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## **THE POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ASPECT IN THE CINEMATOGRAPHY OF THE USSR AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ON THE EXAMPLE OF FILMS ABOUT WAR**

### **Abstract**

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*The author explores the political and ideological aspect of films about the created in the USSR and the Russian Federation. It is explored on the basis of a survey conducted in Sochi, individual respondents from other regions of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus. The purpose of the article is to clarify the audience's attitude towards films about war and their political and ideological content. When writing the article, the methods of questioning, analysis and synthesis, comparative, survey, statistical and film-art hermeneutics were used. It is concluded that in the cinematography of the USSR, films about war performed the function of patriotic, political and ideological education of the population, but in the Russian Federation they are deprived of an ideological basis.*

**Keywords:** *Soviet cinema, Russian cinema, films about war, politics, ideology, film-art hermeneutics.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Cinema is an effective mass art. As a rule, it is associated with politics and ideology and is an instrument for ensuring the interests of state power. With the help of cinema, a large part of the population is quickly informed. Their attitude towards politicians and political parties, and state regimes is formed. Studying films about war is relevant because they influence relations between peoples and generations of citizens in one state, form norms of behavior and values. Soon, they become the subject of scientific and political discourse to identify historical truth. The propaganda and ideological content of films about war were not and are not excluded under any regime. In the modern world, there is a threat of destruction of the unified historical consciousness of the population of a state with the help of cinema. It leads to the weakening of peoples and states, facilitating the transformation of their territory into raw material appendages or markets for low-grade products of foreign countries. I. E. Mishchenko notes that at the beginning of the 21st century, "...the understanding of the events of the mid-20th century, in particular the Second World War, as a situation in which Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union must share historical and political responsibility for its outbreak; the countries of Europe – personal and, to some extent, civil responsibility for complicity in the crimes of the Nazi regime; the United States – to take upon itself the "burden of the victors" and the banner of the leaders of the new world" became relevant.<sup>1</sup> The problem of countering such trends, as well as the desire to objectively present the events of the Second World War, actualize the issue of the struggle for historical truth. It should be noted that in the USSR they attached great importance to the role of communists in public life. They showed the attractiveness and heroism of fighters for Soviet power even in comedy films. Masquerading as comedy films, some Soviet films conveyed great political and ideological information and carried out the political education of the masses. For example, the Soviet film comedy "Wedding in Malinovka" is a work of genius. It shows the moral and political superiority of people who fight for Soviet power, for justice and a bright future.

**The degree of knowledge of films** about the Great Patriotic War. It cannot be said that the analysis of films about the Great Patriotic War has not yet been the subject of special research by political scientists.

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<sup>1</sup> И. Е. Мищенко (2020), "Современное кино о войне: опыт сравнительного анализа европейских и российских кинофильмов", *Культура и цивилизация*, Том 10, № 6А, 67.

This was usually done by cultural scientists and art historians. Writing books and articles, making films about war is a responsible undertaking.

**Research methodology.** Research methods in the study of cinema can be: general (hermeneutic); general scientific (systemic, comparative); and specific scientific (historical, statistical, surveys, observations). The author conducted a survey of 799 students and teachers of the Sochi branch of Russian State University of Justice (the Ministry of Justice of Russia). Citizens of other regions of the Russian Federation and foreign countries (Republic of Belarus) also participated in the survey. The data obtained during the survey were analyzed to identify the influence of films about the Great Patriotic War on the ideological and political views of viewers, on people's behavior, to remove social contradictions.

The Victory Day of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War was celebrated for the first time in the USSR in 1965. After it, an active process of creating films about the war began.

During the Soviet period, the image of the victorious Soviet people was created. Writers, poets, cultural figures and, essentially, representatives of the cinematic arts worked. Soviet feature films: "Ordinary People", "Officers", "Liberation", "Father of a Soldier", "The Fate of a Man", "Battalions Ask for Fire", "And the Dawns Here Are Quiet", "Shield and Sword", "Seventeen Moments of Spring", "Resident Mistake" and others, showed the heroism of the Soviet people, the military, and employees of Soviet intelligence and counterintelligence agencies.

'Pure theory of cinematography' does not contain political and ideological assessments and is a rare phenomenon. Sergei Loznitsa noted that in cinema there is always a triumph of illusions. "...In any cinema – neither in the documentary nor in fiction – no reality exists."<sup>2</sup> We cannot completely agree with this thesis. Indeed, there is fiction in propaganda and feature films, especially when feature films are based on stories or novels. In scientific documentaries, which are considered by scientists as a historical source, fiction is minimal.<sup>3</sup>

Films about intelligence officers were carefully made: "Shield and Sword", "Seventeen Moments of Spring" and others. These films educate viewers today, and not just the generation of Soviet youth of the late 1960s and early 1980s.

<sup>2</sup> "Это не поиск подлинности, это поиск способа говорить" С Сергеем Лозницей беседует Алексей Гусев, *Сеанс*, № 83. 2022, 65-66.

<sup>3</sup> See also: М. Ферро (1993), "Кино и история", *Вопросы истории*, № 2, 47-57.; С. О. Егоров (2022), "Кино, история, идеология: возможные подходы к интерпретации кинотекста", *Исторический курьер*, № 5, 12.

The four-part feature film “Shield and Sword” (1968) were filmed at the Mosfilm studio. It was made with the participation of the Defa studio of the GDR and the Start studio of the People’s Republic of Poland by director Vladimir Basov. The author of the story was Vadim Kozhevnikov. The first episode, “Without the Right to Be Yourself,” shows the process of infiltrating the Soviet intelligence officer Alexander Belov under the name Johann Weiss (played by Stanislav Lyubshin) into German intelligence. The plot of the film is as follows: a young intelligence officer was assigned to a promising young man living in the Baltic States. He was the nephew of a high-ranking German officer (in the role of Heinrich Schwarzkopf’s nephew Oleg Yankovsky, who would later also turn out to be a Soviet intelligence officer). After repatriation to Poland, Heinrich helps Johann get a job as a driver in a taxi company, and then as a driver in intelligence. The second film, “Ordered to Survive,” and the third film, “Not Subject to Appeal,” contain a story about how an intelligence officer’s career progresses. He gains influence by working in an intelligence school and recruiting agents there. At the end of the fourth episode, “The Last Frontier,” I. Weiss leads the capture of a secret military plant and helps save prisoners of war working at the plant, doomed to death. I. Weiss receives a concussion and comes to his senses in the hospital. There is also a dubious scene in the film with A. Hitler, who is sympathetic to the often drinking young officer Heinrich Schwarzkopf. The Germans are shown as ideological warriors loyal to the Fuhrer. The audience liked the song “Where the Motherland Begins” performed by Mark Bernes in each episode.

The feature film **“And The Dawns Here Are Quiet”** (1972) directed by Stanislav Rostotsky was based on real events. Therefore, the film is still watched with interest in the 2020s. The film shows female anti-aircraft gunners, unprepared for combat with German Special Forces. They fight in difficult geographical terrain and die in the row. The main character of the film, Sergeant Major Vaskov, tried to save five of his subordinates, but he failed. The film shows short biographies full of difficulties and experiences associated with the Soviet regime and the war. The feature film was popular among Soviet television viewers.

The serial film “Seventeen Moments of Spring” (1973), directed by Tatyana Lioznova, tell the story of German Security Service officer Max Otto von Stierlitz. Actually, he is a Soviet intelligence officer, Colonel Maxim Maksimovich Isaev, who was introduced into Germany back in the 1930s. The role of Stierlitz was brilliantly played by Vyacheslav

Tikhonov. The 12 episodes of the film show the events that took place in the last months of the war from February 12 to March 24, 1945. When the top German leadership realized that the war was lost, they sought contacts with the allies (the USA and Great Britain). Stierlitz is often on the verge of failure. The real activity of an intelligence officer is apparently not as easy as in the movies. The film also adequately portrays German officers and generals. In the summer of 2023, this film was shown in connection with the 50th anniversary of its release.

In the feature film "Only Old Men Go to Battle" (1973) there are many plausible episodes from the life of military pilots who died very often. This was achieved because the main consultant of the film was Hero of the Soviet Union, Lieutenant General S. I. Kharlamov. The consultant was Honored Military Pilot of the USSR A. I. Ivanov. Performance of the songs "Carved curly maple leaf", "Dark-skinned woman", "I'll get up before dawn today", "It's not a month, it's dawn, it's clear!" and others made the film light-hearted. These songs were often broadcast on the radio. The screenwriter and also the main character Leonid Fedorovich Bykov in the role of Hero of the Soviet Union, commander of the "singing squadron." The regiment commander Alexei Titarenko (Maestro), utters several phrases: "Who said you needed to give up singing in war?" It became popular among the people. Also popular at one time were the following phrases: "Away from the gun" (go away), "Away from the authorities, closer to the kitchen." The film claims to promote internationalism. The heroes of the film are representatives of different nationalities of the USSR: Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Uzbeks. The film reflects the patriotic feelings of Ukrainians. Question from L. F. Bykov to his fellow soldiers: "What did you see today?" His answer: "They fought over Ukraine. ...The air is different here." The film shows the care of elders over the young. In the episode of handing over party tickets to young members of the CPSU (b), the secretary of the party committee says the enemy cannot be underestimated. He asks the main character (L. F. Bykov): "Do you want to say something?" Answer: "No. I do not know how. I'll tell you better in battle." The characters in the film try explaining and educate by personal example. The manifestation of heroism and nobility can be seen in the episode when the pilots wrote a leaflet in German. They challenged the best German pilot to an honest fight in a one-on-one air battle. The role of regiment commander L. F. Bykov was played well. This is indeed typical for persons who have gone through all the stages of their career.

The five-part epic film directed by Yuri Nikolaevich Ozerov (1921 – 2001) “**Liberation**” (1970-1972) tells the story of the outstanding historical role of the USSR in the victory over Nazi Germany. The film was made jointly with the GDR. The script was based on the memoirs of Marshal of the Soviet Union G. K. Zhukov. The first film, “Arc of Fire” (1968), was dedicated to the Battle of Kursk (July 5 – August 23, 1943). The situation is shown in the headquarters of the German command led by Adolf Hitler. The role was played by the actor from the GDR Fritz Dietz and in the Soviet headquarters of the Supreme Commander I. V. Stalin. In this film I. V. Stalin pronounces his response to the proposal to exchange his son, who is in German captivity, for Pauwels: “I am not exchanging a soldier for a field marshal.” Stalin gave orders to liberate large cities on famous Soviet holidays. In Soviet times, this had ideological significance.

The second film, “Breakthrough” (1968), has an episode when a regiment is sent to hold the bridgehead. This film showed the heroism and genius of Marshal of the Soviet Union G. K. Zhukov. The leaders of the allied states are shown: I. V. Stalin, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill at the Tehran Conference when discussing the issue of opening a second front. The third film, “The Direction of the Main Attack” (1970), shows the events that took place after the defeat of the Germans in Stalingrad and at Kursk. The liberation of Belarus is shown. The fourth film, “The Battle of Berlin” (1971), is one of the best films about the war. Soviet soldiers liberated the territory of the USSR, and now they are fighting for the liberation of Poland and Warsaw. Events take place in Germany. The film shows G. K. Zhukov (played by M. Ulyanov), who plays the harmonica. The film shows the leaders of the Allied states at the Yalta Conference, but also Soviet soldiers.

After the epic “Liberation” Yu. N. Ozerov directed the two-part film “Soldiers of Freedom” (1977). At the beginning of the first episode, it is said that the film will show two years of the fight against fascism in Europe: in Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland. The fight was under the leadership of the communists. At the beginning of the film, the words of I. V. Stalin are spoken. He said that with the victories of the Red Army in European countries the growth of the anti-fascist movement is intensifying. The epic film shows the role of communists in organizing the anti-fascist and partisan movement. Field Marshal Pawels’ conversation with the leader of the German communists, Wilhelm Pieck, was too overplayed. V.

Pick's proposal to Pauwels to fight against Hitler is ignored. The scene when the communist leader V. Pick and Pauwels came out to the captured German soldiers is shown in contrast: a beautifully and cleanly dressed field marshal and frozen and hungry German prisoners of war.

The second film begins with showing events in Bulgaria, telling about the struggle of the Bulgarian communists and partisans. The defeat of the partisan detachment, the scene of the execution of the Bulgarian general and the Soviet intelligence officer (Russian by mother) Vladimir Zaimov (1888-1942) are shown. His courage lies in the fact that he refused to be executed wearing a mask and himself directed his execution on June 1, 1942. Subsequently, General V. Zaimov was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union posthumously. The leader of future Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, is also shown. He refused W. Churchill's offer to cooperate with the Yugoslav Tsar Peter. The idea is expressed that after the war the people themselves will decide what form of government in Yugoslavia will be: a monarchical, republican or Soviet republic.

It is shown how, before the New Year of 1944, people in Warsaw dream of a new Poland. Much has been said about the Warsaw Uprising. A military meeting of the front headquarters is shown. It is noted that the rebels have chosen a bad time, since the Red Army is having difficulty repelling attacks in the vicinity of Prague. All troops participate in battles. At this time it is impossible to start a new operation. The leader of the Warsaw Uprising, General Komarovsky, was subordinate to the Polish government in London. Poles are shown fighting and living in a besieged city: burying the dead and registering marriages. Komarovsky refuses to meet with the Soviet captain and entrusts negotiations with him to his deputy with no authority. At a time when the troops of the first Belorussian Front were making their way to Warsaw, General Komarovsky signed an act of surrender on September 30, 1944. The rebels capitulated. During the Warsaw Uprising, 200,000 Poles died, and the Germans sent the rebels who surrendered to concentration camps. The First Polish Army, formed in the USSR, entered the defeated Warsaw in January 1945. Warsaw is later liberated by the Red Army. During the capture of Warsaw, 17,348 Soviet soldiers and officers died. In total, 600,000 Soviet soldiers died during the liberation of Poland.

Soviet cinema was influenced by the principle of "socialist realism." Therefore, reality was presented in a distorted form: communist theory and its bearers were extolled; and the lifestyle of its opponents, class enemies, was belittled and caricatured. In films about the Great



Patriotic War, it was necessary to show the heroism of the fighters for their homeland. It became clear to ideologists that films about war influence relations between peoples and states, generations of people, form norms of behavior and values. Documentaries and historical films can become the subject of scientific discourse and the identification of historical truth.

## **FILMS ABOUT THE WAR OF THE PERIOD OF “PERESTROIKA” AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

Unlike Soviet films before 1985, films from the perestroika period and Russian cinema formed a negative attitude towards the era of Stalinism. Vitaly Kurennoy noted that in the films “Cadets”, “Penal Battalion” (2004) “... one ideological line can be traced very confidently and stably. It is associated with the condemnation of the Soviet state security agencies. At the same time, in a number of episodes, the viewer is clearly made to understand that the fascists are less terrible people than the NKVD officers.”<sup>4</sup>

Russian cinema of 1992-2024, a time of triumph for detective stories, has not yet created films that Russian citizens would enjoy watching and reviewing. The six-part film “Life and Fate” based on the novel of the same name by Vasily Grossman were released on October 14, 2012. The novel was banned in the USSR for a long time and was published in 1988 almost 30 years after the death of the author.

Films about the wars of 1985-1991, 1992-2013 and 1914-2023 are not convincing. They have not fulfilled and do not fulfill the political and ideological functions of the modern Russian state. In the Russian Federation, after 1993, cinema began performing an entertainment function.

If in films of the perestroika period and Russian films before 2013 the activities of the Soviet state security agencies were denigrated. Then in films after 2013 they tried glorifying it. But in the absence of state ideology this could not be achieved. Although they watch with interest the film “SMERSH” (2018-2019, 2022) about the work of counterintelligence officers. Documentary films and films promoting the activities and ideas of the head of state and films that form a positive or negative assessment of events and famous politicians have become important. Ideas of Russian cinema 2000-2023 are: the fight against terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and organized crime. One of the most successful

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<sup>4</sup> В. Куренной (2009), *Философия фильма: упражнение в анализе*, Москва, 232.



was the film “Height” about the events of 2000 in the North Caucasus, showing the heroism of the Pskov paratroopers.

Even after 80 years, interest in the events of the Great Patriotic War on the part of writers, poets, and film workers continues to this day. During the start of the Special Military Operation on February 24, 2022, interest in war films and especially in Soviet films increased significantly. The theme of war has great political and ideological significance in the struggle for historical truth. In European cinema, they want to present the image of the Soviet soldier-liberator as a conqueror.

In Soviet and Russian films, “...a military man is an almost mythological hero. He is a defender who fulfills his duty and does not fulfill a contract. The level of his professional training does not play a role, since his training is almost metaphysical in nature. He is prepared by the entire Russian history and culture.” Therefore, “modern European cinema, when released into Russian film distribution, broadcasts, if not directly harmful, then at least ideas and experiences alien to the Russian viewer.”<sup>5</sup>

In the cinema of the USSR after 1965, the theme of the Great Patriotic War was dominant. Soviet films about the war can be classified into groups: scientific-documentary, documentary, feature, feature-documentary and propaganda. Only scientific and documentary most accurately reflect historical events. Fiction and artistic-documentary films, openly or covertly, are of an ideological and propaganda nature. They reflect the interests of certain government bodies, a political party, a nation, or a group of people.

In the Russian cinema of 1992-2023, the themes of the fight against crime and terrorism dominated. The impulse in development in Soviet and Russian cinema in the 2000s occurred on the eve of anniversaries and other events (battles).

A survey of 799 students and teachers of the Sochi branch of Russian State University of Justice (the Ministry of Justice of Russia) was made. 88.6% of respondents were under 22 years old. The survey showed that 51.3% prefer to watch comedies, 48.1% action films. Among the Soviet films, the ones I liked most were “And The Dawns Here Are Quiet” and “Only Old Men Go to Battle,” but 271 out of 799 respondents had not watched a single Soviet film about the war. Soviet films were recognized as the most truthful films about the war (noted by 590 people, 75.8%). To the question “Whose interests were reflected in Soviet films

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<sup>5</sup> И. Е. Мищенко (2020), “Современное кино о войне: опыт сравнительного анализа европейских и российских кинофильмов”, *Культура и цивилизация*, Том 10. № 6А, 72.

about the Great Patriotic War?” 40% found it difficult to answer, 31% answered – the majority of citizens, 18% – the policies of the governing bodies of the Communist Party, 6% – the interests of government bodies, 5% – the interests of a group of people.

To the question: “Should films be ideological and propaganda in nature?” only 12% answered “yes,” 35% answered “no,” 22% answered it didn’t matter. 31% were undecided.

To the question: “Can war cinema be outside of politics and ideology?” 39% “yes”, 23% “no.” 38% found it difficult to answer.

The data presented indicate that films produced in Soviet times, not overly ideological or politicized, are successful even among modern Russian citizens. The data includes young people under 20, who recognized Soviet films as being of the highest quality and most truthful. Those Soviet films that were overly ideological and politicized (“Liberation”, “Soldiers of Freedom”) did not have the same success as films of a lighter genre. Soviet cinema was influenced by the principle of “socialist realism.” It truthfully depicted the heroism of fighters for the homeland and did not extol communist theory and its bearers. It did not caricature the images of military opponents and class enemies during the Great Patriotic War. That is the reason why these films are still interesting to watch, and they represent the gold standard of Soviet cinema.

*Translated by Dajana Lazarević*

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