Despite the extensive bookshelf of historical works about World War II and the Holocaust, the scholarly study of war and Holocaust photography has generally been carried out not by historians, but by journalists or cultural theorists. Scholars generally use these “photographs of trauma,” to quote Ulrich Baer, to explore the nature and meaning of photography. The late critic Susan Sontag did much to raise awareness of the power of photography, and her 2004 book Regarding the Pain of Others reflects in depth on the function that war photography plays (or doesn’t play) in politics and national memory.¹

Historians have rarely touched the field of Holocaust photography. This is a major gap, especially since photography and film were the primary means of representing the war visually to the public worldwide, and because they have become primary means of memorializing the Holocaust. It is also surprising given the deep interest in questions of Holocaust history and memory that historians such as Saul Friedlander, Charles Maier, and Jeffrey Herf have wrestled with since the 1980s. In fact, one could argue that it was the attempt to historicize the Holocaust that forced historians to engage in theoretical questions about history and memory, as a result

Thanks to the following archives for allowing me to work, scan, and photocopy: the Dmitrii Baltermants Archive and the Georgii Zelma Archive, both located in Scarsdale, New York; the Evgenii Khaldei and Arkadii Shaykhet Archives at Fotosoyuz in Moscow; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; the Library of Congress; the Yad Vashem Archives; the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art; the Russian State Archive for Political and Social Research; and the State Archive of the Russian Federation. I would like to thank Paul and Teresa Harbaugh, Michael Mattis, Yelena Sitnina, Andrei Baskakov, Valerii Stigneev, Tatiana Baltermants, Anna Khaldei, and Maria Zhotikova. For advice on this particular essay, thanks to Harriet Murav, Oren Stier, Gregg Drinkwater, Vanessa Schwartz, Shannen Hill, Dmitrii Belkin, Stuart Liebman, Joan Neuberger, Alice Nakhimovsky, Amir Weiner, Judy Cohen, Vladimir Sumovsky, Michael Lee, and the anonymous readers. Finally, thanks to the University of Denver, the University of Colorado, the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Social Science Research Council, and the National Council for East European and Eurasian Research for supporting my work.

¹ See cultural theorists such as Ulrich Baer, Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); Andrea Liss, Trespassing through Shadows: Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust (Minneapolis, 1998); Brett Ashley Kaplan, Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation (Urbana, Ill., 2006). Journalists and photographers who have written critically about Holocaust photography include Barbie Zelizer, Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s Eye (Chicago, 2000); and Janina Struk, Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence (London, 2004). See also Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (New York, 2004).
of which the journal *History & Memory* was launched in the 1980s. In some ways, photographs are historical artifacts that sit at the nexus of history and memory.² If Holocaust photography in general has been well treated by cultural theorists, neither historians, theorists, nor journalists have explored Soviet war photography. Nor have they studied the photographers who took the immensely important pictures that fostered a wartime narrative and historical memory quite different from the history and memory of the Holocaust propagated in the United States, Western Europe, and Israel. Why has there been such a lack of awareness of or interest in the photographs and photographers from the “other ally”? First, public memory of the Holocaust in the West usually centers on the experience of extermination camps such as Auschwitz as understood through the voices of survivors. Only in the past fifteen years has the Holocaust experience in the Soviet Union been widely told, through the voices of Soviet Holocaust survivors, or understood, let alone incorporated into the dominant historical narratives. Because of this, Soviet wartime photographs have not generally been included in the canon of Holocaust imagery that illustrates museums and memorials around the world. Second, Cold War politics made it difficult for those in the West to understand the Soviet Union as one of the primary victims of Nazi atrocities. In the eyes of the West, immediately after the war, the USSR became a perpetrator of crimes against the people of Eastern Europe and elsewhere, and the history of the Soviet, primarily Jewish, experience of genocide during World War II disappeared from the war narrative. In addition, Soviet archives relating to World War II were inaccessible to Western scholars until the fall of the USSR in 1991. Before that time, few scholars in the West had studied the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, or how Soviet citizens, particularly Soviet Jews, related to the event.³


Finally, in contrast to much of the West, where the Holocaust has been widely studied and memorialized since the 1960s, the Holocaust in the Soviet Union became a subject of study only in post-Soviet Russia and other successor states. Ideologically and politically, the Soviet Union did not officially memorialize the Holocaust, meaning that it did not foster a particular memory of the special persecution of the Jews by Nazi Germany and its allies. Historian Amir Weiner has shown that there were very specific political and ideological policy shifts that erased particular Jewish suffering during and shortly after the war. Political scientist Zvi Gitelman has argued that the Soviet Union had a harder time recognizing a specifically Jewish tragedy during the war precisely because Nazi atrocities and mass destruction took place extensively in the Nazi-occupied Soviet Union. The murder of 1.5 to 2 million Jews on Soviet soil could easily be absorbed into the staggering 25 to 30 million Soviet deaths overall. Historian Yehoshua Gilboa has told the story of the Soviet Union’s suppression of the Holocaust narrative as part of more general policies of late Stalinist antisemitism, another reason that the Holocaust in the USSR, including the study of its visual representation through photography, has not been at the forefront of the scholarly agenda.4

But the Soviet visual record of the war and the Holocaust tells us much about narrative, history, and memory. Because Jews in the USSR were murdered in town after town from the first year of occupation in 1941–1942, Soviet photographers were among the first people in the world to photograph the Nazis’ actions from the perspective of the liberator. This also means that Soviet newspapers were the first press outlets to discuss in great detail and to show in very graphic ways Nazi atrocities against Jews as they were taking place. Unlike the U.S. press, which tended to put such stories on the inside of the paper, and only rarely at that, the Soviet press gave them extensive first-page coverage as soon as the war began. Only recently have scholars started studying the ways in which Nazi atrocities were represented to the Soviet reading public, or the international Communist readership of Soviet newspapers, as these events were taking place. Studying these early photographs enables us to see how the war was reported visually at the time as news.5

sored a panel dedicated to Holocaust representation in the Soviet Union. Nearly all theorists who write about liberation photography write about the American liberation photography from Ohrdruf, Buchenwald, and Dachau, and Sontag marks the moment of bearing witness to these photographs as a turning point in her life. On the way in which images have become Holocaust icons, see Oren Stier, “Different Trains: Holocaust Artifacts and the Ideologies of Remembrance,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 19, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 81–106.


5 Many historians, in fact, date the beginning of the Holocaust to June 1941, when Nazi Germany began its campaign of mass murder in the Soviet Union. But historian Jochen Böhler has shown that the German army was already carrying out major shooting campaigns in Poland in the period 1939–1941, complicating the timeline of the Holocaust. See Böhler, Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939 (Frankfurt, 2006). On the New York Times coverage of the Holocaust, see Laurel Leff,
In addition to being the first liberation photographs, Soviet war and Holocaust images—taken primarily by Jewish photographers, who made up about 50 percent of the overall Soviet press corps during the war—force us to confront questions of overlapping narratives of the war. What happens when the state gives power to a very visible minority to create the visual record of a nation’s war? Although Jews such as Robert Capa, Joe Rosenthal, and Alfred Eisenstaedt were among the most important photographers documenting the war worldwide, the state did not place them in these key positions. Moreover, photographers such as Capa, Rosenthal, and Eisenstaedt were not bearing witness to the unfolding of Nazi atrocities as their Soviet Jewish counterparts were doing. Capa, for example, did not discover his entire family shot and thrown into a mineshaft as the twenty-seven-year-old Soviet Jewish photographer Evgenii Khaldei did when he photographed liberated Donetsk (then called Stalino) in eastern Ukraine in 1943. How did Soviet Jewish photographers navigate the very dicey terrain of overlapping narratives—their personal tragedies of bearing witness to their murdered families and friends, the particular perspective of Jewish suffering, and the general story of the Nazi war against the Soviet Union?

Wartime narratives are always multiple, as much recent scholarship has shown. The story and meaning of the war in the United States and England varied greatly depending on whether one was African American, Latino, Japanese, Jewish, or Anglo, or whether one was a woman. But the state-sponsored Soviet wartime press created explicit multiple narratives of the war by publishing newspapers in Russian (the lingua franca of the Soviet Union) as well as in the national languages of individual Soviet ethnic groups, including Yiddish, the official state language of Soviet Jewry. The Russian- and Yiddish-language Soviet press created different frameworks through which to understand Nazi atrocities. In the Russian-language press, photo and print journalists, as well as their editors, many of whom were also Jewish, generally framed the Nazis’ actions as crimes against the Soviet people. Soviet Yiddish newspapers made explicit the Jewishness of the Nazi war against the USSR. Soviet Jewish photographers operated at the intersection of multiple narratives, seeing themselves as Soviet and Jewish simultaneously, and they and their images thus helped incorporate the story of the Holocaust on Soviet soil into the evolving narrative of the Nazi war against the Soviet Union.

6 The story of Khaldei’s discovery of his family’s murder in the city of Donetsk was recounted to me by his daughter Anna. Interview with Anna Khaldei, September 24, 2007.

7 On overlapping narratives in the wartime American press, see, for example, Ronald Takaki, Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II (Boston, 2000); Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., Mexican Americans and World War II (Austin, Tex., 2005); Carina A. del Rosario, Ken Mochizuki, and Dean Wong, eds., A Different Battle: Stories of Asian Pacific American Veterans (Seattle, 2000). On British national identity, citizenship, and belonging during the war, see Sonya O. Rose, Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939–1945 (Oxford, 2003). Debates about overlapping American war narratives became part of the national conversation in 2007 over the launching of Ken Burns’s documentary on World War II, The War, which some Latino organizations thought downplayed Latino contributions to the American war effort. On how Yiddish functioned as an official marker of Soviet
Finally, by studying the history of specific images, we can better understand how news photographs meant to document events at the time were later transformed into both objects of art and emblems of memory. Photography is not simply illustration of historical narrative. We must examine how captions used in wartime photojournalism became titles of exhibition photographs, how the placement and context of an image changed over time, and, most important, how the actual image changed as its role changed from documenting a moment in time to fostering reflection of the past. By doing this, we can trace how overlapping narratives of the war that informed one another at the time became competing memories of the past.

The German army invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, breaking the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact that had shaped Soviet policy for the previous two years. In both print and photojournalism, the Soviet press made Nazi atrocities a primary means of representing the German war against the USSR to Soviet readers. From the first days of the war, the Main Political Administration of the Red Army, which oversaw the military press during the war, sent regular memoranda reminding newspaper and magazine editors of the need to publish both stories and photographs of Nazi atrocities. This material would function as visual evidence of Nazi crimes and as propaganda to rile up the anger of the population. Ogonek, the Soviet Union’s leading illustrated magazine, published its first atrocity photo on June 25, 1941, the first edition following the invasion. According to the magazine, the photograph was taken by a German soldier who had carried a camera with him on the front lines to document his work for family and friends back home. Dead German soldiers’ cameras were left on their bodies to be picked up by Soviet troops and then delivered to the relevant Soviet authorities. Since this particular photograph was published so quickly after the German invasion, and therefore was not likely picked up by Soviet troops, it is clear that the Main Political Administration was already gathering evidence of Nazi atrocities from others who had access to these so-called perpetrator photographs before war broke out. Most major Soviet press outlets published photographs such as “Punishment in Poland,” usually called “trophy photos,” depicting not only the “bestiality” of the enemy, but also the very fact that these soldiers enjoyed documenting their crimes. In this particular photograph, on the right, the Nazi

Jewish culture, see David Shneer, Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918–1930 (New York, 2004). According to N. P. Popov and N. A. Gorokhov, about 20 percent of the editors of military newspapers during the war were Jewish, including David Ortenberg, who edited Red Star (Krasnaia zvezda), the most important military newspaper in the Soviet Union, through July 1943. This statistic does not include party and state newspapers such as Pravda and Izvestia, which also had many Jews sitting on their editorial boards. See Popov and Gorokhov, Sovetskaia voennaia pechat’ v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny, 1941–1945 (Moscow, 1981), 263–264. For a broader discussion of the presence of Jews in the Soviet intelligentsia, see Yuri Slezkine, The Jewish Century (Princeton, N.J., 2004). Zvi Gitelman, “Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion: Soviet Jewish Veterans Remember World War II and the Holocaust,” in United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Symposium Presentations (Washington, D.C., 2005), 95–126. This was the same rationale that the publisher of the New York Times, Arthur Sulzberger, used to explain why stories of the Holocaust were always inside the paper and why Jewish particularity was downplayed. Jews were human beings, and atrocities committed against Jews were a human tragedy, not just a Jewish tragedy. See Leff, Buried by the Times.
soldier-photographer has captured two Jewish victims digging the grave for the pile of corpses in the center of the frame. 8 (See Figure 1.) Throughout 1941, nearly all of the photographs of Nazi atrocities that appeared in the Soviet press were taken by German soldiers themselves.

Soviet photographers did not witness scenes of Nazi destruction with their own eyes until late 1941, when the Red Army began re-conquering cities near Moscow that had been under Nazi occupation for a brief time. Most of what these image-makers saw were gruesome scenes of corpses in the streets, public hangings, looting, and burning. These photographs had everything to do with the Nazis’ violent occupation politics in the Soviet Union, but little to do with the Nazi war against the

8 On the unfolding of the Holocaust in print journalism, see Ilya Altman and Claudio Ingerflom, “Le Kremlìn et L’Holocauste, 1933–2001,” in Vassili Petrenko, Avant et après Auschwitz, as cited in Harvey Asher, “The Soviet Union, the Holocaust and Auschwitz,” Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 4, no. 4 (2003): 886–912. This image was published in Ogonek, no. 18 (June 25, 1941). On orders to editors about Nazi atrocities, see, for example, Direktiva Glavpu RKKA voennym sovetam i nachal’nikam politicheskikh upravlenii frontov o prisylke v Glavpu RKKA fotodokumentov, August 1, 1941, Tsentral’nyi arkhiv Ministerstva oborony (TsAMO), f. 32, op. 920265, d. 3, l. 157, as printed in V. A. Zolotarev, ed., Velikaiia Otechestvennaia (Moscow, 1996), 55.
Jews. No Soviet photographer had witnessed the mass murders of Jews that were going on throughout the occupied Soviet Union in 1941.  

The first photographs taken of such scenes by liberators were from the city of Kerch, located on a small peninsula that juts into the Sea of Azov in southern Russia. The Germans had occupied the city in mid-November 1941, but held it for only six weeks. The Gestapo, the German State Secret Police, registered 7,500 Jews who were in Kerch after the arrival of German forces (some had evacuated in advance of German occupation); in the first week of December, they were ordered to Sennaia Square, from which they were deported to an anti-tank ditch in Bagerov, on the outskirts of town, and shot. On December 31, the city was one of the first places with a significant prewar Jewish population to be liberated from Nazi occupation, which meant that it was one of the first places where Soviet soldiers, journalists, and photographers saw what we now call the Holocaust with their own eyes.  

The first Kerch photographs, by Mark Redkin, appeared in Ogonek on February 4, 1942. A landscape photograph shows bodies strewn along an anti-tank ditch at the center of the composition. Two Soviet soldiers standing on the right investigate the scene as the white of the sky and the white of the snow in the ditch blend together at top left. The photo beneath the landscape image shows a close-up of the dead, in this case a mother surrounded by children. This was the first time that Soviet readers had the chance to see images taken by a Soviet photographer bearing witness to the mass murder of thousands that had to date been visually documented only by the Germans’ own cameras.  

Redkin, a Soviet Jewish photographer, worked for the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), the Soviet wire service. The caption beneath the photographs suggests how he and the Ogonek editors placed them into an evolving narrative of

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9 The Baltermants Archive in Scarsdale holds many of Baltermants’s photographs from November and December 1941 of liberated villages in the Moscow region that had been under Nazi occupation. See the section of the archive labeled “War Photography, 1941.” In addition, the Semyon Fridlyand Archive at the University of Denver, which houses the images of a special war correspondent for Ogonek, shows similar photographs from late 1941. The two biggest stories about early Nazi atrocities broke after the liberation of Volokolamsk, eighty miles northwest of Moscow, and Rostov, in southern Russia. About the Germans’ eight-day occupation of Rostov, journalists and photographers wrote of mass shootings on the streets. See, for example, “Ne zabudem, ne prostim: Fotodokumenty o krovavkh zverstvakh fashistskikh merzavtsev v Rostove-na-donu,” Krasnaia zvezda, December 11, 1941. The newspaper published stills from a newsreel by the filmmaker G. Popov. About Volokolamsk, journalists and photographers wrote about the gruesome public hangings of eight presumed partisans, whose bodies were left dangling in the town square for days in order to terrorize the population. All Soviet press outlets ran stories on Volokolamsk and how it revealed the depravity of the enemy.  

10 Andrej Angrick’s work on Einsatzgruppen D, which carried out the murders in Kerch, is based on German archives and trial testimony taken in the 1960s. His report says that only 2,500 Jews were murdered in that first week of December. The remainder were murdered in the second occupation of the city in June 1942. See Angrick, Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion, 1941–1943 (Hamburg, 2003). Soviet sources, based on survivor testimony, put the number at 7,000 to 7,500. See Leonid Melkov, Kerch: Povest’ khronika v dokumentakh, vospominaniakh i pismakh uchastnikov geroicheskoi zashchity i osvobozhdeniya goroda v 1941–1944 godakh (Moscow, 1981). I base my claim about Jewish demographics and liberation on the dates the Red Army liberated certain cities, comparing them with the Jewish populations of various regions. The cities to be liberated before Kerch were primarily in the Moscow region (Klin and Volokolamsk) and did not have large Jewish populations, as well as Rostov, which was occupied for too short a time for mass executions. For a list with dates of cities liberated by the Red Army, see http://militera.lib.ru. For the demographics of prewar Soviet Jewry, see Mordechai Altershuler, Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile (Jerusalem, 1998).
the war: “Hitler ordered his bandits to annihilate the peaceful Soviet population. Wherever the Germans found themselves, they murdered thousands of women and children. The bodies of the murdered were dumped in a pit (see top photograph). Among the murdered were many women and children (see bottom photograph). The Hitlerite thugs showed no one any mercy.” The caption obscures the perpetrators of the crimes. In one sentence they are followers of Hitler; in another, Germans. And no mention is made of the fact that most of the dead women and children so grotesquely splashed across the pages of the magazine were Jewish women and children.11

One month later, Ogonek followed up its earlier Kerch images with a two-page layout of photographs by Dmitrii Baltermants and Israel Ozerskii and an article by the journalist I. Antselovich, all three of whom were Jewish. The headline reads: “These photographs were taken after the German occupiers drove [the people] out to this place. 7,500 residents, from the very elderly to breastfeeding babies, were shot from just a single city. They were killed in cold blood in a premeditated fashion. They were killed indiscriminately—Russians and Tatars, Ukrainians and Jews. The Hitlerites have also murdered the Soviet population indiscriminately in many other cities, villages, and in the countryside.” (See Figure 2.) It is clear from the caption that by the 1940s, Soviet citizens, including victims of Nazi atrocities, were being divided first and foremost by ethnicity, rather than class as one might expect in a socialist narrative universe. And Jews were included among the Soviet ethnicities. But the captions of the Redkin and Baltermants photographs obscure the fact that the Nazis targeted Jews.

Retrospectively, Baltermants claimed to have understood that the German occupiers did not kill Kerch residents “indiscriminately,” as the caption states, but singled out Jews and other politically suspect people. In an interview, he recounted how he took the Kerch photographs: “In fall 1941 the Germans drove 7,000 residents—partisans, Communists, and Jews—to the trench. They drove out whole families—women, the elderly, children. They drove all of them to an anti-tank ditch and shot them.” The Ogonek editor back in Moscow who captioned the picture only hints at the Jewishness of the story. Antselovich, too, insinuates that the Nazis were not killing indiscriminately when he writes that the first to be shot, on orders from Berlin, were “Soviet citizens of one particular nationality.” Some readers, Jews among them, would have understood which nationality the writer was alluding to; others would not have picked up on the reference. According to Gitelman’s study of 221 Soviet Jewish war veterans, “Most said they knew about [atrocities against Jews] from newspapers and lectures at the front.” However, making the photograph too much about specifically Jewish suffering as opposed to national Soviet suffering ran the risk that general readers would not see themselves in it.12

11 Ogonek, February 4, 1942, 4. For biographical information about Mark Redkin, see http://www.sem40.ru, a website that commissions articles about famous Russian Jewish cultural figures. The original photograph can be found in the Yad Vashem Archives, photograph 4331_16. According to one survivor of the Kerch massacres, Jews were rounded up over the course of two weeks and trucked out to the Bagerov trench to be shot. Sinti/Roma (Gypsies) were then rounded up and brought to the same site to be shot. See “Testimony of Neysha Kemilev,” Yad Vashem Archives, Group M33, File 88, 102. Angrick suggests that the roundup and mass murder of the city’s remaining Jewish population took place over three days, December 3–5, 1941. See Angrick, Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord, 356.

In his 1943 book *Russia at War*, the Soviet Jewish journalist Ilya Ehrenburg, one of the best-known wartime Soviet writers, described the German atrocities at Kerch: “They came to Russia drunk with the blood of Poles, Frenchmen and Serbs, with the blood of old people, girls and infants in arms. And death came with them to our country. I don’t mean the death of soldiers, for no war is without its victims. I refer to the gallows from which the bodies of Russian girls are dangling, and the terrible pit near Kerch in which the children of Russians, Tatars and Jews are buried . . . The memory of what we have experienced cannot be wiped out.” In 1943, long before the discovery of Auschwitz and other concentration or extermination camps, Kerch symbolized the depths of Nazi atrocities against Russia.13

The images in the top left suggest how photographers and editors began telling the story of the Holocaust as it was unfolding. (See Figure 3.) The caption reads: “Residents of Kerch Search for Their Relatives. In the photo: V. S. Tereshchenko digs under bodies for her husband. On the right: the body of 67-year-old I. Kh. Kogan.” By placing this photograph alongside one of a corpse named Kogan—one photographs of Kerch, see “Interview with Dmitrii Baltermants,” in V. A. Nikitin, *Rasskazy o fotografakh i fotografakh* (Leningrad, 1991), 153, 175–176. See also Lev Borodulin, “Lev Borodulin o Dmitrii Baltermants,” http://sem40.ru. In addition to consulting the Baltermants Archive, I interviewed Baltermants’s daughter Tatiana on two occasions.

of the mourner, the other of the one she is presumably mourning—the editors suggest that the very Jewish-sounding Kogan (Russian for Cohen) is, in fact, the husband that the very Ukrainian-sounding Tereshchenko was searching for. Although this multiethnic marriage reflected the Soviets’ idealized notion that their diverse empire was a happy, integrated “brotherhood of nations,” the fact could not have been lost on the reader that after the Nazis left town, the Ukrainian Tereshchenko was alive, and the Jewish Kogan was dead. As with the use of the phrase “Soviet citizens of a particular nationality” in the article text, the Jewishness of the war was implied by the photo editor’s placement of the photographs. Thus we see how overlapping narratives began appearing in the Russian-language press, through both text and images, from the earliest discovery of the Holocaust.

One particular image in the series would have a long publication history—the image on the left page, in the lower right-hand corner—which is captioned here “Kerch resident P. I. Ivanova found her husband, who was tortured by the fascist executioners.” In this picture, there is no suggestion that Ivanova’s husband was Jewish, although he most likely was. The editors chose to publish the fourth image in the strip of negatives, with Ivanova crying and blowing her nose. Seeing the full series of Baltermants’s photographs shows how the photographer worked to capture the best image of her grief. (See Figure 4.)

Only a few of Baltermants’s Kerch photographs were published in newspapers or magazines at the time. But his images circulated in other ways during the war. Immediately after the city’s liberation, Kerch administrators put up posters produced by TASS, known as TASS Windows, in several places around the city, giving visually graphic evidence of what the Nazis had done—as if it was not obvious to the
city’s residents, who had lived through six weeks of Nazi terror. The posters were intended to shock viewers and encourage them to fight harder to prevent the German army from re-conquering the city, which it would unfortunately do several months later. One poster, titled “Death to the German Occupiers,” displayed a montage of twenty Baltermants images taken at the killing fields on the outskirts of town. (See Figure 5.) “7,000 murdered, and they didn’t spare old people, women, or children,” the banner proclaimed to a traumatized city. This new number, 7,000, would become the accepted number of dead at Kerch, even though the first account had put the number at 7,500.14

Photographs of Nazi atrocities were published throughout the war, but after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad in February 1943, their frequency diminished, and those that did appear tended to fall into two categories—images used in Soviet war crimes trials, which began in 1943, and photographs taken at the liberation of concentration camps, especially at Majdanek in July 1944. By May 9, 1945, the day the war officially ended for the Soviet Union, there was little discussion of the Nazis’ crimes, since the former “Hitlerites” and “bestial Germans” were now “liberated German people,” who would eventually be rehabilitated as the new East Germany. When there was mention of these atrocities in war crimes trials at places such as Krasnodar or Kharkov in 1943 or in connection with the postwar Nuremberg Trials, the Soviet press presented the victims of the crimes as peaceful Soviet citizens or as humanity in general. Jews were included in both of these rubrics, of course, but only implicitly.15

14 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kino-fotodokumentov (RGAKFD), oborona Kercha 0-276238. TASS Windows was a highly successful propaganda operation that put out posters demonizing the enemy. It used some of the most recognizable figures in the world of illustration, cartoons, and drawing.

IN THE YIDDISH-LANGUAGE PRESS, a different but equally Soviet story unfolded during the war. In the 1940s, there were two regularly published Yiddish newspapers in the Soviet Union, a far cry from the dozens that had circulated in the early 1930s, but a reminder that, during the war, Jews were still visibly marked as one of dozens of Soviet ethnicities, each with its own language and culture. One was the Birobidzhan Star (Birobidzhaner shtern), from the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Soviet Far East. The other was Unity (Eynikayt), the weekly newspaper of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC). The JAFC was established in the summer of 1941, along with four other “special interest” committees organized to foster international support for the Soviet war effort. Despite calls from Yiddish writers to reestablish a Yiddish newspaper in Moscow in 1941, it took nearly a year before Unity began appearing from Kuibyshev (contemporary Samara), where many government agencies had been evacuated when the German army was on the outskirts of Moscow.16

From the first weeks of its publication, in June 1942, Unity “judaized” the war for both its domestic and international Yiddish reading audiences. In late June, for

16 There were also anti-fascist committees for Slavs, women, scientists, and youth. See Joshua Rubenstein and V. P. Naumov, eds., Stalin’s Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (New Haven, Conn., 2001), 7. Unity’s editor-in-chief was Shakhne Epshteyn, a long-time Yiddish Communist in both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, who had been one of the early editors of the Soviet Yiddish paper The Truth (Emes), and the editorial board and list of contributing writers was a who’s who of Soviet Yiddish culture, including David Bergelson, Perets Markish, and Itsik Fefer. Ilya Ehrenburg also published in Unity, although in translation from Russian.
example, Ehrenburg published an article in *Unity* titled “Why Do the Fascists Hate the Jews So Much?” The Russian-language original, published in May in the Soviet army newspaper *Red Star*, was titled simply “About Hatred,” and there was no mention of Jews. All of the well-known Soviet Yiddish writers, among them Perets Markish, Itsik Fefer, and David Bergelson, wrote for the newspaper, and it served as the primary outlet for Soviet Yiddish literary creativity during the war. *Unity* published special columns on Jewish war heroes, including Bergelson’s 1944 article on the Soviet Jewish general Yankev Kreyzer; it contained notices about Jewish men and women on the front, and frequently included their portraits.17

Throughout 1942, the newspaper published graphic photographs of German atrocities against Jews, but unlike the Russian-language press, whose purpose was to create a nationally unifying narrative of the war, *Unity*, whose political job was to build support for the Soviet Union by creating connections among Jews across national borders, marked the victims unambiguously as Jews. There were photographs of Jewish burial sites and the Warsaw ghetto, and other images whose captions clearly noted that the people in the pictures were Jews. On December 27, 1942, for the one-year anniversary of the liberation of Kerch, *Unity* republished Redkin’s photograph of the dead women and children. Although the caption spoke about the victims in a universal sense, the well-known Soviet Yiddish writer Itsik Fefer’s poem “I Am a Jew” was published on the preceding page. Associating the photograph with Fefer’s poem rendered the scene Jewish. If, from the beginning of the war, Russian-language print and photojournalists, including the Jews who wrote and took photographs, stressed a national Soviet experience, subtly incorporating the Jewish side of the war into it, it was precisely the point of *Unity* to develop a specifically Jewish narrative of the Soviet war.18

On March 3, 1945, almost exactly three years after the first appearance of the Kerch photographs of Nazi atrocities, *Unity* published a grim layout of five photographs from the Budapest ghetto. The unidentified photographer, Evgenii Khaldei, who had found his family murdered in 1943, photographed the war from its first days, including working alongside Baltermants and Redkin at Kerch in early 1942. Working for TASS, he accompanied the Red Army on its path of liberation in 1944 through southern Russia and the Balkans and found himself in Budapest, Hungary, in January 1945. During the battle to take the city, the Red Army liberated two ghettos—the small international one and the larger Hungarian Jewish one—on January 16 and 18. Khaldei made an unusual trip to these ghettos, established in 1944 to separate the Jewish population of Budapest from the non-Jews, to photograph the specific tragedy of European Jewry.19

Since the Soviet press did not simply tell the news but always also interpreted it,


18 “Der shlakhtman fun a farnikhtung-batalion,” photograph, *Eynikayt*, June 17, 1942, 2. For Redkin’s photograph, see *Eynikayt*, December 27, 1942, 3. Fefer was arrested in late 1948 during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. In his trials, his “nationalistic” poetry written during the war, including “I Am a Jew,” was used as evidence against him. See Rubinstein, *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom*.

the caption for the individual photographs had to both describe the awful scene and help readers understand it:

Jews in Budapest. Hitlerites drove tens of thousands of Jews from all over Hungary into the Budapest ghetto region. [Pictured here are] the first building that served as the beginning of the ghetto, and the store in this house, which the fascists transformed into a torture room in which they used to inflict all kinds of things on Jews, shoot them, and then toss their bodies onto the square. Thanks to the hate-driven attack of the Red Army, thanks to the fact that Soviet forces quickly encircled the city, a significant part of Hungarian Jewry was saved from murder.

In the pictures (from right to left): 1. Budapest is liberated. Jews go in every direction back to their places of permanent residence. 2. A mother and daughter whom the fascists dragged out from their cellar, beat in the middle of the street, and then shot. Next to them sits their husband and father. 3. Jews with yellow Stars of David. The fascists forced them to wear these on their chests. 4. A store in which Jews were shot. 5. Slaughtered Jews whom the Germans and fascists murdered before retreating from the city.

Just as a single photograph—of Ivanova, the mourning woman at Kerch—was the one from Baltermants’s series to have a long life, the third one in Khaldei’s Budapest series would become one of his signature images. Its caption describes the act of visually marking people with a Jewish symbol that the Nazis had turned into a grotesque marker that flattened individual identity. This text, along with the captions to the individual photographs, told readers that by 1945, the Soviets were liberators of Jews from Nazi atrocities, not victims themselves. In addition, Unity’s editors chose to express a Jewish and Soviet story in one. Through the use of active verbs such as “murdered,” “forced,” and “dragged,” rather than the passive constructions that would have been more common in both Yiddish and Russian, the caption articulated a clear perpetrator: the fascists/Hitlerites/Germans, and a victim: Jews. In Unity, the Soviets’ role was as heroic liberators who saved Jews, not “peaceful Hungarian citizens,” from murder and destruction.20

Not long after victory, the Soviet press stopped talking about war in general and Nazi atrocities in particular. During high Stalinism in the late 1940s and early 1950s, war memory moved out of the public sphere and into the private. The realities of a war that killed between 25 and 30 million Soviets reflected poorly on the USSR’s wartime leadership, and the high losses were a permanent scar on the rebuilding process. In 1947, Stalin demoted May 9, Victory Day, from a state holiday to a regular working day. Very few photographs from the war were republished until the early 1960s, and Victory Day was not reinstated as a holiday until 1965, when Leonid Brezhnev officially put war memory at the center of Soviet identity.21

Ideological space for war commemoration expanded under Nikita Khrushchev, who ushered in the era known as the “Thaw” of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In


21 Nina Tumarkin, The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia (New York, 1995), 98–104.
film, the war came back with a vengeance with such important works as *The Cranes Are Flying* and *Ballad of a Soldier*. These internationally acclaimed films broke through the public silence about the war in Soviet culture. In the mid-1960s, under Brezhnev, war commemoration became a monumental state operation, in the literal sense of the word. Monuments and memorials went up in every part of the country, culminating with a giant motherland statue in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad), whose construction began under Khrushchev in 1959 and which was unveiled in 1967. If before World War II the Bolshevik Revolution had been the primary event through which Soviet citizens derived a Soviet identity, by the late 1950s and 1960s it had become the war, including for Soviet Jews. As the celebration of wartime heroism opened up before the Soviet public, so too did the tragic loss of the war. *Ballad of a Soldier* features an amputee as the friend of the lead soldier, and in 1961 Baltermants printed a 1943 photograph of injured war veterans in the Kremlin that had not been published during the war. And although the Jewish tragedy had been circulating in Yiddish during and after the war and in Russian war literature subtly since the last years of the war, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, in his poem “Babi Yar,” highlighted the mass murder of Soviet Jews in places such as Kiev’s Babi Yar and the fact that the story of the Holocaust had been not just universalized, as it was during the war, but explicitly suppressed in the immediate postwar period.22

In this context, some of the Nazi atrocity photos that had aroused the anger of the Soviet population during the war reappeared in the Soviet and Communist world press and were shown for the first time in exhibitions as art photographs. These images were no longer documenting crimes but were now part of the process of creating war memory. In January 1965, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the end of the war, *Ogonek* published “We Will Not Forget.” (See Figure 6.) The editors created a two-page layout of a single, blown-up Baltermants photograph of the weeping woman in Kerch, the third one in the series in Figure 4, whom readers from 1942 would remember to be P. I. Ivanova. The wartime photographer’s career had skyrocketed in the postwar period, and in 1961 he became the photo editor of *Ogonek*. In this role, he had the power to shape the visual memory of the war, and was likely the one who created the layout.23

Although it was a slightly different photo from the one originally published during the war, this was the first time that any of Baltermants’s Kerch images had been published in the Soviet Union since wartime. It appeared at the same time that Baltermants exhibited the photograph in Germany with a newly added title (as opposed to caption), “Grief.” The photograph got its name in the early 1960s from the Italian artist Caio Garruba, who first saw it when he was in Moscow looking for images for a sweeping exhibition he was putting together on war. “Grief” made its

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first appearance in print in 1963 in the Czech illustrated publication *Praha-Moskva*, which published a series of Baltermants photographs in its January edition.\(^4\)

After more than twenty years, the publication of Ivanova’s grief now served different purposes. When it was news, the photograph was about the mass murder of Soviet citizens at the hands of the Germans. It was about bearing witness to very specific war crimes against the national enemy. Twenty years later, as an art photograph, it literally pictured grief very differently: no longer focused explicitly on what the Germans did during the war, it was now about the nature of evil and about fostering a new national memory of the war.

Note how Baltermants darkened the sky in the exhibition photograph. In an interview, he explained, “I filled in the sky. But I didn’t do this for aesthetic effect, but simply because of specks from the glue.” While he was developing the film near Kerch, it apparently got stuck to some contact paper. When he pulled them apart, he noticed that there were specks left on one exposure—the exposure he liked the best, of course, the one that would become his most famous photograph. As one can see from the strip of four images, the wartime image, printed off a different negative, had the flat gray sky over Kerch, not the haunting darkened sky of the 1965 version.\(^5\)


\(^5\) “Interview with Dmitrii Baltermants,” 153.

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**Figure 6:** Dmitrii Baltermants, “Grief.” Published in *Ogonek*, January 1965, with the title “We Will Not Forget.” Courtesy of Michael Mattis.
Although Baltermants claims to have altered this particular image because of damage, it was common for Soviet photographers to compose their photographs at every stage of the process, from selecting a scene before taking the picture to manually altering the negatives and creating composite prints of two negatives. News photos were altered at every step of the production process to make them more aesthetically interesting, visually powerful, and politically and ideologically appropriate. Most famously, photographs of Soviet leaders were altered as different people fell out of favor during the height of the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. Some were removed entirely; others were placed closer to or farther away from Stalin. Today’s hero could become tomorrow’s enemy, and photographs—those seemingly permanent documentary records of the past—needed to be altered to reflect the new changed reality. These photographers worked in an environment in which their images were politically sensitive and carried much ideological weight.26

They also worked within different aesthetic and ideological conventions than their colleagues in the West. The boundaries between news journalism and art photography were not nearly as well defined as they were becoming in the West by World War II. This meant that it was acceptable—and often encouraged—to stage scenes, lighten or darken negatives, crop images, and add or subtract details to make a photograph more compelling or more politically “appropriate,” even if it meant altering key information. During the war, adding smoke was one of the most frequent manipulations. Baltermants’s 1945 photograph “Crossing the Oder” depicts Soviet soldiers pushing heavy artillery through the river enshrouded in thickening smoke from explosions that seem to be right on top of them. He added the smoke to create a more powerful image, one that emphasized imminent danger and Soviet heroism. (See Figure 7.) When he fixed up the damaged Kerch negative for exhibition and publication, he made sure to put out the best possible image of “Grief,” one that better reflected the photograph’s new function as a universal meditation on loss.

In the 1942 image, the focus is on a single woman, and the discovery of her husband. The image is cropped, so there is less background. The sky is incidental, gray and lifeless. More important, the 1942 image is embedded in a broad narrative about the crimes discovered at Kerch, and her image is just one of many. The darkened sky in the 1965 “Grief” image, whether done for practical or aesthetic purposes, changes the mood and aestheticizes the violence. It becomes more ominous, more threatening, and ironically more heavenly. The sky itself becomes a subject, and the woman is figured as a representative of grief, one of many mourners as the image leads off into infinity on the left side. The 1965 image suggests an endless landscape of grief, while the 1942 image localizes it. Beyond the immediate scene is emptiness, while the 1965 image shows bodies laid out into the distance.

As significant as the differences in the two images was how they were presented. The 1942 photograph was part of a news story about Nazi/German atrocities directed against Ukrainians, Russians, Tatars, and especially Jews, and was one image among many illustrating the event, including the image of the multiethnic marriage of Tereshchenko and Kogan. We might assume that Ivanova was in a similar relationship. The 1965 photograph was no longer documenting a specific crime, but was

memorializing human tragedy. According to Baltermants, “the photograph expressed not the personal grief of that individual woman, or even a single nationality or country, but it represents the grief of humanity in general,” a statement that became true as the image moved from documenting news in a Russian magazine to aestheticizing war memory on the walls of a German exhibition or on the pages of a 1960s Czech journal. Kogan’s Jewish corpse does not appear juxtaposed with the crying women. And the surrounding text very clearly marked this reappearance of grief as a memorial practice. “We Will Never Forget” trumpeted the sidebar that accompanied the photograph. During the war, those words were an oft-heard call for vengeance against the Nazi enemy; in 1965, they were now cause for reflection and memory.27

The caption on the 1965 photograph reads: “January 1942, Kerch. As they were withdrawing, fascist troops shot thousands of peaceful Soviet citizens, tossing their corpses into a nearby anti-tank trench.” There is no mention of Germans or Hitler, but merely “fascist troops.” Nor is there mention of Jews. By 1965, Germans were liberated friends, not barbaric enemies, and the Great Patriotic War, as World War II was called in the Soviet Union, was figured as a battle of ideologies, not peoples, of Soviets against fascists, not Germans against Jews, Russians, and others. The photo editor, most likely Baltermants himself, also added a comment from the future Nobel Prize–winning German writer Heinrich Böll, who apparently saw the photograph at the German exhibition and said, “Women on the field of battle searching among the dead for their loved ones. Their cry is no longer their own. It has become the cry of humanity.” Baltermants made a German writer the one responsible for universalizing the woman’s personal grief to his Soviet readership, and an Italian writer gave the photograph its name. The former fascist enemies became partners

27 Interview with Arnold Drapkin, June 2, 1988; transcript provided by Arnold Drapkin.
with Baltermants in refiguring the atrocity photograph from a record of the news to a memorial device.²⁸

Baltermants has been asked to recount the story of the famous “Grief” photograph many times: “During the war I photographed and printed a lot, but here is what’s surprising. Fifteen photographs that I’m proud of and that gave me a name as a photographer—‘Attack,’ ‘Tchaikovsky,’ ‘Battle for the Village,’ and finally my most important photograph, ‘Grief,’ were never published during the war. Other photographs appeared in the newspapers . . . But these photographs . . . that really showed what it was like, and that today have artistic value, found life only after victory.” In a 1980s interview with Time magazine photo editor Arnold Drapkin, he said, “The [Kerch] pictures were never published during the war, because the editors thought they were too gruesome.”²⁹

We know that Baltermants’s photos from Kerch were published during the war, and that the images circulated widely in TASS Windows posters. But today, when asked “When were Baltermants’s Kerch photographs first published?” curators, collectors, and even family members will say “The 1960s,” basing their understanding on Baltermants’s own story of the photos. Reviews of his exhibitions invariably mention that “Grief,” in the words of New York Times art critic Charles Hagen, “was censored by the Soviet government for many years.” Neither reviewers nor family members seem to know that the Kerch photos were some of the first, if not the very first, published Holocaust liberation images in history. Why would Baltermants claim that his Kerch photographs were censored during the war?

By downplaying the wartime history of the news photograph, the specific story of the mass murder of Kerch’s Jews and others murdered by the Nazis, Baltermants could more easily make this photo function as a visual icon in the Soviet war memory that emerged in the 1960s. The story of the wartime censorship of his more gruesome images also helped him craft an identity as a photographer who had been oppressed by Stalin. In the Thaw and the early Brezhnev years, when the photograph made its comeback, all things associated with Stalin (including his namesake city, Stalingrad, whose name was changed to Volgograd in 1961, and his burial spot in Lenin’s tomb on Red Square, from which he was removed in the same year) were politically problematic. A changed reality demanded a changed history. With the appearance of “Grief” in the 1960s as an art photograph dedicated to memory, without the complicated and overlapping narratives of Soviet and Jewish loss, it became embedded in a story of universal tragedy, and Baltermants, the photo editor of Ogonek in the 1960s, who likely wrote the caption for his own photograph, followed the trend toward universalizing the story of the Holocaust and toward highlighting his own oppression under Stalin.³⁰

Many of Khaldei’s war photographs, especially his famous photo of the Red Flag being raised over the Reichstag, were republished in books, journals, and newspapers and were exhibited throughout the Eastern Bloc in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. (See

²⁹ “Interview with Dmitrii Baltermants,” 153, my emphasis; interview with Drapkin.
³⁰ Interview with Tatiana Baltermants, June 2004.
Figure 8.) But his photographs of the Budapest ghetto did not make a second appearance in the same way that Baltermants’s Kerch photograph did until the fall of the Soviet Union. Although it worked as news in 1945, the two Jews of Budapest were too Jewish for postwar public Russian-language Soviet war memory. The Soviet Yiddish journal *Soviet Homeland (Sovetish Heymland)*, which began appearing in 1961 and fostered a Soviet Jewish war memory, did not publish many photographs, and Khaldei’s Budapest did not appear there, either. But after the fall of the Soviet Union, his “Jews with Yellow Stars on Their Chests” made a fierce return as “Jewish Couple.” (See Figure 9.)

In the six years between the end of the Soviet Union and Khaldei’s death in 1997, he gave many interviews about his life as a Soviet Jewish photographer and about what was quickly becoming one of his most famous photographs. In one of them he said:

I saw them walking down the street. I was in a black leather coat, and at first they were afraid—they thought I was from the SS. I walked over and tore off their stars, first the woman’s, then the man’s. She got even more frightened. She said, “No, no, you can’t do that, we have to wear them!” I told them that the Russians were here. I told them, “ikh bin oykh a yid. Sholem Aleichem. [I’m Jewish too. Hello.]” Then she cried.31

If, in fact, the scene happened as Khaldei describes it, with the symbolic tearing off of the yellow star—a symbol of liberation from both Nazi and Hungarian fascist violence and also from an externally imposed Jewish identity—then the photograph would have been taken before he symbolically liberated the couple, because they are shown still wearing their stars. Or Khaldei could have torn off the stars with a penknife to symbolically liberate the couple, and then prepared to photograph them, only to realize that it was the stars, those graphic simplifications of identity, that made a photograph of two people on a street a symbol of Nazi atrocities and Jewish tragedy. (It is not that easy to sew a star back on, nor would the couple have likely agreed to this, so one must presume that he photographed them before their symbolic liberation.) (See Figure 10.) Even if Khaldei’s story of the photograph does not reflect the reality of the January 1945 encounter, when he crafted his post-Soviet self for Western audiences, he emphasized his role in the couple’s liberation, as the one tearing off their stars and building community between Jews on the streets of Budapest.

“Jewish Couple” has adorned the walls of art galleries and Jewish museums around the world, but it is different from the version that was published in Unity during the war. First, the faded photojournalistic image in Unity had a descriptive caption rather than a pithy title like “Jewish Couple.” If the emphasis during the war was on the violent act of fixing identities—marking Jews with yellow stars—then in the 1990s, the story was about the Jews themselves. The composition of the photographs is also different. In the 1945 photo, the stars are at the center of the frame.

**Figure 9:** Evgenii Khaldei, “Jewish Couple,” January 1945. From the original negative. Courtesy of Agency Fotosoyuz, Moscow.
The woman looks away from the camera, suggesting disengagement from the photographer. The image is cropped close in on their bodies, so the viewer sees little of the buildings and streets of grand, but ruined, Budapest. In the exhibition photograph of the 1990s, our gaze is directed into their faces and into the endless street behind them, which suggests the long journey they have travailed and traveled. The exhibition photograph—the better, more compelling of the two—tells a more intimate and more profound story about the Jewish couple. “Jewish Couple” made the people, and not the wartime antisemitic laws about wearing yellow stars, the center of the story.

Although for post-Soviet Western audiences Khaldei emphasized that he was a Jewish photographer and exhibited his work in Jewish venues, including the Jewish Museums in New York and San Francisco and Tel Aviv’s Museum of the Diaspora, immediately after the war his national identity proved to be a liability. The superstar photographer of the Red Flag photograph was named the official Soviet photographer of the Nuremberg Trials and the Paris Peace Conference. But unlike Baltermants, whose career soared after the war, Khaldei fell on hard times as the Cold War with the United States heated up and everything smacking of the foreign was deemed suspicious. The anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the late 1940s and early 1950s claimed to target those with too many foreign connections. In fact, it drove out Soviet Jewish doctors, dentists, attorneys, writers, artists, photographers, and others from their positions in the cultural elite. Khaldei lost his job with TASS in
1948, and had difficulty finding stable employment for ten years. Many Jewish photographers lost their staff positions in 1948–1949, although none experienced the horrible fate suffered by several Yiddish writers, including Fefer, Markish, and Bergelson, who faced arrest and eventually murder in 1952. Khaldei, along with several other underemployed but well-known Jewish photographers, worked for the magazine Art Hobby (Khudozhvestvennaia samodeiatel’nost’) in the second half of the 1950s, and Pravda finally hired him as a staff photographer in 1957. 32

Khaldei’s story about photographing the couple shows just how invested he was in the Jewishness of his work as he presented it late in life to American and often Jewish audiences. He always began his life story with his birth in 1917 in Yuzovka (which would become Stalino in 1924, and then Donetsk in the early 1960s), just before the outbreak of anti-Jewish pogroms during the Russian Civil War. We learn of the death of his mother during one of those pogroms and of the murder of many family members during World War II when the Nazis occupied Stalino in 1941. His 1997 New York Times obituary talked in detail about his being raised in an “Orthodox Jewish family.” The word “Soviet” disappears from his own, and from others’, description of the photograph, and the focus of Budapest turns to the Jewishness of the encounter. Just as the subtle Jewishness of the Kerch news photographs drops out of Baltermants’s photograph as it becomes part of Soviet memory, the 1990s reincarnation of Khaldei’s Budapest photograph moves in the opposite direction and loses the Soviet wartime liberation story as it becomes a Jewish icon of Holocaust memory. 33

However, Khaldei’s post-Soviet legacy in Russia is quite different from his legacy in the West. As the war narrative became official Soviet and then post-Soviet war memory, with Jews the ever-present absence, Khaldei rarely presented himself, or his story of the Budapest ghetto, as a Jewish story. Rather, he presented himself and the photo as part of Soviet war memory. This is how he recounted the story of the Budapest photograph to a Russian journalist in the 1990s:

I was walking along a side street and I ran into these two. Although people knew that Soviet troops had entered the city, the woman stopped and looked distressed. I began to explain to them in German that I was Russian, Soviet. The woman began to cry. I photographed them, and then they immediately began to rip off their stars that had been sewn onto their coats.

The journalist ended the interview by saying that the photograph was left unpublished for years until it came out in the 1990s, a mythic story that had become so ingrained, like the story of the suppression of Baltermants’s “Grief,” that it had become fact. In this interview, Khaldei does not use the word “Jew,” instead saying that he described himself to the couple as “Russian, Soviet.” He does not claim to have spoken Yiddish or Hebrew to them, as he suggests in his other interviews, but says that he spoke German. Perhaps most important, he says that the couple tore

32 Ibid., 12–13. On the arrests and murders of Yiddish writers, see Rubenstein, Stalin’s Secret Pogroms. Khaldei’s archives contain documentation about his firing, or as his boss called it, “downsizing of the staff,” including a petition from Khaldei to get his job back on the basis of his outstanding war photography and the fact that he had never received any kind of political or ideological reprimands. See “Spravka, fotokhronika TASS,” October 25, 1948, as found in the Archive of Evgenii Khaldei, housed at Agency Fotosoyuz, Moscow.

off their own stars, rather than his doing the symbolic liberating. If in 1945 Khaldei’s Budapest photography could be published in a Soviet Yiddish newspaper read by Jews in Moscow, Kiev, New York, or London, in the 1990s Khaldei presented different selves and different frameworks for his photograph to audiences that fifty years later had very different memories of the war.34

“Grief” and “Jewish Couple” first appeared as news photographs embedded in a complicated wartime story. At the time, the Soviet story of the war was also the Soviet Jewish story of the war, and the Jewish story of the war in the Soviet Union was the Soviet story. When the photographs reappeared—“Grief” in the 1960s with the emergence of official Soviet war memory, and “Jewish Couple” with the 1990s emergence of the story of the Holocaust (the war against the Jews) on Soviet soil—they became individual icons of seemingly separate memories of World War II and the Holocaust.

In the 2000s, two exhibitions attempted to return the photographs to their original context in time and place. In 2005, the European House of Photography in Paris held a solo exhibition for Baltermants and, for the first time since the war, contextualized “Grief” by exhibiting it with other photographs he had taken at Kerch. The photographs were hung together as a series, titled “From the Series ‘That’s How It Was [Tak eto bylo].’” The curators attempted to return the iconic “Grief” photograph back to its historical context, although neither Ivanova, Tereshchenko, nor Kogan was named, and no mention was made of the fact that most of the bodies in the Bagerov trench were Jewish. Contemporary curators continue to see the story of Kerch as a Soviet one, as Baltermants would have wanted.35

Also in 2005, at the Russian State Historical Museum on Red Square in Moscow, the late Khaldei and his son Leonid, a budding photographer in his own right, had an exhibition titled “Budapest through the Eyes of Two Generations.” It was the first major showing of a wide range of Khaldei’s Budapest photographs and included several taken in the Budapest ghetto. Leonid went to Budapest in 2005 to take photographs for the exhibition, nicely contrasting the elder Khaldei’s historic photojournalism of violence and destruction with contemporary documentary images of the newly bourgeois capital of a European Union country. Following Khaldei’s self-presentation to Russian audiences as a Soviet photographer, the online catalog for the exhibition makes no mention of the fact that both photographers are Jewish, and

34 See http://cityscan.ru/catalog.php?view=687. The original Russian reads: “Ia idu po ulochke, a eti dvoe mne navstrechu. Khotia v obschem-to znali, chto sovetskie voiska vosili, zhenschina ostanovilas’, i kakoe-to napriazhenie pochuvstvovalos’. Ia nachal po-nemetski im ob’iasnit’, chto ia russkii, sovetskii. Zhenschina rasplakalas’. Ia ikh sfotografiroval, a potom oni priamo u menia na glazakh stali sryvat’ zvezdy, kotorye u nikh byli nasnit’ na pal’to.” In my September 2007 interview with Khaldei’s daughter, she insisted again that the photograph had never been published in the Soviet Union. I then showed her scanned images of the Yiddish newspaper from March 1945, which are not of high enough quality to reproduce here.

35 The title of the series came from an unpublished maquette that Baltermants assembled in the 1970s called “That’s How It Was.” The book included most of his Kerch photographs. Much to Baltermants’s dismay, no Soviet publishing house picked up the project, and the book still sits in the Baltermants Archive unpublished. The Paris exhibition was the first time the photographs had been presented together as Baltermants envisioned them in the book. There are two extant copies of the maquette, both of which were consulted for this article.
in the biographical description of the elder Khaldei, it mentions nothing about pogroms, and says that he was fired in 1948 not because he was Jewish, but “because of what was written under ‘nationality’ in his passport.” As befits the Soviet and post-Soviet memory of the war, the word “Jew” never appears.\(^{36}\)

The fact that these news photographs became icons of distinct war memories makes it difficult to get back to the overlapping narratives that did not divide Jew from Soviet as neatly as contemporary Holocaust and war memory often do. In Russia, the war is still a more powerful memory than is the Holocaust, even for post-Soviet Jews, and especially for World War II veterans, who generally see themselves as Soviet war heroes. According to Gitelman’s study of the Soviet Jewish war generation, most elderly Russian Jews understand the importance of the Holocaust to Jewish identity, but when asked about the Holocaust’s role during the war, Soviet Jewish veterans told Gitelman that “they did not fight in the war as Jews but as Soviet citizens.” The relatively new Holocaust museum located on the grounds of Russia’s enormous national war memorial complex in Moscow is hardly utilized, and a good percentage of its visitors are foreign tourists. It does not function as a national pilgrimage site, as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum does for both American Jews and Americans in general.\(^{37}\)

Returning iconic photographs to their original news context shows how photographs function in the creation of narratives and memories. Soviet Jews, Baltermants and Khaldei among them, saw the war as many tragedies in one—personal, family, communal, and national. And when these two Soviet Jewish photographers, empowered by the state to create the national war narrative, shot their respective photographs, they were taking news photos of particular aspects of this Soviet and Jewish war. Their employer, the Soviet press, was the first institution to publicly develop a narrative of and an interpretive framework through which to understand Nazi atrocities, in both Russian and Yiddish. When we see these photographs in all of their historic complexity, the distance between Soviet and Jewish, the war and the Holocaust, and Baltermants and Khaldei collapses.

\(^{36}\) The State Historical Museum’s online record of the exhibition, Budapesht glazami dvukh pokolenii, is at http://www.shm.ru/ev3884078.html.

\(^{37}\) Gitelman, “Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion.”

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