

Panel Two 11:40AM-1:40PM

Remaking Ukraine's Religious Landscape in the 1990s

Frank E. Sysyn

Mikhail Gorbachev's loosening of restrictions on religious communities in the Soviet Union between 1987 and 1991 remade the religious structures in Ukraine. With numerous Protestant communities, including unregistered Baptists, and one half of all Russian Orthodox parishes in the USSR, Ukraine occupied a prominent place in the Soviet religious landscape. As important, its underground Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) was the largest banned body of Christians in Europe. Indeed one quarter of all Russian Orthodox churches in the USSR were in four western Ukrainian oblasts in order to draw believers away from the underground Eastern Catholic (Uniate) Church. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) founded in 1921 and revived during World War II was also banned by the Soviet regime that used Russian Orthodoxy in Ukraine as a tool securing political loyalty and Russification. In 1988 the UGCC emerged from the underground and in 1989 a parish in Lviv declared the restoration of the UAOC. Assisted by their co-religionists abroad, the two Churches opened hundreds of parishes in western Ukraine, in many cases by taking over Russian Orthodox parishes. The Moscow Patriarchate responded to this challenge in late 1990 by declaring its exarchate in Ukraine a Ukrainian Orthodox Church with elements of autonomy in administration. Thus by the time Ukraine declared independence in 1991 and the Soviet Union dissolved, the religious structures of the country had been fully transformed. The Ukrainian state faced great complexity in dealing with a rapidly changing religious map. During these years, I wrote frequently on the religious situation. (<https://ciuspress.com/product/religion-and-nation-in-modern-ukraine/?v=5435c69ed3bc>). Through confronting my own evaluations and expectations, I hope to address the significance of the decade in creating a religiously pluralistic Ukrainian state and society, while leaving unresolved many issues that have surfaced in contemporary Ukraine.

(Un)silencing the Past: Trauma, Archival Gaps, and Dissonant Legacies of Communist Violence in Ukraine

Karolina Koziura

Across Eastern Europe, the reckoning with the Communist past took different forms after 1989. Reopened secret police archives, public trials, informant scandals, new centers of remembrance, and anti-Communist educational projects reinforced the perception that the entire region is haunted by "memory ghosts." In Ukraine, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, "file fever" shaped historical revisionism and efforts to (un)silence histories of communist violence. Archival opening did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, alongside the discovery of new documents, the public confronted long-suppressed trauma, grief, and compassion associated with communist violence. How did people narrate the previously silenced histories of experienced violence? And, more importantly, how did these silences shape the turbulent processes of Ukraine's nation and state formation in the 1990s?

Focusing on the ways in which memories and trauma of the famine of the 1930s entered Ukrainian public discourse in the late 1980s, this presentation examines the dissonant legacies of communist violence in Ukraine. It demonstrates how historical and cultural conditions shaped processes of historical reckoning and the emergence of a language of cultural trauma, contributing to conflicting identities and divergent trajectories of nation and state-formation. In doing so, the presentation argues for rethinking the 1990s as a dynamic moment of both possibility and contradiction, one that simultaneously emancipated and repressed traumatic silences, with enduring consequences in the decades that followed.

Mapping Ukrainian Identity Discourses in the “Long 1990s”

Adrian Ivakhiv

This talk begins from the premise that the past 35 years have seen Ukraine transform, both in outsider representations and to an unusual degree in insider self-depictions, from a “terra incognita” to a “terra invicta,” but that this masks a questioning of national identity and global allegiance reflected in a much longer history.

I will focus on developments in the cultural, environmental, and religio-spiritual life of Ukrainians during the “long 1990s,” a period that I argue begins with the Chernobyl nuclear accident of 1986 and ends with the Orange Revolution of 2004. It is during this time that the “terra incognita” was mapped out in ways that opened up possibilities without following through on them, but that also left behind formative residues that could be tapped into later.