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Nationhood, identity and the Russian state in contemporary Russian film

The fight against state corruption has been high on the political agenda since Vladimir Putin first came to power in 2000, yet corruption persists today as a core threat to Russia's infrastructure and Russians' quality of life. The lack of real progress in fighting institutionalised corruption in Russia and the societal consequences of this has been reflected upon in recent Russian cinema. Between 2013-2014, three seminal films were made, each directly addressing the devastating effect of state corruption upon individuals and their local communities. These films are: *A Long and Happy Life* (Khlebnikov, 2013), *Leviathan* (Zviagintsev, 2014) and *The Fool* (Bykov, 2014).

These three films do more than hold a spotlight on the widely-discussed issue of corruption in post-Soviet Russia. Firstly, this paper will show that these films actively condemn a post-Soviet value system based on self-aggrandisement, greed and rampant individualism. Secondly, it will demonstrate that these films imagine a Russian nationhood built upon values of collectivism and altruism, which are strongly rooted in Christian ideology and iconography. This positive vision of Russian nationhood is achieved through the cinematic aesthetics employed, and these films frequently draw upon Christian iconography and biblical narratives to simultaneously other the state and to encourage spectatorial identification with the victimised protagonist. For example, two of these three films- *The Fool* and *A Long and Happy Life* - visually and narratively figure the protagonist as the Holy Fool (a familiar trope of Russian culture) in order to both present a challenge to the status quo of self-interest and corruption and to encourage Christian notions of altruism and loving thy neighbour. *Leviathan* similarly draws on Christian imagery, figuring the protagonist as a modern-day Job and the Russian State as the eponymous Leviathan, a terrible and omnipotent creature of the Bible. A crucial aspect to *Leviathan* is the total condemnation of the Russian Orthodox Church for its utter venality and collusion with the Russian State, yet this film's overarching narrative and cinematics are permeated with Christian iconography. Overall, these films present the conflict of the state and the "ordinary" individual as a battle of good and evil that is couched in Christian terms. Ultimately, these films demonstrate that in the Russian cultural imaginary, nationhood remains a contested concept; it is a battleground not a *fait accompli*, despite President Putin's recent claim that only patriotism is, and can be, Russia's national idea.