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FILM REVIEW

Like Dew in the Sun, directed by Peter Entell. 2016, 108 minutes. In Russian, Ukrainian, and English with English subtitles. Contact: Evgeniya Chulkova, Antipode, festivals@antipode-sales.biz. Webpage: https://www.asnconvention.com/like-dew-in-the-sun. Shown at the ASN 2018 World Convention.

Like Dew in the Sun is arguably one of Peter Entell's most personal films yet. In this film, Entell, a U.S.-born filmmaker living in Switzerland, travels to Ukraine in 2014 to search for his grandparents' village. In 1914, Entell's Jewish grandparents fled Russia's pogroms in Ukraine and found refuge in the United States. As Entell travels to Ukraine to understand the war that drove his grandparents out, he finds himself in the middle of another war.

On his journey, he meets an elderly Crimean Tatar, a survivor of Stalin's 1944 deportation. A sense of deep historical connection transpires between these two unlikely interlocutors: like Entell's Jewish grandparents, this Crimean Tatar's family were removed from their homes by Russian imperialists. The man's stories are interlaid with video footage from Crimea today. A vibrant festival brimming with yellow-and-blue colors celebrating the heritage of the Crimean Tatars is juxtaposed with Russian flags and Soviet paraphernalia. The absurdity of modern day Crimea is not lost on the viewer.

Entell continues his journey eastward, where pro-Russian separatists and Ukraine's national forces are engaged in intense fighting. Traveling through checkpoints, Entell meets a young Ukrainian commander. This bright man with a disarming smile seems to have transitioned from a civilian to a combat-ready soldier without notice. As a Russian-speaking Ukrainian with family in Russia, the officer shares the need to rid Ukraine of the foreign aggressor, but not "break communication with the Russians."

The film then takes us to "the other side"—the pro-Russian separatists. Scenes of blood, violence, and torture are graphic and sickening. We later learn that videos featuring pro-Russian separatists were taken from various YouTube channels.

As the film elegantly switches between multiple story lines, the viewer may be challenged to piece it all together. The two themes that stood out to me were historical continuity and the construction of national identity. Entell skillfully unpacks Ukraine's history as a cycle of war. This cyclicity is, in no small measure, a product of our collective memory, composed of human stories. With artful delicacy, Entell blends story with history. His family stories hold memories that string together generations and create interconnectivity across time and distance. William Faulkner's prophetic saying, "the past is never dead, it's not even past," opens the documentary. By reconnecting with his family's past, Entell is seeking closure in the present, and creates continuity for the future. "[I will] mix this with my ashes when the time comes"—whispers Entell as he collects dirt from a Jewish cemetery into a Ziploc bag.

Entell shows that there is no evolution in history: "So much fighting, so much suffering here, so many conflicts here in Ukraine. Why?"—He asks the commander he had befriended earlier. This young officer doesn't know the answer. What he does know is that the time for change has come and every ordinary Ukrainian plays a role in defending their country and writing its history. Entell skillfully punctuates messages of historical continuity with images of World War II memorials: like shadows of the past, they stand as permanent reminders of the irreversible damage of war.

With artful perception, the film also showcases the formation of national identity: people's fervent obsession with the flag, the land, and the anthem—on both sides—is unmissable. Entell's

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acute observations are backed by voluminous research that suggests that under conditions of uncertainty, people begin to more intensely identify with their in-group, formed on the basis of ethnicity, language, or religion. But it's not only the *experience* of war that leads to the intensification of national identity, but also the *memory* of war. The current war in Ukraine will shape the collective memory and identity of future generations, the way Jewish pogroms of 1914 shaped Entell's. And much like Entell who, 100 years later, is struggling to piece together his past and identity, descendants of the current war victims will continue to search for answers even 100 years from now.

Among many documentaries about Ukraine's violent past and present, what makes this film stand out is its rather balanced portrayal of the warring factions within Ukraine, and emphasis on their humanity. It presents each side as passionate and self-righteous. Each side believes that God, history, and justice are on their side. Each side has been dehumanized, humiliated, exploited, and violated. As the film flashes images of dead bodies scattered outside their homes and survivors wailing by their side, it makes it clear that the damage is done by Ukrainian military and separatists alike. Entell shows that modern day war is as dehumanizing, senseless, and destructive as it was 100 years ago. Many scholars contend that conflict de-escalation begins with the understanding that neither side has a monopoly on virtue. In my opinion, Entell was effective in driving that point home.

The film's main shortcoming, in my view, is its rather nebulous portrayal of the current Russo-Ukrainian war. After watching the film, one might assume that the current conflict in Ukraine is a civil war. "Here on this land, torn between east and west, people have been at war for thousands of years"—says the caption. At the same time, a Ukrainian soldier interviewed by Entell insists that Ukrainians "don't want to have war." "But they kill each other all the time!"—exclaims Entell. With disarming naiveté, the soldier retorts, "Not all the time, only the last three months." There is nothing about his disposition that suggests sarcasm. To Entell's point, it is true that Ukraine has never been truly independent, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that Ukrainians have been fighting amongst themselves for "thousands of years."

The war in Donbas is not a civil war: given the scope of Russia's financial and military support to the separatists, it is a hybrid, interstate war. With that in mind, Entell's portrayal of the pro-Russian separatists as local fanatics fighting for *their* motherland "Novorossiya" can be misleading. "Novorossiya" is a part of a much more ambitious project—Eurasionism—which seeks to reestablish Russian hegemony over most of the former Soviet Union; the pro-Russian separatists are mere pawns in that game.

The film offers little insight into the causes of the current war in Ukraine besides platitudes about violent human nature and perpetual war. As the film concludes, fatalism prominently emerges as an overarching theme. In this context, the meaning of the current war seems to be reduced as a mere data point in Ukraine's history of continual suffering.

While one should not expect to learn a great deal about the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war from this film, one is sure to walk away moved by the historical continuity of suffering in Ukraine. One will also feel a renewed sense of connection with and curiosity about her past and an acute awareness of shared destiny with peoples at war.

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