

THE POWER OF PERSUASION: REMEMBERING THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD
DURING THE THAW, 1958-1966

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ABSTRACT

Vadim John Haanstad: The Power of Persuasion: Remembering the Battle of Stalingrad during the Thaw, 1958-1966

(Under the direction of Donald J. Raleigh)

This essay examines how memoirists of the “thaw” period following Josef Stalin’s death in 1953 collaborated with the state to represent morale as a positive force that acted to persuade Red Army soldiers fighting the Wehrmacht at the Battle of Stalingrad in the justness of their cause. Morale also served as a counterbalance to the threat of violence associated with Stalinism. As a system that justified its rule using morally sanctioned language, the Soviet state desperately needed to revitalize itself after a brief crisis of legitimacy that followed de-Stalinization and the growth of a dissident movement. Although Stalinism presented coercive measures as an acceptable means of disciplining the population, de-Stalinization made it necessary to emphasize the use of persuasive methods in the process of molding good citizens. The Communist Party acted through high-ranking officers to articulate how the power of persuasion had motivated Soviet soldiers to achieve victory.

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No matter what your ideology may be, once you believe that you are in the possession of some infallible truth, you become a combatant in a religious war. There is nothing to prevent you from robbing, burning and slaughtering in the name of your truth, for you are doing it with a perfectly clear conscience—indeed the truth in your possession makes it your duty to pursue it with an iron logic and unwavering will. We held it with evangelical certainty and believed that whatever we did in its name was rendering a service to truth and the future happiness of our country and mankind.

— Milovan Djilas¹

After Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev finished delivering the general report of the Central Committee to the Twenty-second Congress of the Communist Party in October 1961, delegates gathered in the lobby of the recently completed Palace of Congresses in the Kremlin to make small talk and reminisce. Among them stood Pavel Ivanovich Batov, a former general of the Red Army and now deputy of the Supreme Soviet. Despite having attended five previously held party congresses, none of them brought back memories of the war with quite the same force as this one. It turned out that a sizable group of former officers and soldiers of the 65th Army recognized their general and soon gathered around Batov to remember the Great Patriotic War and to reflect on the present. A likely topic of their conversation dealt with the sharp increase in anti-Stalinist rhetoric heralded by the removal of Stalin's coffin from the mausoleum on Red Square after Lenin appeared in a vision to an old woman to inform her that he did not want to share his space with a man "who brought so much misfortune to our party."² The renaming of Stalingrad to Volgograd just eleven days after the congress, the very site where many of the soldiers assembled around Batov had fought and saw their comrades die, likely provoked a strong response. In fact, during the congress itself, one of them had already suggested that every

¹ Milovan Djilas, "Christ and the Commissar," in *Stalinism: Its Impact on Russia and the World*, ed. G.R. Urban (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 207.

² Quoted in William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 514-15.

veteran, as an example of “living history,” had the responsibility to “educate people on the basis of heroism and of experience of the war.”³ As these former “soldiers of the army” began their duties as “soldiers of the Party”⁴ following the end of the war, many of them connected the formative experiences of their lives to the war and its legacy. De-Stalinization threatened to undermine the sanctity of events connected to Stalin, memories that linked the past, present, and future of the many people who worked to create Communism. The efforts of the memoirists to “educate” the public involved the writing of memoirs that excised the legacy of Stalinist coercion from the public record and especially its connection to the Second World War.

Although Khrushchev’s speech in 1961 prompted Batov and many others to begin writing their memoirs, the authors examined in this essay got their start in 1958, on the fifteenth anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad. I end my investigation in 1966, the year before the leading Soviet military history journal signaled a turn toward a more conservative approach to the writing of memoirs by calling for “a high ideological standard,”⁵ which meant that the heroic past of the Soviet state needed to be praised while any outright criticism of Stalin would no longer be tolerated. The eight memoirs⁶ considered in this essay represent the most widely circulated works issued at the time with print runs of 100,000 or more, and those reviewed in *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, and the Red Army’s *Krasnaia zvezda* (Red Star). Former officers wrote most

³ P. I. Batov, *V pokhodakh i boiakh* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1962), 394.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A. Shimanskiĭ and M. Malakhov, “Za vysokiĭ ideĭnyi uroven’ voenno-memuarnoĭ literatury,” *Voenno-ist. zhurnal*, no. 7 (1967): 80.

⁶ I. K. Morozov, I. M. Loginov, and P. V. Ul’ev, ed., *Bitva za Volgu* (Stalingrad: Stalingradskoe kn. Izd-vo, 1958); V. I. Chuikov, *Nachalo puti* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1959); I. F. Afanas’ev, *Dom soldatskoĭ slavy* (Stalingrad: Stalingradskoe Knizhnoe izd-vo, 1960); I. Paderin, *Na glavnom napravlenii* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1960); A. I. Eremenko, *Stalingrad* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1961); Batov, *V pokhodakh i boiakh*; A. P. Bachurin, *Frontovye zapiski politrabotnika* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1962); I. P. Selishchev, *Volga v ognе* (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1963); A. I. Rodimtsev, *Liudi legendarnogo podviga* (Moskva: DOSAAF, 1964), A. I. Rodimtsev, *Na beregakh Mansanaresa i Volgi* (Petrozavodsk: Karel’skoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1966).

of the accounts. In spite of their many differences, morale forms the most common theme that unites these narratives. Morale during the war itself depended on two processes: persuasion and coercion. Even though both intended to motivate Soviet troops to fight and to die for the Motherland, coercion involved the physical application of violence, while persuasion aimed to convince the soldiers of the justness of their cause and instill patriotism in them through “political work,” by which I mean oral and printed propaganda. The threat of coercion sought to instill a sense of fear in the minds of the soldiers by reminding them of the violent measures taken by the state against cowards, traitors, panicmongers, and others who failed to obey their superiors. Political work carried out by Party appointees attached to all military units had the goal of mobilizing the patriotic spirit of Soviet soldiers. Oral agitation involved party meetings, mass rallies, and work with individual soldiers, while printed propaganda included the establishment of the Soviet Information Bureau on 24 June 1941 in order to streamline the delivery of information coming in from the frontlines through printed and broadcast media, the publication of mass fliers, posters (most notably a collection of posters organized by the TASS News Agency – “TASS Windows”), and even newspapers published at the front. This process of mobilizing the troops into battle was the main purpose of fostering morale during WWII.

Memoirists collaborated with the state during the Khrushchev period (1953-1964) to alter the meaning of morale in order to sustain the “moral economy of the gift.”⁷ I build on the work of historian Jeffrey Brooks who argued that the moral relationship of the Soviet state to its people depended on Stalin to dispense “gifts” in the form of public goods and services to the people in return for their participation in the Stalinist “performative culture” defined by “public

⁷ Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), xv-xvi.

displays of support” and the affirmation of the public values dictated by the state.⁸ Moral, rather than economic, incentives meant emphasis on the benevolent nature of the Soviet leadership that supposedly took care of its people in return for their loyalty and obeisance. Khrushchev’s “thaw” placed emphasis on freedom of expression and “sincerity” but a lack of an autonomous civil society and the reluctance of the political elite to democratize the country represented neither Stalinism nor true democratization. According to historian Stephen Bittner, “a universe of meaning was thrown into disarray, a process that was akin to the ‘cosmic reorganization’ that followed the collapse of communism.”⁹ Soldiers of the army who transitioned into Soviet politics represent the main subjects of this essay. Their memoirs exemplify the way the state intended the cult of the war to be “performed” in Soviet culture. Vasiliĭ Chuĭkov, Pavel Batov, and Andreĭ Eremenko served as deputies of the Supreme Soviet, and as soldiers of the Party they acted as intermediaries on behalf of the state who articulated the Party line in a language accessible to the general public. The moral economy of the Khrushchev period came under severe pressures following the publication of *Not by Bread Alone* by Vladimir Dudintsev in 1956, Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1962, and Konstantin Simonov’s *The Living and the Dead* that same year, as well as other works published in the literary journal *Novyi mir* (New World), which exposed corruption, provided an extremely cynical portrayal of Communist ideals, and, more importantly, vividly described the coercive application of brutal violence for the sake of attaining the political goals set by the state. In sum, the thaw represented a time when the Soviet belief system came under increased strain and permitted a much greater

⁸ Ibid., xv.

⁹ Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 12. For a historicization of the term de-Stalinization, see the Introduction to *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2-3.

engagement of the public in defining the Soviet project than was ever possible during Stalinism. How was the Soviet state able to continue managing its performative culture under these conditions? Why did mention of coercion remain absent from the memoirs written by Soviet veterans? What role did morale play in articulating the memory of the Battle of Stalingrad? And how did the state produce a commemorative culture in collaboration with the memoirists?

Memory and Wartime Stalingrad

My study is the first to analyze morale as a function of memory production that established the Battle of Stalingrad as a central aspect of the cult of World War II. In effect, I demonstrate how memoirists restructured the means by which this victory was won. In other words, in their accounts morale no longer depended on coercion to motivate and persuade soldiers to realize the goals set before them by their commanders and the Party. My aim is to demonstrate how certain truths served to enable the Communist Party to discursively reassert its dominant space within a morally sanctioned system. Authenticity projected by the dissidents during the thaw depended on the brutality of both the war and the Soviet system that forced “true heroes” to suffer in the purges of 1937 and through the interrogations of Stalin’s henchmen. Rather than search for truth and authenticity, I seek to understand how certain truths became authentic. I want to know how the Soviet state articulated its version of the “truth” through the agency of World War II veterans. I want to determine how memoirists employed the concept of morale as a mechanism of collective memory that served to establish their own “truth,” one that articulated persuasion as the dominant form of morale and also framed the discursive world that informed the cult of the Great Patriotic War.

Sites of memory, by which historian Jay Winter means “physical sites where commemorative acts take place,” depend on convincing a broader community of their significance, which presupposes their moralistic message.¹⁰ Sites of memory that do not evoke a collectively shared acknowledgement of their moral importance often remain in cultural and social obscurity (for example, one will strain to find any signs of commemorative rituals associated with the disastrous Russo-Japanese War in Russian society). The Battle of Stalingrad, however, represents a site of memory that made it *the* turning point in the war against Germany, both emotionally and strategically. I borrow my definition of collective memory from psychologist James Wertsch, who defines it as a form of mediated action “distributed between active agents . . . and the cultural tools—especially narrative texts—that they employ.” Second, collective memory is social in that the narratives employed in this process “always belong to, and hence reflect, a social context and history,” since they “bring with them a social position and perspective.” Finally, collective remembering is dynamic, “it undergoes change.”¹¹ Appreciating the subjective quality of the memoirs¹² used in this essay, I nonetheless stress their power to

¹⁰ Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch, ed., *Memory in Mind and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 252-53.

¹¹ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 172-73.

¹² Memoirs as a genre evoke much controversy in literary scholarship, since they share the same literary space with autobiography, fiction, and history. A relevant definition of memoir is given by Beth Holmgren in her introduction to a volume on Russian memoirs that she edited, *The Russian Memoir: History and Literature* (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 2003). Holmgren notes the authoritative voice that memoirists strive to take on in representing the “real” stages their lives had occupied in time and space. Irina Paperno chooses to combine memoirs with diaries in her examination of how they created a sense of a common community and identity for the Russian intelligentsia. See her *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). Aside from literary scholars, historians have recently delved into memoirs and diaries for insights on Soviet subjectivity. The most fruitful of these is Jochen Hellbeck’s *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Hellbeck is well aware of the narrative changes that some of the diarists he examines attempted to make in the 1990s as they prepared the diaries they wrote in the 1930s for publication. See *Revolution on My Mind*, 220-21. Anna Krylova, on the other hand, does not pay attention to the fact that the memoirs she examines cannot be separated from the sociocultural environment in which they were written. She does not explain what role ideology played in influencing the authors who wrote them. See her

create a sense of collective identity for the broader Soviet public. I view them as voices of collective remembering, as cultural tools that reflect a specific sociocultural context, in this case Khrushchev's "thawed" Soviet Union.

While the current state of scholarship on morale¹³ in the Red Army during WWII emphasizes coercion, it neglects persuasion as an equally legitimate category of analysis.¹⁴ In addition to explaining how the Soviet understanding of wartime morale changed during the thaw, when World War II veterans were finally allowed to publish their memoirs,¹⁵ I also seek to explore what persuasion and coercion meant during the war itself from its start in 1941 to the end of the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943. In order to accomplish this task, I rely on two sources published in 1996 and 2000, respectively: *Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Russkii arkhiv* (The Great Patriotic [War]: Russian Archive)¹⁶ and *Stalingradskaia epopeia: Materialy NKVD SSR i voennoi tsenzury iz Tsentral'nogo arkhiva FSB RF* (The Stalingrad Epic: Materials of the NKVD

Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹³ Several recent histories have focused explicitly on morale to explore soldiers' "combat motivations and psychological coping strategies." See Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 141. Also see Jonathan Fennell, *Combat and Morale in the North African Campaign: The Eighth Army and the Path to El Alamein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ For the most significant study of the political work conducted in the trenches during the war see Katherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006). Merridale makes the first effort to examine the role of the Main Political Administration of the Red Army (GlavPU RKKA), and the many responsibilities political workers occupied at the front. Although Karel Berkhoff does not examine the effort to affect the behavior of the soldiers on the frontlines, for a close analysis of the overall importance of propaganda in mobilizing the Soviet population, see his *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Whereas the cult of the Great Patriotic War represented Stalin as the father figure and mastermind of all strategic decisions made during his lifetime, the thaw period emphasized the contribution of the Party and high-ranking officers to the war and saw the growth of memoir literature "from a trickle in 1956-57 to a flood by 1967," see Seweryn Bialer, ed., *Stalin and His Generals: Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 16-18.

¹⁶ V. A. Zolotarev et al., ed., *Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Russkii arkhiv*, vol. 6 (Moskva: TERRA, 1996).

of SSR and Military Censorship from the Central Archive of the FSB of RF).¹⁷ My interrogation of these sources helps me explore how *the thaw period articulated persuasion as a way to offset the memory of coercion linked with Stalinism*. The most widely published memoirs during the thaw supported the moralizing discourse established by the Soviet state that gave priority to political work while drawing on the wartime experiences of the memoirists who wrote them. In order to convince their audience, veterans cited archival information and relied on their wartime experience to frame their narratives while still managing to keep certain topics largely in silence, for example, issues of cowardice and desertion.

During the Second World War, the Main Political Administration of the Red Army (GlavPU RKKA) was placed in charge of political work on the Eastern Front. The goal of this activity was to mobilize and uphold the morale of the Soviet soldiers through coercion and persuasion. Coercion did not necessarily result in direct application of violence, since the threat alone disciplined the troops through fear. The purges of the 1930s, sustained threats of state violence, and the general militarization of public life created a system largely based on fear. Commissars struggled to find a balance between coercion and persuasion as an effective way of motivating Red Army soldiers. By 1941 coercion had long been a part of Soviet life and did not require an explanation within the Soviet discursive sphere, whereas the meaning of persuasion still lacked a clearly defined space within the Stalinist performative culture.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ia. F. Pogoniĭ, ed., *Stalingradskaia epopeia: Materialy NKVD SSR i voennoĭ tsenzury iz Tsentral'nogo arkhiva FSB RF* (Moskva: Zvonitsa-MG, 2000).

¹⁸ Soviet authorities divided their actions into two categories: soft-line and hard-line. Soft-line policies and institutions dealt with the masses by positively reinforcing the bonds between the state and the people through various cultural and propagandizing efforts. Hard-line institutions “specialized in maintaining Bolshevik vigilance and ensuring the implementation and preservation of core Bolshevik policies and values.” See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 21-22. My understanding of coercion places it as a hard-line policy, while persuasion remained a soft-line policy and therefore secondary to coercive policies and institutions (i.e., the NKVD).

In his *Pedagogical Poem* published in 1935, one of the founders of Soviet pedagogy, Anton Makarenko (1888-1939), provides an indispensable perspective on Stalinist coercion and discipline. According to Dobrenko, Makarenko treated education as an elaboration of discipline: “discipline is an end in itself; its goal is voluntary submission and the acceptance of coercion as an internal impulse toward the required action. In other words, the goal of discipline is self-discipline: complete manageability via reproduction of the memory of coercion.”¹⁹ The threat of coercion constantly reminds the individual to discipline the self, thus removing the very need of the state to monitor the individual. The threat of coercion also defines discipline, and discipline shapes Soviet society: “Discipline is freedom. We made the revolution for that [*sic*], so that our personality might be free, but the form of our society is discipline.”²⁰ Unfortunately for the state, the memory of coercion did not dispense with the need to apply coercive practices to discipline troops during the Second World War. Coercion made Stalinism a world where Gulags, purges, and torture reigned supreme. It also made it easy to understand why the NKVD (The People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs), and the physical violence associated with it, became the dominant force behind the brutal energy that pushed Red Army soldiers to fight to the end.

On 20 July 1941, Stalin called for the need, using an “iron fist,” to “inculcate revolutionary order, discipline, and ruthlessly punish panicmongers, cowards, defeatists, deserters, and all those who, of their own will, leave their positions without the order of a higher authority.”²¹ While political workers had the responsibility to ensure “revolutionary order,” they did not have an efficient means to apply the iron fist of discipline until Stalin issued the notorious “not a step back!” directive № 227. This decree demanded that “panicmongers and

¹⁹ Makarenko quoted in Dobrenko, *Political Economy*, 128.

²⁰ Ibid., 130.

²¹ Zolotarev, *Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, 50.

cowards must be exterminated on the spot.”²² Extermination consisted of creating blocking detachments that shadowed the advancing troops and remained in the rear to prevent any units from retreating, opening fire on anyone who did so without orders. One report of a Special Section acting along the Stalingrad Front indicated that, from 1 August to 15 October 1942, blocking detachments apprehended 140,755 soldiers who fled from the frontlines. Out of this number, 3,980 were arrested, 1,189 shot, and 2,961 sent to penal companies and battalions, while 131,094 servicemen were returned to their units or sent to transit locations to await further instructions.²³ These figures demonstrate that blocking detachments shot only .8% of the soldiers they saw fleeing the battlefield. These numbers likely mean that coercion often acted through fear instead of the direct application of brutal force. In the vast majority of cases, the commanders of these detachments returned the withdrawing units to their original positions, simply fired threateningly over their heads, or propped up the retreating units by joining them in the fight.

Nonetheless, many soldiers suffered simply for voicing uncertainty that the Soviet Union would be victorious. For example, an NKVD report dating to 16 January 1943 documents the arrest of one Plotnikov for saying: “We are incapable of fighting, we will not win. Victory will belong to the Germans.”²⁴ The fact that Plotnikov also had volunteered to serve with the Whites during the Civil War did not bode well for him. In general, panic and cowardice did not represent a widespread phenomenon. In the period from 1 October 1942 to 1 February 1943, only 203 “cowards and panicmongers” were arrested along the Don Front, yet most of them—

²² Pogoniĭ, *Stalingradskaia epopeia*, 443.

²³ *Ibid.*, 230.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 383.

importantly—belonged to the 62nd Army fighting in Stalingrad.²⁵ Political officers (commissars) together with commanders bore direct responsibility for any signs of treason within their units, or for giving unauthorized orders to retreat.

In August 1942, a report on the reactions of the soldiers and commanders to Order № 227 compiled by the Special Sections attached to the 21st, 57th, 63rd, and 1st armies of the Stalingrad Front indicates a range of views, but mostly positive. The report notes that the order increased both the fighting spirit of the servicemen and their belief in victory.²⁶ One soldier told his comrades that “this order should put an end to those unstable people who do not yet understand our just cause and, in a panic, run from the battlefield to protect their hides, dishonor[ing] their comrades and the entire Red Army.”²⁷ Many believed that this order would put an end to any cowards or panicmongers (including high-ranking officers) who try to retreat or flee from the battlefield.

Others, however, thought that the order contributed to desertion, believing that the Germans would spare the lives of Soviet soldiers. For instance, a military doctor serving in the 21st Army expressed what must have resonated among many soldiers: “during retreat a blocking detachment will detain those retreating, but the latter, withdrawing with weapons, will fire on the blocking detachments. [They] will try to shoot as many as possible, but in the meantime the Germans will be capturing territory.”²⁸ While Soviet soldiers killed each other, the Germans would advance deeper into friendly territory, thus nullifying the very purpose of the order. This perspective coincided with a number of other more strongly worded negative responses. One

²⁵ Ibid., 403-04.

²⁶ Ibid., 183.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 186.

junior sergeant was recorded saying that “the creation of penal companies and battalions in addition to blocking detachments will not improve the situation, since the German has broadened his success and will advance further, but as for us, we will continue to retreat as we have always done.”²⁹ Some soldiers did not get the details of Order № 227 because political workers failed to propagandize it properly, thus leading to confusion and misunderstandings. Overall, coercion likely generated as many deserters as heroes, since death at the hands of their own troops in situations of retreat certainly did not appeal to many soldiers.

In a macabre twist, such ruthlessness was intended to coexist with benevolence. Stalin’s July 1941 order also specified the need “to reward and popularize the best fighters and commanders, to cultivate [*vospityvat*] among the troops courage, bravery, composure, initiative, quick wittedness; to cultivate a contempt for death in the name of victory over the enemy.”³⁰ Within the military, politruks represented the Communist Party at the company level and answered directly to regimental commissars. They were political officers whose job was to mold soldiers into politically conscious members of Soviet society with clear loyalties to the Party.³¹ In the words of an article published in *Pravda*, a politruk “mobilizes the spiritual powers of the fighters toward an unyielding steadfastness in defense, toward an unstoppable impulse to advance. . . . [and] instills within them a belief in the victory of the Soviet armed forces.”³² While military commanders had the responsibility for tactical and technical aspects of combat operations, politruks led the charge in battle as the “true sons” of the Bolshevik Party and “first” soldiers, educating others by their “personal example” in word and deed. Politruks also had to

²⁹ Ibid., 187.

³⁰ Zolotarev, *Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, 50.

³¹ Merridale describes the functions of the politruks as ranging from that of a propagandist to “army chaplain, military psychiatrist, and school prefect.” *Ivan’s War*, 63.

³² “Politruk – dusha roty,” *Pravda*, 22 March, 1942.

make sure that soldiers “were well fed, had an opportunity to take a bath, change their clothes, and prevent interruptions in their contact with family members.”³³ Political work and the effort to cultivate, or instill within the army a sense of Soviet patriotism coincided with the responsibility to take care of the soldier’s basic needs as an outcome of the importance given to the overall maintenance of morale and its mobilization by political workers.

The important place occupied by morale finds reflection in NKVD reports, which suggest that political work had a positive effect on many soldiers serving at the Stalingrad Front.³⁴ A briefing released in August 1942 indicates that out of 67,380 letters³⁵ written by soldiers and examined by the military censors for the period from 15 July to 1 August, most (64,392) contain messages of a “domestic character,” in addition to 1,333 positive and 125 negative responses. Positive meant that “many letters reflect a healthy politico-moral state of the servicemen, a high patriotic spirit, loyalty to the Motherland, and readiness to continue the fight with fascism until the complete destruction of the German army.”³⁶ Another report sent to the NKVD organs of the Stalingrad Front by the military censor comprised an analysis of 74,667 letters sent by soldiers of the 66th Army. Most of these had largely positive—patriotic—observations. One soldier wrote that “our slogan is ‘not a step back’ and we will carry it out, this is demanded from us by the Motherland, this is demanded from us by the narkom [People’s Commissar] com. [comrade]

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Although Merridale acknowledges this emphasis on persuasion, she dismisses its effectiveness too readily. *Ivan’s War*, 125.

³⁵ The authors of some of these letters may have concealed information from their friends and relatives either due to their awareness of censorship or simply because they did not want their loved ones to worry. Nonetheless, the presence of large quantities of both negative and positive responses indicates that many did not feel these pressures.

³⁶ Pogoniĭ, *Stalingradskaia epopeia*, 164.

Stalin.”³⁷ Others give examples of their participation in political rallies, where oaths were given to Stalin and the Motherland, and of the general solidarity among the various peoples of the Soviet state. Of course, positive commentary does not represent the entirety of views present among the soldiers of the Stalingrad Front. A diary (confiscated by the NKVD) written by an assistant politruk exemplifies some of the more dire conditions, and loss of morale, among the soldiers. The entry for 20 September 1942 reads: “Absurd [political] lessons, black [filthy] work, and starvation rations bring fighters to extremes, to desertion. Today again two fled. And how many others are there like this, who are waiting for the right chance [to escape]. Nobody believes in victory anymore. Thus, we remain meekly and timidly silent.”³⁸ In many cases low morale generally reflected poor performance on the battlefield, and did not necessarily coincide with the resentment of Stalin or Soviet politics.

The incongruity between persuasion and coercion finally received attention from Stalin on 4 October 1941 in the “Order on the facts of the substitution of educational work with punitive measures.” The order gave several examples of excessive use of violence taken by commissars and commanders, seemingly without reason. For example, a lieutenant serving in the 228th Infantry Regiment shot a soldier with his Nagant revolver without giving any cause. A colonel by the name of Sushchenko shot a junior sergeant because he did not climb off of a car quickly enough due to an injured hand. According to Stalin, these cases demonstrated that:

- a) the method of persuasion wrongly recedes to the background, while the method of punitive measures in regard to subordinates came to occupy first place;
- b) daily educational work within units in a number of cases is replaced with swearing, punitive measures, and physical abuse;
- c) the method of clarification and conversation of commanders, commissars, and political workers with Red Army men is abandoned; and the explanation of questions not understood by Red Army men is often replaced with shouting, swearing, and rudeness;

³⁷ Ibid., 220.

³⁸ Ibid., 215.

...

e) forgotten is the fact that the use of punitive measures is the last resort, allowed only in cases of direct disobedience and open resistance in conditions of combat or in cases of flagrant violation of discipline and order by those who conscientiously impede the orders of the command authorities.³⁹

Accordingly, Stalin ordered that the “method of persuasion”⁴⁰ should be reestablished. Despite this emphasis on persuasion, Stalin did not reject coercion. In the directive, he crossed out the less ambiguous phrase “violations of disciplinary rights” and replaced it with “excesses of authority” on the part of individual commanders and commissars toward their subordinates.⁴¹ In other words, force was permitted as long as it did not exceed a certain level. This order is evocative of Stalin’s March 1930 *Pravda* article “Dizzy with Success,” which shifted culpability for collectivization and dekulakization of the countryside onto lower party officials who supposedly implemented these policies with excessive zeal.⁴² Morale played a significant role in the Soviet attempt to motivate Red Army soldiers to fight, but coercion and persuasion represented contradictory approaches that simply could not exist in the kind of symbiotic relationship that the leadership of the Party and GlavPU RKKA imagined. The effort to discipline through coercion had an already well established discursive sphere (as exemplified by the *Pedagogical Poem*), while the persistent need to clamp down on the excessive use of force

³⁹ V. A. Zolotarev et al., ed., *Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Russkii arkhiv*, vol. 2(2) (Moskva: TERRA, 1997), 108-09.

⁴⁰ GlavPU RKKA released a number of orders paralleling those of the NKO (People’s Commissar of Defense). Thus, directive #248 issued on 4 October 1941 cites Stalin’s order and emphasizes that “politorgans should take all measures toward an immediate and decisive turn . . . toward educational work that organizes and inspires masses of fighters and commanders for the destruction of the hated enemy.” Zolotarev, *Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, vol. 6, 77. Another order issued on 7 December 1941 reiterates Stalin’s, adding that political workers still do not understand the need to “fight for the correct combination of methods of persuasion with methods of coercion,” while emphasizing that “the greatest danger . . . is the loss, by certain of our people, of the prospects of fighting, belief in our victory.” Ibid., 88-89.

⁴¹ Zolotarev, *Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, vol. 2(2), 108.

⁴² Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 169.

demonstrates that persuasion remained an obscure concept in the age of Stalinism. The thaw would change that.

Memoirists and Stalingrad

Memoirists of World War II could start writing the story of their experience only during the thaw, when a multitude of voices were allowed to join the official discursive market place. As historian A. M. Samsonov explained in 1963, Stalin's cult of personality negatively impacted histories of the Battle of Stalingrad by emphasizing the exclusive role played by Stalin in ensuring this victory, thus excluding the other participants who helped shaped these events, most of whom did not start publishing their memoirs until 1958.⁴³ The authors of these narratives emphasize the importance of passing on the memory of the Battle of Stalingrad to future generations, the need to honor the memory of their fallen comrades, and place themselves at the center of the events that resulted in one of the most celebrated Soviet victories of the Great Patriotic War. Memoirists were part of a larger community, a network of veterans who traced the bonds of their friendship to the Battle of Stalingrad. These bonds left a prominent trace in the memoirs themselves, a connection that unites their past and present. The fraternal bonds they formed also reflected the fact that the authors of these memoirs were men who represented their hegemonic status in society by way of the cultural tools they created. Memoirs written by high-ranking officers dominated the discursive space allocated to writings on the cult of the Second World War and as such these tools of memory production sustained the leading role⁴⁴ of these

⁴³ A. M. Samsonov, "Izuchenie istorii velikoi bitvy na Volge," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 1 (January 1963): 54-56.

⁴⁴ The memoirists established masculinity as the defining feature of Communists who won their battles guided by the positive impact that morale had on them. This meant that any signs of weakness had to give way to the morally uncompromised image of a soldier willing to fight and die for his cause. Memoirists were men who classified the ideal soldier as both a male and a Communist. As literary critic Katerina Clark argues, the Soviet discursive conception of consciousness signified "actions or political activities that are controlled, disciplined, and

men (and by complicity, the leading status of men in general) in society. As “exemplars”⁴⁵ of hegemonic masculinity, these men articulated the memory of Stalingrad by asserting a dominant space of power within the discursive universe that defined the cult of the war.

In their memoirs, authors did not simply retell the past, but also included information on the path the lives of their fellow comrades took after the war, thereby suggesting a fraternity of men that stuck together. In a memoir by Pavel Batov published in 1962, the author mentions at least 270 soldiers with whom he has served in the war. Batov recalls with particular sadness the death of lieutenant general Pavel Shvydkoï in 1961. According to Batov, Shvydkoï proved himself during the war as a military engineer, a true *bogatyr*’ (the warrior knight of Russian folklore) whose mighty visage did not hinder his instincts for his craft long after the war’s end.⁴⁶ Former politruk A. P. Bachurin similarly recalls meeting his former commander Mikhail Morozov who became a party secretary of a factory on the eve of the Twenty-second Party Congress in 1961. Bachurin informs the reader of his attempts to locate his former comrades, who now serve in various capacities as soldiers of the party, either as political functionaries such as Morozov or as Stakhanovites who over-fulfill their work quotas by as much as 300 percent.⁴⁷

guided by politically aware bodies,” see *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 15. Within this world, persuasion helped memoirists construct conscious Soviet warriors by way of political work. The meaning of what it meant to be a *bogatyr*’ (the warrior knight of Russian folklore) now merged with a clearly political identity, a conscious understanding of the need to support and defend the Motherland and the Party. The power of persuasion consisted in its ability to mold men into Communists. This model depended both on the marginalization of the “weak” men—cowards, deserters, and panicmongers—and the placement of women in secondary positions of power, which defined their military roles as nurses, telephone operators, as well as a limited part in combat. The women in these narratives are always limited by their own weakness: either physical (small hands can pull only so much weight) or emotional (men do not cry in battle).

⁴⁵ Connell notes that “the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity are [not] always the most powerful people. They may be exemplars, such as film actors, or even fantasy figures, such as film characters.” R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 79.

⁴⁶ Batov, *V pokhodakh i boiakh*, 15, 42.

⁴⁷ Bachurin, *Frontovye zapiski politrabotnika*, 107-08.

These heroes continue to serve the cause of communism even after the war, establishing their mettle as legitimate sons of the Party, a process for which the memoirs provided an ideal format.

Although Nina Tumarkin and literary scholar Lazar Lazarev examined a large and undifferentiated group of memoirists as part of “spontaneous de-Stalinization” during the thaw,⁴⁸ my examination of strong authority figures—mainly high-ranking *male* officers—leads me to conclude that at least this cross section of memoir writers represented the most qualified memoirists in official discourse. A highly selective minority of the soldiers who fought in the war fulfilled the role of spokesmen, and held a monopoly on the collective truth of the wartime experience.⁴⁹ Soviet military historian I. Prochko, author of a review article published in the *Military-History Journal* entitled “Memoir Literature of The Great Patriotic War,” emphasized that the

especially important meaning of memoir literature . . . lies in the fact that the remembrances of what they have lived through and experienced are presented, as a rule, by officers, generals, admirals, and marshals of the Soviet Armed Forces, under whose belts lie many years of military service, great knowledge, and experience training and preparing armies during peacetime and leading combat actions and operations in wartime.⁵⁰

According to Prochko, the first precondition of writing good war memoirs is their basis in fact (truth). In general, as “living” documents, memoirs (and the still living memoirists) capture the experiences of eyewitnesses who filled in the blank spots present in documenting the war, providing information that substituted for the missing military briefs and other documents lost in

⁴⁸ Lazar Lazarev, “Russian Literature on the War and Historical Truth,” in *World War 2 and the Soviet People*, ed. John Garrard and Carol Garrard (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 32. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living And The Dead: The Rise And Fall Of The Cult Of World War II In Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 110-11.

⁴⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 212.

⁵⁰ I. Prochko, “Memuarnaia literatura o Velikoī Otechestvennoī voīne,” *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* no. 5 (1961), 96.

combat.⁵¹ This process reflects what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu termed the *oracle effect*: “the trick which consists in producing both the message and the interpretation of the message, in creating the belief that ‘*je est un autre*’, that the spokesperson, a simple symbolic substitute of the people, is really the people in the sense that everything he says is the truth and life of the people.”⁵² High-ranking officers served as spokesmen whose authority to speak for others consisted of their possessing the necessary information and overall knowledge of an entire theater of war that also endowed them with the power to narrate the “truth and life” of their soldiers.

The connection between these leading men and the memory of the Great Patriotic War also received attention from Prochko. Far from representing spontaneity, memoirists clearly recognized that the message they crafted influenced the way the Soviet public understood this formative event. As Prochko put it, “the publication of every new book of war memoirs – is a joy to all those who love military history, who are actively interested in the heroic past of our Motherland, for whom the immortal deeds of the Soviet warriors are endlessly valuable.”⁵³ Memoirists had a responsibility to their readers. They had to prove that the memories they expressed reflected reality. To accomplish this task, memoirists went to the archives and either solicited or received information from other veterans in the form of letters or interviews. General Vasiliĭ Chuĭkov, the former commander of the 62nd Army that fought in Stalingrad, finally clarified the fate of one of the battalions of the 62nd Army thanks to the help of a fellow veteran who decided to contact Chuĭkov after reading his first memoir, *Armia massovogo geroizma* (The

⁵¹ Ibid., 95.

⁵² Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 211-12.

⁵³ Prochko, “Memuarnaia literatura,” 102.

Army of Mass Heroism).⁵⁴ After exchanging letters, Chuikov met Anton Dragan in the summer of 1958. Dragan informed him that, far from being destroyed, a good number of the soldiers survived; it turned out that a traitor was responsible for falsely reporting the destruction of the battalion.⁵⁵ Andrei Eremenko, the former commander of both the Southeastern and Stalingrad Army Groups, includes in his memoir many of the orders he issued to the troops, as well as multiple excerpts from letters written by enemy soldiers that were captured by the Red Army during the war.⁵⁶ These sources represent the conscious effort on the part of the memoirists to justify the validity of their statements and their authority as spokesmen. Just like Prochko, memoirists clearly recognized the need to convince the readers of the reality presented in the narratives by avoiding obvious misrepresentations, but this did not mean that they exposed everything. At the same time, their relative autonomy from the state is reflected not only in their efforts to highlight the memory of their comrades, but also in the process of exaggerating their own role as officers and leading men of the Party, thus emphasizing the many sides of “spontaneous de-Stalinization.”

Their role as men and the claim they place on their right to express their memories finds reflection in the memoirs themselves. General Aleksandr Rodimtsev explained his reason for writing a memoir by citing a letter he wrote together with eight other veterans to *Red Star*, which they addressed to other soldiers of the Great Patriotic War. Entitled “Our fatherly duty,” it lists a number of things that veterans should do to ideologically educate the youth: “[write a] sketch about a hero of war in a newspaper, [make a] speech on the radio, . . . [tell a] story about a little

⁵⁴ Chuikov, *Armiia massovogo geroizma: Iz zapisok o boevom puti 62-ĭ armii* (Moskva: Izd-vo Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1958).

⁵⁵ Chuikov, *Nachalo puti*, 131-41.

⁵⁶ Eremenko, *Stalingrad* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1961).

known exploit.”⁵⁷ But, more than this, Rodimtsev and others recalled how they asked their wives in the letters they sent home before battle to make their sons “true patriots of their Motherland.”⁵⁸ And now that they have returned, the veterans are happily aware “that our fierce youth became not only history studied in schools, but also an example of selfless service to the Motherland, to which our sons compare themselves.”⁵⁹ This clearly masculine encoding of their duty to their sons and to the larger Soviet public also reflects the right of these memoirists to express the memory of their days in power. This need to ideologically educate the future sons of the Communist Party based on the history of the Great Patriotic War represents a powerful desire on the part of the veterans for future generations to remember their past, but also their continuous duty to the Soviet state as soldiers of the Party.

Newspaper reviews published during the thaw legitimize “the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group”⁶⁰ by emphasizing the leading role played by memoirists in saving Soviet society. The review of Batov’s *V pokhodakh i boiakh* (During Campaigns and Battles) published in *Izvestiia* clearly establishes a fraternal bond between the people and the Red Army. The reviewer notes that “the author uses convincing examples to show that the power of our army lies in the familial (*krovnoi*) and unbreakable connection with the people. . . . The entire book tells the reader: . . . the Soviet people believed [in the Red Army] and their belief was not in vain.”⁶¹ The review of Eremenko’s *Stalingrad* published in *Pravda* explicitly marks the dominant role

⁵⁷ E. Savitskiĭ et al., “Nash otsovskii dolg,” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, September 11, 1964.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Connell uses the term *marginalization* “to refer to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups.” At the same time, “marginalization is always relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group.” *Masculinities*, 80-81.

⁶¹ Petr Vershigora, “Stranitsy slavy,” *Izvestiia*, February 26, 1963.

occupied by these men in Soviet society by linking Eremenko directly to Nikita Khrushchev, who served as a member of the Military Council during the Battle of Stalingrad. The reviewer writes that “multiple pages of A. I. Eremenko’s book tell with great warmth about the work of N. S. Khrushchev on the front, [he] provides colorful episodes that show how, in a difficult combat environment, Nikita Sergeevich decisively and definitively threw aside anything that did not help the cause and supported everything that facilitated a quick advance toward the final goal.”⁶² Eremenko did not limit himself to praising Khrushchev. He used this personal connection to promote his own authority as a commander. For example, Eremenko falsely takes credit for a plan of the Soviet response to an attempt of the Germans to break the encirclement of their armies at Stalingrad, silencing any possible rejection of his version of the events by the very virtue of the fact that Eremenko has friends in high places.⁶³ A review of Chuikov’s *Nachalo puti* (The Start of the Journey) also emphasizes the masculine identity of the memoirists and the importance of their memoirs to the wider Soviet community:

Colorful recollections of the former combatants, celebrated commanders, Heroes of the Soviet Union, create deep impressions on the young boys and girls, help them to even better comprehend the greatness of the deeds accomplished by their fathers and brothers. These books teach the Soviet man how to honestly and selflessly serve the Motherland, how to fulfill his civic duty, to be vigilant, and to know how to love one’s friends and hate one’s enemies.⁶⁴

This review, published in the journal *Molodoi kommunist* (Young Communist), draws attention to the need of any good memoir to teach young Communists the core experience that shaped Soviet identity. This experience needed to clearly mark and separate friends and enemies. And although cowards and traitors make an occasional appearance in the memoirs, Red Army soldiers

⁶² I. Rukhle, “Novye knigi: Stalingrad,” *Pravda*, June 24, 1961.

⁶³ For details on this episode see Bialer, *Stalin and His Generals*, 26-27.

⁶⁴ N. Baranov, “O vremeni i o sebe,” *Molodoi kommunist* no. 2 (1961): 124.

presented in these narratives demonstrate an overwhelming sense of just and selfless service in the name of the Motherland. In order for the “deeds accomplished by their fathers and brothers” to reflect greatness, memoirists employed persuasion to explain how the Communist Party motivated and mobilized its citizens for war. As spokesmen, memoirists used their power to articulate the experience of a just war. The Great Patriotic War could not have had its allure of justness if the memoirists revealed the entire truth about the violence used to mobilize Red Army soldiers.

The “living documents” written by memoirists reflect both the Socialist Realist intention to aesthetically transform reality⁶⁵ and their personal motivations. Memoirs intended to demonstrate the psychological effectiveness of persuasion on the soldiers as a nonviolent and morally unambiguous motivational method. Memoirists presented the effectiveness of persuasion on the psychological make-up of their heroes. Qualities such as perseverance, steadfastness, courage, bravery, and others all resulted from the positive effect that political work had on the soldiers. This characterized the very conscious effort on the part of memoirists to shape public perceptions of the Great Patriotic War as a morally unambiguous memory. These highly placed men desired to create narratives that placed them and their fellow veterans within a tightly-knit

⁶⁵ Memoirs reflect the desires of their authors and the state to keep the war as a topic of a moralizing discourse. This discourse also highlights the fact that the thaw did not scrap the most insidious system of socialization present in the Soviet Union: the artistic canon known as Socialist Realism, the main purpose of which was to aesthetically transform reality. In the words of literary critic Evgeny Dobrenko, “all reality outside of Socialist Realism was but the wilderness of everyday life, waiting to be rendered fit to be read and interpreted,” see *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 4. According to Katerina Clark, the thaw did not end the production of Socialist reality: “The great traditions of Socialist Realism were still largely intact; the new age merely demanded certain new tropes and adjustments in the master plot,” *The Soviet Novel*, 212.

community⁶⁶ of heroes not associated with the memory of coercion so closely linked with the atrocities committed during Stalinism.

Morale and Persuasion

As a result of the denunciation of Stalinist “excesses” under Khrushchev, persuasion became the acceptable way to interpret the work conducted by the political administration of the Red Army during the war. Two manuals published for political workers published during the thaw, *Moral’no-politicheskiĭ faktor v sovremennoi voĭne* (The Politico-Moral Factor in Modern Warfare) and *Ideologicheskaia rabota KPSS na fronte (1941-1945 gg.)* (The Ideological Work of the KPSS at the Front [1941-1945]), reflect the official reconceptualization of the work done by the political apparatus of the Soviet military away from practices associated with coercion. *The Politico-Moral Factor in Modern Warfare* provides a theoretical framework that intended to teach political workers the proper meaning of morale during the thaw. *The Ideological Work of the KPSS at the Front (1941-1945)* complements the theoretical presentation of morale by serving as a history of the political work conducted by the Party during the war itself. These texts established a new discourse that signified Stalingrad and the Great Patriotic War as a source of moral victory and success of the Communist Party in motivating its people by winning their hearts and minds—persuasively. Memoirs mirror the official template by presenting persuasion to the Soviet public as a catalyst that shaped and mobilized Red Army soldiers. As soldiers of the Party, memoirists represented the wishes of the state and framed persuasion as the defining feature of morale, thus representing the officially sanctioned boundaries of the performative culture that marked the moral economy of the thaw.

⁶⁶ For an exploration of the close networks that formed among Soviet veterans following the war, see Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941-1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

The Politico-Moral Factor in Modern Warfare defines morale and the “moral powers of the people and army” as the “condition of the spirit of the fighting masses – the desire of the people and armies to fight for the goals of the war that started, their belief in victory, steadfastness in the fighting, the determination to endure all trials and difficulties of war time.”⁶⁷

The link between morale and morality intentionally implies a broader connection to societal values and mores, since the sociohistorical conditions of a country determine the readiness of the soldiers to fight for it. The overall spiritual motivation that contributes to a positive outcome in battle includes both “the purely moral stimuli. . . [as well as] ideological and political stimuli.”⁶⁸

Thus, strong morale depends on both the economic—the objective conditions that reflect the potential of the country to supply the army with weaponry and other material goods—and the political conditions present in the country. “The moral powers of the people and the army grow by virtue of a skillful party line, a thought out pedagogical system [*sisteme vospitaniia*], the mastery and experience of the military command, or by success in the process of military combat.”⁶⁹ The Communist Party affects the entire existence of the soldiers in the army, and understands the *military as an organism* that depends on moral inspiration, just as much as it does on physical training and good weaponry. Any understanding of morale, from this point of view, involves a series of elements: “the political views and convictions of the people, their societal feelings (class solidarity, love of the Motherland, hatred of her enemies, etc.), as well as a series of psychological traits of the people, such as their will [the determination to win at all

⁶⁷ V. G. Zhuravkov, B. A. Belyĭ, and I. V. Maryganov, ed., *Moral'no-politicheskiĭ faktor v sovremennoi voĭne* (Moskva: Voennoe izd-vo Ministerstva Oborony Soiuza SSR, 1958), 7, footnote 1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

costs], specific emotions, habits.”⁷⁰ This understanding of morale presents its development as a function of political and military pedagogics,⁷¹ which involve the cultivation of political consciousness together with passionate feelings and a stern character, all existing in harmony.⁷² It is in fact the strength of political ideas that guides the morally conscious soldiers and officers to perform unbelievable feats of bravery and heroism.

Political work occupied a central place in this conceptualization of morale as a force that enabled soldiers to fight and endure the hardships of war. But how was the state to achieve a high “ideological matureness” of the servicemen? “Our methods of hardening warriors politically is based on the principle of organic unity of combat and political preparedness.”⁷³ These methods involved both education and professional training. Professional training dealt with instruction in combat, physical endurance, and other forms of strictly military preparation. Education covered this type of training, but encompassed “the inculcation of a specific worldview, morality, and rules of human existence [*obshchezhitii*], formulization of certain traits of character and will, habits and tastes, the development of certain physical qualities, and so on.” At the core of this system lies the *proven* “method of persuasion.”⁷⁴ Political workers and commanders depended on persuasion to explain the main aims and goals of the Soviet Union and Armed Forces as an explanatory framework for the soldiers to better comprehend the ideology of the Communist Party as a just system of government worth fighting for. For

⁷⁰ Zhuravkov, *Moral’no-politicheskiĭ faktor*, 23.

⁷¹ Interestingly, Makarenko also defined discipline as a “moral and political phenomenon.” See Dobrenko, *Political Economy*, 128.

⁷² Zhuravkov, *Moral’no-politicheskiĭ faktor*, 24. The constant desire to achieve harmony between conscious and spontaneous forces also reflects a common Socialist Realist trope.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

example, in *Stalingrad*, Eremenko explicitly links morale to patriotism, which facilitates the soldiers' hatred of the enemy and their sense of duty to the people and the country. The rise in morale resulted from "the great, unending political work of the party organizations in the military, directed at strengthening the discipline, the cultivation of endurance and tenacity, and the explanation of the military and political significance of the battle at Stalingrad."⁷⁵ Political work intended to permeate the very consciousness of soldiers with the goals and desires of the Communist Party.

While persuasion forms the central thesis of *The Ideological Work of the KPSS at the Front (1941-1945)*, it nonetheless acknowledges that "in the fight to strengthen the discipline within the military some commanders and political workers allowed the perversion of disciplinary practice, [strengthening] . . . measures of coercion."⁷⁶ Some memoirists also admit to their use of coercive practices, but justify them as actions taken against cowards. For instance, Ivan Paderin, who served as a commissar in the 62nd Army, explains his decision to place a machine gun detachment at the Volga river crossing with orders to fire on anyone who attempted to leave Stalingrad by citing an example of a sixteen-year-old teenager who bravely continued fighting despite having seen his father die in battle.⁷⁷ Chuikov also recognizes the state of low morale upon his arrival at Stalingrad. "Combat losses, retreats, lack of ammunition and foodstuffs, difficulties with reinforcements – all this negatively affected the morale of the troops."⁷⁸ Low morale did not simply affect the soldiers. Batov notes that he had to replace two regimental commanders who "were unable to recover from the shock following the heavy

⁷⁵ Eremenko, *Stalingrad*, 27.

⁷⁶ I. P. Slednev, ed., *Ideologicheskaya rabota KPSS na fronte (1941-1945 gg.)* (Moskva: Voennoe izd-vo Ministerstva Oborony Soiuza SSR, 1960), 55.

⁷⁷ Paderin, *Na glavnom napravlenii*, 49-51.

⁷⁸ Chuikov, *Nachalo puti*, 90.

setbacks of the previous summer [the summer of 1941], [they] exaggerated enemy strength and most of all were afraid of encirclement.”⁷⁹ Chuikov describes the feeling of despair that took hold of the previous commander of the 62nd Army, a state of depression that transferred to his aides and troops.⁸⁰ Although coercion presented the Soviet military with an obvious means of dealing with cowards and low morale, persuasion and political work dominate memoirs as an effective representation of how soldiers were motivated during the war.

The Great Patriotic War exemplified the application persuasive methods both in the instruction manuals and memoirs written during the thaw. Batov describes a “true political worker” as someone who is connected with the soldiers, understands military strategy, and “always stands out by his ability to control the feelings of others, subordinating them to higher purposes.”⁸¹ Political work provided the means of this control and subordination. When Rodimtsev visited the famous Pavlov House, which served as a defensive strongpoint during the Battle of Stalingrad, he found a “Lenin’s room” inside. Located in the basement of this four-story house, the room provided the soldiers with a means to relax. Here, the soldiers “could read political, military, and belletristic literature.”⁸² The room also had checkers, chess, and dominoes. Political workers usually came here to speak with a small garrison defending the house. The job of political workers was to motivate the soldiers to achieve the “higher purposes” dictated by the party. These purposes had to culminate in the mass heroism of the Soviet troops. For example, Eremenko mentions an oath taken by the soldiers on the eve of the 25th anniversary of the Great October Revolution: ““Our spirit is as hearty as never before . . . our will is strong,

⁷⁹ Batov, *V pokhodakh i boiakh*, 33.

⁸⁰ Chuikov, *Nachalo puti*, 90-91.

⁸¹ Batov, *V pokhodakh i boiakh*, 60.

⁸² Rodimtsev, *Na beregakh Mansanaresa i Volgi*, 217.

our hands are not tired of crushing the enemy. We have decided to stand to the death at the walls of Stalingrad!”⁸³ At least on the pages of memoirs, Soviet soldiers manage to accomplish these tasks with unimaginable veracity and single-mindedness. They willingly sacrifice themselves to achieve the goals set by the Party and communicated to them by political workers. Although this high level of patriotism does not accurately portray the views of every Soviet soldier who fought in Stalingrad, the “healthy politico-moral state of the servicemen” reported in NKVD documents suggests that memoirists did not simply invent the successful impact of persuasive measures.

Political work had to motivate and positively influence the morale of the soldiers during the war, but its efforts to educate reached beyond the need to motivate soldiers. In order to accomplish this task, political work focused on both print and verbal propaganda. Printed propaganda involved the publication of newspapers within the military units (sometimes published at the front), fliers (many of them handwritten), brochures, posters, and so on. But just as much emphasis was placed on the verbal work of political workers with the soldiers, individually or in large collectives during rallies and mass meetings. Besides its focus on modifying behavior and motivating the soldiers to fight, political work also focused on helping the soldiers with the basic anxieties associated with combat. Thus, when a clear need to address the fear of enemy tanks and aircraft arose, a number of meetings were held to identify the best methods of shooting down tanks, and subsequent fliers dealt with topics such as “How to strike an enemy tank,” “How to throw a bottle with combustible mixture [Molotov cocktail] into a tank,” and “How to strike fascist tanks with a grenade.”⁸⁴ The scope of this work emphasized the politico-moral development within the military as discussed in *The Politico-Moral Factor in*

⁸³ Eremenko, *Stalingrad*, 290.

⁸⁴ Slednev, *Ideologicheskaya rabota KPSS na fronte*, 56-57.

Modern Warfare. The unity between professional training and the inculcation of a socialist worldview combined in the Soviet understanding of what it took to motivate the soldiers to fight.

According to *The Ideological Work of the KPSS at the Front*, the pedagogical work that accompanied the counterattack at Stalingrad in the fall of 1942 received the most support from the political administration of the Red Army. Political workers explained to the soldiers the goals of the military campaign to retake the city, and inspired them to dedication and selflessness. The need to destroy the enemy at Stalingrad received special attention in conversations with soldiers on the following themes: “Stalingrad must become a grave for the enemy forces,” “Let us defeat the enemy at Stalingrad, and free the stronghold on the Volga from the hitlerite filth,” “The enemy that now bleeds near Stalingrad will not survive our attack.”⁸⁵ Memoirs echo this presentation of the events by emphasizing the success of Communist propaganda in instilling within the soldiers a sense of hatred toward the enemy and a belief in victory.

Memoirists write about the political education of the troops as something that raised their morale and guided their feelings. Eremenko writes that “in the most critical moments of a battle orders were given and proclamations were made that carried a political character, in such a way as to launch a wide explanatory and agitational mass work to reach, as it were, the heart of every warrior of Stalingrad.”⁸⁶ Paderin describes the skill of an experienced politruk in provoking the emotions of a group of soldiers. On the 25th anniversary of the Great October Revolution, this politruk found himself next to a radio that he fixed so that the words of Stalin delivering a special anniversary address seemed so near that “everyone was absorbed by the report.”⁸⁷ The politruk’s function as a medium between the sacred words of the supreme leader and soldiers instilled

⁸⁵ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁶ Eremenko, *Stalingrad*, 91.

⁸⁷ Paderin, *Na glavnom napravlenii*, 101.

within them an impulse to grip their weapons and begin singing the “Internationale:” “Our outraged minds are boiling,/ Ready to lead us into a deadly fight.”⁸⁸ V. M. Badanov, a lieutenant general and one of the sixty-four veterans who published their reminiscences in an anthology entitled *Bitva za Volgu* (The Battle for Volga), relates the power of political work to trigger a strong emotional response. “We achieved success and fulfilled the combat mission assigned to our corps because we hated the fascist invaders. Hatred is a great power in war, and we used every means of party-political work to increase the fighting efficiency of the troops, inculcating in the soldiers an offensive spirit, courage.”⁸⁹ Memoirists made sure to highlight the potential of persuasion to motivate and modify human behavior and feelings for the sake of victory.

The Ideological Work of the KPSS at the Front and *The Politico-Moral Factor in Modern Warfare* clearly established the need to support the moral-political factor in modern warfare. Although they targeted active military commanders and political workers, both also served as convenient templates for memoirists to use in marking the Communist Party as a force that shaped and motivated Soviet soldiers. These sources represent the power of the Communist word to instill in the soldiers hatred toward the enemy, belief in victory, and even explain the use of military technology. The silences they maintain with regard to how many deserters, cowards, and panicmongers existed within the Red Army ranks demonstrate only the powerful need to ensure that the Second World War remains a morally pure memory.

Conscious Warriors

What kind of warriors did political work produce? Memoirs written during the Khrushchev years served to exemplify hegemonic masculinity, which authorizes and defines a

⁸⁸ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁹ Morozov, *Bitva za Volgu*, 160-61.

particular version of manliness.⁹⁰ I rely on the concept of hegemony to examine how a “cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” is created and maintained. In this regard, R. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity “as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”⁹¹ In the memoirs, weak men such as cowards, deserters, and panicmongers occupy only a marginal space, while the dominant male figure represented as a Communist *bogatyr*’ dominated this discursive field of memory articulation. The men represented in the memoirs are also defined against the women who served as soldiers, pilots, and medics during the war. The contribution of women to the war effort was limited both by the extent of their exposure to violence, which defined the experience of their male counterparts, as well as by the subordinate space women occupied in their main role as nurses. This served to place women in the role of mothers who would take care of the wounded male soldiers. And although they challenged the conventional roles associated with the military, the strong association of women with “weakness” meant that they could not die, fight, or sacrifice themselves the same way as men in the imagined realities presented to the greater Soviet public by the men who wrote memoirs. Even though women wrote their own memoirs with descriptions of their active participation in combat, print runs as well as reviews published in the *Military-History Journal* and national newspapers prioritized accounts written by men. And in spite of the

⁹⁰ Because both the people who tell the stories and the main characters they represent are male, the issues of complicity and marginalization must also come into play. In the words of R. W. Connell, “the majority of men gain from. . . the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women.” See Connell, *Masculinities*, 79. Just as other men are marginalized and are placed within a subordinate hierarchy, or cease to exist entirely at least discursively, men in general benefit, and are therefore complicit, from the power that they acquire through the overall subordination of women.

⁹¹ Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

fact that 820,000⁹² women served on the eastern front, they occupy only a marginal place on the pages of the memoirs written by male veterans. These symbolic representations translated the values that made up the Soviet moral(e) code expressed in *The Politico-Moral Factor in Modern Warfare* as masculine.

The theme of sacrifice clearly identifies men as Communists and appears in most memoirs written on the Battle of Stalingrad. A typical example that appears on the pages of *Bitva za Volgu* involves a Red Army soldier and his comrades who decide to join the Communist Party as the last gesture of loyalty before they die at the hands of the fascists. Thus, one soldier considers it a “happiness to die as a Communist.”⁹³ And, of course, he does. Another of his comrades sacrifices himself in an attempt to save the rest by strapping grenades to himself in order to attack a tank. Journalist I. P. Selishchev gives one more example of a sacrificial death in *Volga v ogne* (Volga in Fire). In his last effort to stave off a German attack, Mikhail Panikako attempted to throw a Molotov Cocktail at an enemy tank but a bullet struck the bottle, engulfing the hero in flames. In that moment, “he straightened and, burning like a torch, darted toward the tank.”⁹⁴ Managing to break a second bottle against the tank, Panikako destroyed it. Selishchev compares this death to that of Danko, the hero of Maxim Gorky’s short story entitled *Starukha Izergil’* (Old Izergil).⁹⁵ Just like Danko’s use of his own “burning heart” to persuade his people to follow him, Panikako’s sacrifice emboldens the rest of the soldiers to neglect any thought of death for the sake of victory. These examples of death in the moment of sacrifice contrast with a similar incident that occurs in Rodimtsev’s memoir, this time involving women who have died

⁹² Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 3.

⁹³ Morozov, *Bitva za Volgu*, 144.

⁹⁴ Selishchev, *Volga v ogne*, 50.

⁹⁵ Maksim Gor’kiĭ, *Izbrannye sochineniia* (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1946).

serving alongside their male comrades as nurses. Rodimtsev describes how “pity toward them squeezed the heart, such young girls, who found themselves in the thick of the war, having voluntarily joined together with their fathers and brothers.”⁹⁶ This clearly subordinate relationship of the young women who deserve pity having lost their lives so early versus the Communist soldier bravely sacrificing his life to save his comrades demonstrates the persistence of the masculine right to die in glory. Women are not allowed to partake in one of the central moments that defines the life of any good Communist: sacrifice for the sake of the greater cause.

Another common feature that the memoirists discuss is mass heroism. Mass heroism represented the mass effect of political work in mobilizing the soldiers to perform heroic deeds. An example of mass heroism that became one of the defining moments in the Stalingrad campaign supposedly occurred on the banks of the Don River in August 1942. Sixteen Red Army men faced twelve enemy tanks. On the first day the soldiers managed to destroy six, but most of them died in the process: “one after the other our fighters became incapacitated, letting go of their weapons only after death or a severe wound.”⁹⁷ The hero of the story, Private Pavel Burdin, sustained a serious wound, but managed to make contact with another soldier who saved his life. Unfortunately, his regiment believed he had died with the rest of the unit. At a memorial service held at the factory where he worked as an administrator, his wife said: “it is best to be the widow of a dead hero, then the wife of a coward.”⁹⁸ A true incident of a deserter being caught occurs in I. F. Afanas'ev's⁹⁹ *Dom soldatskoï slavy* (The House of Soldierly Glory). The deserter is a “hefty fellow, a pathetic coward who quietly rested in his hiding place, while the garrison

⁹⁶ Rodimtsev, *Liudi legendarnogo podviga*, 43.

⁹⁷ Morozov, *Bitva za Volgu*, 21.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁹ Afanas'ev fought inside the Pavlov's House in Stalingrad with the 62nd Army.

bled in uneven skirmishes with the fascists!”¹⁰⁰ Even though this man might have proved his credentials as a true son of the Party, he chose to hide instead in a basement together with a couple of women who protected him. Cowards occupy a marginal space in these narratives, since mass heroism was supposed to have enveloped the entire army, with “innermost patriotism and high political consciousness of the Soviet people” being “the main weapon of the Soviet Army at the Battle of Stalingrad.”¹⁰¹ The funeral service held inside the factory where Burdin had previously worked turned into a political rally that linked his personal life with his duty to save the Motherland, thereby integrating his past, present, and future prospects as a member of the Soviet community.

The women themselves often act as signifiers of the Motherland in that they function as substitutes of mothers to the fighting men. They nourish, nurse, and motivate the soldiers to fight and die for their land, the Party, and the wives they left at home. Most of the women who appear in the memoirs serve as nurses, while others supply soldiers with the basic necessities of life: sustenance (water, bread, other foodstuffs), tobacco, clean clothes, and so on. They sent encouraging letters to soldiers along with gifts, mimicking the countrywide effort to support the troops. But women also shared the life of the trenches along with men. One such woman defended the factory *Red October* where she worked as the first female smelter in the Soviet Union. Though initially rejected, her stubbornness won her a spot among the workers who joined the military. Once in battle, Ol’ga did not cease to project a strong emotional force that motivated the workers under her command during peace. Seeing a group of machine gunners who stopped advancing due to the faulty mechanism of the gun, she stood in the middle of the battlefield wildly gesticulating and admonishing the soldiers for falling behind the rest of their

¹⁰⁰ Afanas’ev, *Dom soldatskoï slavy*, 58.

¹⁰¹ Morozov, *Bitva za Volgu*, 24.

comrades.¹⁰² Ol'ga's passion informs the kind of unconscious spontaneity¹⁰³ that the Communist Party attempted to temper and control through the active political work of the politruks and commissars. Although women give men a reason to fight, their participation in the actual fighting does not result in any significant acts of heroism: Ol'ga's death does not contribute in any substantial way to the destruction of the enemy, she dies irrationally, struck by a random bullet. Her death reflects the untamed personality that acts only to reinforce the morale of the men.

The participation of fathers and sons in the Battle of Stalingrad represents another masculine constellation within the memoirs. Batov presents one example of the death of a major in the arms of his sixteen-year-old-son who volunteered to fight alongside of his father. While leading the fight at the front of their unit, the dying father passes on the torch to his son: "Onward my son!"¹⁰⁴ Another example of a ceremonious generational shift is offered by Rodimtsev, who recalls a ceremony involving the presentation of weapons to the newly arrived replacements aged eighteen to twenty. Although they did not have much time, the unit went ahead with this symbolic act. Rodimtsev privately hoped that "perhaps some of you [recruits] will get to have the rifle of your own father. . . . We sacredly preserved the weapons of our fellow soldiers, who died under Kiev, Konotop, on the Seim [River]."¹⁰⁵ These symbolic examples demonstrate the importance of respect that is owed to the elders. And, in general, it symbolized the leading role of all Communists who represented the vanguard of the Party and fathers of the people. *Bitva za Volgu* contains a particularly poignant representation of the

¹⁰² Ibid., 303.

¹⁰³ Socialist Realism emphasized the dialectical relationship between conscious and spontaneous behavior.

¹⁰⁴ Batov, *V pokhodakh i boiakh*, 98.

¹⁰⁵ Rodimtsev, *Liudi legendarnogo podviga*, 56.

leading role of Communists. It tells of a sixteen-year-old Komsomol member named Serdiuk. “This energetic . . . lad practically became the father and breadwinner of approximately six hundred families.”¹⁰⁶ Presumably taking care of young children and women, Serdiuk’s membership in the Young Communist League assures his capability as an authority figure, which he in fact becomes.

Conclusion

The publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1962 introduced Soviet audiences to the coercive environment of the forced labor camps, but also reflected the general atmosphere of the thaw period that challenged the legitimacy of the Soviet state. The revelations of violence perpetrated by Stalin and the ability of the people to finally voice their perspective on a range of political and social issues made it necessary for the state to justify the future wellbeing of communism in the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet discursive space allowed for a greater degree of expression during the thaw, the extent of democratization remained largely limited since the Communist Party and Marxist Leninism remained intact and Communists still represented the political vanguard. Nevertheless, the third program of the Communist Party adopted in 1961 promised that the Soviet Union would achieve communism in twenty years. In the process of articulating their memories of the Battle of Stalingrad, memoirists of the thaw period consciously sought to establish the Second World War as a shared experience that would shape the group identity of the Soviet public and restore people’s faith in the Party. As I have argued in this essay, the process of memory formation during the thaw involved the production of a truth that memoirists defined as authentic, a truth

¹⁰⁶ Morozov, *Bitva za Volgu*, 323.

that depended on the persuasive efforts of political workers to motivate and guide Soviet soldiers into battle.

Even though the thaw articulated and exposed Stalinism as a coercive system of power, memoirists examined in this essay conspicuously avoided coercion as a topic of memory production. Pavel Batov appropriately defined the high-ranking officers who wrote these memoirs as “soldiers of the Party.” As veterans and deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, they had an obligation both to their former comrades and to the state. The numerous references to the present whereabouts and wellbeing of their comrades following the end of the war indicate the level of attachment among veterans. In the process of giving praise to the deeds of other veterans and those who did not survive the war, memoirists consciously used their narratives as both commemorative tools and a means of public support. The enormous print runs and favorable reviews of their memoirs in major newspapers also point to the close relationship of the memoirists to the state. Both the state and the memoirists intended to avoid associating the Second World War with the memory of coercion that now clearly defined the legacy of Stalinism. Their commitment to their fellow comrades and the care they took to establish their own legacies also motivated memoirists to avoid associating their service in the Red Army with coercive practices. Coercion intended to motivate Red Army soldiers by serving as a constant reminder of the physical violence that targeted cowards, deserters, and others who failed to enact the orders of their superiors. Memoirists aimed to support the state by removing the memory of fear and coercion that defined Stalinism during the thaw. Memoirists thus shaped the cult of the Second World War in collaboration with the state. The moral economy of the gift defined this relationship and dictated the preservation of the Second World War in Soviet culture as a morally stable site of memory.

The ideological commitment of the memoirists to the state finds reflection in the close correspondence of the arguments made in favor of persuasion found in *The Politico-Moral Factor in Modern Warfare*, *The Ideological Work of the KPSS at the Front (1941-1945)*, and memoirs. The texts written expressly for political workers and military officers of the Soviet armed forces served to establish persuasion as the main function of morale-building work. Persuasion acted through political work to affect Red Army soldiers' consciousness. It meant to increase their ideological awareness by placing emphasis on political education. Political work intended to encourage soldiers to believe that Soviet victory could come only as the result of their active participation in the defense of the Motherland. Politruks taught soldiers to follow Communists as representatives of the leading men, the vanguard of the Party. Communists served as examples of model behavior, as men guided to victory by their faith in the Communist Party. Belief in the justness of their Communist cause and future victory combined with a focus on combating feelings of fear and panic by positively inspiring soldiers and channeling their feelings toward the fight with the enemy. As the authors of *The Politico-Moral Factor in Modern Warfare* put it, "truthful, incisive, inspiritualizing agitation and propaganda, and daily political work with the masses, which helps them to mobilize all their spiritual powers toward the fight with the enemy, are capable of changing the feelings of the masses in the necessary direction."¹⁰⁷ During the thaw, memoirists employed examples of persuasive work in order to convince their readers that Red Army soldiers won the Great Patriotic War because the Communist Party motivated them by forming politically aware individuals who consciously realized that their lives and the future of their country depended on Soviet victory.

Memoirists articulated the collective memory of the Battle of Stalingrad by combining elements that brought their personal motivations and experiences of the war together with the

¹⁰⁷ Zhuravkov, *Moral'no-politicheskiĭ faktor*, 40-41.

ideological exigencies of the contemporary political climate. If the basis of the Stalinist “performative culture was the cult of Stalin,”¹⁰⁸ then the moral economy of the gift suffered during the thaw as a result of the attack on Stalin’s cult of personality and the exposure of coercion as a central force that guided this system, thus utterly undermining the very idea of the *moral* economy upon which this culture was built. Stalin’s cult of personality established the leader as the dispenser of “gifts,” removing individual agency and the potential to benefit the self that characterized capitalist exploitation by creating “a society in which public allocations of resources were officially presented as moral transactions, and performers who publicly thanked Stalin validated personal ties to the leader.”¹⁰⁹ The close association of the Communist Party to this morally authorized transaction between the benevolent leader and the Soviet people meant that once Solzhenitsyn and others like him exposed the coercive character of this system during the thaw, the state was forced to seek a new alternative. Memoirists collaborated with the state by emphasizing persuasion as a motivational tool that won the war and discursively created an opportunity for the Communist Party to once again assert its dominant role within a morally sanctioned system. This articulation of morale explained how the Party motivated soldiers to fulfill its political goals. It also allowed the memoirists and the state to preserve the Great Patriotic War as a centerpiece of a myth that defined Soviet identity.

¹⁰⁸ Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, xvi.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

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