From: Picturing the Family: Media, Narrative, Memory. Ed. by S. Arnold-de Simine and J. Leal. Bloomsbury, 2018

3

Soviet Heroes and Jewish Victims: One Family's Memories of the Second World War

Oksana Sarkisova and Olga Shevchenko

Introduction

Igor Samuilovich[1] is a warm and talkative man in his mid-seventies, with an easy-going manner that seems a bit at odds with his lifelong career trajectory in the Soviet military. We met him and his family in 2006, in the course of our two-year fieldwork on post-Soviet family photographic archives. During the years of our fieldwork, we conversed with members of fifty-four multigenerational families in five regions of Russia, exploring the role domestic photo collections play in establishing and supporting family narratives about the past.[2] In this chapter, we take Igor's family as a revealing case of generational conflicts of interpretation that arise over family photographs. The neat order of Igor's archive supported an equally neat, tightly framed story he wanted to deliver about the most accomplished member of his family, his father Samuil Izrailevich, particularly in the context of the latter's military career and exploits. His narration of the family archive was refracted through the prism of what Aleida Assmann (2010: 42) would term the political, or national memory culture around the Second World War – or, rather, the Great Patriotic War, as it is called in Russia.[3] At the same time, these tropes were far less prominent in the subsequent stories told to us by Igor's family members (his daughter, Irina, and grandson, Kirill).

This disjuncture informs broader guiding questions that animate this chapter. How do particular family photographs get identified as significant and worth telling about? And, given the power of 'family frameworks of remembering' (Halbwachs 1992), how are we to understand generational conflicts of interpretation that arise out of family archives? In this discussion, we draw on Assmann's distinction between social, political and cultural memory (2010), as well as Hayden White's notion of 'emplotment' (1978, 1992) to understand the variety of ways in which generational accounts of family history function at the intersection of visual evidence, memory formats and genres of historical narration. A conversation about a family archive is thus a negotiation over not only the possible meanings of the photographs but also over the very definition of history and the corresponding criteria of 'memorability' of the family past. Furthermore, we suggest that, as family photographs are mobilized in support of divergent memory narratives, they become entangled with competing regimes of photographic truth, a notion that has so far been discussed only in the singular, and primarily in the context of state and media, but not vernacular uses of photography (Tagg 2009).

A commissar is born

Igor started his introduction to the family archive with a photograph depicting a group of men, most of them in uniform, lined up in several rows in a V-shape (presumably, to fit in the frame) in front of the doors of a brick public building, looking as if they all had just stepped out from inside. 'You will be very surprised . . .', he promised, passing the photographs to us. 'Here he is. In 1919, when he entered the school of heavy artillery commanders... In Moscow.' And, after a pregnant pause, 'Here stands Lenin, and here [my father] stands'.

Igor could not recognize any of his father's old classmates and knew nothing about their fates as his father took care to keep many of his photographs from the eyes of his family. As a result, Igor did not know of their existence until after his father's death when he discovered the carefully hidden photo archive. For this reason the photograph lacked the performative context associated with the viewing practices of family albums (Langford 2001). Its significance for Igor rested on three elements: biographical, social and medial. While this was not the earliest photograph of his father (contrary to his own promise), it was the first image that documented his father in the capacity Igor valued most (that of a military commander) and thus it provided a good starting point for the teleological narrative of him becoming a high-ranking member of the military establishment who ended his career in the rank of General with multiple awards and signs of recognition from the state. Socially, this

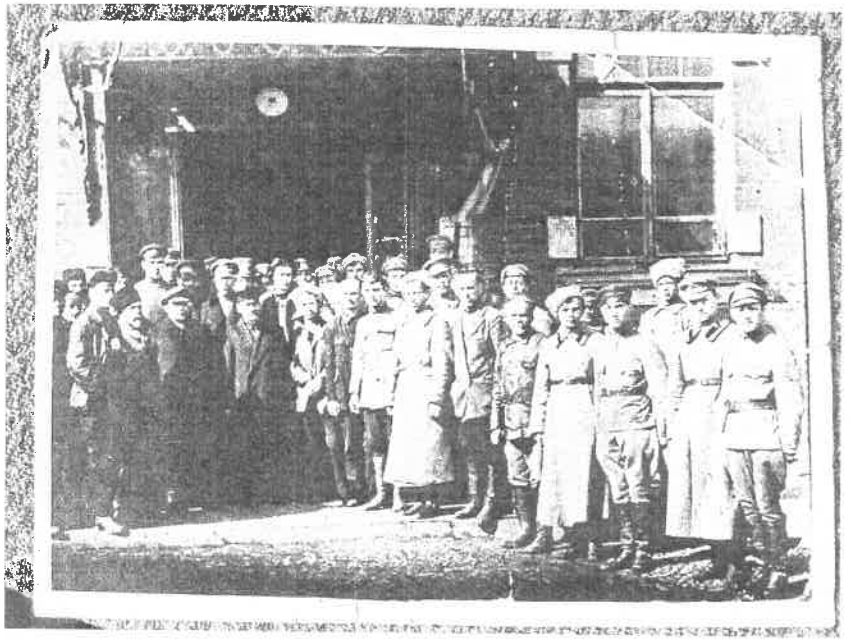

FIGURE 3.1 *Group photograph with Lenin, c. 1919.*
Source: Private archive, St. Petersburg. Published with the owner's permission.

image documented his father's early proximity to the Soviet leaders (Vladimir Lenin and Mikhail Kalinin, at the time the titular head of state of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) which Igor interpreted as an index of his social stature and historical significance. The son's gaze treated his father as a focal centre, while having Lenin and Kalinin play a supporting role, a strategy facilitated by the composition of the image in which Igor's father, who stands closest to the camera, appears to be twice Lenin's size. Finally, the medial context of this image deserves special attention. Immediately after sharing the 1919 photograph he found in his father's archive, Igor took out an almost identical image, although cropped less tightly. Unlike the first photograph, found in his father's archive, the second one was a re-photographed illustration from a magazine, one of many that used it to accompany stories of the Civil War. What he valued most about this early image was not the rarity of the print but rather the way in which this image's multiple reproductions in history books and magazines testified to the significance of the photographed event. From this perspective, it was precisely the plurality of medial reproductions that generated the image's aura for its owner.

The rest of the photographs in the folder that Igor dedicated to his father consisted of portraits of his father at different stages of his career, almost all of them in military uniform increasingly covered by signs of distinction

FIGURE 3.2 *Portrait of Samuil from his son's archive.*
Source: Private archive, St. Petersburg. Published with the owner's permission.

FIGURE 3.3 *Portrait of Samuil from his son's archive.*
Source: Private archive, St. Petersburg. Published with the owner's permission.

FIGURE 3.4 *Portrait of Samuil from his son's archive.*
Source: Private archive, St. Petersburg. Published with the owner's permission.

and markers of its owner's advancement through the hierarchy. The few exceptions are the earliest photographs that depict the teenage Samuil as a pre-revolutionary student. They, too, are studio shots and feature a uniform (albeit not a military one yet).

Lined up side by side, the portraits made palpable the physical and stylistic changes in his father's modalities of self-presentation over his long and eventful

FIGURE 3.5 *Portrait of Samuil from his son's archive.*
Source: Private archive, St. Petersburg. Published with the owner's permission.

FIGURE 3.6 *Portrait of Samuil and Igor from his son's archive.*
Source: Private archive, St. Petersburg. Published with the owner's permission.

life. One can tangibly trace the transformation in the grooming practices and technologies of the self that turned a pensive Jewish pupil into an ascetic 1920s Red commissar and further into a competent-looking Second World War commander and finally into a member of the post-war military establishment projecting power and confidence. While only one of the photographs shows Samuil participating in an actual parade, the full military regalia featured on all the photos bring to mind the conventions of a formal portrait [*paradnyi portret*] which exclude spontaneity in favour of status display.

The logics of this visual display were very well in synch with Igor's rendering of his father's history. In his commentary on the photographs, Igor provided a parallel narration which drew heavily on canonical public historical narratives of the Second World War and used the images to mark his father's respective career stages. Indeed, the structure of the narration rested on the sequence of his father's promotions and geographical career moves, as well as military operations in which he had participated during the Second World War:

> So up until 1935 he was there [in the Far East] in the rank of assistant battery commander, that was his position, then he became battery commander, and then division commander. [...] [I]n 1935 he gets transferred to Russia and my father becomes the head of the regiment's artillery, it was a cavalry regiment in Pskov. [...] In the early 1940s he gets transferred to the city of Mary, this is in Turkmenistan, between Ashkhabad and Kushka. [...] And there, my father

was already in a higher rank, he got appointed Colonel, yes, and wore four bars [on his uniform].

Key terms Igor used repeatedly ('military accomplishments' [*boevye zaslugi*], 'received a high governmental award' [*poluchil vysokuiu pravitel'stvennuiu nagradu*], 'participated in the defense of' [*uchastvoval v oborone*]) drew heavily on the formalized language of Soviet autobiography. Their formulaic character correlated with the visual formality of the father's portraits and further accentuated it.

The formal portrait and its alternatives

Historical narratives and explanations, Hayden White points out, are 'determined more by what we leave out of our representations than by what we put in' (1978: 90). White's overall argument is that any representation of the past as offered by historians has an essentially fictive character in the sense that it is constructed using literary devices and shaped in accordance with specific plot configurations, such as romance, tragedy, comedy, satire and epic (indicating that the list could be continued).[4] While his main target is history as a scholarly discipline, not the vernacular accounts of the past that we encounter over an album of photographs, White's interest in what he calls 'emplotment' provides a useful lens for understanding the interpretative work done by Igor and his family members in their retrospective accounts of the family past. Let us then examine more closely the structure of Igor's account of family history and the figures of absence that accompany it. Here is a characteristic excerpt from an interview:

Oksana: Now, let's talk a bit about your student years.
Igor: Wait a second, I just want to show you several important photographs [. . .] These are photographs that feature Rokossovskii,[5] you know, there are so many important . . . . [searches through the folders]
O.: If you have trouble finding them, that's quite alright. We are more interested in your father right now than in Rokossovskii.
I.: All right, all right, now here are documents, documents that characterize his valour. Also, there is this book, here it is right here, an amazing book!
O.: [reading out loud]: *The Orders of the High Commander, Marshal of the Soviet Union, Comrade Stalin, Second Belorussian Front*, I see, there is a bookmark here.

I: Here, here is my father's last name, here, for the liberation of different cities and so on, and it shows which armies were stationed where and how they advanced, you see here? [. . .] well, if it's not of interest, we don't have to . . .
O.: It is of interest, but this is a rather known story, whereas I was hoping you could share some of your own memories of the first years after the war. You were a young man back then, did you know what you wanted to do, where to study?
I.: No, of course not.
O.: And how did you decide to continue the family tradition and get a military education?
I.: How shall I tell you? [smiles]
O.: Tell us how it was.
I.: The truth, who knows what it is. The truth is, I was not such a stellar student and so I was told that, well [smiles], I had to go somewhere where there's strict discipline. And that's how they placed me in an institution that had discipline [the army school].

This extensive quotation makes visible the complicated interpretative work that has to happen in the course of telling stories about the past. To tell a story about a family photograph is to make a judgement concerning the aspect of the family past worth remembering, relegating other narrative possibilities to the status of unworthy of narration. In this particular case, two models collided. One is that of the interviewers who came looking for the history of everyday life that values the quotidian, the insignificant and the unheroic. The other belonged to Igor who sought to tell the story of distinction by connecting his father's career to the grand actors and acts of Soviet history, glossing over human details in favour of the 'big map' that constitutes, in the words of the Russian writer Liudmila Ulitskaya, the 'far-sighted vision of the state' (2015: 16). It was in the back-and-forth that ensued as a result that the conflicting assumptions of these models became palpable and questionable in light of one another: the biographical details that Igor originally cast off as banal became the subject of a conversation, while the interviewer's resistance to the formulaic narrative of the Second World War was replaced by an interest in the ways in which this narrative was mobilized to give shape and meaning to the family past.

For some time, the conversation moved from the rehearsed hagiographic narrative to a more prosaic autobiographical disclosure (accompanied by a change in tone and framed by an aside about the nature of truth). Yet this was a reluctant and indeed provisional detour. Before too long, Igor returned to the story of his father and to the genre of heroic epos in which he narrated it. A tale of heroism is the mode of narration most commonly deployed in Soviet

and post-Soviet public discourse on the Great Patriotic War (Dubin 2013).[6] In other words, Igor formatted his family narrative in line with the frameworks of political memory culture that valorizes Soviet military glory and emphasizes a common, shared heroic sacrifice. It is instructive, then, to look closely at what such representation left out. One such opportunity presented itself when the conversation turned to the Yiddish-language inscriptions on several early photographs in Igor's collection:

Oksana: Would you happen to know if Yiddish was spoken in [your father's] family?
Igor: You know, they mostly spoke Russian, yes, all of them spoke only Russian. Say, my father, I never hear him speak in Jewish [*sic*], neither my aunt, so I don't know...
O: And yet the photographs are inscribed in two languages, right?
I.: Well, I suppose my father knew a little bit, I guess ... The thing is that my father completed the grammar school with a Gold Medal, so of course he knew languages, but subsequently...
O.: Knew from his parents?
I.: Of course, of course.
O.: But you never heard him speak Jewish [*sic*]?
I.: [with laughter] Never ... Never. Even these Jewish words, like *potz*,[7] he never used them.
O.: What about some Jewish holidays, traditions, was anything kept in the family?
I.: [decisively] No. No. Our family has always been primordially Russian [*iskonno russkoi*], and all traditions were only Russian.

The ambivalence surrounding Jewish identity among secular urban Soviet Jews has been extensively described by Slezkine (2004) as well as others, and it is quite clear here that Igor did not treat this aspect of his father's identity as one that deserved extensive commentary or a central place in the narrative. Indeed, he used the strongest possible terms for emphasizing the family's 'primordially' Russian identity (*sem'ya byla iskonno russkoi*), despite (or perhaps, precisely because of) evidence to the contrary that is contained in the Yiddish inscriptions on his father's photographs. Furthermore, he turned this potentially discrepant detail, one not congruous with a model Soviet military commander's biography, into further evidence of his suitability for this role, using terms that could fit unproblematically into a biographical entry of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* ('completed school with a Gold Medal' with its corollary 'spoke foreign languages').

Just like the studio portraits in Igor's archive, the verbal portrait of the father featured a public figure, an archetypical Soviet military hero lacking private

weaknesses, hesitations, idiosyncratic viewpoints or controversial opinions. In his intention to create an exemplary biography of a Soviet military hero, Igor downplayed and omitted biographical references and characteristics that did not support this image. Thus, all references to the Jewish identity of the family members were relegated to the narrative margins. By contrast, his daughter Irina explicitly embraced these elements and elevated them into the centre of her family narrative. Comparing this version of the family history with the one presented by Irina not only highlights the role that broader cultural and political frameworks play in family memories, but demonstrates how closely people's relationship with their family photographs is entangled with the narrative genres and memory formats that they embrace.

Jewish boys with a fiddle

Irina's relationship to both family photographic archive and family history emerged in dialogue with her father yet evolved in a markedly different direction. This energetic woman appeared to be a self-assigned family chronicler and came across as a compelling storyteller. A construction engineer in the Soviet times, at the time of the interview she lived with her husband and son not far from her parents, settling in the vicinity with the explicit purpose of supporting them as they age. Irina's fascination with family history went beyond a private interest. On the suggestion of her friends from Israel, she wrote a short story about her grandfather which, however, was never published.

Both Igor and Irina saw their roles as central to the preservation and transmission of family history not only to the next generation of their own family but also as part and parcel of the 'grand' history of the twentieth century. Yet in contrast to the hagiographic 'mythos' modelled by her father after authoritative accounts of Soviet war heroism, Irina's stance gravitated towards an elegiac narrative of loss that reached out to incorporate an extended family.

Practices of handling domestic photographic collections tend to be gendered, with women typically doing the bulk of the emotional and social labour of keeping the extended family connected and acting as keepers of family legends and stories (Hirsch 1999; Rose 2010). In Irina's case, this was so because she grew up in close contact with her great-aunt Ninel, the older sister of Commissar Samuil. Ninel had no children of her own but made a conscious effort to pass her stories and photographic archive to Irina. Many photographs in Irina's collection bear explicit marks of Ninel's efforts to shape the family narrative of the past. Unlike typical inscriptions on family images, which tend to function either nominatively (naming the where, when and

the who of the photo) or dialogically, addressing the recipient of the image ('remember and don't forget'), the commentaries that Ninel provided on the images from the family archive do both, explicitly addressing the younger generation as remembering subjects and simultaneously instructing them in what to remember (characteristic examples of such inscriptions: '*Aunt Fenya's sons, died in Vitebsk in 1941. Aunt Fenya is your Grandfather's sister*'; '*My dear mother's little brother, died at the age of 15*').

As a result, while Irina was driven by a similar desire to contribute to the passing on of the important family memories, she interpreted the notions of importance quite differently from her father. In place of Igor's references to battles, dates and army detachments, Irina's account was built from family anecdotes passed by word of mouth from the older generations to the younger ones. References to fate, legends, myths and mystical premonitions underlay her narrative of the family.

Irina's mental image of the family's geography differed as well. While her father presented the history of the family as a centrifugal motion from the provinces to the centre of Soviet power, Irina's imagined geography revolved around Vitebsk, the town which her grandfather Samuil had left but where his parents and most of his kin had remained. While Irina inherited ostensibly the same range of photographs of her grandfather that we saw in Igor's family album, her description of his life hit on (and possibly exaggerated) precisely the notes of Jewishness that her father sought to displace:

Irina: My grandmother and grandfather,[8] – especially, grandfather – became very religious with age, he literally closed in on himself, read this Talmud, and Torah, spent a lot of time in reflection... [...] They had their daughter, who did everything as a good Jewish girl should, she married a tailor, who came from a respectable family of rabbis [smiles]. They had three kids, Mulya, Musya, some purely Jewish boys and they would start playing the fiddle and all that [*kakie-to chisto evreiskie mal'chiki i vot tam nachinali igrat' na skripochke*].

Oksana: Was Yiddish spoken in the family?

Irina: Yes, yes, they spoke. [...] You know, I even think that my own grandfather ... I mean, it is absolutely clear that he knew the language, but even more, that he read these religious books. I think he did, because once, when I ran into his study and grabbed something off his desk and accidentally dropped a book, I just remembered very vividly that it had these letters, not like letters but like fishing hooks, and later on my friends, who have gone to Israel and learned the language, they explained to me that this is the Jewish [*sic*] script. My grandfather must have been reading something like this, and it was kept at home.

Irina's departure from her father's interpretation of the family narrative does not only mark a generational break in transmission but implies a refusal of the heroic frames available in Russian political memory in favour of a global cultural memory that views the Second World War as intrinsically linked with the Holocaust. The Holocaust is largely absent from the official public narrative of the war in Russia; overshadowed in Soviet times by the internationalist and class-based representations of victims of Nazism, it is now marginalized by the self-congratulatory rhetoric of victory.[9] Yet, likely due to contacts with the above-mentioned Israeli friends, Irina has been able to deploy it to make sense of her aunt Ninel's stories, reframing the image of her grandfather from that of hero to survivor in the process.

Irina's emplotment of the family history oscillated between elegy and tragedy, and this affected her interpretation of the family photographs. Photographic records with their 'potent illusion of the real' (Baer 2002: 77) may be used to support narrative investments even in a situation when the visuals do not fully square with the interpretation. One such example was described by Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2006) who wrote of Hirsch's own photographic archive that included one street photograph from the Second World War ghetto in Czernowitz. The photographic situation, knowledge of Second World War chronology and the anticipation of the tragedy looming over the Jewish inhabitants of the town made Hirsch's viewing conducive to interpreting a blurred mark on the lapel of her father's coat as the notorious yellow star which all ghetto inhabitants were required to wear. We came across an even more dramatically telling example of such 'directed vision' during the interview with Irina, when she delved into two images especially meaningful for her: a pre-war posed portrait of the 'grandparents' (i.e. Samuil and Ninel's parents from Vitebsk) and a smaller photograph that Irina identified as a wartime portrait of the same 'grandmother' which, on closer inspection, left much room to question this attribution.

Irina: Here is a photograph of my grandmother, shortly before the war, this is 1941, early on. Look at how she looks here, and this is [how she looks] after the Germans had arrived [in Vitebsk] ... [holds up the two photographs for contrast]

Oksana: Oh my! This is just in the matter of several ...

I.: Yes. In the matter of six months.

O.: Stunning [turning the second image over]. There is an inscription here, looks like it was cut out of a larger photo ... 'In good memory from Grandpa, 1938.' It says, 1938.

I.: I don't know about that.

O.: But is the date correct?

I.: Let's see. Maybe this is not 1938, I don't know [takes off her eyeglasses and moves the second image closer to her face].
O.: But you seem pretty sure that this is your grandmother, in these first war years?
I.: Yes, yes. [pause] She must have known [her fate].

Irina's interpretation of the second photograph was disturbed neither by the contrast between the pre-war image of the grandmother and her alleged transformation in the course of several months, nor by the visibility of a tie (presumably incongruent with a portrait of an elderly woman), nor even by the date and inscription on the back of the photograph that marked the second image as a souvenir from a grandfather received before the war. On the contrary, the stark 'before-and-after' contrast only further entrenched Irina's conviction that the second photograph depicted the premonition of the Holocaust in her grandmother's features, and bore witness to the rapid ageing of a Jewish woman who was not destined to survive the war. Indeed, Irina accentuated her doubts about the veracity of the inscription ('In good memory

FIGURE 3.7 *A portrait of Irina's great-grandparents from Vitebsk, taken before the German occupation.*
Source: Private archive, St. Petersburg. Published with the owner's permission.

FIGURE 3.8 *The alleged portrait of Irina's great-grandmother from Vitebsk, taken during the occupation. Dated 1938 on the back.*
Source: Private archive, St. Petersburg. Published with the owner's permission.

from Grandpa, 1938') and her absorption in the image by removing her glasses when desiring to see 'better' and in fact differently from the uninitiated viewer, as if substituting a metaphorical 'mind's eye' for physiological perception. Irina's confidence was so powerful that it was not until after the interview, after we had a chance to look at the images closely, that we developed deep doubts regarding the second image's attribution as the grandmother's photograph.

This example raises fruitful questions about the entanglement of oral testimonies with visual evidence. The visual exploration of the Holocaust experience by artists, photographers and film-makers often revolves around ongoing discovery and work with the previously unknown visual imagery of the Second World War, the ghettos and the camps.[10] At the same time, other projects work not with the new archival material, but with the viewer's optics, aiming to consciously refocus the viewers' attention on the afterlife of the traumatic *lieux de memoire*. For example, photographic images by Dirk Reinartz and Mikael Levin represent an attempt to construct an interpretation of 'after the event' sites of former Nazi extermination camps in the light of the knowledge of the past as it overlaps with the image of the present. Analysing these images, Ulrich Baer argued for the necessity of 'a new way of looking at the presumed photographic past [...] which comes closer to the mode of witnessing than to visual analysis' (Baer 2002: 67). These and other photographic exploits follow on Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*'s (1985) paradigmatic rejection of archival footage which transformed visual representations of the Holocaust in favour of survivors' testimonies taken at the sites of former extermination camps that no longer carried visible traces of the past crimes but that were accentuated and revived as spaces at once lost and present, visible and invisible, full of significance and yet incomprehensible, whose meaning was defined in the act of communication and commemoration.

Irina's reading of the photographic material shared with these other interpretations of post-Holocaust landscapes an emotional tone and a narrative emphasis on unbridgeable temporal distance. With this perspective photographs in her private collection held a promise of truth obtained through the experience of transformative witnessing to the invisible traumas of the past. Her relationship with the photographs was markedly different from that of her father who valorized primarily those images that were sanctified by their proximity to 'official' historical narratives. Yet this approach, too, was wrapped up with the photograph's ability to testify, it is just that the testimonies they sought were entrenched in starkly different memory frames with distinctive affective cadences (pride in the case of the national memories of the Great Patriotic War, and grief in the case of cultural memory of the Holocaust).

These divergent modes of mining the domestic photographic archive for meaning underscore the ways in which family memories are formed in conversation with larger cultural, political and national memory narratives. It is these narratives that enable family members to make choices as to how to interpret these images, which of the available details to accentuate and how to emplot them according to differing generic conventions.

Thanks to Grandpa for the victory

While the cult of the Great Patriotic War dates back to the Brezhnev era, post-socialist dislocations made the hagiographic discourse on the war all the more potent in Russia. This was both because there were arguably no suitable recent historical markers more capable of mobilizing popular support and because the Soviet role in the Second World War was being questioned and contested among other post-socialist states, from Estonia to Germany, in a way that threw into question the most foundational aspects of the Soviet triumphalist narrative.[11] The Russian state's investment in the commemorative politics of the Second World War continues to grow: in December 2014, the Ministry of Culture announced that funding would be allotted for six fiction and sixty documentary films about the 'Great Patriotic War' to commemorate its seventieth anniversary.[12]

Generational socialization has always played a central role in the cult of the war and it continues to do so today. As Olga Kucherenko (2011: n.p.) points out, 'the official policy of war commemoration [...] seeks to save this unheroic youth from itself, by teaching it a lesson in solidarity and self-sacrifice'. If anything, increasing temporal distance seems to generate some anxiety around whether or not new generations of Russian youth are capable of fully absorbing the oversized importance ascribed to the war in post-Soviet ideological discourse. As the generation of the living witnesses of the war dwindles, post-Soviet memory entrepreneurs come up with new strategies for 'bringing the war home' through historical re-enactment, material artefacts and, increasingly, recorded personal stories and domestic photographs with their powerful 'authenticity effect'.[13]

A good example of the meshing of generational rhetoric and personal photographs is the internet project 'Thanks to Grandpa for the victory'/'*Spasibo dedu za pobedu*' that launched in 2014 in Volgograd. Featuring blog entries with titles like 'My Heroic Great-Grandfather' and 'I am Proud of my Grandmother and her Heroic Past', the project relied on crowdsourcing to collect and exhibit descendants' tributes to war veterans as well as photographs of the veterans from private collections. Unlike the Salford Past project discussed by Richard MacDonald in this volume, the contributors treat this opportunity not as an invitation to articulate marginalized memories, but on the contrary, as a platform for deploying their filial and grand-filial connection to a veteran in order to partake in the most dominant political memory discourse of the Great Patriotic War, and to share in the symbolic capital of the victory.

The same slogan 'Thanks to Grandpa for the victory' was actively used for the Victory Day celebrations starting in 2014, becoming one among many public displays honouring the war in the Russian cityscape.[14] Like the web

FIGURE 3.9 *Patriotic posters displayed on the streets of Moscow to commemorate Victory Day in 2012. Photo: Olga Shevchenko.*

portal, such displays also frequently foreground generational narratives and themes of the direct transmission of knowledge and experience, featuring (great-)grandparents and (great-)grandchildren absorbed in the task of remembering and passing on the war experiences through engagement with images, as well as material relics referencing that past.

The divergent choices made by Igor and Irina need to be seen in this politically charged context: as distinct modalities of historical narration that are aligned with, or, in Irina's case, tacitly resist the frames of patriotic mobilization available in the public sphere. The youngest member of Igor's family, 23-year-old Kirill, a student of a music academy who at the time of our interview was taking a year off from his studies to find his true vocation, took this resistance a step further. Having grown up in the situation of an over-saturation of historical narratives and especially memories of the Second World War, he kept a distance from both the photographic collections and the two generations' compulsive interest in reconstructing family history, each from a different angle. In his conversation with us Kirill professed disinterest in family photo archives and distanced himself from the ownership of the family collection, calling the preoccupation with family history and archive 'some sort of compensation' or 'pseudo-creativity'.

While Kirill did not elaborate further on this critique, his choice of term ('compensation'), as well as the lack of affect with which he uttered it, put him rather visibly at odds with the reverential engagement with the heroic past modelled by children on patriotic posters, or indeed, by his own family members. This overall indifference, however, did not imply Kirill's divestment from the family's history altogether. His interest in family roots tended not towards the well-documented, heroic image of his great-grandfather as a war hero (or survivor) but rather towards an enigmatic figure in distant family history who had left no photographic record. Kirill introduced this figure as his great-great-grandfather, a refugee of Greek origin who fled Greece during the war with Turkey. In the absence of family stories or photographic references, this figure became for Kirill an ideal identity projection, featuring the romantic image of the freedom fighter.

This interest in pre-photographic family history allowed Kirill a form of escape from the over-determination of politically charged narratives of the Great Patriotic War circulating both in his family and in the larger public sphere. In this sense, it is a choice the meaning of which is established, at least partially, by what it is *not*. In other words, at a moment of intense politicization of the Soviet period in national memory, Kirill's choice was to embrace neither the hagiographic account of his grandfather, nor the melancholic saga of his mother. Notably, Kirill did not fully escape from the over-determined family and national memory discourses, since the figure of the exotic Greek forefather seemed to combine the features valued by Igor (agency and self-determination), and Irina (victimhood and innocence).[15] Still, placing his chosen ancestor at a significant historical remove, Kirill enjoyed a considerably greater freedom in relating to his exploits. Questions of innocence and responsibility or of the degree to which he could be a perpetrator of injustice, conceivable and potentially unsettling in reference to his less distant kin, seemed less pressing when projected backwards, into the distant era of the Greco-Turkish war. The scarcity of information available about the Greek forefather and the remoteness of his struggle thus likely made him a more, not less appealing figure to Kirill.

Conclusion

Any conversation about the past is a way of sifting through family stories and identifying their significant aspects. In our conversations, our interlocutors proposed, tried out and negotiated different models of what is of value and interest in their photographic collections and the family past. This suggests that browsing and commenting on family photographs is not a repeated mechanical process of imprinting or gradual erasure. In situations when alternative

models of interpreting the past exist in cultural and political memory, family photographs develop new meanings as traces of the past are uncovered and emplotted in accordance with new assumptions and available modalities of narration. What the notion of 'transmission of family memory' effectively conceals is that generations that take possession of the family archives are just as likely to articulate their reading of the photographs they inherit through the logic of distinction from the narrative modes available from their parents and grandparents or at least in dialogue with them. The notions of the 'banal' and 'historical' in every family archive thus remain open to renegotiation.

Notes

1 All names are pseudonyms. We addressed our older respondents using the conventional Russian formal address that includes first name and patronymic. In this chapter, for the ease of the reader, we will refer to our interlocutors by first name only.

2 This fieldwork was made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities/NCEEER, Williams College and by the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

3 Unlike the Second World War, the Great Patriotic War in Russian national memory starts in 1941, bracketing off the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet-Finnish war as unrelated to the Soviet war experience. This is done in service of the effort to keep the cult of the war free of any references to Stalin's repressive policies and to the Soviet pre- and post-war aggression, concentrating instead on the heroic victory (Dubin 2013: 19). The Soviet and Russian cult of the war has been the subject of analyses by Brandenberger (2009), Feretti (2005), Gudkov (2005), Kirschenbaum (2011), Kucherenko (2011), Norris (2007), Oushakine (2013), Tumarkin (1994), Wood (2011), and many others.

4 It is important to stress that White does not conflate this recognition with sheer relativism, noting specifically that he does not mean 'to say that we cannot distinguish between good and bad historiography, since we can always fall back on such criteria as responsibility to the rules of evidence, the relative fullness of narrative detail, logical consistency and the like to determine this issue' (1978: 97). This point is often lost on his critics and followers alike.

5 Konstantin Rokossovskii, Marshal of the Soviet Union and one of the most prominent Soviet military commanders from the Second World War.

6 See Catherine Merridale's (2006) meditation on the difficulties encountered by an oral historian attempting a departure from this almost obligatory modality when discussing the Second World War.

7 It is worth noting the irony here: Igor uses Yiddish slang for male genitals to prove his 'primordially Russian' upbringing.

8 Irina is talking about her great-grandparents (i.e. the parents of her Commissar grandfather) here. Yet, she uses the term 'grandparents' to refer to them, with the effect of shortening the generational distance between herself and them.

9 This was paradigmatically reflected in a MuzTV talk-show episode in which two college students, unaware of the term, associated the Holocaust with a brand of wall-paper glue. This episode later became the starting point for a documentary film *Holocaust – Is That Wall Paper Glue?* (2013), dir. M. Shakirov.

10 Documentaries that use found footage range from *The Film Unfinished* (2010, dir. Yael Hersonski) that explores the making of a Nazi-commissioned propaganda film in the Warsaw Ghetto to the controversial *Warsaw Uprising* (2014, dir. Jan Komasa), a narrative drama that draws on the recently discovered newsreel footage from the 1944 Warsaw Uprising (for more information, see http://warsawrising-thefilm.com/the-film/). The recently (re)discovered photographic archive of the Lodz Ghetto allows us to see the everyday life of the ghetto through the lens of Henryk Ross ('Memory Unearthed: Photography from the Lodz Ghetto', www.mfa.org/exhibitions/memory-unearthed), while the crowdsourced project on yellow-star houses in 1944 Budapest draws on family photographs and personal memories to spatially map the contours of Jewish life in the occupied city (www.yellowstarhouses.org).

11 On East European memory wars, see Blacker et al. (2013), Etkind (2012) and Rutten et al. (2013).

12 'Minkul't sosredotochitsia na podderzhke ekranizatsii klassiki i voenno-patrioticheskogo kino', http://kinote.info/articles/14355-minkult-sosredotochitsya-na-podderzhke-ekranizatsiy-klassiki-i-voenno-patrioticheskogo-kino (published 17 December 2014, accessed 19 December 2014).

13 See Oushakine (2013) for an insightful discussion of the affective labour done by historical re-enactment. The official site of the Ministry of Culture dedicated to the anniversary of the Second World War in 2015 lists a wide scale of commemorative activities initiated by the state. See http://www.may9.ru/.

14 For further information see cpacibodedu.ru. Last accessed 2 April 2017.

15 We are grateful to Silke Arnold-de Simine for this observation.

References

Assmann, A. (2010), 'Re-framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past', in K. Tilmnas, F. van Vree and J. Winter (eds), *Performing the Past Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, 35–50, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Baer, U. (2002), *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Blacker, U., A. Etkind and J. Fedor, eds (2013). *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brandenberger, D. (2009), 'A New Short Course? A.V. Filippov and the Russian State's Search for a "Usable Past"', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 10 (4): 825–33.

Dubin, B. (2013), 'Kollektivnaya Pamiat o Voine i Natsional'naia Identichnost v Segodniashnei Rossii', in *Simvoly – Instituty – Issledovania*, 17–24, Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing.
Etkind, A. (2012), *Remembering Katyn*, Cambridge-Malden, MA: Polity.
Feretti, M. (2005), 'Neprimirimaia Pamiat': Rossiia i Voina', *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, 2–3: 40–41. Available online: http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/fere8.html. Accessed 28 July 2017.
Gudkov, L. (2005), 'Pamiat' o Voine i Massovaia Identichnost' Rossiian', *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, 2–3: 40–41. Available online: http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/gu5.html. Accessed 27 July 2017.
Halbwachs, M. (1992), *On Collective Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Hirsch, M., ed. (1999), *The Familial Gaze*, Hanover: Dartmouth College.
Hirsch, M. and L. Spitzer (2006), 'What's Wrong with This Picture?: Archival Photographs in Contemporary Narratives', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 5 (2): 229–52.
Kirschenbaum, L. (2011), 'Introduction to the Special Issue: World War II in Soviet and Post-Soviet Memory', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38: 97–103.
Kucherenko, O. (2011), 'That'll Teach 'em to Love Their Motherland!: Russian Youth Revisit the Battles of World War II', *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, 12. Available online: http://pipss.revues.org/3866. Accessed 28 July 2017.
Langford, M. (2001), *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*, Montreal–Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
Merridale, C. (2006), *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945*, New York: Metropolitan Books.
Norris, S. (2007), 'Guiding Stars: The Comet-like Rise of the War Film in Putin's Russia: Recent World War II Films and Historical Memories', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 1 (2): 163–89.
Oushakine, S. (2013), 'Remembering in Public: On the Affective Management of History', *Ab Imperio*, 1: 269–302.
Rose, G. (2010), *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public, and the Politics of Sentiment*, London: Ashgate.
Rutten, E., J. Fedor and V. Zvereva, eds (2013), *Memory, Conflict and New Media*, London–New York: Routledge.
Slezkine, Y. (2004), *The Jewish Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Tagg, J. (2009), *The Disciplinary Frame. Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Tumarkin, N. (1994), *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, New York: Basic Books.
Ulitskaya, L. (2015), *Detstvo 45–53: A zavtra budet schast'e*, Moscow: AST.
White, H. (1978), 'The Historical Text as a Literary Artefact', in *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 81–100, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
White, H. (1992), 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth', in S. Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 37–53, Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press.
Wood, E. (2011), 'Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and World War II in Russia', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38: 172–200.