5 Narratives of Suffering: Soviet Movies About World War II

This chapter considers mass violence to be a participatory process and points to a rarely acknowledged Soviet line of remembrance of World War II: the war as a tragedy, a line which came about through the efforts of many committed individuals.[1] Thus, I try to employ an understanding of mass violence as social interaction to cultural history in order to explore the construction of memory of mass violence and challenge conventional views about state-controlled remembrance. Specifically, this chapter deals with the construction of the memory of the German-Soviet war (1941–1945) in Soviet fictional movies,[2] which supposedly took place under tight control by the state and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Thus, I try to shed light on the relations between official and private remembrance. Memory, in this view, is the outcome of complex social relations instead of being easily determined by a state. In a way, this chapter explores the agency of social forces in the construction of non-violence and peace-building.

From the Second World War the Soviet Union emerged victorious and as a world power. However, in absolute numbers, the USSR also suffered immense war losses (although the specific figures are contested). Therefore, this chapter traces what narratives played which role in Soviet films and in particular in how far were these stories of victory, heroism, suffering and victimization. In contrast to a large portion of the literature, I argue that the tragic element, which emphasized suffering and pain, was always strong and became increasingly influential. To do this, several themes and elements of the plots are examined, among them the war situation in which the plots were placed and who among the characters dies and who survives. In the war, many sorts of people were victimized; hence, it is important to explore how the experience of people who met an especially painful fate was represented (who, it is often said, were near absent in Soviet war memory), such as Jews, war-disabled people and famine victims. For insights into the impact that the war had on social relations, as per these movies, I describe how the sensitive issue of sexual infidelity and faithfulness was dealt with. There

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1 I gladly acknowledge my gratitude to Moritz Feichtinger, Andrej Kotljarchuk, Julia Richers, Gregor Thum and Magdolna Zsivnovszki for sharing information and insights on the topic of this chapter with me. I am also grateful to all students who took a class "Sowjetische Erinnerungskultur: Filme über den Zweiten Weltkrieg" with me at the University of Bern, especially to Julian Flückiger and Michael Schmocker.

2 For my sample of 25 films, see the filmography.

is also the question of the analysis that the films offered for those who caused Soviet suffering: how are the Germans depicted in these films?

While the aspects mentioned so far refer to the memory of violence imposed on Soviet people externally, Soviet troops and civilians also exerted violence in World War II. Next to military combat, this was primarily about killing or letting German prisoners die, mass rape, and Soviet terror against Soviet citizens. This raises the question, do memories of this appear in Soviet war films, and how does this fit with the overall narratives? Finally, how can it be explained that the tragic narrative became so prominent in Soviet fictional war movies, and what does that say about the public memory of World War II in the Soviet Union in general? I ask these questions against the background of the fact that films made in any country can be called ideological;[3] my objective, rather, is to find specific ideological elements.

In the scholarship on the Soviet memory of World War II, which concentrates on monuments and commemoration festivities, films have not played a big role.[4] As for artistic works, researchers have sometimes taken novels, poems and paintings into account, but movies have primarily been examined by film historians and only at times by general historians of Eastern Europe. My work builds on the studies by several film historians, such as Denise Youngblood, Neya Zorkaya and Jeremy Hicks, who pointed to some of the tendencies that I emphasize here. Methodologically, this chapter deviates from many film historians in several ways. My analysis pursues themes, constellations and narratives diachronically whereas the existing works often distinguish between different phases which, as they argue, should be kept apart. In fact, some studies proceed film by film. Moreover, I confront Eastern Europeanists' assertions about Soviet official memory with films. This chapter also differs from many existing studies by comparing films' themes, constellations and scenes with their literary model.[5]

Movies appear to me as a significant subject of research for two reasons: their vulnerability to censorship and their impact. In the USSR, films were part of state-produced memory construction. They were made in state-owned studios by

3 See Detlef Kannapin, "Avantgarde, Agonie und Anpassung: Die ideologischen Grundlagen des sowjetischen Kinos nach 1945" in Lars Karl, ed., *Leinwand zwischen Tauwetter und Frost: Der osteuropäische Spiel- und Dokumentarfilm im Kalten Krieg* (Berlin: Metropol, 2007), 21–23.

4 For exceptional statements, see Lev Gudkov, "Die Fesseln des Sieges: Russlands Identität aus der Erinnerung an den Krieg", *Osteuropa* 55, 4–6 (2005): 63; Beate Fieseler and Jörg Ganzenmüller, "Einführung" in: idem., eds., *Kriegsbilder: Mediale Repräsentationen des ‚Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges'* (Fulda: Fuldaer Verlagsanstalt, 2010), 9.

5 This course is also taken in Olga Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (New Brunswick et al.: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

state-paid directors, actors and cameramen, shown in state-owned cinemas and advertised and discussed in state-controlled newspapers and journals. Compared to novels, films were even easier to control for officials given the large funding they required and their complex production and distribution processes. Film censorship was actually tightened after World War II and again after the Brezhnev takeover.[6] Moreover, movies reached far more people than novels, poems and museums. For example, *Young Guard* (1948), shown in two parts, sold 42.4 million tickets with its first part and 36.7 million with its second part, *Story of a Real Man* (1948) sold 34.4 million tickets, *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959), although it was not considered a box office hit, sold 30.1 million, *Cranes Are Flying* (1957) 28.3 million, *Fate of a Man* (1959) 39,25 million, *Clear Skies* (1961) 41.3 million, the two parts of *The Living and the Dead* (1964) sold over 40 million tickets each, *Hot Snow* (1972) 22.7 million, *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975) 40.6 million, *Come and See* (1985) 28.9 million, *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) 16.7 million and *Ascension* (1977) sold 10.7 million tickets. By contrast, *The Mirror* attracted only three million viewers.[7] In addition, many films were later repeatedly shown on TV. The wide outreach of most of these films cannot be disputed.

The State of Research: Victory, Heroes and Sufferings

According to the dominant interpretation, the memory of the Second World War was of great political importance for the Soviet rulers. Thus, it has been argued that it was distorted by political propaganda[8] and censorship. This is, at least im-

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6 Beate Fieseler, "Keine Leidensbilder: Der Invalide des 'Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges' in sowjetischen Spielfilmen", Fieseler and Ganzenmüller, *Kriegsbilder*, 81; according to Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 56 censorship was loosened during the war. For Brezhnev, see Lars Karl, "Von Helden und Menschen: Der Zweite Weltkrieg im sowjetischen Spielfilm (1941–1965)", *Osteuropa* 52, 1 (2002): 82.

7 Beate Fieseler, "Der Kriegsinvalide in ausgewählten sowjetischen Spielfilmen der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit (1944 bis 1964)", Bernhard Chiari et al., eds., *Krieg und Militär im Film des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), 206, 215; Christine Engel et al., eds., *Geschichte des sowjetischen und russischen Films* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999), 128, 139, 187; Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 93, 124, 129, 136, 184, 197 and 277 note 5. For the GDR film *I Was Nineteen* (1968), a figure of 2.5 million cinema viewers indicates a large impact too (Holger Südkamp, "Ich war neunzehn: Zur filmischen und politischen Bedeutung von Konrad Wolfs DEFA-Film", *Europäische Geschichtsdarstellungen – Diskussionspapiere* 2, 3 (2005): 12, docserv.uni-duesseldorf.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-6991 (retrieved November 22, 2013).

8 Martin Hoffmann, "Der Zweite Weltkrieg in der offiziellen sowjetischen Erinnerungskultur", Helmut Berding, ed., *Krieg und Erinnerung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 129–143.

plicitly, based on the concept of totalitarianism which assumes that socialist rulers control the masses by force and manipulation. Although not all academic proponents of totalitarianism theory categorize the Soviet Union after Stalin's death as totalitarian, some scholars on Soviet war memory have explicitly done so.[9] "State and Party monopolized the history of the war and made the victory one of the main sources of legitimation of their rule" after 1964 under Brezhnev.[10] A view popular among Eastern Europeanists holds that there was official silence on World War II in its aftermath under Stalin and a "victory narrative",[11] or narratives of victory and heroism, prevailed under Brezhnev.[12] "Only triumphalist, heroic narratives were available in public".[13] Overall, "sufferings and privation, death and destruction were purged from the public memory of the war in favor of a mere cult of heroes", as the dominant historiographical narrative has it.[14] For decades, as has been argued, there was no "representation of grief, pain and guilt" in Soviet movies.[15] Generally speaking, traumatic memories were "almost entirely lost", or, in another version, the traumatic losses of life were not worked through in the USSR.[16] This has culminated in a film historian's essentialist charges that Russians only have the capacity for melancholy but do not mourn, as Europeans do and is considered normal.[17] The cult of the veterans, annual com-

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9 Sabine Arnold, *Stalingrad im sowjetischen Gedächtnis: Kriegserinnerung und Geschichtsbild im totalitären Staat* (Bochum: Projekt, 1998), esp. 18–19. Lev Gudkov, "The fetters of history: How the war provides Russia with its identity", www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-05-03-gudkov.en.html (retrieved November 23, 2013) even applies this to post-Soviet Russia – not to mention many diatribes by scholars in the recent anti-Russian campaigns.

10 Christian Ganzer and Alena Paškovič, "'Heldentum, Tragik, Tapferkeit': Das Museum der Verteidigung der Brester Festung", *Osteuropa* 60, 12 (201): 94; similarly Gudkov, "Fetters", 5; Arnold, *Stalingrad*, 393.

11 Bernd Bonwetsch, "Der 'Grosse Vaterländische Krieg': Vom öffentlichen Schweigen unter Stalin zum Heldenkult unter Breshnew", Babette Quinkert, ed., *"Wir sind die Herren dieses Landes": Ursachen, Verlauf und Folgen des deutschen Überfalls auf die Sowjetunion* (Hamburg: VSA, 2002), 178–181.

12 Hoffmann, "Weltkrieg", 131; Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, Basic Books, 1994), 110, 126–127, 135–145; Arnold, *Stalingrad*, 22–23.

13 Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Heroes into victims: The Second World War in post-Soviet memory politics", www.eurozine.com/articles/2012-10-31-zhurzhenko-en.html (retrieved November 21, 2013), 4.

14 Bonwetsch, "'*Grosse Vaterländische Krieg*'", 168.

15 Fieseler, "Keine Leidensbilder", 81.

16 Catherine Merridale, *Nights of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London: Granta, 2000), 201, 304 (quote).

17 See Evgenia Bezborodova, *Die Rolle des Imaginären in sowjetischen Kriegsfilmen*, Ph.D dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 2018, 256–295.

memorative anniversaries and monuments in particular fostered the heroic narrative.[18]

While narratives of victory and heroism are certainly known to everybody who visited or visits the area of the former Soviet Union, many of these statements seem excessive. If one follows some of these views, only literary works were, as it is often phrased, "more open", "more sincere" and "closer to reality", depicting less heroic truths about the everyday in the war.[19] According to one version, the image of the "heroic defender" contrasted with the individual experience of "personal tragedy".[20] Another author leaves it undecided whether private memory was marginalized and silenced or processed and manipulated.[21]

Scholars have offered varying periodizations of Soviet war memory. Among them, the view is widespread that there was some openness in 1945–1946, the cult of victorious Stalin prevailed from 1946 to 1953, de-Stalinization between 1953 and 1964 and a "bombastic" remembrance practiced in the so-called stagnation period from 1964 to 1987, which again emphasized victory above all.[22] Some conceded that in a few films during the thaw period, but only then, the war memories were presented "as history of destruction and grief",[23] and Neia Zorkaia argues that this was preceded by similar tendencies during the war, in 1941–1945, when "tears, suffering, fear and humiliation" were depicted on Soviet film screens.[24] Another analyst found that a shift "from triumph to trauma" occurred only after the end of socialism.[25] Before 1991, in these views, "narratives of suffering [were] secondary to heroic narratives", and "Soviet commemorative culture required

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18 Guido Hausmann, "Die unfriedliche Zeit: Politischer Totenkult im 20. Jahrhundert", Manfred Hettling and Jörg Echternkamp, eds., *Gefallenengedenken im globalen Vergleich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013), 427–435.

19 Bonwetsch, "Grosse Vaterländische Krieg", 174, 182; near-identical Bernd Bonwetsch, "'Ich habe an einem völlig anderen Krieg teilgenommen': Die Erinnerung an den Grossen Vaterländischen Krieg in der Sowjetunion", Berding et al., *Krieg*, 159; Fieseler, "Keine Leidensbilder", 80; Tumarkin, *Living*, 111.

20 Hoffmann, "Weltkrieg", 140.

21 Gudkov, "Fesseln", 6, 9.

22 Bonwetsch, "Grosse Vaterländische Krieg", 169–172, 178–181.

23 Peter Jahn, "Patriotismus, Stalinismuskritik und Hollywood: Der 'Grosse Vaterländische Krieg' in russischen TV-Serien der Gegenwart", Fieseler and Ganzenmüller, *Kriegsbilder*, 128.

24 Neja Zorkaja, "Kino in Zeiten des Krieges: Visualisierungen von 1941 bis 1945", *Osteuropa* 55, 4/6 (2005): 328–334 (quote 328).

25 Zhurzhenko, "Heroes", 2; for the merely deductive rationale ibid., 5.

martyrs rather than victims".[26] After 1991, some observe a pluralization of narratives in Russian films about World War II.[27]

Many students of the Soviet remembrance of World War II have written on the assumption that there were two types of remembrance, individual memory based on private experience and official, state-directed memory. Without much elaboration, they usually acknowledge that there was some middle ground. Some think of them as intertwined rather than disconnected, with individual memory and private desires also influencing official remembrance and propaganda.[28] In particular, this argument has been made for literary works.[29] Although Sabine Arnold, unlike me, thought that it was primarily official memory that influenced private memory, I accept a term mentioned by her, "public memory"[30] for what I explore because the films analyzed here were state-produced and in the public arena, but not official, since they reflected the artistic work of individuals.

My sample includes 25 films[31] made between 1943 and 2010. This study is focused on the Soviet period; just one film covered here was made after 1987. Further, I largely exclude movies produced during the war, and all films included in my sample were shown in Soviet cinemas. The films were selected because they are well-known, often also internationally, having won several accolades. This means that my selection neglects works that critics and historians have considered to possess lower artistic value. The narratives of the latter may well have differed from those discussed in this chapter, but, again, most films I cover did reach large audiences, and one could easily add a dozen more that convey stories and imageries similar to those that I have written about.

Narratives of Suffering and Tragedy

Deep sadness can be felt in many Soviet war films. Pain, loss and grief are not marginal but constitutive aspects of them. Moreover, almost all of these films, even the ones produced during the war, show dead or dying Soviet people. In *Hot*

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26 Ibid., 3.

27 Isabelle de Keghel, "Glaube, Schuld und Erlösung: Religion im neuen russischen Kriegsfilm", *Osteuropa* 59, 1 (2009): 97–108; Zhurzhenko, "Heroes", 2.

28 Hoffmann, "Weltkrieg", 132, 139.

29 Ilja Kukulin, "Schmerzregulierung: Zur Traumaverarbeitung in der sowjetischen Kriegsliteratur", *Osteuropa* 55, 4–6 (2005): 236.

30 Arnold, *Stalingrad*, 19, cf. 174–175.

31 One of the motion pictures included is a documentary (*Ordinary Fascism*), one a fictional movie from the GDR (*I Was Nineteen*), and one Soviet fictional film is entirely set in the postwar period (*Today There Will Be No Leave*).

Snow (1972), for example, a young Soviet officer searches despairingly for the surviving members of his unit, a general climbs over Soviet corpses, and those still alive receive medals from him with gloomy faces. These films often dwell on Soviet citizens suffering under collective and individual German atrocities (as those of the wartime period did[32]). At least from the late 1950s onward, the strong tragic element and downplaying of heroism in these films was not lost on contemporary Western European film critics.[33]

Film historians have identified a turn to tragedy primarily based on four movies that came out between 1957 and 1962.[34] Three of them show how the life of the protagonist is destroyed. The viewer watches them suffer one blow after another. Importantly, the individual tragedy is not depicted as a sacrifice instrumental to the common good of the people, and the disaster is not remedied by a comforting meaning.[35] In *Cranes Are Flying* (1957), a young woman loses her parents and her fiancé to whom she is temporarily unfaithful. In *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) a boy of about twelve years, tormented by nightmares and memories related to the murder of his mother and sister at the hands of the Germans, is active as a Soviet agent behind the German lines until he is brutally executed. In *Fate of a Man* (1959), a Soviet soldier gets captured by the Germans, deported, starved, tortured and used as a forced laborer. He manages to escape, but his entire family is killed by the Germans, leaving him mentally broken. This character, who is also the narrator of the film, calls his war experience "bitter", emphasizes his "sufferings" and asks, "Why has life played such pranks on me?" Only the young protagonist in *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) avoids suffering major losses of family or friends, but he himself, depicted as the ultimate altruist, does not survive (which the viewers are already told at the beginning of the film). Furthermore, his love from a brief furlough from the front remains unfulfilled, and his last meeting with his mother, planned to be several days long, shrinks to a few minutes and is framed as a dramatic farewell, suggesting that they will not be seeing each other again. It is symbolically significant that the protagonists in *Cranes Are Flying* and

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32 Dmitri Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography 1918–1991: Ideological Conflict and Social Reality* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993), 118; Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 57–81.

33 See Oksana Bulgakowa and Dietmar Hochmuth, eds., *Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion im Spiegel von 36 Filmen: Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek e.V., n.y. [1992]), 69–70, 85, 96, 120. The reviews collected there refer to *Cranes Are Flying*, *Fate of a Man*, *Ivan's Childhood* and *Ascension*.

34 Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography*, 211–232; Karl, "Von Helden", 76–81; Engel et al., *Geschichte*, 118–128; Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 118–127.

35 Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography*, 136 make this argument for *Cranes Are Flying*.

Fate of a Man also spoil their farewell from their loved ones or miss to meet them. This happens even twice in *Clear Skies* (1961), once in a haunting scene showing hundreds of women on a railway station platform screaming because the train with their husbands or partners does not stop as expected.

Such storylines were typical for many Soviet movies about the war but also controversial. The makers of *Fate of a Man*, for example, were urged to cut down on the scenes set in camps and asked to not exhibit the "sufferings of an innocent" so extensively.[36] But the producers resisted, and this choice was confirmed by the reason why cultural policy-makers nominated the film as the official Soviet contribution to the International Moscow Film Festival: to show the brutal character of imperialism by depicting the suffering and struggle in the Great Patriotic War and demonstrating the Soviet support for peace.[37] A script writer wanted the boy in *Ivan's Childhood* to survive, but director Andrei Tarkovsky rejected this idea because he wished the "painful life phase" of the protagonist to end with death ("nothing follows afterwards"), without any "acts of heroism".[38] The film *Come and See* (1985) was a point of culmination of this film poetics, as, by optical and acoustical means, it places the viewer in the position of a victim of various types of atrocities, including an overwhelming scene toward the end of the film where villagers are burned alive in a wooden church. This has been called "the most powerful antiwar film in Soviet cinema".[39]

Soviet war films carried this potent tragical element at all times. As film experts have shown, this is, first of all, true for many movies made during World War II,[40] certainly including *The Unvanquished* (1945), which shows as part of its story the murder of the local Jews, dramatically set in the middle of the film. As in that scene, the tragic element can also be found in the motion picture *Young Guard* (1948), especially in its use of music. Shostakovich's elegiac cello tune evokes seriousness from the start, and the film ends with the execution of most of the heroes and a mourning ceremony organized by the Communist Party. Young Oleg Koshevoi is driven to become the fanatical leader of the resisting youth in town by secretly watching a German mass execution, which provokes him at first to exclaim to his mother in desperation: "How can we live on after this?!" Even in

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36 Quoted in Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 85.

37 Lars Karl, "Zwischen politischem Ritual und kulturellem Dialog: Die Moskauer Internationalen Filmfestspiele im Kalten Krieg 1959–1971", Karl, *Leinwand*, 284.

38 Quotes from Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 94–95.

39 Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 197.

40 Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 192, 196–199; Fieseler, "Keine Leidensbilder", 78; Karl, "Von Helden", 71; Engel et al., *Geschichte*, 87–95.

The Fall of Berlin (1950), Soviets, especially women, suffer, although this film is primarily about victory.[41] *Story of a Real Man* (1948) is less serious in its treatment of its topic, despite all the suffering that the protagonist Meresiev goes through and the depression he falls into after having both his legs amputated due to injuries. But Meresiev, a self-made hero seemingly without family and friends, becoming a fighter pilot once again with the help of protheses, is too schematic a character to be the subject of a tragedy. Still, suffering and tragedy were not principally absent even in late Stalinism (1945–1955). As noted, the tragic narrative became very strong during the thaw period (1956–1964), and, as will be seen in the following, it was lost neither in the Brezhnev era (1964–1982) nor afterward. The move "from triumph to trauma" came long before the breakdown of socialism.[42]

The transition from late Stalinism to the Khrushchev period visible in the films *Immortal Garrison* (1956) and *Leningrad Symphony* (1956–1957) is noteworthy. *Immortal Garrison* starts with dramatic martial music and a dedication to the heroes of the Brest Fortress who fought under siege for four weeks (another real episode of the war). The protagonists in the film talk a lot about willpower and communism, but the battle scenes are in fact rather short, all the main characters die except for one (their death is often shown on screen), the Germans are depicted as mowing down surrendering women and children, people are shown crying and many end up dying of exhaustion and excruciating thirst.[43] Their weakness is exhibited extensively.[44] The film's subtitle reads "A Heroic Tragedy", which, linguistically speaking, emphasizes tragedy over heroism while combining both.

Leningrad Symphony deals with the staging of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 in Leningrad, which he dedicated to his home-town during the brutal German siege in 1942. Stressing the moral and cultural superiority of the Soviets over the attackers, the film dwells on German artillery fire and partisan fighting more than on hunger and cold although the latter, in reality, claimed many more victims. Tragedy strikes twice dramatically but shortly in the film when a woman who had starved to death is discovered and a soldier finds the house of his friends that was erased by a German bomb attack; the latter is similar to scenes in *Cranes Are Flying* (1957) and *Fate of a Man* (1959). The climax is particularly significant. From the concert, one mostly hears the fourth bombastic and militant set of Shostakovich's symphony, but it is underlaid with pictures of a partisan

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41 Kenez, *Cinema*, 232–235.

42 This is in contrast to Zhurzhenko, "Heroes", 2, 5.

43 See also Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 71–72.

44 This is especially the case after 1:04:30.

horsecart convoy with provisions reaching the city. What could have been triumphal is not because the partisans suffered heavy losses and their leader, beloved to the concert's female organizer, is brought back dead. The Leningraders receive the convoy like a funeral procession, weeping and taking their caps of. Finally, the sad message reaches her in the concert hall. Thus, in this transitional period, narratives of tragedy and victory were brought together.

The very situations in which these movies' stories are set have tragic narratives written all over them, and filmmakers would obsessively return to them. Two of the films depict the epic but hopeless defense of the Brest fortress in which (allegedly) no defender survived: *Immortal Garrison* (1956) and *Fortress Brest* (2010). This topic still seems to have much appeal, given that the latter was made quite recently and was a critical and commercial success in Russia.[45] Like *The Living and the Dead* (1964), these films deal with the Soviet defeats of 1941. Of those set in 1942, two show, instead of victory, events during the disastrous retreats of July 1942, among them *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975). Even the plot of the lyrical romance *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) takes place exactly during the days leading up to July 28, 1942 – the day Stalin gave the harsh no-step-back order no. 227, although that order is not mentioned in the film. Two films in the sample depict the battle of Stalingrad but emphasize times when the Soviets were on the defense (*Nobody Is Born a Soldier* in 1969 and *Hot Snow* in 1972). Thus, for all their monumentality, the narrative of suffering was principally kept during the Brezhnev period.

Two other films, *Leningrad Symphony* (1956–1957) and *Clear Skies* (1961), show the siege of Leningrad that appeared heroic but resulted in immense losses of life. *Clear Skies* also touches upon the unheroic issue of captivity, which is central in *Fate of a Man* (1959). Other films show defeat or retreat in partisan warfare (*Ascension* in 1977 and *Come and See* in 1985) or death in underground struggle (*Ivan's Childhood* in 1962 and *The Young Guard* in 1948). And two pictures depict the precarious situation during evacuation, which is not a particularly heroic topic either (*Cranes Are Flying* in 1957 and *The Mirror* in 1974).[46]

A few films do show general situations of victory, which, however, is usually ruined by the last-minute battle death of main characters or their loved ones like the son of Andrei Sokolov in *Fate of a Man* or Djengiz in *Ich war neunzehn* (1968),

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45 *Fortress Brest* is assessed as a model of a Russian program of war education in Francesca Mazzali, *The Kremlin's Propaganda for Patriotic Education and Russian War Movies (2000–2010)*, Ph.D. dissertation, Charles University, Prague, 2016, 93, 196–206, 221.

46 For evacuation as an unheroic topic and rare in Soviet war films, see also Olga Gershenson, "The Missing Links of Holocaust Cinema: Evacuation in Soviet Films", *Post Script* 32, 2 (2013): 53–62.

which is based on a true-life story.[47] In *Fate of a Man*, Sokolov looks at the celebrating troops with a stoney face out of grief. In *Ivan's Childhood*, officer Bondarev, shortly after victory, discovers that the Germans executed the child agent Ivan when searching files in a Berlin government building.[48] The film ends with the chilling sounds of Ivan being dragged to his execution, contrasted with his happy childhood memories. Both scenes do not indicate triumph. In *Cranes Are Flying* (1957), the film ends when Veronika gets to know that her fiancé Boris fell in battle long ago from his comrade, which turns a homecoming-cum-victory celebration into a sad scene. Boris' father then takes her by the arm and leads her into the crowd, for she still has Boris' family and another, as the camera move suggests – the Soviet people.

The motif of loss at the last minute is even present in the super-Stalinist war fairy tale *The Fall of Berlin* (1950) during the storming of the Reichstag building, where, however, Stalin's genius manages to overshadow any tragedy. However, in general, victory is not the main element in these films, and the last-minute death is often shown because without death and loss, *any* film about this war would have appeared unrealistic in the USSR, even to the makers of the cineastic absurdity that was *The Fall of Berlin*.

How do the main protagonists in these films fare personally? Very many of them die, on or off screen,[49] like the young heroes in *Young Guard* (1948). Further, the loss of main characters' loved ones is omnipresent. A few examples shall suffice. Sometimes, there is only one survivor to tell the story. In *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), it is Galtsev who survives, while Ivan, Cholin and Katasonov fall in battle or are murdered by the Germans. In *Immortal Garrison* (1956), only Baturin remains alive. *Fortress Brest* (2010) depicts real historical characters and tells the audience that all perished but invents a young boy who manages to sneak out (in contradiction to the above, they also let us know in writing that Major Gavrilov returned from a German POW camp at the end of the war). Flyora in *Come and See* (1985) loses his mother and little sisters in a German massacre. Similar to *Hot Snow* (1972), the four main characters in *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975) do survive for the moment (although in one case, it is not clear), but viewers are told that from their entire regiment, only 26 men are still alive. And probably not for very long, as even though the regiment is replenished because it kept its banner through all the battles, it is going to be sent to a new place – the battle of Stalingrad that is about to begin, where losses were high, as every viewer knows.

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47 Südkamp, "Ich", 8.

48 Tumarkin, *Living*, 112.

49 See also Woll, *Real Images*, 81.

In *Ascension* (1977), four out of the prison's five cell inmates are hanged by the Germans and their local helpers. The fifth, Rybak, survives as a German auxiliary policeman, who starts this job by helping hang his former partisan comrade Sotnikov. Also remains the nihilist pro-German prosecutor Portnov, who, significantly, tells Sotnikov during his interrogation that nobody will ever hear of his refusal to cooperate because the German side will spread false stories about him. Nevertheless, Sotnikov becomes a role model for a little boy who watches the execution. The film was based on a novella written by Vasil Bykau, who, in his writings, often lets his main, affirmatively portrayed character be killed after not having achieved anything in military terms; and the few who survive are tormented by their memories.[50] The way *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) is narrated is symptomatic: viewers are told at the beginning of the film that the main character will not survive the war. In his case, three women mourn him for a long time afterward, but two of these women do not know about the third, and she does not know them.

In connection with the stories of suffering that Soviet war movies told it is striking how often and how strongly Christian symbols are used throughout all phases of the Soviet depiction of World War II, including late Stalinism.[51] The most obvious example in my sample is *Ascension* (1977) which likens the main character Sotnikov to Christ not only in the title but in much of the film, mostly through the use of imagery. This was not the first time that a parallel between German executions and Golgatha and crucifixion was constructed in a Soviet war film.[52] *Come and See* (1985) is an apocalyptic film[53] the title of which is borrowed from the Gospel according to John. In *Fate of a Man* (1959), the Germans herd Soviet prisoners of war in a damaged church. A prisoner needs to defecate but cannot do so in a church due to his Christian convictions; mocked by his fellow Soviet prisoners, he tries to get out and is shot by the Germans, which leaves his fellow POWs shocked and ashamed. *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), like other films by Tarkovsky, is replete with Christian symbols (for example, an askew cross), and Ivan and Galtsev meet and stay in a half-destroyed chapel. Sergei Bondarchuk inserted an ironic scene in *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975) where, as a battle becomes life-threatening, the character (played by the director himself) starts to pray, mumbling that, after all, this is allowed as he is not a member of the Communist Party, but stops because praying will not make a good impression on his

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50 See Wassil Bykau, *Romane und Novellen* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1985, 2 volumes).

51 For the wartime period, see Engel, *Geschichte*, 94–95; Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 62. For the time after 1991, see de Keghel, "Glaube".

52 For *Zoia* of 1944, see Tumarkin, *Living*, 77.

53 Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 127–132.

comrades in arms. Generally, the emphasis on Christian symbols was part of the wartime mobilization of Russian nationalism and was used in the films to underline the Russian character as well as the unity of the Soviet people during the conflict. Russophiles became quite strong in 1970s and 1980s Soviet cinema, also beyond war stories.[54] In war movies, Christian symbols are often used to depict the sacrifice of the innocent.

Like Christian motifs, the contrast drawn between life in the prewar period and during wartime is to evoke the feeling that war is an unnatural state[55] (rather than being celebrated as an opportunity to show bravery or communist superiority). The most glaring example of this is the contrast between the glistening, dreamlike prewar family scenes and the gloomy war imagery in *Ivan's Childhood*. The films about the Brest Fortress, which was attacked on the early morning of the first day of the German invasion, begin with the wonderful summer day and private happiness on the eve of that event (*Immortal Garrison* of 1956 and *Fortress Brest* of 2010). Several films show Soviet citizens receiving the news that the war has started – sometimes by listening to Prime Minister Molotov's radio announcement – on a sunny, optimistic Sunday morning (for instance, *Cranes Are Flying*, 1957[56]). *Young Guard* (1948) and *Clear Skies* (1961) set some initial happy moments into wartime before tragedy strikes. It should be added that such scenes implicitly downplay the tragedy and gravity of Soviet mass persecution before 1941.

The motif of the child soldier also conveys strong messages of a world in a terrible condition. The most famous example is *Ivan's Childhood*, in which the twelve year-old boy appears as a mentally disturbed child who suffers from ghastly nightmares and daydreams and feels a fanatical and fearless urge to act against the enemy. Compared to the novella *Ivan* by Vladimir Bogomolov, which the film is based on, the film focuses even stronger on the theme of lost childhood by changing the title and introducing intensity to the narrative by adding Ivan's dreams, nightmares and memories of his happy life with his family that was murdered.[57] Like many other movies covered here, this film was meticulously researched and portrayed the boy as a victim, the troops' affection for him and the boy's agency, which was typical of many actual Soviet child soldiers.[58] Later So-

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54 Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography*, 141–143, 167, 208.

55 This unnatural state is also expressed by depictions of nature, on which I cannot elaborate here.

56 See Woll, *Real Images*, 79–80.

57 See Wladimir Bogomolow, *Leuchtspur über den Strom* (Berlin [East]: Kultur und Fortschritt, 1960). The Russian title of the book was *Ivan*.

58 See Olga Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers: How Soviet Children Went to War, 1941–1945* (Oxford et al: Oxford University Press, 2011), 151–192.

viet/Russian movies continued to depict Soviet suffering through the eyes of minors and used them as examples of suffering, but they tended to treat the very existence of child soldiers less and less critically (*Come and See* in 1985 and *Fortress Brest* in 2010[59]). However, the fact that child soldiers fought on the Soviet side was not hidden in Soviet films.

The artistic doctrine of Socialist Realism was only applied in the early films.[60] Defining artworks as being 'socialist in content, realist in style', socialist realist pieces were to show tough but victorious struggles of progressive social forces. In their most dogmatic versions, such pieces would make clear that the Communist Party led this struggle correctly. However, this was only the case in a few films included in this sample, such as *Young Guard* (1948) and *The Fall of Berlin* (1950), to some extent also in *Immortal Garrison* (1956) and, interestingly, in the post-socialist Russian-Belarusian co-production *Fortress Brest* (2010). But especially the latter two hardly pictured the Communist Party leading a *successful* struggle. In this context, it is notable that, according to Peter Kenez, few of the Soviet war films made until 1945 had a communist as the main character.[61] While most of the movies covered here had positive lead characters, these were increasingly individualized, their fate was sad rather than uplifting, and/or their behavior was flawed rather than model-like. There are some more films in my sample where main characters – always men – are marked as communists (like in *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975)), but they often fail in their struggle, and sometimes they do so more or less alone like in *Cranes Are Flying* (1957) and *Ascension* (1977). In the plots of *Clear Skies* (1961), *The Living and the Dead* (1964) and *One Isn't Born a Soldier* (1967) the CPSU, as part of Stalinist repression, discriminates against lead males who are communists, who, nevertheless, prevail in the end and strike military success.

Yet, the main characters are usually not winners. In movies such as *Cranes Are Flying* and *Ivan's Childhood*, the protagonists do not fire any shots at the Germans. If heroism is at all central to these films,[62] then it would have to be another sort of heroism than the one associated with military success – one of endurance and preservation of one's humanity. The word "human being" (chelovek) appears prominently in several films. In two cases, it is used in the titles of the films, although this gets lost in the English translation. Translated literally, the titles should read *Story of a Real Human Being* (1948) and *Fate of a Human Being* (1959),

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59 For literary depictions, see Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*, 249.

60 See also Kannapin, "Avantgarde", 28.

61 Kenez, *Cinema*, 201.

62 Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 119, 125 denies any.

and in the latter film, a traitor is simply called a "bad human being".[63] In *The Un-vanquished* (1945), Ukrainian worker Taras pays his respect to his friend Dr. Fishman when watching him being taken to the mass execution of the Jews; Fishman stops and responds: "Thank you, human". And in *Clear Skies* (1961), Astakhov, a victim of Soviet persecution, says that the Communist Party had not taught him that vigilance meant universal suspiciousness, insisting that he is "a human being" seeking the truth. (The very next moment, he receives the message: "Stalin is dead"). Disappointing from a Marxist point of view, this insistence on humanity is closely related to the individualizing stories that most of these films tell.

Most of them were *not* monumental, deindividualized and full of grim determination like the sort of Soviet memory that many scholars describe.[64] They usually did not celebrate victory. Often, they showed martyrs only in a certain sense: some protagonists are passive victims of German violence, and among those who are involved in active struggle, many are unsuccessful, although some are explicitly called heroes in films such as *Ballad of a Soldier* and *They Fought for Their Motherland.* Neither do they want to die for the cause, nor is their sacrifice shown as being uplifting, resulting in collective harmony. Soviet narratives of heroism and suffering could be closely connected,[65] but many of these films did not propagate the kind of self-sacrificial heroism that war monuments celebrate internationally by honoring heroes who saved the day through their self-sacrificial deeds in seemingly hopeless military situations.[66] The films discussed here did not present "the war [. . .][as] one of the best pages of our [Soviet] history".[67] Additionally, these movies went beyond the common practice of soldiers pitying themselves after the war[68] and internationally familiar narratives of the failed reintegration of former soldiers into civilian life.

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63 Only in *Story of a Real Human*, human is used in a heroic sense, for a real human, according to the film, is a Soviet human (who can successfully fly fighter planes with two leg protheses). But this hero too has to go through half a film of suffering and endurance.

64 Tumarkin, *Living*, 124–157.

65 See Tumarkin, *Living*, 133–135, 145–146; Arnold, *Stalingrad*; Mazzali, *Kremlin's Programme*, 19.

66 One example is the depiction of World War I heroes in the U.S. Soldiers and Sailors Memorial at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (I refer to the state of the exhibition in 2006).- Gudkov, "Fesseln", 67 asserts that all public Soviet war narratives, including films, were only variations on the theme of "heroic self-sacrifice".

67 This is in contradiction to the cited statement by Aleksander Shpagin, "The Religion of War", *Iskusstvo kino* 5 (May 2005), 57, quoted after Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 131.

68 For example, see Nadire Mater, ed., *Voices from the Front: Turkish Soldiers on the War with the Kurdish Guerrillas* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

The Depiction of Jews and Their Persecution

Another stereotype among researchers, which serves to emphasize the purport-
edly uniform character of Soviet war memory, is that Jews were absent from it
because Soviet memory politics allowed only for one victim group, the Soviet peo-
ple.[69] Although this has been disproven, such assertions are widespread.[70] Soviet
citizens, it has been argued, could learn "that the German occupiers had perse-
cuted the Jewish population specifically" only from the works of two novelists or
one poet due to censorship.[71] This has also been considered true for fictional
films, except for the time till 1945. "Jews, their religion, and their culture were
nonexistent in Soviet movies (as well as theatre and literature) in the four deca-
des prior to perestroika. [. . .] It is impossible to name a single positive character
in pre-Glasnost Soviet movies who can be identified as a Jew".[72] A recent itemiza-
tion of Soviet fictional movies representing Jews lists no more than three from
1946 to 1981.[73]

Again, works of some scholars and my material suggest something else, and
in addition, there were many Soviet documentaries on the Nazi persecution of
Jews.[74] Jews do appear in at least eight of the films analyzed for this chapter,[75]
usually as positive figures (some as fighters), and in characteristic ways. This is
not so surprising in the case of films made by directors with a Jewish background.
Mark Donskoi's *The Unvanquished* (1945) shows the persecution of Jews (and
other groups) in a Ukrainian town through a side character, the physician Fish-
man. In a long scene, Jews are being marched off to a ravine to be shot by Ger-
mans with machine pistols and revolvers, which is underscored with tragical

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69 Zhurzhenko, "Heroes", 3–4; for official commemorative events: Merridale, *Nights*, 292.

70 See Karel Berkhoff, "'Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population': The Holocaust in the Soviet
Media, 1941–1945", *Kritika* 10,11 (2009): 61–105, who also sums up and corrects the earlier litera-
ture on the topic.

71 Bonwetsch, "Grosse Vaterländische Krieg", 182 (quote); nearly identical Bonwetsch, "Ich", 159;
see Tumarkin, *Living*, 114–124.

72 Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography*, 223; only slightly more guarded is
Engel et al., *Geschichte*, 95.

73 Valérie Pozner and Natacha Laurent, eds., *Kinojudaica: les représentations des Juifs dans le
cinéma de Russie et d'Union soviétique des années 1910 aux années 1980* (Paris: Nouveau monde,
2012), 501–503.

74 See Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews*
(Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Gershenson, *Phantom Holocaust*; Pozner and
Laurent, *Kinojudaica*, 509–556.

75 In addition to the films discussed below, there were side characters recognizable as Jewish
also in *Wait for Me* (1943) and *Hot Snow* (1972). See Gershenson, *Phantom Holocaust*, 42, 176, 188.

music (41:00–44:40). This scene, climax of this movie, was in fact filmed at the Babyi Yar gorge in Kiev, the original place of the German massacre of more than 33,000 Jews in late September 1941.[76] The literary source the film is based on describes the Jews being marching off but refrains from describing the massacre in detail, unlike the film.[77] A few passing references to the Germans persecuting Jews in particular appeared in other wartime Soviet fictional films.[78] In Mikhail Romm's documentary *Ordinary Fascism* (1965), the specific persecution and murder of Jews constitute a substantial portion. Jews are, though not always, mentioned in the comment or visible as Jews (Jewish stars appearing on the screen and the commentator speaking of ghettos).[79] Notably, their murder is portrayed as one of the first steps toward a larger (supposed) German scheme for annihilating the Slavs.

Jews also appear in the works of non-Jewish filmmakers. In *Ascension* (1977), the little girl named Basya, a supporting character, is recognizable – although this is not said explicitly – as a Jewess by her fate and appearance (and played by a Jewish actress). In the film, the audience learns that she was hiding for months, possibly from extermination. It is clear that she has been abused by pro-German policemen, and by the end, she is hanged with the rest. If the protagonist represents Christ, she appears as a saint-like figure. In *Come and See* (1985), a German anti-Jewish leaflet is cited, and there is a short scene where a Jewish man receives special torment by Germans and their Soviet helpers during the orgy of violence where almost the entire population of a village is massacred.

In *Fortress Brest* (2010), there are two Jewish figures, both of whom are political commissars. One of them is Weinstein, who first denies the danger of a German invasion, wrongly so, but later becomes a brave leader in the defensive battle in which he is killed. Before the invasion, he, at a rehearsal, aptly shows to soldiers how to perform a Russian folk dance, and even during the battle, he tries to cheer up his comrades with some folklore dancing steps, indicating that he is well-integrated. The second man, Fomin, a lead character in the film, is a serious, hardened hero who commands part of the troops. Having been overwhelmed and

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76 Jeremy Hicks, "Confronting the Holocaust: Mark Donskoi's *The Unvanquished*", *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 3, 1 (2009): 33–51; Hicks, *First Films*, 134–156; Gershenson, *Phantom Holocaust*, 40–48; Olga Gershenson, *"Les Insoumis* (1945) ou comment un roman soviétique et devenue un film juif", Pozner and Laurent, *Kindojudaica*, 341–364; Zorkaja, "Kino", 334.

77 Boris Gorbatov, *Die Unbeugsamen* (Stockholm: Neuer Verlag, 1944), 85–88.

78 Hicks, *First Films*, 87–88, 97.

79 See also Gershenson, *Phantom Holocaust*, 63–66. The assertion that there is no verbal mentioning of Jews in the film (Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 161) is incorrect, cf. chapters 6 and 13 of *Ordinary Fascism.*

run out of ammunition, he is captured along with a few others. When a German officer declares that "commissars, [communist] party functionaries and Jews are being punished", he steps forward, proudly stating "I am a commissar, communist and Jew", and is shot as a result. (This is based on a real person who was famous in the postwar narrative about the fortress.[80])

Even more impressive is the depiction of the fate of the Jews in *Fate of a Man* (1959). When a crowd of Soviet prisoners of war is being held in a damaged church shortly after being captured by the Germans, a Jewish physician-soldier is shown walking around and selflessly helping the wounded.[81] He appears as a Good Samaritan and is shot the next morning when the Germans begin searching for commissars and Jews. Still more important is a ghastly scene exactly in the middle of the film when a train with Soviet POWs arrives at a German camp, il- logically in the same train that carries other people, including many (Western Eu- ropean) Jews marked by yellow stars, among them many women and children. While playing loud music, the Germans announce through loudspeakers that Jews have to walk through one gate, Soviet POWs through another and all others through a third gate. The film depicts children being torn away from the Jews. Hundreds of Jews – unlike people of other categories –, are made to follow a sign that reads "Bath – Disinfection" and walk calmly and silently in several columns toward a building with a huge and menacing, strongly smoking furnace, which is obviously a crematorium with a gas chamber. Shortly afterward, the voice of the narrator, who is the lead character, says that the Soviet POWs were sent on as "probably Hitler's ovens were not sufficient for everybody". Nonetheless, unno- ticed by historians as it seems, the film optically presents the murder of the Jews as yardstick for German murders and human suffering, almost creating an equiv- alence between the fate of Soviet POWs with that of the Jews, but not quite, to emphasize the victimhood of the Soviet prisoners. Otherwise, the movie closely follows its literary template, a novella by Mikhail Sholokhov. The scene just de- scribed, however, was original to the film.[82]

On a different note, some historical agents in the films included in my sample who were Jewish in real life were fictionalized and 'Russified' in war films, such as conductor Karl Eliasberg in *Leningrad Symphony* (1957) and commissar Jefim Fomin in *Immortal Garrison* (1956).

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80 See Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 218.

81 In the book from which the film was adapted, this doctor is not Jewish: see Michail Scholo- chow, *Ein Menschenschicksal* (Frankfurt a.M.: Büchergilde, 2009 [1957], 58–59.

82 *Fate of a Man*, minutes 43–47; see Scholochow, *Menschenschicksal*, esp. 68.

Depictions of Jews and their persecution were not infrequent in Soviet films about World War II and are found in every time period of film-making. Some characters recognizable as Jewish were lead characters, some supporting cast. In some films, Jews appeared passive, in others active and resolved. Both could be stereotypical: they were represented either as passive civilians, especially in the case of women, children and elderly men, or as active political commissars, physicians or artists. That the representation of Jews in these films is usually positive is unsurprising, given that suffering is such a point of emphasis in them. In some cases, they are even idealized and likened to figures of Christian mythology. Jews are also depicted as patriotic and well-integrated into Soviet society (through music and friendship), although in two films they are betrayed or mistreated by Soviet compatriots siding with the Germans (*Ascension* and *Come and See*). Often, Jews appear as victims but never as the only victims. This reinforced the image of the entire Soviet people as having been under the threat of annihilation, but fictional films, which had to individualize people unlike commemorative speeches dealing with collectives, also showed them as members of particular groups, with others being communists, farmers, POWs, or Russians. In these films, Soviet and Jewish victimhood could coexist.

Infidelity and Faithfulness

The image of the impeccable, heroic and ultimately victorious defender of the homeland would be matched by steady relationships between male and female protagonists in film stories. This would also have fitted with the rigorous and repressive sexual morality of the Stalin era. Moreover, the idea that their wives or girlfriends are not faithful while they are in battle is an old fear among warriors. Konstantin Simonov's famous 1941 poem, *Wait for Me*, addressed this issue, saying that she shall wait, also when there is no message from him and others say he is dead, because only her waiting will make him survive and return.[83] Many soldiers are said to have known this poem by heart. So popular was it that it was converted into a 90-minute feature film, *Wait For Me* (1943), which ends with the husband finally returning to his wife who has waited for all this time (and worked in a factory).

However, in the films covered here, sexual infidelity is not uncommon, prominently mentioned, usually committed by women, and the filmmakers often do not condemn it. The best-known example is Veronika in *Cranes Are Flying* (1957),

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83 Konstantin Simonow, *Wie lang vergessene Träume* (Berlin [East]: Volk und Welt, 1975), 58–61.

who does not wait for the return of her fiancé Boris who volunteered for the front. Veronika gets involved with Boris' treacherous cousin Mark, whom she goes on to marry. Nobody is shown to be blameless in the film; but Veronika leaves Mark when it turns out that he is a corrupt coward, she is still accepted as part of Boris' family and then waits for Boris's return until she gets the confirmation of his death at a victory celebration for returning troops in Moscow. Sasha in *Clear Skies* (1961) promises to marry her innocent young friend after the war but does not keep this promise, although he continues to love her. Her sister also does not wait for the return of her boyfriend as she marries an older man instead, who is a nasty coward. Sasha falls in love with famous pilot Alexei and has a child with him although they do not marry. She sticks by Alexei when he is declared dead by the authorities as well as after his return from captivity, when he is being suspected as an enemy of the people and becomes a bitter drunkyard. In *Djamila* (1969), the titular character does not wait for her brutal young husband to return from the front and flees with the half-disabled young war veteran and farmworker Danijar. Their relationship is portrayed as a romantic and sympathetic love story.

By contrast, in *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975), Nikolai tells a comrade that his wife left him for another man on the first day of the war, at which the other soldier curses her and all women as unreliable. Such contempt for the infidelity of women is also seen in side casts in *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) and *Wait for Me* (1943).

The films also show examples of faithfulness, including *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959), where three women – his mother, his travel acquaintance Zhura and his former neighbor's girl – are still mourning or waiting for the late Alexei after the war. Needless to add, these examples carry deep sadness. However, infidelity was also prominently depicted in its many complications, not for accusatory purposes but to indicate that the war had also upset private lives and profoundly disturbed and damaged society. Here, unfaithfulness evoked tragedy more than treachery, reinforcing the basic narrative of suffering by that of women.

The Presence of War Disabled and the Absence of Hunger

A sense of tragedy could also be felt in cinematic representations of the war-disabled, who existed in millions as a result of World War II. However, as some recent publications have argued, disability was a problem that was only shown in Soviet films as a hardship that had to be overcome and that characters could cope with. Pictures of crippled beggars, alcoholics or criminals were purportedly

not shown.[84] Such euphemistic tendencies in depicting the disabled did exist, for example in the portrayal of Alexei Meresiev in *Story of a Real Man* (1948), who manages to become a fighter pilot again although both of his legs had been amputated (based on a real story; the actual Meresiev later became a member of the Supreme Soviet). However, some of these statements need qualification.

War-related disability surfaced in several of the movies discussed here. In *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959), a veteran with an amputated leg initially decides to never see his wife because he feels useless, but he is later persuaded of the contrary. In *Djamila* (1969), Djamila mocks Danijar who is not very strong and limps after a leg injury at the front but later falls in love with him. A manager of a collective farm in *They Fought For Their Motherland* (1975) wears an artificial leg. More significantly, one of the three main characters, Nikolai, returns to his unit even though he is deaf and constantly quivers after having been shell-shocked in a German attack. The second main character, Nekrasov, complains that he suffers from what he calls trench disease, which involves nightmares of being buried or trapped in a deep hole, but the others laugh at him for this. The third, Sergintsev (who is played by director Sergey Bondarchuk), is shown loudly moaning and complaining when being stitched together by doctors in a seven-minute-long scene. This film, sometimes presented as a typical bombastic war epic of the Brezhnev era[85] that was the most expensive production on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the 1945 victory, actually is very clear about conveying that even war survivors suffered lasting damages.[86]

This is also true for *Fate of a Man* (1959), also based on a book by Mikhail Sholokhov, in which the protagonist is left with a broken heart mentally and physically.[87] He worries that he will die in sleep next to his adopted little son. In other Soviet war movies, male or female veterans, whether disabled or not, are often depicted as hardened people left with few friends and sometimes living without a life partner.[88] Thus, it is incorrect that "no film explores the psychological consequences – for example destroyed partnerships" – due to disability.[89] Somewhat veiled, a few films did tell moviegoers that the physical or psychologi-

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84 Fieseler, "Kriegsinvalide", especially 217–218.

85 Engel et al., *Geschichte*, 194.

86 Down to details true to the literary template: Michail Scholochow, *Sie kämpften für die Heimat* (Berlin [East]: Kultur und Fortschritt, 1960); for a similar movie from 1961, see Woll, *Real Images*, 121.

87 See Woll, *Real Images*, 90.

88 Neya Zorkaya, *The Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema* (New York: Hippocrene, 1989), 200, 205, 253–254.

89 Fieseler, "Kriegsinvalide", 218.

cal life of a veteran was not easy, which many probably knew anyway from personal observation. War-disabled and veterans might have been considered victors but were at times also depicted as victims.

Hunger was common during the Soviet war against Germany, as millions starved to death, including Soviet POWs in German captivity, people in Leningrad, soldiers at the front, and civilians in evacuation, during the German occupation or elsewhere. But very little of this made it to postwar cinema. In my sample, there are no depictions of starving soldiers at the front. Almost the same goes for scenes of people in evacuation areas. For instance, the characters in *Cranes Are Flying* (1957) seem to have enough to eat. In *The Mirror* (1974), the mother at least tries to sell jewelry to pay for food.[90] But the hunger of straying pilot Alexei Mareyev in the novel *Story of a Real Man*[91] is omitted in its film adaptation.

The partisans and the refugees under their protection in *Ascension* (1977) and *Come and See* (1985) do suffer from hunger, which sets in motion risky missions to procure food. Depictions of POWs mention starvation: in *Clear Skies* (1961) very briefly and purely verbally, in *Fate of a Man* (1959) in repeated references, showing the meticulous sharing of one bread in equal parts by a crowd of prisoners and their weakness during forced labor. However, this is in contrast with the physical appearance of lead actor and director Sergey Bondarchuk, who is a sturdy giant. In *Nobody Is Born a Soldier* (1967), Soviet troops liberate a Soviet POW camp, and the narrator begins describing gruesome scenes of starvation, but the picture is blurred so that one cannot see anything. Later, survivors are shown in a cellar but they are almost invisible under their blankets.

In two films set during the Leningrad siege (during which at least 600,000 civilians died of famine and cold[92] and a fraction of the victims died of shelling and bombing), starvation does not play a major role. *Clear Skies* (1961) lets the two lead characters have their days of initial romance in late November 1941, among happy, well-fed onlookers, when, in reality, thousands perished of hunger and cold each day. *Leningrad Symphony* (1956–1957) focuses on artists' struggles for public morale against fascism and on military battle but does refer to hunger in two scenes, one involving documentary street-life images and the other showing a soldier visiting a private apartment and discovering a child in bed with its mother, who turns out to be dead.[93] Like in *Clear Skies*, long, twisted stove pipes

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90 For another example of deprivation in a movie on evacuation, see Zorkaya, *Illustrated History*, 288–89.

91 Boris Polewoi, *Der wahre Mensch* (Berlin [East] and Weimar, 1975), 36–42.

92 Jörg Ganzenmüller, *Das belagerte Leningrad 1941–1944* (Paderborn et al.: Schöningh, 2005), 239–240.

93 See also Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 135.

crisscrossing the rooms point to the pervasive cold, as do people who still wear sweaters, shawls or coats in summer.

The only film in my sample that portrays hunger intensely is *Day Stars* (1968). It dwells on women in besieged Leningrad walking agonizingly slowly through snowy streets, exhausted, tottering and sinking to the ground. In passing, it shows the lead character, a nurse, stealing bites of food while feeding wounded soldiers in an open-air hospital (in wintertime). But this film is an exception in regard to its detailed description of hunger.[94] *Immortal Garrison* of 1956 at least portrays deadly thirst. Hunger was typically not visualized in these films. In particular, none of these films presents any emaciated body, let alone something like cannibalism. Hunger was either downplayed in these motion pictures or cut out because it seemed to fundamentally undermine the legitimacy of a state that could not provide for the survival of its citizens. Starvation – humiliating, demoralizing and divisive as it is – also seems to have been a form of suffering that was not even being admitted in many tragic narratives.[95]

The Flip Side of Soviet Suffering: Demonized Germans

In order to magnify Soviet suffering, their enemies were portrayed as beasts just as they were in the reports of the Extraordinary Commissions investigating German atrocities in the Soviet Union in 1944–1946. The famous film director Alexander Dovzhenko explained this connection to a cameraman in 1942.[96] In *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) the Germans appear as sadists (indirectly also in *Today There Will Be No Leave* in 1959), in *Fate of a Man* (1959) and *Fortress Brest* (2010) many of them do; in *Ascension* (1977) they are portrayed as disinterested, ruthless colonialists. *Come and See* (1985) shows two types of Germans: sadists who deny their deeds and sadists who aggressively rationalize their exterminatory actions. The apocalyptic images in the film require an "animal" as opposite force.[97] In 1980, screenwriter Ales Adamovich still seemed to defend his earlier dehumanization of Germans.[98] *The Living and the Dead* (1964) shows Germans as robot-like mowing down Soviet soldiers who have already surrendered. In *They Fought for Their*

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94 For another exception of 1944, see Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 71.

95 Zhurzhenko, "Heroes", 4. I do not agree with the argument by Ganzer and Paškovič, "'Heldentum'", 92 that starvation was not shown because Soviet citizens were not allowed to appear as passive victims.

96 Hicks, *First Films*, 113.

97 "Komm und sieh: Interview mit Regisseur Elem Klimow", leaflet, Berlin [West], n.d. 1, 3.

98 Ales Adamowitsch, "Chatyn berichtet über sich selbst", *Kunst und Literatur* 28 (1980): 454.

Motherland (1975), German troops are being mocked for their arrogance,[99] but the Soviet soldiers also call them beasts, as do Soviet female civilians in *Come and See*. In some movies like *Cranes Are Flying* (1957) no Germans appear, but they are indirectly present through the tragedies that they cause. Typical is a dialogue between the child soldier Ivan and lieutenant Galtsev in *Ivan's Childhood*: finding a print of Dürer's painting of the four horsemen of the apocalypse in a book, Ivan asks whether these are Germans, to which Galtsev responds that this is only a piece of art, but Ivan replies: "No. I know them."

Films made in the late Stalin period after 1945 showed a slightly less demonizing and more differentiated picture. In particular, a range of behaviors is shown in the depiction of German soldiers and officers in *The Young Guard* (1948). Although Germans execute resisters *en masse*, deport people for forced labor, loot and torture, their everyday life during the occupation beyond atrocities is also depicted, in which some German soldiers are trying to behave correctly in some scenes, and one, who courts Ljubov Shevtsova, a member of the underground organization, is shown to be witty. Upon her arrest, he slaps her, but they exchange sarcastic remarks; he may not be not humane, but he is human. Importantly, Oleg Koshevoi, the leader of the resistance group, who is going to be executed, tells one of his Soviet pro-German henchmen: "It is not you who are terrible; what is terrible is what spurs fascism." Such a politically correct analysis from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, although a bit unrealistic in this situation, is almost non-existent in post-Stalinist films. Even *The Fall of Berlin* (1950), while showing German atrocities, differentiates (though in a highly schematic way), dwells on Hitler and other leading Nazis and backers, such as industrialists, and shows a Nazi atrocity on Germans, the flooding of the Berlin subway. Traces of such a more complex portrayal can still be found in *Immortal Garrison* (1956): Germans shoot surrendering women and children, but one of those whom the Soviets captured turns out to be a Social Democratic worker. Also, a German general declares the Soviet commander of the Brest fortress Baturin to his troops as being worthy of a war medal; and when Baturin is carried out of the fortress unconscious and half dead, German officers – unrealistically –salute him as a great enemy. Such differentiation, connected with a bit of erosion of the good-evil dichotomy, reappeared on Russian screens in the 2000s.[100]

Although some of the earlier films at least depict some contradictory behavior by Germans, hardly any film offers any explanation for their motives, espe-

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[99] Arrogance that was also ascribed to the Germans in many Soviet films made during World War II.

[100] Isabelle de Keghel, "Ungewöhnliche Perspektiven: Der Zweite Weltkrieg in neuen russländischen Filmen", *Osteuropa* 55, 4–6 (2005): 337–346, esp. 342–343.

cially not in the way of an analysis of German aims and policies. This is consistent with the notion that beasts cannot be explained. Of course, the Germans were not devils but humans, and any inquiry into their actions might put their demonization into question. It is worth emphasizing that the demonization and dehumanization of Germans had not only been ordered by Stalin, or any leaders, but originated in part from Soviet troops and civilians themselves, being magnified in a 1942 hate campaign by some of the same artists who would later be involved in the making of the films discussed in this chapter, such as Konstantin Simonov and Ilya Ehrenburg, combined with the rejection of the idea of dwelling on the psychology of Germans.[101]

The GDR movie *I Was Nineteen* (1968), directed by a German-born Soviet Army veteran who was a GDR citizen, shows the difference glaringly. Aimed at East German audiences, the film, set during the Soviet conquest of Berlin, presents different types of Germans (based on their dialects, they also represent different regional parts of Germany and social groups) and lets several of them talk about their thoughts and motives. They include a subservient Nazi town mayor, a refugee girl, an airy-fairy intellectual, several liberated antifascists, a bureaucratic officer, two child soldiers, a concentration camp murderer, a fanatical high-ranking SS officer, a hesitant German general and a witty Berlin worker who, in a last-minute shoot-out between SS and Soviets, takes the side of the latter even though he knows that he will go into Soviet captivity. These varieties exemplify different options for German postwar political life. Although East Germany was a Soviet ally, I know nothing of that sort in any Soviet movie. For Soviet filmmakers, the background of the Germans did not really matter as it would have in a Marxist analysis.

Ordinary Fascism (1965), a feature-length documentary, would have offered room for a differentiated analysis, but this opportunity was lost. Instead, director Mikhail Romm argued that most Germans had given up their individuality and become "masses" through unconditional obedience to Hitler, on whom the film dwells extensively. Romm explains with help of a simple manipulation thesis that Germans had become cruel barbarians who had "stopped thinking". These ideas drew greatly from totalitarianism theory,[102] and whether Romm also alluded to conditions under Stalin's rule or not,[103] it is clear that his film did little to differentiate Germans (except for mentioning a few brave anti-fascists and those who "started thinking again" in the last phase of the war) and revising their dehuman-

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101 See Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*, 134–138; for the campaign, see also Tumarkin, *Living*, 74–75; Merridale, *Night*, 282–283.

102 For these reasons, *Ordinary Fascism* resembles very much the later FRG documentary "Hitler – a career" (1977), directed by Joachim Fest and Christian Herrendoerfer.

103 This point is discussed in Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 156–167.

ization. In 1965, Romm stated that a fascist was "a being that is the contrary of the term 'human'".[104]

Memories of Soviet Violence and Stalinism

If violence by Soviet troops or partisans appears in my selection of war movies, it is usually because Germans brought it upon themselves. What is shown, implied or narrated for the most part is that German combatants who surrendered or were captured are being shot out of hatred or revenge for their atrocities. In several movies, there are disagreements among Soviet troops regarding this point. *I Was Nineteen* (1968) shows how Soviet troops find what is most likely a hidden SS man from the nearby, just liberated Sachsenhausen concentration camp and shoot him after an argument in which one Soviet soldier almost shoots another who demands that this German should not be killed instantly. In *The Living and the Dead* (1964), Sintsov criticizes a soldier who has shot a German prisoner for being a coward, acting against Soviet interests (for the German could have been asked about militarily relevant information), but also for being wrong in principle when shooting prisoners. In the follow-up to this film, *Nobody Is Born a Soldier* (1967), there is talk suggesting that Soviet troops have killed surrendering Germans in Stalingrad in understandable rage after they discovered German atrocities. Even in the über-Stalinist *The Fall of Berlin* (1950), popular steelworker-soldier-super hero Alexei Ivanov prevents a comrade from killing a German soldier by capturing him instead. Despite all the torment he has endured, Andrei Sokolov in *Fate of a Man* (1959) is careful to only knock out German officers without killing them when he flees.

In other cases, German troops do not fare so well. *Story of a Real Man* (1948) shows a place in the forest where Soviet partisans destroyed a German convoy and tied a dead German officer to a tree along with a menacing sign. Notably, the latter image is not in the source novel.[105] Partisans in *Come and See* (1985) brutally massacre German SS men and their local helpers after these have annihilated the population of a Belarusian village. For the guerrilla, it was a problem to keep prisoners; nevertheless, murdering them was morally problematic. Director Elem Klimov signalled symbolically that the Soviets must still try to remain humane through the boy Flyora who shoots at images of Hitler but stops when he sees a

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104 Interview with *Komsomolskaia Prawda*, April 6, 1965, quoted in Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 157.

105 Polewoi, *Der wahre Mensch*, 35–36.

picture of Hitler as a baby. This scene was the reason behind the authorities preventing the making of the film at first in 1977.[106] Still, the message is, as usual, that Soviet troops should refrain from falling to the inhumanity imposed on them by the Germans. They are not killers for any autochthonous reasons. It was very disturbing for Russian audiences and led to protests to see Soviet NKVD officers massacre not unsympathetic German POWs unprovoked and in cold blood in a 2005 Russian motion picture.[107]

The other sort of violence by Soviet citizens against unarmed people shown on screen was the killing of individuals who cooperated with the Germans, taking away their property and sometimes verbal abuse. Such action by partisans against village elders is shown in *Ascension* (1977) and *Come and See* (1985). In *The Young Guard* (1948), young communists overpower and hang a 'collaborator' after a mock trial. Partisans also shoot 'collaborators' for their participation in atrocities with the Germans in *Come and See*. In *Fate of a Man* (1959), Andrei Sokolov chokes a Soviet soldier who threatens to reveal to German guards that a co-prisoner of war is a communist. This is the only of these scenes where the perpetrator indicates that he feels this is ghastly, albeit necessary. Usually, such acts of violence are depicted as being directed against people who undoubtedly deserved it. While such scenes admitted that there had been differences between Soviet people in the war, they carried the doctrinal view that anybody siding with the Germans was an unworthy traitor who deserved no sympathy whatsoever. These were no accounts of civil war, but of just punishment meted out to perfectly illegitimate enemies.

Soviet soldiers committed mass rapes in Germany, Poland, other countries of Eastern Europe and Manchuria, but sexual violence by Soviet soldiers or men surfaces only a few times in these films and usually in passing through veiled references. In *They Fought For Their Motherland* (1975), Lopachin, a supposedly positive character (played by the very popular actor Vasili Shukshin, who was also a writer and film director), is a womanizer who sexually harasses Soviet women, who are able to fend him off. A similar scene is seen *en passant* in *Leningrad Symphony* (1956–1957). A nameless German refugee girl living in a suburb of Berlin in the GDR film *I Was Nineteen* (1968), directed by former Soviet army soldier Konrad Wolf, seeks the protection of the 19-year-old German-born Soviet town commandant because, as she says, "[sleeping] with one is better than with all of them".[108] Already in *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959), a young girl named Zhura is shocked, starts to scream

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106 See leaflet "Komm und sieh", 1–2.

107 Christine Engel, "60 Jahre danach: Neue Sichtweisen auf den 'Grossen Vaterländischen Krieg' im Film *Polumgla*", Fieseler and Ganzenmüller, *Kriegsbilder*, 96–110; for other recent films Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 219–230.

108 For a similar scene in a 1961 Soviet movie, see Woll, *Real Images*, 122.

and tries to jump from a rolling train after she illegally enters a freight car and finds herself alone in it with a young soldier, Aljosha, who fortunately has no bad intentions. Mark in *Cranes Are Flying* (1957) pursues Veronika, the fiancé of his cousin, kisses her against her will and probably rapes her;[109] despite this, she marries him afterward. Clumsy lieutenant Galtsev in *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) has a young nurse sent back to the rear not only because he thinks that war is unwomanly but also to protect her from an officer pursuing her. In the hinterland, the homecoming soldier Sadiq in *Djamila* (1969) unsuccessfully tries to kill his wife who has fled with her lover.

Films made later, such as *Come and See* (1985) and *Fortress Brest* (2010), blame German occupiers for brutal acts of rape and graphically show the half-dead or dead victims. In *Ascension* (1977), the perpetrators who sexually abuse a girl of perhaps twelve years (which is only mentioned and not shown) are Belarusian auxiliary police who serve the Germans. Generally, sexual violence itself is not shown on screen in the Soviet films covered here, and sexual abuse by Soviet soldiers is marginalized, although its depiction is not a total taboo. Obviously, this was a controversial topic and did not match the self-image of Soviet society where illegitimate violence was generally projected or blamed on the German invaders.

This also resonates with the way how Stalinist terror appears in these films. Mostly it is a marginal aspect. In *Fortress Brest* (2010), Major Gavrilov initially complains about a lack of vigilance because of the dominant turn against so-called panic-mongering, and later, Fomin rationalizes an attempted breakthrough from the siege by carefully avoiding the impression that this could appear as a retreat. The narrator of the film criticizes the post-1945 repression against Gavrilov. The strongest reference to the terror in *The Mirror* (1974) is not connected to the war; the mother suddenly panics because she is not sure if she deleted a certain word from a text that she typed and is to be published that could appear counter-revolutionary. This film also presents images from the Cultural Revolution in China as a menace, indirectly accusing Stalinism. *Tomorrow There Was War* (1987), set in 1940, depicts intrigues and political pressure at a Soviet high school during which one student is driven to suicide.

The two strongest indictments of the terror are in *Clear Skies* (1961) and *Nobody Is Born a Soldier* (1967), both pointing to discrimination, persecution and mistrust against Red Army officers who had been captured by the Germans or

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109 As in ibid., 74.

temporarily been unintentionally on the other side of the front.[110] Substantial censorship defused the message: in *Clear Skies*, any reference to pilot Astakhov having been in a Soviet punitive camp was cut, as were the scenes of brutal inter-rogation during the Soviet terror in *Day Stars* (1968).[111] Likewise, in *The Living and the Dead* (1964), the scene from the original book involving the menacing screening of Sintsov by the Soviet military intelligence after he breaks eastward through the front line is missing[112] (despite the film being more than three hours long), and the anti-Soviet panic in Moscow in October 1941 during the German approach has also been virtually erased. However, the viewer learns that General Serpilin, a positive main character, had been in the Gulag before the war like many innocently persecuted officers.

Generally, Soviet terror was rarely mentioned in these films, but if it was, it appeared either disconnected from the war or Stalin was blamed for having crip-pled Soviet fighting power through senseless terror. What these movies did not argue was that Stalinism had brutalized Soviet society, led to violent inner con-flict or contributed to illegitimate violence against enemies in the war. If any-thing, the protagonists were victims of Soviet terror and persecution, not its agents. This was consistent with the general sense of victimization in these films.

Non-state Agents Shaping Film Narratives About Violence

How could all this possibly be the case? After all, state control and censorship did exist, World War II was a vital ideological issue for the governing Communist Party of the Soviet Union after 1945, and the cinema did influence the masses. If narratives of suffering, pain and tragedy entered Soviet film in contradiction to doctrines governing history construction, it was because directors of different generations, screenwriters, novelists, actors and music composers were using their moral authority, often based on personal traumatic war experiences, to get their views accepted against considerable resistance.

Most of the films were based on literary works by prose writers, some of whom had enough prestige that film directors could invoke their names to gain respect for their projects. Alexander Fadeev, the author of *The Young Guard*, was a founding father of the doctrine of Socialist Realism and a member of the party's

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110 This topic was already shown in a Soviet film and screened in 1944: Engel et al., *Geschichte*, 92–93.

111 Ibid., 141.

112 See Konstantin Simonow, *Die Lebenden und die Toten* (Berlin [East]: Kultur und Fortschritt, 1975 [1960]).

Central Committee and the state's Supreme Soviet.[113] Mikhail Sholokhov, the author of *Fate of a Man* and *They Fought for Their Motherland*, was one of the few writers to win both the Stalin Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature. Mark Donskoi, Sergei Gerasimov and Mikhail Romm had their own standing as experienced and decidedly communist film directors, while Shostakovich was respected as a composer. In January 1943, Romm wrote to Stalin, demanding war films to be more realistic and of better quality, which seemingly triggered the CPSU to take steps in the recommended direction.[114]

Konstantin Simonov, author of the novels *The Living and the Dead* and *Nobody Is Born a Soldier*, as well as the screenwriter for *Wait For Me* and *Immortal Garrison* (he starred in another war movie himself), had experienced dangerous situations as a front correspondent, like Sholokhov, Boris Polevoi and others. Sometimes dubbed a conservative, Simonov defended Donskoi's film *The Unvanquished* in 1945 on the grounds that it was important to preserve the memory of the German atrocities, also of those against Jews.[115] Authors such as Vladimir Bogomolov and Vasil Bykau, after whose works *Ivan's Childhood* and *Ascension*, respectively, were made, had been front fighters. Bykau allowed the story to spread that he had escaped death so closely that his name was inscribed on a mass grave.[116] Not only did this give such men authority in the debates; it also fueled their passions to forward their interpretation of the 'truth' about the war. The same went for a woman like Olga Berggolts, who was a poet and survivor of the Leningrad siege and author of the text that was later adopted into *Day Stars*.[117]

This was also true for Ales Adamovich, who wrote the script for *Come and See* (1985). A former partisan in Belarus, he wrote about the German occupation and guerrilla war all his life. In *Come and See*, the population of a village is crammed into a wooden church and then burned alive; Adamovich's own family was in a crowd that was forced into a barn similarly, but the Germans called off the massacre at the last minute.[118] In the late 1960s, Adamovich, along with two other novelists, did something no historian did by collecting the accounts of nearly 300 survivors of German mass shootings and village burnings for a book

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113 Michail Ryklin et al., "Deutscher auf Abruf: Vom *Schwarzbuch* zur *Jungen Garde*", *Osteuropa* 55, 4–6 (2005): 171.

114 Carola Tischler, "Der Krieg als Komödie: Die Wiederkehr der sowjetischen Filmgroteske während des Zweiten Weltkrieges", Fieseler and Ganzenmüller, *Kriegsbilder*, 69.

115 Gershenson, "Insoumis", 351–352; for Polevoi and Simonov opposing the pompous design of the Stalingrad memorial, see Arnold, *Stalingrad*, 273–276; for Simonov and Gerasimov supporting Alexei German's banned film *Roadblock* in 1971, see Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 108–111.

116 Bykau, *Romane*, vol. II, back cover.

117 See Olga Bergholz, *Tagessterne* (Berlin [East]: Kultur und Fortschritt, 1963).

118 Adamowitsch, "Chatyn", 460–461.

that is almost unbearable to read because of its cruel descriptions.[119] Which other novelist has tried to describe the feelings of a fetus in the womb at the moment it dies because the mother is being shot?[120] With Daniil Granin, he also gathered painful testimonies of survivors of the siege of Leningrad.[121] By the mid-1980s, he developed, in discussions with Bykau, the idea of a "super-literature" that should be able to effectively counter the threat of atomic war during another peak of the nuclear arms race.[122] The burnt villages in Belarus in World War II appeared to him like a "Hiroshima [done] by conventional means", a menacing example.[123] All this influenced his work, resulting in a strong emotional impact on the viewer of *Come and See.*

Many of these artists were driven by their own experiences. *I Was Nineteen* was Konrad Wolf's attempt to process his memories of the battle of Berlin; Elem Klimov had seen Stalingrad burn when he was being evacuated from the city as a boy in 1942; and Andrei Tarkovsky had suffered during evacuation in the war and was then the same age as his young protagonist Ivan who, as Tarkovsky said, symbolized the "situation of my generation".[124] Sergei Bondarchuk had fought at the front and then starred in *Young Guard* in 1948, as well as later in his own movies.[125] For *Young Guard*, director Sergei Gerasimov, who had developed a semi-documentarian style of acting, let Bondarchuk and the other young actors live for some time in the real families of the executed young communists whose fate they would have to enact.[126] Some elderly lay actors in *Come and See* (1985) had themselves survived the German destruction of Belarusian villages; it was similar with lead actors in Donskoi's 1944 film *Rainbow*.[127] All of this made the efforts such contributors put into these films especially persuasive and lent them special authority. This seemed to be of particular value because somewhat shallow concepts of desirable authenticity prevailed in the Soviet Union, according to which no technically ahistoric details were permitted, such as those concerning

119 Ales Adamovich et al., *Out of the Fire* (Moscow: Progress, 1980).

120 Ales Adamowitsch, *Henkersknechte* (Berlin [East] and Weimar: Aufbau, 1982), 266–267.

121 Ales Adamowitsch and Daniil Granin, *Das Blockadebuch* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, vol. I 1987, vol. II 1984).

122 Ales Adamowitsch, "Über das neue Denken und das adäquate Wort", *Kunst und Literatur* 35 (1987): 707–712.

123 See G. Belaja, "Ales Adamowitsch über Kriegsprosa", *Kunst und Literatur* 30 (1982).

124 Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 94 (quote), 132.

125 Engel et al., *Geschichte*, 114; Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography* 221.

126 Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 64; Engel et al., *Geschichte*, 102.

127 See Zorkaya, *Illustrated History*, 188.

uniforms and types of weapons.[128] Consequently, these artists could make the claim to speak as the authoritative voice of the people's suffering.

Filmmakers, like other political and social actors, also wished to make their own contribution to important commemoration dates with their films. Klimov and Adamovich intended to contribute to the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Soviet victory in 1985 and Konrad Wolf to the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967.[129] Bondarchuk celebrated 30 years of Soviet victory with *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975), Jegiasarov brought out *Hot Snow* 30 years after the battle of Stalingrad, and in *Ordinary Fascism* (1965) Romm showed street scenes of the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the victory. Apparently, some films also became politically influential in turn: *Fate of a Man* (1959) was meant to contribute to the ongoing historical rehabilitation of former Soviet POWs in German hands, and *Immortal Garrison* in 1956 and a non-fiction book by Sergei Smirnov in 1964 more or less coincided with the two waves of the recognition, mostly posthumous, of Soviet defenders of the Brest Fortress.[130]

There were heated debates about many films sampled here. One of the problems was that censorship, too, was not a matter of one state or party authority but multi layered and decentralized, involving various groups of participants. Director Grigori Nikulin remembered later that his film *Don't Forget, Kaspar!* (1964) was forbidden to enter cinemas after 13 different panels, committees and authorities had reviewed it.[131] This could also result in contradictory stories: the anti-Stalinist movie *Clear Skies* (1961) was distorted by cuts, but part of the message remained recognizable, and it was submitted as an official Soviet contribution to the International Moscow Film Festival.[132] These conflicts were harsh, and although the films covered here were usually not dissident, but conveyed tolerated lines of memory construction, some of those involved moved on to become anti-communist activists in the late 1980s, most notably the writers Adamovich and Bykau.

It should be added that controversy and censorship sometimes led to a deradicalization of the films planned or produced as shown, but, somewhat counterintui-

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128 For similar tendencies in museums and visitors insisting on these concepts of authenticity, see Anne Hasselmann, *Wie der Krieg ins Museum kam: Akteure der Erinnerung in Moskau, Minsk und Tscheljabinsk, 1941–1956* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2022).

129 Leaflet "Komm und sieh", 2; Südkamp, "Ich", 3.

130 Information taken from plates in the film *Fortress Brest*.

131 Interview, July 25, 1991 in Bulgakowa and Hochmuth, *Krieg*, 99–103. On the mechanisms of Soviet film censorship, see Gershenson, *Phantom Holocaust*, 8–11.

132 Karl, "Zwischen", 285.

tively, in several cases cited above, the films became more radical or drastic than their literary source even though more people were involved in their making.[133]

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that elements of tragedy, pain, suffering and victimization were very influential in Soviet films about World War II. Often, these elements were not combined with a triumphal narrative. Only in part did this different line of war memory reflect the will of the CPSU party leadership. This remembrance was public; movies served the role of a bridge between private experiences and official war memories. Fictional films contributed, like literary prose, to a continuous soul-searching among Soviet citizens about the war, its impact and meaning, not unlike the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) in West Germany that is sometimes praised, though in a very different context. Similar was also the inability to *bewältigen* (overcome or master) anything. Soviet films could address war trauma but, of course, not heal it.[134] And, so, the efforts went on.

This is not to say that the tragic narrative was the only kind that was told, as stories of victory and heroism continued to exist. Writers such as Sergei Smirnov and Konstantin Simonov showed or advocated for heroic stories on Soviet TV.[135] Even Andrei Tarkovsky co-directed a heroic thriller about the risky but victimless postwar recovery of ammunition from a town center called *Today There Will Be No Leave* (1959), which was released just three years before *Ivan's Childhood*. Multiple lines of remembrance co-existed. This pluralistic memory allowed for the construction of a past common suffering of *the* Soviet people (and for many historians, this was the only narrative) side by side with regional versions of the war's history (like a special Belarusian or Ukrainian narrative[136]). The pluralistic character of memory also explains why, to a degree, narratives of particular group experiences such as representations of the German persecution of Jews could appear. To be sure, all of this did not develop in total harmony, as there were heated debates over differing views.

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133 This refers to scenes discussed above in *The Unvanquished*, *Story of a Real Man*, *Fate of a Man* and *Ivan's Childhood*, notably all of them from the first half of the time period under inquiry.

134 For Soviet literary works addressing traumata, see Kukulin, "Schmerzregulierung".

135 Engel et al., *Geschichte*, 159–160.

136 For the latter, see Weiner, *Making Sense*, 298–363.

On a general scholarly level, these findings show once more how inadequate the state-focused totalitarianism theory is. Many students of historical memory have simply overlooked the quite obvious tragic narratives due to their preconceptions. Films had to be a central element of Soviet government manipulation, so what could be expected from them? Film historians were somewhat less prone to such interpretations. In reality, there was no total control over the content of Soviet movies and no total streamlining of memory production. Contrary to general deductions about collectivist mindlessness, individuals had quite a bit of leeway in the Soviet system to popularize their views, although they needed to overcome resistance, including censorship, as Denise Youngblood has argued with some reservations.[137] One book states, "The Soviet Union did not mourn her fallen of the Second World War":[138] the nonsense in the second half of this statement corresponds with the invention of a monolith called "the Soviet Union" in the first half, based on the totalitarianism concept. Soviet war memory was not monolithic but constructed by real people, different groups of actors and with some degree of disagreement.[139] For this volume, this is an important example of the fact that not only violence is generated by social actors but also anti-violence (in this case, anti-war messages).

For historians, this chapter questions periodizations offered in previous research. First of all, memories of suffering were not completely absent in Soviet war movies at any point. A social history perspective, as opposed to a state-centered analysis, helps explain these continuities. Changes were gradual. I suggest that a turn to giving less prominence to Soviet suffering, but no total disappearance, can be located in 1948, not 1946, and lasted until 1955. After putting much emphasis on the tragic sides of the war during the thaw after 1956, many films in the Brezhnev era (1964–1982) were also far from fading out tragedy. The impression that the publicly constructed memory of the war in the Brezhnev period was not uniform, not merely bombastic, and not only reflecting conservative dogmatism is also confirmed on an aesthetic level. Most of the films discussed in this chapter employ conventional artistic means, but five can be considered

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137 "Through these films, it is evident that autonomous action *was* possible in late Soviet society, even from those working within the system" (Denise Youngblood, "*Ivan's Childhood* (USSR, 1962) and *Come and See* (1985): Post-Stalinist Cinema and the Myth of World War II" in John Whiteclay Chambers II and David Culbert, eds., *World War II, Films, and History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 95; emphasis in the original). But Youngblood limited this statement to post-Stalin times (unlike me), and she called war films "a counter-analysis to official history" (ibid.), whereas I emphasize that they were part of state-produced memory construction.

138 Arnold, *Stalingrad*, back cover.

139 This is a point also made by Hasselmann, *Wie.*

avant-garde. Two of these are from the Khrushchev period – *Cranes Are Flying* (1957) and *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) – and three from the Brezhnev era – *Day Stars* (1968), *Djamila* (1969) and *The Mirror* (1974).[140] *Day Stars* and *The Mirror* create mazes from the personal memories of artists (Olga Berggolts and Andrei Tarkovsky) that are not easily accessible to audiences, presenting their dreamlike, surrealistic scenes in a confusing, associative order. *Djamila*, with its dramatic cuts and occasional use of psychedelic colors in a largely black-and-white film, also takes the perspective of an artist, the fictional narrator, in this narrative of a young boy who will later become a painter and remember the story.

The strengthening of the narrative of suffering and grief around 1960 was not only a Soviet thing. In a striking parallel to developments in the USSR, narratives of suffering and victimization became hegemonic in Israel with the Eichmann trial in 1961. Like in the USSR, the Israeli remembrance of the Nazi persecution of Jews is said to have previously been dominated by stories of heroism and, if not victory, at least armed struggle. The voices of survivors were not new in Israel around 1961, but they had been less influential before; in fact, the prosecution, which designed the trial like a history lesson, selected witnesses against Eichmann based on their already recorded and sometimes already published memories. One criterion was how tragic they were, although few witnesses had ever seen Eichmann before the trial. It served to popularize their memories and narrative.[141] Oriented toward past victimization, both Israeli and Soviet society became caught up in a backward-looking habitus though anti-war messages were less influential in Israel.

Moreover, on the level of films about mass violence in World War II, the tragic turn and an increasing emphasis on senseless sacrifice could also be observed in other Western and Eastern European countries at the same time. To keep this analysis short, it would suffice to point to films like *Night and Fog* (France, 1955), *Canal* (Poland, 1957), *Eroica* (Poland, 1958), *Stars* (GDR/Bulgaria, 1959), *The Bridge* (FRG, 1959) and *Kapò* (Italy, 1960). These parallels exemplify that

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140 Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 141, 147–150 makes a similar argument though without mentioning any of the three last mentioned movies.

141 Hanna Yablonka, The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann (New York: Schocken, 2004), 89–99, 218–235. This turn toward tragedy also explains in part the intensely hostile reactions to Hannah Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1965, revised ed.). On the one hand, Arendt tried to explain "evil" precisely when others tried to mystify the Nazis because they wanted to construct a narrative of infinite suffering. On the other hand, Arendt's interpretations had grave deficiencies. Among others, she made the counterproductive effort to use the metaphysical concept of "evil" for rationally accounting for violence, using a brash tone when others demanded a solemn, commemorative one.

perspectives of global history may generate some insights that narrow national histories do not offer.[142] I presume that one of the reasons for this development toward narratives of victimization in these anti-war movies was the second peak of the nuclear peril in the Cold War with the introduction of massive nuclear bomber forces and long-range missiles,[143] as embodied by Alain Resnais' film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). This issue would deserve further research.

Thinking about mass violence as social interaction helps, in this case, recover the traces of the construction of the memory of mass violence as a social process and the outcome of negotiations, rather than remembrance being merely subject to centrally directed state manipulation. Through films, private memory became part of the public one instead of simply being suppressed. Personal experiences drove many people involved in filmmaking and lent them authority. However, although few absolute taboos existed, there were limits to public memory in the Soviet Union. This included everything that could not be blamed on the enemy. How hunger was represented in these films and how it could not appear are symptomatic. Within limits, even violence and injustice by the Soviet state did surface, as did violence by Soviet citizens if it struck illegitimate enemies (i.e., Germans and their Soviet helpers). What was not shown or mentioned (until the 2000s[144]) was supposedly illegitimate violence exerted by loyal Soviet citizens, as it would have contradicted the self-images of Soviet society.

Besides, there was another limitation: Soviet victimization and tragedy required, by tendency, absolute evil on the other side (see the following chapter). As the Soviet representation of Germans, in the films and much of the historiography, was subordinate to constructing images of Soviet history and society, there was no explanation of German action and no genuine interest in such an explanation either.

Nonetheless, the war films discussed here took an anti-war stance by emphasizing tragedy and suffering. One could argue that they aimed at non-violence, which is also the result of social interaction, and this chapter has described how non-violence was produced on the basis of personal experiences and individual and collective initiatives, mostly after the war. In contrast, the next chapter examines how indirect and direct violence against non-combatants was also produced collectively during World War II, in the Soviet Union and many other countries.

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142 This is even more so as *Night and Fog* can also be seen as an instrument to denouncing the French war in Algeria. For this insight I am grateful to Richard Derderian.

143 I owe insights about the role of the nuclear threat in thought around 1960 in part to contributions by Peter Krause at the conference "Eichmann nach Jerusalem" at the University of Vienna, Austria, on March 24, 2013.

144 See Jahn, "Patriotismus", 118–119, 129.

Filmography

Wait For Me, 1943, director: Aleksander Stolper, script: Konstantin Simonov.
The Unvanquished, 1945, director: Mark Donskoi.
The Young Guard, 1948 (1964 director's cut), director: Sergej Gerasimov, music: Dmitri Shostakovich.
Story of a Real Man, 1948, director: Aleksander Stolper.
The Fall of Berlin, 1950, director: Mikhail Chiaureli, music: Dmitri Shostakovich.
Immortal Garrison: A Heroic Tragedy, 1956, directors: Zachar Agranenko with Eduard Tisse; script: Konstantin Simonov.
Leningrad Symphony, 1956–1957, director: Zachar Agranenko.
Cranes Are Flying, 1957, director: Mikhail Kalatosov.
Ballad of a Soldier, 1959, director: Grigori Chukhrai.
Fate of a Man, 1959, director: Sergei Bondarchuk.
Today There Will Be No Leave, 1959, directors: Aleksander Gordon and Andrei Tarkovsky.
Clear Skies, 1961, director: Grigori Chukhrai.
Ivan's Childhood, 1962, director: Andrei Tarkovsky.
The Living and the Dead, 1964, director: Aleksander Stolper.
Ordinary Fascism, 1965, director: Mikhail Romm.
Nobody Is Born a Soldier, 1967, director: Aleksander Stolper.
Day Stars, 1968, director: Igor Talankin.
I Was Nineteen, 1968, director: Konrad Wolf.
Djamilja, 1969, director: Irina Poplavskaia, script: Djengiz Aitmatov.
Hot Snow, 1972, director: Gavriil Jegiasarov, script: Yury Bondarev, music: Alfred Schnittke.
The Mirror, 1975, director: Andrei Tarkovsky.
They Fought for Their Motherland, 1975, director: Sergei Bondarchuk.
Ascension, 1977, director: Larisa Shepitko, music: Alfred Schnittke.
Come and See, 1985, director: Elem Klimov, script: Ales Adamovich, music: Alfred Schnittke.
Tomorrow There Was War, 1987, director: Yuri Kara, script: Boris Vasiliev.
Fortress Brest, 2010, director: Aleksander Kott.