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Mother Russia and her daughters : representations of Soviet women in Hollywood film, 1941-1945

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**Mother Russia and
Her Daughters:
Representations of
Soviet Women in
Hollywood Film,
1941-1945**

May 2008

Mother Russia and her Daughters:
Representations of Soviet Women in Hollywood Film, 1941-1945

by

Raisa Sidenova

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The table of contents

| | |
|--|-------|
| Abstract..... | p. 1 |
| Introduction..... | p. 3 |
| History: a Thorny Path to Friendship..... | p. 8 |
| Ideology of Representation and Representation of Ideology..... | p. 20 |
| Textual analysis: Women's Films about Russia..... | p. 32 |
| <i>Mission to Moscow</i> | p. 32 |
| <i>The North Star</i> | p. 39 |
| <i>Song of Russia</i> | p. 43 |
| <i>Days of Glory</i> | p. 47 |
| Conclusion..... | p. 54 |
| Appendices..... | p. 58 |
| Notes..... | p. 72 |
| Bibliography..... | p. 75 |
| Vita..... | p. 78 |

Abstract

In this thesis which focuses on representations of Soviet women in the World War II Hollywood films *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *Song of Russia* (1943), *The North Star* (1944), and *Days of Glory* (1944), I argue that these four films created a more friendly and acceptable portrayal of the Soviet Union for the American audience through the feminization of the country's image. The main goal of this study is to examine how Hollywood changed its image of Russia from the previous films like *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* and how American film gendered the Soviet-American wartime alliance by coding the United States as masculine and the Soviet Union as feminine. Another goal is to analyze to what extent these representations of Soviet women reflect American character and its values and beliefs. Following the contention that any representation inevitably mirrors the ideals and worldviews of those responsible for the representation, I argue that the images of Soviet women underwent the process of Americanization and, after all, reflect more the conditions of the American wartime society rather than those of the Soviet Union. In this context, I believe that the womanly personification of the Soviet Union in Hollywood film was influenced by gender politics in the United States. I analyze how the melodrama genre, iconography of the *mise-en-scène*, music, as well as casting choices shaped patriarchal meanings of the films. The insistent gendering of American-Soviet relations marked by the constant use of stereotypes about both Russia and women illustrates how, on the one hand, Hollywood tried to create a less threatening and benign image of the new ally, and, on the other, how this placed the Soviet Union

into another space of ideological opposition of femininity versus masculinity. Thus, the analysis of Hollywood's wartime representations of Russia demonstrates how a dominant hegemonic culture represents another culture by placing it in a subordinate position and, in doing so, diminishes the chances for mutual understanding and cooperation between the cultures.

Introduction

The period of the American-Soviet alliance from 1942 to 1945 has been investigated in various studies from political, diplomatic and cultural perspectives. Some historians see this “interlude” as a necessary but uneasy cooperation at the time of a devastating world crisis. Often they consider the awkward friendship as foreshadowing the future hostility of the Cold War.¹ Others see these years as worth studying on their own terms and insist that the war provided a unique political and cultural milieu in American-Soviet relations that had ramifications during the following decades but nonetheless was unpredictable and remarkable.² The events of those four years from 1941 to 1945 when the shift in the two countries’ attitudes toward each other occurred deserve special attention without attempts to contextualize them within Cold War politics.

The purpose of this paper is neither to give an overview of the American-Soviet wartime friendship nor to analyze the reasons and consequences of it. Focusing instead on the portrayal of Russia in wartime Hollywood films, I will analyze the changing representation of the Soviet Union in American popular culture and argue that one of the tools for this change was the feminization of Russia’s image. Of course, historically Russia has been represented as feminine inside and outside of the country: the nation was gendered through the powerful myth of Mother Russia, as well as the popular press’s use of the pronoun “she” in reference to it—I see the feminization of the country neither as completely novel to the period nor as strictly reserved for Russia.³ I do, however, believe that a feminine representation of the Soviet Union during the war was important in the construction of the fragile American-Soviet alliance. Therefore, the main focus of my

analysis here is the gendering of American-Russian relations in American popular culture with the United States representing the masculine and the Soviet Union the feminine.

The feminization of the Russian image is most strongly seen in wartime Hollywood films about the Soviet Union. Recognized as a propaganda tool by Roosevelt's administration, these films revisited the previous, often rough and masculinized cinematic portrayals of Russia and the Russian people and offered a more friendly and feminized image that showed the audiences the necessity of collaboration with the Communist state, as well as the Soviets' trustworthiness and reliability. Films such as *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *The North Star* (1943), *Song of Russia* (1944), and *Days of Glory* (1944) feature portrayals of benevolent Russians and reflect the shift in American perception of Russian character from masculine and aggressive to feminine and needing protection.⁴ These films concentrate more on the wartime struggle of the Soviets rather than the country's politics and ideology. The Russian people are almost always shown as innately good. For example, even *Mission to Moscow's* Trotskyites, who, according to the film, planned a coup d'état, admit their mistakes and become patriotic during their trials.

The paper's focus on female characters as the major vehicle through which Russia is feminized in Hollywood films is not random. All of the films emphasize similarities between Americans and Russians, and, as the political ideologies of the two countries were far apart, the films concentrate on so-called "universal" human values such as family, patriotism, and romantic love that are often culturally gendered as "feminine." Female figures also frequently embody the nation, hope, and romantic love. For instance, *Song of Russia* is the love story of Nadya and John, a Russian pianist and an American

conductor, and explicitly depicts Nadya not only as John's romantic interest but also as a symbol for Russia. The musical theme of the film is a love song called "And Russia is Her Name," which, as the *mise-en-scène* unmistakably confirms, also refers to Nadya. Other films like *Days of Glory* or *The North Star*, for example, allude to Russia's feminine face more subtly in order to reveal that the United States' new ally was, indeed, a feminized entity during the Second World War.

Another goal of this study, along with the examination of Russia's national identity's feminization in wartime Hollywood films is to analyze to what extent these representations of Soviet women reflect the American character and its values and beliefs. Following the contention that any representation inevitably mirrors the ideals and worldviews of those responsible for the representation, I argue that the images of Soviet women underwent the process of Americanization and, after all, reflect more the conditions of American wartime society rather than those of the Soviet Union.

In this context, it is important to look at how the womanly personification of the Soviet Union in Hollywood film was influenced by gender politics in the United States. Adopting Margaret and Patrice Higonnet's "double helix" metaphor,⁵ I argue that one strand of the gender politics helix of these films is progressive and the other reactionary. The former was registered at the level of stories: as wartime productions, the films could not ignore the increasing necessity for female labor and through their narratives did encourage female viewers to join the work force and to contribute to the work effort.

The latter is conveyed through genre, *mise-en-scène*, music, and acting. Made within the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema, the films do not offer any progressive view of femininity. Putting female characters on pedestals can be seen as

reverence within a patriarchal order, but in the context of the great gains wartime labor brought women, reducing female complexity to their symbols proved diminishing and regressive. The following close analyses of the films will illustrate how the melodrama genre, iconography of the *mise-en-scène*, traditional music and lyrics as well as casting choices shaped strongly patriarchal meanings of the films. To some extent, however, the films reflect the gender politics of American society during the war. Caught between progressive and regressive strands of the double helix, in which, while they were more and more public figures, women still stayed in a subordinate position to men.

In this inquiry about the feminization of Russia during the Second World War, one cannot ignore the masculinization of the United States in these films. The masculine coding of America, just as the feminization of Russia, is expressed both explicitly and implicitly. In *Song of Russia*, for example, in their marriage, John represents the United States while Nadya represents the Soviet Union; at the end, he saves her by bringing her to America. In other films, the gendering of the two states is not as straightforward, but the portrayals of the countries can still be seen in terms of traditional gender roles. The propaganda purpose of the films could not allow a softer portrayal of the United States or a tougher image of Russia for that matter. As the films were made to explain why the American people should help Russians, the filmmakers needed to maintain the balance between Russian heroism and their inability to fight Nazi Germany alone. In the meantime, the United States was coded as a savior of Russia, thus acquiring masculine characteristics like protectiveness and strength.

What does the feminization of Russia's image in American popular culture during wartime mean in the context of 1940s gender politics? The insistent gendering of

American-Soviet relations, marked by the constant use of stereotypes about both Russia and gender, illustrates how, on the one hand, Hollywood tried to create a less threatening and benign image of the new ally, and, on the other, how this placed the Soviet Union into another space of ideological opposition. This antagonism is not communism versus capitalism, but rather femininity versus masculinity. With the feminization of Russia, Hollywood placed the country into another space of “otherness,” reinforcing not only patriarchal myths about the otherness of women but also popular myths about Russia being, in Winston Churchill’s words, “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.”⁶ Thus, the analysis of Hollywood’s wartime representations of Russia demonstrates not only the fleeting nature of international relations as represented in popular culture—how in a matter of several years two countries could go from animosity to friendship and back—but also shows how a dominant culture represents another culture by placing it in a subordinate position and, in doing so, diminishes the chances for mutual understanding and cooperation between the cultures.⁷

History: a Thorny Path to Friendship

A 1939 feature *Ninotchka* is probably the most famous Hollywood film about the Soviet Union. It is exemplary in how it presents Soviet Russia and its people to Americans before the war. The film tells the story of a three-man mission in Paris trying to sell the former Duchess Swana's confiscated jewels. When the emissaries, seduced by the consumerism of the capitalist Parisian society, neglect their assignment, the Soviet state sends a commissar to take over their duties. Late to the train station, Buljanoff, Iranoff, and Kopalski are looking for the just arrived commissar, whom they have never met. The first person they spot at the platform that looks "like a comrade" to them turns out to be a German Nazi who greets his escort with a "*Heil* Hitler!" Their second guess, however, is more successful, yet rather surprising, as the Soviet envoy proves to be Nina Yakushova whom the *New York Times* critic called "the flat-heeled, Five-Year-Plannish, unromantically mannish comrade," played by a deadpan Greta Garbo. Already experienced in the gallantries of Western culture, Iranoff notes, "What a charming idea of Moscow to surprise us with a lady comrade!" Kopalski assents: "If we had known, we would have greeted you with flowers." Nina abruptly interrupts them saying, "Don't make an issue of my womanhood!" After a short encounter with a porter (Yakushova does not want him to carry her bags, saying it is a social injustice), the company proceeds to the exit, and Nina updates her fellow countrymen about the latest news in Moscow: "The last mass trials were a great success: there will be fewer, but better Russians."

This sequence at the train station speaks volumes about the American public's views on the Soviet Union in 1939. First, the scene offers a comparison of Russia with

Nazi Germany, common for those times. The fact in the film that even the Soviets could not tell a Nazi from a comrade emphasizes the supposed similarities between the two countries. The infamous quote about “fewer but better Russians,” referring to the Stalin purges, also stresses the alleged kinship between the totalitarianism of Russia and Germany. Opinion polls of the time confirm that this notion was shared by the majority of the population in the United States. Second, Nina’s encounter with the porter expresses the differences in economic systems of the Soviet Union and France.⁸ Soviet communism and its incompatibility with Western capitalism was one of the main factors, if not the most important one, that determined U.S.-Soviet relations in the 1920s and 1930s. *Ninotchka* ridicules and caricaturizes communism of its Russian protagonist. In the short conversation with the porter, Ninotchka’s socialist point is defeated by the porter’s witty remark:

Ninotchka: Why do you want to carry my bags?

Porter: That is my business.

Ninotchka: That's no business. That's social injustice.

Porter: That depends on the tip.

The idea of fair compensation for one’s labor in this capitalist society and the notion of private enterprise are opposed to the “unreasonable” nature of the Soviet communism that was understood to be based in economic communality and collectivism.

Finally, the sequence implies a certain gender politics. The film shows Ninotchka as a woman with a man’s occupation; while looking for the commissar at the train station, the three emissaries do not suspect that “he” might be a woman. Her masculine appearance further conveys the idea of this male occupation, as she has no makeup and is wearing a simple hat and a khaki uniform and is carrying her own suitcases. Nina’s

manliness is ridiculed as unnatural in the sequence and throughout the film, and her “womanhood” (that is her femininity or lack thereof) eventually does become one of the most important issues of the film. By the end, the film restores traditional gender roles when Ninotchka becomes more traditionally feminine (which includes being a better consumer), surrenders to Count d'Agoult (played by Melvyn Douglas), and decides to stay with him in Constantinople, leaving totalitarian Russia behind.

Although the *New York Times* critic Frank S. Nugent considered the film's philosophy to be “that people are much the same wherever you find them and decent enough at heart,” most of the critics saw the film as critical of the Soviet Union.⁹ Despite the positive yet humorous portrayal of Ninotchka herself, the country is made to be seen grim and depressing. The *Time* magazine critic called the film “a literate and knowingly directed satire, which lands many a shrewd crack about phony Five Year Plans, collective farms, communist jargon, and pseudo-scientific gab.”¹⁰ *Variety* wrote that the film displays “the punchy and humorous jabs directed at the Russian political system and its representatives.”¹¹ The *Daily Worker* noted that “Garbo does more in one line to debunk Soviet Russia than we have been able to do in a hundred editorials.” Thus, one can see that the film was in fact considered a truthful (if humorous) account of Soviet life in which a brain-washed, almost robotic population suffer a scarcity of consumer goods, poverty, totalitarian control of the government, and the overall failure of socialist experiments.

The popular success of *Ninotchka* shows the complexity of U.S.-Soviet relations.¹² As Ninotchka herself, the country was presented as both intimidating and attractive—as masculine (primarily) and feminine (potentially). On the one hand, the

economic and political differences between the two countries were so vast that the ideological confrontation led to hostility and mistrust. In addition, the rise of the American socialist movement in the 1920s and 1930s provoked the political repercussions of another “Red Scare,” which reinforced antagonistic attitudes toward Russia. On the other hand, the Soviet Union’s political, economic, and cultural experiments generated significant interest among the American public, particularly among the liberal-minded population. However, in part because of the pre-war period witch-hunts of American Communists, the image of Russia before the war was largely negative. Besides, even if the film showed Russian people (Ninotchka and her peers) as more warmly human when they are being “good Soviets,” the country and its political system would still have been seen as rotten: as the heroine herself puts it, “When I look at Buljanoff, Iranoff and Kopalski, I know they are scoundrels and I should hate them—then I realize who made them like that.” To a great extent, this portrayal was a result of news of Stalin’s Great Terror, the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact, and the Russo-Finnish war, which contributed to the American public’s negative views of Russia.

Russia’s tremendously negative image among Americans in the 1930s is reflected in *Ninotchka*, and pivots around a comparison of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany which was already frequent in the media and public discourse. Often Russia was seen as the greater of two evils. For example, in response to the 1939 Gallup question, “If you had to choose, which kind of government would you prefer to live under—the kind in Germany or the kind in Russia?,” 59 percent of those with opinions chose Germany, while only 41 percent favored Russia. The same year, by a margin of 55 to 45 percent,

Americans responded that American Communists were a greater danger than Nazis living in the United States.¹³

James O. Twohey's "Analysis of Newspaper Opinion," a 1939 report based on a sample of the front and editorial pages from across the country representing more than 20 percent of the nation's newspaper circulation, provides an important guide to American public opinion on Russia after the start of the Russo-Finnish War in late 1939. Twohey's analysis shows 33 percent of Americans thought Stalin was a greater threat because of the danger of communism to Western civilization. Moreover, throughout December 1939, Twohey notices a strong trend in support for a German-led alliance against Russia, leading to a possible war against communism.¹⁴

The Gallup polls also show overwhelming animosity toward Russia after the outbreak of the conflict in Scandinavia. In the December 1939 poll, 99 percent of Americans polled favored Finland in the war, and only 1 percent favored Russia.¹⁵ Another indication of Russia's negative image was immense public support for the House Committee on Un-American Activities, chaired by Martin Dies Jr. Although not as powerful as during the postwar period, the committee reflected and reinforced the public paranoia about the socialist movement in the United States. As Ralph B. Levering points out in his book on American public opinion and the Russian alliance, despite the open opposition of the President and other liberals, 75 percent of the sample polled in 1939 wanted the committee to continue for another year, and 70 percent thought it more important for the committee to concentrate on Communist rather than Nazi activities in this country.¹⁶ At this point in history, American media were flooded with anti-communist propaganda: many books and articles dedicated their pages to the coverage

of “communist infiltration in America,” “the web of the red spider,” and “Stalin—Hitler’s new ally.”¹⁷ Clearly Russia’s considerable presence in American popular culture did little to make the country’s image more benign or friendly.

At the end of 1939, *Time* magazine named Stalin its man of the year, clearly stating that the past year presented a grim picture of the world where evil triumphed over good. The feature article criticized Stalin for friendship with the Nazis and the invasion of Finland. In the magazine’s opinion, Stalin had “matched himself with Adolf Hitler as the world’s most hated man.” The article emphasized the comparison by mentioning that Hitler congratulated Stalin on his 60th anniversary and that the Nazi press eulogized the Soviet leader as the “revolutionary führer of Russia.”¹⁸ *Time*’s assessment of Stalin and his actions in 1939 capped American condemnation of Russia in the pre-war years. By the end of the 1930s, “the words *Russia*, *Stalin*, and *communist*,” as Levering concludes, “were obviously anathema to almost all Americans familiar with them.”¹⁹

From the end of 1939 and until the German attack on Russia in June 1941, American attitudes toward Russia did not radically change. One of the most significant commentaries made about Russia was attributed to President Roosevelt, who during a presidential campaign of 1940 asserted: “The Soviet Union, as everybody who has the courage to face the facts knows, is run by a dictatorship as absolute as any other dictatorship in the world.” Roosevelt also stated that he “disliked the regimentation,” “abhorred the indiscriminate killing,” and “heartily deprecated the banishment of religion” in Russia.²⁰

In the meantime, Hollywood dutifully reflected public animosity toward the Soviet Union. In 1940, MGM released another Soviet satire, a *Ninotchka*-inspired screwball comedy, *Comrade X*. Set in Moscow, the film takes viewers to the very heart of the frightening communist state where an American journalist, Mac Thompson (Clark Gable), faces the hardships of working in a totalitarian country and has to write in disguise, dispatching his reports under the nickname of “Comrade X.” When his identity becomes known to his butler (Felix Bressart), Mac is in jeopardy of being uncovered and punished. The butler, however, prefers not to give the reporter away but to blackmail him into marrying his daughter Theodore (Hedy Lamarr), an ardent communist, and taking her out of the country.

Comrade X repeats the criticism of Russia started by *Ninotchka*, but it focuses even more on political differences between the United States and the Soviet Union and is more pointed about revealing the terrors of a totalitarian society. The film shows poverty and political instability as essential elements of Russian daily life, aggravated by constant spying and ubiquitous mutual distrust among its citizens. *Comrade X* also addresses the absence of freedom of speech and the problem of the Soviet Union’s censorship of the foreign press. The film demonstrates that it is obvious for everybody except brainwashed citizens like Theodore that the country is in dire straits with no immediate hope for improvement.

The New York Times, in its review, compared the film to Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* for creating a satire of “a nation and its political system with such grim and malicious delight,” while *Variety* called Theodore “a rabid Communist.” But behind the burlesque, satire, and anti-Soviet propaganda, the film rang true about some aspects

of the contemporary situation in Russia. In his dissertation Azary E. Messerer points out that the film, thanks to the work of its Russian adviser Andrey Tolstoy, is filled with insightful details about Soviet life.²¹ Nevertheless, the satiric side of the film's representation of Russia overshadows its realism, and the film was mostly regarded as a sharp, comic portrayal of the evil communist empire.

Undoubtedly, the image of Russia in these Hollywood films up to 1940 was largely negative, but how exactly was it gendered? The paradox is that while the protagonists of both *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* were Soviet women, they embodied a specific type of woman: emancipated, independent, and masculinized. The overall manliness of Soviet women was conveyed by these women's appearance (severe, tailored uniforms, absence of glamorous makeup, and a humorless and strict demeanor) and their "masculine" occupations (Ninotchka is an apparatchik and Theodore a streetcar conductor). In *Comrade X*, the main female character even has a man's name. Both Theodore and Ninotchka also demonstrate incredible physical strength: the former walks seven miles and the latter goes up the Eiffel Tower without any signs of physical tiredness. They also share aspiration for education: Ninotchka wants to visit French factories and plants to get acquainted with the newest technological achievements, while Theodore is interested in economics and the problem of "overproduction." These characters' attitudes toward sex and marriage also suggest the impression Americans had of Soviet women's unconventional gender position. Ninotchka and Theodore, for instance, see love as a biological urge without any romantic implications. "Love is a failure of the mind," proclaims Theodore, who also sees marriage as a partnership—a radical idea for 1940s Hollywood, so, not surprisingly, the film presents this attitude

with a negative connotation: “Marriage is like partnership...or opening a store.” As she has been married and divorced twice and readily agrees to marry Mac, the film suggests that Soviet women have sexual freedom comparable to that of men. Ninotchka, although more chaste, is also far from a traditional Hollywood representation of a “good” woman, given her willingness to go to a strange man’s apartment (“You might be a good case study,” she says to justify her actions) and her aggressive response to his kiss.

Thus, for most Americans, pre-war Russia was as masculine on the whole as its citizens were individually (even its women). In general, the aggressiveness of Russian foreign policy, its totalitarianism, and its leader’s perceived toughness all contributed to the creation of a masculine image for the country in the West. Stalin himself was largely seen as a symbol of the nation, as was the allegorical image of a bear used to describe Russia in the above-mentioned issue of *Time* in 1939.

The historical shift in American attitudes toward Russia started after Hitler’s June 22, 1941 attack on the Soviet Union. Levering insists that American public opinion was largely influenced not only by the invasion itself, but also by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s speech, made shortly after the attack and broadcast in the United States. In his speech Churchill denied any endorsement of communism but insisted that in the current situation, “The Russian danger is therefore our danger and the danger of the United States, ...just as the cause of any Russian fighting for his hearth and home is the cause of free men and free people in every quarter of the globe.”²² The British leader’s speech was the first move by the West toward a more positive assessment and representation of the Soviet Union.

The next day the Roosevelt administration issued a statement supporting Russia. Although neither the U.S. government nor the American people were ready to intervene in the European crisis, by early July of 1941, Americans had indicated by an overwhelming margin of eighteen to one that they would like to see the Soviet Union defeat Nazi Germany. Moreover, as Levering's analysis shows, most Americans were also prepared to condone aid to the nation if Russia held out and if supplies were available.²³

The new-found sympathy for the Soviet Union, however, did not mean that Russia's image immediately improved. The idea of an alliance with a communist country terrified the majority of Americans, and Russia was really never seen as the ally that Britain and China were. Suspicion about the Soviet government and its representatives would often blight possible alliances between the countries. Another important aspect of the United States' apprehensive attitude toward the Soviet Union was the mysterious state of the Red Army. While the supremacy of the German military seemed indisputable to most American observers, the Soviet Army's preparedness for a long war was in question. Thus for many months—from the German invasion to the opening of the second front—the American public and government held to a temporizing policy, observing the situation on the Soviet front.

Constant suspicion marked the Soviet-American alliance from start to finish. As David M. Kennedy comprehensively shows in his book *Freedom from Fear*, the dynamic within the Grand Alliance of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union was far from ideal. There was constant diplomatic pushing and pulling, mistrust, and anxiety. Roosevelt and Churchill felt that they could not fully confide in the Russian

leader, and Stalin did not feel that he was an equal partner in the Alliance.²⁴ It took several months of negotiation for the United States to agree to open a much needed second front to aid a fighting Russia.

Hollywood, however, ignored the complexities of international politics altogether, offering simplified portrayals of the Grand Alliance. In 1942, one of the first pro-Soviet films was released, a B-production *Miss V from Moscow*. Although singled out by B-film historian Don Miller as “one of the worst movies ever made by any standards, certainly the worst movie of its year,” the film offers an interesting example of the process of feminizing Russia’s image in 1940s Hollywood film. Lola Lane plays Soviet secret agent Vera Marova who is a look-alike of a Nazi spy. Taking advantage of this resemblance, she confounds Police Chief Fritz Kleiss (Noel Madison) in occupied Paris, and comes to the rescue of an American soldier, Steve Worth (Howard Banks), and American aid shipment to the Soviet Union. In one of the most intriguing lines in the film, an Axis villain says to his underlings after arresting the undercover Soviet agent, “Instead of a Russian bear in our trap, we have a very beautiful woman!” So while it may lack in artistic value, *Miss V from Moscow* presents an early example of the ways in which American popular culture would transform the image of Russia from masculine to feminine.

The last sequences of the film are telling in their rendition of world—and gender—politics. Vera and Steve (a Russian woman and an American man) go to a French tavern and meet with representatives of the French Resistance, and wire an important message to Russia. On the way to the tavern, Vera and Steve are followed by the Gestapo. Upon their arrival to the tavern, a fight between the Germans and Steve

ensues. Steve is helped by his British friend, who, though introduced in the beginning of the film, disappears in the middle and appears in the tavern out of nowhere. As the sequence continues, the American and the Brit fight the Nazis while Vera and her French helpers send the message in the backroom. Interestingly, the French are represented by three characters who are linked to Vera in their “feminine” representation (vs. those of American and British characters): two men in their 60s and a chubby middle-aged woman. As the Germans outnumber the “Allied” forces, allies have to flee and leave behind the French telegraph operator who sacrifices his life but apparently succeeds in sending the wire to Russia. The next sequence from Moscow confirms the success of the mission. Then the film cuts to the scene of the execution of the German officer who confided too much in the Russian spy. The sequence abruptly cuts to a close-up of a laughing Vera now in a traditional Russian dress with a scarf on her head. The camera pans back and we see she is not laughing alone: Steve is sitting next to her and is sharing her joy. The couple, sitting at the back of the hay wagon, is driving away to a happy life together somewhere in rural Russia, or so we can assume judging from the landscape.

As the example of *Miss V from Moscow* shows, Hollywood responded to the change in Russian-American relations enthusiastically enough. In the context of a necessary alliance between Russia and the United States, the film moves from the somewhat complex (if negatively represented) Russian characters of Ninotchka and Comrade X to a simple propagandistic representation of events and characters. As is clear from the discussion above, a big part of the propagandizing in *Miss V from Moscow* lies in its re-gendering of Russia in form of feminine Vera, and its “marriage”

of Russia and the United States, as bride and groom respectively, in the form of Vera and Steve.

Ideology of Representation and Representation of Ideology

Having discussed the historical background of this study, we cannot move to the films' analyses without establishing the ideological premise for this work,²⁵ for the questions "Why was Russia feminized in American film during the war?" and "What are the ramifications of this process?" require an ideologically-charged response. Two definitions of ideology are at the foundation of my critical approach. The first is Louis Althusser's definition that ideology "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."²⁶ The second is Bill Nichols's definition from *Ideology and the Image* that states "ideology is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals; it is the image a society gives of itself in order to perpetuate itself."²⁷

Both definitions emphasize important phenomena that construct ideology. First is the role of representation in ideology. I will discuss at length below the question of how American ideology influences representations of Russia and how Hollywood represented American and Soviet ideologies. Second is the issue of the "imaginary" in ideology. As Nichols points out, "*Imaginary* here does not mean unreal, existing only in the imagination, but rather pertains to views, images, fictions, or representations that contribute to our sense of who we are and to our everyday engagement with the world around us."²⁸ The imaginary is a crucial factor in understanding the construction of both

national identity and gender roles in patriarchy as well as the gendering of international relations. It also evokes the issues of myths as narratives and their role in sustaining the dominant ideology. Thus, these definitions of ideology stress its hegemonic function to control and maintain order within the dominant social and political system.

Moving from theoretical generalities to the historical and cultural specifics of the period and texts in question, we need to point out that the ideology of American society has been based for a long time on two main premises—capitalism and patriarchy—and classic Hollywood cinema, a major institution of social representation, has been a central medium for reflecting, expressing, and shaping this ideology. To use Gramscian terminology, classical Hollywood cinema helps maintain the “cultural hegemony” of capitalism and patriarchy. Since Soviet ideology and gender politics were represented in popular culture as contradictory to the American status quo, especially considering Russia’s negative image among the American public during the pre-war period, Hollywood filmmakers had a difficult task at hand: to present Russia more positively but at the same time not be accused of promoting socialist ideas. Thus, films needed to reassure audiences that the existing economic and political system in the United States was not in jeopardy due to the changed state policy toward Russia. At the same time, films needed to raise awareness and appreciation of the current situation in the Soviet Union, as well as convince the audience that the previously propagandized differences were not so problematic after all.

Another aspect of ideological to consider in the analyses of wartime films is how the “dominant culture” reinforces or/and changes its ideology due to the war, in other words, how wartime narratives differ from those produced in a time of peace. Michael

Renov points out that a war crisis “produc[es] a kind of ruptural unity, reduces the level of contestation [in hegemony] to an all-time low, so that the interests of capital appear to coincide with the interests of the people—to preserve democratic principles, to insure the continued existence of the state.”²⁹ The role of the state in shaping public discourse significantly increases during a war. The example of Hollywood production during WWII is especially telling as the American film industry ardently responded to the government’s plea to help boost the war effort. As the production histories of the films I analyze demonstrate, during the war the distinction between state and private interests blurred. The Warner brothers, for instance, were famous for their enthusiastic support for FDR and his wartime policies.³⁰ Another example of how the war shattered peacetime standards and conventions was director Frank Capra who, although well known for his strong anti-communist convictions, made one of the most successful and convincing pro-Soviet films, the documentary *Battle of Russia*.

Renov suggests that the “the meshing of normally oppositional categories—public and private, labor and capital, legislated and volunteered”—that happened during the war only typifies and intensifies the hegemonic order:

This period of social life, of which film production was a part, constituted a moment ... during which a variety of disparate elements fused together to form a condensed ideological amalgamation.... It is this period of film history that constitutes the apogee of confluence between perpetuation of state policy and authority and the “relatively autonomous” cinematic institution.³¹

For Renov, then, one of the most important features of cinema/state relations during the war is the issue of propaganda.

Without denouncing Renov's interpretation of film and its role in wartime popular culture, Dana Polan suggests that the filmic narratives of the 1940s should not be limited to a discussion of "propaganda." Polan offers a framework that suggests that "cinema [of the forties] poses historical and theoretical questions of and to the representations of ideology—the ways it suggests a narrativity caught between power and paranoia."³² By power here, Polan means, "the power that narrative structure specifically possesses to write an image of life as coherent, ideological, univocal." Paranoia, for Polan, is "the fear of narrative, and the particular social representations it works to uphold, against all that threatens the unity of its logical framework."³³ Paranoia is not "an eternally abstract condition but a specifically social way of responding to new permutations in everyday perception and possibility."³⁴

For the purposes of this work, Polan's focus on narrative power and paranoia has several important implications. As narrative power stems from dominant ideology, it is necessary to analyze Hollywood pro-Soviet films from the vantage point of how these films created, to use a Foucauldian term, a new "discursive gridding" about the Soviet Union and its people, in other words, how these films tried to construct a new narrative about the Soviet-American alliance. Yet because the previous discursive grids established by, among other things, the "Red Scares" of the 1920s and 1930s, the two countries' ideological hostility as well as Hollywood films like *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* were strongly embedded into the American perception of Russia, and, thus, the new grids that overlapped with the earlier ones created a blurred and incoherent portrayal of the Soviet Union. In the analyses of the films' narratives, we see that they aspire to consistency, and sometimes they succeed individually but fail as a whole. Therefore,

Polan's narrative paranoia (or lack thereof in the analyzed films) and its rupturing nature and impulse to destroy the unity of the narrative provides a helpful tool for thinking about reasons for the failure of these films to create a lasting or coherent cultural map for the Soviet-American friendship.

The contradiction of power and paranoia, and of the dominant ideological narrative and the creation of a new social gridding, is most strikingly demonstrated in the dynamic of gender roles during WWII. Wartime representations of masculinity and femininity, on one hand, most often reveal a significant shift in gender roles. Women's participation in the work force and the war effort offered a challenging environment for both men and women and called for serious (if, temporary, as it turned out) revision of traditional gender definitions and relations. But because of the patriarchal order of American society, wartime representations of women (not only Soviet women) still often emerged out of a popular and widely shared notion of "woman behind man behind gun." Regardless of the type of job and how successfully women performed it, wartime propaganda constantly stressed the temporariness of the situation and women's ultimate subordination to men. Women were represented as substitutes for men, but they were never seen as equal replacements. Michael Renov provides an excellent example of such discourse during the war. A War Department pamphlet entitled "You're Going to Employ Women" communicated its approbation of the 'new woman' by coining a rather curious metaphor: "A woman worker is not a man, in many jobs she is a substitute—like plastics instead of metal."³⁵

Leila Rupp in her study of *Mobilizing Women for War* shows that such propagandistic portrayals of women both urged the acceptance of women in "male" jobs

and preserved their feminine identities. Rupp states that, regardless of the fact that the media's attention to working women was unprecedented during World War II, attitudes toward women did not fundamentally change: "Rosie the Riveter, like the flapper, was exotic in appearance, even perhaps in lifestyle. But the new image did not mean that the ideal American woman had changed beyond recognition. Beneath her begrimed exterior, she remained very much a traditional woman."³⁶ The ambiguity of Rosie the Riveter's image is most tellingly reflected in the American public's confusion about the "real" Rosie. The iconic image associated with Rosie is J. Howard Miller's 1942 poster entitled *We Can Do It!* (See Appendix II). Miller's heroine, however, has no name in the painting, but was mistakenly labeled and widely embraced as Rosie the Riveter. The real Rosie, however, was portrayed by Norman Rockwell in 1943, and, although famous in its own right, the image did not become as iconic a representation of wartime American women as the nameless heroine in the *We Can Do It!* poster.

The comparison of the two images might give us an answer that correlates with Rupp's idea of wartime conservatism regarding gender roles and representations of femininity. Rockwell's Rosie with her manly demeanor is a large and tough woman with strong arms, a rivet gun across her lap, and a copy of *Mein Kampf* under her feet. There is nothing glamorous or sexual about her image. Miller's poster, on the contrary, portrays a tough yet feminine woman: with a bandana, playfully tied on the head, she wears makeup, has painted nails, and dons a tight and flattering shirt. The absence of any tools on the poster also contributes to a more "feminine" reading of the image. If Rockwell's Rosie is explicitly masculine, Miller's character represents (or, perhaps, gestures towards) more conventional femininity. The fact that the more feminine

portrayal became an iconic image of the wartime woman exemplifies Rupp's point that wartime propaganda adapted to the temporary employment of women in male fields but left traditional gender norms untouched: "The economic role and the popular image of women may change drastically in the course of a modern war, but basic ideas about women's proper sphere, characterized by cultural lag even in the case of long-term economic developments, change little."³⁷

In *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, Maureen Honey further develops the idea that popular cultural propaganda of WWII shaped and reinforced the image of women as temporary (and "feminine") substitutes for men. She points out that several techniques were used to reinforce this gender ideology. For instance, "war workers," as she calls women, served as a "symbol of the ideal home-front spirit, standing for national unity, dedication to the cause, and stoic pursuit of victory."³⁸ This image put women between Scylla and Charybdis as it idealized women as both strong, capable fighters and workers and vulnerable personifications of peace and domesticity that could not survive without male protection. As Honey stresses, "the role allocated to women in wartime propaganda, then, was a complicated mixture of strength and dependence, competence and vulnerability, egalitarianism and conservatism."³⁹

The use of women as personifications or symbols is another dimension of the gendered wartime propaganda that helped to keep women in their subordinate position, suppressing the progressive gains of women's involvement in the workforce. Honey points out that "propagandists found in women the personification of vulnerability they were looking for to concretize and make real the message that civilians must help soldiers protect American interests." Also, women were portrayed as preservers of

peacetime virtues and family life, which came to be equated with security, stability, and prosperity. In addition to their courage and strength, they emerged as caretakers of national ideals and normalcy, a role that echoed women's traditional function as spiritual guides for the family.

For centuries, women have been seen as symbols of nation, culture, reproduction. Higonet emphasizes the connection between the reproductive function of women and military strategies:

Military strategy and pronatalist policy... are two columns in a double-entry political accounting system. From this joint policy flows the wartime segregation of sexes and the symbolic politicization of women's reproductive function. The nation addresses to its soldiers or prisoners of war a political discourse that is ironically obsessed with sexual reproduction. War strengthens the sense of women are property, as well as symbols of national victory.⁴⁰

In this passage, Higonet brings up some important issues: the perception of women as symbols of nation and land, the masculinization of warfare, and the subordination of women's position. Further, she asserts similar patterns of gendering characteristic for both aggressors and victims of war: "For the aggressors, viewing military technology as masculine permits the domination and ordering of a nature and territory perceived as female. For nations on the defensive, the radical changes entailed in mobilization and demobilization may be symbolically limited by a rhetorical continuity that stresses the subordination of woman to the family."⁴¹

In the textual analysis of cinema, the reading of women iconographically as cultural "signs" is especially interesting. In relation to the topic at hand, Claire Johnson

stresses that Hollywood cinema is governed by the ideological operations in and through which the woman is constructed as a fixed sign:

Iconography as a specific kind of a sign or cluster of signs based on certain conventions with the Hollywood genres has been partly responsible for the stereotyping of women within the commercial cinema in general, but the fact that there is a far greater differentiation of men's roles than of women's roles in the history of the cinema relates to sexist ideology itself, and the basic opposition which places man inside history, and woman as ahistoric and eternal.⁴²

To an extent, the stereotypical perceptions of women as symbols for nation, land and culture have been rooted in the idea of "otherness" of women. Viewed as other, woman is indirectly the signifier for man, the signified. As Simone de Beauvoir first observed, woman's identity is culturally constructed around man's identity: "she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other."⁴³ Renov argues that the otherness of women during WWII also manifested itself in adoration of the female: "For the American fighting man, the prototypical American male of the 1940s, women were rendered 'ideological' by their physical absence; they were dreams, letters, pin-ups and memories rather than flesh and blood."⁴⁴

The symbolism and "admiration" for women were coupled with the discourse on special "manliness" of the era. In the words of Jonathan Daniels, an administrative assistant to the President, writing just weeks after Pearl Harbor:

The forties are here in which Americans stand on a continent as men—men again fighting in the crudest man terms—for ourselves and also for that destination in decency for all men of which our settlement, our spreading, was always a symbol. In an America grown magnificently male again we have a chance to fight for a homeland with the full meaning of homeland as a world that is fit to be the home of man.⁴⁵

As Renov emphasizes, this masculine coding of warfare provides a clue to the ubiquity of wartime female self-effacement, the sacrifice credo, and subordination of female social and political positions.

J. Ann Tickner in *Gender in International Relations and Gendering World Politics*, states that historically the discipline of international relations and political practice legitimate the states' "security-seeking behavior" through appeals to types of "hegemonic" masculinity. For instance, she emphasizes that "war and peace are frequently portrayed as gendered concepts; while women's voices have rarely been granted legitimacy in matters of war and national security, they have been stereotypically associated with idealized versions of peace."⁴⁶ Moreover, she points out, "the valorization of war through its identification with a heroic kind of masculinity depends on a feminized, devalued notion of peace seen as unattainable and unrealistic."⁴⁷ Tickner's study shows the power of hegemonic patriarchy in creating a homogeneous discourse about war and peace as related to national security and how difficult it is to rupture this masculine-gendered discourse since it is, as she emphasizes, the "only permissible way of speaking about national security if one is to be taken seriously by the strategic community."⁴⁸ On the other hand, wartime death and destruction are frequently coded as feminine in this dominant discourse since they are often spoken of in emotional terms, stereotypically associated with women. Tickner indicates that war is constructed in such war that it reinforces gender distinctions: "To act like a soldier is not to be 'womanly,' and war is promoting an image of a soldier as a warrior, self-sacrificially protecting women, children, and other vulnerable people."⁴⁹

Another aspect of patriarchal wartime construction of gender relations is the reinforcement of the long-standing distinction between “good” and “bad” femininity. The former group consists of good wives, faithful sweethearts, and self-sacrificing mothers who serve as quintessential symbols for peace and domesticity. Their sexuality was soft and unthreatening; even if explicit, as, for instance, in some pin-ups, it was still packaged to reassure its “man pleasing” function. The latter group reminds us that not all women are benign and good-natured. This type of femininity, stigmatized as treacherous and dangerous, can be seen in such posters as, for instance, Victor Keppler’s 1944 *Wanted! For Murder* (See Appendix I). This poster portrays a woman who is supposed to resemble the viewer’s neighbor, sister, wife, or daughter, as an unwitting murderess. The tagline read, “Her careless talk costs lives.” In cinema, this opposition was represented most evocatively by *film noir* with strong *femme fatales*. Films like *Double Indemnity* and *Phantom Lady* created the images of threatening female sexuality pointing to “excessive” emancipation and independence of women. Although the female characters in pro-Soviet Hollywood films are rather remote from *femme fatales*, the distinction between “good” and “bad” femininity is present in at least one—*Days of Glory* creates a binary opposition between Nina and Yelena, which I will discuss in more detail below.

This complexity of representations of femininity in wartime popular culture brings us back to the question of what representation is and how it is connected to ideology. In his typography of representation, Richard Dyer considers four different factors: first, the media language or conventions used to represent the world to the audience; second, the extent to which types (stereotypes) are used to represent groups; third, the people responsible for the representation; and, four, the audience’s response to

what is being represented to them.⁵⁰ All these criteria are important for our understanding of how media representations are created and how they function. But, overall, Dyer's typography emphasizes cultural hegemony in the process of representation.

Since this study's main concern is the representation of one culture by another, the analysis of the use of stereotypes is especially valuable. Adopting Walter Lippmann's definition of stereotypes, Dyer points out that they have four functions: ordering process, "short cut," way of referring to the world, and expression of "our" values and beliefs. The last is the most valuable observation for this study, as it helps us understand the construction of gendered Russian images in Hollywood film during WWII. Also, it echoes Siegfried Kracauer's contention that "any culture in portraying another culture inevitably projects itself and reflects more the state of mind of its own people than the mentality of the other people."⁵¹ Therefore, in my textual analyses of the pro-Russian Hollywood films, I will examine how Hollywood constructed a friendlier image of the Soviet Union through the feminization of the new ally and creation of the representation that reflected American values and beliefs more than those of the Soviet Union.

Textual Analysis: Women's Films about Russia

Mission to Moscow was the first major, and most controversial, of all wartime Hollywood productions about the Soviet Union. The debate over the film was ignited by its production circumstances as well as its notorious portrayal of Russia. Based on the bestselling memoir of Joseph E. Davies, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1936-1948, the film was produced by Warner Brothers, the most ardent supporter in Hollywood of President Roosevelt. The studio's best talent was delegated to the effort: *Casablanca*'s director Michael Curtiz and scriptwriter Howard Koch worked together. As Todd Bennett points out, "the film was an attempt by FDR, Davies, Warner Bros. Studios, and the OWI to counter Americans' distrust of their socialist and allegedly totalitarian Soviet ally."⁵² The film was not directly commissioned by any government institution, but Davies was actively involved in the production and the President overtly encouraged it. Roosevelt later used the film as a tool of communication between the United States and the Soviet Union. Upon its completion, the film was sent to Stalin and became, as Bennett describes, "an integral part of the foreign half of Roosevelt's Soviet policy."⁵³

Constructed as a political pseudo-documentary drama, the film is transitional and marked the shift in American-Soviet relations and in the cultural feminization of Russia. Its main task was to explain the political implications of the alliance and, more generally, convey the reliability of the Soviet Union, its army, and leaders. Made in the midst of the war, the film depicts the pre-war situation with a great deal of presentism, embellishing useful details and distorting inconvenient facts about the Soviet Union and its economic and political problems. The film starts with a talk between President Roosevelt and

Joseph E. Davies. FDR wants Davies to take a job as an American Ambassador to the Soviet Union. To Davies's objection that he is no diplomat, the President replies, "This isn't a job for a diplomat. I need an American businessman to get me hardboiled facts." This "pragmatic" approach is praised throughout the film: Davies is sincere, open-minded and committed to finding out the "truth" about the Soviet Union as opposed to "traditional" diplomats, represented by Germans and Japanese, who are prone to lying, spying, and plotting. Because of its pseudo-documentary approach (reinforced by the extensive use of actual documentary and newsreel footage), the film insists on its realism and truthfulness.

As the film depicts the journey of the American diplomat across the Soviet Union, the women in the film are presented rather comprehensively. Marjorie Davies (Ann Harding) and Emlen Davies (Eleanor Parker), the ambassador's wife and daughter respectively, represent the American women, while Mrs. Litvinov (Barbara Everest) and Tanya Litvinov (Maria Palmer), the wife and daughter of Maxim Litvinov, the Russian Foreign Minister (and the wartime Soviet Ambassador to the U.S.) represent the Soviet side. Since the film desperately tries to prove that Russians and Americans are very much alike, the two families of the diplomats find more commonalities than differences between themselves. Casting choices were one of the techniques that conveyed these similarities between Russians and Americans. If in the pre-war films Russians were usually portrayed by European actors who frequently imitated the German accent instead of a Russian one, starting with *Miss V from Moscow* and *Mission to Moscow*, American or Russian actors were used to play parts of Soviet protagonists. The only exception in

the four films I analyze is the actor Maria Palmer, who was Austrian and played Russians in both *Mission to Moscow* and *Days of Glory*.

As McLaughlin and Parry assert in their book, two major strategies draw connections between the two countries and present them in a more or less believable way: the use of already established stereotypes and decontextualization—that is, moving the film away from the specifics of the Soviet Union and creating a more general situation that can be easily connected to America and Americans.⁵⁴ Both techniques are used in *Mission to Moscow*, although not always successfully. As the stereotypes about Soviet politics and politicians were not particularly flattering and decontextualization was not suitable for depicting political situations, the political part of the film is controversial for its heavy-handed propaganda. Nevertheless, the strategies worked culturally in *Mission's* depiction of ordinary Russian people, including its representations of Soviet women, as being like Americans in many ways.

In the film, women are represented in three clusters: the diplomats' wives, their daughters, and working women. The first group is the most traditional, but with a progressive twist. The characters of Mrs. Davies and Mrs. Litvinov, essentially identified as the wives, show the change in wartime representations of women, but at the same time reinforce the idea of women's inferior social position as well as the notion of politics, international relations, and security as masculine occupations. Educated, sophisticated, and rather formal, they have the demeanor suitable to their standing. On the other hand, as their dialogue reveals, they both believe that women should have an occupation outside their domestic responsibilities. When Marjorie Davies visits Mrs. Litvinov at work—she is a commissar of the cosmetic industry—they discuss their misconceptions

about each other and are delighted to find that they “have much in common”: they, as women, want to be beautiful “to please their men,” but they also want to work. When Mrs. Davies says that she is running her father’s business, Mrs. Litvinov notes in surprise, “An American woman running a business? We had an impression American women were ornamental but not useful. And you thought our women were useful but not ornamental.” They both smile in agreement that they were wrong about each other. Therefore, the film shows that working women can be socially productive, yet at the same time, many of their jobs are still “feminine,” as the cosmetic industry clearly has strong patriarchal implications: it produces goods to “please men.” Later in the film, when the Davieses go to Britain to meet the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Mrs. Davies shares a short conversation with Mrs. Churchill, who asks a rhetorical question, “Do you ever stop thinking that men are always trying to make the world better or worse, while most women are content just live in it?” This remark reinforces the patriarchal myth of female peaceful passivity as opposed to men’s active and benevolent social intervention.

While the mothers discuss a woman’s duty to be beautiful and acknowledge their ability to be business women, their daughters have fun with ordinary people. Davies’s daughter Emlen acts as a liaison between her parents and ordinary Russians, especially Soviet youth: she goes to the skating rink, wants to learn Russian dances, and takes a ride in a sleigh drawn by a traditional Russian three-horse team. In this heavy-handed political propaganda film filled with figures of real politicians, the audience sees through Emlen’s eyes a glimpse of non-political life in Russia. What she sees looks appealing to her and shows that life in Russia is simple and happy. Yet she is astutely loyal to American

ideals. When dancing with a Russian officer at the diplomatic ball, she notes that, although she is familiar with the works of Marx, he should not try to convert her to communism. Elmen's youth and liveliness, as well as the fact that she is enjoying herself in Soviet Russia, convey a sense of security and benevolence about the country.

Tanya Litvinov, Elmen's Soviet counterpart whose company she enjoys most, represents a new generation of Russian women. Young and beautiful, educated and athletic, she is a parachutist in the military. Although her father emphasizes that his daughter's training is a necessity rather than a choice ("it's better for us to be prepared for what's coming"), Tanya herself looks rather fearless and proud to be in the armed forces. Tanya's portrayal, more than anybody else's in the film, is built on the foundation of pre-war Russian characters like Ninotchka or Theodore from *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X*. In the character of Tanya, the filmmakers turn the qualities ridiculed and criticized in the older characters into virtues. Like her predecessors, Tanya is outspoken and patriotic. She is not afraid to take up a typically male occupation, and she also possesses the physical strength of Ninotchka and Theodore, a stereotype usually attached to Russian characters (male and female) in pre-war Hollywood films.

In addition to the female representatives of Soviet society's elite, the film shows several working women, emphasizing women's active participation in the workforce under the Soviet regime. The idea that Soviet women do men's jobs is ridiculed in *Comrade X*, but in 1943 the United States needed to encourage American women to go to work in support of the war effort. *Mission to Moscow* finds Russian female workers admirable and depicts them in the best light possible. The film shows women as train engineers, miners, and factory workers. The film's American male protagonists are

surprised to find women performing typically male jobs. For instance, when Davies's valet sees a woman in an engineer's cabin of the train, he wonders if they let her ride with the engineer only to find out that she *is* the engineer. Then the ambassador himself goes across the country to visit different regions and assess the Soviets' preparedness for the war. He finds that over thirty percent of Soviet miners are women, and one of them asks him whether it is true that American women do not do work like this. Davies replies, "There is no law against it but we don't like putting our women underground until we have to." For a film made in 1943, it sends a clear message that American men had to put their women to work. In this sense, Russian women on screen provides a good example for American women, but the film still emphasizes the emergency and temporary nature of all this. Above all, in its gender politics, *Mission to Moscow* stresses that the decision about women's entering the workforce or the military is supposed to be made by men. The film does not leave space for female characters' initiatives.

While one of the main ideas of the film is that Russians are just like Americans, it appears that *Mission to Moscow* was largely unsuccessful in convincing the American public. The film got mixed reviews, and its explicit endorsement of Stalin's government ignited a vivid discussion on propaganda and its suitability in Hollywood films. In their letter to *The New York Times* philosopher John Dewey and journalist Suzanne LaFollette condemned *Mission to Moscow* as "the first instance in our country of totalitarian propaganda for mass consumption." Hollywood's earlier ideological apparatus also created an obstacle to delivering a new positive message about the Soviet ally. The new and contradictory discursive grid exemplified by *Mission to Moscow* conflicted with those previously established by *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* both of which painted a dark,

if satiric, picture of terrible realities of Soviet Russia a few years before. The general audience was not ready to believe in Russia's quick transformation from a poor totalitarian state sunken in violent bloodshed into a prosperous and happy country, where people were just like Americans.

One of the strongest contradictions between the old and new images of the Soviet Union was *Mission to Moscow's* interpretation of the U.S.S.R.'s relationship to Nazi Germany. Both *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* drew a connection between Russian and German regimes, yet *Mission to Moscow* completely dismissed any associations. In Curtiz's film, Germany is a dark zone of totalitarianism where children are like "wooden soldiers," reading nothing but Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Russia is a merry land of music, dances, ice-skating parties, and happy children. But the factor that made the film most notorious and controversial was its treatment of Stalin's purges of the 1930s. By defending the fairness of Stalin's regime, the film failed to significantly improve Russia's image in the eye of the American public.

The lesson of *Mission to Moscow's* failure was absorbed in Hollywood, and all subsequent pro-Soviet productions tried to ignore issues of politics and ideology, instead concentrating on the Russian people's struggle against Nazism. The shift from politics to emotions was expressed, among other things, in the change of genre of pro-Soviet films. If *Miss V from Moscow* was a comedy and *Mission to Moscow* a political docudrama, *The North Star* and the films that followed were constructed as melodramas. The narratives of the films focused on the struggle of female protagonists (who often stood for the entire Russian nation) with generous use of lush, romantic music to elevate the emotional appeal of the films. Taking into account the feminization of the Soviet Union's national

identity, I argue that *The North Star*, *Song of Russia*, and *Days of Glory* present a type of women's films with a general emphasis on the struggle and sacrifice of the Russian state as represented by women.

The North Star, released in November 1943, was the next major picture to portray the wartime Soviet Union. Written by Lillian Hellman and directed by Lewis Milestone, this picture does not have American protagonists. Set in rural Ukraine, *The North Star* tells the story of a village occupied by Nazis and its struggle for freedom. The film has a straightforward narrative structure. The first part depicts peaceful times, while the second concentrates on wartime troubles and challenges. Interestingly, the film was originally conceived as a documentary. In 1942, Harry Hopkins, one of Roosevelt's closest advisers, approached Hellman about doing a documentary about Russia. William Wyler, who directed the wartime hit *Mrs. Miniver*, and Gregg Toland, who did photography for *Citizen Kane*, planned to participate in the project. However, due to various delays their plans were not realized. Hellman decided she did not want to do a documentary with anyone else,⁵⁵ thus she wrote a fictional film about the heroic resistance of ordinary Russians. The film has several central characters: high school graduates Damien (Farley Granger), Marina (Anne Baxter), and Clavdia (Jane Withers); a bombardier Kolya (Dana Andrews); the village doctor Kurin (Walter Huston, who played Ambassador Davies in *Mission to Moscow*); and Marina's mother Sophia (Ann Harding, another actor from *Mission to Moscow*—she portrayed Marjorie Davies). All the film's actors were American, and they speak in the film with their American accents without any hint of Russian. The film's plot is rather simple: Damien, Marina, Clavdia, and Kolya are hiking to Kiev for vacation, but Germany invades the Ukraine and now they have to fight

against the Nazis. *The North Star* was one of the first pictures to show graphic violence of the war in the Soviet Union. The political themes, however, were underplayed or altogether ignored in favor of concentrating on “human interest” situations which would be identifiable for an American audience.

Although there are no American characters on the screen, the film encourages the audience’s identification with the Russian people through the Americanization of its Russian characters (including the aforementioned American accented speech). As Brett Westbrook writes, Hellman purposely diminished differences between the two cultures to show that, despite the antithetical nature of capitalism and communism, both nations were actually fighting for the same goals.⁵⁶ Westbrook points out that the idea of common goals is most powerfully embodied in the portrayal of children—both peoples love and protect their kids—and the general representation of Russians as victims. To deliver the idea of children’s suffering during the war, Milestone graphically shows the killing of several children and makes them the main victims of Nazi villains. The “fascist beasts” even drain blood from children for wounded German soldiers. The second idea is depicted through the village’s struggle to defend itself. As Westbrook notes, the Russians were depicted as “the poorly equipped good guys fighting against the better armed bad guys.”⁵⁷ Lillian Hellman, as Westbrook points out, was “well aware of her medium and its traditions, relies heavily on the American tendency to root for the underdog.”⁵⁸ The victimization of the Russian characters also contributed to the country’s melodramatic, feminized image through suffering and vulnerability. In one sense, *The North Star* is a family melodrama in which Russia is a main maternal protagonist and the Russian people

her children. The film tells the story of Mother Russia's sacrifice in the name of preserving the family.

Beyond melodramatic "Mother Russia" allegorical elements, the film's narrative largely relies on the female characters' development as mothers and daughters, in order to reflect the great sacrifice of the Russian women. Mothers and/or motherly figures in these films stand for domestic life and struggle for family values, as daughters or younger female characters stand for romantic love. In a larger metaphorical sense, both groups embody the motherland and the hope for its future.

Maternal sacrifice is most powerfully personified in the character of Sophia, Marina's mother and the wife of the head of the village's collective farm. Sophia is an embodiment of stoic motherhood and sacrifice. In the sequence of the Nazi attack on the village, she is a central figure. The sequence starts with images of peaceful domesticity: women are doing their tasks, a doctor checks on a woman who just gave birth to a baby girl, Sophia looks out of the window to see her younger daughter playing with a friend. Then the sequence cuts to German airplanes flying over the village. The children scream and run away, but Sophia's daughter is killed during the bombing. The next scene, after the attack, shows the village in shock and disarray. We find Sophia sitting on the ground with the lifeless body of her daughter. When she sees her husband approaching her, she covers the dead child's face with her apron. Shocked, the parents do not rush to embrace each other in grief; the father stops a couple of yards from his wife and does not move. The film valorizes their stoicism and conveys that their loss is not only a personal one as the chorus of *The International*, which was the National Anthem of the Soviet Union at the time, plays as a soundtrack for the sequence. Sophia's stoic maternity and heroism are

further stressed when she becomes the first woman to set her house on fire, following the directions of Stalin's "scorched earth" policy, before the arrival of Nazi troops. Later, when the Nazis are already in town and want to know where all the men have gone, Sophia steps up as the wife of the head of the farm, sacrificing herself and saving the villagers. She is tortured but does not give away the locations of the guerrilla fighters that the village men have joined.

The young characters of Marina and Clavdia are the film's representations of women as faithful daughters. In the beginning they are ordinary teenagers, but by the end of the film they become brave young women fighting for their country. Clavdia undergoes the most significant transformation, from a naïve chatterbox to a courageous fighter who gives her life to save a friend. Marina and Damien, her high school sweetheart (called the village's Romeo and Juliet in one of the songs in the film), represent a romantic relationship. Romantic love in these wartime films is both a reminder of the past (we are still able to feel and love)⁵⁹, and hope for the future (the prospect of having children and a happy domestic life when the war is over). The young women are yet another symbol of the cause of the war, personifying the answer to the "Why do we fight?" question. *The North Star's* Damien rather curiously expresses what Marina means to him when he says to her, "You will sleep on my shoulder. It will make me feel good, sure of myself." Then he kisses her for the first time. These words show Damien's intuitive understanding of a connection between female safety and protective masculinity. The war shatters traditional gender roles, and the teenaged Damien subconsciously feels it and tries to restore some of his lost feeling of "masculinity" with his words above. It is important to note that while masculinity in general is powerfully

presented in the films under examination here—in images of American and German characters especially—Russian masculinity was frequently portrayed as impotent or “[un]sure of itself.” Even in *Days of Glory*, the male guerrilla fighters are shown emotionally wounded and susceptible. This portrayal of Russian masculinity in Hollywood pro-Soviet films can be explained by the fact that many of these films were made to boost American public’s support for the Soviet Union and emphasize that Russia cannot fight Nazism on its own, so Russian men could not be made to seem *too* masculine.

Thus, by the end of the film, *The North Star*’s Damien, blinded by an exploded grenade, is in the most vulnerable position. The film concludes with a close-up of Marina and the blinded Damien. While he is silent, Marina passionately expresses hope that the village will be rebuilt one day and “people will learn that wars don’t have to be.” She ends her speech proclaiming, “We’ll make a free world for all men. The earth belongs to us, the people. And we’ll fight for it. And we will fight for it.” The film’s conclusion charges Marina’s character with even more symbolic meaning. She is not just a young woman now: she is a symbol of a fighting Russia and an emblem of hope.

The importance of romantic love to gender coding of Russia’s image is most evidently shown in the next Hollywood film about the “new” Soviet Union, MGM’s *Song of Russia*. Released in February 1944, the film is a mix of melodrama and war film. Like *Mission to Moscow* and *The North Star*, *Song of Russia* focuses on the common values of Americans and Russians and shares a similar narrative trajectory, moving from peaceful times to the maelstrom of war. Its main message was encouragement of American involvement in the war and depiction of the love between a Russian woman and an

American man. In this film, directed by Russian-born Gregory Ratoff, an American composer John Meredith (Robert Taylor) travels to Russia with a concert group and is followed by a beautiful pianist, Nadya (Susan Peters), who wants him to come to her native village of Tschaikowskoye for an annual music festival. John and Nadya fall in love and get married in an Orthodox church, but the war breaks out and they have to separate. He continues his tour across Russia and she remains with her family. Later they both join the guerrilla army but eventually decide it would be better for them, and, most importantly, for their countries, to go to the United States and tell the Russian people's tragic story of struggle. The film concludes with their concert in New York City playing Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No.1 for an American audience.

In terms of politics, the film positions itself between the two previous films. It is neither as politicized as *Mission to Moscow* nor as oblivious to politics as *The North Star*. *Song of Russia*, whose script was rewritten several times according to recommendations received from Office of War information (OWI), Production Code Administration (PCA), and even the Soviet embassy,⁶⁰ incorporates Stalin's speech on the "scorched earth" policy but still focuses more on similarities between the United States and Russia. Throughout the first half of the film, the decontextualization strategy is evident: the characters do not discuss any political issues. While at a restaurant with Nadya, John comments on the opulent abundance of the place and the cheerfulness of the people surrounding him: "I can't get over it. Everybody seems to have such a good time... I always thought Russians were a sad, melancholy people, sitting around brooding about their souls. This is such a surprise." To Nadya, he adds: "You're a surprise, too....If I did

not meet you in Moscow, I would think you are an American girl.” Yet the image of Nadya the film constructs is more than that of an ordinary woman, Russian or American.

On one hand, Nadya incorporates almost all the good qualities of her cinematic predecessors. She is young, beautiful, talented, and hard-working. Just as the female workers in *Mission to Moscow*, she has a man’s occupation as a tractor driver (the piano is her hobby). In this respect, she is a non-comedic reincarnation of Theodore from *Comrade X*, who could operate a streetcar and a tank. Even in her romantic life, Nadya is reminiscent of Ninotchka and Theodore as she thinks that love is impractical and she should listen to her reason rather than her heart. Interestingly at the end, all three Russian characters surrender to Western men, who teach them that love is more important than everything else. As Marina and Clavdia from *The North Star* and *Mission’s* Tanya, Nadya is fearless and ready to take the gun if necessary. She knows how to shoot and even teaches the village kids how to make Molotov cocktails. Later in the film, staying on the Nazi occupied territory, she decides to join the guerrilla fighters.

On the other hand, *Song’s* protagonist is elevated to a high symbolic level. The narrative frames her not only as a typical working, yet feminine, Soviet woman but as an allegory of Russia. Shown in both a small village and in Moscow, Nadya integrates features of both places. Coming from a peasant family but having a great talent and love for classical music, she is both simple and sophisticated. She is shy yet courageous, feminine but strong. She, in short, is a symbol of the entire country. The restaurant sequence when John and Nadya go on a date reinforces this. A song entitled “And Russia is Her Name” reflects the emerging feelings between the American conductor and his Russian admirer:

When I was young, I gave my heart away
Her cheeks were all the cherry trees that bloom in May
Her eyes were stars that lit the darkness with a silver flame
And she is still my love, and Russia is her name⁶
She stood beside my plow, she kissed away my tears
And warmed my empty hands, through all the empty years.

The song's flowery words reflect not only Nadya's position as John's love interest but her position as a symbol of her country.

As Marina does in *The North Star*, Nadya also represents hope for the future. As in *The North Star*, this film ends with a close-up of Nadya playing Tchaikovsky's Concerto with the voice-over plea of Boris, Nadya's friend who died at the hands of the Nazis: "We will feel you fighting side by side with us, all soldiers in the same army. Fighting to bring a new light to our children, for the great day when the whole world will sing with a new song of freedom; for you will bring our great countries closer together, in the fight for all humanity." The end of *Song of Russia* echoes the conclusion of *Mission to Moscow* when Davies also pronounces his plea: "We pledge to you, the unborn generations yet to come to work for peace, and justice, and the dignity of man so that you can answer Cain's angry cry, 'Am I my brother's keeper' with 'yes, you are.'" The film ends while the chorus swells: "You are, yes, you are, you are your brother's keeper, now and forever, you are—"⁶¹ However, the endings differ in tone and connotation. Both of them address the American people, but the former is focused on the idea of unity between the two nations and the idea of a common goal, while the latter is more focused on the future of the United States. Deeply religious in content, Davies's conclusion appeals to the American people's spiritual convictions; the imagery of "a shining city upon a hill" comes to mind with the last shot of the film when the crowd turns their heads up to the

bright light at the top of a hill. *Song of Russia*'s ending echoes *Mission to Moscow*'s political statement, while at the same time it resonates with the conclusion of *The North Star*, which also features a close-up of the female lead, thus placing women as objects of pseudo-religious devotion.

The religious connotations of female characters, as well as the national symbolism attached to them take another step with *Days of Glory*, one of the last wartime Hollywood productions about the Soviet Union. Released in June 1944, the film was the least noticed "Russian picture" produced by a major studio. Largely known today as Gregory Peck's first film, *Days of Glory* gives a rich portrayal of Soviet women. Written and produced by Casey Robinson and directed by Jacques Tourneur, the film tells the story of a group of guerrilla fighters in the Nazi occupied regions of Russia. Vladimir (Gregory Peck) is a guerrilla leader preparing for a major attack on the Nazis. His squad is small but diverse: drunkard Sasha (Alan Reed), blacksmith Dmitri (Igor Dolgoruki), teenage brother and sister Mitya and Olga (played by Glen Vernon and Dena Penn), brave sniper Yelena (*Mission to Moscow*'s Maria Palmer), depressed soldier Petrov (Edward Durst), and professor Semyon (Lowell Gilmore).

The film starts when Sasha brings "a package" from his guerrilla raid to the occupied village. The package turns out to be ballerina Nina (Tamara Toumanova) from Moscow, who was separated from her troupe when touring for the Red Army and rescued by the guerrillas. Initially, the group does not want to accept Nina, who does not know how to cook, sew, or shoot a gun. Only young Mitya and Semyon are fascinated by her otherworldliness. She recites a Pushkin poem by heart with Semyon and gives an ad lib performance for Mitya. But Yelena, who clearly has some feelings for Vladimir, is

jealous of her (even though Vladimir does not appear to be interested in Nina). Olga is annoyed by Nina's inability to contribute to their day-to-day life. Feeling like an outsider, Nina tries to adjust to her new community, but succeeds only when she shoots a Nazi soldier who tries to escape from the guerrillas. The killing is a kind of an initiation for her. After the incident the group starts to trust her, as Vladimir takes her on a mission to blow up a railroad. After the successful operation, Nina and Vladimir find time to enjoy each other's company and fall in love. As the film progresses, the group starts falling apart—Yelena is killed on a mission, Mitya is hanged by the Nazis for his refusal to reveal the guerrillas' location, Olga is evacuated with the villagers. Finally the survivors are killed under Nazi gun fire.

The film's treatment of women is relatively complex. On one level, Yelena represents the traditional portrayal of the combat women. She is a skilled sniper and a good soldier. The film, however, insists that women should not forget their femininity. Olga, although only a teenager, is a good cook and housekeeper. In the introductory part of the film, the narrator calls her "little mother." The film even tries to temper Yelena as she is introduced as a "girl from a factory turned soldier," which means she was forced to turn soldier by necessity. But Yelena's masculinity is apparent with her first appearance on the screen: it is a sniper rifle—a very masculine object—that we see even before we see the shooter. Only when Yelena has completed her task and takes off the hood of the uniform can we see that she is a woman. Thus, Yelena's introduction is ambiguous in terms of her gender role in the film, and though she is not a treacherous *femme fatale*, her femininity is questionable by the standards of wartime propaganda. Her manliness is emphasized by her costumes (she usually wears a uniform), her behavior (she is shown

several times cleaning her gun, and, as we find out, she killed 63 Nazis), and her dismissal of poetry (“is it important today what happened in a fictitious love story?” she asks annoyed, when her comrades are reading Pushkin).

But most vividly Yelena’s “bad” performance of femininity is shown in her relationship with Vladimir. The film suggests that they have a sexual relationship, but it is contrasted with the romantic love Vladimir and Nina share. When Nina asks Vladimir what Yelena meant to him, his first reaction is a lie: “Nothing, we were comrades.” But seeing that Nina does not believe him, he continues: “Well, Yelena...But I can tell you there was no love as we understand it. No one part of it.” He further reassures Nina of his love by elaborating, “I try to remember when I did not know you, but I can’t. Only an emptiness, hatred, and death. There was agony. You’ve done a dreadful thing to me. You taught me the love life again. My dear, dear Nina.” In his effort to assure Nina of the truthfulness of his feelings, Vladimir denounces Yelena’s feelings, but even to a greater extent he denounces Yelena herself. Her love for him could not sustain his faith in “love life” nor could it fill in his “emptiness.” As the previous narrative demonstrates, in her masculine soldiering, Yelena was associated with hatred and death, thus the narrative “punishes” her for her unconventional and uncompromising gender position. Vladimir sends her as a messenger from his squad to another, and she is shot by the Nazis and dies alone in the woods. Although the scene of Yelena’s death abruptly cuts to Nina, who wakes up from a disturbing dream, presumably feeling that Yelena was killed, the film does not otherwise associate the two women. On the contrary, the montage of Yelena’s death and Nina’s waking up invests itself more in the latter’s emotional acuity and deprives the viewers of any possibility to mourn the former’s tragic death. Thus, Yelena

presents a type of woman too manly and too emancipated to be cherished and revered as a national symbol like Nina.

The Moscow ballerina Nina (a feminine woman who will do “man’s work,” but only if necessary) is more of a nationalistic allegorical figure like Marina and Nadya from *The North Star* and *Song of Russia* respectively. Being a dancer, she does not know anything about women’s domestic tasks. At first, Olga is disgusted with Nina’s inability to contribute to the everyday life of their guerilla camp, but her brother Mitya explains the value of Nina’s otherworldliness. “When you grow up, you’ll understand that we should admire such a [woman],” he says to his sister. The rest of the narrative further emphasizes that indeed Nina’s love for poetry and dance, and her “strangeness” and distinctiveness, conveys that she is more than just a woman but a feminine symbol for Russian culture and religion.

Allusions to Russian cultural heritage were one of the most common ways to make the American audience sympathize with the Russian people during this period. Leo Tolstoy and Pyotr Tchaikovsky, two of the best-known Russians, are mentioned in almost every single pro-Soviet film of the period.⁶² In *Song of Russia*, everything is about Tchaikovsky’s music: John says that everything he knows about Russia is from music, the Piano Concerto No. 1 is played on several occasions, and even the village is named after the composer. As McLaughlin and Parry point out, “music...represents not only Russian culture but also the Russian soul, the Russian identity. One implication of this metaphor is that the Russian national identity precedes and transcends the Soviet state.”⁶³ By the same token, *Days of Glory* is set near Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy’s estate, and Dmitri rescues the writer’s manuscripts from his vandalized house.

The Nazis' treatment of cultural artifacts is made to be outrageous for the characters in the films and for the American audience. As an allegorical embodiment of Russian culture, Nina is a significant character as she adds a new dimension to the collective image of Soviet women as mothers, daughters, wives, and workers. It is noteworthy, however, that the previously discussed "mother/daughter" patterns are still relevant in *Days of Glory*. As a romantic lead, Nina is definitely classified as a "daughter," but as she also symbolizes the country's cultural heritage, she becomes more of a motherly figure.

As the film progresses, Nina acquires one more symbolic meaning. After Mitya is hanged, the character appears in a setting that has religious connotations. First, we see an icon and a candle in her room; and second, while consoling Olga, Nina has her head covered with an untied scarf, looking like Madonna. The allusion is reinforced by the iconography of the shot. Nina is sitting with her head covered as Olga is crying in her arms, resembling a picture of Our Lady with Jesus. Nina looks like a saint and says to comfort Olga,

I saw a big, beautiful, shining medal upon his heart, for he's going to be one of our great, great heroes. In every school of our land his picture will be on a wall, and all the teachers will make beautiful speeches about his bravery on this day of every year. And all the children on the benches will look at Mitya's picture, and they all will envy him for having given up his life for his country so courageously.

The religious implication of the scene is powerful: the fallen soldiers of the war are saints and should be praised as such by generations to come. It is, however, unclear from the film whether the religious connotation was a conscious effort on the part of the filmmakers to show the religious revival in Soviet Russia during the era, or if it was a

practical addition on the part of the producers to satisfy a religious American audience greatly concerned with the atheism of the Soviet state.

When we consider *Mission to Moscow*, *The North Star*, *Song of Russia*, and *Days of Glory*, several trends emerge in the representations of women in pro-Soviet Hollywood pictures of World War II. First, through the course of the war, the films “progressed” from more political topics to more sociocultural ones. If the first pro-Russian films wanted to explain the current political situation in the Soviet Union, later pictures tended to focus more on the terror of war and the struggle of ordinary people. Second, almost all female characters could be placed within two groups, mother(ly) and daughter(ly) figures. The difference between them is generally connected to the age and physical attractiveness of the characters. “Mothers” represent domesticity and the sacrifice of the home front (they are also more present in documentary films than in fiction); and “daughters” are usually characters representing romantic love, but they have a strong daughterly sense of responsibility. Daughters are presented as multifaceted. They are usually young, good-looking, willing to work and fight, with a belief in love and family (cynicism or apathy are not common among these characters). Members of this group often become symbolic, representing the motherland in relation to romantic love, friendship, culture, and religion.

Historically, the films moved from traditional and concrete metaphors to more abstract allegories. If the early films embody the attitude that “we are fighting for women because they are our mothers, daughters, and lovers,” the later films present women as symbolic incarnations of Russian culture, in connection to the “sacred” causes of the war. Finally, the images of Russian women in the films underwent the process of

“westernization” and were tailored not only to American audience’s expectations of Russian women, but also to the audience’s (or filmmakers’ for that matter) perceptions of women in general, as the films wanted to encourage the American public’s identification with the Russian women as (being like American) “women.” In this respect, it is interesting that in comparison with the Soviet wartime productions, the majority of American films emphasize the youth and physical appeal of women. Although not devoid of sexualization of females, Soviet films tend to focus on heroic mothers and their sacrifice. Thus, the representation of Soviet women in the wartime Hollywood films encompasses not only political implications of international relations but also powerful gender politics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to elaborate on the subject of the “westernization” of Soviet images in Hollywood films and look closely at how the image of Russian women and Russia itself was altered for the American audience. In order to understand the differences between Soviet and American portrayals of Russian women, we need to investigate what the “real” image of them was in the 1940s. Realizing that the study of women’s representation in Soviet culture is a multifaceted and complex matter in its own right and unwilling to diminish the issue’s complexity, I suggest analyzing four images of Soviet women from posters, films and photography that represent different aspects of Soviet “womanhood.” Then I propose juxtaposing these images with those from the previously analyzed films.

To establish the initial framework for the comparison, one should consider two posters created for mobilization purposes in the two countries, posters which can be seen as iconic representations of women in the United States and the Soviet Union. The already discussed poster *We Can Do It!* is the American version, and I will juxtapose it with the 1941 Soviet poster *Motherland Calls!* (See Appendix II). The latter features a middle-aged woman holding a copy of the oath of allegiance in front of her; her left arm is raised in a reassuring gesture; the expression on her face is calm and focused; her large frame is covered by a red dress with the traditional Russian scarf on her head and shoulders.⁶⁴ The title, *The Motherland Calls*, conveys that this woman is the motherland calling for action while the bayonets in the background symbolize the unity and strength of the Red Army behind her. Thus, this poster is an iconic representation of both the Russian nation and heroic Russian women. Comparing this image of Russian femininity

with the American woman in the *We Can Do It!* poster, we can see the differences in how the two countries saw their women.⁶⁵ The most striking differences are the American image's youth, physical attractiveness, and an obscurity of her actions. By the latter I mean that her gesture, her facial expression, as well as the "We Can Do It" slogan are open to interpretation. It is up to the viewer to decide what exactly she wants to do and who the "we" stands for. As I have already discussed, Miller's heroine complies more with the American standards of conventional femininity because of her undetermined activity (as opposed to Rockwell's Rosie with a rivet gun): she might work on her own, or she might just help other people. In the meantime, the Soviet image is full of agency. She is the motherland and is doing the calling and handing of the oath of allegiance.

Another image contributing to our understanding of the image of Russian women is a documentary photograph taken by Margaret Bourke-White during her trips to the Soviet Union in the 1930s. The image appeared in *Life* magazine which enjoyed wide circulation among the American audience. In the center of the composition is a woman in a worn jacket, her head covered with a scarf. She is surrounded by other women all dressed similarly with scarves covering their heads; without a smile, they look grave and somber. Even the young girls have the same deadpan facial expression as their older cohorts. The photograph conveys the poverty and misery of Russian women. The documentary realism of Bourke-White's work makes a compelling case in asserting an authentic kind of Russian femininity that was closer to the one portrayed in this picture than to the cinematographic reincarnations of the Soviet women in Soviet or Hollywood films of the period.

In Stalinist cinema of the 1940s, women were portrayed as more physically attractive than in either the *The Motherland Calls!* poster or Bourke-White's photograph, but their social functions as workers and fighters remained equally powerful. A representative example of Soviet femininity in the Russian films of the period is actress Vera Maretskaya who starred in the Fridrikh Ermler's canonical movie of the war years, *She Defends the Motherland* (a 1943 Mosfilm production released in the United States as *No Greater Love*). Maretskaya's character Praskovia loses her husband and son at the outbreak of the war; captured by a German soldier, she is apparently raped, and after wandering through the forest, eventually finds refugees from her village. She becomes a leader of a guerilla group and adopts the name "Comrade P." As Denise Youngblood points out, "the pretty, vibrant young wife and mother has been transmogrified into the stone-faced icon of *The Motherland Calls!* poster."⁶⁶

Coming back to the analyses of the Hollywood pro-Soviet films, we notice that the shift from pre-war to wartime representation of female characters was never like that of a Soviet film like *She Defends the Motherland*. Hollywood's accounts of Soviet women's transformations were more subtle. As *The North Star*'s Marina or *Song of Russia*'s Nadya show, while women's response to the war is stoic, they still preserve their femininity and maintain a subordinate position in patriarchal society. As Damien tells Marina, although he is in love with her, she never comes *before* either the state or his male duty as a citizen. In Soviet wartime films, since that country's ideology allowed for it, women were presented as having more agency than in Hollywood cinema.

In its portrayal of Russian women, American cinema was persistent in advancing only one type of acceptable woman: one who was traditionally feminine, beautiful,

faithful, dutiful, self-effacing, and self-sacrificing motherly or daughterly embodiments of culture and religion. That objectification resonated with the culturally constructed hegemonic views on femininity at work in wartime American society and also condemned any alternatives to the dominant representations of women. In this context, Hollywood's feminization of Russia as a nation in order to make the U.S.S.R. more acceptable to Americans as an ally has broader ramifications for international politics as it represents a failure in promoting any real understanding between the two countries. Of course, the role of cinema in promoting and shaping international cultural relations is important but is also limited as the relations between the two countries were monstrously complex and driven by myriads of problems. And the decades of the Cold War demonstrated that most evidently. Nonetheless, Hollywood films are significant in defining people's views of others, and as this analysis shows that by portraying the Soviet Union as a feminized entity, Hollywood gained some sympathy for Russia among the American audience, while at the same time it failed to contribute to a better understanding of Russian culture or character among average Americans during the Second World War.

Appendices

Appendix I

The List of Pro-Soviet Hollywood Films, 1941-1945⁶⁷

| Title | Release date, studio, and director | Synopsis |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Miss V from Moscow</i> | November 23, 1942 PRC Albert Herman | Vera Marova (Lola Lane) is a Russian spy impersonating a dead German spy whom she closely resembles. Her ally is Steve Worth (Howard Banks), an American serving in the British armed services, and the two work with the Free French underground agents in Paris to send secret radio messages to Moscow that save the American convoys from German submarines. ~ IMDB website |
| <i>The Boy from Stalingrad</i> | May 20, 1943 Sidney Salkow | Russian children out in the fields gathering grain find themselves in the path of the invading German army making its way to Stalingrad, a target city of their onslaught. The four youths, Kolya, Grisha, Pavel, and the girl, Nadya, realize the German army, is attacking so they set fire to the grain field's harvest. Returning to their village the children find Tommy, a hurt English consulate's son fleeing the city with his parents who perished in the attempt. They stretcher him to their village for recovery. Still alive in the rubble of the village is a young child Yuri whom the group takes in also. Kolya, the oldest assumes leadership and skirmishes to find food for the group, living in a village cellar. ~ IMDB website |
| <i>Mission to Moscow</i> | May 22, 1943 Warner Bros Michael Curtiz | ... Requested by President Roosevelt to make a film supportive of America's Russian allies, Warner Bros. turned to the memoirs of Ambassador Joseph E. Davies, who spent several years prior to WWII in the Soviet Union. As played by Walter Huston, Davies is a pillar of incorruptable integrity, reporting the facts "as I saw them." Sent to Moscow by FDR as a means of finding out if Russia is a potentially trustworthy ally in case of war, Davies and his family are given the royal treatment by the Commissars, who display the social, technological, agricultural and artistic |

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| | | <p>advances made under the Stalin regime. Invariably, the Russian citizens are shown to be singing, smiling, freedom-loving rugged individuals—in contrast to the Nazis, who are depicted as humorless automatons. In its efforts to present the USSR in the best possible light, the film glosses over the notorious Purge Trials of 1937, presenting the trials as scrupulously fair and the defendants as unabashed traitors to the Soviet cause. At one point, Russia's annexation of Finland in 1939 is “justified” by Davies' explanation that the Soviets merely wanted to protect their tiny neighbor from Nazi domination! It is unfair to label <i>Mission to Moscow</i> as Communistic or even left-wing, since it was merely parroting the official party line vis-a-vis US/Soviet relations in 1943. ... ~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide</p> |
| <i>Background to Danger</i> | <p>June 9, 1943 Warner Bros Raoul Walsh</p> | <p>Eric Ambler's intriguing novel <i>Uncommon Danger</i> is brought down to a Republic serial level in Warner Bros. <i>Background to Danger</i>. George Raft, who always seems miscast, plays an American undercover intelligence agent operating in Turkey. Sultry Osa Massen passes on some valuable secret papers to Raft just before she is killed. Our Hero then finds himself at the mercy of enemy agent Sidney Greenstreet, who knows that the papers contain Nazi plans to invade Turkey. Despite several brutal beatings, Raft and his cohorts Peter Lorre (a good guy for a change) and Brenda Marshall turn the tables on Greenstreet: <i>Background to Danger</i> was the first of many Warner Bros. follow-ups to the studio's megahit <i>Casablanca</i>; it's also the film wherein the prankish Peter Lorre stole George Raft's hat between takes--an affront that rankled the touchy Raft to his dying day. ~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide</p> |
| <i>The North Star</i> | <p>October 13, 1943 RKO Lewis Milestone</p> | <p>In this bit of WWII propaganda, Kolya, Kurin, Damian, and Marina are members of a collective farm in the Ukraine known as the North Star. The hard-working but happy members of the North Star find their way of life shattered when Germany, in defiance of previous treaties, storms the nation and begins a brutal occupation. Dr. Otto Von Harden (Erich Von Stroheim) begins gathering children -- who are to be used for blood transfusions and medical experiments. Many of the outraged</p> |

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| | | farmers take to the hills to fight with the anti-Nazi resistance, while those who stay behind bravely destroy precious crops and materiel rather than turn them over to the Nazi war machine. Producer Samuel Goldwyn made <i>The North Star</i> at the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt (whose son James was an executive at Goldwyn's studio). ... ~ Mark Deming, All Movie Guide |
| <i>Three Russian Girls</i> | December 30, 1943 United Artists Fedor Ozep and Henry Kesler | Another of a wartime cycle of Hollywood films lauding the praises of America's Soviet allies, <i>Three Russian Girls</i> is a remake of Russia's <i>The Girl From Stalingrad</i> . Set just after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the film stars Anna Sten as Natasha, a Red Cross volunteer who is dispatched to a field hospital located in an old pre-revolution mansion. American test pilot John Hill (Kent Smith), who'd been in Russia on a goodwill mission, is wounded in battle and brought to the hospital. As he slowly recovers from his wounds, Hill falls in love with Natasha. A last-act crisis develops when the hospital personnel are forced to move immediately to Leningrad as the Nazis advance. Most of the "counter attack" scenes that follow were obviously lifted from the original <i>Girl from Stalingrad</i> . For the record, the other two "Russian girls" are played by Mimi Forsythe and Cathy Frye. ~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide |
| <i>Song of Russia</i> | December 29, 1943 MGM Gregory Ratoff | ... Based on <i>Scorched Earth</i> , a story by Leo Mittler, the film stars Robert Taylor as John Meredith, a famous American symphony conductor who is touring Russia just before the war. Meredith falls in love with Russian lass Nadya Stepanova (Susan Peters), who impresses him with her conviviality and charm: why, she's almost like a typical American girl! In the course of their romance, Meredith and Nadya visit a collective farm, where the peasants sing, dance and smile all day. The lovers marry, only to have their honeymoon abruptly halted when the Nazis invade the Soviet Union. Nadya promptly joins the Resistance, solemnly assembling molotov cocktails and shooting down Germans with her comrades. Just before the Nazis swarm into Nadya's village, the peasants set fire to the place so that Hitler's minions will not be able to plunder its resources. <u>All of this is played out against the music of</u> |

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| | | Tschaikovsky and other Russian composers. ~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide |
| <i>Days of Glory</i> | April 27, 1944 RKO Jacques Tourneur | Like <i>Song of Russia</i> and <i>Mission to Moscow</i> before it, <i>Days of Glory</i> is a paean to the courage and resourcefulness of the Soviet Union during WWII. Producer Casey Robinson took a gamble with the project, casting the leading roles with movie newcomers. Heading the cast is Broadway actor Gregory Peck as Vladimir, the leader of a band of Soviet guerilla fighters. Tamara Toumanova, former premier ballerina of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, costars as Nina, whose love for Vladimir is surpassed by her love for Mother Russia (Toumanova was at the time the wife of producer Robinson). The actors speak in long, lyrical monologues about freedom, sacrifice and the indomitability of the human spirit: fascinating at first, the excess verbiage begins to wear on the viewer after three or four reels. In traditional underground-movie fashion, hero and heroine are obliged to give up their own lives for the sake of their countrymen, in a reasonably spectacular climactic battle sequence. ... ~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide |
| <i>The Doughgirls</i> | August 30, 1944 Warner Bros James V. Kern | The wartime housing shortage in Washington, DC is the basis for this comedy. Several attractive young ladies rent a single DC apartment, causing no end of complications to their various professional and private lives. Also moving in (due to a misunderstanding) is a young newlywed (Jane Wyman), whose flustered husband (Jack Carson) is denied access to the apartment. The funniest of the female roommates is a visiting Russian sniper, played con brio by Eve Arden. <i>The Doughgirls</i> is based on the popular Broadway play by Joseph A. Fields. ... ~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide |
| <i>Counter-Attack</i> | April 3, 1945 Columbia Zoltan Korda | This drama is based on a Broadway play, <i>One Against Seven</i> , which in turn is based on the Russian play <i>Pobyeda</i> . Set during WW II, it centers on a Russian officer, a Russian woman, and seven German soldiers who have been trapped in the ruined cellar of a bombed out factory in a Nazi-controlled town. While waiting for someone to rescue them, the two Russians try to keep the Germans away. Eventually the Russian officer |

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| | | <p>begins toying with a German officer and vice versa as both seek to extract information from the other. The Russian lets on that his troops are planning to construct a tunnel beneath the river. The woman is appalled at this betrayal of information, but her companion reassures her that he can kill the enemy before they have time to share that information. But first they need to get rescued. As time slowly passes, the tension increases, especially when the Russian finds himself falling asleep. The film was made during the brief period after WW II when Russia and the US were allies and the political overtones of the film were unintentional. ~Sandra Brennan, All Movie Guide</p> |
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Appendix II: Illustrations

2.1. Incarnations of Rosie the Riveter.



J. Howard Miller, *We Can Do It!*, 1943



Norman Rockwell, *Rosie the Riveter*, 1943

2.2. Soviet and American mobilization posters.



I. M. Toidze, *The Motherland Calls*, 1941



James Montgomery Flagg, *I Want You for the U.S. Army*, 1917

2.3. Dangerous type of women in American poster.

WANTED!



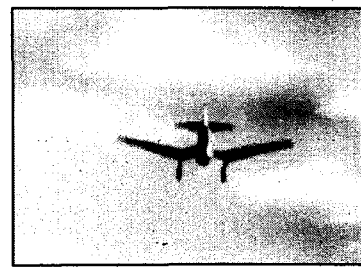
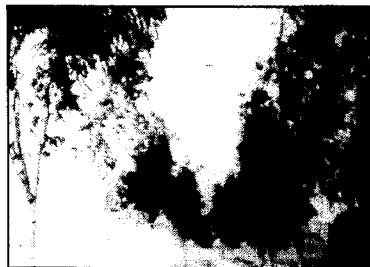
FOR MURDER

Her careless talk costs lives

Victor Keppler, *Wanted! For Murder*, 1944

Appendix 2.4. Stills from *The North Star*, 1944

German planes attack the village.



Appendix 2.5. Stills from *The North Star*.

Sophia grieves the death of her younger daughter; the chorus of *The International* is playing



Appendix 2.6. Stills from *Song of Russia*

Transformations of Nadya



John and Nadya taking a tour around Moscow.



John and Nadya at a restaurant. The singer on the background sings *And Russia is Her Name*



Nadya learns how to shoot a gun before the war.



The first shot of Nadya after the announcement of the war.



Nadya listening to Stalin's speech.



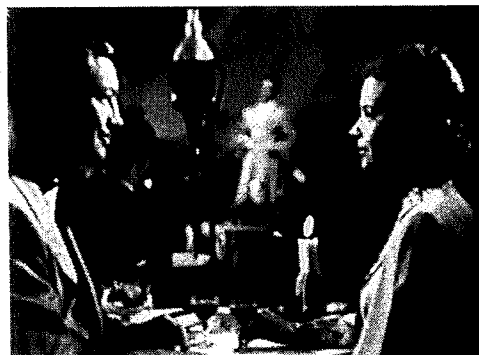
The close-up of Nadya when Boris dies.

Appendix 2.6. Stills from *Song of Russia*

Transformations of Nadya



John and Nadya taking a tour around Moscow.



John and Nadya at a restaurant. The singer on the background sings *And Russia is Her Name*



Nadya learns how to shoot a gun before the war.



The first shot of Nadya after the announcement of the war.



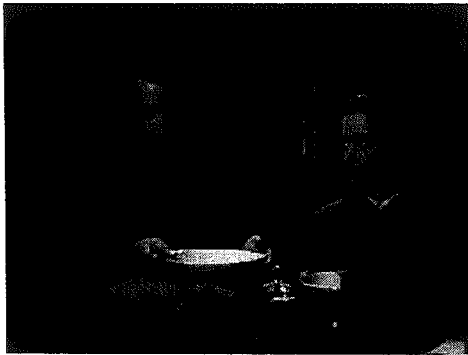
Nadya listening to Stalin's speech.



The close-up of Nadya when Boris dies.

Appendix 2.7. Still from *Days of Glory*

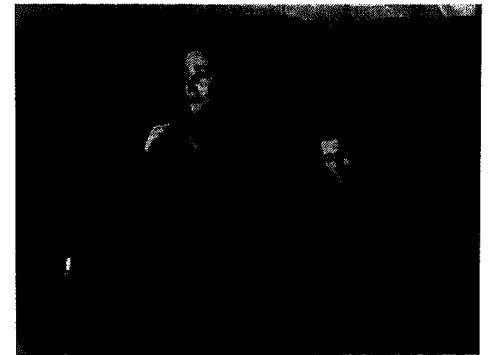
Yelena and Nina



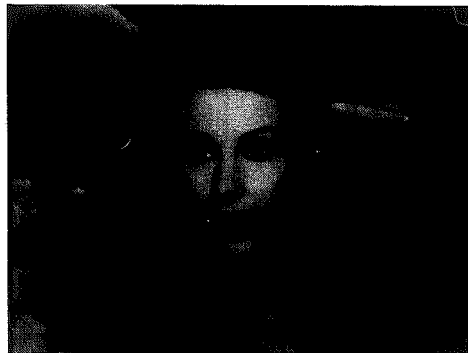
Yelena and Vladimir



Yelena in her uniform with a medal on her chest.



Yelena preparing for her mission, ties a traditional scarf on her head.



The first shot of Nina



Nina dances for Mitya



Nina as "Madonna" consoles Olga

Appendix 2.7. Still from *Days of Glory*

Yelena and Nina



Yelena and Vladimir



Yelena in her uniform with a medal on her chest.



Yelena preparing for her mission, ties a traditional scarf on her head.



The first shot of Nina



Nina dances for Mitya



Nina as "Madonna" consoles Olga

Appendix 2.8. Endings of *The North Star*, *Song of Russia*, and the transformations of Praskovia from *She Defends the Motherland*

Marina, Marina, and Praskovia



Marina and blind Damian



Nadya playing Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto



Praskovia with her husband and son before the war



Praskovia as a symbol of Motherland

Appendix 2.9. Documentary portrayals of Soviet women, 1930s.



Margaret Bourke-White, *USSR: Women by Shop Window*, 1931

Notes

¹ See Kennedy, David. Freedom from Fear : The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945 (New York, 1999).

² See Levering, Ralph B. American Opinion and the Russian Alliance, 1939-1945 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1976).

³ The ancient myth of Mother Russia comes from Russia itself and is rooted in medieval folklore and religion. See Joanna Hubbs, Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture (Bloomington, IN, 1993). As for a pronoun for Russia, now the country is usually deprived of a gender and is referred to as "it" in the press, see *Time* magazine "In Search of Russia's Big Idea" Dec. 31, 2007. Looking at national personifications of other countries, one cannot ignore the fact that there are a number of countries represented by feminine images in popular culture: for instance, Marianne in France or Britannia in the United Kingdom to name a few.

⁴ During wartime, several pictures about the Soviet Union were produced: a 1942 production *Miss V from Moscow*; 1943 productions *Mission to Moscow*, *The North Star*, *Three Russian Girls*, *The Boy from Stalingrad*; 1944 films *The Doughgirls*, *Song of Russia* and *Days of Glory*; and the last pro-Russian feature was 1945 *Counter-attack*. Besides these feature films, there were two documentary films, *Battle of Russia* and *Our Russian Front*, produced by Hollywood filmmakers. I am analyzing the four above-mentioned films due to their relative popular success and current availability. For the list of the films with synopses, see Appendix I.

⁵ Higonet 34

⁶ Churchill gave this description of the Soviet Union in a radio broadcast in October 1939. The original quote is "I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest."

⁷ This happened, for instance, in the relations within the Soviet Union, where Russia was frequently seen as a "big brother" to other Soviet republics. In this discourse of "brotherhood," there was always a sense of superiority of Russia among other regions of the U.S.S.R.

⁸ Even though the film is set in Paris, the opposition is never France vs. Russia, but rather the Soviet Union vs. the capitalist world. An American production, the film encourages the audience's identification of France with the United States at least in terms of common values and traditions.

⁹ Nugent, Frank. "The Screen in Review." The New York Times. 10 Nov 1939: 31.

¹⁰ "The New Pictures: Review of *Ninotchka*." Time. 6 Nov 1939.

¹¹ "Review of *Ninotchka*." Variety. 1 November 1939.

¹² The film was a box office success and gained several Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture.

¹³ Levering 17

¹⁴ Twohey as cited in Levering 34

¹⁵ Levering 34

¹⁶ Levering 35

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- ¹⁷ See Barson and Heller, Red Scared! The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture 24-33.
- ¹⁸ "Person of the Year: Joseph Stalin." Time. 1 Jan. 1940.
- ¹⁹ Levering 35
- ²⁰ Levering 36
- ²¹ Messerer 62
- ²² Levering 40
- ²³ Levering 50
- ²⁴ See Kennedy 565-614
- ²⁵ Here I acquire Michael Renov's scheme of "history-ideology-text" as basic premise for my film analyses. Renov sees ideology as "a level of mediation between history and text."
- ²⁶ Althusser 109
- ²⁷ Nichols 1
- ²⁸ Nichols 3
- ²⁹ Renov 77
- ³⁰ See Birdwell, Michael E. Celluloid Soldiers. The Warner Bros. Campaign Against Nazism. (New York, 1999).
- ³¹ Renov as cited in Polan 16
- ³² Polan 15
- ³³ Polan 12
- ³⁴ Polan 15
- ³⁵ Renov 99
- ³⁶ Rupp 151
- ³⁷ Rupp 174
- ³⁸ Honey 6
- ³⁹ Honey 7
- ⁴⁰ Higonnet 37
- ⁴¹ Higonnet 38
- ⁴² Johnson as cited in McCabe 23
- ⁴³ De Beauvoir as cited in McCabe 16
- ⁴⁴ Renov 105
- ⁴⁵ As cited in Renov 104
- ⁴⁶ Tickner 37

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- ⁴⁷ Tickner 49
- ⁴⁸ Tickner 53
- ⁴⁹ Tickner 57
- ⁵⁰ Dyer in Lacey 131. Also see Dyer, Richard. The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation. (London, 2002).
- ⁵¹ Kracauer 62
- ⁵² Bennett 490
- ⁵³ Bennett 504
- ⁵⁴ McLaughlin and Parry 156-157
- ⁵⁵ Koppes and Black 209
- ⁵⁶ Westbrook 172
- ⁵⁷ Westbrook 176
- ⁵⁸ Westbrook 176
- ⁵⁹ We will see it more clearly later in *Days of Glory* and its depiction of love between Vladimir and Nina.
- ⁶⁰ Mayhew 23-41
- ⁶¹ Koppes and Black 204
- ⁶² Documentaries *Battle of Russia* and *Our Russian Front* also emphasize the Nazi vandalism.
- ⁶³ McLaughlin and Parry 156
- ⁶⁴ Another interesting comparison might be juxtaposing *The Motherland Calls!* poster with James Montgomery Flagg's *I Want You for U.S. Army*, produced during WWI but then adapted for use during WWII.
- ⁶⁵ Of course, the posters were made with different purposes in mind, but it is their ubiquity and popularity that matters for this study.
- ⁶⁶ Youngblood 68
- ⁶⁷ The synopses of the films are cited from IMDB (imdb.com) and *All Movie Guide* (allmovie.com). The respective sources are indicated at the end of each synopsis.

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Vita

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**END OF
TITLE**