INTRODUCTION

Victory! For most Russians, their country's victory in World War II, referred to almost universally as *Pobeda*, with a capital *P*, proves it is the greatest of all nations, giving it a moral authority that has no expiration date. Victory is the triumph over fascism, symbolized by the capture of Berlin and the raising of a red Soviet flag, the Victory Banner, over the Reichstag. This flag was photographed and filmed, and images of it being raised were disseminated by newsreel and the press in 1945. It exists as a museum artifact, an exact copy of which is paraded annually on Red Square on 9 May, Russia's Victory Day, as well as in facsimiles at parades, demonstrations, and reconstructions around the country. The Victory Banner has also been reproduced in historical and compilation films and referred to in television programs, poems, histories, memoirs, paintings, and even video games ever since.

By contrast, the historic Reichstag building has since 1999 been the seat of the Bundestag, the German Federal Republic's parliament—a symbol of transparency, of democracy and Germany's overcoming of its long and troubled twentieth century, and of its reunification, with Berlin as capital once more, at the heart and head of a European Union.[1] The Soviet capture of it and the raising of the red flag above the building appear as a single episode in a longer history of German democracy overcoming setbacks and challenges to it, a narrative of liberal triumph in World War II that is widely shared in western Europe and the United States.

It is this sharp contrast and mismatch between Russian and Western visions of the Victory Banner that intrigued me when I first encountered a striking photo of it one Sunday afternoon when, as a teenager, I was leafing through *Purnell's History of the Second World War* while listening to

I.3. Evgenii Khaldei, *The Victory Banner over the Reichstag*. Courtesy of RGAKFD.

my brother's collection of obscure punk music (*Fifteen Thoughts of Brinsley Schwarz*?). Although the black-and-white image was sepia-tinted, the implicitly red flag, bearing the hammer and sickle, hoisted from a tall building, fluttered above the ruined, smoldering Berlin cityscape below.

I asked my brother, who usually knows everything, about the image and the building but was not satisfied with the vague answer. The explanation in Earl F. Ziemke's accompanying article was little better: "In the centre of the city, the Russians had driven spearheads through from the north and south to the edges of the government quarter and the Soviet armies were competing for the honor of taking the Reichstag—which to the Russians, even though it had been a charred ruin since 1933, had come to symbolize the Third Reich."[2] The photographic image's dramatic, heroic tenor is not echoed in the chapter devoted to the battle, entitled "Into the Abyss," which focused on the German side and described the battle as "a contested mop up" without naming a single Soviet figure or unit. The scene was described in the text thus: "A quarter of a mile away, the Russians were storming the Reichstag."[3] The image was not attributed (although it was Evgenii Khaldei's famous shot; see chapter 1). The "Russians" were anonymous, inexplicable, and distant; the resonant images of their feats were toned down by anodyne text.

This strange mismatch between text and image was compounded for me years later as I started, already an adult fluent in the Russian language, to experience the way most Russian-language sources and the

Russian media treated this event: it was the holy of holies, a key symbol of the wartime victory, the nation's greatest achievement, which in turn serves an uplifting function, underpinning the national identity.

This vision of the war is partly based on the historical record, such as the fact that the largest and most important land battles of World War II were fought by the Soviets, achieved at the cost of an enormous estimated 27 million Soviet war dead, and the extraordinary transformation from a battle for survival to the conquest of half of Europe up to Berlin and Vienna. However, the conclusions and pride derived from this episode of history do not originate solely in historical fact; for one thing, the dominant historical account underplays other facts, such as the specific fate of Soviet Jews, the Soviets' own alliance with Nazi Germany, and the invasion of their Polish and Baltic neighbors in 1939–1941, and it denies outright the crimes committed during their own drive forward to Berlin. Rather than an objective account, the Russian view of World War II selects and elevates suitably heroic elements from the complex and sometimes contradictory facts of the Soviet contribution to World War II. This requires the selective organization of history, a process that may be described as a construction of *memory*. It is the product of the interaction of a panoply of cultural forms and practices: commemoration in a national holiday, parades, reenactments, museum exhibitions, the wearing of black-and-orange St. George's ribbons, badges, and the waving of flags, through statues and monuments, especially the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and eternal flame, art, songs, television programs, news stories, memoirs, internet articles, and films of all kinds. There are also serious works of painstakingly researched scholarly history, but the products of mass memorial culture far outweigh them.

The tension between the vast array of often contradictory episodes, some of which make it into the history books, and the selection and organization of these data in popular memory is resolved through the organizing principle of the war as a coherent historical narrative, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning of the war is highly contentious, involving as it does the joint Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, so, despite recent Russian polemics around this date, in the Soviet case it is important to mark this beginning as occurring on 22 June 1941, with the middle usually seen as the 1942–1943 victory at Stalingrad, and the end is typically framed around the Soviets' storming of Berlin, culminating in the assault on the Reichstag in April and early May 1945. This final defeat of fascism is symbolically completed by the raising of the red flag, the Victory Banner, over it, and the related Victory Parade on Red Square in June that year. These resonant dual images of victory—the conquering of Berlin and the parade on Red

Square—defined the triumph as a Soviet one and fixed the dominant narrative of the war.

In order to ensure that the narrative functions, there is a need to synthesize, as well as to condense facts into symbolically potent scenes. The storming of Berlin, the raising of the Victory Banner, and the Red Square parade are precisely this: a symbolic synthesis of a number of currents relating to the end of the war, to victory, and it is this power to evoke the final victory that is a key reason for the enduring appeal of the Victory Banner.

This is because the war is remembered in Russia and elsewhere not only through a pithy narrative but also through images and symbols. Political scientist Murray Edelman has written that "symbols become a facet of experiencing the material world that gives it a specific meaning. The language, rituals, and objects to which people respond are not abstract ideas."[4] Edelman points especially to the emotional power of what he calls "condensation symbols" that sum up attitudes toward the past.[5] The image of the Victory Banner is such a symbol, and it serves to convey the significant, overarching organizational principle that orders such references to the war: the notion of victory. This is a word that frequently replaces the more official term, Great Patriotic War, itself a rhetorical construction framing the war as one of survival and starting in June 1941, focused on the Soviet Union or Russia. The vernacular way of naming the conflict *Victory* underlines the positive result, the outcome of a complex narrative conferring meaning. Victory helps people to remember what is important and to forget what is not, dismissing the latter as an irrelevance or temporary blip.

The interaction of the notion of victory within an interlocking and overlapping system of symbols across many media can be productively analyzed through the emergent scholarly field of memory studies, which interprets a society's attitude toward its history as analogous to individuals' recollection of their past, a dwelling on favorite memories and reluctant recalling of others, in a way that is socially and culturally constructed, or what has been termed "cultural memory."[6] Alexander Etkind has drawn a distinction between hard and soft memories, where hard memories are the more enduring physical artifacts or monuments and soft memories are the more malleable and negotiable narratives told of them. The more these two modes interact, the more central a memory is: the relative rarity of Gulag monuments and museums suggests how marginal that experience is to Russian self-understanding.[7] By contrast, the Victory Banner raised by the Red Army atop the Reichstag on the night of 30 April 1945 is a key image synonymous with Victory that encompasses both soft and hard cultural forms, across many media, anchored in the

I.4. The Victory Banner on display in the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow.

symbolic calendar of public holidays. The fact that the recognizably related images of the Victory Banner span reiterations or "remediations" across various different cultural forms enhances the "aura of authenticity" of these images.[8] The "hard" artifact and facsimiles combine with the "soft" images and narratives to strengthen the power of a symbol summing up memory of the war.

ICONIC IMAGE?

We might see the repetition and reproduction of this image as an iconic image in the sense elaborated most compellingly in Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites's influential study of iconic photographs in the United States.[9] However, this account is anchored in the specifics of the photographic image that acts as an "object . . . of contemplation."[10] In this account, the singularity of a specific still image is part of the claim that it bears "the aura of history, or humanity, or possibility" and the sacred.[11] By contrast, the Victory Banner is characterized by multiplicity—by the variety of widely recognized photographic and filmic representations of the moment, from a number of angles, and the fact that these are not identical to the actual artifact. This banner, inscribed with an abbreviated form of the name and number of the unit credited with raising it—the 150th Order of Kutuzov, Second Class Idritsa Division of the Seventy-Ninth Rifle Corps, Third Strike Army, First Belorussian Front—is displayed in a

glass case, in a special room that evokes the 1945 Victory Parade: it is the centerpiece of Moscow's Central Museum of the Armed Forces. An exact copy of this banner is the one held aloft annually at the 9 May Victory Parade. The multiplicity of this artifact on the one hand and the various film and photographic images on the other, many of which do not bear the famous inscription, undermine notions of the Victory Banner as an icon in the sense described by Hariman and Lucaites, who work from the notion that, like religious icons, other iconic images strictly reproduce their fixed original models.[12] The Victory Banner photographic and filmic imagery purports to record the moment of its raising, but memoirs supplement the verbal narrative of what happened, as well as the actual artifact, itself reproduced in highly controlled facsimile copies. Consequently, there are tensions and differences between the various instances of the iconic images. Yet, despite the multiplicity of the images, the enduring power of the Victory Banner imagery for Russian war memory is difficult to ignore, even if complex and sometimes obscure.

The notion of iconic image also deliberately mobilizes religious connotations to suggest that these images possess a sacred aura of authenticity. Nina Tumarkin's prominent study of what she called the "cult" of the war in the Soviet Union treated the idea of the Victory Banner as a "holy of holies" with skepticism and quoted a 1990s journalist's recollection of his lack of interest in the Victory Banner as a 1970s teenager, dismissing any claim as to its sacred power.[13]

This attitude seems understandable, but misplaced, and it is largely a consequence of when Tumarkin wrote her book—at the beginning of the post-Soviet period, when there was a widespread hostility to Soviet-era symbols. In turn this attitude informed Tumarkin's suggestion that the practice of commemoration of the Great Patriotic War was in terminal decline and would disappear in post-Soviet Russia, as Soviet inconsistencies and silences about the war would result in a post-Soviet shift from collective to individual grieving and the end of the "war cult."[14] A further context that perhaps informs this approach is a tradition in historical scholarship that sees its task as distinguishing between mythical elements, including what we have come to term "memory," and the factual elements of history, which are not only primary but must ultimately be pivotal in shaping societal understanding. A model for this approach is Eric Hobsbawm's attempts to show how "invented traditions," associated, for example, with the English royal family, were actually symbolic practices invented fairly recently with the aim of constructing a spurious continuity. Implicit in this paradigm was an assumption that reason will triumph and that exposing the constructed nature of memory would lead to it becoming less influential.[15]

The emerging field of memory studies has taken a rather different approach to such traditions. Aleida Assmann criticizes Hobsbawm's method, arguing that showing the "inventedness, manufacturedness" of a tradition is not enough and would be unlikely to break its spell anyway. Instead, she suggests scholars analyze their function.[16] This perspective, which sees the Victory Banner as a "mobilizing symbol" within an "affectively charged narrative," informs the present study.[17] This book is an attempt at understanding how the symbol functions, how it has evolved, how it acquired the power it now wields, and what effects this particular "memory construct" has in contemporary Russia.

More broadly, such skeptical attitudes to claims that the Victory Banner is sacred may be seen as a misreading of modernity and its relation to practices that we can understand as religious or as relating to the sacred. Rather than seeing these as backward relics of premodern societies or totalitarianism, the French scholar Danièle Hervieu-Léger develops Emile Durkheim's approach to the sociology of religion and treats religious practices or expressions of the sacred as an important facet of modernity. As well as demystifying religious doctrines, modernity, she argues, also fragments existence and a sense of coherence, opening up spaces that only religious practices can fill. These substitute, secular religions often express themselves in terms of an evocation of tradition.[18] Such a relation to the past is also theorized in Pierre Nora's account of symbols as memory sites (*lieux de mémoire*), which he terms "rituals of a ritualless society; fleeting incursions of the sacred into a disenchanted world."[19] This notion of ritual is particularly important in the Russian and Soviet contexts, where parades and formulaic speech patterns have been seen as central to the ideological edifice.

SOVIET RITUALS

Durkheim made the division of objects into the sacred and profane a key feature of religious belief, arguing that what makes an object sacred is not an intrinsic property but rather the attitudes and social rituals attached to it, as well as the setting of it apart from the profane sphere.[20] This can be seen in the way in which the Victory Banner was presented as sacred and contrasted with the profane sphere through its ritualized use in the Victory Day holiday parade and the narrative constructed around it in its museum home.

While the Victory Banner was invented as a symbol in the Stalin era, at the end of the war, when it was subordinated to the Stalin cult, its ritualized use and references to it as sacred became pronounced in the post-Stalin era, with 1965 marking a key point. This chronology would

seem to corroborate Alexei Yurchak's influential account of "late socialism" as one of ritualized participatory performance in which it was important to repeat and cite established norms without analyzing and scrutinizing them.[21]

This perspective has the advantage of explaining the outsider's experience when talking to Russians about World War II to this day: there is often a strange moment when reasoned debate ceases and a strange, hard-wired automation seems to take over. Memory of World War II, the Great Patriotic War, is beyond rational scrutiny; it belongs to a qualitatively different, ritualized, or sacred sphere of discourse, where repetitious formulas must be repeated.

Similarly, the ritualization of the discourse around the Victory Banner, as a key image of the war, is also evident in public debate. There have been book studies and films made that stress the Victory Banner's staged nature, suggesting persuasively that it was not the officially rewarded Mikhail Egorov and Meliton Kantariia who put up the original flag but that those who did so were for many years not credited for it and that the flag in Moscow's Central Museum of the Armed Forces was not the first to be raised over the Reichstag either.[22] Such critical voices, no matter how well substantiated, have done nothing to alter the commentary and claims habitually made in the voice-over for the televised Victory Parade or at occasions such as the April 2017 Storming of Berlin reenactment in Moscow's Patriot Park. Such running commentaries are not only repetitious but they accompany the ritual, repeated performance of the parade or reenactment with a ritual, repeated verbal performance that repeats claims and myths long disputed or disproved as if incontestable, passing over inconvenient truths in silence. The repeated epithets, rituals, and images reinforce each other and serve as a basis for a wider preference for myth (or memory) over history.

The claims made for the Victory Banner may be debunked and disbelieved, but their very repetition throughout a myriad of media implies a need for them. Moreover, to some degree both their constructed nature and enduring presence are inherent in such images, as Susan Sontag points out in a discussion in which she refers to a wide range of iconic photographs, including Khaldei's of the Victory Banner: "What is odd is not that so many iconic news photos of the past, including some of the best remembered pictures from the Second World War, appear to have been staged. It is that we are surprised to learn that they were staged, always disappointed." Sontag sees this as the consequence of an almost primordial desire to be there and capture the event as it unfolded, to be a "spy in the house of love and death."[23] What Sontag seems to be referring to here is a desire that these images be authentic, a need somehow to

invest them with aura, a sense of authenticity, despite the fact that they are known to have been staged and constructed.

In the Russian context, however, this desire for the myth rather than the reality takes a particular, state-sponsored form. In March 2016, the director of the Russian State Archive, Sergei Mironenko, resigned from his post, in a move widely seen as connected to his publication of documents showing that the story of the Twenty-Eight Panfilovites, a squad of soldiers from the 216th Rifle Division under the command of General Ivan Panfilov, who supposedly fought to the death to stop the German advance on Moscow, was a myth, made up by wartime journalists.[24] Mironenko's publication had antagonized Russia's then minister of culture, Vladimir Medinskii, who, in a history book devoted to showing that every nation needs its benign "white" myths for their uplifting effects, had, while accepting that the official account was inaccurate in its details, publicly defended the true story of the Twenty-Eight Panfilovites as even more impressive than the long-established version.[25] Needless to say, Medinskii also endorses the long disproved account as to who put the Victory Banner up and where on the Reichstag it was put up, combatively sparring with claims to the contrary, ridiculing the sensationalism of journalistic revelations and the credulity of their readers.[26]

HISTORY, NARRATIVE, AND TRAUMA

In maintaining this uplifting narrative, Russians are also able to exorcise and offset facts about the war that threaten its uplifting tenor, most notably the enormous toll of death and suffering that are inextricably associated with it. In December 1941, the Soviets first narrated the story of Nazi atrocities against their own civilian population, but they did so in a film depicting one of their very first victories, the liberation of Rostov-on-Don, with the recapture depicted in a scene of the raising of the red flag over the city's soviet building. Suffering could be depicted if it was made meaningful as a sacrifice, compensated by victory in a battle dramatically depicted. This followed the logic of established Bolshevik portrayals of death as part of a meaningful, historically redemptive narrative. This may be seen as the insertion of the loss into a narrative, a channeling of grief, leaving little space for mourning in its own right.[27] This logic was subsequently imposed on the war as a whole, through the use of symbols such as the Victory Banner. This process can be understood through Hayden White's reflections on the narrative construction of historical writing.[28] He sees the past as a construct that needs to be organized into a story to be understood as "historical" and thus coherent and meaningful.

A central challenge to such constructions of the wartime experience as meaningful and redemptive was the sheer scale of the suffering and losses, figures for which were revised upward under Nikita Khrushchev in the early 1960s to 20 million.[29] Yet, under Khrushchev this enormous sacrifice was part of a somewhat unstructured reassessment of the war introducing elements that had previously been passed over in near silence, such as the disastrous military reverses of the first months of the German invasion and the direct consequence of this failure to protect the country or the fate of more than 3 million Soviet prisoners of war who died of starvation in German hands. Facts such as these had not yet been incorporated into a positive overall narrative. Fashioning a redemptive narrative that made sense of this scale of loss was an intrinsically difficult task.

In the 1960s there were also attempts to see the enormous suffering caused by the war in terms of trauma, a sense that the experience could not be reconciled with habitual narratives; this is certainly how many people have come to see the mass murder of 6 million Jews—as resistant to all sense-making narratives.[30] A prominent Soviet example of this "trauma" approach was Andrei Tarkovskii's film *Ivan's Childhood* (*Ivanovo detstvo*, 1962), the main character of which is a traumatized boy consumed by revenge and whose grim life and death are, as Jean-Paul Sartre argued controversially, not at all redeemed by victory.[31] However, even if art addressed the after-effects of traumatic experience, the notion itself was taboo, since it originated in the works of Freud, whose works were banned in the Soviet Union.[32]

Overwhelmingly, however, Soviet veterans and Soviet society more widely came to see the war in terms of meaningful sacrifice, suffering, and death redeemed by heroic feats and the ultimate victory.[33] Yet this was the consequence of a deliberate and concerted effort by the Soviet media from the final years of the war right through the Soviet period into present-day Russian society to ensure that war was seen in this way. In particular, the whole thrust of the twentieth-anniversary celebration in 1965 was about regaining control of the image of the war and exciting the whole population with a sense of this as a heroic, holy enterprise that could not be criticized, diminished, or even analyzed dispassionately. Emerging facts such as the Red Army's vengeance against the German population, especially the many rapes committed, was covered in sources from the 1950s in German, including the famous anonymous memoir *A Woman in Berlin*, translated into English in 1955, then in serious scholarly work, and, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in works published in Russian.[34] However, these claims are very rarely even articulated in Russia, where doing so risks prosecution. For the most

part they are obliquely refuted; consider, for example, the famous statue at Berlin's Treptower Park cemetery of a Red Army soldier rescuing a German child, or the references to such acts in numerous memoirs. The social and narrative framework of victory, underpinned by symbols such as the Treptower Park statue or the Victory Banner, largely prevented the claims of rape from being expressed: they made no sense, and there was no place for them in collective memory of the war as victory and of liberation. The campaign of 1965, coming after a period in which Soviet identity and Soviet history, including the war, were reappraised and reassessed, aimed at elevating the cult of Victory beyond such potential criticism in part by working through all conceivable media.

In addition to working the disparate facts of the war into an uplifting narrative, memory of the war also serves to help Russians forget less pleasant and more divisive historical episodes. Michael Rothberg has developed Freud's concept of "screen memory," in which one memory serves to obstruct recollection about another that is more troubling, or more difficult to make sense of, to produce a notion of "multidirectional memory." Rothberg argues that the relation between these two memories is never entirely one of screening, or of a competition in which one remembers either one thing or the other, but that in fact there is an implicit interaction between these two memories, one waiting to be explored by the attentive critic.[35] From this perspective, constructing memory of the war through the prism of victory, as well as the Victory Banner, serves not just to vindicate the sacrifice and price paid as meaningful but also to distract from elements of the war that cannot be assimilated into this paradigm, such as the Holocaust, and that do not fit notions of meaningful sacrifice because those killed did not go to their deaths consciously for a cause but were murdered for their ethnic identity. Moreover, the war also distracts from the crimes of the Soviet state against its own citizens, such as the Gulag and mass arrests of the Great Terror in 1937–1938.

Looking at the war in this way enables us to understand a difficulty with Alexander Etkind's important intervention into the politics of Soviet memory—his wide-ranging and conceptually sophisticated study into repressed memory of the crimes of the Soviet state, *Warped Mourning*. That book unearths and analyzes unsuccessfully repressed expressions of mourning and the parallels between the Soviet and Nazi regimes. However, this task seems to distract the author from the full consequences of the primary mechanism of repression of Stalin's crimes, which he mentions in passing: many Russians believe that victory in the war justifies Stalin's crimes.[36] Thus, whereas Etkind's focus is mourning, he does not even explore the possibility that memory of the Great Patriotic War encourages the expression of a "warped mourning" for which the true

object may be a victim of the Soviet state rather than the Nazi state. Here, too, in repetitions of war memories we surely also see the compulsive repetition and reenactment of the past described by Etkind. The difference is that it is the pathological repetition not just of loss but also of the more pleasurable memory of victory, explicitly defined as a dramatic, heroic Soviet victory associated with the state, as a legitimizing force, is one that screens out and dispenses with alternative constructions. The Victory Banner imagery does this in a manner that is both memorable and emotionally powerful.

EVOLUTION OF THE VICTORY BANNER

One of the extraordinary aspects of the Victory Banner is the fact that it has not only migrated across various media but also successfully evolved through numerous changes in the Soviet system. It ultimately outlived the Soviet state that created it, acquiring a more powerful status than ever in post-Soviet Russia. From Stalin's first call for a banner to be raised over Berlin in a speech on 6 November 1944, through its subsequent adoption as a slogan to motivate troops storming Berlin, to the raising of the banner over the Reichstag on the evening of 30 April 1945, it was initially intended to create a powerful symbol of the triumph of the Soviet state and to link that victory with Stalin's leader cult. This endowed the Victory Banner with the sacred, charismatic power of that cult.[37] After Stalin's death, the unstable vacuum left by the absence of an effective leader cult led to a search for powerful, transcendent symbols capable of investing lives with meaning and as "a reference point for a belief system."[38] Ultimately the Victory Banner was selected and promoted as one such symbol, one strong enough to create a continuity that outlasts any single leader. This is its one key advantage over the personality cult: the Victory Banner could assure stability in a way that few symbols could following Stalin's death. In this respect, it was so successful that it became a communist symbol that survived the system that created it, conferring a sacred aura, power, and legitimacy upon the post-Soviet Russian state.

This continuity, however, also functions to redeem the Stalinist mode of charismatic politics, and potentially the package of Stalin's crimes as well, along with other aspects of the Soviet system. In tracing the life of this symbol, across periods and media, my aim is to scrutinize these continuities and discontinuities relating to the end of the war and the late Stalin period. The continuities in historiography, for example, are harder to illustrate and grasp. By following the evolution of a symbol, I hope that readers can more easily grasp this tension. In order to do this,

however, I shall be concentrating on moments and texts when we can see the Victory Banner symbol being constructed, contested, and tweaked.

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY EMPLOYING FILMS AND ARCHIVES

To gain an understanding of the constructed nature of this sacred symbol, talking to people is unlikely to be productive, precisely because the success of the symbol and the narrative of the war it conveys mean that most Russians do not see this as a construct at all: as Yurchak has argued, people reproduce words as performances, the meaning of which they do not fully understand.[39] Moreover, they see the past through the filter of the present.

Instead, this book focuses primarily on representations of the Victory Banner in the mass medium of film and, to a lesser extent, television, as well as on the processes that lay behind the production of these works. Through an examination of unpublished studio debates and decisions, it becomes possible to see how these images were made and constructed, and this approach shows how memory, narrative, and symbols were being selected, debated, and shaped. To trace how effectively these symbols function and are received, I have made extensive use of reviews of those films and television programs, especially reviews from print media. The process of negotiation and shaping is especially clear in documentary and newsreel films, which are a special focus of the book, since their claim to be presenting a factual account and the need in that genre to achieve a quick turnaround to respond to anniversaries and shifting ideological imperatives means that the negotiation of the fixed ideological clichés can be especially clear in the preproduction debates and sometimes even in the actual films. Moreover, for some relevant documentary films there is discarded film footage of the same events, available to the researcher in the archive, and this evidence too grants an insight into the evolution of well-known "iconic" images and their relation to forgotten photographic images of the same events that lay unwatched in the archives.

At the same time, many documentary films tend toward the ritualized repetition described by Yurchak: alongside their quoting of existing verbal formulations and opinions, the filmmakers, especially those producing compilation films, gravitated toward material from already existing movies rather than opting for the more time-consuming and ideologically hazardous path of sifting the discarded footage for a novel angle. This approach reinforced the tendency to reuse the same footage, the "iconic" images, and it also meant the rearticulation of the same interpretations, as the images tended to bring with them their already existing narrative.

The archive of discarded film footage, by contrast, provides the possibility of an alternative narrative, a different account, because it also retains that which was not thought of as significant at the time. Thus, such films oscillate between the repetition of fixed visual formulas and their renegotiation. In this, a symbol such as the Victory Banner is a potential site of contestation, and various films, references in speeches, and uses of the symbol in the media reinflect it and at certain points seek to redefine it.

This account of symbols as a site of contestation echoes Hariman and Lucaites's classic account of the iconic image in US society, where various narratives about ethnicity and the war are played out with regard to the famous image of Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima. Their account seems to suggest that such a contest can only occur in US society. However, there have been studies since that try to examine the use of popular symbols in other contexts, such as India.[40] In the Russian context too there are a number of conflicts and tensions worked out through the different iterations of the Victory Banner at key moments, even if ritualized repetition of the image dominates.

Of course the Victory Banner is not completely monolithic; there are other frequently repeated and rich symbols of the Soviet victory in World War II. The Twenty-Eight Panfilovites, the Brest Fortress, or Zoia Kosmodem′ianskaia, for instance, would also be interesting subjects for treatment, but they are not as central to the *narrative* of the war as the Victory Banner is and have not shown quite the same mutability as it has, across different media and across the various Soviet and Russian postwar changes of leadership. These other images narrate the story of heroic sacrifice, but the unique role of the Victory Banner is to reassure the public that those sacrifices were ultimately not in vain, that a glorious victory was indeed achieved, ensuring that those sacrifices were indeed meaningful. It remains a crucial symbol to this day, as the current Putin administration (as I write in 2020) has elevated this symbol as one with the power to cohere a society on the brink of fragmentation by evoking the memory of Victory.

The Victory Banner functions as an iconic image inviting repetition. It is a memory meme enabling the fixing and stabilization of a certain view of World War II and affirming the identity of those who recognize the symbol and the interpretation it represents. At the same time, the Victory Banner plays a special role in cementing the continuity of Soviet and Russian memory of the war through periods of profound discontinuity and historical rupture, such as those following the death of Stalin in 1953 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the Ukraine conflict, facsimiles of the Victory Banner have

been widely paraded by the pro-Russian Ukrainians and defiled by the anti-Russians.

This fault line illustrates the ways in which the Victory Banner is paradoxically both a national and a transnational symbol. The red flag itself is a symbol that dates back to the French revolutions of 1832 and 1848, during which radicals used red banners because the Tricolor of the revolution had become compromised by antirevolutionary regimes. It then became an internationally accepted symbol of socialism in the years following the Paris Commune of 1871. From its first use in May Day demonstrations across the Russian Empire in 1900, it subsequently became the state flag of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1918, prior to its adoption by the Soviet Union in 1922.[41]

Khaldei's 1945 photo itself juxtaposes a conquered Berlin with the triumphant Soviets. It is thus indicative of a stance of conquest, possibly a representation of empire, and certainly Soviet opposition to external enemies. At the same time, the Soviet state flag raised is a variation on the red flag of the international socialist movement—crushed inside Germany by the Nazis but now in ascendance—as well as an emblem of a multiethnic state. The Victory Banner represents the end of World War II, an international conflagration, but its purpose is to stress the Soviet nature of the war and of victory. More recently it has become a uniquely Russian symbol, an alternative state flag, even if Russia can be seen as a never entirely self-contained nation-state but always an empire.[42] This book is about the making of that symbol, the story of its initial inception during the battle of Berlin, and ways in which it has been reused across media, but especially film, since the war.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER CONTENTS

Chapter 1 charts the initial creation of the Victory Banner as a symbol by analyzing the decision to storm the Reichstag and make it the scene of the Soviets' raising of a red flag over Berlin in 1945 to symbolize victory. The chapter then examines the photojournalism (especially documentary and newsreel films) made about the raising of the Victory Banner and then the organization and filming of the 24 June 1945 Red Square Victory Parade, the absence of the Victory Banner from it, and the way it was displayed at the Central Museum of the Red Army.

Chapter 2 examines the difficulty of integrating victory into the communist symbolic order in the postwar Stalin period, the tensions between the 1 May and new 9 May holidays prior to the abolition of the latter in 1948, and the attempt to subordinate the Victory Banner to the Stalin cult with Petr Krivonogov's 1948 painting *Victory* (in Russian, *Pobeda*)

and Mikheil Chiaureli's 1949 film, *The Fall of Berlin* (*Padenie Berlina*). The Victory Banner becomes part of an epic and monumental aesthetic and plays a crucial role insisting on the communist (and Stalinist) nature of victory.

Chapter 3 examines how, following the death of Stalin, memory of the war evolved, culminating in the 1965 Victory Day parade, in which the Victory Banner was central. The chapter begins with an analysis of the films of Stalin's funeral and then discusses the rewriting of the history of the war, which reassessed Stalin's role and also attempted to establish the true story of the raising of the Victory Banner through two secret conferences to determine what happened. After considering this peak of iconoclasm with regard to war memory, the chapter concludes by showing how, with the documentary film *The Great Patriotic* (*Velikaia otechestvennaia*, 1965) and the 1965 Victory Day parade—the first to be covered live on television—the Victory Banner was needed as a symbol associating victory with the communist cause. It was a key part of the emergent Victory cult that emerged following the dismantling of the Stalin cult and was used to confer legitimacy and stability on post-Stalin society.

Chapter 4 examines how commemoration of the Victory cult in the period from 1965 to 1985 was conveyed through a growing variety of forms and how film in particular adapted the narrative of victory to the television age through two epic film series in which the Victory Banner imagery plays a central role: Iurii Ozerov's spectacular five-part *Liberation* (*Osvobozhdenie*, 1970–71), and the television series *The Unknown War* (1978). Analysis of the reception of these films, as well as of the lackluster 1985 Victory Day parade, suggests the decline of the Victory cult among young people in particular.

Chapter 5 surveys the ways in which the Victory Banner and Victory Day commemorations became a site of political contest from the 1990s to the present as the glasnost agenda colored the 1990 Victory Parade and brought revelations as to the staged nature of the images of the raising of the red flag over the Reichstag. This political battle continued through the 1990s, as the communists claimed war memory and the Victory Banner symbolism, which culminated in Vladimir Putin's instituting of the annual Victory Day parade as the central ritual of the Russian symbolic calendar from 2000 onward. The chapter also shows how television coverage of the anniversary parade has become ever more sophisticated and how film and television depictions of the war have evolved in response to the rising popularity of video games among young people. Both the video games and the films that echo them have repeatedly turned to the image of the Victory Banner. The final sections of the chapter examine

the growth in uses of the Victory Banner in reenactments and demonstrations across the post-Soviet space and beyond, especially since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Needless to say, this book does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of all mentions and uses of the Victory Banner symbolism; rather, it strives to place prominent and indicative examples in film, television, parades, and other media in the context of evolving understandings and interpretations of history.