," and as long as the accused displayed potential for rehabilitation as a "Soviet person." Soviet authorities seemed to encourage this kind of activity, effectively blurring the boundary between communal punishment and official Soviet courts. To the KGB, re-education seemed to simultaneously be a more insidious as well as effective form of weeding out transgressors in Soviet society. Again, the contradictory signals from the Kremlin with regards to rehabilitation and punishment led to inconsistency within the local collectives, as some collectives pursued punishment for transgressors of communist morality while others granted forgiveness. This lack of ideological consistency manifested itself through discourses of humanist socialism in the 1960s and 70s as well.

Crime and Humanist Socialism in Practice

⁶³ Ibid., 253.

The discourse of “humanist socialism” embodied this tension, as calls for harsh punishment for criminals paradoxically coincided with a shift away from punitive measures such as prisons and penal colonies for transgressors of morality. As a result of the devolution of responsibility from central authorities, Soviet courts often approved petitions by local collectives to reeducate transgressors and convicted criminals, rather than having them face punishment from state organs. In the city of Sverdlovsk in the RSFSR, for instance, two men were sentenced to prison for two years after stealing batches of steel from their workplace. Despite admitting the guilt of the two men, the steel factory work collective submitted a petition to the court requesting that the pair be given a suspended sentence and released to the collective for “re-education.” Surprisingly, the court granted the petition, and released the two men to the collective while reducing their sentence.⁶⁴ This suggested a sharp contrast with the Khrushchev era, when discourses on parasitism and socially useful labor had often led to much harsher punishments. Internal court memos from 1970 suggest that this kind of leniency was used to demonstrate the “humanist face of Soviet power” as well as “the possibility of rehabilitating people without further isolation from society.”⁶⁵ This aligned with Brezhnev’s calls for humanist socialism free from the excesses of Stalinism and emphasizing trust of the individual. The possibility of rehabilitation of Soviet convicts by collectives did indeed suggest a more collectivist, humanist take on morality and punishment in Brezhnev’s USSR.

⁶⁴ GARF, f. A-353, op. 15 d. 72, l. 36.

⁶⁵ GARF, f. A-353, op. 17, d. 1, l. 4.

The perceived sincerity of the transgressor by the collective often played a deciding factor in their ultimate fate. For example, after a high school teacher in the village of Ripne in the Ukrainian SSR was discovered in 1966 to be hiding nationalist literature, he attempted to express his sincere regret by arguing that his transgression was only a way alleviate his financial situation in a time of dire need. However, during his trial, the prosecution argued that the teacher was acting disingenuously, with multiple witnesses corroborating the prosecution's story and stating that they personally witnessed the teacher spreading "bourgeois nationalist propaganda," with the "goal of building an independent Ukraine."⁶⁶ The head of the school's parental committee even declared that "we do not want our children to be scarred by such educators. His rotten actions earned him a place in prison."⁶⁷ In support of the parental committee, the director of the school stated that "our collective and the residents of the village are angered by the actions of this individual, and the collective asks the court that he receive the utmost punishment as allowed by Soviet law."⁶⁸ For the crime of spreading anti-Soviet literature, the teacher received six years in a maximum security penal colony (*strogii rezhim*).⁶⁹

While it is impossible to determine the sincerity or insincerity of these particular individuals, it seems that the teacher's attempt to express regret was irrelevant in determining punishment, as the hostility of the community toward this

⁶⁶ It is important to note that this case could also easily be a witch-hunt, and large numbers of community members turning against someone does not indicate that justice is being served. SBU Archive, Kyiv, Ukraine, f. 16, op. 1, d. 954, l. 277.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

individual suggests that the outcome of the trial was predetermined. Furthermore, the contrast between the severity of punishment in this case and the abovementioned trial of V. suggests that Soviet courts and prosecutors took the recommendations of local collectives seriously and doled out harsher punishments when they were requested by community leaders. These cases imply that even if the state was unable to penetrate into the daily lives of each Soviet citizen, there was a popular basis for collectives taking justice into their own hands, as Soviet citizens voluntarily participated in punishing their own coworkers and neighbors when they violated norms of socialist behavior. Ironically, the retreat of the state from the daily lives of Soviet citizens, as well as the devolution of responsibility to local collectives, did not result in a more liberal and tolerant society during Late Socialism; instead, Soviet citizens zealously upheld and enforced the oppressive social norms of communist morality. The personal policing of behavior under Brezhnev suggested that promises of “humanist socialism” were either premature or disingenuous, as Soviet citizens sought to implement strict norms of morality during an ostensibly more liberal period of Soviet history, pointing to the lack of consistent principles with regard to enforcement and punishment of crime within Late Socialist USSR.

Even in people’s last moments, they sometimes sought approval from their collectives, suggesting that Soviet citizens strove to be in a collective, even posthumously. In a suicide note to Brezhnev and the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1970, a Communist Party member and secretary of the regional committee of Kyiv oblast pleaded for forgiveness and wrote, “I ask for

forgiveness for any bad actions which I committed [committing suicide]. The trust which I enjoyed among my comrades is hard to restore.”⁷⁰ He went on to say, “How is it possible to live with no trust and no sympathy? I am being torn apart by grief, but at the same time I feel boundless love for our Party, to its leaders. I am leaving life.”⁷¹ The man concluded his letter saying “Forgive me for what I am about to do.... Wish you, my dear comrades, great health and success in the name of our Motherland. Sincerest respect and eternal commitment to our Party and our people.”⁷² Much as Jochen Hellbeck demonstrated with peasant diaries from the Stalin period, the heartfelt goodbye of this Party member suggested a deep desire to be a part of the collective and to be forgiven by the communist collective, even after his death.⁷³ This man, a relatively high-ranking member of the Party, attached his mental health, identity, and emotional wellbeing to his perceived standing among his peers, comrades, and inclusion in the Communist Party. The last line of the note suggests a spiritual connection to the Party, and even the entire Soviet people.

In another much less dramatic example, in October of 1979, a Soviet miner in the Donetsk region of the Ukrainian SSR was arrested and put on trial in front of the people’s court for possession of anti-Soviet literature. As the miner was a member of the Communist Party, the Party collective quickly condemned his actions, with the

⁷⁰ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 397, l. 120.

⁷¹ As Kenneth Pinnow argued in *Lost to the Collective: Suicide and the Promise of Soviet Socialism*, suicide in the Soviet Union of the 1920s was considered a social pathology, where each suicide was considered to be a crime against the state and a failure of collective responsibility. The KGB’s investigation of this suicide and the inclusion of this letter into the memo suggests a continuity of this trend in the 1970s.

⁷² TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 397, l. 120.

⁷³ Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*.

regional Party secretary declaring that the miner “has embarrassed the entire Donetsk region.”⁷⁴ At his hearing, the miner declared that he would only consider changing his mind if “the communists from the mine vote against him in a secret ballot.”⁷⁵ After the collective condemned their fellow miner’s actions, he ultimately renounced his beliefs, despite refusing to do so in the court. While the reasoning behind this man’s actions are unclear, his decisions suggest that he valued the opinions of his collective more than he feared punishment from the courts. The importance of the collective was typical of the Brezhnev period, playing a disproportionate role in punishment of transgressors. In accordance with Marxist principles, the collective sway over opinions and beliefs of individual Soviet citizens was formidable, as the Soviet collective played an integral role in stifling any ideological deviance from the official Party line. Some Soviet citizens displayed an unequivocal desire to be accepted and embraced by their collectives while simultaneously tying their self-worth and identity to the opinion of their communist comrades and peers. These cases suggest that sometimes the Marxist prediction that individuals’ desires and behavior would be shaped by the collective was not always incorrect, as the Soviet state was able to create truly communal socialist collectives under Late Socialism.

Popular Participation, Public Reticence and Private Lives

More often than not, when the collectives failed at their task of stopping or preventing crime, Party organs and the Soviet Supreme Court called on individual

⁷⁴ “Dokladnaia zapiska,” SBU Archive, f. 15, op. 1, d. 1162, l. 100.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

citizens to step in and prevent crime. However, despite calls for collectivist intervention, not all Soviet citizens were equally enthusiastic in enforcing strict norms of communist morality. Indeed, some Soviet citizens viewed the lofty tenets of communist morality as incompatible with daily life. Reflecting the inconsistent nature of Soviet punishment and echoing the 1961 Moral Code, some letters to the newspaper *Nedelia* from 1974 asked, “why is it that here in the USSR, where the central tenet of relations between people is that ‘a person is a friend, comrade, and brother to another,’ where we teach people comradeship, collectivism, and mutual help, why do we have such manifestations of indifference and immorality?”⁷⁶ The article lamented that “many Soviet citizens do not want to partake in the affairs of others, especially in family affairs.”⁷⁷ Another letter from Moscow to the newspaper described the author’s lack of desire to adhere to the tenets of the moral code and wrote, “Who wants to deal with a hooligan? This is why I live by the old Russian saying: the less you know the better you sleep (*Moia hata s kraiy, ia nichego ne znaiy*).”⁷⁸ Another letter writer from Krasnoyarsk wrote, “In our apartment building the husband beat the wife, and I stood up for the wife and said something. Now they are back together, the wife will not talk to me, and I am an enemy to them.”⁷⁹ The letters suggest that some Soviet citizens believed that the home was a space of privacy where the state and ordinary citizens could not intervene in the affairs of

⁷⁶ A. Vasiliev, “Neravnodushie i ravnodushie,” *Nedelia* no. 47 (1974), 19.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. In my translation I tried to keep the spirit of the colloquial saying rather than simply translating it word for word. The literal translation is: My hut is on the other side of the village, I do not know anything.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

others. This suggests that Soviet citizens had different, and sometimes competing ideas on privacy, morality, and their obligations to other citizens in upholding communist morality. Just like in the film *The Diamond Arm*, not all Soviet citizens equally shared the commitment of enforcing the law or communist morality, viewing anti-social behavior and criminal activity as something irrelevant or distant from their own private lives.

In contrast, others letter writers stated that they had a moral obligation to intervene in behavior they perceived as immoral and illegal. In a letter from Odessa, for instance, one man wrote, “I live next to a family where the husband beats his wife and children. In a particularly bad incident, the neighbors went over to his apartment, made him stop yelling, and threatened to call the police. For the last few years things have been calm and the wife is especially grateful to us.”⁸⁰ Another letter writer wrote, “Even though I did not want to, I called the police when I heard my neighbor beating his wife. I acted as my consciousness was telling me, and I do not regret it.” The article in which the letter was published praised the woman, and wrote that “the citizen acted correctly, according to the principles of our morality.”⁸¹ The article’s praise for neighbors and citizens who intervened shows that the state expected ordinary citizens to intervene when they witnessed incidents of immoral behavior, and that ordinary citizens expected to be praised and commended for their behavior as good, upstanding communists. Furthermore, the article implies that beatings stopped

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

every time the police were called, suggesting that both denunciations and the state's subsequent intervention into the daily lives of these citizens ultimately led to a positive outcome for the victims of domestic abuse, validating the intervention of the letter writers. These two contradictory examples show that Soviet citizens were not always consistent in their commitment to preventing crime, as some enthusiastically displayed their support for the regime's efforts to fight crime, while others simply showed a desire to retreat into their own private lives.

In some cases, Soviet citizens were overzealous in their desire to punish criminals, and like the courts, newspapers heeded the calls of ordinary citizens for tough punishment for criminals and transgressors. In a *Nedelia* article titled "The Price of Indifference" from 1974, author A. Vasil'eva condemned the neighbors of an apartment building where the residents stood by as a man beat his wife and ultimately murdered her.⁸² Many citizens wrote to the newspaper and demanded a tough sentence for the perpetrator, and some even called for him to be put to death. One letter to the editor from Stavropol asked, "How did they punish the criminal?"⁸³ Others lamented the possibility that the perpetrator "got off easy (*otdelalsia*)."⁸⁴ Placating the concerns of these citizens, the article gleefully and morbidly concluded, "we can report that the court gave the criminal the highest form of punishment – the death penalty."⁸⁴ Soviet citizens were so adamant about demanding tough punishments for criminals that one court memo from the Supreme Court of the USSR

⁸² A Vasil'eva, "Tsena ravnodushia," *Nedelia* no. 21 (1974), 10.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

complained that some judges were too easily swayed by pressure for punishment from ordinary citizens and newspapers, stating that, “sometimes [the judge’s] lack of objectivity is a result of... public pressure through periodicals and other means.”⁸⁵ In these cases, the newspaper served to placate or even fan the bloodthirsty citizens’ desire for revenge, arguing that criminals will always get the sentence they deserve. Situations such as these show the all-immersive nature of daily life in Late Socialist USSR, as Soviet citizens voluntarily encouraged popular witch hunts against criminals and transgressors of morality under both Brezhnev and Khrushchev. During a period in which the state took a step back from the daily lives of citizens, newspapers became the mediators of justice and morality, both fanning the passions of their readers and doling out solutions, suggestions and punishments. Finally, official discourse was not merely performative for some Soviet citizens, as decisions taken by the collective had very real consequences on the lives of ordinary citizens.

Other Soviet publications provided vivid examples of what could happen if transgressors were not brought to justice in time. In a letter sent to *Soviet Police* in 1977, one police officer recounted that a woman convicted of theft came into his office and started crying. According to the letter, the woman said, “There is no question that I am guilty.... But why did you not catch me earlier?! I am forty-nine years old, nothing awaits me in life. I will be an old woman by the time I finish my sentence.”⁸⁶ Although it is impossible to verify the credibility of this story, the

⁸⁵ GARF, f. R-9474, op. 1, d. 793, l. 29.

⁸⁶ Diunin, “Real’nyi gumanizm,” 29.

publication of the letter suggests the journal's didactic intent. The publication implied that if the authorities had been able to step in earlier in this woman's life, they could have prevented her from spending her senior years in a prison cell. While the letter may have been a warning to some, it also suggested that Soviet police officers had the moral obligation and responsibility to set Soviet citizens on a more righteous path while simultaneously justifying state interventions into the lives of Soviet citizens.

Despite the controversies, Soviet police and Party organs sometimes intruded into the ostensible privacy of the Soviet home to conduct periodic checks. In 1975, in the city of Chervontsy in the Ukrainian SSR, the city police and groups of volunteers conducted an operation titled "Square." The city was broken into squares, with each squad responsible for investigating a predetermined set of apartment blocks and public spaces. Following these raids, the authorities ultimately arrested individuals who failed to show up for work, as well as those identified as drunks, drug addicts, and prostitutes.⁸⁷ After the arrests, the alleged transgressors, "who were known to have violated socialist law and communist morality, were given lectures by Soviet organizations, administrative organs, and social organizations." The KGB agent on the case noted that these lectures "had a positive impact on the levels of particularly dangerous crimes, which are decreasing month by month."⁸⁸ While it seems that not all Soviet citizens agreed that their peers had the right to interfere in their lives, Soviet Party organs clearly did not share this point of view. These raids in Chervontsy

⁸⁷ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 1399, l. 28.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

indicate that Soviet authorities did not view Soviet homes and private apartments as spaces of privacy, and instead forcibly intruded into the lives of ordinary citizens during random hours of the day or night to conduct raids, in the hopes of finding citizens who violated the law or norms of communist morality.

Authorities sometimes followed raids such as this one with campaigns for the public shaming of arrestees. In the city of Kherson in 1980, following a raid the local Komsomol collective put up billboards around the city with the faces of the alleged transgressors. The Komsomol “conducted a group of ‘photo-raids’ to uncover parasites.... The Komsomol took pictures of them and their living conditions and created a photo stand, a 1980s version of the wall newspaper in Soviet collectives.”⁸⁹ The use of seemingly extreme public measures such as these suggests that drunkenness, hooliganism, and allegedly immoral behavior were not the concern of only the courts, collectives, or the neighborhood, but of the entire city. All citizens could get a glimpse into the intimate and private lives of their fellow citizens who had fallen afoul of the law. It was not sufficient that the transgressors receive their punishment from the courts, as public shaming was an integral part of the punishment for so-called hooligans. Ultimately, punishment was a public spectacle meant to serve as a lesson for anyone who broke the norms of communist morality.

Morality, Confusion, and the Courts

Despite the public nature of punishment in the Soviet Union, the court system was not always willing to punish transgressors of communist morality. A memo from

⁸⁹ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 2104, l. 38.

the Supreme Court of the RSFSR from 1964 lamented that Soviet citizens were not doing enough to promote communist morality. In a case from Moscow, a local man, V. Matiukhov, was accused of sexually assaulting and raping his daughter-in-law in the presence of Ms. Kovalev, a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and a worker at the Rot-Front factory. While the Moscow local court convicted Matiuhov to 15 years in a penal colony, the Moscow prosecutor did not charge Ms. Kovalev with a crime, despite the fact that she witnessed the young woman's pleas for help while the rape occurred, but refused to call for help. After auditing the case, the Supreme Court of the RSFSR criticized Ms. Kovalev for "behavior incompatible with the norms of communist morality," but did not pursue the case any further.⁹⁰

This case suggests that Soviet courts did not always have clear guidelines on how to punish transgressions of communist morality. Furthermore, this example shows that different courts had different definitions of morality when compared to the Supreme Court, as the local Moscow courts did not see a problem with Ms. Kovalev's behavior. Even though these two courts were in the same city, they could not agree on when to criticize transgressions of morality, as definitions of morality were often left up to individual prosecutors and their subjective whims. Ultimately, Ms. Kovalev did not face consequences for failing to report the crime, suggesting that transgressors of communist morality were not always punished for their behavior, and that punishments were sometimes contingent and unpredictable. Even when everyone could agree on the importance of communist morality in principle, in the decades of

⁹⁰ GARF, f. A-353, op. 15, d. 71, l. 24.

Late Socialism few could agree on how to punish transgressors of communist ethics, pointing to the inconsistent implementation of the tenets of the Moral Code in late Socialist Soviet Union. Despite the claims that morality and the law were overlapping concepts, these sorts of cases exposed the divergence between the law and immoral behavior, which was not always punishable by the legal system.

Party audits of local courts and collectives also sometimes complained of Soviet courts' inability to fully enforce the law. After sixteen alleged criminals were arrested in Western Ukraine in 1969 for hooliganism and drinking, a Party memo complained that "Local authorities failed to conduct preventative measures. Voluntary citizen patrols (*druzhiny*) stopped doing their work.... Plans are not being met, raids are not being conducted, *druzhiny* are doing nothing to protect socialist property, to combat drunkenness. The local comrade court is just as guilty, shows no initiative, and often does not even look at case documents."⁹¹ The memo went on to say that, "In some cases, comrade courts were overly liberal, taking pity on criminals. For example, in the comrade court of Krutogorb village, the head of the comrade court... after looking at documents of criminals A and B and after finding their distillation columns with ninety liters of alcohol, fined the duo five rubles."⁹² A Party memo from L'viv from 1961, the same year the Moral Code and the Anti-Parasite Law were introduced, complained that "separate courts displayed stunning liberalism towards especially dangerous criminals. A Vorovskoy regional court in Ukraine in

⁹¹ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 392, ll. 13-14.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 14.

1961 sentenced citizen B. and handed him a three-year suspended sentence, as B. did not work, lived a parasitical lifestyle, and systematically speculated. After the city prosecutor complained about the soft sentence, B. was retried and sentenced to prison.”⁹³ Clearly, Party organs, the courts, and even local prosecutors could not always agree on the suitable punishment for alleged criminals. Party documents suggest that despite official discourse on criminality and the courts, Party authorities could not always rely on the courts to enforce socialist legality and socialist justice. The lack of consistency within the legal system itself was an obstacle in the construction of moral, upstanding Soviet citizens. Often neither the courts, nor Soviet citizens could agree on the appropriate nature of punishments and criminality. From the perspective of Party organs, these inconsistencies were gargantuan obstacles in the state’s project to create the New Socialist Person, and at times both Soviet citizens and the courts displayed surprising reticence and restraint in punishing criminals.

At other times, the Supreme Courts of the USSR and the RSFSR were forced to intervene when local courts failed to uphold their duty to promote socialist morality and socialist law. One internal court memo from the RSFSR lamented that “there are many cases in which local organizations and collectives do not take seriously the crime of transgressors, requesting a suspended sentence when a tougher punishment is clearly in order.”⁹⁴ In a criminal case from 1964 in the city of Sverdlovsk, a group of local housing office workers, some of whom were Party

⁹³ L’viv Oblast Archive, f. R-3, op. 8, d. 266, ll. 105-106.

⁹⁴ GARF, f. A-353, op. 15, d. 71, l. 37.

members, were charged with illegally registering residents in the city in exchange for bribes. Despite the severity of the crime, the court received several petitions from the city housing collective for leniency, since “local Party organs failed to sufficiently mobilize public opinion against the criminals.”⁹⁵ During the trial itself, the public prosecutor failed to show up to court multiple times, while one of the main witnesses for the prosecution wrote numerous petitions defending the accused.⁹⁶ While Soviet publications claimed that Soviet courts “have done a lot of work on creating moral citizens... in the norms of communist morality,” this example suggests that local courts were often unreliable partners for enforcing Soviet law.

As a matter of fact, court processes often unraveled due to unreliable witnesses or prosecutorial indifference.⁹⁷ Furthermore, local collectives often seemed apathetic to the crimes of their peers and were more than eager to defend them in court. As a result, convicted criminals were not always punished, due to active sabotage on the part of local collectives. Juxtaposed with the enthusiastic denunciations mentioned above, these documents underscore the often-schizophrenic nature of Late Socialism. In reality, Soviet courts oscillated between harsh punishment and seemingly random leniency. This arbitrariness reflected the ambiguities and anxieties around creating a socialist subject and underscored the often inconsistent approach to crime and punishment in Soviet society of the 1960s and 1970s.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ S. Strelnikov, “Novoe o rabote tovarisheskikh sudov,” *Sovetskaia militsiia* no. 10 (October 1977), 70.

The clearest example of divergences between official discourse and practice occurred in the Starookolskii Region of the RSFSR, where a local collective actively sought to undermine the courts and the law. At a local train repair depot, Comrade Ivanova was extorted by one of her coworkers, Pavel Petrov, after he blackmailed Ivanova. When Ivanova complained to the local workers' union, the union declared her a slanderer, a liar, and a person "unfit for Soviet society... and our collective." The petition went on to say that Ivanova "is impeding the collective's and the Soviet people's work of constructing our bright communist future."⁹⁸ After a meeting of the factory collective, the workers strongly condemned Ivanova, while defending Petrov as "an honest Soviet worker."⁹⁹ While the court ultimately did find Petrov guilty of bribery and blackmail and handed out a suspended sentence, the Supreme Court memo on the case lamented that the local court did not sanction the collective for its actions. This case suggests that local collectives, and even local courts, could be dubious partners in the project to create the New Socialist Person. Instead of acting as the guardians of communist morality, local collectives sometimes undermined the project to create a moral person by smearing citizens who reported crimes using the proper channels. In this culture of comradism, connections and relationships seemed more important than morality.¹⁰⁰ In order to defend their co-workers, some collectives

⁹⁸ Ibid., 91. I changed the names to protect the identity of the individuals in the court documents.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ As Alena Ledeneva pointed out in *Russia's Economy of Favors*, the Soviet system worked on an informal network or relationships and favors, outside of official discourse and state institutions. Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favors: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

appropriated and deliberately misused official language to promote their own idiosyncratic goals.

In rare cases, the local committees of the CPSU came to the defense of alleged transgressors. After a man was arrested for bribing a collective farm manager in the RSFSR in 1964, the chairman of the local CPSU committee wrote directly to the judge, stating that “the bureau of the local Party committee believes that the accused is not yet lost as a communist and as a worker.”¹⁰¹ To the dismay of the Supreme Court, these individuals were given a suspended sentence by the local court after the involvement of local Party officials. This case suggests that even local Party organs were not always reliable partners in enforcing Soviet law. While the relationship between the Party committee and the accused is unclear, the document suggests that the local Party’s involvement had a profound impact on lessening the sentence of the accused. To the dismay of leaders in Moscow and the Supreme Court of the republic, local committees and Party organs often undermined official language and discourse for their own private benefit. In each locale, ordinary citizens appropriated state discourse in different ways to promote their own goals and ideals, further creating ambiguity in the language of morality.

Conclusion

Overall, the approaches to communist morality and punishment in Late Socialist Soviet Union reflected the lack of a coherent approach to crime during this time. While promising to eradicate crime and to build a stateless communist society,

¹⁰¹ S. Strilnikov, *Sovetskaia militsiia* no. 10 (October 1977), 93.

Soviet leaders made promises of a more humanist form of socialism, allowing for the rehabilitation of transgressors. At the same time, the Communist Party relentlessly pursued criminals and called for the “extermination of freeloaders and parasites.” These contradictory impulses reflected the lack of a larger coherent strategy to eradicate crime in the Soviet Union, as the Soviet state failed to make any meaningful progress toward a bright communist future. Furthermore, the confusion of how to eradicate crime under socialism encapsulated the ideological anxieties and tension within the Soviet state, as fifty years of socialism had not yet created a harmonious Soviet citizen who acted in accordance with the collective. The lack of consistent guidance from the Party leadership allowed for a much more ambiguous understanding of proper forms of behavior and punishment among Soviet citizens, leading to further destabilization of ideal norms of behavior, as local collectives and Party leaders were left to their own devices to implement communist morality. Local courts, collectives, and ordinary Soviet citizens, while seeming to sincerely cling to ideals of communist morality, demonstrated the ambiguities and inconsistencies of communist ethics through letters to periodicals and the court system. At the same time, not all Soviet citizens were equally enthusiastic regarding the project to enforce communist morality, as attempts to penetrate the private spaces of Soviet apartments and homes proved controversial at best. These inconsistencies exposed tensions, paradoxes, and anxieties of Late Socialism, ultimately paving the groundwork for the unravelling of discourse on morality during Gorbachev’s Perestroika in the 1980s.

Chapter Four

Morality, Moral Awakening, and Early Perestroika

In his 1986 work *Perestroika*, Mikhail Gorbachev stated that “a gradual erosion of the ideological and moral values of our people began [during the Brezhnev period].”¹ Gorbachev went on to say that “things could not go on like this much longer.”² Gorbachev’s book, and his policy of Perestroika, or rebuilding, came as a reaction to the perceived degradation of Soviet society. Gorbachev’s claim suggests that the USSR of the mid-1980s was a space of moral degradation, alcoholism, crime, and cynicism stemming from the Brezhnev period’s so-called “Stagnation.” Gorbachev felt that the Soviet Union needed moral regeneration; invoking language from Karl Marx’s 1875 work *Critique of the Gotha Program*, he stated that, “We are fully restoring the principle of socialism ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his work,’ and we seek to affirm... one kind of discipline for all, and high responsibilities of each.”³ At the 27th Party Congress in 1986, Gorbachev also stated that “we must fight any retreat from the people’s rule and public morality. Democracy remains the underlying foundation of socialist legality and socialist morality.”⁴

¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 20.

² *Ibid.*, 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 31

⁴ It is important to note here that Gorbachev was not talking about Western capitalist liberal democracy with multiple parties, but rather Roy Medvedev’s ideas of socialist democracy within a more open, socialist one-Party state. *Materials From the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1986), 61.

Reminding the Politburo of the moral degradation of Soviet society, Gorbachev went on to say that “we must enforce all our laws to fight against alcoholism, crime, and other forms of criminality in our society.”⁵

Gorbachev viewed Perestroika and Glasnost’ (openness) not merely as reform, but as an opportunity to restore the Soviet people’s faith in state socialism. After Soviet society failed to reach communism by 1980, as Khrushchev had promised, many Soviet people felt disappointed by the Party’s promises and saw the ritual of replicating state discourse on communism as a performance of standardized and ossified language.⁶ In accordance with this, one Soviet joke read, “Is it true that by 1980 we will have communism in the USSR?” The response stated, “No, we decided to hold the Olympics instead.”⁷ Another joke mocking the bureaucracy asked, “When will we achieve communism?” The response read: “We will learn about it from a secret memo from the Central Party Committee.”⁸ As sociologist Alexei Yurchak points out, these jokes reflected the growing cynicism within Soviet society toward the promises of communism, as Soviet citizens replicated the same official discourse without any meaningful impetus to change Soviet society.⁹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Here I am referring specifically to Alexei Yurchak’s argument in *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More* that Late Socialist official discourse was mostly performative, lacking any meaningful substance or desire to change.

⁷ “Sovetskie anekdoty,” <http://www.lib.ru/ANEKDOTY/anec1001.txt> .

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More*.

In response to the political malaise of the 1970s and early 1980s, in his work *Perestroika* Gorbachev wrote that “it was clear that cosmetic repairs and patching would not do; a major overhaul was required. Nor was it possible to wait.”¹⁰ It seems that to Gorbachev, the legitimacy of the Soviet Union, and even the legitimacy of socialism itself, was at stake during this pivotal time in Soviet history. Gorbachev wrote that “people [with] a sense of justice and commitment to the ideals of Bolshevism criticized the established practice of doing things and noted with anxiety the symptoms of moral degradations and erosion of revolutionary ideals and socialist values.”¹¹ He went on to say that “the ideals of Perestroika have been prompted not just by pragmatic interests and considerations but also by our troubled conscience, by the indomitable commitment to ideals we inherited from the Revolution.”¹² Finally, Gorbachev concluded that “we are moving not away from socialism, but toward more socialism, not away from democracy but toward more democracy, not away from socialist morality, but toward more socialist morality.”¹³

To Gorbachev, Perestroika was a fight for the morality of the Soviet people and the legitimacy of socialism itself; the invocation of the notions of morality and consciousness represented a central tenet of Soviet socialism’s spiritual rebirth among Soviet people. Gorbachev’s call for a new, reinvigorated

¹⁰ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 27

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ O.P. Tselikova, “Nravstvennoe obnovenie obshchestva i sovershenstvovanie demokratii” in *Moral’ i etika*, 53.

morality was an opportunity to save the Soviet state as well as its ailing socialist ideology from growing political cynicism. For the first time, the discourses on communist morality were utilized to criticize the party apparatus rather than ordinary citizens, representing a stark shift from the Brezhnev era. Gorbachev and his reforms sought to disavow the crimes and cultural practices of the Stalin and Brezhnev periods, instead nostalgically reaching back to the period of the 1920s and the period of revolutionary zeal, collectivism, and optimism for a bright communist future.

In a speech at the aforementioned 27th Party congress, Gorbachev outlined his envisioned Perestroika program, where he declared a top-down economic and social reform of Soviet society. He declared that “today, the primary goal of the Party is to destroy unacceptable tendencies in economic growth.... The Soviet people should no longer experience food, service, housing, and medical shortages.... This will be a significant investment in the strengthening of global socialism.”¹⁴ At the same time Gorbachev called for “expansion of socialist democracy,” as well as “direct democracy” in the labor collective.¹⁵ This was especially apparent with the establishment of the Congress of People’s Deputies in 1989, a new supreme legislative body with competitive elections established in the spirit of reform and democratization.

¹⁴ *Materials From the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57-59.

Most importantly, however, for the first time since the establishment of the Soviet Union, the 27th Party Congress declared that the goal of the Party was “improving socialism,” rather than building communism. At first, the calls for “democratic socialism” and economic growth did not seem revolutionary, as the main goal of Gorbachev’s reforms was predominantly economic. At the same time, the retreat from the promises of a communist utopia reflected a continuation of the logic of mature socialism, deferring the achievement of communism to some nebulous future.

Despite calls to “strengthen socialism,” however, starting in late 1986, the Soviet state under Gorbachev’s leadership began to tacitly tolerate small-scale private enterprise with the so-called “Law on Cooperatives” in the hopes of boosting the flagging Soviet economy after the collapse of oil prices in the 1980s. At the same time, the Soviet government introduced a policy of “openness” or Glasnost’, which relaxed press censorship and allowed for relatively obstacle-free publication of anti-Soviet newspapers, books, and journal articles. While hoping to achieve “democratic socialism,” the Soviet state’s tolerance of private enterprise, combined with the policy of Glasnost’ created a powder keg of contradictory tensions and impulses in Soviet society. I argue that the project of trying to create the moral and selfless communist citizen while pushing limited privatization of the Soviet economy angered many Soviet citizens who pointed out the hypocrisy of market reforms within a socialist state. Using the tools available during Glasnost’, some Soviet citizens expressed their anxieties about

these reforms, while other used the opportunities presented to them by Glasnost' to undermine Soviet power.

Ultimately, the promises of “economic reform” and “democratic socialism” were vague, leaving it up to ordinary citizens to work out the details of these reforms. Some Soviet citizens used the notion of “rebuilding” under Perestroika to advance their own political or economic goals. Others, however, took the challenge of building a better society seriously, scolding those who were perceived to be merely paying lip service to Gorbachev’s lofty ideals. The conflicts over representations of the model Soviet citizen, morality, and intentions reached a boiling point during this time period, as Soviet citizens argued over which competing discourse represented the will of the Soviet state. Soviet citizens struggled to implement the broad notions of “rebuilding” into their daily lives, as the broad concept of Perestroika could be interpreted and applied in multiple, contradictory ways. I also show that after economic and political catastrophes such as Chernobyl, the Soviet state reverted to utilizing the oppressive machinery of the state to suppress dissent, despite the promises of openness and democracy during Perestroika, contributing to the anger of the state’s hypocrisy. The continued use of state oppression suggested that from the perspective of the Kremlin, Perestroika was never intended to be the radical reorganization of society it turned out to be.

This chapter argues that tensions surrounding morality and spiritual rebirth were at the center of political discourse during Perestroika, especially in the first

years of reform. It explores the period of Early Perestroika, between 1985 and 1989 – the time before the Soviet Union began to unravel at the seams – tracking the incipient historical processes unleashed by the 27th Party Congress which ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. It also shows that the definition of communist morality was ultimately subjective, allowing Soviet citizens to appropriate and twist the vague definitions of this morality for their own political goals. This process was most pronounced in the peripheries of the Soviet Union, in places such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs, where Perestroika took on completely new meanings and practices, as nationalist groups seized onto discourses of morality to subvert the socialist project, setting the groundwork for collapse of the Soviet Union along ethnic lines by the late 1980s. Seizing onto the opportunities to discuss previously taboo topics, and using the language of socialist morality, ordinary Soviet citizens questioned the moral legitimacy of the socialist state, while Soviet apologists denounced their neighbors and coworkers for undermining so-called traditional Soviet values. During the Gorbachev period, the state opened the possibility for nationalists to seize onto the idea of morality, with which they could accuse the socialist state itself of lacking moral legitimacy. The discourse of idiosyncratically Soviet concepts such as the so-called “Friendship of the Peoples” lost meaning as both pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet groups utilized it to justify their respective political aims.

Soviet citizens and Party organs in the non-Russian Soviet republics had radically different concerns from their counterparts in Moscow and the RSFSR. As

defenders of the Soviet system and anti-Soviet nationalists both promoted competing claims of moral legitimacy, social schisms based on nationality and political allegiance compromised every aspect of public life. The discourse of a new, reinvigorated morality would have been difficult, but not impossible without Gorbachev, yet communist morality also took on a new significance within the context of the changing circumstances introduced by his reforms. In other words, while Gorbachev tapped into already prominent discourses on morality and behavior, his reforms created the necessary circumstances for Soviet citizens to use those discourses to undermine the Soviet state. In many ways, Perestroika represented an opportunity for nationalist groups on the Western periphery of the Soviet Union to subvert and destroy Soviet socialism in places such as Ukraine and Moldavia.

Perestroika Historiography

This chapter builds on an already large body of literature on nationalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Scholars such as Walter Laqueur, Padma Desai, and Steven Solnick have pointed out that Soviet leaders who preceded Gorbachev, such as Andropov and Kosygin, already had attempted to implement systemic reforms in the Soviet Union. According to these scholars, while Gorbachev's reforms were unprecedented in scale, the USSR by the 1980s was ripe for reform, the scope of which was mostly shaped by his predecessors.¹⁶ Other historians, such as Archie

¹⁶ Walter Laqueur, *The Long Road to Freedom: Russia and Glasnost* (New York: Scribner, 1989); Padma Desai, *The Design and Dilemmas of Soviet Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Steven Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse of Soviet Institutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Chris Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

Brown, Anthony Deluca, Linda Cook, Seweryn Bialer, and Stephen Kotkin argued that without so-called “Gorbachev Factor,” the collapse of the Soviet Union would have been impossible.¹⁷ Another group of scholars, largely consisting of economic historians, claim that the Soviet state’s political and economic system was not viable in the long term, and the Soviet Union was destined to collapse regardless of who was in power. Scholars such as Thane Gustafson, Yegor Gaidar, Dimitri Volkogonov, and Peter Boettke argued that Soviet economic and political strength was merely a façade upheld by an ossified and out-of-touch bureaucracy. In other words, reforms could not have prevented the collapse of the USSR because the Soviet Union was structurally unstable by the 1980s and already on the brink of collapse.¹⁸ Finally, Soviet historians and political scientists such as Ronald Suny, Mark Beissinger, and Rasma Karklins have argued that nationalism was ultimately responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union; the Soviet economy, bureaucracy, the Communist Party, and even Gorbachev played a secondary role. According to this view, nationalist groups seized the opportunities presented by Perestroika to destroy the Soviet state

¹⁷ Linda J. Cook, “Brezhnev’s ‘Social Contract’ and Gorbachev’s Reforms,” *Soviet Studies* 44, no. 1 (1992), 37-56; Archie Brown, *Seven Years That Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Anthony Deluca, *Gandhi, Mao, Mandela, and Gorbachev: Studies in Personality, Power and Politics* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000); Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Seweryn Bialer, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988); Mark Galeotti, *Gorbachev and His Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); Martin McCauley, *Gorbachev* (New York: Longman, 1998); Robert G. Kaiser, *Why Gorbachev Happened: His Triumph and His Failure* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

¹⁸ Thane Gustafson, *Crisis Amid Plenty: The Politics of Soviet Energy under Brezhnev and Gorbachev* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Peter Boettke, *Why Perestroika Failed: The Politics and Economics of Socialist Transition* (London: Routledge Publishers, 1993); Dimitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire: The Seven Leaders who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998); Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

along ethnic lines.¹⁹ This chapter builds on this literature, arguing that combined with nationalism, morality played an essential role in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The literature on morality during Perestroika is very limited; the main exception is Leon Aron's work *Roads to Temple*. In his work Aron argues that the Perestroika period of 1985-1989 was one of the most successful and shortest spiritual reorientations of modern history. Aron argues that during Perestroika, the Soviet Union was forced to "confront the matters of ultimate concern that inspired religious revivals and all great modern revolutions: goodness and evil, truth and falsehoods, virtue and sin, liberty and slavery, justice and tyranny.... Within a few years, this national soul-searching led to the rethinking of some of the most fundamental aspects of the country's existence."²⁰ Aron argues that a spiritual reawakening, as well as conversations surrounding the birth of a new way of life were central to the political and social upheaval of the Perestroika period. He also makes an explicit connection between Perestroika and the discourses around the revolution of 1917, a time of revolutionary possibilities and revolutionary zeal. This chapter explores Perestroika's spiritual awakening in places such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs and shows that this reawakening was not uniform across the USSR. By extending Aron's ideas to focus on social groups beyond Russian intellectuals, I show that Gorbachev's so-

¹⁹ Among the numerous works are: Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and Transition to Democracy*; Ronald Suny, *Revenge of the Past*; Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*; Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence*; Senn, *Lithuania Awakening*; Senn, *Gorbachev's Failure in Lithuania* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Dawson, *Eco-nationalism*; Taras Kuzio and Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence* (London: Macmillan, 1995); Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

²⁰ Aron, *Roads to Temple*, 2.

called “spiritual reawakening” led to distinctly different outcomes outside of the RSFSR, as not all Soviet citizens on the Western periphery shared the lofty goals of reshaping Soviet society shared by Russian intellectuals.

Morality, Perestroika, and Public Discourses

Initially, the Soviet intelligentsia welcomed Gorbachev’s calls for the rebirth of a more moral, harmonious, and free society. In their publications, sociologists such as Vladimir Shubkin called for a “moral education” to foster the awakening of “people’s conscience.”²¹ Prominent political leaders such as Andrei Sakharov, who was only released from internal exile during Perestroika in 1986, called for “rebirth” of Soviet society through the creation of a “new moral foundation.”²² In an open letter to Gorbachev, Sakharov criticized the arrests of Soviet dissidents, calling for the liberation of “prisoners of conscience” and claiming that “we cannot have these prisoners of conscience in a society moving toward justice... freeing them falls in line with our country’s current political trends.”²³ The use of the language of conscience, rather than the traditional word “dissident”, suggests that the Soviet intelligentsia readily accepted the Communist Party’s new reinvigoration of the discourse on morality. Furthermore, Sakharov suggests that for many Soviet dissidents, Perestroika was a newly optimistic time, full of opportunity for rectifying the Soviet state’s past mistakes.

²¹ Vladimir Shubkin, “Trudnoe proshchanie,” *Novyi Mir* 4 (1989), 165-184.

²² Andrei Sakharov obituary, *Novyi Mir* 2 (February 1990), 271.

²³ Andrei Sakharov, Open Letter to Mikhail Gorbachev (March 1986). <https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?num=2107&t=page>

Much like in earlier periods of Soviet history, the discourses of morality and moral behavior (*moral'nost' i npravstvennost'*) sparked earnest conversations during the Perestroika period among many Soviet citizens, ranging from government officials and the intelligentsia to ordinary Soviet citizens, as morality was at the center of political and social shifts occurring in the country between 1985 and 1989. Some Glasnost'- and Perestroika-era intellectuals viewed the late 1980s as a battle for the Soviet Union's soul, the creation of a new morality in the spiritual revolution of Perestroika. Political commentator Andrei Nuykin wrote that a "new structure of values" was key to the regeneration of Soviet society.²⁴ A *Pravda* article from 1987 stated that "our country is undergoing a moral shift. We cannot achieve success in Perestroika without a spiritual change, a change in social consciousness and thought processes."²⁵ Seemingly for the first time in Soviet history, the Soviet state utilized the same language as the Soviet intelligentsia, including intellectuals critical of the Soviet state like Sakharov. Rather than criticizing the Soviet state and its ossified Party bureaucracy from the outside, the Soviet intelligentsia was able to criticize the state from the inside using state newspaper such as *Pravda* and using the same language as Gorbachev. While the discourse on communist morality predated the Gorbachev period, this realignment of Russian intellectuals with Gorbachev's rhetoric on morality speaks to Gorbachev's impact on this discursive shift.

²⁴ Andrei Nuykin, "Otkrytoe pismo," *Ogonek* 40 (1989), 6.

²⁵ "Utverzhdaui nashu moral'," *Pravda* no. 38 (February 7, 1987), 1.

Ordinary Soviet citizens seemed to share this enthusiasm to some extent as well. In places such as the Moldavian SSR, educated Soviet citizens such as teachers and professors enthusiastically responded to calls for reform. In a letter to communist Party organs from 1987, a group of teachers wrote that “our morality was incorrect, as it was tainted by careerism, as we were more interested in big salaries... than the results of our labor.... In the process of Perestroika, we are conducting an uncompromising battle of ideas, psychological, ways of thinking and behavior.”²⁶ In their letters to central authorities, some Soviet citizens unequivocally expressed their enthusiasm and desire to build a more just and open society where moral communists would triumph over careerism and bureaucracy, which had supposedly flourished during the Brezhnev and Khrushchev periods.

Ambivalence, Ambiguity, and Continuity

However, while many Soviet citizens, government agents, and intellectuals agreed with the state’s calls for a more moral, truthful society, in theory, little consensus existed over the meaning of these terms. Gorbachev’s discourses on morality represented both a continuation and a culmination of decades-long conversations on communist morality, while at the same time introducing a new element of “spiritual rebirth” absent from earlier periods of Soviet history. After Gorbachev’s speech to the 27th Party congress in 1986 calling for a moral reawakening of Soviet society, official Soviet publications such as *Pravda* linked the

²⁶ “Pis’mo Viktoru Il’ichu,” Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 74, d. 28, ll. 118-119.

1961 Moral Code of the Builder of Communism to Gorbachev's reforms, reminding Soviet citizens that Perestroika was in many ways a continuation of the already familiar project to build the New Socialist Person. This seemed to resonate with ordinary citizens. One article written by the Lipetsk city prosecutor and published in *Pravda* in 1987, for instance, argued that "Our work against freeloaders [*tuneiaadtsy*] is not close to being over."²⁷ Other articles, however, picked up on the novel undertones of spiritual rebirth, as exemplified by an article calling for a revival of morality on all levels of Soviet society: "[I]n this time of Perestroika," the author wrote, "should not every single one of us feel a rebirth of morality and moral clarity? Are we all so pure (*chistye*)?"²⁸

While Party newspapers such as *Pravda* called for a renewed interest in morality, they also relied on the same tropes and language from earlier periods in Soviet history. In this sense, the message from the Central Party organs was somewhat ambiguous, leading to ordinary citizens interpreting the calls for a moral and spiritual reawakening in different and contradictory ways. To some, Gorbachev's reforms represented a continuity of older discourses on communist morality, while others viewed Perestroika as an opportunity to fundamentally reform Soviet political discourse. These ambiguities ultimately manifested themselves in discursive and even physical conflict between citizens of different Soviet republics, as nationalism and

²⁷ A. Komakov, "Letuny slozhili kryl'ia," *Pravda* no. 272 (December 29, 1987), 2.

²⁸ Aleksandr Skrypnik, "Izvinite za sochuvstvie," *Pravda* no. 123 (May 3, 1989), 3.

morality on the periphery mobilized Soviet citizens against the authorities in Moscow.

These contradictions also manifested themselves in Party organs, since despite claims that Perestroika was a period of ostensible social renewal, Soviet Party organs often relied on the same approaches and discourses in daily Party work. Some Communist Party documents, for instance, continued to call for lectures educating Party workers on communist morality. An internal Ukrainian Communist Party bulletin reporting in 1986 on the functionality of Party organs, for instance, relied on the same discourses and even the same tools to enforce norms of communist morality as in earlier periods of Soviet history.²⁹ The author of the document insisted that the “Party Control Committee...studies the work of committees from the Dnepropetrovsk region with communists who deviated from the norms of Party life. Our analysis has shown... that Party committees pay undivided attention to the adherence of Party workers to Party demands and norms of communist morality.”³⁰ The bulletin also stated that “Individual work has been conducted with those Party members who are inclined to break Party and labor discipline. Many Party organs analyze how those members behave in social situations.... We also note that we successfully utilized measures such as Party influence, comradely criticism, reprimands, and warnings.”³¹ Another Ukrainian Party bulletin from 1988 echoed the calls for the creation of moral communists in the Party. This bulletin stated that “the

²⁹ TsDAGO Archive, “Informatsionnyi biulleten” f. 1, op. 25, d. 2974, l. 26.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

main requirement of a communist is their political position, real participation in Perestroika, attitudes to labor, and moral character.”³² These bulletins suggest that Party organs did not always understand the extent of Gorbachev’s reforms, interpreting the General Secretary’s calls for creating moral communists as a mere continuation of business as usual. The inculcation of proper behavior through continued use of mutual policing and surveillance epitomizes the contradictions of Perestroika, as some Party organs on the Western periphery misinterpreted signals from the Kremlin and its calls for fundamental structural reform.

Communist Party publications such as *Pravda* reflected the confusion within the Party with regard to what was truly novel about Gorbachev’s communist morality. While some articles appealed to the Moral Code of the Khrushchev period, other articles set out to define the ostensibly new socialist morality of the Perestroika period, in an attempt to re-legitimize Soviet socialism. One *Pravda* article, for instance, used language reminiscent of the Moral Code when it called for “collectivist morality of all for one and one for all.”³³ Another article, drawing on the same language, claimed that Soviet citizens “must have close relationships between one another, comradely relations of cooperation and mutual help, benevolence, honesty, and humility in private and public life.”³⁴ This same article called for “an internationalist training and socialist internationalism along with solidarity with the workers of brotherly countries, fighters against imperialism, and for social progress in

³² TsDAGO Archive, “O rabote komitetov oblasti po utverzhdenii chistogo i chestnogo oblika partiitsa,” f. 1, op. 25, d. 3315, l. 31.

³³ “Programma Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuz,” *Pravda* (October 26, 1985), 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the world.”³⁵ These explanations of Gorbachev’s “New Morality” suggest that Perestroika-era reformers were in fact drawing from older conversations on communist morality. Official sources such as *Pravda* newspaper articles reflected the vagueness and ambiguity in Gorbachev’s programs and discourses on communist morality. Ultimately, Gorbachev’s and Central Party organs’ directives on creating moral communists were equivocal, leaving it to ordinary citizens to work out definitions. The fact that even *Pravda* staff, writing for the official mouthpiece of the CPSU, could not come to a consensus on the definitions of communist morality speaks to the confusion within the Party on what Perestroika’s reforms meant for ordinary citizens.

These sorts of ambiguities were apparent even among the Soviet intelligentsia. Some Soviet sociologists and political scientists openly expressed their own ambivalence toward communist morality during Perestroika, themselves taking advantage of the atmosphere of Glasnost. In an anthology published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Soviet Philosophy Society in 1989 titled *Morals and Ethics (Moral' i etika)*, scholar O.Tselikova criticized the mass incarceration and terror of the Stalin period, stating that “the distortion of truth in the context of [socialist] modernity has heavily damaged the socialist cause, and leads... to the undermining of moral norms.... This is best demonstrated by recently uncovered facts in our country regarding previous years of amoral development.”³⁶ The author went

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ O. Tselikova, “Nravstvennoe obnovenie obshchestva i sovershenstvovanie demokratii,” 55. With regard to the so-called “uncovered facts” and “amoral development,” the author is referring to the revelations of Stalinist repressions and abuses of power during the five-year plans.

on to say that “it is easy to understand how this negatively affects the norms of morality: it lowers social responsibility and upholds habits such as deception of society, the state, of other comrades, and prevents the destruction of that amoral lie which showed successes only on paper....[W]hy is it,” she asked, “that under our modern conditions we can often witness the weakening of belief in the moral principles of socialism? Why is it that honest people sometimes express doubt in the realization of these ideals?... This phenomenon... has a fairly concrete reason: socialism often paints itself in brighter colors compared to its true colors in real life.”³⁷ Tselikova concluded that “in the context of Perestroika the change of internal characteristics of people is especially difficult.... What is required is truly revolutionary change, the destruction of those frames of reference which limited the social participation of people [before Perestroika].”³⁸

Tselikova’s article epitomized the anxieties surrounding Late Socialism shared by many Soviet intellectuals and ordinary citizens during Perestroika. On the one hand, she explicitly condemned the pre-Perestroika period, calling it amoral and accusing it of negatively affecting the upstanding character of Soviet citizens. On the other hand, she expressed concerns regarding Perestroika’s inability to escape the stranglehold of the pre-Gorbachev period on the mindset and behaviors of Party officials and ordinary Soviet citizens. The unintended destabilization of Soviet society under Perestroika brought to the forefront the paradoxes of Soviet society, as

³⁷ Ibid., 56.

³⁸ Ibid., 60.

the project to rehabilitate the New Socialist Person encountered the problem of an ossified bureaucracy with a history of state violence and oppression.

Other Soviet scholars viewed Perestroika as an opportunity to salvage the socialist project. In a monograph published by the Department of Philosophy at Moscow State University in 1988, philosopher Liudmila Borisovna Volchenko echoed the January 1987 Party Plenum, when she stated that “the process of Perestroika is inextricably tied to the strengthening of the moral foundations of socialist society, of the Soviet way of life.”³⁹ However, Volchenko also expressed ambivalence toward communist morality, stating on the same page that “the difficulty of determining the concept of ‘communist morality’ consists of the incomplete historical process of creating this morality.”⁴⁰ Despite her zealous calls for communist morality, Volchenko explicitly admitted that this morality had historically been an all-encompassing, yet tenuously defined and misused concept. In contrast to Tselikov, Volchenko expressed hope for Perestroika, arguing that Perestroika was an opportunity to resolve some of the earlier ambiguities and tensions of the Soviet past. For Soviet intellectuals, Perestroika was a time of disagreement and conflict over the course of the Soviet socialist project, suggesting that Party bosses in the Kremlin were unable to shape a consensus even among the most dedicated communists from the intelligentsia. For Party authorities, Glasnost opened a Pandora’s box which the Party would not be able to control.

³⁹ L.B. Volchenko, *Stanovlenie kommunisticheskoi npravstvennosti* (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1988), 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Youth, Ambivalence, and Perestroika

As in earlier periods of Soviet history, the anxieties and contradictions surrounding Perestroika manifested themselves in discourses surrounding children and Soviet youth. When educators, school administrators, and local politicians tried to respond to the vague guidelines laid out by Gorbachev, some reverted to old repertoires of exercising compulsion and proper behavior, while others expressed anxiety over the apparently slow pace of reforms and the fact that some Soviet citizens seemed content to carry on as before. Still others expressed concerns that Gorbachev's Perestroika had gone too far, insinuating that calls for moral reform allowed for unprecedented expressions of anti-Soviet sentiment, anti-communist morality and the need for spiritual and moral reform. An article in the January 1988 issue of *Young Communist* expressed fears that:

All of a sudden, after seven decades of socialism, we are once again seeing not only the reappearance of capitalist morality and ways of thinking, but a collapse in the sphere of reason, and deformations of consciousness which allow people... to live as parasites while others work, and to undermine the wheels of progress.⁴¹

The tone of moral panic in the article represents a sharp rebuke to the forces unleashed by Glasnost'. Such worries about the perceived rise in crime, unemployment, and alcoholism were shared by many other Soviet citizens during the late 1980s. The *Young Communist* article also expressed the anxieties of introducing market reforms into a socialist planned economy, indicating that some Soviet citizens

⁴¹ Genadii Kovalenko, "Vozrozhdenie," *Molodoi kommunist* no. 1 (1988), 3.

were deeply uncomfortable with this new for-profit mode of production. The use of the language of parasitism, a clear allusion to Khrushchev's Anti-Parasitism campaign of the 1960s, drew a distinct parallel between the moral panic of the Thaw and that of Perestroika; it was also a reaction to Glasnost'-era tolerance for previously unacceptable forms of behavior, music, and lifestyles. This suggests that for some Soviet citizens, morality was linked to the spiritual reawakening of Soviet society, while for others, morality continued to refer to comportment, music choice, and style of dress. The contrasts between these points of view reveals the paradoxes of Perestroika and the lack of consensus regarding the meaning of reform and communist morality in the age of Glasnost'.

A moral panic about behavior, dress, and lifestyle did, in fact, once again emerge in Soviet society as a result of Soviet citizens pushing the boundaries of Glasnost'. In a manner eerily reminiscent of the moral panic surrounding jazz during the Khrushchev period, an article in *Young Communist* lamented the prominence of rock music among Soviet youth. The author wrote that "rock music can even bring on physiological changes of the ear when the listener cannot differentiate between the different sounds of the music."⁴² Challenging the popular conception that Soviet youth were simply "releasing some steam," the author went on to say that "psychologists have shown that the dynamic and unpredictable sounds of rock not only increase stress, but cause stress to manifest itself in more insidious ways."⁴³

⁴² Igor Nabok, "Music Around the Ring," *Molodoi kommunist* no. 1 (1988), 52.

⁴³ Ibid.

Here, the author suggested that manifestations of bourgeois morality and crime could partially be blamed on the “insidious effects” of rock music. Much like Thaw-era anxieties surrounding jazz culture, the article challenged the idea that rock is simply an innocent form of music.

The article also blamed the manifestation of anti-socialist, bourgeois forms of “individualism” on the infiltration of rock music into Gorbachev-era society. The author argued that “ever since the culture of the bourgeoisie corrupted rock music, it has caused the aggressive spread of bourgeois values, such as individualism.”⁴⁴ Again, the author drew on Thaw-era discourse of moral degradation while placing blame on the West and its bourgeois values. As in previous decades, such critiques show that for some, the Perestroika period meant a continuation of business as usual, while for others it represented a radical societal shift.

Much like before, the ways in which discourses on morality were applied to dress, music, spirituality, as well as criminal behavior made the definition of morality very broad, sparking heated conversations about the meaning of morality. In 1989, for instance, one letter to *Pravda* asked, “Engels argued that all classes have different moralities. Does this mean that our society has multiple forms of socialist morality as well?”⁴⁵ Another person questioned the applicability of socialist morality to the Perestroika period, writing: “What do we do with individuals whose actions do not correspond to existing laws? We do not have laws about villainy and hypocrisy. What

⁴⁴ Ibid., 54

⁴⁵ U. Sherbinin, “Ravnodushia ne primliu,” *Pravda* no. 88 (March 29, 1989), 2.

do we do with people who violate communist morality? Do we exclude them from society? Educate? Do we enforce Party cleansings?”⁴⁶ The writer of another article similarly questioned the relationship between morality and Soviet legality, arguing that “in a literal sense, morality and the law have parted their separate ways,” and that morality was ultimately too subjective and detached from the Soviet legal system to have any meaningful bearing on the Soviet political system.⁴⁷ Again, the argument over a divergence between morality and law not only draws on older claims that socialist societies would not need a legal system, but also shows the contradictions of Soviet state socialism, as Soviet citizens struggled with the notion of building communist utopia through state institutions, instead of grassroots communism emerging as the state withered away. These conversations show that previous debates about the relationship between communist morality and the law were not resolved by Gorbachev’s reforms, and that Soviet citizens continued to disagree over how to shape the New Socialist Person as late as the late 1980s.

While some Soviet citizens appealed to the official organs of the state for help understanding communist morality, others showed little faith in the function of these organs, indicating a split within Soviet society. Some letter writers took advantage of the newly open atmosphere of Glasnost, even going as far as mocking socialist morality and the project to build the New Socialist Person in Soviet newspapers. One letter to *Pravda*, for instance, openly mocked the Party’s moral program, stating,

⁴⁶ I. Sibiriakov, “Ob etike i chesti kommunista,” *Pravda* no. 364 (December 30, 1989), 2.

⁴⁷ I. Pestun, “Sut’ dela,” *Pravda* no. 231 (August 18, 1988), 3.

“Moral Codex?! Ha-Ha-Ha! I spit and forget this Code!” Mocking the Code’s tenet that “One human being is a friend, comrade and brother to another human being,” the letter writer wrote, “[O]ne human being is a wolf to another human being! Socialism was a mistake!”⁴⁸ The reference to the Moral Code in this letter was overshadowed by this citizen’s complete disregard for the concept of a specifically communist morality. The letter suggests that some saw the official discourse of morality as having little meaning in the everyday life of Soviet society, implying that not all Soviet citizens shared Gorbachev’s zeal for radical spiritual reform. Some residents of the Soviet Union were clearly highly aware of the language of morality, yet unwilling to implement it into their daily lives, seemingly unconcerned with Perestroika’s lofty goals of shaping new and moral communists.

Such open hostility and questioning of Soviet morality suggests that during Perestroika, the Soviet state was unable to penetrate the intimate spaces of the Soviet home as it did before.⁴⁹ An article published in *Pravda* in 1988 decried the so-called “double morality of Soviet citizens,” condemning their “two-facedness.”⁵⁰ The author wrote, “We have multiple cases where a Party member says one thing in public, but at home drastically changes his lexicon and corrupts Soviet morality and the moral compass of his children.”⁵¹ In a letter to *Pravda* quotes in the same article, a young girl complained that her parents promoted socialist morality at Party meetings and in

⁴⁸ I. Kozlov, “V neskol’ko slov,” *Pravda* no. 148 (May 28, 1990), 3.

⁴⁹ As Alexei Yurchak points out, during the Late Socialist period, many Soviet citizens simultaneously existed within and outside of official discourse. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*.

⁵⁰ E. Manko, “Tsvety zhizni,” *Pravda* no. 59 (February 28, 1988), 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

public, but at home they said “that the most important thing in life is making money—everything else is pointless. What am I supposed to do?” she asked, “Leave my parents and move to the orphanage?”⁵² Unlike the earlier periods of Soviet history, while this newspaper had little helpful advice to give the confused student, the letter exposed the practical limits on official advice and discourses on behavior during this time. Furthermore, the article suggests that the tension surrounding morality existed even at the family level, as Soviet citizens both appropriated and condemned official language in the private sphere of family life.

Yet despite the political, economic, and social upheavals of the Perestroika era, the family, school, and home continued to be expected to play an essential role in establishing the moral compass of Soviet society. At a pedagogy conference in 1986, one pedagogue declared, “[W]e have to admit that the combined work of school, the family, and society still leaves a lot to be desired.... There are many cases of bad family child-rearing, bad family relations, which are the principal reason for the bad comportment of children in school and in society.”⁵³ Another teacher echoed this sentiment, but also declared that “we need a deep psychological rebuilding (*perestroika*). But how do we push each individual to rebuild themselves? These are the questions with which the presidium of the pedagogical society is concerned.”⁵⁴ A third speaker agreed, stating that “we have to actively implement the new.... A rebuilding of the teacher, a rebuilding of their consciousness.”⁵⁵ These examples

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Stenogramma 8-go plenuma tsentral’nogo soveta pedagogov,” GARF f. 10235, op. 1, d. 14, l. 31.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 62.

underline the variations within Perestroika – while they all agreed that reform of Soviet society was necessary, just what kind of “rebuilding” Perestroika implied was vague and unclear.

Experimental housing complexes in places such as the Urals represented another attempt to reform Soviet society through the physical reconstruction of neighborhood spaces. These housing blocks sought to supplement the spirit of Perestroika in daily life, simultaneously borrowing from neighbor surveillance practices while embracing revolutionary 1920s notions of a radical restructuring of society. A modern housing complex in the city of Sverdlovsk embodied this shift through its “experimental basis of trying new norms of educational work with young adults and children, the search for rational forms of organizing how young families spend their free time, and the instillation of values of collectivist living.”⁵⁶ Besides simply offering clubs and activities for children and adults, these kinds of housing complexes offered so called “parental patrols” where “parents look after order in the neighborhood... resolve conflicts, and write their suggestions in a special journal.”⁵⁷ These housing complexes also integrated child collectives, where each housing block (*pod’ezd*) was formed into so called “educational units” (*vospitatel’nye platformy*), whose educational progress (*vospitatel’nyi progress*) was studied by brigades of teachers or psychiatrists.⁵⁸ Complexes such as this one represented a renewed and focused attempt to rebuild socialist society from the ground up during the early

⁵⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 103

Perestroika period. These experimental housing and school arrangements borrowed from old methods of neighborhood and school surveillance and supplemented these methods with Revolutionary- era utopian notions of communal living and collective responsibility, reminiscent of the 1920s. During Perestroika, these complexes represented the newest attempts of the Soviet state to create moral Soviet citizens utilizing tools of mutual policing and neighborhood surveillance, suggesting a new attempt to penetrate the domestic sphere. While Gorbachev sought to disavow the cultural practices of the Stalin and Brezhnev periods, ironically the promises of Perestroika were implemented using the same repertoire as Gorbachev's predecessors.

Nationalism, Disagreements and Concerns in Soviet Moldavia

The tensions around communist morality was even more pronounced on the periphery, where Soviet citizens battled over the meaning of communist morality and its application to nationalism, self-determination, and the discourse of the "Friendship of the Peoples." In a speech to the 27th Party Congress in 1986, Gorbachev stated that "the national question... has been successfully solved in the Soviet Union."⁵⁹ However, despite Gorbachev's lofty promises, the reality on the ground was often more complicated, especially in the non-Russian western periphery, where the ambiguities around morality and the so-called national question became particularly acute during Perestroika.

⁵⁹ *Materials from the 27th Communist Party of the Soviet Union Congress*, 156.

Indeed, Soviet citizens in 1986 were hyperaware of the growing sense of national awareness in different Soviet republics. One teacher at the abovementioned pedagogy conference stated that “among problems of ethnic relations, which are very active in schools, is the indispensable task of improving Russian language education in ethnic schools. It is important... to study and to propagandize the experience of teaching the Russian language as a means of international communication and as a means of cultural exchange and communicating the cultural achievements of the peoples of our country.”⁶⁰ The emphasis on the Russian language in non-Russian schools represented a continuation of the imperial status of the Russian language within the Soviet Union. The Soviet state continued to be invested in the hegemony of Russian language and culture even during a time of ostensible liberalization, highlighting the fact that early Perestroika was simultaneously an attempt to introduce serious reforms while wanting to preserve the foundations of the Soviet state and Soviet society. This example embodied the underlying and unresolved tensions in Soviet society in the mid-1980s, as the contradictory impulses of Perestroika – reforming Soviet society while simultaneously trying to preserve its tenets – exposed faultlines within Soviet society.

In places such as the Moldavian SSR, despite Gorbachev’s claim that the “national question” had been “solved,” some Soviet citizens did not see any tangible improvements in their material wellbeing or social standing. In a letter to Gorbachev in June 1987, one group of Soviet citizens wrote:

⁶⁰ GARF f. 10235, op. 1, d. 14, l. 18.

We citizens... of the Moldavian SSR welcome the Party's decisions on Perestroika, because we are very proud of our Moldavia... but now it is in last place for abuse of power and incongruence of reality and Party reports (*ochkovtiratel'stvo i pripiski*). But unfortunately, nothing ever changes. In fact, the opposite happens, as our leaders, are 'rebuilding' themselves however they want (*perestraivaiutsia po svoemu*).⁶¹

The authors went on to ask:

[W]here are our defenders, our leaders who gave everything to defend Soviet power and to build socialism? Simple Soviet people and moral communists to whom you may turn for advice and for help with solving complex problems. Where did all these arrogant people come from, whose main concern is their private property and their pride? Among us there are veterans of the Great Patriotic War [i.e., World War Two] and workers, but we will not give our last name, we want our Communist Party to know why our Moldavia is falling behind.... People have lost all hope.⁶²

The writers concluded by denouncing high-level Party members in Moldavia, claiming they had abused their positions and taken bribes, accusations which were later substantiated by an internal Party investigation launched directly as a result of the letter.⁶³ The investigation following the complaint suggests that during the early Perestroika period, Party organs took their task of reforming the Soviet system seriously, as the individuals accused in the letter were fired and sanctioned by the Party. The writers' appeal to Party justice shows that they had faith in the ability of central authorities in Moscow to rectify situations when corrupt local officials failed to fulfill their duties.

⁶¹ "Pis'mo ot grazhdanina," Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 25, d. 25, l. 68.

⁶² Ibid., 73.

⁶³ Ibid., 83.

The Moldavian citizens' letter epitomizes the tensions of Perestroika in its expression of dismay over the official allowance of private enterprise during a time when the state ostensibly sought to create a society of moral communist citizens. Gorbachev's reforms of the mid-1980s allowed for a tacit tolerance of private enterprise, and the concerns over the reappearance of seemingly capitalist endeavors in the Soviet Union laid bare the tensions of this time period between groups using the notion of *perestroika* ("rebuilding") to pursue their own economic desires and those who heeded Perestroika's promises of spiritual renewal as the call to construct a better socialist society. While the letter's language of honesty, communist morality, and Perestroika may have been appropriated in the hopes of invoking an intervention from the Party, the performance of language still had merit during the Gorbachev period.⁶⁴ In contrast to Alexei Yurchak's findings, these kinds of examples also suggest that not all invocation of official discourse was performative, as some Soviet citizens truly continued to believe in the efficacy of this discourse in the 1980s.

In another letter to Gorbachev from 1987, a Soviet Communist Party member and veteran of labor from the Moldavian SSR also expressed his discontent with the perceived moral decay of Perestroika and the failure of moral reforms in the republic.

The complaint stated:

Dear Mikhail Sergeevich, I know you are very busy, but as an upstanding communist I cannot listen to the television and radio, nor can I read the newspapers and see all the ugliness occurring around us. While our people, our party, and all progressive

⁶⁴ This particular example draws parallels with Jochen Hellbeck's work, which argues that even when Soviet citizens utilized official discourse for nefarious goals, their use of official language reflected their subjectivities as official Soviet citizens regardless. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*.

members of the human race are preparing to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the glorious October revolution, our Moldavian republic plans to undermine Soviet power in our republic and to celebrate the 1930s... a time when capitalists and landowners robbed honest workers.... Not a year has gone by when I have not brought my concerns to the Party, the prosecutor's office, and to the police.⁶⁵

With regard to continued corruption within the Party, the author of the letter wrote that, "as an old Bolshevik, I think we need to try these individuals in public trials for their behavior, to let them know that with their unethical behavior they are undermining our society, helping the bourgeoisie and capitalists destroy our great multinational country."⁶⁶ The Party member concluded that "at the dawn of Soviet power, we declared that we will triumph over the bourgeois capitalists... but the newly reborn bourgeoisie wants to destroy us again and to bury the honest, fair, and hardworking people who found their purpose in life under Soviet power."⁶⁷ In spite of its criticism of the 1930s, the letter's calls for public trials of corrupt Party members closely mimic official discourse from the 1930s, when Soviet publications called for mass trials and executions of supposedly corrupt or disloyal members of the CPSU. The concerns and language of this particular individual resemble those of someone strongly invested in the Soviet system and the socialist project, someone immensely worried about the forces unleashed by Perestroika. This person's concerns about glorifying the 1930s, a time when Moldavia was a part of Romania, foreshadowed the start of nationalist movements in places such as Moldova which denounced the CPSU

⁶⁵ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 25, d. 25, l. 266.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 266A

⁶⁷ Ibid., 267.

as immoral, decrepit, and ethically bankrupt. Finally, the concerns about the bourgeoisie and capitalists highlighted ordinary citizens' concerns with the restructuring of the Soviet economy and the ways in which the reforms of Perestroika were undermining, rather than strengthening, the progress of socialism in the USSR.

In order to combat the rise of nationalism, Party authorities in Moldavia expressed the need for so-called “internationalist education,” or lectures in the inherently internationalist and anti-nationalist nature of socialism. For example, in an internal Party memo written in June 1987, Moldavian Party authorities called for “an increased attention to socio-economic and cultural development for cities and villages with majority Gagauz and Bulgarian nationalities. Everywhere we have started work on the education (*vospitanie*) of our people, especially the youth, in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and socialist internationalism, as well as the friendship of the peoples of the Soviet Union.”⁶⁸ In another case from July of the same year, a Moldavian film director was denounced by *Pravda* for employing nationalist motifs in his work. In defense of his friend, an ethnic Russian director from Moscow wrote a letter to Moldavian Party authorities in which he doubted his friend’s guilt, asking: “is our long friendship not a true example of internationalism on a personal level?”⁶⁹ The director pointed out that “the *Pravda* article stated that Glasnost’ is a weapon of honest people. That is why I chose to write this letter. A letter in defense of an honest person.”⁷⁰ These documents from the Moldavian SSR reveal concerns which did not

⁶⁸ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 278.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

align with universalist lofty ideals of national renewal promoted by Russian intellectuals in Moscow and Leningrad. In places such as Moldavia, even the early years of Perestroika were marred by squabbles over nationalism, as ideological goals of strengthening socialism were relegated to secondary importance and Soviet citizens struggled with applying abstract concepts such as “rebuilding” to their own lives and institutions.

Compared to their Russian counterparts, moreover, Moldavian intellectuals and Party members in the mid-1980s were preoccupied with concerns regarding not just morality, but also amorality, particularly as it related to nationalism. At the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of the Moldavian SSR in January of 1987, the people’s deputies called for the “end of the deterioration of the moral and psychological condition among the members of the Writers’ Union.”⁷¹ In a speech to the Moldavian Writers’ Union, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM) criticized “certain writers who need to recognize their responsibility in shaping patriotic Soviet workers,”⁷² while Moldovan Party leaders called for a patriotic education in the Writers’ Union. While the people’s deputies were critical of “liberalism,” or lack of adherence to socialist dogma among the writers, the critiques once again resembled earlier discourses of morality, suggesting that not all Party organs were privy to Gorbachev’s understanding of moral revolution.

⁷¹ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 74, d. 28, l. 13.

⁷² Ibid.

In Moldova, another group of writers were condemned for “manifestations of immoral behavior” after their “nationalist speeches” at the Sixth Plenum of the Communist Party of Moldova in 1986.⁷³ After the writers were excluded from the Party, an internal memo declared that “these ideas are fundamentally opposed to Leninist Party policy. However, after reading the speeches of Central Committee secretaries at various meetings and conferences (in universities and in Moldavian *Komsomol* groups), it is obvious that this particular [national] question is unresolved in our republic.” Another memo from 1987 encouraged party organs to improve the “moral and psychological climate in the writers’ sphere” by organizing conferences and talks on the topic of “ideological and political education (*ideino-politicheskoe vospitanie*) of the members of the writers’ union... while foregrounding internationalist and patriotic education (*internatsional’noe vospitanie*) in the Moldavian writers’ union.”⁷⁴ The confusion within the writers’ union suggest that even in 1987, there were ideological limits to Glasnost’. While some of the writers seemed to be taking advantage of what they perceived to be a more open climate, they found that some topics, such as nationalism, were still taboo. The need for ideological “education” to put them on the right path suggests that morality was useful for straightening out those writers who had taken Glasnost’ as a license to stray too far from ideologically acceptable discourse.

Early Perestroika and the Ukrainian SSR

⁷³ “Party Memo on Question of Nationalities in the Moldavian SSR,” Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 74, d. 28, ll. 13-14.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

At first glance, Party authorities in Ukraine were concerned with many of the same issues as their counterparts in Moscow throughout the Late Socialist period, especially as issues such as nationalism became more prevalent. Internal Party memos from 1985 and 1986 decried the rising crime rates and the supposed omnipresence of parasites in the republic. One 1986 Ukrainian Party memo from Pavlohrad declared that “the fight against individuals who are conducting an anti-social, parasitical lifestyle remains a sharp problem in the city. Many parasites and freeloaders are outside of the purview of internal organs of society in general.”⁷⁵ Another document from June 1985 had called for the abolition of anti-social elements, complaining that “the number of parasites increases by the year. There are multiple cases where malicious freeloaders live a parasitical lifestyle for years, drink, and break the law.”⁷⁶ The calls to combat immoral behavior and parasitism show remarkable continuities between the Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and early Gorbachev periods. On the surface, Party authorities continued to express concern regarding crime, immoral behavior, and parasitism.

Moreover, as in previous decades, KGB agents continued to have their hands full trying to contain the effects of Western influence in order to preserve the “upstanding moral character of the Soviet person (*moral'nyi oblik sovetskogo cheloveka*).” A KGB memo from 1986 decried the influence of Western music in Ukraine, stating that “some citizens have been using high-quality audio equipment to

⁷⁵ “O neudovletvoritel'nom sostoianii bor'by s prestupnost'iu,” TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 2885, l. 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

listen to foreign music... the content of which includes propaganda and ideals hostile to Soviet society and its moral norms.”⁷⁷ The memo stressed the importance of “preventing the popularization of materials with hostile ideas about the USSR, materials which promote moral and ethical norms alien to our society.”⁷⁸ The KGB’s concerns regarding Western culture and the notions that Western media was undermining the norms of communist morality resemble earlier moral panics of the Brezhnev and the Khrushchev periods.

However, much like in the Moldavian SSR, the 27th Party congress and the official introduction of Glasnost’ in late 1986 unleashed forces beyond the Party’s control in the Ukrainian SSR. While Party authorities in Ukraine remained concerned with crime and amoral behavior, they also became worried about manifestations of nationalism. An internal KGB memo reacted to the 27th Party congress by stating that “KGB organs are fighting with anti-Soviet provocations and ideological diversions....by bourgeois nationalists.”⁷⁹ Much like in the Moldavian SSR, the Ukrainian Communist Party stressed the importance of “ideological, political, and moral education (*ideino-politicheskoe vospitanie*).”⁸⁰ The same internal Party memo from 1987, however, admitted:

[T]here are cases of homegrown [incorrect] conceptions of Perestroika, ideals of political paralysis and unconstructive criticism of social and economic problems. Some nationalist elements, especially individuals previously convicted by the justice system... are trying to create groups of individuals with anti-social intentions.... The leaders of these groups are

⁷⁷ “Dokladnaia zapiska,” SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1238, ll. 220-221.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁷⁹ “Dokladnaia zapiska,” SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1242, ll. 45-46.

⁸⁰ “O dal’neishem ulutshenii raboty s molodezh’iu,” TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 3318, l. 12.

undergoing prophylactic and educational talks and events
(*vospitatel'no-profilakticheskie meropriiatiia*).⁸¹

Much like in Moldavia, *vospitanie* in the Ukrainian SSR involved educating Soviet citizens in the spirit of internationalism. The reeducational spirit of Perestroika and the conclusions of Gorbachev's 27th Party congress manifested themselves in different ways in Ukraine, in comparison to Russia. In Ukraine, as in the Moldavian SSR, the changes of Perestroika and the encouragement of transparency brought to light national grievances.

In Ukraine, nationalist sentiments also emerged from the Soviet government's handling of the nuclear meltdown at reactor number four at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Ukrainian city of Pripyat in April 1986. As Kate Brown points out in her work *Manual for Survival*, the Soviet state took active steps to cover up the severity of the disaster and to prevent leaks of information from the region.⁸² Coming only one month after the 27th Party congress, the Chernobyl accident marred the positive atmosphere of renewal and rebirth introduced by the congress to a Soviet Union in desperate need of reform.

Compared to Party documents from Moscow and Kishinev, which explored anxieties over the future of Perestroika, documents from the Party and KGB archives in Kyiv show a perpetual anxiety about the social and political fallout from the catastrophe. As early as April 1986, classified KGB memos displayed concerns over

⁸¹ Ibid., 35.

⁸² Kate Brown, *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 2019.

citizens of the Ukrainian SSR using the catastrophe to delegitimize Soviet power in the Ukrainian SSR. Some nationalist-minded Ukrainians decried the catastrophe as an “actualization of long-standing plans in Moscow to carry out the planned destruction and russification of Ukraine.”⁸³ After multiple groups of citizens openly displayed their concern over the catastrophe, the KGB responded by creating “ideological response groups” to ensure a “healthy” understanding of the situation in Chernobyl.⁸⁴ The KGB also showed concern regarding public distrust of disseminated information after the catastrophe, with one document expressing the worry that “in some cases, people have displayed doubt in the objectivity of official messages regarding the consequences of the accident, the level of radiation in Kyiv and the surrounding areas.”⁸⁵ The author of the same document expressed concern over the fact that “our enemies are using radio programs, letters, and personal contacts to inspire negative thoughts by spreading false information and creating panic among Soviet people.”⁸⁶

While Soviet authorities and the KGB were certainly concerned with containing the radioactive fallout from the Chernobyl catastrophe, internal KGB documents suggest that the Party was just as concerned with ideological loyalty in the wake of the nuclear meltdown.⁸⁷ The creation of response teams to monitor the

⁸³ “Dokladnaia zapiska,” SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1238, l. 101.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 104.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 150.

⁸⁷ The Chernobyl disaster has recently been the focus of a number of scholarly and literary works. Historians and scholars such as Serhii Plokyh, Svetlana Alexievich, and Kate Brown have explored the causes and consequences of the catastrophe. Plokyh explores the underlying reasons for the collapse while Brown shows how the authorities in Moscow covered up the accident, tracing the legacy of Chernobyl in the region. My chapter explores the Ukrainian Communist Party’s political and social restrictions following the catastrophe. Serhii Plokyh, *Chernobyl: History of a Tragedy* (London:

ideological disposition of Soviet citizens and foreigners resembles tactics utilized by the Soviet state during the Stalin period, suggesting that the Perestroika and Glasnost' period was perhaps not as liberal and openminded as Gorbachev and his supporters claimed. During this time period, much like before, the Party conflated ideological loyalty with Soviet citizens' ability to be a good communist and a good Soviet citizen.

KGB organs were also acutely concerned with the optics of Chernobyl, as the accident undermined ordinary citizens' faith in the Soviet project. One document, for instance, records that Ukrainian Party organs were combating "anti-Soviet fiction and bourgeois propaganda.... regarding 'dead Kyiv' and 'the poisoning of all lands in Ukraine.'"⁸⁸ In reaction to Gorbachev's delayed speech after Chernobyl, one KGB memo tracking citizens' reactions to Chernobyl mentioned a case in which one citizen stated that "the Soviet people's moral and material help to Chernobyl victims is a manifestation of the highest levels of humanism and morality."⁸⁹ According to the same document, "the workers of our republic have condemned the amoral campaign which bourgeois propaganda has conducted after the accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant."⁹⁰ While the optimistic tone of these documents is questionable, the use of the language of morality suggests that the Chernobyl catastrophe was seen

Penguin Publishers, 2018); Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices From Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (London: Picador Publishing, 2015); Kate Brown, *Manual for Survival*; Sonya Schmid, *Producing Power: The Pre-Chernobyl History of the Soviet Nuclear Industry* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015).

⁸⁸ "Reactions to Gorbachev's speech on May 4, 1986," TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 2979, l. 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

as a moral, as well as social, political, economic, and environmental issue. Internal Party documents show a preoccupation with dealing with the fallout from Chernobyl and its ecological consequences during Perestroika, rather than concerns over trying to build a New Socialist Person during Perestroika. Overall, these documents also display the contrast between the Communist Party's concerns in Moldavia and Ukraine, as the two republics faced starkly different challenges in the years of Perestroika, despite their geographical proximity to one another.

To combat the legitimate concerns of the Soviet population after Chernobyl, the KGB infiltrated ordinary workers' collectives in the Ukrainian SSR. One KGB document from the Ukrainian SSR from 1986 triumphantly declared that the "the population of Kyiv and the surrounding regions, including those directly affected by the accident, continue to show ideological maturity, restraint, and confidence."⁹¹ Another KGB document stated that the situation in "labor collectives... is normal and is being controlled by us."⁹² The KGB's concern over the attitudes of its citizens toward the Chernobyl accident reflected deeper anxieties over the beliefs of Soviet citizens. Until the collapse of the USSR, KGB continued to infiltrate labor collectives to propagandize ideologically "correct" points of view. Despite the spirit of openness implied by Glasnost', the KGB fundamentally did not trust Soviet citizens or tolerate dissenting points of view. These documents suggest that early Perestroika was not a period of democracy and transparency, as the Kremlin suggested. Instead,

⁹¹ "Dokladnaia zapiska," SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1238, l. 102.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 108.

cataclysmic events such as the Chernobyl reactor meltdown led to strict ideological control and state intervention into the lives of Soviet citizens in Ukraine. Chernobyl, and the state's reactions to the accident, epitomized the contradictions of Perestroika. Following the accident, Party authorities sought to enforce a strict moral code of communist comportment in a time of ostensible liberalization and openness.

Conclusion

Arguments around morality fostered by the moral reawakening of the Perestroika period are central for understanding official discourses during the late 1980s in the USSR. Much like during the Khrushchev period, in the years between 1985 and 1989, Soviet citizens appropriated and applied the discourse on morality for their own political goals. In reaction to forces unleashed by Gorbachev, Soviet citizens seized onto the opportunities to push the margins of socialist discourse to previously unimaginable limits. The guidelines put forth by Gorbachev and the Kremlin proved to be ambiguous and subjective, leaving ordinary Soviet citizens and Party members to navigate the meanings of Gorbachev's morality. The arguments over the definitions of this morality exposed the underlying tensions and contradictions in Soviet society. In fact, in the early Perestroika period some ordinary citizens and official publications viewed Perestroika as a continuation of business as usual, while others pushed for a radical transformation of Soviet society. This lack of consensus on the language of morality led to disagreements and conflict in the press and on the streets of places such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSR. In these republics, some ordinary citizens were primarily concerned with the unravelling of

the socialist project while others pushed an anti-Soviet, nationalist agenda, exposing the long-existing schisms in Soviet society which Perestroika could not heal.

Furthermore, cataclysmic events such as the Chernobyl catastrophe fundamentally warped the course of Perestroika in Ukraine. During this period, the Party utilized the oppressive machinery of the state to suppress dissent in the republic during a time of ostensible democratic socialism and openness.

As I will show in the next chapter, the forces unleashed by the Communist Party during early Perestroika led it to lose its monopoly on the discourse of morality, causing the Soviet state to unravel at the seams, as Soviet citizens left the Party in droves. In an ultimate historical irony, Gorbachev's calls for a moral reawakening in the Soviet Union ultimately led to its collapse. The spiritual reawakening in this period would have been impossible without Glasnost' and Perestroika. The period of early Perestroika laid the groundwork for Soviet citizens to seize onto ambiguous notions of morality to destroy the Soviet state, laying the foundation for the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union.

Chapter Five

Perestroika, *Vospitanie*, and the Soviet Collapse: 1988-1991

In a KGB memo from the city of L'viv from March 13, 1990, dismayed KGB operatives decried the plethora of new political movements aimed at undermining Soviet power in the Ukrainian SSR. The memo complained that “in their attempt to seize power, numerous political groups, many of them promoting a nationalist worldview... have been able to push the official Party apparatus and organs of ideological influence to a place of secondary importance in the republic.”¹ This particular KGB document, written roughly a year and a half before the official collapse of the Soviet Union, underscored the anxieties felt by many official Party members before the collapse. In contrast to the political situation in the USSR merely a few years earlier, starting in 1988 with statutes such as the Law on Cooperatives, which allowed private enterprise, and continuing through the 1991 referendum, when Gorbachev introduced a public vote on the preservation of the Soviet Union, the circumstances in places such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs spiraled out of control. In these republics, nationalist and anti-Soviet groups seized the apparatus of state power, including Party newspapers, radio stations, and police organs. Even though the Party attempted to utilize local collectives and workers' councils to rally support behind the socialist cause, by the end of 1990 the Party had lost control over its monopoly on public discourse, functionally destroying the Soviet Union before its official collapse in December of 1991.

¹ “O razvitii obstanovki vo L'vove,” SBU Archive, f. 1, op. 16, d. 1284, l. 109.

Much like in earlier periods of Soviet history, morality and education (*vospitanie*) were still very much at the center of public discourse in Late Perestroika.² However, by 1989 Soviet citizens had learned to appropriate and twist the vague definitions of this morality for their own political goals, actively working to undermine the Soviet socialist project, though few Soviet citizens and Party leaders predicted the Soviet collapse.³ This process was most pronounced in the peripheries of the Soviet Union, in places such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs. As nationalist groups such as the National Front in Moldova seized onto Gorbachev's notion of Glasnost', with its implication of open criticism, by the summer of 1988 idealistic notions of a bright socialist future were replaced by nationalist slogans, and the optimism of the 27th Party congress in 1986 turned into anti-Soviet agitation. Seizing onto the opportunities to discuss previously taboo topics, and using the language of socialist morality, ordinary Soviet citizens questioned the moral legitimacy of the socialist state, while Soviet apologists denounced their neighbors and coworkers for undermining so-called traditional Soviet values. By 1988, I show that National Front movements across the Soviet Union twisted the ideas of socialist morality invoked by Gorbachev to use as ammunition against the Soviet state. In other words, I argue that during the Gorbachev period, the state opened the possibility for nationalists to seize onto the idea of morality, with which they could accuse the

² Scholars such as Leon Aron have pointed out that morality and spiritual rebirth were central to Perestroika in the 1980s. Aron, *Roads to Temple*.

³ As Alexei Yurchak points out in his essay "The Canon and the Mushroom," the Party's attempt to revitalize Soviet ideology by returning to Lenin's original texts yielded the opposite result. Alexei Yurchak, "The Canon and the Mushroom: Lenin, Sacredness, and Soviet Collapse," *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 2 (2017): 165-198.

socialist state itself of lacking moral legitimacy. The discourse of idiosyncratically Soviet concepts such as the so-called “Friendship of the Peoples” lost meaning as both pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet groups utilized it to justify their respective political aims.⁴

By 1989, as evidenced in letters to the editor, personal correspondences, and archival documents, the Communist Party in Moldova and Ukraine had little influence in public discourse, despite the Party’s ostensible preeminence in these Soviet republics. As defenders of the Soviet system and anti-Soviet nationalists alike promoted competing claims of moral legitimacy, social schisms based on nationality and political allegiance compromised every aspect of public life in these republics. When neither Soviet hardliners, nor their National Front opponents were willing to compromise their ideals, these schisms led to violence and clashes in the streets. As shown in the previous chapter, the discourse of a new, reinvigorated morality at the heart of these clashes would have been impossible without Gorbachev.

The political and social situation, however, was not the same in all Soviet republics. While in the Moldavian SSR the population was somewhat evenly split between nationalist groups and pro-Soviet forces, Ukrainians seemed more content to remain in the Soviet Union despite the meltdown at Chernobyl. In the case of Ukraine, nationalist groups, representing a sizeable minority of the Ukrainian

⁴ As historian Jeff Sahadeo points out, the Friendship of the Peoples had real meaning for many Central Asian migrants in Moscow and Leningrad during the Brezhnev period. This discourse, however, unraveled during the 1980s. I trace these shifts in Moldova and Ukraine. Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

population utilized the opportunities of Perestroika and Glasnost to declare Ukrainian independence from the USSR. While the Ukrainian National Front movements did not represent the majority of the Ukrainian populations, the chaos of Late Perestroika presented an opportunity to undermine the legitimacy of the USSR.

Scholars such as Stephen Kotkin, Archie Brown, and Stephen White, blame the collapse of the Soviet Union either on widespread cynicism or on Gorbachev himself. Others, such as Alexei Yurchak, argued that many Soviet citizens were not surprised that the Soviet Union collapsed, despite thinking that its disintegration was impossible, as the performative aspect of official discourse suggested that few Soviet citizens expected any sort of meaningful progress.⁵ Others have pointed to the nationalist movements across the Soviet Union as the instrumental driving force of change. With a particular focus on the Baltic states, many political scientists argued that nationalist, anti-Soviet movements were instrumental in undermining the legitimacy of the Soviet state and the Communist Party.⁶ This literature portrays Soviet nationalist movements as largely peaceful, despite the outbreaks of violence in places such as Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan.⁷ As political scientist Mark Beissinger points out, this “teleological assessment...views the actions of individuals as epiphenomena of structure, as if the human actions involved in the

⁵ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*; Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World*; Stephen White, *Communism and its Collapse* (London: Routledge, 2001); Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*.

⁶ Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and Transition to Democracy*; Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence*; Senn, *Lithuania Awakening*; Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism*.

⁷ The removal of the Kazakh First Secretary in 1986 became fertile ground for nationalist grievances in that republic. Other Soviet republics, including Lithuania, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan also saw violent clashes with the Soviet army.

collapse of the USSR were not intentional but rather reflections of a larger logic or moving hand operating outside the individual.”⁸

This chapter attempts to explore how individual agents exploited the opportunities presented by Gorbachev’s Glasnost’ and Perestroika to undermine Soviet power. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Beissinger and Botakoz Kassymbekova, who explore the role of local agents and Party members in the Soviet periphery, I argue that the actions of ordinary citizens and local Party cadres in Moldova and Ukraine were essential to the disintegration of the Soviet state. Although Kassymbekova’s work focuses on Soviet Tajikistan in the 1920s and 1930s, she argues that Soviet official discourse seldom had any set meaning:

Since language and actions were open and flexible, the system based on individuals embodied a crucial dilemma for party leaders: how does one check loyalty if one’s own envoys are empowered above laws and words? Flexibility on the part of the state and officials could jeopardize ‘real’ central state control. How can one trust officials who failed to implement campaigns but could legitimize them in terms of corresponding to Bolshevik rhetoric? These puzzles inspired insecurity on the part of central leaders, who had to constantly come up with strategies to motivate, empower, and celebrate – but also check, secure and, purge – their own envoys.⁹

Some of the problems from the 1920s explored by Kassymbekova still existed on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Drawing on Kassymbekova’s work, this chapter explores the actions of individuals on the Soviet periphery during the late 1980s. I trace the shifts in the meaning of official discourse through Party memos,

⁸ Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, 7.

⁹ Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

letters, and denunciations, arguing that instead of being hopelessly formalistic, official state discourse during Perestroika was dynamic, allowing ordinary officials to appropriate Party language for their own benefit.

This chapter also provides a new perspective on the role of nationalism in the Soviet collapse. By the end of the 1980s in the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs, for some Soviet citizens nationality and national identity trumped any allegiance to the communist Party or to the Kremlin, suggesting that in the Soviet periphery, these tensions were simmering beneath the surface for decades.¹⁰ While historians such as Sergei Zhuk, Michael Bruchis, and Serhii Plokhii have explored the nationalist movements of the 1980s in the Ukrainian and Moldavian SSRs, none have linked these movements to local interpretations of morality and the New Socialist Person, instead relying on nationalism as the sole reason for the collapse of the USSR.¹¹ Other have pointed out that the events in the Baltics were crucial to understanding the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, while the literature on the Baltic states primarily focuses on these republics' opposition to the Kremlin, this chapter complicates that narrative and explores the conflicts between nationalists and the significant pro-Soviet forces in the Ukrainian and Moldavian SSRs. I argue that resistance to and appropriation of official Soviet language in the periphery led to the creation of new, unpredictable meanings in Soviet discourse. Ironically, both

¹⁰ While Yurchak points out these tensions, Yurchak's work is based on interviews with ethnic Russians and does not analyze the link between Soviet subjectivity and national identity. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*.

¹¹ Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*; Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*; Plokhii, *The Gates of Europe*; Bruchis, *The History of Moldavia*.

supporters and opponents of Soviet power were able to simultaneously appropriate, resist, and emulate official Soviet discourse. As shown in the previous chapter, the tenets of Gorbachev's morality were vague, allowing both supporters of Soviet socialism and their nationalist opponents to pick and choose aspects of official discourse to support their cause. While the ambiguous language of morality had often divided Soviet citizens in previous decades, the scale of disagreement in the Glasnost' era was unprecedented. Moreover, the destabilization caused by nationalist appropriation of a newly emergent official discourse on morality and the New Socialist Person during Perestroika weakened the power of the Soviet state, as the usual strategies of appeasement, violence, and oppression ceased to function in intended ways. Ultimately, I argue that the Soviet Union collapsed from the peripheries, as the authorities in Moscow lost the monopoly on public discourse.

Ideology and Ambivalence in Late Perestroika

By the late 1980s, despite the emergence of mass nationalist movements, not all Soviet citizens were ready to abandon the Soviet project. Just as Gorbachev intended, some Soviet party organs and members viewed Perestroika as an opportunity to rehabilitate the tarnished image of socialism within the Soviet Union. A 1990 internal document from the Moldavian SSR, for instance, contained the statement that “we are deeply committed to the positions of socialism and Soviet power. We do not accept any other ideology and we must fight for it [communism].” At the same time, the memo denounced the calls and letters to use police batons and violence to subdue anti-communist protesters, stating that “some of our ideologues

are manifesting the spirit of Stalinist-Brezhnevite thinking (*stalinsko-brezhnevskoe myshlenie*).”¹² Another memo echoed this sentiment, stating that “While many canonized concepts and laws are now subject to criticism and reassessment, we are witnessing a renewal of socialist ideology. Furthermore, in many ways we are still imprisoned by the period of stagnation.”¹³ These memos reflect the ongoing tension and ambivalence within the Communist Party during the period of Late Perestroika. Soviet authorities sought to condemn the Party’s crimes of the preceding decades while simultaneously attempting to preserve the preeminence of state socialism in Soviet society. The reference in the second memo to the renewal of socialist ideology echoed Gorbachev’s calls for reconstruction and renewal of a society “imprisoned by stagnation.”¹⁴ The conflation of “Stalinism” and “Brezhnevism” into one category and mode of thought reflects the internal struggle between the profound desire to preserve Soviet socialism while discrediting the temporal majority of Soviet history.¹⁵ These divisions were also especially apparent in the peripheries of the Soviet Union,

¹² The condemnation of “Stalinist-Brezhnevite thinking” seems to consistently appear during this period, suggesting that some citizens viewed the Khrushchev period as a period of positive reform. Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 73, d. 162, l. 28.

¹³ While the Brezhnev period was not marked by police batons and violence, the authors of these memos were referring to the liberal use of state violence as a tool of social control both during the 1930s and the 1970s. The association between “Stalinism” and “Brezhnevism” referred to similar patterns in suppression of dissent during those periods. *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴ The term “stagnation” was only popularized during Perestroika, as Gorbachev used the term to describe the Brezhnev era.

¹⁵ According to Soviet dissident Roy Medvedev, Gorbachev very much saw himself as carrying on Khrushchev’s legacy of top-down liberal reform during the “Thaw.” As a result, some Party apparatchiks were reluctant to condemn Khrushchev in the way they condemned Stalin and Brezhnev during Perestroika. Roy Medvedev, Zhores Medvedev, *Khrushchev: The Years in Power* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978); Roy Medvedev, *Khrushchev: politicheskaiia biografiia* (Moscow: Kniga, 1990).

where the arguments over how to implement Perestroika and Glasnost' spilled over into national discord.

Some Soviet citizens blamed the rise in nationalist sentiment on forces unleashed by Glasnost'. A letter to *Pravda* from 1989 blamed so-called moral relativism and a lack of moral education (*vospitanie*) on the rise of crime and various political movements, phenomena which official publications associated with one another.¹⁶ The letter asked: "How do we explain the current rise of crime in the Soviet Union? Can we not also explain in this way the rise of various extremist and anti-social forces? Letters from readers are getting harsher and harsher every day—as is evidence of the rise of hooliganism and nationalist sentiment."¹⁷ It seems that not all Soviet citizens were elated by the newly unleashed forces of Glasnost'; indeed, some lamented the rise of various social movements across the USSR.¹⁸ Furthermore, the author's explicit link between hooliganism and nationalism suggests that some Soviet citizens regarded both behaviors in tandem, correlating the rise in crime, immoral behavior, and nationalist sentiment. Another Party declaration in *Pravda* from later that year stated that "One of the biggest dangers to our state today is manifestations of nationalism and chauvinism... and the attempts to create nationalist armed conflicts."¹⁹ The article went on to say that "Good communists cannot allow themselves... to be swayed by nationalist movements... and should consider it their

¹⁶ A. Chernenko, A. Cherniak, "O bukve zakona i dykhanii zhizni," *Pravda* no. 198 (July 17, 1989), 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ The literature on the collapse of the Soviet Union has generally focused on narratives of resistance to Soviet power in the periphery.

¹⁹ "Internatsional'noe edinstvo KPSS," *Pravda* no. 362 (December 28, 1989), 1.

duty to combat nationalism and chauvinism within their Party and work collectives.”²⁰ This article, too, suggested that communist morality was incompatible with nationalist sentiments.

Yet outside of the RSFSR, many non-Russian nationalists also appropriated the discourse of Soviet morality. Although Soviet newspapers continued to maintain that socialist internationalism was a core tenet of Soviet morality, as stated in the Moral Code, some Soviet citizens saw little contradiction between their nationalist beliefs and their allegiance to the Soviet state. For example, in one Russian-language complaint written in 1989 in the Rybnitsa oblast of the Moldavian SSR and addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Moldavian SSR, the author stated, “I am a communist and a soldier. Russians have no moral consciousness as communists and are poisoning the relationship between the various people of the USSR.”²¹ The weaponization of the language of morality here suggested that while some Soviet citizens were aware of the official discourses on morality, they ultimately made their own, subjective conclusions with regard to its use in their daily lives.

Other Soviet citizens appropriated state-sanctioned discourses on morality to call the state itself immoral and to fan the flames of ethnic conflict and nationalist strife. In a letter addressed to Gorbachev from the Azerbaijani SSR, a group of factory workers reacted angrily to the invasion of Baku by Soviet forces in 1990.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 74, d. 87, l. 5.

They wrote that “Gorbachev, whose hands are already drenched by the blood of Kazakhs, Georgians, and Abkhazians, personally allowed for the invasion of our republic. We communists cannot tolerate the actions of this bloodthirsty tyrant, and we are leaving the Party until Gorbachev is punished for his immoral crimes against the Soviet people.”²² The letter concluded:

We upstanding communists and factory workers oppose the implementation of martial law in the city of Baku, and we oppose Moscow’s suppression of our sacred democratic national movements.... We communists consider Gorbachev’s and the CPSU’s actions a violation of the norms of socialist humanism and condemn the behavior of the anti-humanist, anti-communist Soviet government.²³

In an unprecedented appropriation of official language for the purposes of state criticism, these Soviet citizens invoked their innate righteousness as both communists and nationalists participating in a “sacred democratic” movement to criticize the hypocrisy of the General Secretary and his government. This kind of open hostility to the Party leaders in the Kremlin would have been impossible even in the mid-1980s, yet Glasnost’ and the reemergence of private commerce had led to irreversible discursive shifts in the USSR by the years of Late Perestroika. Complicating matters even further, complaints such as this one even implied that it was possible to simultaneously be a nationalist and a good communist. Central Soviet authorities had little control over the unravelling of the Soviet Union from the periphery.

²² Ibid., 88. The letter was addressed to Gorbachev, so it is unclear how it ended up in Moldovan archives.

²³ Ibid., 89.

In sharp contrast, however, other Soviet citizens used the same language of morality to stifle nationalist movements and to defend Soviet socialism. One letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova from a Soviet citizen in the Ungeni region of the Moldavian SSR requested that a co-worker be deported for harboring pro-Romanian, anti-Soviet sympathies during the Second World War, while another letter to Party organs from 1989 called for the public arrests of all members of the National Front, a pro-independence party in the Moldavian SSR, for violating the “the norms of internationalist socialism.”²⁴ Once again, these examples put on display the vagueness and ambiguity of official language; with notions of communist morality and proper forms of behavior remaining contentious and unstable, some Soviet citizens were able to use the language of morality to criticize the authorities in Moscow, while others attempted to utilize this discourse to inhibit the nationalist causes undermining Soviet power.

Using much stronger language than in earlier periods of Soviet history, some citizens even saw the nationalist appropriation of socialist discourse as a transgression of Soviet morality. In a letter to the Moldavian Communist Party, an ethnically Moldovan disgruntled Soviet citizen stated, “As a communist and a veteran of the Second World War who liberated our Soviet land from fascist occupants.... I was outraged watching [nationalist] maniacs deface the statue of Lenin in our [Kishinev’s] central square while chanting that communists are occupants.”²⁵ With an appeal to the

²⁴ It is important to note that Moldova only became a Soviet republic in 1940, and then again in 1945. Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 74, d. 109, ll. 9, 50.

²⁵ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 74, d. 87, l. 22.

discourse of communist morality and Soviet justice, the letter writer proclaimed, “[W]e must enforce our Soviet laws.” With a clear reference to the Anti-Parasite law of 1961, the author asked, “how else can we prevent hooligans and criminals from violating the norms of our society?”²⁶ and called National Front participants “maniacs, social parasites, and hooligans.”²⁷ The author reminded the Party officials that “it is our duty as communists to report such immoral behavior.”²⁸

Even as late as 1990, the collapse of the Soviet Union was neither an obvious nor a desired outcome for many citizens of the USSR, as suggested by a survey conducted in 1990 in the Moldavian SSR, asking citizens of the republic whether the Communist Party of Moldavia could salvage Perestroika and lead the republic out of the dire political situation, to which 76% of respondents answered positively. Another question asked whether citizens of Soviet Moldavia citizens saw any viable long-term alternative to the Communist Party, to which 64% answered in the negative. Finally, 72% of respondents stated that they condemned feuds between communists based on ethnicity and national origin.²⁹ Though some of the Baltic states such as Latvia and Estonia were proclaiming independence from the USSR by the spring of 1990, in places such as Moldova not all Soviet citizens, including ethnic Moldovans, were willing to condemn the Soviet Union to the dustbin of history. Even in places torn apart by ethnic feuds, many residents of the Moldavian SSR displayed hope in the Communist Party’s ability to salvage the situation and to preserve the USSR.

²⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 73, d. 162, l. 91.

From the Moldavian SSR to Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) Moldova

Despite optimism about building a new society shared by many Soviet citizens during Perestroika, by 1990 the CPSU openly admitted to losing its monopoly on public discourse and meaningful ties to the Kremlin. On June 5th, in a pivot away from the Russian-speaking world, the republic was named SSR Moldova in accordance with the Romanian spelling of the republic's name, symbolizing the republic's schism with Moscow.³⁰ In the Moldavian SSR, the National Front movement led by liberal activists such as Anatol Salaru and Mircea Druc, who envisioned an independent Moldova without the Communist Party, created competing structures of power based on the parliamentary liberal democratic model. The National Front organization recruited volunteers and workers within Communist Party organs, leading to internal Party criticism and suggesting a deep split within the CPSU itself. As the Party collapsed from within, so did the Soviet state itself. A 1989 party memo from the Moldavian SSR suggested that "the current political situation and the widespread popularity of the National Front represents an existential threat to our Party."³¹ Another memo stated that:

Despite President Gorbachev's address to the Soviet people, tensions in the USSR are at a breaking point. The Moldovan National front insists on renaming the Moldavian SSR the Romanian Republic of Moldova while the Transnistrian and Gagauzian separatists are creating separate republics in the interest of preserving the USSR. Among the separatists, there are many dedicated communists, creating accusations that the Communist

³⁰ During this time period, the use of Moldavian SSR vs. Moldovan SSR was a display of a certain political allegiance. National Front groups exclusively used Moldovan SSR while more conservative, pro-Russian Moldovans continued to refer to the republic as the Moldavian SSR.

³¹ *Ibid.*, l. 27.

Party is implicitly supporting anti-Moldovan separatist movements... Regardless of the fact that the CPSU has disavowed Stalinism... and today represents a new generation of Soviet citizens, we are still seeing daily critiques of... communism, and even local Party cadres.³²

This memo suggests that Late Perestroika was a new stage in the history of the Soviet Union, in which nationalists seized on opportunities presented by Gorbachev's Glasnost' to undermine the state. Separatists in places such as Moldova were able to push Soviet discourse to previously unthinkable limits with critiques of the Soviet state, Lenin, and even the ideals of socialism.

Glasnost' gave nationalist movements the opportunity to openly criticize the state using official language. One Moldavian Party memo stated that "Intermovement," a faction within the Moldavian Communist Party, had misused Party discourse to promote nationalist goals. "Some of the People's Deputies from the Intermovement faction have advocated for granting the Moldavian language the status of a state language, while lowering the status of Russian," the memo reported.³³ Another memo expressed dismay that "for years, the CPSU retained its monopoly on public discourse, and presented itself as the singular representative of the people's interests. However, life and Perestroika have shown that this approach is unsustainable, and Glasnost' has created an atmosphere of multiple, competing, socio-political movements."³⁴ As National Front leaders, including Moldovan intellectuals such as Leonid Lari and Nicolae Costin, led anti-Soviet movements

³² Ibid., 7. The document is referring to Gorbachev's address to the Moldovan people in early 1990 urging calm within the republic.

³³ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 73, d. 163, l. 3.

³⁴ Ibid., 34.

based on the Baltic example, they offered a decidedly non-Soviet future, featuring an independent Moldova with a government based on Western liberal principles.

The appearance of anti-Soviet movements in places such as the Moldavian SSR represented a shift from clandestine opposition to Soviet power to outright subversion of communist ideals. The Moldovan National Front's liberal democratic message resonated with many Soviet citizens, causing them to leave the Party. Multiple essential government apparatuses and organizations ceased to function, as entire Party office buildings, including the city Soviet in the capital city of Kishinev, left their posts to join mass protests and demonstrations in the city in the summer of 1989. In response to the protests, an internal Party memo from early 1990 stated that "Our Party cadres are leaving the Party in droves. The Kishinev Party Commissariat is unable to fulfil the basic functions of running the city."³⁵ Another Party memo reported, "Due to political conflict within our factory, our office is split along political and ethnic lines. We are unable to cooperate or work as a collective."³⁶ A third memo lamented that "On our post in the Ministry of Culture, half of the staff has walked out and joined the anti-Soviet National Front. We cannot continue to work under such conditions."³⁷

The mass departure of Party members to the National Front indicated a fundamental transition of power in the republic. In elections to the Moldavian Supreme Soviet in February and March of 1990, the Moldovan National Front won a

³⁵ Moldovan National Archive, f. R-3343, op. 1, d. 15, l. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

landslide victory, despite the fact that the Communist Party was the only official party on the ballot, suggesting that National Front organs had successfully infiltrated the Communist Party. The widespread democratic appeal of the National Front in 1990 was indicated by the fact that central authorities in Moscow struggled to contain mass marches in the Moldavian capital, while both central and regional Communist Party authorities scrambled to retain a semblance of legitimacy for the CPSU.

Gorbachev's promises of democracy resulted in conflict and tension in the Western peripheral regions of the Soviet Union. In response to the Supreme Soviet elections in early 1990, Soviet Party authorities in the Moldavian SSR openly admitted that the situation in the republic was highly unstable and teetering on the brink of conflict. That summer, one year before the Moldovan Parliament's official declaration of sovereignty in the summer of 1991, the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moldova published an open letter stating that "the political situation in the republic... is changing very quickly. Every day of Perestroika puts before us complicated and ambiguous problems."³⁸ The letter writers went on to say that:

current events are evidence that in the context of expanding democracy, people have become... overcome with the political storm. We are witnessing an increased number of unsanctioned protests and marches... in which emotions and passion tend to overtake reason. We also consider it impossible to hide our alarm and concern regarding the fact that some irresponsible social elements promote anti-Soviet mottos with anti-communist content... Unending political protests not only increase the tension in society but rock the boat of Perestroika and can lead to serious, unanticipated consequences. Never

³⁸ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 73, d.162, l. 1.

before in history have hate, nationalist and chauvinist hysteria played a constructive role in society.... We are calling on all communists... on our youth, in whose hands is the future of Perestroika, but we are also calling everyone who values the revolutionary renewal of life not to succumb to demagogues and political contortionists.³⁹

The writers of the letter conceded the fact that the central authorities in Moscow had failed to provide clear guidelines for what was permitted and what was disallowed during Perestroika, nor had they spelled out the limits of Glasnost'. The authors suggested, however, that communist morality could provide a roadmap for how to reform the Soviet Union without potentially undermining the foundations of Soviet society. In this sense, the discourse of communist morality represented a moderating factor in Perestroika, intended to contain the forces unleashed during this time period within a constructive framework. The pleading tone of the letter shows the radical shift in political discourse between early and late Perestroika, as the Party called on Soviet youth for salvation, despite losing its monopoly over public discourse. Party members were not even certain whether "a Party monopoly over mass media would normalize the political situation in the republic."⁴⁰

With the main legislative body of the Communist Party dominated by the National Front in 1990, the Communist Party of Moldavia not only lost its monopoly on public discourse, but also its membership. Another Party memo admitted that, "unfortunately, among the initiators [of unrest] there are many Party organizations and communists.... We are witnessing the polarization and confrontation between

³⁹ Ibid., 2-3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24.

communists based on ethnic identity, especially in Transnistria.... The departure of communists from the Party to other political organizations has intensified.”⁴¹ The memo concluded that “regardless of the fact that the Communist Party of Moldavia has condemned the lawlessness... which took place in the past,” and that the Party had reminded people “that now it represents a new generation of people who have embraced the principles of humanism and democratic socialism, we see attacks on communists, the Party, Lenin, and socialism.”⁴²

A more dramatic memo from the Central Committee of the Moldavian Communist Party explicitly admitted the desperate nature of the situation following the outbreak of hostilities on the left bank of the Dniester river in the region known as Transnistria. As the Moldovan National Front sought to capitalize on its massive electoral gains in the Supreme Soviet, even declaring its intent to unify with Romania, Communist Party officials in Transnistria armed themselves in panic. One Communist Party memo from Transnistria stated that “a bottomless pit of catastrophic events has ruthlessly descended on the Moldavian land. Blood is being spilled, and humans, the highest creation of nature, are in danger.... As moral as some of the goals of Perestroika are, the actions of some social forces... can cause a national catastrophe from which we will not be able to get out.”⁴³ While the letter appealed to the innate morality and goodness of Perestroika, it implied that some nationalist groups had subverted the benevolent aims of the Communist Party,

⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

⁴² Ibid., 9

⁴³ Moldovan National Archive, f. R-3343, op. 1, d. 15, l. 5.

appropriating these goals to promote a distinctly anti-Soviet and anti-communist political agenda. Despite calls to “unite all moral and committed socialists who believe in the idea of communism,” the Party continued to have trouble retaining its membership throughout 1990, as appeals to fictitious moral communists rang hollow for many Soviet citizens.⁴⁴

In 1990, the Moldavian Communist Party was also deeply concerned with the events happening in the Baltics, as nationalist groups in Moldova seized onto the independence movements in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. On April 1, 1990, one month after the elections to the Moldavian Supreme Soviet mentioned above, a group from the National Front marched through the center of Kishinev chanting that the “Moldavian people support Lithuanian independence.” “Today Lithuania, Tomorrow Moldova,” they chanted, as well as “Down with the Communist Party.”⁴⁵ While the official memo describing the event denounced the protesters as immoral and conjured tropes of hooliganism, condemning the protesters for “eating sunflower seeds and drinking alcohol,” the Party clearly could not contain these manifestations of anti-Soviet behavior in the center of Kishinev. The denunciations of drunks and hooligans suggested that as late as the spring of 1990, the Party continued to cling onto an outdated and now largely ineffective repertoire of condemnation.

Fascinatingly, some internal Communist Party memos from the Moldavian SSR attributed the failures of the Party itself to a lack of morality and correct

⁴⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 89. By the summer of 1991, the Moldovan Supreme Soviet was renamed to the Moldovan Parliament.

behavior, both by individual Party members and on a structural level. One memo from 1991 stated:

The path walked by the Communist Party of Moldavia turned out to be difficult and dramatic, but also enlightening. The Party's goals were benevolent and brave. The socialist ideal mobilized people to grow the economy and to defeat fascism.... However, the means by which we achieved these great goals often not only undermined socialist values but contradicted communist morality.... leading to negative consequences in economic and cultural growth, in achieving the socialist ideal."⁴⁶

While admitting the Party's failures, however, the document also stated that it is "historically inaccurate and immoral to blame the Party's past mistakes on the current generation of Party cadres."⁴⁷ In the view of some members of the Moldavian Communist Party in 1991, moral transgressions and immorality were the primary culprits in the delegitimization of Soviet state socialism. According to the memo, immorality and the lack of adherence to communist ethics within the Party had led to the highly tenuous political situation. This memo represented an entirely new usage of communist morality, this time utilized by the Party itself as a tool to criticize the Soviet past. Unlike the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods, when communist morality was seen as a vehicle for the CPSU agenda, during Late Perestroika communist morality became a means for criticizing the Party itself and for undermining its political agenda.

As the Moldavian Communist Party lost any real political power by 1991, Party members abandoned its principles, fully embracing formerly unthinkable

⁴⁶ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 73, d. 187, l. 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

political positions, such as support for the market and private property. One Party memo from 1991 stated that “the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism-Leninism has deeply penetrated our hearts and minds. Overcoming old dogma is painful, it is causing moral and spiritual trauma. With great difficulty we are turning to social-democrat and non-communist ways of thinking, as our party cannot claim a monopoly on truth and on the implementation of socialist ideas.”⁴⁸ The memo went on to say, “our goal is humanist, democratic socialism.... However, in our case real socialism has diverged from its core principles.... What does this mean then? It means we believe in the market.”⁴⁹ The defense of socialism, social democracy and the market on one page of a Party memo represents a radical shift in the Party’s platform in the early 1990s, immediately before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The document combined Brezhnev-era notions of humanist socialism with Gorbachev’s notions of democracy and the seemingly incompatible desire for a free market. The ambiguities of Gorbachev’s reforms and his calls for the introduction of market elements to the socialist planned economy left Party organizations throughout the USSR to navigate the ambiguities of Perestroika. The memo exposed one of the multiple tensions of Late Perestroika, as top-down pressures for the “socialist market” conflicted with calls for building a communist utopia and moral Soviet citizens.

As a result of the Party’s inconsistent messaging on Perestroika, during this time period few Soviet citizens were willing to take the Party’s statements at face

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3

⁴⁹ Ibid.

value. In a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU from 1990, one letter writer from the Moldavian SSR stated, “As a member of the CPSU, I am writing to the highest Party organ in our unitary, totalitarian state.... I would like for the current leaders, who possess... power over our society, to stop their hypocrisy. And for the calls for more democracy to be more than mere declarations.”⁵⁰ This citizen’s criticism of Central Party organs is unprecedented in its candidness, yet for this particular citizen, Party authorities in Moscow had lost any shred of legitimacy by 1990. Ironically, by the time this letter was written, the Party had effectively lost its monopoly on power.

In spite of the weakening of the Party’s grip on power, some Soviet citizens continued to call for the central authorities to step in and violently suppress any anti-Soviet demonstrations and even calls for democratic reform. A letter written in February 1990 by a veteran of the Second World War from the Moldavian SSR and sent to the Central Committees of the Communist Party in Moscow, Kyiv, and Kishinev, as well as to the main office of the National Front in Kishinev, asked, “why is it that Party organs and local Soviets don’t disperse these National Front members like [the] animals [they are]? These people are manifesting abominable, hooligan behavior.... How long should we tolerate the banditism of these extremists and nationalists? It is time to disperse and to ban the existence of these groups.”⁵¹ The letter went on to say, “I was born on the territory of the Soviet Union, I went to

⁵⁰ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 74, d. 101, l. 7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23-4.

school here, was a Pioneer and Komsomol member here. We are all comrades, and my comrades are Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians, we never paid attention to anyone's nationality... all of us were always loyal comrades of our Motherland."⁵² Finally, the letter declared, "The CPSU must condemn the fascism in the National Front and other anti-Soviet movements, [must] suppress these hooligans, parasites, and reckless elements."⁵³ Another letter to Party organs from 1990 suggested banning any nationalists from participating in elections, stating that "any concessions by our leadership will be perceived as a weakness. I am not seeing enough punishment for these extremists and nationalists."⁵⁴

According to these letters, not all Soviet citizens were content with merely sitting idly by and watching the collapse of the USSR. Some called on their leaders to suppress, sometimes violently, the anti-Soviet nationalist movements in places such as the Moldavian SSR, feeling that the Party was not doing enough to suppress dissent. The use of the language of parasitism and hooliganism harkens back to an older, Khrushchev-era discourse on morality and comportment, as some Soviet citizens seized onto this discourse to denounce their political enemies as late as 1990. These disagreements between the residents of the Moldavian SSR led to political and social strife in the republic, ultimately leading to armed conflict. In the next section I compare the situation in Moldova to the one in Ukraine. Party bosses in Moscow had

⁵² Ibid., 25.

⁵³ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴ Moldovan Archive of Socio-Political History, f. 51, op. 74, d. 100, l. 116.

little say or control over the events unfolding in the other republics while the USSR unraveled not from the center, but from the periphery.

Morality and Ideology in Late Perestroika Ukraine

Unlike Moldova, which became part of the Soviet Union in 1940, or the Baltic states, which were added to the USSR only in 1945, Ukraine was one of the four founding republics to sign the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR in 1922. However, with the nuclear meltdown in Chernobyl and the rising popularity of nationalist movements in the republic, by the late 1980s many citizens of the Ukrainian SSR expressed their profound dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union. At the same time, Ukraine's trajectory in the collapse of the USSR was not as radical as Moldova, with the majority of Ukraine's population voting to remain in the Soviet Union in Gorbachev's 1991 referendum.

For a large proportion of the population of the Ukrainian SSR, the moral character of a Ukrainian communist was seen as essential to the success of Perestroika. In an internal Party memo from the Ukrainian SSR written in 1988, the author declared that "We are looking for new ways to increase the activity of communists, as well as strengthen Party discipline.... As a result, the main requirement we have for a communist is their political position, tangible participation in Perestroika... and their moral character."⁵⁵ Another memo from the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv stated that all Party organs are "dedicated to the formation of a [morally]

⁵⁵ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 3315, l. 31.

clean and honest Party member, as well as the strengthening of the moral character of Party organs.”⁵⁶

Much like during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods, the Communist Party utilized work collectives to verify the moral character of Party candidates. The same memo stated that “the forces of Democracy and Glasnost’ are influencing the Party admission process, as labor collectives take an active part in the selection process. More than ninety percent of applications for Party membership are reviewed at Party meetings and open to the general public; every second application is vetted by testimony from non-Party members, veterans of labor, and representatives of labor collectives.”⁵⁷ According to another memo, despite the shrinking membership within the Ukrainian Party in 1988 and 1989, Party members were excluded from the ranks for “failing to carry out Party tasks... and for moral corruption.”⁵⁸ Echoing Party discourse from the 1960s and 70s, another document from 1988 called for the “moral cleanliness of communists and unquestionable fulfillment of their duties.”⁵⁹

Overall, these memos suggest that during Late Perestroika, Soviet Party organs were still concerned with communist morality and the supposed moral cleanliness of communists. Even when Party members were leaving the Party for nationalist political groups, the process for admitting new members was still stringent, with a microscopic focus on the private and public life of applicants. Despite the calls for democracy and openness, the Party’s repertoire for admitting

⁵⁶ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 41.

new members strongly resembled earlier periods of Soviet history, when every aspect of individuals' private lives was scrutinized by Party organs.

Party documents continued to call for the scrutinization of citizens' daily lives. A Ukrainian party memo from 1988, for instance, declared that local Party collectives and ordinary workers "are doing everything they can to strengthen the fight against the evils of drunkenness, alcoholism, and drug addiction... with the help of society, the media, the legal system, as well as improvement in morality education (*vospitanie*) in labor and neighborhood collectives."⁶⁰ Another memo expressed that the Party's concern with "the fight for... a healthy, sober lifestyle is an important part of perestroika... and relevant to the 70th anniversary of the Great October Revolution."⁶¹ The same memo described how "the requirements for Party, Soviet, and legal organs have increased, [and] leading Party organs are responsible for keeping order and implementing a socialist labor lifestyle. This includes increased activity in the ideological and political sphere by Party workers."⁶² Finally, the authors of the memo stressed that "labor collectives have an important role in this process, as we must root out drunkenness, and alcoholism.... There are organized ways of spending your time, made to spiritually enrich the Soviet people."⁶³

While the calls for sobriety might reflect the idiosyncrasies of the alcohol prohibition during Perestroika, the appeals to *vospitanie* suggest that even during Late Perestroika, sobriety continued to be linked to ideas about communist morality and

⁶⁰ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 3191, l. 97.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

proper modes of behavior.⁶⁴ As late as three years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Party organs took their task of enforcing morality seriously, mobilizing Party workers and collectives to implement the moral code. In comparison to the dramatic situation in the Moldavian SSR, the Baltics, and the Caucasus, the situation in Ukraine in 1988 was relatively stable. Much like before, ordinary Party organs concerned themselves with education of moral communists in a similar fashion.⁶⁵

As in earlier periods of Soviet history, many Soviet Ukrainian citizens responded to the calls for fighting alcoholism, drug addiction, and “immorality.” One Ukrainian Party memo from 1988 lamented the fact that “citizens are concerned about the degradation of the moral atmosphere in the cities which have expanded the sale of alcohol.”⁶⁶ In a letter from the city of Dnepropetrovsk, one concerned citizen complained about the immoral behavior in his neighborhood, writing that “It is difficult to explain why in our city we ended the fight against alcoholism. There are lots of drunks in public places.... Is the pursuit of ‘booze’ rubles more important than public health, harmony in the family, and order at the factory?”⁶⁷ In a dismayed letter, another citizen wrote, “There are drunks everywhere again on the streets. Once again, our children are navigating through the hordes of drunks on their way home after their

⁶⁴ In May of 1985, at the behest of Gorbachev, the Communist Party passed a so-called “Dry Law” banning the sale of alcohol within the Soviet Union.

⁶⁵ As historian of Ukraine Zbigniew Wojnowski points out, the Soviet Union was an Eastern Slavic empire, where Ukrainians enjoyed more status and privilege than their Moldovan, Caucasian, and Baltic counterparts. As a result, the stability in Ukraine in 1988 can be explained by this national factor, despite the Chernobyl catastrophe only a few years before. Zbigniew Wojnowski: *The Near Abroad: Socialist Eastern Europe and Soviet Patriotism in Ukraine: 1956-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

⁶⁶ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 3191, l. 127.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

school lessons on ‘unity’ of word and deed. The Party secretary of our city told me ‘everything is okay, it is all legal, it is not your problem!’ But I believe that the fight against drunkenness is not only my own personal, but our communal task.”⁶⁸

Another letter to central authorities from the city of Dneprodzerzhinsk complained that “drunks and parasites feel very comfortable around here, they drink where they want.... Help us, we are begging you, to remove this criminal contingent from our town.”⁶⁹

While some of the letters decried the repeal of the prohibition on alcohol in the Soviet Union in 1987, the larger message was one of larger social responsibility, calling on all Soviet citizens and Party organs to stop drunkenness and immoral behavior. At the same time, the letters express a sense of frustration among some Soviet citizens. For these residents of the USSR, the top-down directives from the Kremlin were so sudden and contradictory that many Soviet citizens fighting for a more moral society and following the state’s directives on combating alcoholism felt abandoned by the authorities who ostensibly supported their cause. These examples also show the issues facing Party officials, who by attempting to follow Gorbachev’s oscillations between radical reform and conservative caution, exacerbated the already significant divisions in Soviet society.

It is unsurprising then, that some ordinary Soviet citizens were unhappy with the path Perestroika had taken by the late 1980s, even in the relatively stable

⁶⁸ Ibid., 129.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 132.

Ukrainian SSR. In a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine from 1988, one Party member, a veteran of the Second World War from the Ukrainian city of L'viv, wrote that "while Perestroika is happening, we are not seeing any major shifts.... It seems that Party leaders... do not have any sense of responsibility."⁷⁰ Another Party member and film director from the Ukrainian city of Odessa declared that "the crimes of Stalin... and Brezhnev are crimes against humanity. The habits created during those times will create a roadblock to new kinds of thinking for a long time to come, and in order for Perestroika to be effective, it is imperative that three generations die out."⁷¹ In these two examples, the letter writers were not explicitly antagonistic to Soviet power and state socialism. Instead, even though both of these individuals were members of the Communist Party, they were skeptical and pessimistic regarding the promises of Perestroika. The film director conflated the Stalin and Brezhnev periods, arguing that the USSR was too deeply burdened by the crimes of the past to be able to implement any meaningful change. Once again, these letters also reflect the frustration expressed by some Soviet citizens over any lack of meaningful progress, despite lofty promises of societal change from Gorbachev. Gorbachev's indecisiveness during Perestroika caused many previously enthusiastic and optimistic Party intellectuals to resign themselves to indignant cynicism only a few years later.⁷²

⁷⁰ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 3424, l. 86.

⁷¹ SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1261, l. 263.

⁷² The enthusiasm for change was not as explicit in Ukraine, and 71.5% of citizens of the Ukrainian SSR voted in favor of staying in USSR during the March referendum in 1991. In contrast, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Moldova did not participate in the referendum.

Nationalism and Morality in Soviet Ukraine

Despite the relative stability in Ukraine in the late 1980s, Ukraine saw the rise of nationalist movements much like in the rest of the USSR. While the vast majority of Ukrainians voted to remain a part of the Soviet Union, Ukrainian nationalist groups, representing a minority of Ukrainian citizens utilized the opportunities presented by Glasnost to win Ukraine's independence. The so-called "People's Movement of Ukraine for Reconstruction (Perestroika)" was founded by the Writers' Association of Ukraine, a dissident group, in 1989. In 1990 the Rukh Party, led by Ukrainian dissidents such as Viacheslav Chornovil, became a household name after forming a human chain 550 kilometers long from the cities of L'viv to Kyiv to promote Ukraine's independence from the USSR.⁷³ Despite the comparatively subdued nature of Late Perestroika in the Ukrainian SSR, these nationalist groups in Ukraine also appropriated the language of communist morality to criticize Party organs.

Even before the ascendance of the People's Movement in 1989, nationalist publications were already sharply critical of Soviet power in Ukraine. One 1988 article from the Ukrainian nationalist newspaper *Shliakh Peremogy* (*The Path to Victory*) argued that:

Real economic difficulties became a catalyst for so-called "glasnost" and Perestroika, an attempt to stimulate Soviet industry. This industrialization has already been happening for sixty years, and on the one hand turned the USSR into a military superpower; on the other, it has robbed us of our natural riches and

⁷³ Chornovil was responding to the events in the Baltics, where citizens of Baltic republics formed a human chain roughly 420 miles long as a sign of protest to Soviet power in 1989.

polluted the nature of the European part of the USSR, including Ukraine.⁷⁴

The article went on to say that “at the same time, we have seen a deep degradation among our people, including cynicism, soullessness, carelessness in work, corruption, crime, drunkenness, all tied to this moral and physical degradation.”⁷⁵ The argument of this nationalist newspaper explicitly contradicted the Party’s official narrative and undermined the state’s project to build a moral Soviet citizen. While official sources claimed that Soviet state socialism created the necessary material base to shape the New Socialist Person, nationalist newspapers argued that the socialist project merely created cynical, hollow individuals under a fundamentally corrupt material base. Ironically, these papers utilized official discourse, suggesting that they still functioned within the realm and logic of the Soviet state, despite weaponizing this discourse for their own personal use.

Internal Party memos admitted that Perestroika and Glasnost’ allowed for such explicit criticism of Soviet authorities. One Ukrainian-language Party memo, for instance, stated that “nationalist propaganda is declaring that weakened control over speech, resulting from glasnost’ and democratization, has allowed for criticism of... the USSR, using this opportunity to create social discord in the political atmosphere of the country.”⁷⁶ Another memo accused nationalist groups of actively trying to undermine the legitimacy of Soviet socialism, claiming that “Socialist ideology and

⁷⁴ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 3331, l. 12. As Jane Dawson pointed out in her work, preservation of so-called natural riches was a significant part of anti-Soviet discourse among nationalist groups. Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism*.

⁷⁵ TsDAGO Archive, f. 1, op. 25, d. 3331, l. 13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

Soviet propaganda, from the perspective of ‘independent’ commentators, continue to lose popularity, as glasnost’ has exposed the ‘discrepancy between the consciousness of most Soviet citizens and official ideology.’”⁷⁷ A KGB memo from 1988 echoed this sentiment, stating that “the KGB office of the Ukrainian SSR has received information that individuals with previous convictions for anti-Soviet conduct have renewed their hostile actions in the wake of Glasnost’ and Perestroika.”⁷⁸ The memos show that internal Party organs were both simultaneously concerned with the rise of nationalism and the so-called “consciousness” of Soviet citizens. In other words, official sources were predominantly concerned with the internal constitution of ordinary citizens and their ability to withstand anti-Soviet propaganda, exposing the limited faith Party organs had in the loyalty of their own citizenry and their ability to act in accordance with communist morality. The Ukrainian KGB also admitted that compared to earlier periods of Soviet history, the liberalization of public discourse under Perestroika allowed for anti-Soviet groups to operate with impunity in Soviet Ukraine.⁷⁹

Internal Party documents and letters from ordinary citizens suggest that the Party overestimated its citizens’ ability to uphold the Party line and to maintain their efficacy in the socialist project during the upheavals of Perestroika. One Ukrainian KGB memo from 1988 stated that “in the context of the deepening of Perestroika in our country, [some people] are attempting to expand the scale of anti-Soviet political

⁷⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁸ SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1256, l. 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

actions, the aim of which is to undermine Party control of the state. This movement is inspired by the ‘legal opposition’ and manifestations of anti-social behavior.”⁸⁰ The memo went on to say that “foreign citizens are propagandizing the Western lifestyle, the ‘advantages’ of bourgeois democracy, and are using anti-Soviet publications and visual media. In these new circumstances we have witnessed a noticeable increase in separate hostile elements, which are attempting to propagandize... anti-Soviet, nationalist ideals... to encourage citizens to anti-social behavior and extremist actions.”⁸¹ Another memo echoed this sentiment, stating that “in connection to the activization of hostile actions by foreign security services and centers of ideological diversion against our country aimed at undermining Perestroika, the international education (*vospitanie*) of workers, political awareness, and a class-based education and understanding of events in our life is very important.”⁸² During this period, internal Party memos tacitly admitted that by 1988 ordinary Soviet citizens were susceptible to Western influence and creeping anti-Soviet nationalism.

These documents blamed the failure of education, or *vospitanie*, for the rising popularity of the so-called “Western lifestyle” and nationalism in the Ukrainian SSR. In 1989, the KGB arrested and disbanded a group of Soviet citizens, some of whom were members of a “so called ‘hippie-pacifist’ group... whose aim was to create a nationalist group.”⁸³ The memo went on to say that “the group sought to discredit the

⁸⁰ SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1261, l. 5.

⁸¹ Ibid., 6. The term “legal opposition” is a reference to the parties officially allowed to oppose the Ukrainian Communist Party, such as the National Front.

⁸² Ibid., 166.

⁸³ SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1256, l. 39.

state apparatus and to protest the repression of Ukrainian patriots.”⁸⁴ Despite the tenuous connection between the hippie lifestyle, pacifism, and Ukrainian nationalism, the memo reflected earlier concerns and anxieties regarding the so-called “Western lifestyle” and implied that behavior not befitting a morally upright communist was inextricably linked to anti-Soviet nationalism. The explicit mention and condemnation of hippies in late Perestroika KGB documents shows that in the eyes of Soviet authorities, Ukrainian nationalism of the late 1980s was linked to earlier failures to properly educate (*vospitat’*) Soviet citizens. Even as late as 1990, the Soviet state was too dependent on the fictitious idea of a so-called “moral communist” during a time when nationalist groups were taking over Party organs. In this context, the so-called “committed communists” earlier periods abandoned the Party right as the Party needed their support most to preserve the USSR.

Collapse in Ukraine

Much like in the Moldavian SSR, by 1990 the situation in Soviet Ukraine had escalated to the point of mass protests and public strikes. One Ukrainian KGB memo from 1990 declared that:

Lately extremist elements from informal organizations... aiming to increase their political standing, are sparking religious and national strife. They are openly confrontational toward Party organs and the police. There is also widespread publication of *samizdat* literature, nationalist imagery.... They are calling for political strikes, the exit of Ukraine from the USSR, the creation of a national army, and rehabilitation of nationalist dissidents.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁵ SBU Archive, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1284, l. 77.

The memo went on to say that “current measures have proven inadequate. As a result, it is indispensable that we implement laws designed to combat extremist, anti-socialist groups, including a moratorium on any public gatherings.... We also suggest that all labor and university collectives... create groups of exemplary workers and students to combat extremism, nationalism, and chauvinism.”⁸⁶ Much like in the Moldavian SSR, nationalist groups in Ukraine exploited the precarious situation in Ukraine for their own political benefit and utilized the new opportunities presented by Perestroika to push their own political agenda. As in earlier periods of Soviet history, official Soviet authorities continued to rely on work and university collectives to stifle the rise in nationalist movements as late as 1990. In other words, the state continued to employ the same repertoire used during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods in a time in which these tools had lost their potency.

By 1990, even historically reliable Party organs and media outlets turned against official authorities in Moscow. A KGB memo from L’viv reported that:

new laws forbidding mass protests and demonstration in Lvov are being practically ignored. As Party organs are unable or unwilling to counteract this, the extremists now have a sense of impunity. In this complicated situation mass media has taken an unprincipled stance, often encouraging nationalist elements.... The organ of the local Lvov newspaper *Leninska Molod* (Leninist Youth) has functionally turned into a mouthpiece for nationalist groups.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 111.

In other words, by 1990, the Party had lost any semblance of control over its own newspapers and media in the western periphery. Ostensibly pro-Soviet, socialist-oriented publications in Ukraine began printing anti-Soviet articles, highlighting the dramatic shift in public discourse in the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. This example reflects the stark contrast in Soviet public life between 1987 and 1990; in only three years, both central and local Party organs lost control over the peripheries of the Soviet Union.

By 1991, the Soviet state in Ukraine was facing what effectively amounted to two governments, a situation similar to the circumstances in Petrograd in 1917 after the February Revolution. A Ukrainian KGB memo from July 25, 1991 stated that “by exploiting the politically unstable situation in our country and the crises in the social and economic spheres, leaders of various political movements... are creating parallel structures of power and control... not dissimilar to the governmental structure of Ukraine in 1918.”⁸⁸ Much like in Moldova, Rukh formed a viable coalition with the Democratic Party of Ukraine in 1990, and ordinary Ukrainian citizens left the Ukrainian Communist Party to join the mass marches organized by Rukh in 1990 and 1991. Before the official dissolution of the Soviet Union in the December of 1991, Soviet authorities in Moscow functionally lost control over large parts of the Soviet Union. In many ways, the official collapse at the end of 1991 was merely a formality, as the Soviet Union had ceased to exist in places such as Moldova and Ukraine by early 1991. State structures previously loyal to authorities in Moscow, such as

⁸⁸ SBU Archive, f. 15, op. 1, d. 1295, l. 203.

publishing houses and Party newspapers, were infiltrated by Rukh and began printing anti-Soviet literature. While in contrast to Moldova and the Baltics the situation in Ukraine was not as explicitly dire, there, too, Party organs lost any meaningful power by 1990. Ironically, the situation in the USSR by 1991 resembled the Russian Empire in 1917, as multiple competing governments vied for control of the state apparatus.

Conclusion

The collapse of the Soviet Union came as a surprise to many Western observers, and the unravelling of the socialist project in the USSR initially seemed like a quick and dramatic process. In reality, however, as Alexei Yurchak points out, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a drawn-out process, though the process quickly escalated in the final years of the Soviet Union.⁸⁹ In contrast to the early years of Perestroika, marked by optimism and hope for a better future, the late 1980s and early 1990s were overshadowed by conflict and collapse, as various political groups seized opportunities presented by Glasnost' to undermine the Soviet socialist project. While the state fell back on familiar repertoires to respond to this crisis, including mobilizing work and labor collectives and calling for better socialist education of the masses, the Kremlin's response was functionally lackluster. By 1990, the Soviet state had lost its monopoly on public discourse and the CPSU effectively was unable to spread its message to the masses. In Soviet republics in the western periphery, the situation escalated much quicker than Party authorities could anticipate, leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the Soviet state's ideological repertoire of

⁸⁹ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was no More*.

communist morality proved inadequate to keep the Soviet Union from collapsing, as nationalist groups appropriated the language of communist morality to undermine and ultimately destroy the entire socialist project.

Conclusion

In 1988, roughly one third of the world's population lived in a socialist state. Socialist revolutions in Russia, Eastern Europe, China, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba and elsewhere had created an international socialist coalition which challenged capitalism's dominance over the world economy. Just three years later, in 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, marking for many Western scholars the ostensible end of the socialist project and the triumph of neoliberal economic policies around the globe. In his now infamous monograph from 1992, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama even argued that the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991, respectively, represented a triumph of neoliberalism and Western democracy on a global scale, as well as the ultimate failure of global Marxism. Fukuyama claimed that any historical antagonism predicted by Marx ironically culminated in the triumph of capitalism over socialism.

The same month as Fukuyama's book was published in the West, elements of the Russian-backed former-Soviet Fourteenth army, combined with military units from the newly Transnistrian Moldavian Republic, were fighting border skirmishes at the Dniester river against irregular units from the newly formed Republic of Moldova. The Republic of Moldova, which declared its independence from the Soviet Union on August 27, 1991, quickly condemned its Soviet legacy, having chosen to forego Gorbachev's referendum in March to preserve the Soviet Union. In the meantime, the Transnistrian Republic on the right bank of the Dniester river strongly opposed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, adopting the sickle and hammer of the

Moldavian SSR as the official emblem of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic. The cleavage of Moldova into two separate states during the collapse of the Soviet Union laid bare the divisions among former Soviet citizens in this republic regarding the Soviet socialist project. On both sides of the conflict, Moldovan and Transnistrian citizens fought and died to either dissolve or preserve the contentious legacy of the Soviet Union. Despite the purported end of history in 1992, clearly not all residents of the newly formed republics of the former Soviet Union were ready to abandon the socialist experiment, particularly when a transition to democracy failed to materialize in places such as Eastern Moldova. This ambivalence is further deepened by the fact that Moldova was the first post-Soviet country to democratically elect a pro-Russian, communist Parliament and a communist President in 2001, only eight years after the end of hostilities with Transnistria.

Twenty-two years after the end of the war in Transnistria, Ukraine faced a similar insurrection in the country's eastern regions, following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. In the wake of the Euromaidan revolution in January 2014 in Kyiv, with the backing of Russian troops, Ukrainian separatists seized the cities of Donbass and Luhansk, forming separate "national republics," including the "Donetsk People's Republic" and the "Luhansk People's Republic." Much like in Moldova, the separatist reaction was a result of the country's pivot away from Russia and the Soviet legacy, as some Ukrainian citizens rushed to defend relics of the Soviet past in their cities while others sought to tear down the remnants of the Soviet Union across Ukraine.

While Ukrainian separatists were fighting Ukrainian troops in the East, the peak of the symbolic conflict surrounded the fate of the multitude of Lenin statues across Ukraine. The legacy of the Soviet Union is so divisive in Ukraine that some Ukrainian citizens argued for the dismantling of these statues, while others clung onto the statues of the controversial Soviet leader. According to historian Zbigniew Wojnowski, at a rally on March 9, 2014, tens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens gathered in a square in Donetsk declaring, “The USSR is our homeland! The West will turn us into slaves!”, while protestors in Kyiv marched in support of Ukrainian integration into NATO and the European Union.¹ The ambivalence surrounding the Soviet past in Ukraine is unsurprising, as the vast majority of Ukrainians voted to preserve the Soviet Union in Gorbachev’s 1991 referendum.

This resistance to the Soviet state and its subsequent collapse has created an entire field of postsocialist studies, exploring the link between postsocialist theory and the realities of life on the ground in current postsocialist states.² The conflicts over politics, history, and identity in places such as the former Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs represent attempts to establish new national identities and histories in the Western periphery, both in opposition to the Soviet past as well as the current neoliberal present. Furthermore, the contemporary failures of neoliberalism,

¹ Zbigniew Wojnowski, *The Near Abroad*, 3.

² Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Philip Roeder, *Red Sunset: The Failure of Soviet Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Chris Hann, Caroline Humphrey, Katherine Verdery, *Postsocialism: Ideas, Ideologies, and Practices in Postsocialism*, (New York: Routledge, 2001); Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Time, Tragedy, Memory, Justice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

combined with the lack of promised material prosperity in former Soviet republics, have created a sense of nostalgia for the more moral, equal, and just promises of state socialism.³ For some, the perceived lack of any meaningful social progress under the current system of capitalism in Russia, Ukraine and Moldova has exacerbated anxieties over both the future and the past in these three countries.

The ambivalence surrounding the Soviet past has even been expressed by contemporary leaders. In a 2006 interview, the current Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that “those do not want the Soviet Union back have no heart, those who want it back have no brain.”⁴ As late as 2014, recent Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin expressed his regret that Moldovan people were not living in the USSR.⁵ Meanwhile Voronin’s Ukrainian counterpart, Petro Poroshenko, condemned the Soviet past and mobilized troops to fight anti-Russian separatists.⁶ However, this tension must be understood not only within the context of postsocialist nostalgia, but also within the context of the Soviet state’s project to create the New Socialist Person during more than seventy years of Soviet power. As I have argued, during the Late Socialist period, some citizens saw little contradiction between their local and national identity and their desire to be a good communist citizen. Meanwhile, others

³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

⁴ Chris Miller, “Why Putin’s Economy Survives,” *Wall Street Journal*, last updated December 29th, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-putins-economy-survives-1483020001>.

⁵ “Vladimir Voronin zhaleet, chto ne zhivet v SSSR,” *point.md*, last modified April 22nd, 2014. <https://point.md/ru/novosti/obschestvo/vladimir-voronin-zhaleet-chto-ne-zhivet-v-sssr>.

⁶ “Petro Poroshenko: ‘Chernobyl’ na zavzhdy zmeniv tysiachi zhittiv i vykryv zlochyny imperii brehni – Radians’kogo Soiuzu,” *Volyn’*, last modified April 26th, 2020, <https://www.volyn.com.ua/news/151060-petro-poroshenko-chornobyl-nazavzhdy-zminyiv-tysiachi-zhyttiv-i-vykryv-zlochyny-imperii-brehhni-radianskoho-soiuzu>.

used their national identity to undermine what they perceived as a mere Russification of their respective Soviet republics. In places such as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs, opposition to the project to create the New Socialist Person was a form of anti-Soviet resistance, as local citizens appropriated the language of communist morality to undermine the fundamental ideological tenets of the Soviet state. This resistance to communist morality ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent conflicts over history and identity in the Western peripheries of the former USSR.

This is not the outcome many early communist philosophers predicted. Scholars such as Karl Kautsky and Paul Lafargue envisioned a world where class identity overrode any national affiliations. Furthermore, theoreticians such as Marx and Engels argued that workers across the world had more in common with each other than with their national elites, despite sharing a similar culture and language. During the inevitable socialist revolution, Marx and Engels argued that workers of the world would forget their national affiliation and join arms to overthrow their capitalist exploiters. Within the framework of dialectical materialism, the material conditions of exploitation and factory work under capitalism would form a formidable working-class identity. According to early Soviet scholars, workers' collectives would continue to shape the consciousness of communist workers, creating a moral citizen who would voluntarily act not out of individual interest, but out of collective interest. After the predicted withering away of the state, this New Man would comport himself correctly, without the need for coercive state structures such as the police and the

courts. In this communist world there would be no violence, no antagonism, and no conflict, and all class-based conflict and tension within society would disappear. Within this framework, the creation of the New Man would also require the withering away of national identities along with the state, while working-class collectivism would supersede any other form of self-identification.

The failure of revolutions in Hungary and Germany in the wake of the First World War, however, created anxieties over the eventual success of global communist revolution among communist scholars, despite the revolution's tentative success in Russia. The creation of a socialist society in only one country in the 1920s and 1930s sparked arguments over the place of violence within the revolutionary project. Within European leftist parties, European communists argued over the morality of the Bolsheviks' use of terror. Within the Soviet Union, Soviet leaders such as Lenin and Stalin employed state terror and repression on a wide scale to create a communist world. When faced with what was perceived to be counterrevolution, Lenin and Stalin argued that state-sanctioned violence was not only justified, but ethical. To the Bolsheviks, the death of thousands was necessary to ensure the well-being and equality for millions.

After the trials and tribulations of the Russian Revolution and the Second World War, the Soviet state continued its project to create the New Socialist Person. According to contemporary communist scholars, the Postwar period was the most opportune time to build communism in the Soviet Union. This kind of thinking was epitomized by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's famous promise that Soviet

society would reach communism by 1980. According to these thinkers, since Soviet society had already achieved the necessary material base under socialism, a transition to communism could finally begin. However, these thinkers expressed their optimism within the context of the perception of rising drunkenness, crime, and increasing popularity of Western dress and music within Soviet society. Many Party leaders and ordinary Soviet citizens expressed grave concerns that their fellow citizens were more concerned with dancing the twist and listening to rock and roll than with building a bright communist future.

As a result, the moral panic and anxieties of the Late Socialist period in the Soviet Union must be understood not only within the context of “ordinary” deviancy, but also as a reaction to promises based on Marxism-Leninism that the Soviet Union would soon reach communism. In many ways, the 1961 Moral Code of the Builder of Communism represented a compromise in the fight to build communism within the framework of Soviet ideology. Rather than building a truly egalitarian society, by relying on the Moral Code Soviet leaders could proclaim their intent to build communism without any meaningful structural change. The Code allowed Soviet authorities to displace any systemic failures by portraying the Soviet system’s shortcomings as individual flaws, ultimately putting the blame on ordinary citizens for the Soviet Union’s inability to transition to communism. While Soviet leaders such as Khrushchev viewed the Moral Code as a guide to building communism, its tenets eventually represented a retreat from the revolutionary promises of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, the Moral Code was simultaneously the problem and

the prescribed solution for the multiple flaws of Late Socialist society. It stood at the intersection of increasing crime, drunkenness, the influence of Western music and dress, worries about youth, and concerns over the ideological viability of the Soviet socialist project. The project to build the New Socialist Person was a stopgap for more meaningful transition, for a goal which the Soviet Union would never achieve.

Most of the anxieties surrounding the construction of communism focused on children, young adults, and criminals. Specifically, the notions of *vospitanie* and *perevospitanie* (education and re-education) focused on the creation of the New Man, a moral and selfless communist citizen. As the youngest generation of Soviet citizens was supposed to be the first to live under communism, many of the concerns regarding educating the New Man focused on children and childrearing. Soviet pedagogues, Party leaders, parents, and theoreticians pondered the best approaches to not only raising a well-adjusted human being, but to creating a person who would be worthy of living in a stateless communist society. Rather than being concerned with Western dress and music, Soviet children raised exclusively under socialism were expected to represent the zenith of Soviet socialism. However, the persistence of improper forms of behavior, deviancy and crime among young adults continued to fuel anxieties that the USSR would not be able to achieve communism, despite the best efforts of armies of pedagogues, professors, and ideologues. During the Late Socialist period, schools and universities were not merely places of learning, but institutions for shaping correct behaviors among young communists and even

battlegrounds over the construction of a communist identity. This martial language extended to teachers as well, who represented warriors in the fight for communism.

Much like with children, the reeducation and rehabilitation of criminals during Late Socialism was not merely a problem of reintegration into Soviet society, but a question of preparing adult Soviet citizens for life under communism. Since communist philosophers predicted that the abolition of classes would lead to collectivist harmony, the existence of criminals and anti-social behavior such as theft and murder was especially problematic for Soviet authorities. Soviet thinkers pondered why some Soviet citizens continued to act in their own selfish interest, despite the ostensible abolition of classes within the Soviet socialist system. As a result, the system of re-education of former criminals was an essential part in the project to build the New Socialist Person. In a system in which there would be no state and no coercive mechanisms such as prisons, these former criminals would have to voluntarily act in accordance with the collective interest. Their reeducation within the ideals of communist morality represented an opportunity not only for spiritual and moral redemption, but for social acceptance in the communist collective. In this sense, much like schools and universities, the Soviet judicial system, the police, and the courts, must be understood as agents and enforcers of communist morality. At the same time, Soviet leaders could not come to a consensus on what punishment should and would look like, oscillating between tough sentencing guidelines and leniency. During Late Socialism, these oscillations were reflected in every aspect of Soviet society, as collective participation in trials, comrade courts, and ordinary collectives

argued over how to implement communist morality. This inconsistency aligned with the ideological framework of so-called “mature socialism” and the Soviet state’s inability to make meaningful progress toward communism.

However, as Soviet society failed to make any meaningful progress toward communism by the early 1980s, many Soviet citizens began to worry that the promises of communism were simply hollow words. For some, the language of so-called “mature socialism” represented a shift from the revolutionary promises of Marxism-Leninism. These concerns over the lack of visible progress played out in arguments over social responsibility, the definitions of morality, and the project to create the New Socialist Person. For some of those Soviet citizens, Gorbachev’s programs of Perestroika and Glasnost’ represented the perfect opportunity to meaningfully move Soviet society forward. Perestroika, moreover, provided yet another opportunity to create the New Socialist Person, and Gorbachev himself viewed Perestroika as a moment for moral reawakening of Soviet society. For many members of the Soviet intelligentsia, in particular, Perestroika was a chance to reinvigorate faith in the socialist project among Soviet citizens.

While some Soviet citizens certainly shared Gorbachev’s enthusiasm for rebuilding Soviet society, others saw an opportunity to undermine the entire Soviet project. In the Western periphery of the Soviet Union, especially in the Baltic republics, as well as the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSRs, nationalist groups saw Glasnost’ as a chance to undermine the legitimacy of Soviet power in their respective republics. For these nationalist groups, the moral reawakening in Soviet society

meant open hostility and questioning of the Soviet project, as discussions on Stalinist repressions and the Soviet state's liberal use of violence during the 1920 and 1930s undermined the moral legitimacy of the Soviet state. Nationalist leaders argued that a state founded on this kind of violence was morally illegitimate and must be destroyed, paving the way for the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's collapse among ethnic lines suggests that national identity had not disappeared after more than seventy years of Soviet socialism. Due to the fact that Soviet workers were unable to put their national differences aside, nationality played a deciding role in the Soviet Union's collapse. Ultimately, the Soviet Union was unable to create the New Socialist Person whose working-class identity superseded all others among all of its citizens. This failure was exemplified by workers from the same factories and collectives who fought on different sides of post-Soviet conflicts such as the one in Transnistria.

The successes and failures of the project to create the New Socialist Person are especially apparent in contemporary Moldova and Ukraine today. Unlike the Baltics, where support for independence was uniformly high, some citizens of the former Moldovan and Ukrainian SSRs continue to fight and die to protect the Soviet legacy. In some senses and among some individuals, the USSR created committed communists who put their lives on the line to defend the Soviet project. In contrast, others were enthusiastic to overthrow the Soviet project, despite decades of education in Soviet schools and universities, as well as education in workers' collectives. This division among citizens of these former republics continues to drive political and ideological wedges between Moldovan and Ukrainian citizens, as attempts to move

these countries in either a pro-Russian, pro-Soviet, or pro-European direction create bitter divisions and military conflicts within these republics today. Rather than facing the end of history, Moldova and Ukraine are unable to meaningfully progress in any direction.

Appendix A

The Tenets of the 1961 Moral Code of the Builder of Communism:

Devotion to the communist cause, love toward the socialist Motherland and to socialist countries

Conscientious labor for the good of society: he who does not work shall not eat

Concern of all for the preservation and growth of public property

High consciousness of public duty, intolerance towards the violation of public interests

Collectivism and comradesly mutual aid; one for all and all for one

Humane relations and mutual respect among people; man is to man a friend, comrade, and brother

Honesty and truthfulness, moral purity, simplicity and modesty in social and personal life

Mutual respect in the family, concern for the upbringing of children.

Intolerance towards injustices, parasitism, dishonesty, careerism and money-grubbing.

Friendship and brotherhood of the peoples of the USSR, intolerance towards national and racial hatred

Intolerance towards the enemies of communism, peace, and freedom of nations

Fraternal solidarity with the working people of all countries and with all peoples.¹

¹ "Moral Code of the Builder of Communism," *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, accessed August 1st, 2020, <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1961-2/moral-code-of-the-builder-of-communism/moral-code-of-the-builder-of-communism-texts/moral-code-of-the-builder-of-communism/>.

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The State Security Archive (SBU Archive), Kyiv, Ukraine

Odessa Regional Archive, Odessa, Ukraine

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