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From the award-winning authors *A People's Tragedy* and *Natasha's Dance*, an important account of what private life was like for Russians in the worst years of Soviet oppression. There are many accounts of the public aspects of Stalin's dictatorship: arrest and trial, slavery and murder in the gulag. No previous book, however, has explored the regime's effect on people's private lives, what a historian called Stalinism that goes into all of us. Now, drawing on a huge collection of newly discovered documents, *The Whisperers* reveal for the first time the inner world of ordinary Soviet citizens as they struggle to survive amid the mistrust, fear, compromise, and betrayal that pervades their existence. Moving from the 1917 Revolution to the death of Stalin and its surroundings, Orlando Figes recreated the moral labyrinth in which Russians found themselves, where one wrong turn could destroy a family or, perversely, eventually save him. He takes us into a cramped communal apartment, where a small quarrel can lead to fatal censure; he examined loyal Communists, who often rationalized even their own arrests as a case of mistaken identity; and he gives a slashing light to the informant, showing how, in a repressive system, anyone can easily become a collaborator. A vast panoramic portrait of a society in which everyone speaks in whispers - whether to protect their family and friends, or to inform them - *The Whisperers* is a gripping account of life in impossible times. This is an important article published recently in *The Nation* about this controversial book and why it was not published in Russia after two attempts by different publishers. I hope that in the wake of his readership ratings will be less upbeat. Orlando Figes and Stalin's Victims. Peter Reddaway and Stephen F. Cohen May 23, 2012 Many Western observers believe that Vladimir Putin's authoritarian regime has in effect banned the Russian edition of the widely acclaimed 2007 book by British historian Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia*. A professor at Birkbeck College University of London, Figes himself inspired this explanation. In an interview and in an article in 2009, suggested that his first Russian publisher drop the project due to political pressure because his large-scale study of Stalin-era terror was uncomfortable for the current regime. Three years later, the explanation continues to circulate. We doubt Figes's Figes's at the time—partly because an excellent Russian historian himself published so many uncensored exposés about the horrors of Stalinism, and continued to do so—but only now can we dispute it. (Since none of us knew Figes or ever had contact with him, there was no personal animus in our investigation.) The examination of transcripts of the original Russian-language interviews he used to write *The Whisperers*, and documents provided by Russians close to the project, tell a different story. A second Russian publisher, Corpus, had no political qualms about immediately signing on for an edition of his own book. But in 2010, Corpus also canceled the project. The reason has nothing to do with the Putin regime but everything planned with Figes himself.*** In 2004 specialists at the Memorial Society, the widely respected Russian historical and human rights organization founded in 1988 on behalf of Stalin's victims and terror survivors, were contracted by Figes to conduct hundreds of interviews that formed the basis of *The Whisperers*, and are now archived in *The Whisperers*, and is now archived at Memorial. In preparing the Russian edition, Corpus commissioned the Memorial to provide the original Russian version of the Figes quotation and to examine other English translations. What the Memorial researchers found was a surprising number of small and large mistakes. Its publication as it is, it is concluded, will lead to scandal in Russia. This revelation, which we learned about a few months ago, did not entirely surprise us, although our subsequent discovery was surprising. Separately, we have been following Figes and academic and related violations for some time. They began in 1997, with his book *A People's Tragedy*, in which Harvard historian Richard Pipes discovered scientific flaws. In 2002 Figes' cultural history in Russia, *Natasha's Dance*, was greeted enthusiastically by many reviewers until she met a careful critic of the *Times Literary Supplement*, Rachel Polonsky of the University of Cambridge. Polonsky points out various flaws in the book, including the borrowing of Figes' sloppy words and ideas from other authors without adequate recognition. One of those authors, the American historian Priscilla Roosevelt, wrote to us, Figes according to an obscure memoir I had used in my book *Life on the Russian Country Estate* (Yale University Press, 1995), but changed their content and messed up references. Another prominent scholar, T.J. Binyon, published a similar critique of *Natasha's Dance*: Factual errors and erroneous statements astounded her page thicker than the autumn leaves in Vallombrosa. In 2010 different dimensions of Figes' practice were revealed. For some time he has been writing anonymous derogatory reviews on Amazon books by his colleagues history of Russia, especially Polonsky and Robert Service of Oxford University. Polonsky's Molotov Magic Lantern, for example, is pretentious and the kind of book that makes you wonder why the book was ever. Meanwhile, Figes wrote on Amazon, also anonymously, a recent warm review of *The Whisperers*. It was, Figes says, a wonderful account and necessary Soviet history written by a writer with incredible storytelling skills.... I hope he writes forever. When Service and Polonsky expressed their suspicions that Figes had written a review, his lawyers threatened the Service with court action. However, soon, Figes was forced to admit that he had indeed written an anonymous review. The service summed up the affair: Figes had been lying through his teeth for a week and threatened to sue me for defamation if I didn't say black and white.... If there is one thing that should come out of this, the importance of giving people the freedom to speak the truth without the threat of financial ruin.*** At almost the same time, as we later learned, the true story of the Russian edition of Figes' *The Whisperers* unfolded behind the scenes in Moscow. In the summer of 2010, representatives of the three Russian organizations involved—the publisher of Corpus, Memorial and a foundation, Dynastia (which owns Russian rights and pays for translations)—met to consider what Memorial researchers had discovered. According to a detailed account by one participant, the group tried to find a way to save the project, but researchers have documented too much anachronism, misinterpretation, stupid mistakes and pure nonsense. All facts, dates, names and terms of *The Whisperers*, and biographies of its central figures, need to be examined, participants added. That's too much. A decision was made against proceeding with the Russian edition. After re-examining the relevant material, Dynastia informed Figes of the decision in a letter to his London literary institution. Indeed, after seeing only a few chapters of *The Whisperers*, Memorial found so many false statements about the life story of Stalin's victims that his chief investigator, a woman with extensive experience working on such material, said, I just cried as I read it and tried to make corrections. Here are just three examples, which we have also examined, whose gravity readers can decide for themselves:• To begin with an example that combines error with discovery, consider Figes' treatment of Natalia Danilova (p. 253), whose father has been arrested. After misrepresenting his family history, Figes inserts words into his mouth, clearly to help justify the title of his book: Except for auntie, the rest of us can only whisper in dissent. The quote does not appear in Memorial's meticulous transcription of the recorded interview with Danilova. • Figes creates facts in other cases, apparently also for dramatic purposes. According to *The Whisperers* (pp. 215-17, 292-93), it is inconceivable that Stroikov was able to complete his dissertation while in prison without the support of the political police. He has two uncles in OGPU (political police). However, there is no that Stroikov had an uncle, nor was there any reason to state that he had the support of the secret police. Figes also claimed that for helping the Stroikov family, a friend who was then exiled was withdrawn, imprisoned and then shot. In fact, this friend was not brought back up, imprisoned or executed, but lived almost to the age of 90. • Figes's distortion of the fate of Dina Ielison-Grodzianskaia (d. 361-62), who survived eight years in the Gulag, grieves in different ways. After placing her in the wrong concentration camp, she alleges that she is one of many 'trusts' whose collaborations make them small profits that... can make the difference between life and death. There is no evidence in the interviews used by Figes that Ielison-Grodzianskaia ever became trusted or accepted privileges. As leading Memorial researchers commented, Figes' account is a direct insult to the memory of a prisoner. *The Whisperers* may be consistent with the practice of other Figes, but for us, the old students (and friends) victims of Stalinist and other Soviet-era oppression, the book's flaws are especially grave. For many Russians, especially surviving family members, millions of Stalin's victims are sacred memories. Figes has not, to say the least, been faithful to that memory—or the mission that tells the truth of the often politically explored Memorial, which, despite the efforts it issued, agreed honorably with the decision not to publish the Russian edition. Still more, many Russians have suffered, even died, because, as the Service says, freedom to speak the truth. Figes also has no respect for martyrdom.*** Unfortunately, *The Whisperers* is still regarded by many Western readers, including scholars, as exemplary studies of Soviet history. However, these new revelations show that Figes's work cannot be read without prudence. Historians are obliged to be very thorough in using generally inaccessible archival material, but Figes cannot be fully trusted even with open source. Thus, in *The Whisperers* he also slandered the memory of the late Soviet poet and Novyi Mir's longtime editor, Aleksandr Tvardovsky, the forerunner of Mikhail Gorbachev's bold anti-Stalinist thinking, stating that Tvardovsky betrayed his own father to the police during terror (p. 134). Figes' allegations have been convincingly debunked in the Russian press. We hope that in his latest book, *Just Send Me Word*, published in May, Figes has treated his unique sources more carefully. The book tells the story of a deeply moving, secretive, more than eight-year correspondence between an inmate in Stalin's remote Gulag and a devoted woman in Moscow, who later became his wife. Unfortunately, this book conveys the impression that maintain the full support of the Memorial, through, for example, insertion at the end of the volume *A Note from Memorial* (analysis of correspondence by Memorial researchers designed for other purposes). Actually, Memorial has come to a different decision regarding Figes. In a letter, one of his leading figures recently wrote about Figes, Many of us have shaped the impression of him as... a very mediocre researcher and poorly oriented source handler in his chosen topic, but an energetic and talented entrepreneur. As a result, the author continued, In the future, we do not want to associate his name with Memorial. Orlando Figes's response had seventy-five words to respond to an article I hadn't been allowed to read. The first cancellation (Atticus, 2009) cites commercial reasons, although I speculate that politics is involved. The second (Dynastia, 2011) cites about a dozen factual inaccuracies and false statements. I replied: some were at Memorial sources, others debated, or mistranslated by Dynastia—leaving some of the original errors in the book based on thousands of interviews and archival documents. This is what I regret. It has long been *The Nation's* policy not to share the full text of the article with the subject of that article before it is published. Our Mail page remains open to Figes. The Editors ... More... More

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