

## World Socialist Cinema of Armed Struggle

### THE PEOPLE'S WAR

At the first 1968 seminar discussion at Tashkent, Azhdar Ibragimov, the Azeri-Turkmeni actor-director who between 1959 and 1962 helped establish the National Film School of Vietnam in Hanoi, recounted an anecdote he heard from Khương Mễ, the legendary Vietnamese guerilla cameraman. Khương's crew was using dinghies as mobile film studios in the war against the French to develop footage that was shot during combat, as well as to transport film equipment (and ice, needed to preserve the film) from Saigon across the Mekong Delta. One day, Khương had to ask a local fisherman for the use of his boat. The fisherman had never seen film equipment and asked if this machinery was used for shooting the enemy. Khương and his teammates response was a categorical and enthusiastic yes! As a result, the fisherman not only gave them permission to use his boat but offered to stand guard over it as well.<sup>1</sup>

This story as retold by Ibragimov in 1968 is part of the canonical iconography and state-sanctioned heroic accounts of Vietnamese revolutionary film history.<sup>2</sup> But it also aligned Ibragimov personally (and by extension, the Soviet cinematic cadre he came from) with the aura of militant combat filmmaking. This contrasts with the more lyrical humanist war cinema of the Thaw period with which he was otherwise associated and that had earned him and his fellow Soviet filmmakers the condemnation of the Chinese-aligned cultural policy of 1960s Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> This variation on the trope of the film camera as Kalashnikov, so prevalent at the Tashkent festival, reveals more than a merely routine expression of that cliché in its allusions to the complex and internally contradictory social forces that converged at Tashkent. Considering this shared international context as it emerges in the war topoi in socialist cinemas across the Soviet bloc and the Global South, indeed, reveals more than its strategic geopolitical employment. Cinematic representation

of armed struggle was a crucial arena for the complex performances of affinities, alliances, and solidarities, as well as the cleavages and contradictions that traversed the postcolonial and socialist projects.

Far beyond the contours of the Tashkent festival, socialist cinema of armed struggle extended to many sites and institutional contexts of production, circulation, and exhibition, both national and international. It included, on one end of the spectrum, the film productions of the military itself and, on the other end, the clandestine filmmaking that has come to be associated with radical Third Cinema.<sup>4</sup> I put in this category all films dealing with the war, insurgent violence, military aggression (including state violence), and armed resistance in a variety of historical and contemporary contexts. In their multiplicity of forms, these films affirm the broadest possible understanding of armed struggle, encompassing “a varying pattern of conflict in which ‘the people’ may become mobilised into a revolutionary political party operating alongside of, or in some cases in competition with, an army.”<sup>5</sup> This chapter focuses on the iterations of this broader cinematic modality that was particularly visible at Tashkent in the 1960s and 1970s. Constituting perhaps the largest portion of the festival selections, this body of work was extremely varied; even so, it is worth keeping in mind that it was merely a fraction of the many forms of socialist cinema of armed struggle at large.

Beyond the genre of “war movies,” this cinematic formation extended to documentary combat films, reportages and newsreels from contemporary war zones, commemorative documentaries, and films dealing with the experience of dislocation brought about by war and violence. In fiction, it included an even wider range—from historical epics and biopics, as well as films depicting episodes from the revolutionary and anticolonial liberation struggles, to stories about more recent and ongoing anti-imperialist conflicts. And while many of these films represented different positions within the debates concerning the aesthetics and politics of leftist cinema (polemics that are themselves reflective of the combative, high-stakes environments in which they were rooted), they are bound by an overall problematic of the role of armed struggle in the history of global socialism as manifested through cinema.

This cinema was articulated explicitly in opposition to US war media (even in the cases where the stylistic features and generic conventions were, indeed, derived from Hollywood), but it differed widely in narrative and stylistic conventions and production modes. Collectively, these films offer profound continuities that point to a shared field of audiovisual references formed through international exchanges, sites of filmmakers’ training, and sites of exhibition (both formal and informal). Finally, these films demonstrate significant conceptual affinities, albeit filtered through specific historical experiences.

Elements distinguishing the shared representational regime of a socialist cinema of armed struggle include the prominence of historical analysis, intended to

create an integral link between the memories of past wars and the experiences of contemporary political struggle; the emphasis on the agency of the people, including women and children; the celebration of heroism in terms of self-sacrifice for the common good, inclusive of revolutionary martyrdom; and the foregrounding of resilience as a form of heroism. Thus, while the spectacularization of violence associated with Hollywood's genre conventions was frowned upon, many socialist war films heighten affect by featuring strikingly graphic depictions of torture, violence (including sexual), and death, deliberately eschewing traditional taboos. Narratively, happy endings in fiction films were rare, and the deaths of the main characters, whether onscreen or off, almost expected. The enormity of the struggle was thus fully recognized and amply visualized through cinematic narratives. The foundational role of war for the history of the modern (socialist) nation-state was exposed, explored, and celebrated. Dialectically, this narrative template was balanced by the explicit appeal to international solidarity in the struggle, transcending national, ethnic, or racial identities. The latter were consistently presented as secondary to the overarching goal of revolutionary transformation and preservation of the path toward communism. Perhaps paradoxically, this shared emphasis did not differentiate between state-sanctioned military warfare and insurgencies; wars of liberation could be fought *with* the state or *against* the state. These two modalities not only produced different cinematic narratives but also projected divergent visions of political struggle and were, therefore, often the source of both internal and international tensions. But by the 1970s, positing warfare as the foundational reality within both the socialist nation-state and the Third World proved to be more productive, culturally and politically, than emphasizing the differences in conceptions. This ambivalence vis-à-vis the role of the state apparatus within this large body of cinematic works allowed for the broadest possible range of affective solidarities around the notion of armed resistance to emerge.

#### THE MARXIST WORLDVIEW AND THE VIOLENCE OF (SOCIALIST) MODERNITY

Just as Marxism produced both the fiercest criticism and the most ardent implementation of modernity at large, it was equally attuned to modernity's underlying organized violence. Soviet socialist rhetoric demanded "fighting fire with fire" for as long as these global conditions prevailed. All of this created a temporality of armed struggle as immanent: it was the foundational historical event, part of collective memories and day-to-day lives, and a constant future threat. This immanence is reflected in the slippage between the cinematic genres, from historical epics to the most up-to-date newsreels, as equally representative of the cinema of armed struggle. By bringing out the structural violence of capitalism and imperialism (including slavery), against which insurgent violence and resistance are directed, these films simultaneously exposed, questioned, and yet ultimately

affirmed the use of violence as “a means to mediate the political . . . as the sphere of actions, attitudes, and processes that revolve around forms of social organization, generally in the form of a state, and around power.”<sup>6</sup> Given that all colonial histories are, to a large degree, histories of organized violence, most postcolonial historical film narratives inevitably fell into the same category.

This commitment to the fight was shared, to varying degrees, by all socialist states. The specificities of the war in question differed in both its historical and contemporary manifestations, but the underlying logic remained constant, whether it was China or Poland, Cuba or Algeria, Yemen or Yugoslavia. Since state socialism in Eastern European countries and their absorption into the Soviet bloc were results of World War II, even for countries like Yugoslavia and Albania, which subsequently left the bloc, these countries would continue to represent not only the historical memory of standing up to Nazi aggression (with the figures of partisans carrying a particularly heavy and complex symbolic load) but also the original moment of the formation of the new socialist nation. These films were often results of the official impositions of the Soviet cinematic models, either copying or otherwise responding to them. At the same time, war films were also undoubtedly rooted in genuine and distinctive historical experiences, far beyond ideological prescriptions. In short, the socialist cinema of armed struggle was simultaneously a part of state-supported efforts to create and sustain an understanding of war as foundational for the national(ist) self-image and, for the filmmakers and audiences, a way to tap into, reflect on, and transform the deeply traumatic legacies of violence.

This recognition of the centrality of war and violence in the creation of the nation-state resonated in the postcolonial world, where independence was rarely won except at the point of a gun. Wars of liberation were foundational for many of the countries’ identities, as were civil wars, in addition to the violence of forced divisions and foreign interventions.<sup>7</sup> These histories were mirrored in the shock of accelerated (uneven) development. As Bhaskar Sarkar elaborates: “Even in the West, as new structures and nationalist ideologies supplanted older political regimes and frameworks, modernity precipitated cataclysmic dislocations. Nevertheless, as the new frameworks emerged out of premodern European paradigms, there was a semblance of continuity. For the postcolonies, in the absence of this gradual and rooted emergence of the assemblage of processes, attitudes, and institutions that we typically call modernity, modern nationhood wrought a form of violence—epistemic, material, and psychic.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in addition to the impact of military aggressions associated with colonial legacies and neocolonial realities, accelerated modernization by way of large-scale national industrial projects was similarly frequently experienced and narrativized using war tropes, and this metaphor was often used to justify the human costs (as we saw in the discussions of the cinema of industrial modernity in chapter 6). Preparedness for wars, present and future, in turn, required further industrialization. Revolution and accelerated modernization were profoundly violent processes,

mutually constitutive of the socialist and postcolonial state as it fought for survival in the face of imperialism.

It was not simply a matter of Soviet propaganda to point out that the Soviet experience—combining the traumas of the two world wars, revolution, the Civil War, forced industrialization, and state violence on a mass scale—was on par with the experiences of “The Third World.” Between 1917, the year of the revolution, and 1920, both Petrograd and Moscow’s population was cut in half as the Civil War claimed several million combatant lives, and seven million more died of malnutrition and disease.<sup>9</sup> More than thirty million Russians died in World War II, and many millions were displaced by the German advance, with around fifteen million evacuated to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The immediate consequences of war and its devastation on infrastructure, both urban and rural, was enormous, leading to a famine, which cost another million lives and possibly more.<sup>10</sup> In addition, millions were lost during the Stalinist purges and famines of the 1930s, which resulted from accelerated industrialization and state terror that was justified in the name of the danger of impending war.<sup>11</sup> The continuous threat of military aggression was predicated on an analysis of capitalism that saw its need for expansion as the driver of new wars. With the end of wars predicated on the end of capitalism, war was an immanent part of socialist peace.

After all, as exemplified by the slogan of the Tashkent festival (“For Peace, Social Progress, and Freedom of the Peoples”), *peace* was as much a catchword for the socialist and socialist-aligned bloc as *freedom* or *liberty* was for the other side. This antiwar discourse, however, rejected pacifism; the fight against the common enemy (imperialism) was the only way to achieve a social order in which peace would not be a cover for the violence of capital and imperialism. This was encapsulated in the frequently used slogan “fight for peace.” As Miriam Dobson explains, “Peace was not just the absence of war; it was the future that revolution was meant to bring. The concept of peace became a metonym for communism itself. As was the case with communism, peace was a cause that required a fighting spirit.”<sup>12</sup> When the “peace offensive” was launched in 1949 at the founding of the World Peace Council, the largest international peace organization in the world, Soviet discourse made explicit the socialist proprietary claim to the “fight for peace.”<sup>13</sup>

### THE FIGHT FOR PEACE

The centrality of the “fight for peace” was reflexively transposed to socialist cinema. Most coproductions of the early period of the Cold War, whether involving the Soviet Union, China, or Eastern Europe (including Albania and Yugoslavia), were war movies.<sup>14</sup> Film production within the army was itself an important site of international collaboration, as Alice Lovejoy explores through the examples of those between Czechoslovakia and China in the 1950s.<sup>15</sup> The same dynamic impacted the way Soviet cinema circulated beyond the socialist bloc. By the 1960s, virtually all world-renowned Soviet and Eastern European films dealt directly with

the experience of revolution or war, making a canon of films of armed struggle.<sup>16</sup> This canon certainly included art cinema: socialist auteurs from Tarkovsky to Wajda first became famous for their war films, although they approached the subject of war from a distinctly liberal, Thaw-influenced perspective.

The status of the socialist bloc's cinema of armed struggle in Cold War Asia, Africa, and Latin America by the late 1960s thus perfectly mirrored the geopolitical position of the Soviet Union in these regions. Its frequent focus of the socialist bloc's role in the Second World War demonstrated its credentials as a potentially powerful military ally against the increasingly expansionist militarism of the US, which threatened postcolonial independence gains. James Mark and Quinn Slobodian explain this logic:

Many of the states formed after World War I in Eastern Europe were recolonized under Nazi Empire from 1939 to 1945. Their experience of the abrogation of national independence after a short period of self-determination demonstrated that decolonization was reversible. From the late 1950s, Communist regimes sought to make these links tangible. Despite formal independence in Asia and Africa, they warned, the world was witnessing the rise of heirs to Nazi imperialism in the form of the US and the fascist successor state of West Germany. The Eastern European experience was invoked to suggest that formal independence was not enough. Progressive nations needed to support each other against a return to the principles that had undergirded Nazi Empire.<sup>17</sup>

This argument was illustrated perfectly by Pinochet's "fascist" coup in Chile, which overthrew Allende's democratically elected socialist government, whose political ideology was rooted in the idea of a peaceful road to socialism. The US support of the coup further demonstrated the fragility of such a path, as the US rise to global dominance in the postwar period relied on using certain national elites as proxies to douse any threat to global capitalism. This sense of fragility vis-à-vis the US, most acutely felt by smaller nations like Cuba or Vietnam, nonetheless extended to all of the socialist world, including the Soviet Union, for whom the economic cost of controlling a considerably smaller global military sphere was proportionally much greater than for its opposing superpower.<sup>18</sup> This is perhaps one of the reasons why the phrase "Cold War," coined in the US, was used only by the socialist side in reference to US ideological discourses, as seeking to obscure the degree to which real (and not just imaginary or potential) military conflicts—from Korea and Vietnam to the Central American dirty wars—were being fought all over the Global South. The metaphor of "cinema as a weapon"—so often repeated at Tashkent by both hosts and guests, as we saw in chapter 4, was the cultural articulation of this logic, which goes as far back as Eisenstein's notion of cine-fist, and the consensus on the notion of cinema as a weapon across global leftist and socialist cinemas emphasized the importance of representing armed struggle.

Soviet film criticism was always eager to expose the way the US, unlike its socialist counterparts, disguised the fundamental links between military and cinematic apparatuses: from the intertwined relationship between the MPAA

and the US military to the enormous scale of activities of USIA in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.<sup>19</sup> In other words, Soviet critical discourses exposed that cinema was used as a weapon by the other side, too, but covertly; cinema, the socialists argued, was part of an arms race, too. As anti-imperialist struggles continued well past formal declarations of national independence, war and insurgency marked the social reality of great swathes of the Third World. It is not surprising, then, that Korean and Vietnamese national cinemas throughout the mid-twentieth century were de facto “war cinemas,” as were Palestinian and Algerian revolutionary cinemas, which constituted the core of leftist Arab filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s. Even in cases where neocolonialism was economic, the threat of violence and armed aggression (from death squads as well as official police and militia action) was an ordinary factor in daily life, forming a motif well captured by radical Latin American filmmakers in particular. In those rare cases where revolutions were peaceful, the threat of military coup loomed large, as was reflected in Chilean cinema in exile, which became an important example of the socialist cinema of armed struggle.

At the same time, socialist cinema of armed struggle normalized violence and military organization as foundational narratives for the path to state modernization and socialist development. Arab socialism, in particular, was led by the military elite, which assumed the role of agents of development.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Syria, Iraq, and Libya, militarization would stand increasingly for modernization. By the end of the 1970s, the reality of violence had outpaced the dream of a socialist path, and regional wars could no longer fit under the category of wars of national liberation. This historical fact has tended to distort our vision of both the plausibility and forcefulness of the cinema of armed struggle under the sign of socialism of those earlier decades of the Cold War, diminishing our ability to truly assess the degree to which they represented the interlocking epistemologies of anticolonialism and Cold War socialism.

### 1970s SOVIET WAR FILMS

Paradoxically, although in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s Soviet film production continued to foreground the theme of war and peace with renewed vigor, in contrast to the classics of the 1920s (or even the late 1950s), few of these films had the desired international impact. This was particularly true of the “prestige productions” explicitly made, as Alexander Prokhorov and Elena Prokhorova argue, to be “public relations vehicles for the state and its agendas.”<sup>21</sup> The epic war “prestige films” of the period—the most emblematic of which was *Liberation* (*Osvobozhdeniie*, Iurii Ozerov, 1968–72), divided into five parts and running 445 minutes—were massive in their scale and length, coproduced with other European studios, and deliberately designed to counter the Hollywood narratives of the Second World War by emphasizing Soviet contributions and victories in the war.<sup>22</sup> Their narratives tended to oscillate between large-scale battle scenes and



behind-the-battle-lines discussions among the top commanders, showcasing only a handful of individualized characters, all of them ethnically Russian.<sup>23</sup> Designed for international exhibition and sold to many countries around the world—including Iraq and Syria, where *Liberation* was shown on television as a mini-series in forty-minute installments, and Afghanistan, where it was screened in mobile cinemas, such bombastic propaganda vehicles were largely unsuccessful in creating the intended impact. At the same time, many Soviet auteurs continued making war films in the Thaw-period cinema mode, with the overall emphasis on the highly subjective personal experiences of the war and the fragility of humanity in the face of trauma. Many of these films (made by, among others, Marlen Khutsiev, Larisa Shepitko, Elem Klimov, Aleksei German, and Grigorii Chukhrai) had considerable difficulties passing through the Brezhnev-era censorship protocols, their exhibition largely limited to the European art cinema circuits.

Neither of these two modes of filmmaking were prominent at Tashkent, which instead promoted the Central Asian and Transcaucasian studios' engagement with the topic of war, which did not fit in with either of the two templates offered by Russophone Soviet war cinema. Instead, turning away from World War II (in which Central Asia mostly served as an evacuation destination), most of the films shown at Tashkent belonged to the category of "historical-revolutionary" films, set during the revolutionary Civil War, and focused on the Sovietization of the Soviet Union's eastern and southern borders. Stylistically and ideologically, these films often occupy an ambiguous space between the poetic cinema(s) of the Thaw, national epics emphasizing cultural heritage of the republics, and the entertainment genres of the 1970s, some of them borrowing from the conventions of the western, thus acquiring the designation "Eastern westerns."<sup>24</sup> As in many other anticolonial historical epics shown at the festival, the thematic core of these films is ultimately modernization, which includes methods of governance and warfare, as well as ideology—all seen in the service of a national culture and the national interests of the Central Asian republics, albeit necessarily channeled through Soviet authority. Made mostly by directors at the local studios and with non-Russian protagonists in the leading roles, these films, like their Algerian and Brazilian counterparts, exceed a simplistic orientalist understanding of the western, where the classic plot pits the civilizing mission of a settler colonialist agenda against the unruly reactionary native hordes.<sup>25</sup>

Despite their historically and ideologically positioned specificity, these films fit comfortably in the broader trends of world socialist cinemas of armed struggle represented at Tashkent. Other examples included historical revolutionary epics, such as Sergio Giral's trilogy on the history of slavery in Cuba; sub-Saharan films exploring the region's history of colonialism and anticolonialism; Algerian liberation war films (known as *cinema moudjahid*); North Korean and Vietnamese war films; Chilean exilic cinema; combat documentaries from hotspots of the global cold war—Vietnam, Palestine, Bangladesh, Yemen, Angola, and Mozambique—



and “solidarity” documentaries, as well as Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian, and Iraqi films, both fiction and documentary, in support of the Palestinian struggle.<sup>26</sup> Within this highly varied cinematic constellation, Japanese antiwar epics held a special status because the history of the US bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki provided a rare representational space for discussing the omnipresence of nuclear threat, which otherwise remained undervisualized on the socialist side of the Cold War.

#### JAPANESE ANTIWAR EPICS

As we saw in chapter 2, Japan occupied an anomalous status at the Tashkent festival, entirely outside the geopolitical realm of the socialist bloc’s influence or anticolonial imaginary. Yet its antiwar films were unequivocally celebrated by the Soviet press and included in every selection of the Tashkent festival, with Japan’s fiction films dealing with World War II becoming central to the festival’s critical discourse. These films ranged from epics, such as Fukasaku Kinji’s *Under the Flag of the Rising Sun* (*Gunki hatameku moto ni*, 1972), to melodramas focusing on women and family life (although, importantly, not on women’s direct contribution to the war), such as Kurahara Koreyoshi’s *The Flame of Devotion* (*Shuen*, 1964), to detailed exploration of the war’s impact on the soldiers, such as Kobayashi Masaki’s *Hymn to a Tired Man* (*Nihon no seishun*, 1968), following on his earlier *The Human Condition* film series (*Ningen no joken*, 1959–61), which had been showered with acclaim in the Soviet press.

It may seem counterintuitive that it was the cinema of a capitalist country aligned with the US who had fought against the Soviet Union in World War II that would occupy a place of honor in the global socialist film formation presented at Tashkent. The political inclusion of Japan at Tashkent would seem to clash, for example, with the history of the Soviet Union, revealing to the world the Japanese germ warfare experiments, directed against Koreans and Chinese, during the Soviet trials at Khabarovsk in 1949, at the same time that the US was whitewashing them. The two major factors behind this are the long-established ties between the Soviets and the Japanese communists and the fact that the war theme almost inevitably touched on the impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The continuous return to the history of the US atomic bombing of Japan was crucial for bringing together the two central themes of Soviet ideology in the Cold War: the struggle for peace and the anti-American rhetoric. This was particularly important since the socialist bloc, unlike the US, largely avoided the imagery of “the bomb” (such as photographs of the mushroom cloud, fictional reconstructions, or speculative fictions featuring nuclear explosions), reproaching Hollywood’s representations of it as overtly sensationalist, fear-mongering, and antihumanist.<sup>27</sup> Instead of featuring nuclear explosions as either sublime, spectacular, fantastic, or, alternatively, as a cautionary tale emphasizing the need for preparedness, as was the

case in the West, the imaginary of nuclear war in the socialist context was concentrated on the concrete historical events and their impact (without acknowledging, of course, the realities of its own nuclear testing program). As a result, at least until the mid-1980s and the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster, Hiroshima and Nagasaki served as the primary focal point and visualization of Cold War nuclear anxiety in Soviet culture.

From Maruki Toshi and Maruki Iri's murals depicting gruesome effects of the A-bomb attacks, exhibited in Moscow's Gorky Park in 1959, to Alfred Schnittke's cantata "Nagasaki," broadcasted on Moscow radio in 1960, together with the readings of "The Songs of Hiroshima—Poems of Contemporary Japanese Poets," Hiroshima and Nagasaki assumed a privileged place in the Soviet cultural politics of war and peace.<sup>28</sup> The canonical story of Sasaki Sadako, the most famous *hibakusha* (nuclear bomb survivor), who tried to fold one thousand origami cranes before eventually dying of radiation poisoning ten years after the explosion, became a charged symbol not only in Japan, where her statue was included in the Hiroshima memorial—but in the socialist sphere as well. In lieu of more spectacular representations, the myth of Sadako was invested with all the great anxieties about nuclear war. Sadako's story in the Soviet Union took many media forms: most famously as a 1968 song "The Cranes" (*Zhuravli*), based on a poem by the Dagestani writer Rasul Gamzatov, which he allegedly wrote on his way back from visiting the Hiroshima site. The poem (and the song's lyrics) explicitly blends together the Soviet experience of World War II and the story of Sadako. It became the last song performed by the legendary actor and singer Mark Bernes, himself most famous for starring in Soviet war dramas and for his war-themed songs, instantly making "The Cranes" a classic. Sadako was also fictionalized as a character in Mark Don-skoi's *Hello, Children! (Zdravstvuite, deti!)*, 1964), a film taking place at a Soviet international children's camp.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from such cultural appropriations, Japanese films dealing with this topic were prevalent on Soviet screens from the mid-1950s on. Shindo Kaneto's film *Children of Hiroshima (Genbaku no ko)*, 1952), which was the first Japanese film to dramatize the atomic bombing of the city, secured Shindo's privileged status in the Soviet Union. Shindo went on to become one of the most influential Japanese directors in the Soviet bloc, along with other antiwar Japanese directors—like the documentarian Fumio Kamei, whose films were the earliest to be circulated in the postwar Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> Sekigawa Hideo's *Hiroshima* (1953)—produced by Japan's Teachers Union and focusing on the experiences of a group of teachers, their students, and their families following the bombing—was also released in the USSR in 1957. Importantly, these films constructed Hiroshima not only as a site of historical memory and trauma but also as a contemporary Cold War ideological battleground, including depictions of the anticommunist "Red purge" in Japan and the protests against the use of Japanese territory for military stations by the US, thus extending the ongoing geopolitical relevance of the war experience.<sup>31</sup>

This argument is made especially apparent in Shindo's *Lucky Dragon No. 5* (*Daigo Fukuryu Maru*, 1959), based on a true story of a Japanese fishing boat whose crew suffered acute radiation syndrome from the nuclear tests conducted by the US at Bikinni Atoll. *The Last Women* (*Saigo no onnatachi*, Kusuda Kiyoshi, 1954), which was also released in the Soviet Union in 1957, depicts the decisive battle of the Pacific campaign of World War II that resulted in a particularly high number of civilian casualties (not least owing to the US military's use of napalm) while exposing the Japanese army-enforced collective suicide of civilians leading up to the fall of Saipan.

Progressive filmmakers in Japan—like other artists and intellectuals—found the war a particularly charged topic, one leading to questions about Japan's own history of modernization and empire. In this view, the Japanese experience of World War II, the trauma of nuclear bombing, and the US occupation were all consequences of the Japanese imperial enterprise, with its historical propensity for war-making—still revered by its contemporary Japanese far-right nationalists. This insight was particularly crucial for Japan's leftist participation in internationalist and pan-Asian movements: while antiwar and antinuclear discourse in Japan was largely shared and employed by both the right and the left, which allowed Japan to represent itself as a peaceful power all over Asia following Bandung, it fell to the Left and, specifically, to communist culture, to analyze Japan's own history of imperialism. As Kristine Dennehy argues, "For most Japanese, while postwar pacifism might call for a repudiation of Japanese militarism in the 1940s, this same kind of repentant attitude was not necessarily invoked in evaluations of earlier stages of Japanese imperialist expansion."<sup>32</sup> Often this history was modified or ignored in the rhetoric of pan-Asian alliances and Afro-Asian People's Solidarity, where Japan's colonization of Korea and Manchuria and its invasion of China were ignored in favor of celebrating, for example, its victory over the Russian Empire in the 1905 war as the first instance of "the new awakening among the colored peoples" in the fight against (white) Western colonialism.<sup>33</sup> This is why, for the Japanese Marxists, it was particularly important to unmask the economic motivations and xenophobic history behind Japan's own imperialist past. Dennehy elaborates:

Leading Japanese historians like Toyama Shigeki combined their scholarly critiques of Japan's imperialist past with an explicit political agenda that was extremely critical of the conservative ruling elite of Japan after 1945. By condemning their own nation's modern history as one of aggression in Asia, Marxists like Toyama were also sending a message that the Japanese people should be on guard against repeating the mistakes of the past. As intellectuals, they felt a particular responsibility to speak up against the actions of conservative politicians who they argued were leading Japan down an eerily familiar path of remilitarization and renewed economic aggression in postwar Asia.<sup>34</sup>

As early as 1946, Kamei, together with his fellow Prokino critic and producer Iwasaki Akira, had attempted to make a four-part documentary, *A Japanese Tragedy*

(*Nippon no higeki*), to explore Japan's involvement in World War II as a culmination of a longer story of the development of capitalism and imperialism, going back to the invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Using mostly newsreels and other found-footage materials, the film is also a reflection on the importance of dialectical "contextualization and conceptualization in documentary."<sup>35</sup> *A Japanese Tragedy* was banned by the American Occupation Forces with direct intervention by the Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru.<sup>36</sup> The argument the film presented, however, grew increasingly more important for the Japanese Left in the subsequent decades as historical reckoning of its own imperial wars was crucial to the Left's ability to place Japan in alignment with countries fighting against US imperialism, Korea and Vietnam in particular—movements that historically crystallized around the struggle against Japanese invaders. As a result, a historical epic like Yamamoto Satsuo's *Men and War* trilogy (*Senso to ningen*, 1970–1973), also shown at Tashkent, was seen within the international socialist community explicitly as an important demonstration of solidarity against ongoing imperialist aggressions such as those committed by the Japanese.

#### YAMAMOTO'S *MEN AND WAR* TRILOGY

Like Kobayashi's *The Human Condition*, Yamamoto's *Men and War* was an adaptation of Gomikawa Junpei's novel. Junpei's fiction mirrored Toyama Shigeki's scholarship as discussed by Dennehy in violating the established cultural representation of the Japanese as victims, not perpetrators, breaking the taboo against representing the "detestable and distasteful" aspects of the war.<sup>37</sup> Yamamoto recounts in his autobiography that his decision to turn to this historical novel was motivated by his contemporary political engagements. Seeing his first North Vietnamese war films at the Afro-Asian film festival in Jakarta in 1964 (the fiction film *Kim Dong* [*Kim Đông*, Nong Ich Dat, 1963], as well as documentaries from the Liberation Front) led him to participate in the making of the film *Vietnam* (Masuda Kentaro and Koizumi Takashi, 1968), which was shot on location. In turn, this experience allowed him to see clearly the continuities between US imperialism and Japanese aggression against the Chinese, which resulted in his decision to adapt Gomikawa's epic novel *Men and War* to the screen.<sup>38</sup>

Kobayashi's and Yamamoto's adaptations shown at Tashkent stood in sharp contrast to the "8.15" series of films (referring to the date of Japanese surrender), which were very popular in Japan at exactly the same time.<sup>39</sup> Except for *Japan's Longest Day*, which depicted in minute detail the events of the day when the speech of the Japanese emperor announced the country's surrender on the radio (and was originally supposed to be directed by Kobayashi), the other films in this series were in the entertainment genre, aestheticizing or glorifying the Japanese participation in the war through spectacular battle scenes.<sup>40</sup> *Japan's Longest Day* was screened at the first symposium organized jointly by the Union of Soviet Filmmakers' and

FIGURE 8.1. Yamamoto Satsuo (center) filming episode 3 of *Men and War*, Soviet Union, 1973. Photo used by permission of Sputnik International.



Japanese Screenwriting Guild in Moscow in 1968, and at the discussion of the film, which included its screenwriter Hashimoto Shinobu (who was renowned for his collaboration with Kurosawa on his most famous films), the Soviet filmmakers and critics indeed criticized the film for its overemphasis on the fates of the highest echelons of the Japanese military at the expense of the people, represented as faceless victims, as well as for insufficient historical analysis of the causes of the war. In response, the film's producer pointed to the pressure on the company from "reactionary militarist circles" in Japan, which included physical intimidation of the filmmakers over the representation of the figure of the emperor.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to the "8.15" series, the epic narrative scale of Kobayashi's and Yamamoto's films framed an in-depth critical analysis of Japanese imperialism and its structural likeness to contemporary US imperialist policy. Moreover, both films lingered on the complex ethical dilemmas and harrowing emotional and physical experiences of war, complicating its legacy and resisting the trope of victimhood of the Japanese. Soviet critical response to Yamamoto's and Kobayashi's film was unequivocally positive both in Moscow and at Tashkent. Predictably, the third installment of Yamamoto's *Men and War* trilogy, which takes place from 1937 to 1939 and deals with the Sino-Japanese war, ending with the defeat of the Japanese by the Red Army at Nomonhan, attracted the most attention. It was filmed with Moscow Film Studio's participation: shot on location in Volgograd, the production used Soviet army personnel—several companies of soldiers, engineers, and tank forces—and armed vehicles to create its battle scenes (fig. 8.1). Soviet staff members even agreed to work overtime without pay on the extremely demanding shooting schedule "for the sake of Russo-Japanese friendship."<sup>42</sup>

A certain overlap between this project and the Soviet War epic *Liberation*, also released in 1973, did not escape critics' attention. The Soviet film magazine *Sovetskii ekran* published a letter from its Tokyo correspondent citing essays purportedly written by Japanese school and university students after seeing

*Liberation*. *Liberation* was grander in scale than *Men and War*: though Yamamoto had planned five parts, he could only afford three, given his studio's resources. *Liberation*, as I mentioned earlier, had five parts and a total running time of 445 minutes. A Japanese student was quoted as marveling at the immense battle scene in the Soviet film, which featured twelve hundred tanks. The surprisingly well-informed young man comes to this conclusion: "only socialist cinema could provide such a number of tanks and people in the making of the film. Soviet cinema belongs to the state and not to private persons. . . . This is what allows it to provide the cinematic interpretation of such historical episodes on the scale worthy of the great people who committed these heroic acts."<sup>43</sup>

Despite such unflattering comparisons, Yamamoto's trilogy was celebrated unanimously in the Soviet Union for "the clarity of its conception, demonstrating not only the catastrophe of war but its ideology"; for the breadth of its historical analysis, which spans the experiences of all ranks; and for its formal qualities, such as the skillful combination of fiction and documentary footage.<sup>44</sup> Its reception outside the socialist bloc was not so enchanted. In Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party's New Liberal Press (Jiyu Shimpō) denounced its incitement to "antiestablishment ideology by playing on the antiwar sentiments of the Japanese people," while Yao Wenyuan, one of the Gang of Four in China, described it as "an extremely reactionary film that goes so far as to glorify fascists and aggressors."<sup>45</sup>

Following the logic of the cinema as a weapon, these films became themselves sites of contention on which geopolitical and ideological conflicts played out: the film of battlefields, the film as battlefield. In place of the spectacularization of war narratives as popular entertainment, films such as Yamamoto's foregrounded historical analysis and the contemporary relevance of past wars to the contemporary anti-imperialist struggles. Rejecting the trope of victimhood, these films nonetheless often included unflinchingly brutal depictions of wartime atrocities, transgressing many traditional representational taboos. They also demonstrated that internationalist solidarity necessarily had to face up to the colonialist legacies of one's own nation—an inward look that continuously proved much harder to follow than the more outward-looking ethos of internationalist solidarity.

#### CINEMAS OF THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST MILITARY HOT SPOTS

Notwithstanding the importance of the World War II epics, it was the films that focused on the ongoing wars in the 1960s and 1970s—reportage from combat zones, films documenting war atrocities and commemorating victims, and explorations of war's aftermath—that constituted the most iconic examples of socialist internationalist cinema of armed struggle. Many of these were so-called solidarity films, made by foreign directors (that is, foreign vis-à-vis the particular struggle depicted). While they had some kinship to films in the traditional genre of international war coverage, the latter maintained an ethos in which the

camera assumes a supposedly neutral bystander's view of the conflict, while the former were overtly aimed at lending support to the struggle.<sup>46</sup> In many ways, solidarity films were a socialist (internationalist) genre par excellence.<sup>47</sup> It is worth emphasizing their importance in serving multiple roles, from effectively providing an alternative global news outlet and political education to viewers, to providing de facto training for local filmmakers, who often assisted with the filming.<sup>48</sup> Nor should the sincere political commitment of many of the filmmakers (especially those whose cinematic engagements were self-directed and not given as "assignments" by state film bureaucracies) be underestimated. In the case of South-South solidarity films in particular, such experiences were crucial for maintaining much needed international networks of support. But given the priority accorded by anti-colonial movements to the development of an independent culture, the combat and commemoration films made by the filmmakers who were embedded in the experience they were depicting were frequently most compelling.

#### VIETNAMESE REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA

Striking examples, celebrated at Tashkent, included films by participants in the independence and resistance movements, which included the Palestinian Film Unit, as well as many militants in the Portuguese African liberation struggles and exiled filmmakers of the Patriotic Forces of Chile. Vietnamese and North Korean cinemas, in particular, served as obvious points of reference for "hot" struggles directly with American troops, creating a bridge between the various narratives of colonial experiences and decolonial struggles. Importantly, the colonialist power in these films was rarely essentialized through easily identifiable national or ethnic markers: the enemy could be French, British, Israeli, American, or Japanese. This diversity, on the one hand, allowed for an imaginary of solidarity as equally not bound by geography or race. On the other hand, it did not preclude the centrality of recognizably national(ist) iconographies such as, for example, the gendered imagery of women standing in for the nation. Early Vietnamese combat documentaries, in particular, had considerable impact and provided the earliest iconography for the cinema of anti-imperialist struggle that subsequently circulated through both Latin American and (pro-) Palestinian militant filmmaking networks.<sup>49</sup> But while largely dismissed in film history scholarship for being overtly propagandistic, Vietnamese fiction war films also had considerable impact, including on sympathetic Western audiences who had a chance to see them at Tashkent. The most famous of these films were Huy Thành's *Rising Storm* (*Nổi gió*, 1966); Hải Ninh's *The 17th Parallel Day and Night* (*Vĩ tuyến 17 Ngày và đêm*, 1972), and especially *The Little Girl of Hanoi* (*Em bé Hà Nội Hải Ninh*, 1974), which included documentary footage shot during the 1972 bombing of Hanoi. All of these films were shown at Tashkent and were lauded by international critics and fellow filmmakers. As Christina Schwenkel observes:



In contrast to recurring images in US media and popular culture of Vietnamese women as passive and helpless victims of US military violence, socialist representations regularly portrayed women as assertive, rational, and compassionate actors in war. In both cases the female body stood in for the Vietnamese nation: in the former, the violated female body alluded to US might and triumph (or, to more critical readers, the war as debacle), while in the latter case, images of young, gun-toting women, often in the act of apprehending American pilots, emerged as an international socialist symbol of Vietnamese resilience and defeat of US imperialism.<sup>50</sup>

This observation holds equally true of the socialist war iconography more generally, whether Palestinian women fighters or Soviet women in World War II. The emphasis on resilience was, indeed, as much a part of the socialist understanding of heroism as the more conventional imagery of individual bravery on the battlefield: given the uneven power balance and lengthy duration of the struggle, the people's endurance as an absolutely necessary aspect of heroism, with the endurance of Vietnamese people being emblematic, given the three-decade-long struggle against first the French and then the Americans was, indeed, legendary.<sup>51</sup> Schwenkel also makes the crucial point that resilience was part of the narrative of the eventual triumph of the socialist path to modernization. The construction of industrial and living infrastructures was a matter of learning the lesson that winning wars requires collective mobilization, not the highly inegalitarian, atomistic, and ultimately self-indulgent individualism of the Western capitalist system. This, too, was part of the broader ethos emphasized throughout world socialist cinema, as we have repeatedly seen throughout the previous chapters, linking its various strands.

Vietnamese fiction war films were also praised for their lyricism, which successfully combined national pictorial tradition with familiar international cinematic iconographies. Brynn Hatton teases out the canonical Cold War iconography of the Vietnamese propaganda poster in which the image of an AK-47, a female guerilla soldier, and a flower in bloom are all brought together under the caption "Hold your gun arm steady to keep the color of the flower": here, in addition to the Soviet-made Kalashnikov, the image of the woman and the flower are equally evocative of both a specifically Vietnamese (pictorial and "lyrical") visual vocabulary and an emphasis on the woman fighter as the guarantor of a better, brighter future.<sup>52</sup> These tropes reflected the real battlefield origins of independent filmmaking in Vietnam. Beginning in 1947, the cameramen of the Southern Cinematography and Photography Branch (SCPB) developed their own style of combat photography and documentary during the French and American wars. SCPB artists such as Mai Lộc, Khương Mỹ, Trần Kiêm, Tuyết Trinh, and Nguyễn Thế Đoàn made a series of films, the most famous of which was *Mộc Hóa Battle* (*Trận Mộc Hóa*, 1948), by Khương Mỹ and Mai Lộc (Khương, the reader will recall, told Azhdar Ibragimov the anecdote about the fisherman that opens this chapter).

But, of course, such imagery also functioned to join nationally specific and internationally recognized iconography, constituting the shared visual language of socialist cinema worldwide. Indeed, most Vietnamese filmmakers were educated at VGIK in the late 1950s, where they were exposed to a wide range of films, both Soviet and foreign. These international contacts developed further with frequent visits by foreign artists interested in making films in solidarity with Vietnamese struggles, providing a cosmopolitan network of references for local filmmakers, in contrast to the common assumption in English-language scholarship. Vietnamese film training was also more structured than it is sometimes presented: between 1959 and 1962, Soviet filmmakers Malik Kaïumov and Ibragimov (both subsequently important figures in the organization of the Tashkent festival) were sent to North Vietnam to support the founding of the National Film School of Vietnam (Trường Điện ảnh Việt Nam). Kaïumov led the documentary section, and Ibragimov taught fiction filmmaking. Ibragimov helped organize the school from the very beginning—in his memoirs he describes the first admission process, when, after the government announced the formation of the film school, more than ten thousand people applied.<sup>53</sup> The admissions committee traveled around the country conducting auditions. The conditions in which these were conducted are hinted at by the first project students and teachers embarked on: clearing the rubble and constructing and outfitting the school building and all its facilities. When classes began, more Soviet staff were sent to the school, including instructors of the economics of film industry and art direction. Young director Đặng Nhật Minh, fresh from VGIK, worked as an interpreter and translator.<sup>54</sup> Other courses taught by Vietnamese artists emphasized traditional plastic and performance arts.<sup>55</sup> In the first years of the school's existence, many Soviet and Eastern European specialists (filmmakers and scholars) visited the school to give lectures and hold workshops. Graduates of the school began producing its first feature films. In his three-year stay, Ibragimov made two shorts and one feature in collaboration with his Vietnamese students: *White-eyed Bird* (*Chim vành khuyên*, 1962), *Two Soldiers* (*Hai người lính*, 1962), and *A Day in Early Spring* (*Một ngày đầu thu*, 1962), which won awards at Karlovy Vary's Symposium of Young Cinemas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Young Vietnamese filmmakers' experience of working on these films certainly created an exchange of techniques and ideas that flowed into representations of war and peace, forming a vital part of world socialist cinema.

Despite their international success, however, these films were harshly attacked for their pacifism and lack of combat spirit by certain Vietnamese hardliners. The concern that Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence would leave Vietnam without any support led to a shift in the cultural policy orientation toward China, among a hail of attacks on "Soviet revisionism."<sup>56</sup> The war films of the Soviet Thaw, which had enormous success with the audiences in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, were thus a causality of this shift, decried in powerful quarters for embracing liberal humanist values, contrary to the spirit of the war in Vietnam.



FIGURE 8.2. Grigori Chukhrai (left) and Azhdar Ibragimov (USSR) receive an honorary gift at the second edition of the Tashkent festival (1972). Photo used by permission of Sputnik International.

Among the films that were explicitly singled out for criticism were Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli*, 1957); Sergei Bondarchuk's *Destiny of a Man* (*Sud'ba cheloveka*, 1959); and especially Grigori Chukhrai's *The Forty First* (*Sorok pervyi*, 1956) and *Ballad of a Soldier* (*Ballada o soldate*, 1959), as well as Ibragimov's Vietnamese productions.<sup>57</sup> Although Vietnam fully realigned itself with the post-Khrushchev Soviet Union by 1965 (ironically, perhaps, owing to the dire need for Soviet military support—the kind that could actually shoot the enemy!), the cinema remained at the center of official suspicion. And even as filmmakers, after several years' hiatus, were being allowed to return to the Soviet bloc for training, they were officially advised to avoid contact with their hosts' culture, which was labeled overly decadent and potentially corrupting.<sup>58</sup> This historical context throws light on the absence of any Vietnamese filmmakers at the 1968 festival and puts Ibragimov's and Chukhrai's comments into a different perspective, revealing the complexity behind the seeming uniformity of the discourse on armed struggle at the festival and in the socialist world at large (fig. 8.2).

#### STOP GENOCIDE: BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR CINEMA

Alongside Vietnam (as well as Palestine, Chile, Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau), another important front of revolutionary struggle and a rallying cry for socialist internationalist cinema in the 1970s was one that is largely forgotten now: solidarity with Bangladesh. Although, unlike Korea and Vietnam, these were not direct acts of US aggression, these proxy wars and National Security States (NSS) were operationalized through overt support (the case of Israel), covert support (the case of Latin America), or by a half-hidden alliance (in Africa), between apartheid South Africa and the US. During the Bangladesh Liberation War, in which as many as three million people, mostly civilians, were killed and several million people took shelter in neighboring India, the US supplied Pakistan troops as they attacked the poorly armed Bangladeshis with M-24 Chaffee light tanks, .50 caliber machine guns, and planes such as F-86s and C-130s.<sup>59</sup> Nixon's (in)famous "tilt" to

Pakistan, even in the face of its committing war atrocities on an enormous scale, was motivated both by anticommunism and by Pakistan's recent role as a backdoor channel for communication with China, a move that put two major regional players in alliance against the Soviet bloc. India's support of Bangladesh independence, on the other hand, was entangled in China's involvement in the Pakistan-India conflict, whose escalation would have led to disastrous consequences.<sup>60</sup> Despite the efforts of UN diplomats to prevent the bloodshed and the denunciations of the Soviets, Nixon and Kissinger disregarded all humanitarian appeals. But with considerable Soviet military support (as well as Soviet diplomatic pressure, twice vetoing the US-controlled UN Security Council's resolution demanding the withdrawal of Indian troops), India and Bangladesh retaliated, leading to a standoff between Soviet and US naval forces in the Bay of Bengal in December 1971. When Pakistani forces finally surrendered, Bangladesh declared independence in 1972. The newly created state proclaimed itself a socialist parliamentary democracy, nationalizing its major industries and joining the Non-Aligned Movement.<sup>61</sup>

The complex role Bangladesh played in the Non-Aligned Movement and the reshuffling of Cold War geopolitical alliances has received little treatment in Europe and North America. Rarely are films dealing with this history discussed outside the nationally specific context. And yet, the genocide in Bangladesh, known in the West primarily via George Harrison and Ravi Shankar's organized Madison Square Garden concert, significantly strengthened ties between India and the Soviet Union, authenticating Soviet anti-imperialist rhetoric within the Third World community. It also temporarily ignited hope for an alliance between Islam and socialist internationalism; a hope that, as we will see, was short-lived. For artists and intellectuals in Soviet Central Asian republics, Bangladesh's combination of socialist orientation, Bengali culture, Soviet-supported literary production, and Islamic identity, which they shared, was a promising development in terms of cultural relations. Given the centrality of the Liberation War, not only its role in the formation of Bangladesh and the geopolitics of the whole Indian continent but its spillover effects across the Third World, it is surprising that its cinematic representation has largely been ignored and forgotten, if not actively repressed.<sup>62</sup> To counter this tendency, my analysis of Zahir Raihan's war documentary *Stop Genocide* (1971), which was screened at Tashkent that year, will fully contextualize it within both the representational tropes of the Liberation War of Bangladesh and the conventions of Marxist socialist war documentaries. Moreover, I argue that the issue of the representation of women operates as a kind of litmus test for the degree of their compatibility and bring together many of the intersecting themes of this book as its concluding discussion.

*Stop Genocide* is best known as the first documentary on the Liberation War of Bangladesh to be both made and shown during the war. Along with S. Sukhdev's *Nine Months of Freedom*, it came to represent the war to the rest of the world. The 1972 screenings of these two films at Tashkent was the first cinematic projection of

the war outside of India (Sukhdev, who was a regular at the Leipzig festival, earned a Silver prize for his film there later that year).<sup>63</sup> But while *Nine Months of Freedom* was a classic solidarity film, commissioned by India's Films Division and made by an Uttarakhandi Sikh, it was *Stop Genocide*, made by a Bangladeshi, that provided the internationalist perspective on the war.

Its director, Zahir Raihan, a native of East Bengal, had already established his reputation as a revolutionary artist, writer, and filmmaker at the Dhaka film studio. He was a communist, having worked as a courier secretly transporting messages and letters (in fact, Raihan was a pseudonym given to him by the Communist Party).<sup>64</sup> Although he kept his party affiliation secret, he openly expressed his political views. For instance, at the Pakistan Film Festival in Dhaka, which he organized in 1965, he had this to say about the commercial film studio system: "By destroying this system, we may foil the insidious plot of the imperialist. Let us create the right mental attitude for collective work."<sup>65</sup> Although the chance for an alternative mode of filmmaking did not come until the war, his film *Glimpses of Life* (*Jibon theke neya*, 1970) did express the rising tide of Bengali nationalism that overflowed into war just a year later. A family melodrama produced within the Pakistani studio system, it instantly became notorious for its allegorical representation of the exploitation of Bengalis by the military dictatorship of Ayub Khan.<sup>66</sup>

When the war broke out, Raihan, like many others, escaped to Calcutta. From there, he began to put out feelers for a project to document the atrocities of war in what he envisioned along the lines of Vietnamese, Cuban, or Palestinian films—a guerilla cinema. Gaining support from the Motion Picture Association of Bengal and two independent groups—the Bangladesh Film Artist-Performers Support Union and Bangladesh Liberation Council of the Intelligentsia (neither of them state-affiliated)—Raihan began his documentary project.<sup>67</sup> Using whatever equipment he could come up with, he and his fellow filmmaker and critic Alamgir Kabir traveled across the liberated zones and battlefields, filming the plight of refugees, guerilla training, and the horrors of war all around them.<sup>68</sup> Inspired by Sergei Eisenstein, Santiago Álvarez, and Andrzej Wajda, whose films had been recently screened at the Calcutta Film Society, Raihan's *Stop Genocide* earned him the epithet "the guerrilla filmmaker of Bangladesh."<sup>69</sup> Rather than seeing references to Álvarez or Wajda as an homage or as a set of influences, I would argue that they are best understood as signs of belonging to the artistic community around socialist cinema of armed struggle.

*Stop Genocide* is structured as a travel narrative. Raihan follows refugees and guerilla fighters, with voice-over commentary and several conversations with refugees and soldiers. The narrative is framed by found footage documenting atrocities—from East Bengal and Vietnam—and a dramatized reading of the UN charter of human rights. The film starts with Lenin's quote about supporting national self-determination, set to the music of "The Internationale" (which will return again in crucial moments of the narrative). It is followed by a brief sequence depicting

a Bengali woman and a smiling girl, working the traditional husking pedal—a pastoral image of the type often used in cultural heritage films. But as Fahmida Akhter suggests, this image is made dialectically complex by its political framing, signifying “the collective image of the Bengalis as an exploited working class.”<sup>70</sup> This sequence is perhaps too brief and the images too beautiful to fully convey oppression, but as the monotonous sound of the pedal carries over to the next shot, it becomes both oppressive and foreboding, as the sequence fades to black and the soundtrack of bombing, sounds of marching, and dogs barking. Finally, intertitles appear, whose agitprop style draws on a lineage that stretches from Vertov to Álvarez, synchronized to the sound of gunshots. The text is set against an iconic but generic backdrop of barbed wire and ruins—their origin purposefully unclear—some being destroyed huts, others collapsing European buildings. This is simply twentieth-century war. The message is reinforced by the footage that follows, which is from Vietnam: air bombing and dead children, with the American voice-over celebrating the advanced war technology alternating with the Dateline news teleprinter reading the UN charter declaration of human rights. We return to Vietnam War footage intermittently throughout the film, with images of US war criminals intercut with footage of dead bodies and destruction.

After this initial narrative framing, the film begins tracking the plight of the refugees and their camp in India, accompanied by a more lyrical text, strikingly punctuated by freeze-frames in sync with the period at the end of each sentence (the voice-over announcing, “Stop!”). One of the first refugees we are introduced to is a sixteen-year-old girl, on whose face the camera lingers, while her story is narrated: she was repeatedly raped by the Pakistani soldiers. Her family was slaughtered. Another refugee delivers a speech comparing Yahya Khan, the Pakistani president, to Mussolini and Hitler. We see more testimonies of survivors. They describe the murders, rapes, and destruction. Most of their testimony is voiced-over by the narrator, while we see more documentary footage. The film proceeds to show refugees gathered in the ruins of the ancient palaces of the Kingdom of Bengal. The narrator intones that it is the place of the ancestry of the people now returning to it, threatened with extermination by “some barbarous hordes straight from the pages of medieval history,” despite all the promises of modernity and progress.

While the narrative sets up the Pakistani aggressors as “barbarous hordes” and the refugees as innocent victims, their strength and resilience, which is foregrounded in the footage, pulls us toward a sense of their resistance. This is exemplified by a woman “somewhere between eighty and a hundred in age,” half blind, having to use her arms as well as a bamboo stick to move. In response to every question, she repeats, “It’s all gone, everything is gone.” But the important thing about this woman is that she keeps moving, the camera following her relentless progress.

The following sequence takes us to the military camp, documenting the training of the Liberation Army—depicted first through Eisensteinian abstracted

montages of guns followed by the routines of military mobilization: young boys learning to march, glimpses of guerilla fighters returning from an assignment. We first see them as mere silhouettes, from afar. The voice-over notes that they are all peasants, but all carry guns. In another training camp, an officer of the Bengal regiment speaks (in English) about the will and the moral readiness of the Bangladeshi people to fight. "The Internationale" is again played on the soundtrack as we see the military training in the camp. This is intercut with the officer continuing his rousing speech.

The concluding narrative sequence returns us to the refugee camp. Another very young girl has newly arrived there. She is clearly traumatized and unable or unwilling to speak. We see a long montage sequence of her beautiful, stern face staring at the camera, but her emotions are illegible. She seems on the verge of saying something—but doesn't. Her silence—which fully occludes her identity—occasions the narrator to reflect on it as a sign of belonging to a shared space as "one of the million, ten million, seventy-five millions of women and children" whose suffering is part of the history "in Paris and Spain, in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, in Algeria and Palestine, in South Africa, Congo and Haiti and Vietnam." Having drawn this conclusion, saluting "the relentless struggle for better life being waged all around the world by working men and women," the film ends with a direct appeal to the communist internationalist community for support of Bangladesh.

Though its running time is only twenty minutes, the documentary is structurally complex and remarkably effective. Lenin's quote, the cueing up of "The Internationale," and the final frame leave no doubt as to the film's condemnation of the historical march of imperialist oppression. Raihan's distinctly Marxist vision of liberation puts the struggle for Bangladesh in a historical line that goes through the Paris Commune and the Spanish Civil War, Nazi concentration camps, and contemporary anticolonial movements (Algeria, Congo), together with anti-imperialist wars (Palestine, Vietnam, Haiti) and antiapartheid agitation. Liberation struggle is positioned within a the broad "call for the oppressed to rise up against all forms of exploitation and demand their freedom from their oppressors,"<sup>71</sup> with its reference to Lenin and even the Siege of Leningrad through the inclusion of a photograph by Boris Kudaiaarov, a Soviet photographer and journalist who witnessed the blockade for its horrific nine hundred days. In the 1920s Kudaiaarov, alongside Rodchenko, was a member of the avant-gardist photography group October. Wearing these influences on his sleeve, it is no surprise that Alamgir Kabir, remembering Raihan, compares him to both Rossellini and the Soviet agit-train filmmakers (a combination that is, admittedly, a commonplace of radical filmmaking of the era).<sup>72</sup>

As befitting the conventions of militant collectivist filmmaking, Raihan's name is not listed in the credits, and neither the title of the film nor its opening sequence positions it in Bangladesh, putting the viewer in the widest possible context of



political identification. The insistence on the dialectical thesis of the universal—internationalist—framework creates certain tensions with the antithetical specificity of Bangladesh's nationalist liberation struggle. The films stubborn dialectical framing—between the general and the particular, the iconic image and a situated one, the collective and the individual—is indissociable from the way the film signifies.

Another, slightly less deterministic, tension is present between the liberal discourse on human rights and the Marxist vision of history. It is not enough to say, as many commentators have, that the film unmasks the hypocrisy of international institutions and their complicity in war crimes. By insisting on the ineffectiveness and hypocrisy of UN human rights guarantees that coexist with the UN's close ties to the US and, by extension, all the war crimes perpetrated by it, the film challenges the liberal understanding of human rights under the (capitalist) modernity associated with global human rights institutions. This critique is behind the narrator's allusion to the Bengal Sultanate's Golden Age (which was known for its religious and linguistic pluralism), which inflects the label he uses for the Pakistani army ("the barbarous hordes") and his unmasking of the blind eye the UN turns to US-associated crimes: all subtle signs that negate the liberal notion of a linear historical progress toward individual freedoms guaranteed by liberal institutions, even international ones like the UN.

#### WOMEN AS WAR HEROES: THE *BIRANGONA*

This critique of liberal modernity becomes particularly relevant when we look at the film's representation of women, which follows the patriarchal norm that assigns the fighter role to men and the victim role to women. Indeed, the only women we see are refugees who are either accompanied by children or are so young that they themselves are almost children. The training camp, on the other hand, is a male-only space, and these young fighters are exalted as "freedom-snatching young lions."<sup>73</sup> Unlike the films that Raihan quotes as influences, neither in camps nor among the guerillas do we catch any glimpses of women as agents in the struggle. This is consistent with the mainstream Bangladesh historical construction of freedom-fighters; only recently has the direct participation of women in the Liberation War in Bangladesh been admitted in the historiography. The uncovering of women's roles challenges the iconic masculinization of the struggle, which Raihan's film clearly helps to ground.<sup>74</sup>

The editing of the camp footage is smooth, and although it intercuts abstract symbols of the uprising (boots, rifles) with the military training of the "young lions," there is certainly a cohesive triumphant tone, underscored by another inclusion of "The Internationale" on the soundtrack, in contrast to the disruptive strategies (freeze-frame, rapid montage of the same shot from different angles) that characterize the footage of the refugees. While the anxiety of the latter invites

a complex response from the audience, one of alienated reflection, shock, and shame, the former is affectively unambiguous.

Yet, arguably, this filmic decision leaves the viewer with a greater sense of the women in the film as individuals, which, save for the opening vignette, produces a certain resistance against an easy and uncomplicated identification of them as symbolic figures representing the archetypal “endangered mother” of the nation so beloved in the epics of national liberation. The new Bangladeshi government in December 1971, the year *Stop Genocide* was made, created a new class of war hero: the *birangona*, literally a brave or courageous woman, a survivor of sexual violence of the Liberation War.<sup>75</sup> We see *birangona* in the first refugee testimony of the woman whose description of her rape is explicit, horrifically detailed, and almost forensic. Disconcertingly, the story is told not in the woman’s own voice but in a translation narrated in Alamgir Kabir’s highly educated upper-class English over the montage of the close-ups of her face intercut with an image of a crying child running away and a montage of the extreme close-up of her eye, punctuated with the sound of a round of shots, alluding to the execution of her family following the rape. The effect of the sequence is jarring in its extreme stylization tending toward abstraction. The disheveled long black hair in sharp contrast with the skin (emphasized by the black and white cinematography), the sideways glances: these visual signifiers fully conform to the iconography of *birangona*, which emerged immediately after the war. Nayanika Mookherjee powerfully describes this mode of representation: “The face stands in as a marker for the shame and the inner, muted pain of rape. The body is thus facified, where the face is reduced to a physiognomic likeness and becomes a symbol of the suffering the body hides. . . . S. Mulgaokar evocatively describes the face of the *birangona* as one ‘where neither forgiveness nor pain nor memory can ever enter. It’s a face at the very edge of suffering—a suffering denied its own understanding.’”<sup>76</sup>

Yet the images in *Stop Genocide* also differ significantly from the most iconic image of a *birangona*—a photograph by Naibuddin Ahmed, published in the *Washington Post*, which depicts a woman whose face is covered with her disheveled hair and her crossed, bangle-clad fists.<sup>77</sup> Unlike Ahmed’s photograph, the woman in Raihan’s film is not completely anonymous or isolated: although we do not hear her speak, the film still tells her story, positioning her in the refugee camp within a community of survivors. The silence of the traumatized woman is further thematized in the second sequence, at the end of the film, with the young girl who is new to the camp and seemingly unable to speak. Although the girl isn’t explicitly treated as a rape victim, the film’s foregrounding of sexual violence and its traumatic impact leads us to assume this was her case as well—for which we would have every reason given the actual history of the war.

It would be easy to read this sequence merely as an example of the aestheticization of this young, silent, nameless woman, for whom the narrative voice-over speaks as the sequence of a series of shots of her beautiful face allows audiences

to project their own ideas and fantasies of victimhood, suffering, and sexual violence. Her anonymity seems to make it even easier to perceive her as an allegory of the traumatized nation, especially when the narrator refers to her as “merely one of millions,” depriving her of agency or individuality. Her diminishment as a particular seems to be entailed by the overall framing of a film that features other silent women, armed men, and a Marxist historical analysis.<sup>78</sup>

#### CONCRETE UNIVERSALS OF SOCIALIST WAR

I would argue that the sequence depicting the young girl produces a much more complex effect on the audience, one that allows for multiple coexisting interpretations. Lingering on her image creates a series of contradictory effects: the focus on her unreadable face lasts long enough for viewers to register their own reactions and expectations, prompted, in part, by the questions the narrator repeatedly poses to her (with the violence that comes from being in the interrogator’s place). We become uncomfortably aware of our own desire to know her, place her, identify her—as her image acquires further visual specificity through its multiple angles and attention to the smallest changes in her facial expression. This technique brings out the contradictory nature of such spectatorial desires, foregrounding, even if unintentionally, the irreducibility of her experience to the forms of knowledge that cinema can provide, evoking Édouard Glissant’s notion of a “right to opacity”—that is, accepting unknowability as a form of resistance to reducing, normalizing, and assimilating the singularity of experience.<sup>79</sup> We become aware of our urge to know—and of the ultimate impossibility and futility of such knowledge.

The duration also disturbs the calm with which the image assumes allegorical status, as we keep returning to the material situation of the girl. As the narrator lists her possible religious identities, a tactic that seems at first to be part of the allegorizing process, the list, as it goes on, begins to disallow a simple equivalence. The indeterminacy and multiplicity of her possible identifications counter the nationalist discourse of certainty, so crucial for the war discourses. If we do not have clear identitarian markers, how can we separate “us” from “them”? As the narrator proposes that the girl is “one of . . . seventy five millions,” he further disturbs the allegorizing move, inscribing her instead within what Ranabir Samaddar calls “a concrete universal” (“a coexistence of singularities in a fold, of dialogues and contentions, of power and resistance, of particular desires toward universality, of the persistence of a spectrum of locality, region and the nation”) as a postcolonial predicament.<sup>80</sup> Raihan’s tactic thus differs in crucial ways from the standard audiovisual representation of a *birangona*, which tends to emphasize the impossibility of integrating these women war heroes into the postwar community of Bangladesh, their cinematic narratives ending in madness or suicide (in Sukhdev’s *Nine Months to Freedom*, for example, a survivor of multiple rapes appears only briefly onscreen, and the film concludes with a confirmation of her death after the footage was shot).

This difference in the social significance of *birangona* in the film is crucial as it ties in to the subsumption of her story, which deprives her of individuality; this is where the critique of liberal modernity presses on the narrative of “the oppressed,” for it is precisely the failure of liberal modernity to stand up to imperialist/capitalist oppression that makes the subjective individual story impossible without making it bathetic. By drowning it in the sea of other such stories, just as individual death is subsumed under millions of dead bodies in the genocidal war, we, dialectically, mark the space of solidarity and collective action, transcending the individual bravery of the young lions. If the sheer scale of oppression and exploitation, historically and geographically, is what robs her of an individuated story, it is also this scale that, Raihan wagers, provides the possibility of the revolutionary collectivity required to take on this struggle. Only such revolutionary collectivity can be mobilized to fight—as was painfully clear to the East Bengalis struggling for independence when they were drastically outgunned not only by Pakistan but by Pakistan’s Western supporters. It is crucial to the girl’s identity that her sequence ends in the call for solidarity: she is included in the millions of the oppressed who can be liberators and revolutionaries, the international rising up against all oppression, and its particular instantiation embodied in the Bangladesh War of Liberation—liberation that depends on solidarity that is based not on shared identities or individual experiences but precisely the dialectic of the “concrete universal.”

Something similar applies to the treatment of the old woman I mentioned earlier. When the narrator poses the question about what could possibly empower this old woman to flee her home and walk for hundreds of miles, a montage responds: advancing tanks, rivers full of dead bodies. But it is not just the horror that punctuates this sequence: as the camera continues to follow her uncannily determined movement through space, one is left with an image of a deeply wounded but strikingly resilient and resolute people. It evokes the beggars in Ousmane Sembene’s *Xala* (1976), another film that played at Tashkent and across the broader socialist Third-Worldist festival circuit. The people in Sembene’s film are also under the ban of various forms of legal and economic oppression but remain resilient and resistant and are the ultimate agents of history in that film’s political critique of postcoloniality. *Xala* is populated by mostly unnamed, crippled figures who use their arms and sticks for support in moving yet are also continuously in motion, seized by a relentless urge to act: dispossessed of their land, removed by the police and the military to the outskirts of the city, they are determined to return, to confront the guilty, and demand retribution. These are people bearing the chronic marks of the violence of postcolonial modernization, which leaves them behind—where they become agents of the revolt of the “Wretched of the Earth,” which occurs on the margins and not through the agency of a party. The resilience one sees in the old woman in *Stop Genocide* is so uncanny that it cannot be contained within the usual patriarchal associations of femininity with natural endurance and preservation of life that runs through the cinema of armed struggle. The use

value of this resilience in the discourse on the preservation of national identity and culture is exceeded by that margin of uncanniness, *Unheimlichkeit*—literally, un-homeness—which signals that here we have a transition to a socialist ideology of struggle against transnational conditions of oppression, a dimension of history transcending Bangladesh. It is a struggle that continues even after the genocide is stopped and independence is achieved. Raihan's film, then, like Sembene's, continues to resonate not as a historical document but as a contemporary one.

Placing the film within this Marxist framework and providing a different reading of its depiction of gender is not a way of neatly resolving the film's problems from the feminist perspective, but it does demonstrate the push-and-pull of coexisting narratives at work in the text. In other words, if the socialist framework does not fully transcend the cultural and religious legacies of patriarchy so evident in these representations, it does at times exceed its boundaries by pointing to the utopian possibilities beyond what is imaginable within the framework of liberal modernity, coalescing around the moments of historical breaks—even if these possibilities that tend to be quickly foreclosed while the legacies of patriarchy, on the contrary, reemerge with greater force. And despite its emphasis on historical analysis, the film is surprisingly complicit in the total obfuscation of another history and another violent trauma embedded in the 1971 war, one much closer to Raihan's home than all the ones alluded to in the film: the 1947 Partition, when Bengal was first divided. While we can see an indirect allusion to this history in the segment taking place in one of the Mint Towns, which presents the specter of pre-Partition unity, the trauma of Partition itself (which was linked to many similar experiences of violence, including sexual violence) is markedly absent.<sup>81</sup> Of course, as Mookherjee notes, "to raise the specter of Partition today is to betray the cause of secularism or to acknowledge the power of communalism, as a large segment of the Bengali Muslim middle classes and rich peasants swung toward the Partition in the 1940s, leading to the creation of Pakistan."<sup>82</sup> The secular Marxist ideology of Raihan (as well as many of his peers) thus contributed to the suppression of this particular memory in a way that is consistent with the nationalist discourses on Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh alike.<sup>83</sup>

#### TRAGIC ENDINGS

Despite this complicity with official ideology of the liberation movement, *Stop the Genocide*'s form of nationalist discourse was sufficiently distinct from the official state articulation to be rejected by the new Bangladesh government. Several Bangladeshi film producers and intellectuals even campaigned to ban the film right after it was made, pointing to the opening image of Lenin and the pointed absence of Kheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Liberation War hero and leader of independent Bangladesh.<sup>84</sup> According to the recollections of MA Khayer, who in 1971 was in charge of the Film Division of the Mujibnagar Government's Information Ministry,

it was only after a “secret screening” of the film in India to a group of Bangladeshi and Indian politicians that the film was approved. Indira Gandhi was so personally moved by the film that she had it distributed by India’s Films Division.<sup>85</sup> Raihan was asked by the Bangladeshi government to make another film, and he used the budget to make three more documentaries with Kabir and Babul Choudhury. The films, however, apparently disappeared on their way from Calcutta to Dhaka. Raihan himself was killed less than a year after making this film while looking for his missing brother Shahidullah Kaiser, an eminent writer and intellectual, who had been seized during the war in the “collaborator-infested Mirpur suburb of Dhaka.” Neither man’s body was ever found.<sup>86</sup>

The fate of socialism in Bangladesh was no less tragic. While Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the first prime minister vowed to establish an independent nation founded on the four principles of secularism, nationalism, socialism, and democracy, his rule quickly evolved into “Mujibism, which was a mixture of populism and personality cult.”<sup>87</sup> Although he pronounced a general amnesty for the Pakistani collaborators, some forty thousand of whom had been arrested soon after the war, no one affiliated with the leftist parties was released.<sup>88</sup> By 1974, in the midst of an enormous famine, Sheikh Mujibur instituted a one-party rule, and by 1975, after a series of coups and countercoups, General Ziaur Rehman became head of state. Military rule extended to 1990, marked by Islamization, trade liberalization, an increase in foreign aid and debt, and the growth of NGOs.<sup>89</sup> Despite its original geopolitical alignments, Bangladesh radically changed its allegiances from the Non-Aligned Movement and toward the Saudi-centered Organization of Islamic Cooperation.<sup>90</sup> With these changes came a different mode of war commemoration. While Raihan and Kabir undertook several projects aimed at documenting the war and its aftermath, Raihan’s death marked the end of state support for such documentary film production, along with various other commemorative projects. Although some fiction films of the early and mid-1970s still dealt with this topic (albeit in a considerably more melodramatic and nationalist vein), after the 1975 coup, virtually no film depicted the war until the 1990s. The political shifts in the government raised the already high stakes of such a charged topic, which discouraged filmmakers from pursuing projects dealing with the war or its direct legacies.<sup>91</sup> As film scholar Zakir Hossain Raju puts it in deceptively simple terms, “by 1975, the genre [had] lost its popular appeal.”<sup>92</sup>

During the Mujibism era of the 1970s, the Tashkent festival continued to be a major site for the exhibition of Bangladeshi cinema, screening most of its significant fiction productions of the period, including virtually all of the fiction war films and hosting several of its most important stars, directors, and critics.<sup>93</sup> Tashkent was probably the only significant international exhibition space of Bangladeshi cinema at this time. For instance, the two most famous Bangladeshi actresses—sisters Shuchanda (Kohinoor Akhtar), the widow of Zahir Raihan, and Babita (Farida Akhtar Poppy)—were frequent and much celebrated guests at the

festival. In their frequent interviews, the sisters' personal stories were intimately linked to their country's traumatic history. By implication, the role cinema played in the history of the people's resistance movement was kept alive at Tashkent. The revolutionary movement's symbolic legacy, according to Soviet critics, survived in their performances as well as in their offscreen histories, even if the films would otherwise be seen as apolitical. Shuchanda's emphasis on tragic performances as "best responding to the conditions of life for the people of Bangladesh" fueled a reading of folkloric romantic films as political allegories of resistance in the face of historical trauma.<sup>94</sup>

This broader historical and cultural context of attempts to inscribe the narrative of the Liberation War into the broader framework of communist internationalist solidarity points to an additional question related to the centrality of the representation of war and armed resistance in the socialist context: the problem of how the public memory of war and the integration of traumatic experiences were transformed in postwar everyday life. Civic commemorations in socialist states (as elsewhere) have tended toward grandiosity and a heroic narrative arc determined by the centrality of the "leaders" to victory, which is in turn treated as a historical inevitability. These official acts of remembrance stand in sharp contrast to the actual experiences of everyday people's adjustments to postwar life, pointing to the frequent incommensurability of the two. In the postwar (postrevolutionary, postliberation) context, the pathos of unity and of the total fusion of the personal and public/collective, as conveyed by Raihan and other war filmmakers, are often frustrated and rendered futile by the routine of reconstruction, which is often nearly as brutal as the war itself yet considerably more difficult to exalt. The liberatory, transformative affects that characterize the intensity of the struggle prove ephemeral, and the promises of leadership are forgotten.

Here, an extension of the socialist cinema of armed struggle—films that explicitly explore the multiple psychic and cultural effects of these experiences and address the problem of war as part of peacetime—often offered a sharp contrast to the other forums of public commemoration. Socialist cinema, at its best, provided a rare public imaginary in which to articulate the continuous stress placed on subjects who carried both the burdens of survival and the burdens of reconstruction. This is why, as we saw in chapter 5 in my discussions of films by Maldoror, Shepitko, and Djébar, cinema dealing with armed struggle proved to be such a rich field for women filmmakers—and vice-versa. In the cinema of armed struggle—films that explicitly explore the multiple psychic and cultural effects of these experiences and address the problem of war as part of peacetime—there is a sharp contrast to other forms of public commemoration by the visual density of the memory of the war inherent to the film form. For the Soviet Union, war was an experience that allowed for fusion of the public and the personal/intimate; here, art (including cinema) could fulfill its function as truly "popular"—genuinely heartfelt, full of sincere pathos, and a liberating experience—in a way that could not only serve the



state's objectives but also allow for a much broader range of liberatory possibilities.<sup>95</sup> As Samir Weiner asserts, "the supra-class, cross-ethnic aspect of the myth provided the polity with a previously absent integrating theme and folded large groups previously excluded into the body politic."<sup>96</sup> A strong case for the fusion of differences came out of the war; the effect was, indeed, a platform in the collective memory that supported a much wider and inclusive imaginary of a socialist polity, which could assert the legitimacy of diverse groups and their respective identities without threatening the hegemonic state formation. In this way, socialist cultural institutions could promote an imaginary in which the agency awarded to the individuals under the overall direction of the state made cinematic engagement with the memories and imaginaries of armed struggle so powerful and yet, to the state, nonthreatening.

Cinema provided one of the symbolic spaces for such engagement not only nationally but also internationally: shown together and forming a shared representational space at a festival like Tashkent, these films articulated a vision of international cross-racial, cross-ethnic solidarity that dubbed over the once potent vision—in the 1920s and 1930s—of international proletariat solidarity. Cinema not only offered a powerful historical and political education for viewers but functioned in many cases as a direct call for action in support of ongoing armed struggles—as well as justifications for external military aid. In its shared historiography, it proposed a general narrative of the postcolonial condition that put it in the historical trajectory of socialist development (albeit one that granted the Soviet side a privileged position). In the case of Japanese cinema, it provided the socialist world with a rare intervention in the cinema of nuclear weaponry, which, in socialist discourse, was an omnipresent threat yet one oddly absent from visual culture. Finally, cinema provided a living form of commemoration; unlike, say, an architectural monument or a parade, cinema was narratively saturated enough to reflect the shifting ideologies of real life—both on terms dictated by state power and in those written by the agency of the people, whose real experiences were legitimized onscreen. There, experiences—both traumatic and, at times, empowering—were recapitulated, their aftermath teased out, enacting, at times, a genuine affective solidarity.

Yet the traumatic power of the war topos made it a complicated basis for the inevitable reconciliation with postwar needs, challenging not just the Soviet Union but all of the socialist world to build some kind of normality. The continuous—and enormously expensive—militarization had correspondingly enormous costs on psychic, social, and cultural life of the socialist world, manifested as an enduring excess of violence and military discipline that seemed to give no place for peacetime, while exacting a high human toll in continual war-making. It was not only the Soviet Union that got caught up in an arms race. As my analysis of the centrality of the tropes of warfare and armed struggle to the cinemas far beyond the Soviet Union demonstrates—and as we are all sadly aware—this

predicament bedeviled Arab and African socialisms, too, with an elite predator class all too often developing in tandem with the military to exploit the wealth of new and supposedly socialist nation-states. The logic of war imposed on the postwar social organization meant that prisons served as a “natural” continuation of the military regime, putting the state’s elite increasingly at odds with the worldview and desires of its citizens—or, for that matter, with the emancipatory vision of Marx or Fanon. Overall, cinema’s continuous affirmation of the ethos of armed struggle and war’s immanence within the socialist world played a vital and malign role in normalizing violence and suffering—what Jean Franco in relation to Latin America refers to as “cruel modernity”—even as it was intended to combat it.<sup>97</sup> When different forms of “progressive” armed struggle, from partisan struggle to popular revolt, were domesticated in the form of the socialist “people’s army,” with its own infrastructure and interests, it quickly absorbed individual and collective agency into the body of the state (of which the military is the representative), thus legitimizing a permanent state of emergency that empowered the most violent—paradoxically, reproducing the very conditions that popular insurgencies had originally revolted against.

## CONCLUSION

The prioritization of war and militarization had an enormous impact on the lives of the citizens of the socialist bloc, as well as on international geopolitics in the 1970s. The fate of socialism in Bangladesh as I have sketched it is just one example: although massive Soviet military support was crucial for Bangladesh’s victory, the famine that devastated the country after the war proved of little concern to the former allies. Thus, during the first four months of its existence, Bangladesh received economic aid worth US\$142 million from India, but only US\$6 million from the Soviet Union. Eventually, Indian aid decreased dramatically, leaving the newly independent country still devastated, providing further motivation for the fickle leaders to look for political and economic alliances elsewhere. All over Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the 1970s, the money to solve such problems came increasingly from loans offered by the IMF and the World Bank. These loans came with conditions. Thus, in building crippling international debts into the very foundations of the new struggling economies, the stage was set for ferocious privatizations, freezing of wages, and a flow of money out of Third World countries into First World banks. Domestically, the leadership turned their economic priorities toward neoliberal reform.<sup>98</sup>

By the late 1970s, the Soviet Union was the largest supplier of arms, military and intelligence training, and energy products to the Global South, virtually replacing all other forms of aid to Asia, Africa, and Latin America (with the exception of education and professional training). Yet this proved to be as ineffective as it was unsustainable. By the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union’s military budget

was approximately \$200 billion, at least \$100 billion less than the United States.<sup>99</sup> These numbers constituted less than 7 percent of the GDP of the US, whereas for the USSR, they added up to 15 percent of its economy, while the GNP, per capita income, and labor productivity were less than half of those of the United States.<sup>99</sup> Soviet interventionism infamously dead-ended in the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Over the course of the 1980s, internationalist rhetoric within the Soviet bloc was replaced with competing nationalist discourses, while its aid programs withered away. As so many scholars have argued, the Afghan war precipitated the collapse of the USSR, the end of the socialist bloc, and the Cold War; but this end did not bring us closer to world peace. Instead, as Samir Amin, a lifelong, fierce critic of Soviet state socialism and one of the leading intellectuals of the Third World(ism), concludes in his personal memoir-cum-political-history of the twentieth century, with all its failures, moral and political, rather than enforcing a Cold War bipolarity, Soviet-led socialist internationalism enabled “from 1945 to 1990 a ‘multipolar’ organization of the world.”<sup>100</sup> The socialist cinemas of armed struggle, the outlines of which I have drawn here, provide us with a powerful record of this multipolar world—a body of work that fully reflected and, in many cases, attempted to negotiate many of its key internal contradictions, conflicting agendas, and shared aspirations. The same is true, more generally, of the broader subject of this book—world socialist cinema of the late Cold War period, into which the Tashkent festival provided a particularly effective aperture.

Not many of the films mentioned or discussed here have achieved global circulation in our present day—as evidenced by the lack of subtitles, whether official or fan-made, available even when one locates copies of the films themselves. Some are lost together with the whole archives of their countries. Others continue to be watched around the world—in some places and times as nationalist propaganda or as objects of nostalgia; in others as kitsch or objects of ridicule; in still others as illustrations of communist propaganda and documents of atrocities; and in still others as a source of political inspiration. To me, as time goes on, they continue to present endless moral and political dilemmas, whose ongoing relevance urges us to seek an alternative to a post-Cold War triumphalist narrative that has done nothing to address these dilemmas—in fact, has obscured them. To undo the epistemic regime of the Cold War, whose political rhetoric is still predominant within both former superpowers and whose effects impact the rest of the world daily, we have to interrogate this history. And like much of history, interrogation often provides fewer answers than questions. But world socialist cinema continues to offer a unique archive and record of that history, a record that we can turn to in our ongoing collective task of making sense of this past—as we continue to seek new alliances, affinities, and solidarities of the global present.