The Stalinist Past in Contemporary Russian TV Serials: Reconfigurations of Memory

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Abstract

The two main issues that continue to be in the focus of hot public discussions in Russian society are the Great Patriotic War (the German–Soviet war of 1941–1945, as part of World War II) and the tragedy of Stalinism. While the Great Patriotic War was widely reflected in Soviet literature and cinema, the Stalinist issue was seldom represented in Soviet art. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a period when Soviet and post-Soviet art contributed much to the debates on the Soviet past, and several significant anti-Stalinist films and literary works were created. Since the early 2000s, the cultural situation in Russian society has changed and nostalgia of the Soviet past has spread in the mass consciousness. The purpose of this research is to analyze how the Stalinist past is reconstructed in public memory in contemporary cinema narratives. We arrive at the conclusion that since the 2000s, public interest has drifted from images of war heroism to ordinary people's lives under Stalin; the contemporary public interest is not the war heroes and famous victims of repressions, but the everydayness of ordinary Soviet citizens who tried to build their private lives, careers, friendships, and family relations under the conditions of pressure from the authorities, spreading fear in the society, shortage of goods, and loss of loved ones. We concentrate on several representative Russian TV serials, such as “Liquidation” (2007), “Maryina Roscha” (2012), and “Leningrad, 46” (2014–2015), because all of them are devoted to the first year of the Soviet peaceful life in different Soviet cities, such as Odessa, Moscow, and Leningrad.

Keywords

politics of memory; late Stalinism; Russian TV serials; trauma of Stalinism; cinematic memory; post-memory

Introduction

The “communist society” as a theoretical concept was developed in the works of Marxists and utopianists of the 19th century. Achieving “communism” was the goal of the Soviet state created after the October Revolution of 1917. However, this goal was not realized in practice: Soviet ideologists called the

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Soviet society a “socialist” one at the economic and political levels, and the construction of communism was seen as an ideal goal of development. From our point of view, the “communist” period of the Soviet past can be considered as the time when the “communist” values were most actively declared. In particular, the belief in achieving “communism” was spread among the Bolsheviks and left-wing intellectuals in the first years after the October Revolution of 1917. This belief in their communist future was embodied in numerous literary and visual works imbued with the pathos of “revolutionary romanticism.” Another period, when the status of “communists” was high in Soviet society, was after World War II, from the first postwar years until the mid-1950s and the death of Stalin, when the Soviet victory over Nazism in the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) preconditioned widespread recognition of the war veterans and communists as the fighters of and victors over Nazism (Weiner 2001). Until the 1960s, the Communist Party executed functions of the political institution and was a personnel resource for the ruling elite. Some scholars consider late-Stalinism as the period when the main political ideas, traumas, phobias, and esthetic culture formed; and these continue to exert influence even after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Dobrenko 2020). However, since the reign of Khrushchev, the belief of Soviet society in the possibility (and necessity) of achieving communism was gradually lost, but the influence of artistic, scientific, dissident, and other elites in the society became more pronounced. The late Soviet society had heterogeneous values when “socialist,” “bourgeois,” “democratic,” and other ideals circulated in the mass consciousness at the same time. That is why, as the object of our studies, we have chosen some popular Russian TV series that are devoted to the everyday life of the first postwar years and are representative for understanding the politics of memory in the contemporary Russian society; the serials include “Liquidation” (2007), “Maryina Roshcha” (2012), and “Leningrad, 46” (2014–2015). These TV series are worth considering because they visualize the most influential and controversial tendencies in the Soviet society of 1946: the atmosphere of ordinary people’s happiness due to the victory over Nazism and optimism of peaceful life beginnings; at the same time it was a period of continuation and even intensification of repressions in the society. Besides, a new force emerged in postwar Soviet society, the frontline veterans who tried to voice their view about the necessity to liberalize the Stalinist regime and to recognize the trauma of the war and repressions.

The goal of our research is to analyze how contemporary Russian society comprehends and reconstructs postwar Soviet life in artistic cinematic images. Studies by Aleida Assmann (2016) on the status of the war memory and the Holocaust (or its ignoring) in contemporary societies are the main

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theoretic basis of our research. We also refer to the concept of Marianne Hirsch (Hirsch 2012) on the “traumatic memory,” which is preserved in the new generations born after the tragedy as “their own” through photographs and cinematic images. The focus of our research is the “traumatic memory” of the “communist past” in contemporary Russian TV series, and the strategies for its comprehension. We have chosen the genre of TV series as the factual material for our analysis, because we adhere to the ideas of American anthropologist Lee Drummond (Drummond 1996), which suggest that the popular genres that are widespread within a certain culture are the most representative for understanding the public, political, and cultural moods in a society. In addition, we share the ideas of Aleksandr Etkind (Etkind 2010), the theorist on Cultural studies, who argued that “cinematic memory” is a reservoir of collective memory of the past. *Christian Metz* (Metz 1977), the scholar on Film studies, considered cinema as the cultural unconsciousness of society, and we use these concepts to investigate the cultural politics in post-Soviet Russian cinema.

Our paper consists of an introduction, three chapters, and the conclusion; we examine scientific approaches to the memory of war, the Holocaust, and the communist past in European discussions in the works of Aleida Assman and other scholars on Memory culture in our first section. The second part of our paper is focused on the evolution of memory about World War II and Stalinism in Soviet and post-Soviet society; the third part is concentrated on studies of post-Soviet memory on Stalinism using contemporary TV series pertaining to 1946 as examples of “cinematic post-memory” of generations.

Constructing the Memory Of Heroes and Victims in European Discourses

The problem of memory became the focus of European social sciences’ attention, first of all, in the context of commemoration of the Holocaust and possibilities of including this tragic national memory in the general context of European history and public memory. Coming to terms with the past was understood as an avoidance of war and splitting the nation, as well as a basis for a stable social order in the future. In the 1970s and 1980s, discussions arose around such concepts as “reconciliation with the past” (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*) (Adorno 1969) and “coping with the past” (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) (König 1998), which were caused by the necessity of achieving moral and emotional reconciliation within the society and the nation. The commemorative strategies that were formed as a result of the discussion in Europe were polar opposites: on the one hand, accepting one’s own traumatic past and, on this basis, the refusal to associate oneself with

the crimes and guilt of the previous generations, and, on the other hand, the desire to break the link between one's own past and present, and to abandon the traumatic history of the nation in order to recreate the status of one's own "normality" for the restoration of national identity. The most significant works of the discussion were translated into Russian and published (Кёниг 2005, Хёслер 2005, Эхтернкамп 2005, Кёниг 2012, Ассман 2016), stimulating debates in Russian academia on the Soviet past and its "traumatic" impact on contemporary society (Сыров, Головашина, Линченко 2016).

Public resonance in the 2010s was caused by Aleida Assman's books *Das neue unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention* (Assmann 2013) and *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, in which the author considered projections of such global and tragic experiences as the Holocaust, genocide, war, and occupation into the future. According to Aleida Assman (Assmann 2016), in contemporary Western societies, the memory of the Holocaust has surpassed in importance the memory of World War II itself, and its official higher status in Western Europe has led to the competition among national communities for the status of a "victim." The recognition of a national community as a "victim" in the past gives it a certain moral privilege to be "right" in any present actions because of the tragic past. The problem of reconstructing the memory and re-making the trauma of the postwar political repressions, allied relations with the Soviet Union, and the forced reception of the Soviet (Russian) culture has become actual in the Eastern European societies since the 1990s and the downfall of the Soviet Union. The memory of the Nazi occupation, voluntary or forced collaboration with the Nazis of a significant part of the population, and the indifference of European societies to the destruction of the Jews was a traumatic and controversial issue for the Eastern European countries as well. In particular, the Polish official "post-communist" narrative of memory, which rejected the "Soviet heroic mythology" and asserted the status of Poland as the first victim of the Nazis, provoked the strategy of "victims competition" (Brumlik 2012). However, this "memorial industry", which multiplies numerous varieties of the collective memory, provoked the lack of consolidation in the society, the American scholar Charles Maier (Maier 1993, 143–146) pointed out, because the national and social groups which consider themselves discriminated today, use the commemorative strategies of "suffering" in the past to increase their "victim" status, to strengthen their identity at present. It can be noted that since the 1990s and up to this date the discussions of memory have focused not only on the trauma and the possibilities of its "re-making" for the nation, but also on the political usage of such moral statuses of its national past as "sacrifice," "trauma," and "guilt" in the actual interests of the national elites.

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Aleida points out the tendency of Eastern European politicians to depict their countries as “victims” of Stalinism and Soviet occupation, ignoring the Holocaust-related themes (Асман 2016, 156–161), and this position means the refusal to accept their own part of responsibility for the crimes in the past. The “heroic” identity was the first, “natural,” and most positive form of postwar identification of the own national experience in countries where the anti-Nazi resistance was comparatively considerable and the postwar attitude toward this movement remained emotionally positive for the whole society, as it was, for example, in Italy (Forlenza 2012). In countries where the opinion of the political elite and national society regarding their own role in the victory over the Nazis and their participation in the Holocaust was heterogeneous, but more unified in relation to Stalin’s crimes, the elites emphasized the issue of repressions, obscuring unpleasant facts for the national consciousness (for example, participation of some part of the population in the Holocaust or pre-war collaboration with the Nazis). The “gap” between the identities of a “hero” and a “victim” widened in the Eastern European countries after the 1990s, when the construction for the national identities was based on pushing away from the “socialist” memory of the past. In the context of the search for a new narrative of the nation, the strategy of “trauma” mobilizes the society, legitimizing the memory of national and social minorities, which were marginalized within the bounds of the “heroic” narrative of the past (Edkins 2003). However, the creation of a new official narrative of the memory of deconstructing the socialist past often came into conflict with the existing personal experience of the past among large groups of the population that identified their own life during the war and postwar socialist time as “heroic,” “successful,” or “normal” and started to feel inner discomfort in the status of “victim.” This was especially true for the Soviet postwar generations, who were brought up on films and books glorifying the Soviet victory over Nazism and the heroism of Soviet soldiers. The fact that Soviet films played the role of the “post-memory” about the period of late socialism and post-socialism time when “cinematic” collective memory was being formulated enters the minds of many people as a personal emotional experience.

The Evolution of the “Communist Past” Memory in the Post-Soviet Culture

Rethinking of the “communist past” began in the Soviet Union in the 1980s and continued after the disintegration of the “union” into national states. For many decades, the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 (the term which referred to the Soviet peoples’ struggle against the German invasion) was the main focus of the Soviet official memory, represented in the literature and

cinema. The canonization of the Great Patriotic War memory took central place in the Soviet public memory and cultural mythology because of several reasons: the losses of the Soviet Union were really unprecedentedly great, i.e., more than 27 million people, and about 17 million civilians among them. Every Soviet family had lost relatives and sad memories. That is why the official commemoration of the war as the “messianic” feat of the Soviet people (Tumarkin 1995, 197) found significant support among the Soviet population.

Another reason pertained to the political origin: the Soviet state believed that the official commemoration of the war should unite the Soviet society, which consisted of many ethnic, social, and cultural groups with different experiences of the war and survival. Although millions of Soviet people experienced the terrible Nazi occupation, hunger, tortures, and loss of loved ones, the “heroic” type of the memory of the past dominated in the Soviet official commemoration, in which Soviet fighters, underground resisters who were killed by the Nazis and the Nazi collaborators, were “martyrs,” and everyone who fought against Nazism was understood as a hero. “Victims” were understood to be survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, the victims of the Nazi medical experiments, and the civilians in the Nazi-occupied territory, who experienced executions, tortures, famine but were not active in anti-Nazi resistance. Despite the fact that suffering was everywhere in postwar Soviet lands, the “competition of victims” was not popular in the Soviet postwar society because it implied an inability to resist. The construction of the memory in Soviet society was carried out from the position of a victorious soldier, because the official Soviet point of view was that the feat of the Soviet people and victory in the war was superior in importance to the tragedy of human losses. The theme of Stalinist repressions was rarely represented in the Soviet public memory, as well as the themes of Soviet prisoners of war and victims of the Holocaust. These issues were not forbidden for representations; they existed in the individual or family memoirs, but they were not a trend in the popular culture in socialist times.

Since the late 1980s, the destruction process of the war “heroic” canon started in Soviet society, which shifted the public attention from World War II to the crimes and victims of Stalinism. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the formation of new national states stimulated the rejection of the “old” socialist discourses and the aspiration to construct new narratives about the past, which might have been based on “trauma” of the war or of Stalinism. The whole period of Soviet history started to be viewed in the public discourse of the 1990s as violence of the Bolshevik state against the peoples of the former

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Russian Empire, and Stalinism was recognized as the most traumatic period in the history of Soviet society, comparable to the trauma of the Holocaust in European society (Богословие 1999). The discussion of Stalinism and its role in Soviet history was so hot for many people that even a particular genre emerged in the 1980s, which was called the “anti-Stalinist” literature and cinema. Those were such films as “The Cold Summer of 53”, 1987, “The Repentance”, 1988, “The Feasts of Belshazzar, or a Night with Stalin” 1998, “Khrustalev, My Car!”, 1998, “Children of Arbat”, 2004, “The last battle of Major Pugachev”, 2005, and many others, that called to comprehend the crimes of Stalin and his entourage, which were not entirely exposed during the Khrushchev “Thaw”.

However, from the mid-1990s, post-Soviet society has been “tired” of numerous historical revelations of the Soviet past, because its witnesses and participants were still alive, and this generation felt a certain dissonance between the public discourses of the “vilification” of Soviet history and their own positive memories of Soviet everyday life. The people who suffered from the Soviet totalitarian system, or whose parents considered themselves as victims of the Bolshevik tyranny, demanded to replace the Soviet official “heroic” memory of the past with the narratives of “suffering,” “guilt,” and “shame” for their past.

At the same time, a significant part of post-Soviet society was extremely disappointed by such radical deconstruction of their national history, which turned out to be a new trauma for many post-Soviet people in the 1990s. Some families perceived the diminishing of the memory of the Soviet victory over Nazism as an insult to the merits of their ancestors who fought or perished for the sake of victory. Serguei Oushakine, Professor at Princeton University, published his research “The Patriotism of Despair” in which he analyzed the deep emotional trauma experienced by people in Russia after the “loss” of their Soviet “motherland.” The need to equate the “all” Soviet Union with the Stalinist regime, which was spreading among many Western commentators, was less “obvious” in the midst of the post-Soviet audience (Oushakine 2009, 80). The difficulties of everyday survival were more painful for the majority of post-Soviet people in the 1990s (than their lives in late Soviet society) and provoked “nostalgia” for the Soviet everyday stability. In the post-Soviet public discourse, the trauma of “war” and the trauma of “Stalinism” coexisted. However, if the “trauma of the war” eventually united people in the gladness of the victory, the “trauma of the Stalinism” split the society into opposing groups of “victims” and “executioners,” who could not reconcile. At the official level, the desacralization of the past started to be understood as a dangerous

way of destroying national spirituality and solidarity, a way to develop public and personal cynicism in relation to national history, and as a result, the loss of the value of human life in society and the destruction of generation ties. The society, a long history of which was built on the “imperial” identity of “victory” and “expansion,” could not be orientated to the commemoration of the “trauma” and “guilt” as the only source of national identity. Thus, Russian cinema since the year 2000 has turned to the theme of World War II as the main source of the ideal personages and a positive source of national identity. The trauma of Stalinism remains insufficiently covered in the post-Soviet societies to this day, as some scholars believe (Etkind 2013). However, the “New Russian cinema” tried synthetically to include the “traumas” of different social, national, gender, and political groups in representation of Soviet history as the complicated and controversial era where violence and solidarity, and losses and beliefs, coexisted. The important reason to depart from the denunciations of the Great Victory and the socialist era was stipulated, in our opinion, by the fact that the war and the Nazi occupation continue to be a trauma in the post-Soviet memory of the generations that experienced it as well as even for the postwar generations that perceived the tragedy and pain of the war from family memories, Soviet war songs, films and literature. From this point of view, the concept of “Soviet heroism” is extremely important against the background of the Nazi theory of the Slavic “Untermensch” people who, by definition, were not equal to the Aryans. The postwar image of the “Soviet victorious soldier,” which was created by the Soviet ideology, was unconsciously perceived by many generations as a counterbalance to the haughty Nazi attitude toward the Slavic peoples, as the “moral compensation” for the trauma of the war and the Nazi occupation.

In our opinion, post-Soviet society, divided by the polar points of view on the communist past, on the status of the Great Victory in 1945, and on the place of the Stalinist repressions in Soviet history, turned to the theme of the postwar everyday life in searches for reunification of the nation at a new level. Many contemporary writers and directors try to find an artistic balance between different commemorative types of the Soviet past. These attempts are made in many recent Russian novels, films, and TV series where writers and directors try to reconstruct the “spirit” of peaceful Soviet everyday life, to visualize the Soviet postwar life not from the “parade” sides of the life, but through the optics of the “kitchen,” “street,” and “bedroom.” In addition to the reason of entertainment, we find a psychoanalytic explanation for it: the wish of “do not touch” the trauma of Stalinism does not mean the indifference of society, but the switching-on of its own “protective mechanism” for many people. People

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can talk about their minor wounds in public but deep-seated traumas cannot be demonstrated to everybody; their “reworking” is a complex psychological mechanism, when the subject learns to live with a trauma, accepts it, and adapts to it. According to Aristotle, healing of soul (*catharsis*) is based on the adaption of both sides of life, tragic and comic, heroic and everyday, in order to be reborn for later life. We suppose that working through the trauma of Stalinist repressions is not only “forgetting” or “recalling,” but understanding that the past cannot be changed, that this part of the national history has to be accepted to enable living with it amicably.

Reconfigurations of Memory on The Stalinist Past in Post-Soviet Cinema

In our opinion, the commemorative trend in contemporary Russian society has drifted to the postwar life of ordinary Soviet people, and many films and TV series demonstrate this. During the war, the majority of the Soviet population focused all their efforts on the struggle in battles and for survival; for years people lived in the atmosphere of difficulties and double pressing from the Soviet state and from Nazi invaders. What changed for thousands of Soviet people after the Victory Day? The first postwar years and peaceful Soviet everyday life became the new focus of attention in Russian cinema and among Russian scholars, as well.

Many significant pieces of research on the first postwar years were published by Russian historians during the past decades (Сенявская 1995, Зубкова 1999, Антипина 2005), and this fact confirms our idea: studies of the first postwar years became a new trend in the contemporary politics of memory. In fact, the Soviet postwar moods in society were considerably different from the prewar atmosphere in the Soviet country. The terrible war that brought grief to the majority of people ended, but the Soviet victory stimulated optimism in Soviet society; many people believed in quick, positive political and cultural changes in the near future (Sukovata 2017, 148–149). During the war, the Stalinist dictate softened, many talented people were able to make an unexpected quick career in the army, in industrial and scientific spheres, and in the national economy in evacuation. In the first postwar years, Stalin eased pressure on the church, and a number of clergymen who fought in the Red partisans, or raised the spirit of Soviet people under the Nazi occupation, even received Soviet decorations. In particular, an outstanding surgeon-professor Voyno-Yasenetsky, who was famous as an acting Archbishop and was imprisoned three times before the war, was awarded the medal “For Valorous Labor in the Great Patriotic War” and the Stalin Prize of the First Class in 1946, for the scientific development of new surgical methods for treating

wounds. It was the first and the only case in Soviet history when a clergyman was awarded with the highest State prize.

A significant number among the Soviet soldiers and officers, due to the battles, were able to get acquainted with Western European culture and returned to the USSR with new ideas of the world, often more liberal ones. Many former Soviet prisoners of war went through concentration camps, participated in the anti-Nazi underground and partisan movement in various European countries, mastered European languages, and were in contact with representatives of the Russian White emigration, a part of which also resisted the Nazis. Generally speaking, the Soviet Army and the Soviet people of the first postwar years differed in their moods from the prewar Soviet society, crushed by Stalin's repressions. The victory and the first postwar years brought a spirit of freedom and hope for liberal transformations into Soviet society; the authority of a frontline soldier and officer in Soviet society was very high due to the status of the "victors over Nazism." However, in this period of the postwar cultural transformations, the establishment of a new way of life, great political optimism, and first disappointments at the liberal expectations in Soviet society were scarcely reflected in Soviet cinema. The understanding of the first postwar five-year period as an opportunity to humanize the totalitarian regime came in the post-Soviet discussions only after the 2010s (Добренко 2020). The ideas about the year of 1946 as a new point for a choice in the life of the Soviet state were reflected in several films and TV series.

The relationships between ordinary citizens and Soviet authorities in 1946, the first postwar year of Soviet peaceful life, were shown for the first time in a popular Soviet TV series by Stanislav Govorukhin "The Meeting Place Cannot be Changed" (1979). This cult film reproduced the postwar atmosphere in Moscow through the private life of people from different social strata, the non-public Soviet subcultures of restaurants, billiard rooms, theater premieres, expensive stores, private doctors, and "society women." There were presented all the typical images of Soviet postwar Moscow, from demobilized officers to various types of criminals, repressed intellectuals, and authoritarian investigators. For a long time the criminal personages were featured in Soviet films, as a rule, with a negative connotation. However, the film director Govorukhin showed postwar Soviet society from a different point of view: when the state's aid to its citizens in supporting families and improving their material survival was minimal, a huge number of Soviet people were balancing on the verge between legal and illegal activities: speculation, black market, prostitution, illegal currency transactions, gambling, search for inheritance, or a rich husband for women. At the same time, the memory of the recent war

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in those TV series permeated into the life of people not as a heroic event, but as a test that revealed the level of morality and physical strength of everyone.

The film director Govorukhin used a dynamic detective intrigue as an external level of his film that attracted the attention of a large number of viewers, but on an internal level this series narrated for the first time the phenomena that previously were mainly absent in Soviet public discourse, such as the fate of the Soviet prisoners of war, the Stalinist repressions, the cruelty of the Soviet police, the supremacy of a man in uniform, and the low gender status of a woman. This detective story about postwar Moscow was the first film in the genre of “popular history” on the Soviet past (Sukovata 2019). However, after this film, for almost 30 years, the theme of postwar Soviet everyday life, as a separate period in the life of Soviet society, was not practically presented in films.

In 2007, a Russian TV series “Liquidation” was screened by the director Sergei Ursulyak, who used visual and semantic quotes from a Soviet TV series “The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed”, rethinking them. A bright detective and love intrigues in the film “Liquidation” were developing in the background of everyday life in postwar Odessa. There are many conceptual and artistic decisions in this film that made the film something akin to a cultural discovery. Against the background of total poverty in Odessa after the war, the characters in the “Liquidation” remember the German–Romanian occupation of Odessa, when a personal economic initiative was welcomed, and theaters, restaurants, and private factories were opened (Бабич 2020). However, the theme of active business life and entertainment in the occupied city of Odessa was not a popular issue in Soviet times. Many characters in the “Liquidation” express criticism against the city administration, Moscow authorities, and the prewar repressions in their everyday conversations; some of the personages are even going to flee from the Soviet regime to Romania with smugglers, and this motif reflects the heterogeneity of the real postwar memory in Soviet society. The film shows the residents of Odessa, who survived the war and occupation in different ways, in particular, collaborating with the Germans. The theme of collaboration was very sensitive in Soviet society. The fact that collaborators were shown in “Liquidation” not only as traitors, but also as smart but deeply unhappy people, means—in our opinion—that this trauma of the past occurred in the process of “elaboration” in post-Soviet society. The stigma of traitors of the homeland has not been removed from these people, but the post-Soviet public wants to know more about the stories of their hard lives.

The film depicts a southern vivid musical multinational Odessa, the “Soviet Marseille,” where Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Greeks, Moldovans, Romanians, Poles, and other ethnicities coexist and everyone speaks a language comprising of a mixture of Russian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish expressions, perfectly understanding each other. In fact, this is a metaphor for the multinational Soviet society. The job of the postwar criminal police, as well as the cooperation and rivalry between the police and the KGB, became in the film a part of the plot. The viewer can observe the postwar life not only of thieves, card swindlers, German spies, and policemen, but also the life of ordinary workers, as well as fishermen, musicians, singers, military doctors, street children, and paranormalists, who create a colorful image of postwar Odessa.

The main character in the film is a Jew, a police colonel who fought in World War II, then became a criminal investigator, and whose family perished during the Holocaust. Despite the fact that the Jews fought in the Soviet Army and in the Red partisan detachments, a Jew was almost never the main character in Soviet films. During the Soviet period, several films devoted to the Holocaust issue were shot (for example, “The Unconquered” (1945), “The Commissar” (1967), and “The Ladies’ Tailor” (1990)), but they portrayed the Jews as defenseless victims of the Nazi genocide. The image of the main character in the “Liquidation” as a brave, skillful, highly professional officer, a war hero, a successful investigator, and a hot lover was a fundamentally new phenomenon in Russian cinema. Historically, Odessa was a city with a high percentage of Jewish population, and the phenomenon of everyday Jewish life was reflected in the film as well. Most of the leading and supporting characters in the film are presented as Jews too, the representatives of the pre-war *shtetl* culture which was destroyed during the war. At the level of the hidden message, this film is a kind of Soviet utopia of a “free Jewish state” where Jew-policemen hunt down Jewish criminals, the Jews serve in the army, work in stores, theaters, and cinema. But, in fact, during the occupation, almost all the Jews of Odessa and the Odessa region were exterminated by the Nazis (Круглов and Уманский 2016). We think that the postwar Jewish Odessa in the film is a memory of prewar Odessa, a fantasy about the possible “Jewish Soviet state” which “could exist if it was not for the war and the Holocaust”. So, the Holocaust, the distrust of the Soviet state to the former prisoners of war, fates of the collaborators, Stalinist repressions in the army, and the dramas of the family members whose relatives were repressed, are presented in this series as sources of today’s events and as the past which everybody wants to forget.

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The next popular TV series “Maryina Roshcha” (directed by Aleksandr Khvan, 2012) presents postwar life in 1946, in Maryina Roshcha, one of the poorest and most criminal Moscow districts. Each episode of the film depicts a short story about the postwar life of Muscovites: relationships among people in communal apartments; depressing poverty of some families and the luxurious life of the officials; the rationing system and speculation on the black market; shortage of necessary medicines and everyday goods; search for husbands and sons lost in the war by their parents and widows; survival of invalids after the war; beggar children; struggle between traditional Christianity and Soviet atheism in everyday life; and the status of German prisoners of war. One of the new aspects of depiction of postwar life was the representation of the fates of Soviet demobilized officers, who, being retired, cannot find a well-paid job for themselves and adapt to the civilian life. Another new aspect is the portrayal of Soviet scientists’ postwar life and their hard work in the atomic project (Sukovata 2020). The series presents the new forms of “collectivity” and solidarity that arose in a peaceful life as a result of the war, when several families who lost their loved ones began to live as one family, performing the functions of relatives (father, grandfather, aunt) in relation to all the children of an apartment.

The atmosphere of Stalinism is represented in the film in the form of Soviet holidays and slogans, in school poetry dedicated to Stalin, and in the fear experienced by many personages of the film when they interact with the authorities and police. At the same time, the director of the film inserts into the film shots of the Soviet chronicle from May Labor Day demonstrations, portraying people with joyful faces, as if making it clear that despite the lack of material comfort and freedom, people had a feeling of happiness because the war was over, they had faith in good future, they had private lives, families, and friends. Despite the financial difficulties, the Soviet people in communal apartments often laughed, enjoyed life, simply because they survived the war, they all contributed to the victory, and therefore they did not have feelings of guilt or shame for their inaction in the struggle against Nazism. The American researcher Birgit Beumers (Beumers 2009) entitled one of the chapters of her monograph on the Russian cinema “The Past which We Have Lost,” meaning a certain nostalgia in Russian society for those ideas that were declared in the Soviet Union and which are not in demand in post-Soviet reality: “sincere friendship,” “altruism,” “loyalty to the motherland,” “internationalism,” “loyalty to professional duty,” and “mutual help.” These concepts, despite Stalinism pressure, are implicitly represented in the microplots of the film, figuratively explaining the reasons for the post-Soviet nostalgia for the Soviet past. The protagonist of the TV series himself becomes a victim of injustice

and the intrigues of his superiors, goes to jail, and is released only thanks to the selfless help of his loved ones. But he did not become the “opponent” of the Soviet state. Stalinism in the film is presented as the external, almost natural “evil” for a person of that epoch, and people try to survive this evil. The survival under Stalinism required, as follows from the film, both physical and moral strength, and every person made his/her own moral choice, to participate or not in the “evil,” in the system of suppression. So, the film is a story of “honest men” and “loyal women” in a “fairy-tale” Moscow where private life, love, and friendship were more significant than career and fear of repressions. I would define the method that was used in this TV series to narrate Soviet life through combining “high” and “tragic” emotions with daily and comic situations of the past, by the term “Menippean satire” (as it was described by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1984), as an element of the “carnival culture.” “Carnivalizing” and joking about the dark sides of the Soviet past is a way that facilitates a releasing from fear, achieving catharsis of the audience, and integrating the complicated past with today’s life.

The darkest memory of the Soviet past is represented in the epic TV series “Leningrad, 46” (directed by Igor Kopylov, 2015). For the first time, postwar Leningrad was depicted not as the “heroic city” which survived 900 days of the Nazi blockade in 1941–1943, but as a city of crimes, poverty, and conflicts between gangs, in which ordinary people suffered, which is similar to the image of America’s Chicago of the 1930s. The main character of the series returns from the front to Leningrad in 1946, having gone through the war, getting wounded, and being in German captivity, and in the Soviet penal camp. He lost his apartment and family because of officials’ intrigues when he was still on the battlefield. The character of the film embarks on the criminal path, wishing, first of all, to take revenge on those officials who destroyed his life. That is why the film in “noir style” features a lot of gunfire, killings, moral treachery, pursuits, and injustice.

The repressions in the film are personalized in the images of the immoral bureaucrats on whom the hero takes revenge, in order to restore justice in his life. Apparently, therefore, the strategy chosen by the main character of the film to restore justice reproduces to a certain extent the archetype of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and lies in punishing certain villains as the mediators of evil, but not in denying the political system or the state. In the last episode of the film, the main character perishes, from which one can draw the following conclusions: at the moral level, this is a condemnation of the choice of crime as the hero’s path, even as a form of revenge. At the level of the politics of

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memory, it is the assertion that hatred for the past should not become the idea motivating a person's entire life, since hatred shuts off prospects for the future. Therefore, in this cruel and bloody film, we can see an appeal for forgiveness and acceptance of one's own past, not as an excuse for injustice of others, but as an opportunity for self-development.

The trauma of the postwar repressions and social inequality in this film is more significant than the trauma of the war; it might be due to the fact that the war is perceived by postwar people as a kind of natural disaster, which none of the Soviet people escaped, whereas the repressions did not affect everyone and therefore were fixed in the individual or family memory rather than in the collective memory of the nation.

Conclusions

"Stalin's era" continues to be the hottest issue in contemporary public and academic discussions. Studies on the moods and conflicting memories of the 1940s–1950s generation have become an important source in the search for emotional reconciliation bases in contemporary society, divided by the polar points of view of the Soviet past. The Soviet past in the analyzed films was presented as a part of both tragic and heroic complicated national history. The authors of contemporary films have moved away from the simple opposition "good" – "bad"; they include the motives that were taboo in Stalin's Soviet cinema. Depicting the Soviet past, directors, on the one hand, rely on the style of the Soviet films of that period in order to form a certain authenticity of images in the spectators' perception (those acquainted with the Soviet cinema); on the other hand, they recreate the reality of the 1940s–1950s, relying on actual historical knowledge (about the Holocaust, postwar famine, the fates of prisoners of war, sexual violence against women, the brutality of army commanders, etc.)

The creators of the TV series "Liquidation" construct the "Jewish Soviet utopia" of Odessa; in the TV series "Maryina Roshcha" there are no clear villains or heroes, the reconciliation with injustice occurs through the devotion of family members and friends to each other, and their own choice of morality in difficult situations. Postwar Moscow is presented as a "bourgeois city" with a vibrant nightlife. The style of the TV series "Leningrad 46" is "dark naturalism," very close to the Western "noir"; however the "good" characters are finally rewarded for their kindness and previous suffering. The resolution of the conflicting memories occurs through the immersion in everyday Soviet life, where different memories coexist in a natural way, since people

live together. We can sum up that in the analyzed series devoted to 1946, a reconciliation strategy of memory is used in relation to the socialist past.

The main reasons of the nostalgia for the Soviet past lies in the fact that residents of the post-Soviet countries feel a lack of sincere relations among people, the value of which was highlighted in Soviet society, and was replaced by the cult of money, material success, and personal pragmatism in post-Soviet times. This means that the discussions on the Soviet past are not only of political but also of moral dimension in the contemporary society, and are connected with the image of the “ideal future.” That is why the Soviet political past in many contemporary Russian films is represented as a certain moral experience, the memory of which should be integrated in contemporary life and can be use to build the future, taking into account some strong and weak points of the national past.

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