Samizdat to Dissident: De-Stalinization through the Publication of Gulag Narratives in the USSR during the 1960s and 1970s

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Abstract

De-Stalinization within the Soviet Union has not been viewed as a concept removed from the policies established by Nikita Khrushchev during the late 1950s and early 1960s. While many scholars have argued the process of de-Stalinization was halted with the removal of Khrushchev from power, de-Stalinization took new forms that were not enforced by the Soviet leadership during the 1960s and 1970s. The publication of samizdat, unofficial publications, of narratives about the Gulags, Soviet prison camps, supported the ideals of de-Stalinization after the policy was denounced by the Soviet leadership. An analysis of samizdat about the Gulags as political tools used by the authors to reach a political fosters a greater understanding of the political culture of the Soviet Union during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In this perspective, the Gulag samizdat literature was a political tool adopted by those who were repressed within Soviet society in order to reach a political goal. The samizdat literature, along with many other factors within the Soviet Union, would be one of the catalysts in the decline and ultimate fall of the Soviet Union.
In 1962, when Aleksandr Tvardovsky, editor of the literary journal Novy Mir, received the manuscript for *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, a fictional account of one day in a Soviet prison camp, the author was unknown to him. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a physics professor at the time, was a former prisoner of the Gulag prison camps in the Soviet Union. Literature about the Soviet prison camps were deemed dangerous to state security, and therefore not allowed to be published within the Soviet Union. Despite the taboo topic of the work, Tvardovsky fell in love with Solzhenitsyn’s writing style and captivating story. Knowing that he would never get the story past the censors, Tvardovsky sent the novel to one of the only people who could authorize its publication: Premier Nikita Khrushchev.1 After reading the novel, Khrushchev supported Tvardovsky in his desire to publish the work, despite not formerly supporting publication of Gulag narratives in general. When arguing with the rest of the politburo over the authorization of the publication, Khrushchev exclaimed, “‘There’s a Stalinist in each of you … We must root out this evil.’”2 By stating that the censorship of the material would be a Stalinist action, Khrushchev set a new precedent within the literary realm that Gulag literature should be considered as anti-Stalinist. Despite this initial backing of Solzhenitsyn and the concept of denouncing the camps under Stalin, the November 1962 publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* would be the only officially authorized publication of a Gulag narrative within the Soviet Union until the end of the twentieth century.

Closing up the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in 1956, Khrushchev gave what became known as “The Secret Speech.” This speech, which spread officially and unofficially throughout the Soviet Union and the West, strongly criticized Stalin, his policies,
his legacy, and his role in the future of the Soviet Union. Towards the end of his long speech, Khrushchev proclaimed, “Comrades: We must abolish the cult of the individual decisively, once and for all…” He continued, “[W]e will be forced to do much work in order to examine critically from the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint and to correct the widely spread erroneous views connected with the cult of the individual in the sphere of history, philosophy, economy and of other sciences, as well as in literature and the fine arts.”

In the years following the Congress, Khrushchev’s policy of de-Stalinization took shape in many forms. Stalin’s name was removed from cities, streets, and buildings; in 1961, Stalingrad was officially renamed to Volgograd and Stalin’s body was removed from Lenin’s mausoleum. In the decade following the Secret Speech, millions of prisoners were released from the Soviet labor camp system, most of which were imprisoned under Stalin.

Recalling his reasoning for publishing *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Khrushchev stated, “After Stalin’s death, there was an investigation into the causes of those who died in the camps. That’s why I considered it necessary not to interfere with the publication of Solzhenitsyn’s book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.” Shortly after the publication of Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day*, Khrushchev reversed his policy supporting Gulag narratives. In March of 1963, Khrushchev responded to the surge of submissions by stating, “‘Magazines and publishing houses are said to be flooded with manuscripts about the life of people in exile, in prisons, and in camps. I repeat once again that this is a very dangerous theme.’”

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and when Brezhnev and Kosygin took over in 1964, they were even less supportive of them than Khrushchev had been due to their complete denouncement of de-Stalinization.

The Soviet leaders used official legislation to support their censorship of the Gulag narratives. According to the Soviet leadership, the narratives fell under material banned through Article 70 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR. The 1962 version of Article 70 states, “Agitation or propaganda carried on for the purpose of subverting or weakening the Soviet regime or of committing particular, especially dangerous crimes against the state, or the circulation, for the same purpose, of slanderous fabrications which defame the Soviet state and social system, or the circulation or preparation or keeping, for the same purpose, of literature of such content, shall be punished by deprivation of freedom for a term of six months to seven years…” The criminal codes of the Soviet Union were purposefully vague, in order to make imprisonments easier to justify. The code was altered many times throughout the history of the Soviet Union, but it was always Article 70 that the Soviet officials used to prosecute publishers of unofficial documents. This law would be challenged during the 1960s and 1970s by authors within the Soviet Union, despite the potential of legal repercussions.

Official censorship of Gulag narratives did not deter recently released prisoners from wanting to tell their story or their interpretation of the Soviet prison systems. This gave rise to samizdat, unofficially self-published, publications of novels, short stories, and memoirs about the Gulags within the Soviet Union. At first, Gulag narratives were embraced by Khrushchev to support his policy of de-Stalinization, but after he and others in power felt that it endangered their own security in retaining control, they labeled the narratives as detrimental to the stability of the Soviet Union. Although not authorized as de-Stalinization by Khrushchev, samizdat

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publications of Gulag narratives forged a new model of de-Stalinization that would persevere through official censorship and attempts of “re-Stalinization” during the late 1960s and 1970s; as de-Stalinization fell out of the realm of politics, it survived in the realm of literature and would continue to challenge the legacy of Stalin and the Soviet Union during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Scholars have written substantially about Khrushchev and his policies of de-Stalinization. William Taubman’s biography of Khrushchev incorporates, for the most part, an analysis of the struggle between the Soviet Union and the West, known as the Cold War. He discusses in length issues such as the U-2 incident, Berlin Wall, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Many biographies and analyses of Khrushchev focus on Khrushchev’s foreign relations because of the impact his policies had on Cold War relations in the decades to follow. In general, scholars spend little time analyzing his treatment of culture, especially literature. The famous dissident historian Roy Medvedev briefly mentions One Day and Khrushchev’s subsequent suppression of Gulag narratives, but offers no further analysis. He simply mentions that “the publication of ‘camp’ literature was virtually discontinued – the flood of these documents apparently proved alarming for Khrushchev.” Taubman claims that the shift in Khrushchev’s censorship policy was due to the Cuban Missile Crisis. These analyses ignore the plethora of Gulag narratives that came about after the publication of One Day, and instead focus primarily upon the political causes and impacts of de-Stalinization and Khrushchev’s “Thaw”.

In relation to samizdat, scholars have recently been re-examining the role of samizdat in the history of the Soviet Union. The majority of scholarship about samizdat in the West has been

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used to reprint the works of samizdat. Because of the wide range of topics present in samizdat, many of these sources cover an expansive period of time during the Soviet Union and discuss an assortment of themes. These reproductions of samizdat materials were popular in Western publishing houses during the 1970s; *Uncensored Russia: Protest and Dissent in the Soviet Union* (1972) and *Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition* (1974) are two examples of reproduced samizdat materials in the United States.

More recently, scholars have analyzed samizdat and works of Soviet dissidents from various perspectives in order to re-evaluate its role in Soviet history. Vitaly Shentalinsky’s *Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Writers of the Soviet Union* (1993) balances providing excerpts from the works of imprisoned soviets and analyzing the circumstances surrounding their arrests. Shentalinsky focuses more on the life of the author and their pre-arrest and post-release experiences than the effects of their works. Paul Hollander’s *From the Gulag to the Killing Fields* (2006), self-proclaimed as an attempt to revive scholarship on samizdat and dissident writing from communist states, is compilation of segments from memoirs from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and other communist states. Robert Horvath took a different approach in analyzing dissident literature in the Soviet Union by approaching the literature from a human rights perspective. He claims that dissidents, inspired by Solzhenitsyn, challenged the lack of response from the West in acknowledging human rights violations in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the 1970s. Horvath attributed the focus of human rights during the 1970s and the development of “a new, radical humanitarianism” to the prominence of dissident writers from the Soviet Union.11

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This thesis will take inspiration from recent scholarship and analyze samizdat literature during the 1960s and 1970s in the Soviet Union. The time period covered in this analysis starts from the late 1950s, after Khrushchev began his policy of de-Stalinization, and ends in the late 1970s, as the dissident writer movement within the Soviet Union created a more public sphere for their unofficial publications. Scholars have not analyzed de-Stalinization apart from the policies instituted and enforced under Khrushchev. Because of this, many scholars focus primarily on Solzhenitsyn and only discuss other authors briefly when commenting on de-Stalinization. This analysis will thematically trace the development of Gulag samizdat during the two decades after the publication of Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and follow the simultaneous rise of dissident authors within the Soviet Union, both of which would emulate the ideologies of de-Stalinization and would eventually prove monumental in the social and political changes that resulted in the end of the Soviet Union.

The literature within this thesis will not be analyzed from the traditional perspective from a creative standpoint, or purely works of art. The narratives will be analyzed as political tools used by the authors to reach a political end. This perspective is drawn from the analysis by scholars that Stalin politicized literature during 1930s. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Scholars have offered various explanations for developments in the culture/politics relationship in the Stalin period, but all of them have emphasized the party’s drive for total control and Stalin’s personal drive for total power and absolute authority. The party controlled culture and Stalin controlled the party.” The samizdat of the 1960s and 1970s was in reaction to the politicization of literature by Stalin, and therefore the samizdat was politicized in its attempt to challenge the lasting effects of Stalin’s political control of literature.

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There are several themes that interlace Gulag samizdat with the concept of de-Stalinization; the first of which is that the literature represented freedom and individualism. Due to very strict cultural and literary restrictions during the Stalin years, the creation of the space for samizdat literature allowed those repressed by both the prison system and the threat of further incarceration to proclaim their freedom and detail their unique tale of the camps. Another theme that Gulag samizdat literature represented was public awareness. The former prisoners, through their accounts, desired to make others, in the Soviet Union and abroad, cognizant of what occurred in the prison camps, motivated by moral obligation and the need to detail what had previously been hidden from the public eye. The lack of publication within the Soviet Union combined with the controversial topic of the works made Gulag literature marketable to Western publishers, who in turn gave more power to the authors by publishing their accounts abroad. This fostered a form of de-Stalinization within the West and created a support base outside of the country that was attempting to suppress the unauthorized works. These themes amalgamated into an overarching, theme of de-Stalinization, and quite likely one of the most important outcomes of the Gulag narratives in relation to de-Stalinization. Through the Gulag narratives, Stalin, and consequently Soviet leadership, was removed as an icon within the Soviet Union and Soviet heritage, and in his place, the dissident became an icon in the 1970s. This role-reversal of politics determining the image of culture and then culture determining the image of politics influenced, and subsequently diminished, the power and efficacy of the Soviet Union in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Inherent to the concept of samizdat is the idea of freedom. Samizdat was the method that writers were able to take to circumvent censorship during the 1960s and 1970s. The authors themselves had been suppressed for years within the prison camps, and the suppression did not
end with their release. Many were forced to sign documents claiming that they would never speak of their experiences, or else face re-incarceration. The Gulag narrative was a mechanism used to challenge the remnants of oppression left over from the Stalin years and a way to institute forms of free speech within the Soviet public. Although *One Day* was censored by Solzhenitsyn and others before official publication, within his story he addresses the issue of freedom of speech in a critique of censorship: “ ‘Then don’t call him a genius! Call him an ass-kisser, obeying a vicious dog’s order. Geniuses don’t adjust their interpretations to suit the taste of tyrants!’ ”13 Perhaps a statement that would inspire the generation of dissidents that would follow, this line perfectly encapsulates the sentiment against governmental control of literature.

One of the most outspoken ways that the expression of freedom manifested itself within the Gulag narratives was through direct critique of Stalin and the Soviet government. Following decades of oppressive control of literature and anti-climatic policy changes by Khrushchev, writers took it into their own hands to publish their own works, despite the illegality of doing so. Self publishing gave author the power to provide whatever commentary they pleased. In Eugenia Ginzburg’s *Journey into the Whirlwind*, a prisoner asks the question, “ ‘Do you know who’s stood everything on its head now?’ ” to which the answer was “Stalin.”14 Ginzburg’s memoir in general was a statement against Stalin, due to her imprisonment for accused Trotskyism. Her story is one of many imprisoned for this falsified charge. Even though Stalin had been dead for years, it was still openly criticize the former dictator in such a direct manner. Ginzburg’s jab at Stalin is representative of the sentiments present in all narratives about the Gulags that were published during the 1960s and 1970s.

Solzhenitsyn’s novel *The First Circle*, circulated through samizdat during the mid to late 1960s, had a whole chapter which featured Stalin as a character. The entire chapter was Solzhenitsyn’s commentary on the former leader of the Soviet Union, and there were several specific scenes which were blatant attacks on Stalin. Solzhenitsyn wrote, “Just as King Midas turned everything to gold, Stalin turned everything to mediocrity.”\(^{15}\) The medium of the novel allowed for the potential to focus so much on critiquing Stalin and his legacy. Breaking from the mold of Gulag literature, having Stalin as a character was Solzhenitsyn’s way of expressing what he felt was his own “freedom.” Solzhenitsyn knew that this chapter would not be able to be published within the Soviet Union, so he censored it out of the manuscripts that he unsuccessfully attempted to publish in journals. This chapter remained in other copies of the manuscript, including copies that were published through samizdat, and later those that were published through tamizdat. The attacks on Stalin within the Gulag narratives are countless, some subtle and others direct like Ginzburg’s and Solzhenitsyn’s references to the former dictator.

Criticism against Stalin was not the only form that freedom of expression took. Other Soviet leaders, past and current in relation to the publications, were viable targets of attacks by the authors of samizdat materials. Andrei Amalrik’s *Involuntary Journey to Siberia* attacked not only Stalin, but also Khrushchev. Within his account, he recalls a song often sung in the camps:

> Once there were three bandits,  
> Hitler, Stalin, and Nikita.  
> Hitler hanged us, Stalin beat us,  
> Nikita made us starve.\(^{16}\)

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The accusation against Stalin is clear, and the one against Khrushchev references Khrushchev’s policies with the farmland. This attack on the former Soviet leaders is more powerful than most within other samizdat narratives for several reasons. The first reason is that Amalrik relates the two Soviet leaders to Hitler, who arguably could be considered the greatest enemy to the Soviet Union during its entire history. Relating Khrushchev to Stalin was considered insulting enough, but relating Khrushchev to Hitler, the man who challenged the image of the Soviets and almost defeated the Soviet Union, was overtly offensive. The second reason is that it is not simply the creation of Andrei Amalrik. If it was, it most likely could be passed over as Amalrik’s own disposition towards the Soviet leaders. Amalrik’s describes the song as one commonly sung within the Gulag camps, and therefore a common attack upon Khrushchev. The Soviet leaders that followed Stalin were not free from criticism within these narratives, and this was perhaps a reason that Khrushchev, and the leaders of the Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s, did not support the publication of novels attacking the Soviet Gulag prison camps.

Anatoly Marchenko’s *My Testimony* had a similarly offensive scene relating to Khrushchev. A prisoner named Vorkuta had Khrushchev’s name tattooed on his penis. This incites laughter by the other prisoners and embarrassment by the guards examining Vorkuta. Unlike Amalrik’s attack, which criticized policies, Marchenko’s was just vulgar. Although not explicit criticism like some of the references within other narratives, it is a clear attack on Khrushchev. The reader would not doubt that it was in reference to the Soviet’s disposition towards his policies, especially since the narrative was not allowed by the leader referenced.

Since they were published through samizdat, the relative “freedom” found within the Gulag narratives of the 1960s and 1970s allowed for criticism to take form in multiple ways. Criticism of Khrushchev and his policies would seem to be an inherent criticism of de-

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Stalinization, since it was a policy that he supported so much early on and it is how he has been remembered by scholars. This is not the case, because although he supported some of his policies of de-Stalinization, he was ineffective at supporting others. The limited amount that Khrushchev de-Stalinized his own policies, specifically censorship, demonstrated that he was not the most effective supporter of the policies he touted. This gap left by Khrushchev’s lack of defense of the freedom of literature was filled by the samizdat writers.

Related to the concept of freedom of expression is the expression of one’s own individuality. One aspect of Stalin’s legacy was attempting to suppress individuality, attempting to forge a unified depiction of the Soviet citizen. Stalin supported stories that depicted diligent workers, who were often rewarded for their hard work, and citizens who served the Soviet Union, for the betterment of all. Jeffry Brooks wrote, “Stories about dignity in ordinary jobs, about respect for authority, about elders who inspired young people to be proud of their work, at whatever rank they found themselves carried values important for promoting stability on a time of rapid social change.”

Samizdat removed the need to conform to those standards and allowed authors to express their individuality within their works. Each author had a unique experience from the camps, resulting in wide circulation of the samizdat materials and potential publication abroad. This was a suppressed realm of Soviet culture that was relatively quiet before the 1960s.

The role of individuality in the narratives challenged Stalinism in a way that Khrushchev had failed to do. Samizdat authors tore down the institutionalized images of the hardworking Soviet farmer, the honorable soldier, and the flawless political leader. In their place, they left depictions of individuals full of emotion, loss, and distrust. The common hardworking farmer was replaced by the hard worked prisoner. The honorable soldier was replaced by the soldier

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who was turned on by his own country, such as Shukhov in *One Day*. The flawless leader became the antagonist responsible for all of the suffering. This had a greater effect upon the public’s perceptions of Stalin’s legacy than the economic changes made by Khrushchev or his promises of reverting back to the Leninist ideals that the Soviet Union was founded upon.

Samizdat rose out of the ashes that suppression left behind, intending to circumvent the attempts at censoring authors. While some samizdat was published simply to release one’s own creation to an audience, one of the main goals the Gulag samizdat was published so that the stories from the prison camps could reach a wider audience. Examined as a whole, not as individual pieces, a main theme of the publication of samizdat was the distribution of information, experiences, and emotion. This conflicted with the government’s desire for strict regulation of the literature due to matters of security. One of the concepts behind de-Stalinization was deconstruction of Stalin’s firm control of the distribution of information to the public. Khrushchev’s hesitance to enforce this inspired others to educate the populous in whatever method they could, one of which was samizdat.

Prisoners of the Soviet labor camps, when released from prison, signed a written agreement that they would not speak of their experiences to anyone. The punishment for breaking this agreement was imprisonment into the system they had just been released from. Samizdat was a clear violation of this agreement, but arguably the best method to do so. If the released prisoners were caught telling a group of people about their experiences, or sending a letter with details, the information would reach very few people before the violator was silenced. Samizdat allowed for an almost immediate and unstoppable circulation of the author’s experiences. State police raids were one of the most common methods to confiscating narratives

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and silencing the authors, but these were ineffective if the samizdat was already in circulation. One of the authors who were victim to the KGB raids was Vasily Grossman. In 1960, Grossman attempted to publish his novel about the Gulags, *Life and Fate*, in the magazine *Znamya*. Shortly thereafter, the KGB confiscated his manuscript, not allowing it to be published. Grossman would die four years later, years before his novel would be officially published.\(^{20}\) One method of combating this was by distributing another copy, or copies, of the manuscript before the state would be able to intervene. Unofficial circulation was preferable to no publication at all. The location of the circulations would likely be unknown to the author, and unauthorized reproductions were beyond the author’s control as well. The threat of imprisonment was weakened by the knowledge that it did nothing to stop the spread of samizdat throughout the country.

Another way in which samizdat supported the expansion of public awareness about Soviet policies and history was the extent of detail found within the narratives. Many details would be glossed over in conversation and letters, due to the limitations of time and space. These mediums also were not as accessible to the public as novels and memoirs were. A letter circulated through samizdat would not get the recognition that a full length book would. While some could argue that details within the narratives could be attributed to exaggeration or falsification by the author, it is hard to make this claim when certain details and themes arise within many narratives. Arguably, accuracy and truth within the narratives are less important when viewed as political tools. As long as the public believed what the authors wrote, or were emotionally affected by it, the authors were successful. These common themes subtly challenged the officially established perspectives of the Soviet Union, its leadership, and policies.

Commentary on the current state of affairs generally occurred during the description of the prisoner’s release. In conversations with officers, the author would either comment, or would be told by the officers. In Anatoly Marchenko’s memoir, he has a conversation with a KGB officer prior to his release. The officer warns him that he has to watch what he says, and that he cannot express his own opinion. Marchenko responded, “‘Citizen officer, even outside I doubt if everybody’s thinking alike. Times have changed. Even the communists have fallen out among themselves.’”21 Marchenko is commentating on the fighting within the leadership of the 1960s, what would ultimately lead to Khrushchev’s forced removal from power. But this reference goes beyond that and can be seen as describing de-Stalinization in general. The Soviet leadership and the Soviet people were reimagining their views of what Stalin’s Soviet Union was and what the current Soviet Union should become. This political tug of war was representative of Soviet politics in the second half of the twentieth century, but not one openly acknowledged in officially published works.

One of the major themes of public awareness found in the narratives was detailing the extensive punishments that the prisoners would have to endure. This was where the substance of the narratives came from, and one of the main reasons that they were banned within the Soviet Union. In Dimitri Panin’s *The Notebooks of Sologdin* (1972), Panin has a chapter titled “How Stalin’s Camps Achieved the Same Results as Hitler’s Gas Chambers.” Beyond having a controversial title, the chapter lists the comparisons between the two. Panin claims that the role of the gas chamber was filled by the “starvation diet”, lack of adequate clothing, unrealistic production quotas, long treks, arctic winter, and lack of days for rest.22 All of these were the issues covered by all the authors of Gulag narratives throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Varlam

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Shalamov, in *Kolyma Tales*, discussed several of these issues. In one short story, he discusses how prisoners had to turn horse oats into food to be consumed by humans. In another, he states that prisoners did not have individual underwear, but the undergarments were communal. These examples of public awareness of the punishments are only a few of the countless depictions within the narratives published in the 1970s and 1960s.

The Gulag narratives assisted in public awareness of the details of the camps effectively through their depiction of the passage of time. No medium was more appropriate to depict the long years that the prisoners were in the camps. Even the several hundred page length narratives were probably not long enough to given full details of the experiences of the prisoners. In *Journey into the Whirlwind*, Eugenia Ginzburg attempts to put this into perspective. Ginzburg recalls, “Had I really spent two years there and come out alive? In those days, two years seemed to us a very long time – we had not yet learned to think in decades, nor had we heard the Kolyma saying, ‘The first ten years are the hardest.’ “ Ginzburg would spend a total of eighteen years in the camps before finally being released. Another author who had a similar experience was Karlo Stajner. His memoir detailing his experiences was titled *Seven Thousand Days in Siberia*. As the title suggests, Stajner spent over nineteen years in the prison camps, from the earliest camps on the Solovetsky Islands to Norilsk in northern Siberia. The ability to survive in the Gulags for twenty years was an almost unimaginable feat, but Stajner, Ginzburg, and others attempted to demonstrate this through their accounts. These details turn the abstract concept of life in the Gulag into a tactile representation that could be understood by the general public of the Soviet Union. The details of life in the camp within the narratives were the way in which the

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substance of the narratives enforced de-Stalinization. Details of the KGB raids, harsh lifestyles of the camp, and long sentences challenged the legacy of Stalin and the practices that he institutionalized. The narratives were first and foremost a challenge to the memory of Stalin and his impact on the Soviet Union. By censoring these publications, the Soviet leaders fell under the attack of the narratives, because they were perceived as just as oppressive in terms of culture.

The authors of samizdat were not just trying to reach the citizens of the Soviet Union with their publications. Many of the samizdat accounts of the Gulags crossed the border of the Soviet Union and reached Western nations. Samizdat that was smuggled out of the Soviet Union and was published abroad was termed “tamizdat.” Some authors also left the Soviet Union and published their accounts freely without restrictions. In many cases, the authors did not authorize the dissemination of their literature outside of the Soviet Union. The downside of samizdat was that once it was released, the authors had little control over what happened to it or who it reached. Once it reached outside countries, it could be published not only against the will of the Soviet government, but also against the will of the author as well.

An example of a work being published through tamizdat abroad is Solzhenitsyn’s *Cancer Ward*. Unlike some authors, this was not initiated by Solzhenitsyn. He was in opposition to its publication abroad, because he felt that the translation would be substandard compared to an official one. Also publications of samizdat abroad did not have to seek the approval of the Soviet Union. Since they were not officially published, they did not gain the protection of copyright. In a letter he wrote to *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, he cited that publishers in Italy and England were arguing over the copyright to the publication, since the USSR did not participate in international copyright laws. He criticizes the Soviet Union and the Writer’s Union for their lack of involvement in protecting writers’ works. He states that unauthorized translations have
“suffered” due to the Soviet Union’s failure to offer protection. Solzhenitsyn claims that if he had been able to publish his work in the Soviet Union, it would have been legally protected from unauthorized international publications. Solzhenitsyn was arguing was that the Soviet Union was not preventing publication of labor camp literature by censoring it, but instead they were unofficially allowing its unauthorized control in the West.

Julius Margolin’s *A Travel to the Land Ze-Ka* and Gustaw Herling-Grudzinski’s *A World Apart* were both published abroad during the 1950s. Some works were smuggled out of the Soviet Union through samizdat, or even smuggled out of the camps themselves. In a unique case, the diary of the writer and dissident Edward Kuznetsov was smuggled out of the camp to Moscow, and subsequently to Paris, where it was published in 1973. Not only was Kuznetsov able to keep a journal without it being confiscated, but he was somehow capable of making an arrangement to get it sent out of the camp. Kuznetsov’s case is an exception to the rule that publications rarely make it out of the Gulag prison camps. It is further impressive that the copy was not confiscated before making its way out of the country to a foreign publishing house. The prison camps themselves were known to have prisoners who would sell out their fellow inmates in order to benefit their own social standing within the prison, with either the reward of better food or better work as an incentive. The mere feat of Kuznetsov’s release of his diary out of the prison reveals weaknesses within one of the institutions of Stalin’s regimes that were supposed to be nearly impenetrable.

The Soviet Union could not prevent prisoners who were released to their native countries outside of the USSR from publishing their accounts. John Noble, an American who spent ten years in Soviet prison camps, wrote two memoirs about his time there, *I Found God in Soviet*

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Russia (1959) and I Was a Slave in Russia (1961). Another memoir by an American published in the United States was Walter Ciszek’s With God in Russia. His story is not like many of others published during the 1960s. While in Russia doing missionary work, he was arrested in 1941 on charges of being a German spy.28 His account provides unrestricted detail about the interrogation process, treatment in prison, and the process of transferring from one prison to another. More strikingly though, is his description of the difficulties he experienced after being released from the prisons. Released in 1955, he was not allowed to return to the United States for another nine years, despite being a citizen of the United States and not of the Soviet Union.29

It is important to note that Ciszek was released from after the death of Stalin and that it was under Khrushchev that Ciszek was forced to remain in the USSR until the mid-1960s. Preventing foreign prisoners from returning to the West was a method of censoring the stories from the camps from being publicized. This backfired on the Soviet leadership; Ciszek, and others, detailed their experiences in the Soviet Union after their release from prison within their narratives. These experiences dealt with criticisms of the Soviet Union not found within the strictly camp oriented literature. Detailing oppressions outside of the camps and the discontent citizens affected by them could be more damaging to the Soviet image than just accounts focused within the Gulags.

Samizdat of the 1960s and 1970s had a very unique impact upon the history of literature and politics. Self publication in the Soviet Union was not a source used often before this point, but it would become a staple of the dissident movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The topic of the Gulag was not the only topic written about within samizdat; samizdat covered all issue of life and all forms of written publication. It is arguable though, that the samizdat relating to the

Gulags were some of the most influential on politics and public perception of the Soviet leaders. One of the most popular samizdat publications from this time period was *Chronicle of Current Events*. *Chronicle*, printed periodically from 1968 until the late 1970s, detailed arrests, searches, and investigations during this time period. Arresting the publishers did little to stop *Chronicle*, as others replaced those who were removed.³⁰ *Chronicle of Current Events* accomplished very similar tasks to those performed by Gulag narratives. It informed the public of events that were occurring, while simultaneously challenging the established suppression by the Soviet government. This publication, along with the authors of the Gulag narratives, generated greater critical public interest in issues of arrests and imprisonments within the Soviet Union.

The rising interest in expressing and reading about these themes not only continued to promote the ideals of de-Stalinization within the writing, but also within the process itself. The late 1970s saw the rise of a dissident movement within the Soviet Union. According to Hyung-Min Joo, samizdat publications nearly doubled in between 1972 and 1974 and levels of publication would remain fairly high until their decline in the 1980s.³¹ The rise in samizdat publications and rise of the dissident movement was mainly in reaction to the suppression enacted by the Soviet leadership. Being labeled as a dissident movement gave the authors unity and therefore greater strength than they had as individuals. This inspired further interest in the public to read works of samizdat. In its own way, dissident samizdat became a trend, something for a suppressed populous to grasp on to. The scholar Ann Komaromi states, “The physical form of samizdat … has value for the [reader]. The samizdat text object is fetishized.”³²

interest in reading samizdat created a greater impetus to publish. In this way, the stories from the Gulags were fetishized as well, giving popularity to the circulation of *Chronicle of Current Events*, the novels, and memoirs.

The Soviet government’s suppression of culture caused the desire for a dissident movement which ultimately influenced the stability and the legitimacy of the Soviet power structure. Fred Coleman writes, “From the beginning, Moscow’s handling of its miniscule dissident movement suffered from a counterproductive overkill. The barbaric suppression of dissent never killed it. On the contrary, the repressions only increased the demands for reform until they at last toppled the Soviet system.”33 The repression that was meant to contain its citizens turned on the Soviet government by creating a discontent populous that had found an avenue to unify in. The dissident movement became a catalyst in the weakening of the Soviet Union’s control. It would be presumptuous to claim that samizdat and the dissidents are the main reason for, or even a major cause of, the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it is undeniable that the dissidents had an important role in the challenge to the government and the direction that the region would take in the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s.

Samizdat became one of the greatest vehicles for de-Stalinization after the policy was no longer officially supported by the Soviet leadership. The dissidents remained influential upon the politics of the Soviet Union, despite having no official ties to the politics of the Soviet Union. Several dissidents crossed the boundary of covert political action and became involved directly in the political process. The Czechoslovakian dissident playwright Vaclav Havel was known for his samizdat publications and his critiques of the Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s. After multiple incarcerations, Havel gained power in Czechoslovakia. He helped lead the Velvet

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33 Fred Coleman, *The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Empire: Forty Years that Shook the World, from Hitler to Stalin* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 112.
Revolution, which overthrew the Communist rule and as president, he subsequently participated in the breakup of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a dissident writer from Georgia, was a big supporter of human rights during the 1970s and 1980s and was imprisoned within the Soviet Union because of this support. He later became the first elected president of the newly independent Georgia in 1991. The dissidents that had operated in a confined space during the 1970s and 1980s were empowered through their actions as dissidents and were able to challenge the repressive legacy of the Soviet Union in new ways as the 1980s drew to a close. The methods that would attack the institutions in a very theoretical way were no longer needed, as the institutions and the people who governed them were removed all together.

With the death of Stalin and the end of his thirty year hold of power in the Soviet Union, Khrushchev had a difficult role to fulfill when he took over in 1953. Although he at first embraced the policies of de-Stalinization, he reversed his policies when faced with political pressure from his political associates. In his politically weakened state, he was removed by the more conservative Brezhnev, who pursued repressive policies toward culture. This repression led to the increase of samizdat publications and a growing dissident movement. A substantial portion of the samizdat publications were novels and memoirs about experiences from the Soviet Gulags. These publications embodied the ideals of de-Stalinization in multiple ways. The narratives supported individual freedom and expression, which was not fully supported by the Soviet government. The narratives’ goal of public awareness also challenged the concepts of Stalinism and repression during the 1960s and 1970s in the Soviet Union. Uncontrolled samizdat led to the publication of tamizdat in foreign countries and increased awareness of the camps and Soviet policies abroad. These factors combined with continued repression fueled the

34 Fred Coleman, *The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Empire: Forty Years that Shook the World, from Hitler to Stalin* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 113.
dissident movement which continued to challenge the Soviet system until its collapse in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By analyzing the literature as political tools, due to the circumstances of their publication, a greater understanding of Soviet history can be gained. Re-evaluating the Soviet political histories by approaching it from cultural and social perspectives not previously examined can give new light into the complexities of the Soviet Union and the forces behind the events that occurred within it.
Bibliography

Secondary


Primary


