The Experience of War and the Construction of Normality. Lessons from the Blockade of Leningrad

Jeffrey K. Hass
University of Richmond, jhass@richmond.edu

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War and Social Meaning: Interpretations and Political Normality

On June 22, 1941, the Nazi war machine crossed the border into the Soviet Union, initiating a process that would shape post-war Soviet politics and society in fundamental ways. This is no small claim: the twin revolutions of 1917 and 1929 — the first «from below» and the second «from above» — were (and remain) awesome moments of social change and transformation. However, Western historiography remains trapped within the shadows of these first two events, to the detriment of the third. This is odd, considering how important experiences of war are in Western polities. Events of war and their interpretations (at that moment and subsequently) shape symbols and discourse of political normality. World War I created throughout Western Europe a cynicism to politics of modernity and the nation, while World War II paradoxically rebuilt national identity and feeling. In Britain, the experience of total war twice shaped national consciousness, enhancing distrust of the Continent (source of both wars) and a feeling of unique heroism against tremendous odds. The myth of Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain reverberate today; the late Queen Mother was revered because she and George VI, remained in London during the Blitz and went out in public to inspect damage, an image of a monarch sharing his subjects' tribulations and creating a bond. The impact of war, especially World War II, on Soviet and

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Russian identities, conceptions of political and social normality and legitimacy, and social practices is both well-known and unknown: well-known in that Russians and Western scholars of the region understand the importance of the war for Soviet society and afterward; unknown in that Western scholarship has paid little theoretical or empirical attention to this subject. Despite this importance of World War II to Soviet politics and society, and its potential contributions to understandings of politics and power generally, Western studies of the Soviet experience pays scant or only passing attention to the importance of World War II in shaping Soviet politics.¹

In this essay I use the example of the Blockade of Leningrad — an extreme example of the Soviet experience of World War II, and an extreme example of the experience of war generally — to address two issues. The first is a more general, theoretical issue: the importance of war to the construction of political and social normality and practices. Political science and sociology have examined the impact of war on structures and institutions, such as states or gender roles and relations; but the impact of war on meanings and meaning systems is addressed only empirically, often without much theoretical reflection. The second issue is how World War II shaped the specific meaning systems, cosmologies, and assumptions about normal practice among Soviet citizens — put another way, how the war impacted on Soviet habitus. Given its radical, extreme nature, the Blockade experience should go far to illuminating these issues — and a study of the Blockade can also liberate those voices and experiences kept in the quiet for too long, ironically in the name of Soviet authority and the stable rule of the Communist Party.

War and Soviet Society

The usual account of the emergence of Soviet institutions, beliefs, and practices stresses the Revolution and the 1930s. The post-1945 Soviet social order is fundamentally that of the 1930s; narratives do not place much, if any, emphasis on the impact or World War II. Even so-called «revisionists» of Soviet history do not go beyond 1939 to explain the rise of Soviet civilization: Soviet politics ends in 1938, and the rest is a footnote.² Sheila Fitzpatrick and students have produced fine scholarship on workers, peasants, and the state, and on relations of power, culture, and resistance in the 1930s.³ Stephen Kotkin's Magnetic Mountain examines Stalinism as civilization, without asking whether that civilization's development was fundamentally shaped by the experience of the war that followed — not simply that the war might have legitimated sacrifices and seemingly bizarre policies of the 1930s, but that the war might have changed the very
ways that the Soviet people thought of their system and elite, and how that elite and its operatives (e.g. in the Party of NKVD-KGB) might have, in turn, thought about a society that felt it deserved more freedom, peace, and plenty following even greater sacrifices and victory by 1945.4

Studies of Soviet identity as well focus exclusively on the 1930s without considering the impact of the war — war, which in the West played a crucial role in the formation of national consciousness. (If Stalin and his people built socialism in the 1930s, his people defended it afterwards.) Jochen Hellbeck’s discussion of the creation of the new Soviet subject (using intimate diary materials) is titled Revolution on my Mind, as if the creation of that subject is primarily an outcome of the 1930s.5 One good illustration of this oversight in scholarship is a chapter by Ronald Grigor Suny in an edited book on the USSR and Nazi Germany.6 In a 27-page overview of the rise and consolidation of Stalin’s authority and system, Suny assigns two pages to World War II, conflating the complex history of war and aftermath (Stalin’s early breakdown, confusion over strategies, Leningrad’s symbolic challenge and the «Zhdanov affair»). Suny also assumes the war played to Stalin’s game of personal power and Soviet legitimacy: «Official propaganda convincingly identified the victory over Nazism with the superiority of the Soviet system, its organic link with rodina (the motherland), and the personal genius of Stalin.»7 It did? Was propaganda so convincing, or did people have their own worldviews about victory and status? What aspects of «the system» were organically linked to the «motherlands»?

This is particularly odd considering the importance Soviet scholars (as well as state and people) gave to the war and that some archival materials from the war period are open.8 Perhaps more important is that historical and comparative sociological has successfully pointed out the significance of war to politics and social structure. This should have alerted scholars to the likelihood that World War II would have a significant impact on Soviet society and politics. Certainly this was understood in private discussions and university lectures; yet in the discourse of Western scholarship, the story of the war was confined primarily to accounts of military history or Stalin’s leadership. I do not want to make the error of replacing one all-determining historical moment (1917, the 1930s) with another (World War II). I take as given that pre-1941 historical events were an important foundation for Soviet institutions, identities, and practices. However, these historical trajectories were reshaped by war; no better proof exists than the fact that by the 1960s more work was published
on the war than on the Revolution, and Brezhnev resurrected the war experience to create a «cult of war.» The experience and victory of war — surviving the horrifying Nazi onslaught at Leningrad, Sevastopol, and Stalingrad and emerging victorious — legitimated the Soviet project. Socialism was not merely the absence of exploitation, it was the expression of a superior modernity in a real confrontation with the capitalist West. Scholarship on war elsewhere shows that if other foundational myths persist, the experience of war changes them or subordinates them, and adds to the social pantheon. To make sense of the construction of political culture and dynamics of political legitimation and normalization, we cannot avoid war. It is time to reincorporate it into the study of Soviet history.

**War and Socio-Political Meaning**

Social science has shown the centrality of war to modernity: no war, no nationalism, no modern state, no modern welfare, retarded development of women’s right—the list could go on. These accounts tend to privilege either structures and institutions or social-psychological dynamics. In political science the obvious body of work is international relations. In political sociology, scholars have looked more at war to make sense of modern political structure and institutions. Theda Skocpol demonstrated the centrality of war to revolutions and American welfare. Just as the British welfare system was born after World War II, to reward the «land of heroes,» American welfare began as a reward (or political bribe) to heroes who fought in the Civil War. Charles Tilly also changed our understanding of the emergence of states and variation in state structures by relating state-making to war-making. In these studies, however, *meaning* remains problematic — it is missing, epiphenomenal, or related primarily to propaganda or elites. While not wanting to turn entirely to a pluralist model of politics, I suggest this oversight requires correction. Meaning among non-elites is as important as meaning among elites, for this relates to the elites’ «formula of rule,» the claims and rhetoric which legitimate elite power and turn it into accepted authority. Distance between official propaganda and policies, and popular meanings and convictions, can impact politics in several ways. Alternative meanings can survive underground and act as a springboard for resistance, or at least dampen support when challenge emerges. Thus, a central issue becomes *how people interpret and give meaning to their experiences of war*. If political culture is important, the context that generates political culture is central to helping us understand where national meanings and traditions emerge. Because
of its power and impact through such traumas as sacrifice and loss, war is one such context.\textsuperscript{20}

This essay begins to broach these issues by examining what kinds of meanings emerge «from below» in the experience of war — not only meanings \textit{per se}, but also their structure into dichotomies of sacred and profane. The relation the «formula of rule» and average people’s frames depends in part on how people construct dichotomies of social and political sacred and profane. The experience of war shapes such dichotomies — in the case of the Blockade, dichotomies often present in Soviet logic and propaganda. However, these sacred-profane dichotomies led to potential and often powerful contradictions between idealized sacred norms and values — ideals made more ideal by the Blockade experience — versus everyday practices of survival that often slid into the profane. This will be clearer in the moral economy of food, where the socialist system of state-run provision was supposed to insure survival and fairness, but where Leningraders had to turn to less ideal means to obtain enough food to survive. As well, we will see a moral economy of bodies and death—the ideal of a peaceful order under Soviet socialism, versus the realities of corpses littering the streets or cannibalism. Certainly this will not exhaust all themes from experiences and diaries, although a few powerful themes reappear: cold, hunger, bombing and shelling, exerting one’s will to stay active and alive, and cooperation versus exclusion.\textsuperscript{21} Such issues became central to making sense of the Blockade, the war, and social normality.

As an example of war’s most horrendous impact on civilians, the Blockade of Leningrad provides a powerful source of data on this very process. In general, however, the Soviet experience of World War II is a powerful laboratory for studying the process of creating, imposing, consuming, and resisting political meanings and hegemony: not only was this a major (if not \textit{the} major) point in Soviet history; the Soviet regime and its state officials were also very conscious of the importance of political culture, as noted. Put simply, the Blockade provides a radical case of the experience of war (not only of the Soviet experience, although this is part of our investigation as well): bombing and shelling; suffering and deprivation (lack of heat and water during cold winters, horrendously inadequate food supply); constant threat from a powerful, aggressive enemy; constant propaganda from home and aggressor states; constant interaction with one’s state and regime during wartime; location directly at the front line but not occupied.\textsuperscript{22} With the effects of war and the struggle for survival at their most intense and desperate, we can see the effects of war on individuals and institutions at their starkest. Much as Kotkin
used Magnitogorsk as a focused case study to examine the building of Soviet socialism, I use the Blockade as a focused case study on war's effects in general, and in particular on state-society relations and constructions of meaning and legitimacy.

Ascertaining Interpretations «From Below»: Diaries

Wartime diaries provide one source of data on the interaction between the experience of war and the formation of social and political meanings. While a few diaries were obviously a continuation of pre-war diaries, which the Party often encouraged among its activists and members as a way of inculcating the new Soviet identity, many diaries began on or soon after the outbreak of the war — showing the significance of the war and Blockade to Leningraders' own identities and senses of overall meaning. Such meanings (and culture in general) are contextual, and comprehending the dynamics governing the formation of meaning required accounting for that context. Wartime diaries, correspondence (e.g. letters), and other forms of communication and discourse shed some light on those dynamics. Wartime diaries also help avoid the danger of circularity: we see what people were thinking during the war, not what they read into it afterwards. Post-war reflections are important but do not show war's impact at the moment of war.

This is not a study of «public opinion» per se, for reasons of sampling. It is far from clear that Leningraders who left extensive diaries (or diaries at all), for posterity or especially for archives, are adequately representative. Certainly in archives one finds diaries written by blue-collar workers (usually skilled), white-collar personnel, managers, Party and state officials, cultural workers (including members of the intelligentsia); by men and women; by older, middle-aged, and young (teen-aged) inhabitants; by those born in Leningrad and those who moved to it. The number of diaries left behind is small in comparison to the city's population, and it is difficult to control for individual peculiarities (e.g. of individual personal history and habitus) that would color issues and interpretations. Further, writing a diary is an exercise in discipline — making entries on a regular basis, including sufficient detail and commentary so that the diary provides sufficient content for analysis. Even disciplined people may be too busy with work, life, or survival. However, a study of diaries can be helpful at an early stage in this kind of study. Extrapolating from existing diaries can provide hypotheses for further testing or refinement. As well, even such a limited data set can provide insights into what people actually thought, what they felt was important to

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take time to write down, and how they came to those issues and meanings (which we could infer from contexts in which issues and comments arose). This is people's own meanings, not what closed-ended surveys tease out. In a system where formal discourse was controlled through censorship, threats of arrest, and Party control of information, diaries are a site and vehicle of personal, underground discourse — not discourse between people but for the self. To tease out that personal, underground discourse, I try to use diary material from as many different social strata and contexts as possible, to provide important insights and help us possible discover sets of meanings and patterns of wartime meaning formation that alter can be tested in different places and times. Naturally we must be aware not only of what diarists mentioned but also what they did not, for sometimes people felt the need for caution, given constant reminders on wall placards about the need to avoid contributing to rumors that might help the enemy.

The war, and especially the Blockade, weakened Party's ability to conduct propaganda. Internal documents within the division for agitation and propaganda note the immense difficulties carrying out «agitprop» work. Party aktiv were mobilized for other activities, such as helping the evacuation, mobilizing production, and even going to fight (or getting out of the city); agitprop cadres could also fall victim to death from hunger or cold. As a result, there were fewer agitprop cadres left to give lectures, hold discussions and «office hours,» visit factories and homes, and continue putting up newspapers on street walls. Thus, there was likely some degree of individual autonomy in keeping diaries. While Hellbeck rejects the public-private dichotomy as an artifact of liberal societies, this weakens our appreciation for games of power and resistance. As Erving Goffman noted, people experience multiple front stages and back stages, and they play to these different audiences. Following this insight and his own research, James C. Scott noted that people have great creative capacity for playing different transcripts in different contexts; the private becomes where people feel relatively safer from the gaze and exercise of power. Despite the Stalinist regime and totalitarian repression, the war was a moment of liberation. The reality of war and survival, coupled with the Party-state's preoccupation with the war, provides a glimpse into some autonomous making of meaning—not only during war, but also in the midst of Soviet socialism's grand project of remaking humans into homo sovieticus.
Themes, Tropes, and Interpretations:
Making Meaning of the Blockade

I carry out this analysis in the double spirit of verstehen and induction. Max Weber saw verstehen as the heart of social science—to understand how people think and, in doing so, reproduce social structures and institutions. This survives in the tradition of the sociology of knowledge and ethnographic methods. I approach verstehen by going directly to people’s own representations as well as actions—looking at what was done (to the best of our ability to account for practices) and at how actions were interpreted. This also follows Hellbeck’s analysis of Stalinism and personal identities: by looking closely at how people discussed themselves and contexts in diaries, Hellbeck followed the construction of the subject amidst Stalinist institutions and power relations. Further, given that theory of state-society relations and political legitimacy/normality remains underdeveloped, there are few concrete propositions to test.

I use two tactics to provide some analytic structure. The first tactic is to compare diarists from different social locations, or location within a society’s structural-institutional matrix. There are myriad locations one could choose from. Because of the importance of formal ideology to the Soviet system, relation to the Party seems important, at least at the outset of the analysis. As well, given the Soviet Union’s anti-capitalist ideology and institutional order, relations to the state seem important as well. In the Soviet construction of «class,» three classes were important: the working class, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia. A fourth unofficial «class» was the bureaucracy—unavoidable, massive as the bureaucracy was in a modern but anti-capitalist society (where the state takes the place of private property and civil society). Finding peasant diaries in the Blockade has proven difficult, so I leave this group out. I have drawn my data from a selection of diaries whose authors cover a range of social locations. These include a model «new Soviet person» (a skilled worker and Komsomolets); assistant managers at industrial enterprises; an older industrial worker sympathetic to the Party and Soviet power; a woman from the cultural intelligentsia who did cultural work during the Blockade; a young woman trained as an engineer, starting her working life as the Blockade struck; an assistant to the planning department at the Seventh State Electric Station who also worked at the Sevkabel factory; a young boy (likely 11-12 years old) not yet been subject to the full force of propaganda; and a teacher and artist. While any «social location» (class, ethnicity, etc.) is a social construction,
people took the identities and consequences of such locations seriously. One related issue is sampling and representation. Diaries in archives are not a random sample of the Leningrad population; diarists in particular, by the very action of keeping a diary, are involved in a more active process of creating meaning. I keep this in mind so as to be modest with claims.

My second tactic for structuring the narratives and analysis is to follow particular themes that are important to making sense of the war-legitimacy nexus and that appear to recur. There is a caveat here: given the stress on induction and the spirit of hypothesis-generation in this essay, the problems of selection bias, and the differences in actual personalities of those who kept diaries, any comparison will be less than perfect. The usual rule of comparisons is to be as rigorous as possible in controlling for the variables under examination; we will have to be a little lenient here, given the nature of the data. This warning aside, I pay close attention to what people viewed as sacred and profane. What was the everyday Blockade experience for these people? What had real meaning, and how was that meaning colored by war? This helps us construct an initial picture of a moral order: suffering and death; the moral economy of provision, and survival in general; and who the heroes and villains were. Suffering and death are rampant in war, interrupting our sense of order, stability, and fairness; this is related to *theodicy*, why suffering or tragedy strikes those who seemingly do not deserve it.\[^{36}\]

To address suffering and death, Leningrad inhabitants tried to remake sense of the normal order of the social universe to explain or justify suffering. By «moral economy» I follow E. P. Thompson’s example: claims and meanings (sacred and profane) assigned to economic experiences. Crucial here is obtaining food, whether in the formal system of state-run stores and rationing, or via the *rynok* (bazaar). What did people say about privileges and privations — did they comment on how *they* got food, while commenting on or critiquing how others did so? Moral economy is important because here the reality of survival ran headlong into formal Bolshevik discourse and value systems: while people could «speak Bolshevik» and articulate (and perhaps in the process even accept) the regime’s claims about morality and reality, no discourse by itself generates food. How did individuals deal with the reality of obtaining food in an anti-capitalist workers’ paradise at war?\[^{37}\]

I propose the following structure of sacred-profane categories and dichotomies. While not exhaustive, this encapsulates several hypotheses: that interpretations of war and Blockade were structured in such a way; that framing as sacred-profane provides explanatory power to
us, investigators, and to *blokadniki*; and that dichotomies were sufficiently significant that Party-state elites had to address them during and after the war.38

### Sacred
- Order
- Collectivist behavior, *kollektiv*
- Moral economy of provision
- Contentment
- Justice and equality
- Cleanliness
- Reality (e.g. of rumors, experience)
- Relations (e.g. to outside, to others)
- Death = natural causes; respected
- Soviet/Russian nation, people;
- Party as ideal

### Profane
- Chaos
- Individualism, self
- Market/patronage economy of provision
- Suffering
- Favoritism and patronage
- Filthiness
- Propaganda and official news
- Isolation (e.g. from rest of USSR, others)
- Death = result of cruelty; hidden, disrespectful
- Fascists (Party cadres sometimes here)

The issue of sacred versus profane is important in this analysis because it was a unifying logic throughout diarists’ narratives—something that would not surprise Emile Durkheim.39 Commenting on events and observations, diarists created dichotomies: profanity of real behavior versus the sacredness of ideals; or of two different observed behaviors that roughly corresponded to sacred (ideal) versus profane. Durkheim noted the importance of sacred and profane in the construction of religious cosmologies and, generally, in the construction of social identity: the sacred as us and what the collective ideally means, versus the profane of the outside «other» that defines the self or group through opposition. If Kotkin is correct and Bolshevism was a religion or church of sorts, where capitalism was profane and the Soviet leadership defined Soviet socialism as its sacred anti-capitalist antithesis, then we should see sacred-profane dichotomies appear as part of the fundamental structure of commentary, if not of the narratives of events themselves.

**War as Drama**

The first theme that structures narratives — a theme which appears fairly consistently across diaries usually without diarists noting it — is the sense of the Blockade, and the war generally, as drama. While drama
itself is not sacred or profane, through it diarists drew out sacred and profane logics: a noble drama of preparation, hope, volunteerism, and a profanity of defeat and retreat, tragedy, suffering, and corruption. As such, the logic of drama helps structure sacred-profane dichotomies that follow, as authors «discovered» dichotomies as the drama unfolded. Further, if the Soviet mission of constructing anti-capitalist modernity in the 1930s was Manichean, the drama of war extended but also altered it: sacred in pitting Soviet civilization against fascism (ironically alongside capitalist democracies), profane in its very essence of being war. The USSR played a leading role in the drama, defending the civilized world against uncivilized fascist aggression. Diaries are littered with references to uncivilized Germans, and popular views dovetailed with propaganda of Germans as «beasts» (zveri) deserving hatred, contempt, and revenge. Within Soviet civilization, some actors had more prominent roles than others: Stalin and the Red Army, but also inhabitants of Leningrad in their own versions of the drama. While they neither fought at the front nor made military decisions, they did hold out, maintained production, and sacrificed money, time, energy, and life for the war effort and to defend Leningrad. As much as the people, the city itself as entity is perhaps the prominent actor. Diarists repeatedly make reference to Leningrad as a city of beauty, culture, and history: the cradle of the revolution, home to prominent Russian cultural creations, its combination of architecture and weather gave it a sense of life reflected in nineteenth-century writings (e.g. by Gogol, Dostoevskii, and others).

Plays and movies, according to the general rule of thumb, have three acts: the first sets up the scenario and begins the tension, the second develops the contradictions underlying the dramatic tension, and the third revolves the contradictions. Diaries did not follow this three-act structure perfectly, but there is a sense of an underlying drama at work. These acts followed the logic of sacred-profane and its contradictions of ideals versus reality and practice. Act one involved the sudden intrusion of war into the peaceful ideal of Soviet socialist life (even if the reality or the Terror, the Winter War against Finland, and the constant international threats belied this). How could war, and the rapid German advance, happen amidst the peace-loving Soviet population that in the 1930s tried to build the more perfect future (including one without capitalist wars)? Act two involved the tension of survival and both the breakdown and solidification of norms as practices. The tension itself was the very act of confronting—but not always resolving — contradictions of ideals versus real survival. «Socialism» was not enough. Act three was the resolution of
tension through «banalization» of war — the implicit acceptance of the Blockade as a reality and an attempt to rebuild ideal norms as practices — and eventual victory.

Act one was the beginning of the war — fairly dramatic in itself — leading up to the encirclement of Leningrad. This was a period of high tension and chaos: children and women were (sometimes) evacuated, not always successfully; workers volunteered en masse for the Red Army or the narodnoe opolchenie (voluntary battalions to support the troops even in combat); other male workers and many women workers were sent outside the city to help dig trenches, often getting caught up in the drama of refugees, retreating soldiers, and the advancing German army. As Aleksei Koslovskii noted, the first month of war was like «an entire epoch,» with the Red Army heroically defending the motherland.41 Wartime measures were hurriedly introduced, including air raid sirens and patrols. The shock of war and of rapid mobilization, along with the juxtaposition of two radically different states of being — sacred peace and profane war — set up one defining trope of Act one, a sense of surreality and heroism that would mark myths and images of the war, as well as the foundation of sacred and profane. The pre-war era was a moment of peace, normality, personal enjoyment with friends and family, in contrast to the chaos, destruction, and suffering. The beautiful summer (normality) was interrupted by war. For Irina Zelenskaia, the June weather and distant threat of Germany lulled her into a sense of security; she had to remind herself that there was a war on.42 Nina Kobyzeva started her diary six months into the war; the first sixty pages are a recollection of pre-war weeks. She even introduced her diary like a novel, with a cast of characters, and she set up the tension by juxtaposing pre-war life as one of freedom — a recent divorce from a troubling husband, wanderings with friends along the banks of the Gulf of Finland, preparing to meet the wonders of summertime Leningrad.43 Aleksei Kozlovskii began his diary by noting how, in June, he headed to his dacha and saw ominous silhouettes of planes in the sky; the next day he was called back to his enterprise for official news of events — an interruption of the usual state of affairs in Leningrad in June.44

Part of the logic of the first act was patriotism and volunteerism: Leningrad would not surrender, the Red Army and Soviet people would inevitably defeat the invaders (unlike the French, as some noted). As one communist noted later, he and comrades were ready to fight. He noticed in the early days of war how Leningraders were confident of victory.45 Another, on June 22, noted how the city was
calm and Leningraders were cold-blooded and ready to fight. In meetings at city enterprises, workers were confident of victory and voluntary mobilized for the front. Molotov's speech signaled the start of war; Stalin's speech several weeks later made the Leader seem a fellow comrade and human being (some commented on hearing him sipping water during the speech). Some diarists felt pangs of separation from family: husbands sent wives and children to safety while bravely remaining to organize work. \footnote{4} \footnote{6} Granted, not all diarists had a rosy view or were skeptical of the state's ability to properly organize defensive measures. Nina Kobyzova was worried of a repeat of the chaos of the Russo-Finnish War, which «showed what kind of order we have on the railroads during the smallest disorders.» \footnote{48} Repeatedly she asked where advice would come from, for it was not forthcoming from authorities. \footnote{47} She also noted that, while younger male workers eagerly signed up for service (including her close friend Petya), «[enterprise] bosses started agitating the people to come forward and volunteer, and for image themselves were signing up, but then they cunningly got out of the army.» \footnote{50} The hopes and masculinity of mobilizing for war in act one — in many ways an ignorance of the horror of war, much in the same way as Allied and German youth signed up happily for war in 1914, only to realize the magnitude of the act later on — gave way to Act two, which begins roughly in early November 1941. Here the profanity emerges, bringing up the full force of sacred-profane dichotomies; with the city, people began to realize the immediate future will be much more difficult than imagined. One profanity, noted with disbelief and even despair in diaries, is retreat, especially retreat coupled with disorganization in the military and related activities such as evacuations. \footnote{51} As the Germans begin to bomb Leningrad, rumors emerged about traitors shooting up green signal flairs to aid bombers. \footnote{52} When the Badaevskii food storage depot is bombed and its contents destroyed, food supply deteriorates rapidly, and the first feelings of hunger soon follow. News from the front is negative: cities surrendered, the Wehrmacht again storming through another country en route to victory. One high point in the drama is the German attack on Moscow — finally some good news when the Nazi war machine is turned back from the capital. However, the tension of war continued as hunger and cold worsened. Electricity and water supplies end, leaving people in darkness and needed to walk to the Neva river for water. Tram service stops; people have to walk to work (sometimes many kilometers), and trams stand still like frozen corpses on the street, symbols of the terror of death about to
arrive. In December the horror of starvation begins, which creates its own set of sacred-profane dichotomies.

The tension of Act two is survival and acclimation to suffering and death, structuring the other sacred-profane dichotomies that follow. In a sense, Act two is the «act of profanity.» Act three is quite long — roughly May 1942 to January 1944 — but it does partially conform to the logic of drama. In Act three, the war and Blockade become everyday, accepted, taken-for-granted. Sacred-profane dichotomies are resolved or held in abeyance. The city’s Party leaders help prepare to supply the city for the winter and undertake measures to clean the streets of corpses, dirt, and debris. Victory gardens are planted in the summer; wooden homes are turned into firewood. Even shelling and air raids, in 1941 among the more fearful of events, become humdrum — which surprised some diarists.53 Diarists mention shelling constantly, not only as an interruption of normal life but also as the clarion of fear; but by 1942 people were used to air-raid sirens and did not let them bother everyday activities, e.g. standing in bread lines.54 (Partly this may have been due to the punctuality of German shelling and air raids.)55 The air raid sirens and shelling were as much a part of Leningrad as the bridges and canals, and people feared them less — they were accustomed to them, and running for shelter each time invariably interrupted important routines such as standing in line for food. (Some diarists also noted that the Germans used shelling and accompanying sirens as a form of psychological warfare — and so taking shelling and sirens for granted may have been a form of resistance for some.) When the Blockade was partially broken in 1943, life in the encircled city went on.

In fact, one defining logic for Act three is banality, as the Blockade and war became part of Leningrad byr; the dramatic sacred and profane become the everyday sacred and profane. Food supply became more regular in 1942; despite unhappy military news in the south, the engagement of the Wehrmacht there meant fewer resources to storm the city. Despite forebodings that the Germans would launch an all-out assault in autumn 1942, most diarists seemed to worry less about the destruction or surrender of the city. It was now a matter of holding out until the end (which would be hastened by the Allies’ opening of a second front).56 Diary material became less dramatic, more everyday. People carried on with work; they fell in love, tended to everyday matters, cleaned house, took walks. The drama of shelling was no longer drama; hunger remained, not as bad as in the winter of 1941–42, and people were as accustomed to it as humans can be. The horrors of war were relatively not as
horrible as in the first six months, and the overall tide of war seemed inexorably to be turning. People tried to resume their lives as best they could. In consequence, diary entries sometimes trail off in Act three. Gaps of weeks and even months appear in 1943. January 1944—May 1945 is usually an apostscript or afterthought: the Blockade is broken, people weep for joy. January 1944 is usually noted as a day of supreme triumph, not only of the Red Army and USSR but especially of Leningraders. After this the drama recedes. Many diaries stop before the end of World War II: Victory Day is minor compared to the end of the Blockade, itself minor compared to the suffering of 1941–42.

Overall, the logic of drama shapes the sacred-profane structure in two ways. First, it acts as a metanarrative into which other narratives of experience and their sacred-profane logics are fitted. Act one is the appearance and assumption of the sacred. Act two is the appearance of the profane, usually in extreme form. Act three involves partial resolution or stagnation of contradictions. Second, Act one is the sacred; Act two the profane; Act three a combination in the banal. The lifting of the Blockade in January 1944, the ultimate sacred moment of freeing the city from the Germans and suffering, ends the drama of diaries. That this would not lead to resolution of the sacred-profane dichotomies—in part because tribulations would continue, this time at the hands of Stalin’s leadership—was a bitter irony of the experience.57

**Homo sovieticus Meets homo economicus:**

Collective Cooperation and the Prisoners’ Dilemma

Part of the Soviet project was the creation of *homo sovieticus*: not only anti-capitalist but also collectivist in norms and practice. Literature on pre-Revolutionary and Soviet culture often touches on the importance of collectivism; while in practice this was likely as much myth as reality, in discourse collectivism was certainly touted as inherent in Russian and Soviet nature and a superior cultural trait vis-a-vis the West.58 Soviet collectivism was invoked in the enterprise *kollektiv* and in communist collective practices, from communal living and other services to public *samokritika* and the practice of airing one’s thoughts (as hiding something in the private was potentially counter-revolutionary).59 During the Blockade, collectivism was tested on two fronts: first, in real practices of individual versus collective tactics of survival; second, in how people framed their and others’ tactics and behaviors through a individual-collectivist dichotomy.60 On the first front, the classic Prisoners’ Dilemma played
out: did people cooperate and pool resources to survive, and did this provide advantages, or did people focus on self to the exclusion of others, perhaps ultimately hindering their efforts to survive? For close circles of friends and family where all survived, cooperative efforts seem at work: different family members (including older children) divided labor of survival. In some diaries one reads of ritual divisions of labor, with some group members standing in lines at bread stores while others scour the rynki for additional food or other needed materials. These groups would also pool their ration cards and, if possible, bring food from the workplace, dividing up the bread, soup, ersatz chocolate, and the like between family members. In general, one refrain in diary entries is how people constantly go to others’ places, or have them come over — sometimes for tea, but other times to spend the night (or days and nights on end), sharing not just tea but also bread and other food.

On the other hand, families or groups where people hid food from each other or split up seemed to suffer — or at least complain more — about hunger and deprivation. For example, diarist Патр Samarín complained that his wife hid rations she would bring back from work. However, as Samarín himself describes, she would also go off to work nearly every day, bring back food, stand in various lines for food or other goods, while he sat at work or home reading newspapers and wishing her were not too old to join the Communist Party or eating at the «buffet» at his workplace (without bring food home — or never mentioning doing so). Sometimes he appreciated her effort and concern for him, but more often he complained how she, younger than he, did not have appropriate collective or cooperative values but rather valued herself over others. Supposedly she brought home not 500 but 150 grams of sugar, or did not bring home anything for him at all (even though on one occasion he ate his daily bread ration at his workplace cafeteria while complaining she did not bring home additional food); one time he claimed she hid food from him. At any rate, even if both survived, individual rather than cooperative behavior could at the least create strains that added little to daily Blockade life.

On the second front — framing tactics and behaviors as individual or collective (not just collection and use of food), and assigning moral weights to one or the other — diaries provide more data, for Leningraders intuitively saw the paradox of the Prisoners’ Dilemma transposed onto the sacred-profane dichotomy of capitalist individualism versus Soviet collectivism, in the context of survival and war. In other words, the ideal (and sometimes real behavior) of
the moral economy of Soviet/communist collectivism ran head-on into the individualism of the Prisoners’ Dilemma and the desperation of individual survival.\textsuperscript{64} This should not be surprising: in cases of extreme suffering and survival as in the Blockade, an individual likely will experience conflict between the rationality of collective, cooperative behavior (e.g. pooling food rations) and focusing on one’s own survival first and foremost (e.g. eating all one’s rations and perhaps stealing others’). Further, this dichotomy was central to the Bolshevik worldview; Soviet practices in the 1930s focused on creating the collective, selfless individual, and it would be surprising of people did not turn to this logic when structuring their narratives. For example, one theme that winds through Irina Zelenskaia’s account of the Blockade is the issue of individualism and its negative impact on the war effort and environment. In particular, individualism came out most strongly as people were starving: many people thought mostly about how «to defend the rights of their stomachs by any means.»\textsuperscript{65} It is clear why this theme is prominent: she oversaw the organization of food distribution at her enterprise’s cafeteria, and she saw firsthand the tensions and conflicts that occurred as the miniscule rations took their toll over that horrible first winter — in fact, she compared the food lines there to «some kind of [military] front.» Hunger created or augmented love for oneself and weakened other morals and principles.\textsuperscript{66} She dubbed this the «dictatorship of the stomach,» and while she also felt the intense pangs of hunger, she consistently claimed that she had to keep active and exercise all her willpower not to let hunger take over her reason.\textsuperscript{67} Zelenskaia’s observations and criticisms of individualism were not confined to food lines. In one instance, she noted how an incendiary bomb started a fire on Vasilievskii Island. Only one woman tried to put it out; she failed, and Zelenskaia commented in disgust, «Such collectivists!»\textsuperscript{68} As for suffering, Zelenskaia noted that over time people seemed to care less and less for their fellow Leningraders.\textsuperscript{69} She helped out those wasting away (e.g. bringing extra food or sharing rations), but she received no encouragement from bosses; young girls at the enterprise sewed their own clothes but did not sew clothes for soldiers, and when Zelenskaia suggested this would be a good idea, she got no support from colleagues.\textsuperscript{70} As well, those who died were those who could not exercise self-discipline; they did not try to help themselves and, by becoming idle, could not deflect their attention from hunger.\textsuperscript{71} As a result, they lost the will to live.\textsuperscript{72}

Nina Kobyzova as well coded much behavior around her, especially in 1941–42, through this sacred-profane dichotomy. For example, at
the outbreak of war, she noted how many women around her tried to avoid any service to the war effort or scrambled madly to get onto evacuation lists. One can appreciate the desire to evacuate with the Germans approaching, but for Kobyzova, using networks or various excuses that others could use but did not (e.g. family and children, accompanying evacuated factory equipment to guard it) smacked of cowardice. As water pipes froze, people turned to the Neva and canals for water, and Kobyzova noted how crowds cutting through Fontanka ice acted rudely, loudly arguing and shoving each other with water buckets — another picture she would remember all her life. At one point she suggested that truly moral behavior meant thinking first and foremost of general Soviet victory, not only about surviving and breaking the Blockade (a local front on the overall war). In other words, the general victory was more important than Leningrad — admittedly, a view I seldom saw in diaries.

In early 1942, reflecting on how much her mother did for her during the worst days of the winter of 1941–42, Kobyzova recalled how one woman at her enterprise, also a mother, refused to share bread or money with her children. This was in contrast to Kobyzova’s situation — in both cases, mothers had a chance to help their young-adult daughters, but one refused. In fact, this other mother — clearly juxtaposed to Kobyzova’s own mother — accepted money from her son (who might have been at the front, although this was not clear) but did not even share that. In one short entry, Kobyzova sets up the individualist-collective, selfish-sharing dichotomy — not in terms of the rationality of sharing (the logic of the Prisoners’ Dilemma) — rather, she framed it in moral terms of the normality of cooperation and the abnormality of individualism.

Zelenskaia and Kobyzeva were not the only diarists to structure much of their narrative in terms of sacred collective versus profane individual; one diarist I read who does not raise this issue was a young boy who tried to refrain from judging others. The collective-individual dichotomy sometimes was wrapped into other dichotomies I discuss below—sometimes explaining them, sometimes explained by them — and so I let data below augment this discussion. In general, however, other diarists also expressed disillusionment or disgust at individualist, selfish behavior they saw around them. Red Army soldiers, for example, were sacrificing themselves for the defense of the Motherland; children, the elderly and sick, and the less-well-off were starving and dying in Leningrad. At the same time, Party officials and speculators were not living so badly. Tensions within families emerged because of perceptions of individualism, i.e. that
someone was free riding and not pulling his/her weight. Kobyzeva turned against her mother’s «boyfriend» (initials B.A.) because he contributed little to the survival of their small living group; even though she saw he was ill, Kobyzeva, her mother, and B.A.’s daughter continued to seek out food, go to work, clean the house, gather firewood, and the like even as they became weaker from starvation and the cold. Kedrov became ashamed at the behavior he saw at Party-sponsored banquets: for example, how people at one banquet ate food from each others’ plates (including his) or greedily and not so slyly pocketed extra food (e.g. bread rolls). In contrast, diarists often noted—sometimes with a sense of pleasure — how they and friends/colleagues shared their apartment space, food, and time with each other; when many diarists slept away from home, they did so not only at work but also at friends’ places. Perhaps the ultimate expression is Pitr Samarin’s remorse at being alone in the latter years of the Blockade. I explore his expression of the individual-collective dichotomy below, as it is directly related to the moral economy of provision. For now, I note here that Samarin repeats feelings of despair over being alone. The stress from the struggle for food and against hunger ultimately led to a fall-out between him and his wife; this left him alone, which he felt his resulting state of being a solitary individual as intense loneliness, negative and abnormal.

Suffering and Dying: the «Leningrad Death»

Images and data on mortality in the Blockade are staggering: perhaps 1.1 million deaths overall, including at least 52,000 in December 1941 alone. Death, like the constant shelling, became part of everyday Blockade life. This was in stark contrast to the ideal Soviet socialist society, where death was of two types: that inflicted by the state (the agent of the socialist society) against enemies of the people, and death as fulfillment of the socialist life course, the end to a comrade’s usefulness towards the revolutionary ideal. And even so, death and disposal in the 1930s was a problematic interaction of the ideals of Party elite and aktiv, on the one hand, and citizens, on the other. Of course, the 1930s saw plenty of innocent victims of state-inflicted terror or accidents of forced industrialization and collectivization, although these were often framed in propaganda and even in popular consciousness as prices for progress or the result of true wreckers and enemies. In this sense, Soviet society was not so different from modern capitalist societies: death inflicted by the state towards enemies (external and internal), accidents rationalized away. However, if the war clarified the boundaries between sacred and
profane, it blurred the same boundaries between ideal and practice. The state that killed enemies could not protect its people, and it sometimes turned on them in the name of security. Further, while the Party struggled to eradicate remnants of tradition, especially religion, that were part of commemorating death (especially funeral rites), it tried to create alternative sacred rites — socialist music (marches, not religious dirges), socialist disposal of bodies (e.g. cremation), and commemoration not through prayer but a recital of the individual's contributions towards collective socialist progress and reminders of how those present should continue such socialist work.

The Leningrad death was bereft of such sacred rites. An important part of the process of confronting and categorizing death was witnessing the incredible number of corpses on the streets in the winter of 1941–42, the result of starvation. Diarists first heard of starvation deaths, and then they began to witness them; and then they witnessed the horror of corpses left on the streets, as relatives had too little money or strength to bury them. (The horror of corpses with chunks of flesh missing, and stories of cannibalism, emerge later.) What they saw was not part of the pre-socialist or socialist sacred rites, but rather emblematic of the profanity of the Blockade. Bodies were not disposed through formal funerals and graves. Those who died at home or work were left on the streets or in masses near disposal points, wrapped in linen (but not always). Those who died from starvation and weakness while en route from one point to another in the cold of winter 1941–42 rested where they fell. We recoil from the simple and occasional photographs of starving Leningraders dragging linen-wrapped corpses on sleds along snowy streets; diarists saw these every day, up close and in person. The corpses (not always intact) were a reality that imposed itself; they were not illustrations in a book that they could put down. One diarist noted how corpses were thrown (not laid) into mass graves; as to the frozen corpses along the streets, some naked and missing flesh, «I will remember that picture all my life.»

How did Leningraders make sense of suffering and death? The sacred and profane appeared again but blended in a curious way. Some diarists commented on starvation as easy death: one grew weak and descended into death resting, while walking or in bed. Yet for many, starvation was not normal. It was the opposite of modernity, especially promises of Soviet modernity. One gut reaction was horror: not just at the number of corpses that first winter, but how the dead appeared on the streets, under bridges, in cold apartment rooms or basements. From this emerged a sacred-profane dichotomy: the «good
death» in the context of care, and the «Leningrad death» through unnatural, man-made starvation and without care and concern. Part of this construction was the lack of a coffin (grob). Kobyzova noted how it was impossible to see fewer than twenty corpses on the streets as she went home from work. Her reaction: «What a horror—a dead person without a coffin.»Aleksandr Kedrov related how one radio employee whom he knew buried his father, but he explained what «buried» meant, implying the profanity of the Leningrad burial: «he simply placed [his late father] between other corpses lying around at that so-called cemetery.» Lenenergo/Sevkabel planning official and cafeteria aid Irina Zelenkaia thought coffins and proper burials were sacred. (The rhetoric of death emerges throughout Zelenkaia’s overall narrative: she coded evacuations as «flights from death» and coined the phrase «Leningrad death» to refer to Boris’ death from starvation — in contrast to dying at the front, in combat.) She went out of her way on several occasions to maintain the sacred rites, in contrast to the profanity of corpses littering the streets without any care. As corpses began to line the streets, she made sure to note in her diary that the burial officials would only bury bodies that winter in exchange for bread. When one «Uncle Petya» died, it became clear the authorities would not do anything, so she and her son-in-law Boris decided to act. Weak as he was from starvation, Boris tried to build a coffin. Zelenkaia used her car — one of the few occasions she did so — to take Uncle Petya’s body to the cemetery. A few months later her friend Mina died from starvation, and Zelenkaia decided to forego the burial bureaucracy. She and friends created a makeshift coffin, took the body in her car and quietly parked in an alley near a cemetery, and dug a shallow grave. Even then, Zelenkaia noted that there was no real moment of farewell, as in normal, legitimate funeral rites — but it was the best they could do. (Zelenkaia and those with her brought a kilogram of bread as a potential bribe, but they came across nobody who might oppose their ritual.) As Zelenkaia noted, «Only a few Leningraders this winter were provided with this kind of funeral.»

This was the real horror of the Leningrad death: it was the dehumanization of death. As many diarists note, the corpses on the street stopped bothering them, as if they were no longer people but objects. Undoubtedly, the rumors or observations of people eating corpses (often indirect evidence, such as missing flesh) reinforced the profane category of the person as object for use, whether by the state or another starving individual. Cannibalism may have been a forbidden topic in post-war accounts, but diarists did not shy away
One diarist wrote that one coworker at his factory went insane after discovering he had eaten human flesh (perhaps bought at the rynok); a worker at another shopfloor of his factory was arrested for killing and eating several coworkers, and worker at another factory (he heard) had killed and eaten one of his children before going insane and dying. Some diarists could not mention it directly — but they alluded to it indirectly, suggesting that they understood the topic (cannibalism) and that any reader would understand it as well. Nikolai Gorshkov remarked about rumors of cannibalism but noted, «it is impossibly difficult to write about this.» Ostroumova-Lebedeva hinted at cannibalism (and other horrifying stories), only to comment that she would not write about it.

In entries for the first months of 1942, diarists nearly always note the corpses, as if this were the height of Act two. And many diarists noted that something inside all of them had changed as a result. Kobyzova understood that something had changed inside all Leningraders in this regard: as the snow melts and reveals yet more corpses, some with body parts missing, she notes that this no longer makes an impression on her—although the very act of recording her observations and noting this suggests just the opposite. «Interesting — will I come to myself at some point, and how will I react to this survival? I will somehow have to survive all this all over again when I will be a normal person—ordinary corpses lying around on the streets make no kind of impression on me. In general, Leningraders now are not worried by anything except food.» Irina Zelenskaia saw the dehumanization of death as part of a wider problem of individualism and survival: as people became uncaring towards each other in their drive for individual survival, they also became coarse towards those who suffered and died around them. She feared one key to survival in Leningrad was indifference to others — which explained why Leningraders were unmoved and ambivalent about constant shelling or seeing death up close on the streets. Nikolai Gorshkov agreed: hungry Leningraders were indifferent to the fates of those who had fallen or lost consciousness on the streets, seldom giving any aid. Sometimes indifference seemed odd: in some diaries the death of close friends and family attracts less notice than other topics. Zelenskaia painfully watched close friends and family waste away; but one diarist barely noted the death of his father, and another youth barely mentioned the passing of his father and brothers, preferring to write constantly about what he had to eat that day.

Ultimately, one outcome of the Leningrad death was the bond it created, at least in the estimation of some. In particular, surviving
the terrible winter of 1941–42 created a potentially common identity — a community of sufferers who had starved and shivered as well, while living and contributing at times to the war effort. The same diarist who noted this juxtaposed the ubiquity of the Leningrad death with powerful signs of life: in April 1942 she saw a living dog. The significance was twofold: it symbolized both the horrors of the Blockade (eating dogs and cats, and on rare occasions people) and survival through such a nightmare — reinforcing the sacred and profane of the «good death» and, logically, the «good life.»

Moral Economy of War and Provision: Participating in the Profane

Soviet civilization was supposed to be superior because it transcended the evil and irrationality of capitalism. The sacred ideal of anti-capitalism involved control via the state as agent of the working class. If the reality of the 1930s was one of constant shortages, at least this could be rationalized as the price for rapid progress towards the socialist ideal. Further, while the Soviet economy used money, it was more an accounting device than a story and expression of value. As in market economics, money could equate the amount of labor one had expended — it was as if storing one's labor for later expenditure. However, in capitalism, money can take on value independent of the exchange of labor, as happens in speculation. Hence the supposed superiority of Soviet socialism — money had no independent meaning. State-based production and provision would, in theory, eliminate the nexus of money and, at the same time, of commodification and exploitation. Interestingly, war economies are not so different — increased state control over production and distribution under capitalism does not end private property or money's multiple meanings, but it does mitigate them. Thus, war (and especially the Blockade) tested the Soviet moral economy of state-based provision free of the influences of property and money. In the end, that test created a powerful contradiction between the Soviet idea of state control and provision versus the reality of relying on quasi-market mechanisms and practices for survival.

While the state-run economy could maintain production during the war and even evacuate entire factories to the east, it could not control all facets of economic transactions even before 1941. With a weakened state and survival paramount, underground market behavior returned, sometimes with a vengeance. Some economic liberalization
was condoned by the regime, but this more often related to small-time artisanal production — and certainly not to food. The rynok, akin to a farmers' market or bazaar, was legal, although trading via money was illegal or gray (selling a good at its production cost was, technically, not illegal). While there was plenty of buying and selling for money, people also bartered for bread or other goods in kind, which was on more solid legal ground, even if the value for goods was expressed in money (e.g. 400 rubles per kilo of bread and 100 rubles per bottle of wine meant four bottles of wine for one kilo of bread). This legal loophole could become the entering wedge for market relations to grow. The shadow economy had already emerged from the 1930s, and to give neoclassical economics its due, when commodities are valued but scarce, their value (however expressed and embodied) will grow. Yet this was anathema to the very essence of Soviet socialism. Further, non-monetary trade in bread and commodities, autonomous and outside state control, meant that the market trade in bread and other needed commodities did not always fit perfectly into the scared-profane dichotomy: with the money link sometimes absent, such exchange could be coded as less profane in the Soviet anti-capitalist logic. To add to the complexity the moral economy and its challenges and contributing to the complexity of monetization and the moral economy was how the state made several drives for war bonds; Party activists would ritually campaign for workers to sign over several weeks or months of their wages to the state for the construction of tanks or other military materiel. That is, money still gained important symbolic power from the state as well as from the rynok. Thus, going into the Blockade, a potential sacred-profane dichotomy was ready to emerge: the sacred of fair, just provision of goods on the principle of provision to those who need or earn, versus the profane principle of provision going to those who have the advantage of superior reserves of capital (economic/material, social).

Diarists saw this contradiction in operation as the first Blockade winter set in. One simple expression of the contradiction of moral economy of war and provision versus market logic was the constant appearance of one oft-met diary entry: monetary prices for bread at the rynok. Some diarists simply stated as fact the prices for different commodities over time; even this, without commentary—the fact of recording this observation (several times as prices changed) — suggests the importance of the money nexus and a market-like mechanism. Other diarists commented on high prices. Regardless of editorial comment, a reading of numerous diaries makes
clear that people found the monetization of food and other needed commodities (especially during the life-and-death struggle of the Blockade, when one would hope for more cooperative, survival-oriented behavior) sufficiently significant to expend time and energy to record such data. In other words, a rudimentary market logic had survived the 1930s. This wartime market for bread, butter, cigarettes and matches, and other needed goods, I suggest, has a dual meaning. First, it suggests the survival of market relations and monetary commodification—the supposed antithesis of Soviet socialism—making its appearance during the most trying moment of the Soviet system. Second, this reinforced the individual-collective dichotomy, albeit indirectly: the market was a place of individuals gaining from the needs of other individuals.

The irony was not lost on everyone. The greater irony, however, was how people who could be critical of a monetary market for bread—and in monetary exchanges in general—could also participate in it without commenting on themselves or noting various contradictions. Some diarists, like Samarin, noted the market for food but did not participate in it; in Samarin’s case, it is unclear whether this is out of conviction, lack of money or something to barter, or other reason.¹⁰⁴ Other diarists, such as Kedrov, saw even non-monetary trade in bread as profane, because those trading probably had more money than they could count. Such people «live, more sated than any of us. Oh, such swindlers, such scoundrels.»¹⁰⁵ Kedrov also commented negatively on his boss’ daughters, who looked well-fed and well-dressed—he could not stand to be in their company long.¹⁰⁶ Related was criticism of how one actually obtained food or other goods: via formal procedures that, in theory, should be fair; via the money nexus of the market; or via the profane practice of informal patronage networks, i.e. blat. Blat could evoke powerful negative comments and connotations, even if obtaining food could be difficult in the absence of personal networks. Pattr Samarin quickly discovered this. Obtaining his proper ration of food at his workplace canteen was often difficult because he did not have proper connections with the staff or bosses in charge of food. «Without blat — nothing,» was his comment.¹⁰⁷ In 1943, with a weak network structure that led him constantly to feel alone, he discovered that no one would help him obtain wine or vodka for the November 7 holiday.¹⁰⁸ Samarin was not the only person to note the importance of blat. Tatiana Kartomyshcheva exploded in one entry about the injustice of blat and networks. «Protection» and blat were bad enough before the war; now, in desperate times, they were worse. To buttress her complaint
about widespread, immoral blat, Kartornysheva told a story (whose accuracy is impossible to corroborate) of doctors refusing to give milk to weak children on the grounds they would die soon anyway. Instead, they gave that milk to acquaintances’ children. Shopfloor worker Ivan Savinkov believed there was a «food aristocracy» of those who organized its supply (e.g. food servers and guards at enterprise canteens) — they would make sure they all received extra rations, which they could consume or trade. He claimed such people stood out for looking well-fed and having good shoes or jewelry.

The case of ironic critique in the face of participation comes from Komsomolets and communist believer Aleksei Evdokimov. His account is peppered with references to money in various contexts. He is always sending money to his family; he claims he cannot carry money in his pocket while he fears that they may be hungry (a tacit admission of the importance of money in Stalin’s USSR). His response to the raising of the bread ration in February 1942 is to comment that «speculators» lowered the price of bread at the rynok. In that same month the appearance of the market gets to him, and in one passage he makes his first major critique of it: «There are sales [prodazha] without any shyness, here in the [bread] store or near it. Speculators stuff their pockets. At the Rzhevki, Porokhovyc, or any other rynok, on street corners or in stores, there are flea markets so crowded that people are giving stuff, sometimes junk from 1935.» Yet despite his criticisms, he engaged in market behavior. For example, he wrote that in the second half of February 1942 he paid 1500 rubles for bread; he commented, «I bought myself life,» apparently without openly recognizing the irony of «buying» life in context the Soviet utopia. (He obtained the 1500 rubles through an acquaintance.) In March he used his bonus from work to buy more bread, and in late March he listed in his diary an account of money he spent on one day for food (1200 rubles): «So there’s how much life costs a person.» In July 1942 Evdokimov even bought a record player from one Leningrader preparing to evacuate the city; as he noted, money had gained «great weight» in the blockaded city. In January 1943 he gave 900 rubles of his future salary for a state bond; this left his with little, and he had difficulty borrowing from his enterprise (and he was personally in debt to others). As a result, he turned to doing repairs for others for extra money; he also bought a broken record player and extra parts for 32 rubles and resold it for 500 rubles. That is, the good communist Komsomolets was engaging in a wartime market economy — and even proudly showing the fruits of his labor!
While he engaged the money economy of the Blockade, he admitted surprise that neighbors one floor up were arrested for counterfeiting money (the police found 6000 counterfeit rubles and counterfeit ration cards)—something he admitted he could not believe before when he had heard such news. To add to his money woes, in April 1943 he had to sell shoes and a new coat, but in June 1943 the Party started another drive to collect funds for state bonds, eating up part of his salary—driving him to ask where all his money was going to and why he was always poor.

Good Komsomolets Evdokimov mentioned his and others' sufferings in the Blockade: hunger, disease (for him, TB), shelling, cold. In his narrative, however, money is more prominent than in other accounts, including those of diarists less well off. While he participates willingly in the money economy, he seems to retreat into Stalin's promises, especially towards the end of the war—returning to socialist competitions of shopfloor production, participating in Party lectures, even wondering if he is a fool for putting up with silence from his wife (which he thinks indicated an end to their marriage). His criticisms suggest a sacred-profane dichotomy, but survival forces him to partake in the profane. He even notes such activities, but he also retreats into Stalinist propaganda and Party activities—as if engaging in acts of religious repentance reviving the sacred to cleanse him of the profane. The Blockade, it seems, was for Evdokimov and others a school in economic realities in the face of Soviet ideals. Certainly the shadow economy colored those ideals in the 1930s; but in the moment of life-or-death, the market reappeared with a vengeance and delivered that which the formal system sometimes only promised—bread.

**Conclusion: Interpretations, Meanings, and Making Sense of the Senseless**

On Friday, July 6, I began this essay, with Ekho Moskvy in the background. Under discussion was the popular rating of Petersburg governor Valentina Matvienko. After the usual sociological analysis came the turn for listeners to call in. The first few were pensioners (a man and a woman) and a seemingly middle-aged man. All complained about prices and the difficulty of life in Putin's wealthy new Russia—one powerful expression (judging from the tone of their voices) were prices of bread and ukrop. Bread and ukrop—echoes of the Blockade. While these callers likely were thinking not of the Blockade itself but of staples of everyday meals, the similarities in claims and
discourse were eerily striking — as if following ascript from the past, already taken-for-granted, far in the background but always present and exerting its influence even today. The experience of war continues to matter. This should not be surprising: after the end of World War II, police and Party informants noted that some people harbored were critical of the Party and regime for low rations, and even an self-proclaimed communist had to note how his son asked, in September 1947, «Papa, will there be such a time when we will eat our fill at the table?» Aleksei Evdokimov, reflecting in only January 1942 of the horrors he had seen, wrote, «I hope that for me the day will come when we will all remember all this as something unhuman, unrepeatable, extraordinary, and heroically survived.»

The experience of the Blockade as an extreme case of war deeply affected its victims, many of whom realized this at the time. Irina Zelenskaia noted in July 1942 that everyone had become cruel, cold, and insensitive towards the suffering of others. She and others easily recalled the faces of the starving — in Zelenskaia’s case, the face of a small boy in line at her cafeteria who only stared at the food that by rules he could not receive. Only in July 1942 was some «human feeling» returning; only then did she cry over the death of son-in-law Boris, who had died four months earlier. Despite the return of a semblance or normality — evidenced by everyday banalities dominating her diary accounts — Nina Kobyzeva intensely felt the loss of her close friend Petya, who died at the front. As her own relations with her boyfriend worsened (in part due to his drinking and lack of attention to her), she returned to Petya as an example of the sacred individual lost in the war: she constantly remembers him, wishes he were still around, wonders what they would be doing now, and recalls pre-war memories in which he figured.

As James McPherson noted, for thousands of American soldiers (especially from the North) the experience of the Civil War created anew sense of identity and norms, including emancipation for blacks (contentious at the start of the war, and especially with the Emancipation Proclamation). The experience of World War II helped create the Soviet nation and at least partially legitimated the Soviet political and economic systems — but even then, only to an extent, as soldiers and citizens felt they deserved a political and economic thaw (including reforms of collectivization). The war experience also could not but have altered constructions of social and political normality, structured through binary pairs of sacred and profane. This paper used the Blockade, a radical experience of war by non-combatants, to illuminate what these dichotomies were and how
they emerged. I briefly noted some of the sacred-profane dichotomies and suggested a more detailed list. What underlies many of these dichotomies is a sense of personal dignity. During the Blockade, Soviet socialism faced little real criticism. Fair provision of food and other goods and services — reflecting the moral economy of Soviet socialism — was reinforced, not contradicted, in diarists’ narratives. Narratives of death and individualism suggested a paradox: increased sense of self (or selfishness), versus increased sense of dignity of the self, seen in repulsion to the lack of dignity in the Leningrad death.

I would also like to venture one hypothesis: the experience of war created a template of sacred-profane dichotomies that, taken as a whole, contributed to the expectation of the post-war system, regime, and policies. Thanks to NKVD surveillance of the population, the regime cannot have been entirely ignorant of this (although we should not assume they were perfectly cognizant of it, either). The interaction of expectations and real policies resulted in real popular legitimacy of the Soviet Union as system and political community (nation) for a time. I would further hypothesize that if expectations were not met — i.e. the regime did not sufficiently satisfy such expectations as a political thaw on several fronts as a reward for sacrifice, as well as recognition of sacrifice (e.g. rebuilding Leningrad’s physical infrastructure and status) — the result would be the «superfluous person» that writers in the nineteenth century noticed.\(^{129}\)

While feelings of «superfluousness» would likely be of degree, they could create an interesting disconnect between popular hopes and beliefs versus the regime’s claims (through its elite or propaganda-police apparatuses). In this situation, the Soviet «nation» — if not born in the war, then certainly baptized and raised in it — could predominate over Party, socialism, and Revolution as the main totem for Soviet legitimacy. Such superfluousness could act as the Achilles’ heel for any political hegemony. Paradoxically, the war strengthened the Soviet nation, system, and leadership while sowing the seeds for its downfall. The superfluous war generation (including blokadniki) would remain loyal because the regime — not meeting expectations and increasing both repression and bribery as the basis for loyalty — deprived them of ritualistic reproduction of that meaning.\(^{130}\) That is, the regime co-opted the war through a selected menu of meanings — some that fulfilled expectations of sacred and profane, others which paid lip service — or the alternative of repression. Superfluous survivors supported the regime not through positive attraction, but because there was nowhere else to turn — theirs was a «captive loyalty.» They did not want wartime sacrifices to be in vain.\(^{131}\) Future
generations would see the war as history, taken and (mis)used by the regime for gain, reproducing the cynicism that helped bring down the Communist Party and the USSR.

While more work and data are needed, a few things seem clear. The intensity of suffering and conflict in general — because of the ferocity and power of the enemy — helped solidify a sense of unity, turning Soviet society into a community of sufferers. Pre-Revolutionary Russia fell apart because the war frustrated as much as it victimized; experiences of World War II, especially the Blockade, were too severe to frustrate. Survival came through individual and collective tactics. In the end the political elite may have gained temporary capital. What did emerge from World War II was the Soviet nation; from the Blockade, a sense of first among equals within that new political community — a status that Stalin and the Moscow-centered Communist elite recognized, and against which they and successors would fight until 2000, when a native Leningrader would take command of the country.

NOTES

NB: In the notes the following abbreviations are used:

**GMMOBL**: State Memorial Museum of the Defense and Blockade of Leningrad, Written Documents Collection ( Gosudarstvennyi Memorial’nyi Muzei Oborony i Blokady Leningrada, Rukopis’nyi Dokumental’nyi Fond), St. Petersburg.

**RNB**: Russian National Library, Written Records Collection ( Rossiiskaia natsional’naia biblioteka im. Saltykova-Shchedrina, Rukopis’nyi Fond), St. Petersburg.

**TsGA**: Central State Archive ( Tsentral’nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv), state rather than Party archive, St. Petersburg.

**TsGAIPD**: Central State Archive of Historical-Political Documents ( Tsentral’nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Istoricheskikh-Politicheskikh Dokumentov), former Leningrad Party archive, St. Petersburg.

Archives are organized through hierarchical systematization: fond (f., collection), opis (op., register), delo (d., file), list (l., page), unless otherwise noted. (Some materials had not yet been archived and are referred to as «Akt,» i.e. the formal act of accepting materials into the archive.)

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1 For an alternative overview, see Amir Weiner. Making Sense of War. The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 2001), chapter 1. I am not saying that there is no quality work on the war or on the Blockade—simply that there is far too little relative to its importance.


3 Stephen Kotkin once remarked to me that this was a problem with earlier studies of the 1917 revolution: the story ends with the Bolshevik seizure of power, as if what happens next (1918, the Civil War) is of lesser importance. Some scholars did take 1918-1922 seriously, e.g. Pipes. The Russian Revolution.


7 Suny, «Stalin and His Stalinism», p. 51. My italics for «convincingly.»

8 Druzhba (Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina) suggests Soviet society and politics are best interpreted through the prism of the war, especially the problematic intersection of people’s real experiences and popular expectations, versus the regime’s claims and policies.


10 Druzhba, Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina, p. 51.


12 This is not a claim that the war is entirely ignored, either. For example, Julie Hessler’s interesting work on wartime economic reforms — like much economic history of the USSR in general — shows a more complicated picture of state-society relations and policies than the usual historiography has always implied. Julie Hessler, «A Postwar Perestroika? Toward a History of Private Enterprise in the USSR,» Slavic Review vol. 57 #3 (fall 1998), pp. 526-543.


14 Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and Defending Soldiers and Mothers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Positing the importance of popular meanings does not deny the power of elites and states. Further, recent research of democracies suggests pluralism should not be sold short. Cf. Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza, «Social Responsiveness in Developed Democracies,» American Sociological Review vol. 71 (2006), pp. 474-494. In non-democratic regimes, popular opinion and meanings may be less overtly important, but the very fact that dictatorial regimes — especially the Bolshevik regime — devoted resources to propaganda and internal policing (and spying) suggests that the elites did take popular opinion, and especially differing beliefs, seriously.

20 For example, the general trauma of the Vietnam experience — to both combatants and the relative secure home population — became a touchstone for presidential politics for decades afterwards. Debates over military engagement since Vietnam have been framed in the different lessons of that experience. As well, the Civil War was central in the creation of a unified American national identity — consider the well-known anecdote that before the Civil War the United States was referred to as «these» (plural) and «this» (singular) afterwards. The trauma of war made soldiers look for meaning, including the defense of a unified political and social community. James McPherson, For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
22 Occupation raises issues of inhabitants subjected to an external state’s direct control. A more appropriate model for occupied territories is a colonial model. In the Leningrad Blockade, this was not an issue to complicate the picture and analysis.
23 There are other historical reasons: Leningrad was one of the first «hero-cities,» and its experience is part of the construction of heroic Soviet images that began to take the place of Revolutionary symbolism after the war; the Zhdanov Affair and inadequate post-war efforts at reconstruction (in no small part on directions from Moscow) suggest that the Blockade provided Leningrad with a competitive advantage of cultural capital vis-a-vis Moscow and the Kremlin leadership. Further, and more generally, the Blockade allows us to look at citizen non-combatants rather than soldiers alone. Soldiers are often the focus of studies about war, and non-combatants appear in studies of post-war politics, reconstruction, and culture.
24 Hellbeck, Revolution on My Mind, especially chapters 1-2.
25 Aleksandr Kedrov, an assistant factory manager, began his diary with the claim that he was writing not a work of art but a «chronicle of events and of my survival.» TsGAIPD, f. 4000, op. 11, d. 44, l. 1a.
26 This is McPherson’s strategy for looking at soldiers’ letters, cf. For Cause and Comrades.
This is problematic: when a diarist does not mention some event or observation, it could mean: 1) the writer did not observe it or ignored it for whatever reason; 2) the event was taken-for-granted and not considered worth mentioning because it was part of the usual social background; or 3) the writer was afraid to bring the issue up. Without the ability to go back in time and perform experiments akin to those conducted by Harold Garfinkel and ethnomethodologists — perturbing usual social practices to discover what is taken-for-granted, and thus ignored or assumed away — solving this issue is difficult. One way around this is to ascertain whether there is a deeper underlying logic to what people write: the events they note, how they discuss several events or problems, etc. Thus, the surface impression provides a glimpse at the construction of meaning; the deeper structures that tie things together might provide insights into what was taken-for-granted. What events or problems are consistently ignored as well as discussed? (For example, does Stalin come up at all — and if so, what triggers his mentioning, and the capitalization of his name, or not?)

As related by one Blockade survivor, Adamovich and Granin, Blokadnaia kniga, p. 331.


Scott, Domination and the Art of Resistance.

Hellbeck, Revolution on My Mind.

On this issue, see Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain.

Theodicy has religious roots. But as Max Weber noted, it can also be any general theory that explains or gives meaning to suffering: Weber, Economy and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), especially pp. 518-526.


I do not claim these dichotomies emerged solely because of or during the war; some certainly existed beforehand. For example, the dichotomy «justice/equality-favoritism/patronage» can be found in complaints during the 1930s, and even in NEP (e.g. workers' complaints about Nepmen).

Emile Durkheim claimed that one of religion's crucial functions was the creation of sacred-profane dichotomies, which in turn structured action, identity, and the like. Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (New York: Free Press, 1965).

Cf. Lozungi k naseleniitu osvobozhdennykh raionov leningradskoi oblasti (Leningrad: Otdelenie voenizzdata NKo pri Leningradskom fronte, 1944); TsGAIPD f. 25, op. 10, d. 260, l. 6; f. 25, op 10, d. 334, l. 84, 119.

TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 46, l. 7.

TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 35, l. 3.

ГММОБЛ RDF, Акт 76-07, vol. 1, l. 1. (Kobyzeva's diary had just arrived in the Museum at the end of June 2007 as I was working there. As such, it had not yet been assigned an opis'or delo number, and the pages were not numerated is listy. Thus, I cite it by «akt» of act of acceptance into the Museum's archives, and I assigned each single physical page a list [1] number. There were three notebooks, which I label «volume» or «vol.»)
1 4
TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 46, l. 2.
2 TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 18, d. 333. l. 118, 119.
3 TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 46, l. 3. 4. 8. Kozlovskii, later noted how Leningrad had become «a real military camp» (l. 6).
4 TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 46, l. 6.
5 GMMOBL RDF, Akt 76-07, vol. 1, l. 12. She also noted how the initial evacuations of children were poorly planned: GMMOBL RDF, Akt 76-07, vol. 1, l. 14. «The idea [evacuating children] was good. but as usual the implementation was the opposite.» Even the more pro-Soviet and pro-Party Aleksei Kozlovskii (clearly pro-Soviet and pro-Party) had to admit the evacuation of children was problematic, not least because of varied or even bizarre destinations. TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 46, l. 5.
6 E.g. GMMOBL RDF, Akt 76-07, vol. 1, l. 13, 14. «Nobody knew how to come forward better, what to do. How gives advice? No one!» (l. 13).
7 GMMOBL RDF, Akt 76-07, vol. 1, l. 13.
8 GMMOBL RDF, Akt 76-07, vol. 1. l. On some problems with evacuation (of people, machinery, etc.), see TsGA f. 7384, op. 3, d. 50. Evaluations of agitprop work, carried out within agitprop departments, make it seem as if agitprop workers were doing a wonderful job organizing evacuations.
9 TsGAIPD f. 4000. op. 11, d. 35, l. 15: Zelenskaia mentions signals flairs going up around the Sevkabel enterprise during one bombing raid. Adamovich and Granin (Blokadnaia kniga, p. 331 n.1) claim that there was no evidence for these flairs.
10 TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 44, l. 38, 106. In November 1941, Kedrov was surprised that Leningraders still went about their business during air raid sirens and bombings — even the police gave up cajoling them into bomb shelters.
11 E.g. TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 35, l. 93; TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 44, l. 88.
12 TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 44, l. 21, 28, 31.
13 This was a sore point for some diarists who complained of the Anglo-American footdragging in setting up a second front. While logistics of the second front were daunting — especially as the Western Allies did not follow Stalin’s logic of inefficiently using resources, including people, willy-nilly — Leningraders in the grip of the Blockade should obviously be forgiven for impatience. Cf. GMMOBL RDF, Akt 76-07, vol. 2, l. 24; TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 44, l. 77, 85, 89, 95, and 96. among others.
14 In post-war Leningrad, some inhabitants complained about food rations, the decline in their purchasing power as a result of Stalin’s monetary reform. and the possibility of a new war, this time with former allies. Given that people made similar complaints before the end of war — which the NKVD duly collected and reported (but not always as «anti-Soviet») — is significant. Cf. TsGA f. 7384, op. 36, d. 129. 36 Greenfeld, Nationalism, chapter 3.
15 Cf. Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain, especially chapters 4 and 5.
16 One interesting issue that addresses this is theft, especially of food and ration cards. Theft is, in a sense, an expression of individualism: I steal from you for my own survival, even if it hurts yours. Theft of food and ration cards was problematic in the Blockade; diarists often note how people would steal food in a bread line, and how others in that line would promptly turn on the thief and beat him or her senseless (even if the thief were a starving youth).
17 E.g. GMMOBL RDF, op. 1r, d. 37, #3.
I also sense here gendered narrative, where women were fickle and could not be trusted. Samarin ends one rant about his wife's lack of truthworthiness with the comment, «Such are women.» In another entry, he mentioned the death of a comrade from work and complains about his wife, who did not seem shaken by the death and who did little to help him survive. GMMOBL RDF, op. 11, d. 338, l. 73, 89.

E.g. GMMOBL RDF, op. 11, d. 338, l. 57, 58, 73, 76, 77, 88, and 97 provide concise statements, although they are not the only times he brings this up. Samarin blamed her youth — she was less experienced at getting along with people and understanding the need for cooperation, and the intense hunger that strained both their nerves. Eventually they split, and he complained bitterly about being alone.

One extreme expression of this was when parents would sacrifice their children for their own individual survival. Some diarists did note hearing of such examples; however, they seemed rare.

This is an important theme that runs throughout nearly every diary I have read so far. Those who survived consistently wrote, especially in 1941–42, that they wanted to live, despite the difficulties of Blockade life. In some cases it almost seems that survival would be the ultimate act of revenge against the Germans — denying them their goal of eradicating Leningrad and its population. Only Zelenskai, however, seems to have recognized and developed this idea. Whether willing oneself to live ultimately mattered cannot be tested from such diary claims, however, as it involves sampling on the dependent variable.

Aleksandr Kedrov inadvertently shows how well the strata immediately below the Party and administrative elite lived. Kedrov himself was an assistant manager with unmentioned responsibilities or network relations that brought him into contact with members of the local NKVD. Although he never mentions his wages, he is able to send more than 2000 rubles to his evacuated family on several occasions. He and another acquaintance («P.M.») are able to obtain beer, wine, sprats, and other relative delicacies in the winter of 1941-42. He is also invited to a banquet featuring Hero of the Soviet Union Preobrazhenskii, with ample food, drink, and dancing. Cf. TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 44, l. 96-97.
In the latter, the author muses that death by starvation is probably calm — but he would rather not die that way.

Cf. GMMOBL RDF, Akt 315-90, l. 51. Commenting on the sight of corpses lying hither-thither on streets and under bridges, in various stages of dress, this diarist concluded: «What has care about people come to, and where further will it go?»


Again, this does not mean that money prices were nonexistent in the Soviet Union. Workers received remuneration in wages (as well as in provision, e.g. of housing or other goods). Goods in stores were priced in money (although the value was set by the state rather than independent market actors). One way to use labor for the state’s advantage was through money or price reforms. I do not want to pain a black-and-white picture of money-versus-no-money. Rather, at issue is the meaning of money.
the system of incentives and rules that might engender, or at least support, such behavior.

110 TsGAIPD f 4000, op. 11, d. 99, l. 59. Throughout his diary, Savinkov blamed the war for bringing out the worst in people, and Russian culture or mentality for its problematic morals and disorganization.

111 Evdokimov noted being active in the Komsomol and spent much time at his shopfloor trying to keep production running (for which he received a Red Star medal). In his diary he also included newspaper clippings about his presentations at Party functions, suggesting pride in such activity. In December 1941 he experienced intense longing for his wife (evacuated from the city); he wrote, «I love her as a wife and as a communist comrade.» Later he was made commissar of his shopfloor. He was confident of victory, and entries in the first days of war have a ring of bravado. This said, the experience becomes so difficult—especially the separation from his wife and child — that in November 1942 he wants to «throw out everything» and leave the city to be with them.

GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 74, 110.

112 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 73. In June 1942 he received a letter from his wife; she noted that the food situation was bad, and food and life in general were expensive and that it was harder to live — as if, to steal a line from Stalin, that «life had become more expensive.» Alas, at that time Evdokimov had no money to send. GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 99.

113 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 83, 84.

114 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 85.

115 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 87, 88, 89. Evdokimov does not note the irony: he, a Komsomolet, survives because of superior salary, and others with less money suffer more under socialism.

116 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 104.

117 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 119, 126.

118 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 126, 127.

119 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 120.

120 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 137, 143.

121 E.g. GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 169.

122 TsGAIPD f. 25, op. 10, d. 528, l. 7-8.

123 TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 18, d. 333, l. 165.

124 GMMOBL RDF, op. 1p. d. 30, l. 81.

125 TsGAIPD f. 4000, op. 11, d. 35, l. 92.

126 GMMOBL RDF, Akt 76-07, vol. 3. Much of volume three covers her ongoing relations with «Viktor» and everyday life; Petya’s death and her mourning also figure prominently, less in terms of words written than the emotion behind those words.

127 Cf. McPherson, For Cause and Comrades.

128 My thanks to Nikita Lomagin for sharing these insights from his own research into the Blockade.

129 This is the thesis in O.V.Druzhba, Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina v soznani sovietskogo i postsovietskogo obshchestva: dinamika predstavlenii ob istoricheskom proshlom (Rostov-na-Donu: Izdatel’skii tsentr DGTU, 2000).

130 Here I mean autonomous rituals such as parades or other forums that allow people to reconstruct their experiences and meanings on their own, with minimal regime-state influence. The American Veterans of Foreign Wars organization comes to mind. Perhaps for this reason World War II retained
meaning that did not contradict the «formula of rule» and hegemony in the United States and United Kingdom.

One interesting source to help explore this issue further is collections, published after glasnost, and the collapse of the Party’s monopoly of power, of reminiscences of Blockade survivors and soldiers. From what I have read thus far at this stage in my project, such recollections tend to focus on intimate, personal events: particular battles from former soldiers’ experiences (a pitched battle and receiving a medal, saving or being saved by a comrade, the comradeship of the immediate unit), moments of friendship or horror from Blockade survivors. That is, the broader context of regime, system, and society is usually missing in recollections. While the Soviet nation does come up positively, it is not the centerpiece of recollections. (Needless to say, the Party and its wartime leadership are absent.) This suggests that superfluousness was in operation — and so the valued memories and meanings people do retain are personal, rather than related to the broader community. However, this must remain a hypothesis at this time. Including an analysis of such reflections and recollections is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is part of the broader project in which this paper is embedded. Cf. I. V. Kosina (ed.), Blokadniki (Volgograd: Komitet po pechati, 1996).

Steve Maddox

The Memory of the Blockade and its Function in the Restoration of Leningrad, 1944—1949

In postwar Leningrad, the memory of the blockade informed all aspects of life. Leningrad’s party and soviet leadership, ordinary citizens, and all else who suffered the horrors of the nine-hundred days felt the desire to commemorate the blockade and preserve the memory of it. For the people who lived through the blockade — the blokadniki — it became the cornerstone of their identity.¹ No longer would they understand their surroundings through prewar lenses. Rather, the blockade became the formative experience through which the world was viewed.² The magnitude of the siege, the mark it left on the city and its residents, as well as its significance in the immediate postwar period, necessitated its commemoration and memorialization.

Plans to commemorate the blockade of Leningrad began during the event itself.³ Leningraders went to great lengths to preserve the