In June 1951 hundreds of Ukrainian writers, actors, musicians, and artists arrived in Moscow for a *dekada* (ten-day festival) of Ukrainian art. This grandiose exhibition of the Ukrainian republic’s cultural achievements appeared to be a huge success and was crowned by the decoration of 669 Ukrainians with various orders, medals, and honorary artistic titles. The premier Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*, provided extensive, enthusiastic coverage of the festival. The ambassadors of Ukrainian culture left Moscow in high spirits, sending telegraphed expressions of gratitude to Stalin, the party, and the government. On 2 July, however, *Pravda* unexpectedly fired a devastating ideological salvo at the Ukrainians in the form of the editorial “Against Ideological Distortions in Literature.” Unsigned, but engineered by Stalin himself, this long article was ostensibly devoted to just one “distortion,” Volodymyr Sosiura’s short poem “Love Ukraine” (1944), which had appeared in Russian translation in 1951. *Pravda* accused the poem, written during the patriotic fervor of World War II, of glorifying “a primordial Ukraine, Ukraine in general,” rather than Soviet Ukraine. In an aside, cryptic reference was made to other serious shortcomings in the work of the Ukrainian Communist Party’s Central Committee.  

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1 Parts of this paper are derived from my book, *Stalin’s Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 6–7, 10–11, 69, 81–83, 129–37, 142–47, and 150–53. These fragments are reproduced here with the kind permission of the publisher, the University of Toronto Press.


Within days of Pravda’s publication, Ukrainian authorities launched a campaign of ideological purification in the republic, complete with condemnations of “nationalist deviations” in all areas and genres of creative activity. 4 While the editorial dealt only with a single poem’s failure to stress love for Soviet socialism, the Ukrainian leaders discerned a larger ideological significance between the lines. The republic’s ideologues interpreted the vague critique from the Kremlin according to what they perceived as the main threat to Soviet Ukrainian identity—a “harmful obsession” with the national past and concomitant insufficiency in the portrayal of historical ties with Russia. On 2 August the Ukrainian First Secretary, Leonid Melnikov, reported to Stalin’s deputy for party affairs, Georgii Malenkov, that the Ukrainian intelligentsia, “in their creative and scholarly work, often idealize the past.” He assured Moscow that his subordinates would instruct local intellectuals to portray Ukraine as “an inseparable part of our great Fatherland.” Writing to Stalin on 14 August, Malenkov expressed his regret that the Ukrainian leaders overlooked “attempts to portray the historical process in Ukraine as separate from the history of the peoples of the USSR.” 5 Generally, the ideological conferences held in the republic concentrated on what was considered to be an inappropriate infatuation with the national past.

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Modern students of nationalism have little patience with older scholars who see nations as organic entities with unique, objective characteristics. Ever since Karl Deutsch, it has not been possible to analyze nation-building without emphasizing the role of print media; over time, Eric Hobsbawm’s and Benedict Anderson’s once revisionist notions of modern nations as “invented” and “imagined” rallied overwhelming support in the profession. 6 Ernest Gellner contributed an influential proposal;