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FILMS AND SERIES AS INSTRUMENTS OF GEOPOLITICS

Abstract

Cinematography plays the role of one of the instruments of geopolitics. That is why, according to some researchers, many governments are interested in maintaining the level of global popularity that this industry has. They additionally provide it with appropriate assistance. It is worth emphasizing that the United States of America is leading in this regard with a specific mechanism of state control of cinematography.

As an instrument of US geopolitics, American cinema demonstrates a visible influence on the minds of the foreign public. Eric Fator, a professor of political science at Colorado State University who specializes in the relationship between geopolitics and international political influence, uses terms like “arsenal of entertainment” and “militarization of culture”. They refer to the American leadership in the modern world order. In other words, it is about turning culture into a geopolitical weapon.

Keywords: *Film, film industry, culture, militarization of culture, geopolitics, soft power, state.*

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Back in 1901, the book “The Laws of Spatial Growth of States” by Friedrich Ratzel appeared¹, in which the seven laws of expansion are singled out. The first is, of course, culture. (“The size of the state grows in proportion to the development of its culture.”)² His laws of expansion became a manifesto, i.e., they are applied in the geopolitical practice of the West. Of course, other non-Western countries also began to apply this law (Turkey with its series, the renewal of neo-Ottoman geopolitics³ and pan-Turkism⁴). However, perhaps the most obvious (idiotypic) example is Hollywood and the USA. This symbiosis was the basis of Americanization (both in culture and geopolitics) after World War II. Instrumentalization of culture for geopolitical purposes is also referred to as “soft power.”⁵ According to American political scientist Joseph Nye, who introduced this term, the language and culture of a country is “soft power.” It plays a key role in international relations, directly or indirectly influencing world politics and business relations.⁶

It is in this context that Željko Injac writes: “Hollywood films are becoming our new reality. With the stronger penetration of Western cinematography, it is safe to say that Western culture has become stronger and more present.”

Of course, it was not only Western cinema that made a cultural inroad into our spaces. There is also a theatrical, literary and musical

¹ The works of this author led to the emergence of “ratzelism”, a peculiar anthropogeographic direction, not only in Germany but throughout Europe at the time. See: Милорад Вукашиновић, Политичка географија Фридриха Ратцела, Културни центар Новог Сада, <https://www.kcns.org.rs/agora/politicka-geografija-fridriha-racela/> (accessed on 7/23/2023). Ratzel published 25 books and 518 articles. He was a doctor of science in the fields of zoology, geology and comparative anatomy, and became the founder of anthropogeography. See: Сепрей Проць, Фридрих Ратцель и его основные идеи, <https://yandex.ru/turbo/fb.ru/s/article/278668/fridrih-rattsel-i-ego-osnovnyie-idei> (accessed on 7/23/2023).

² Александар Дугин (2009), *Геополитика постмодерне*, Преводилачка радионица Росић, Никола Пашић, Београд, 14-15.; With it see: Aleksis Trud (2007), *Geopolitika Srbije*, Službeni glasnik, Београд. Also: Ф. Ратцель, <https://studme.org/393358/politologiya/rattsel> (accessed on 7/23/2023).

³ See: Зоран Милошевић, *Турска и неоосманизам*, Завод за уџбенике и наставна средства, Источно Сарајево, 2010.

⁴ See: Зоран Милошевић, *Турска и пантуркизам*, Удружење „Милош Милојевић”, Црна Бара, 2021.; Зоран Милошевић, Рађање новог Турана, *Печат*, бр. 592, 1. новембар, 2019, 37-39.

⁵ The term “soft power” was first coined by Harvard professor Joseph Nye in a book published in 1990: *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. He then developed the term in another book published in 2004: *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* and the article “Soft Power and US-European Relations”.

⁶ See: Т. В. Андрианова (2001), *Геополитика и культура*, РАН, Институт научной информации по общественным наукам, Москва.

scene. It was during this period that harder musical rock styles appeared, like Heavy Metal, Hardcore, Skins and others. Nevertheless, the culture of the West was most directly and clearly reflected in the East through film art. The meager socialist realist art, with the post-Christian tradition of Eastern Europe, was not strong enough to resist the penetration of “superior” (actually, merely well-designed, and richly financed) Western culture.

Before the arrival of NATO troops in Eastern Europe, it was already heavily influenced by Western culture. The process of neocolonialism in Eastern Europe is similar to what had come to pass centuries before: first, when tribes in America and Africa were visited by missionaries; second, by traders; and finally by the army and bureaucracy that finally formed the colonies. Cultural penetration was actually only the first phase of neocolonialism.”⁷

For the effectiveness of the geopolitics of a specific country, it is extremely important to be able to reach a wide audience, to convey a specific message to as many people as possible. In this sense, films and series are a very effective instrument because they have a large viewership and political influence, and lately other countries are trying to catch up with the Americans. Nevertheless, the USA is the world leader in terms of films and series (that’s why we will have a particular focus on this cinematography in this paper). The list of the ten largest film studios proves that.⁸ They are: Lionsgate, Miramax Films, Dream Works, Sony Pictures, Paramount Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Columbia Pictures, Universal Pictures, Warner Bros and Walt Disney Company.

Also, films made by these studios are extremely popular in the world. Their list and rating also prove it.

⁷ Жељко Ињац, Култура страха, <https://www.kcns.org.rs/agora/kultura-straha/> (accessed on 7/26/2023).

⁸ Топ-10 крупнейших киностудий мира: рейтинг лучших кинокомпаний, <https://lindeal.com/rating/top-10-krupnejshikh-kinostudij-mira-rejting-luchshikh-kinokompanij> (accessed on 7/23/2023).

WHERE ARE THE WORLD'S MOST PROFITABLE FILM STUDIOS LOCATED?⁹

Rank	Country	Earnings (in billions of US dollars)
1.	USA and Canada	11.4
2.	China	6.6
3.	Great Britain	6.5
4.	Japan	2
5.	India	1.9
6.	France	1.6
7.	South Korea	1.5
8.	Germany	1.1
9.	Australia	0.9
10.	Mexico	0.8

In terms of the importance of American films and series, Europe is actually a cultural colony of the USA. That is because 66% of the sales of films in European countries are films of American production. Therefore, the share of billing for EU film products on the EU market, respectively, was 27%, according to the latest data. Also, half of the films available in the European Union within the video-on-demand system are American films. We are referring to individual delivery of television programs and films to the subscriber via digital cable, satellite or terrestrial television network. Films and series shot in the USA account for 45% of all feature films broadcast on European television.

In the ranking of the TOP 10 most popular films in Europe in recent years, all but one film was shot by American film studios.¹⁰ The exception was the film C. Nolan's "Dunkirk", which was jointly published by the Americans, the British and the French. In general, Hollywood's profits from the distribution of films abroad increased significantly during the 20th and early 21st centuries. In the 1920s, it accounted for only 20% of the total income, in 2006 it was already 63%, and in 2018 it was 71%. All these facts suggest that despite the occasional dissatisfaction with American foreign policy, American culture continues to be attractive to people around the world. Before turning directly to the

⁹ Крупнейшие киноиндустрии мира, <https://ru.history-hub.com/krupneishie-kinoindustrii-mira> (accessed on 7/23/2023).

¹⁰ See: Европейские – 2022, <https://topnaroda.com/rating/kino/21059-evropejskie-2022.html> (accessed on 7/23/2023).

role of film in American geopolitics, and consequently, the system of its relations with American government agencies, it seems appropriate to understand why Hollywood productions are so popular in the world.

THE ABILITY TO “NARCOTIZE” VIEWERS

There are a number of factors behind the success of American cinema. **First**, globalization has played a role in strengthening the position of Hollywood: transnational corporations, the Internet, market integration and technological development. New opportunities have made it possible to increase production capacities and expand markets through transnational flows of people, capital, goods and services, as well as through new technologies. **Second**, a significant contribution was made by the imposition of the English language as a universal global means of communication.¹¹ **Third**, the success of American cinema is the result of both the financial capabilities of American film studios (incomparably greater than those of their foreign competitors) and the “style” of American cinema. However, these factors are closely related. Only the American film industry can afford to use the most famous and talented actors and use the most impressive special effects. It is these opportunities that allow Hollywood to maintain its reputation as the “dream factory.” The American film industry, as measured by the number of blockbusters, produces popular and commercially successful films for a wider audience. They tend to understand what mass audiences want better than their foreign competitors. Popular American films do not shy away from taking political positions or taking one side of the conflict when it comes to wars caused by America (for example Bosnia and Herzegovina¹²) or to the image of its geopolitical

¹¹ In his famous novel “1984”, George Orwell, in a series of principles of enslavement and mind control, derived the following law: whoever controls a person’s language controls their mind. In the vocabulary of geopolitics, this means that people whose countries have fallen under the “soft” (hegemony) or hard rule (military conquest) of a particular colonizer, either by grace or by force, have the obligation to learn the colonizer’s language. However, in order for the people to learn the colonizer’s language, it is necessary to suppress native language, as well as the language of its geopolitical allies. See: Зоран Милошевић, Руски језик у демократској Србији, <https://ruskidom.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ruski-ezik-u-dem.pdf> (accessed on 7/23/2023).

¹² Angelina Jolie’s engagement in Bosnia has a great geopolitical context. The film “In the Land of Blood and Honey” from 2012 caused strong reactions from the entire region. The geopolitical context is visible—denigration of Serbs and justification of American aggression against Serbs. See: Голливуд как инструмент геополитики США, <https://mt-smi.mirtesen.ru/blog/43388124202/Gollivud-kak-instrument-geopolitiki-SSHA> (accessed on 7/23/2023). About Jolie’s personality, see: Тяжелая

opponents (Russians and Chinese),¹³ where they introduce an open ideological message.

Nevertheless, Hollywood directors and producers attempt to focus on what is close and understandable to every person anywhere in the world. That's how people all over the world admire "Titanic" and "Gone with the Wind", which celebrate American values, while exploiting/manipulating the love story. This combination produces a desirable geopolitical effect, because the beauty of these films in the viewer's mind is "glued" to the image of the United States. This pattern is used by Turkey in its series today. **In this way, films and series become one of the elements that form a general impression of a country that most viewers have never had the opportunity to visit.**

The ability to establish such an emotional connection with the audience is due to the fact that American producers prefer not to separate art and entertainment. Many prefer American cinema due to the fact that the images are of "good quality" and simply "narcotize"¹⁴ (fix the view for the screen), allow the viewer to escape from reality and everyday problems for a while. The first is the result of financial possibilities, and the second is a conscious choice in favor of the "entertainment" aspect of cinema by the producers.

Big American film studios use their main tool, capital, to set the already mentioned standards of film production. As we said, it requires significant financial costs. It's not just that those producers who can't afford it will never "catch up" with Hollywood. It also means that, because of the need to secure profits, they will tend to avoid plots that are unusual for the viewer and therefore represent a commercial risk. Producer Robert Evans¹⁵ explains it by saying that no one "does anything unexpected, they are too afraid, the stakes are too high." Thus, the set of dominant base scenarios in which Hollywood is so successful is fixed in the minds of producers as the only one that enables success. And the same set remains the only one available to the consumer.

депрессия, наркотики и странная попытка суицида. Как живет и борется с внутренними демонами Анджелина Джоли?, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2023/06/04/jolie/> (accessed on 6/4/2023).

¹³ See: Зоран Милошевич, Спасители мира на желтых экранах, *Просмотр*, №7, 2012, str. 182-184.

¹⁴ That films and series contribute to the "narcotization" of viewers who "glue" their gaze to the screen is the subject of reasoned criticism. See: Подмена понятий и наркотизация с телеэкранов, <https://news-rbk.ru/exclusive/print:page,1,30351-podmena-ponyatiy-i-narkotizaciya-s-teleekranov.html> (accessed on 6/4/2023).

¹⁵ Василий Степанов, Роберт Эванс. Мистер Неотразимый, <https://seance.ru/articles/robert-evans/> (accessed on 6/10/2023).

At the same time, when the “popularity flywheel” of American cinema reached its peak, it is difficult to say whether the films still show exactly what the viewer wants to see, or whether the idea of an equal sign between Hollywood and the fulfillment of desires has simply solidified in the consciousness of society.

The main condition for consumption is the availability of goods. Consumption will depend on how widespread the product is, how visible it is. The film that is shown in all the malls is not doing well at the box office. The reason is the sudden wave of demand rising from the foundations of society, but only because it is heavily advertised. However, a film that is not produced by one of the largest Hollywood film studios and that falls outside the usual plot framework will never be able to afford an advertising campaign comparable to them in terms of scale. This creates a vicious circle. Hollywood’s financial resources allow it to effectively promote its films, which increases the demand for them. The growing demand increases the income of the already richest movie studios, giving them even more advertising space that will further increase the demand. In the beginning, it is almost impossible for a poor and unknown filmmaker in such a situation to break into the market, and even more so to compete with recognized leaders. That is, the current system actually blocks the alternative in the field of film, i.e., it enables the dominance of American cinema.

GEOPOLITICS AND FILM

Cinematography plays the role of one of the instruments of geopolitics.¹⁶ That is why, according to some researchers, many governments are interested in maintaining the level of global popularity that this industry has and provide it with appropriate assistance. However, it is worth emphasizing that the United States of America is leading in this regard with a specific mechanism of state control of cinematography.

As an instrument of US geopolitics, American cinema has a visible influence on the minds of the foreign public.¹⁷ The mass media instruments — films, commercials, cartoons and television programs — have become the main ones in terms of political influence. However,

¹⁶ Голливуд как инструмент геополитики США, <https://mt-smi.mirtesen.ru/blog/43388124202/Gollivud-kak-instrument-geopolitiki-SSHA>

¹⁷ Татев Дерзян (Tatev Derzyan), Кинематография как средство политического влияния, <https://enlightngo.org/language/ru/post/8173> (accessed on 7/24/2023).

the most important property of films, which allows them to be used as a means of propaganda, is their ability to influence people secretly and imperceptibly. The influence occurs mainly on an emotional level, outside the field controlled by the human mind. This is what helps to bypass the rational thinking of a person (the occurrence of emotional resonance). Emotional resonance is defined as creating a certain mood in a mass audience. It allows you to bypass psychological defenses on a conscious level, which try to protect themselves from advertisements, propaganda and all brainwashing methods. Emotional resonance is needed here, since her first rule is: "You need to influence a person on an emotional, not a conscious level."¹⁸

It is this ability of movies and series that leads to what professor **Eric Fator**, at Colorado State University analyzes. He specialized in the relationship between geopolitics and international political influence and uses terms like "arsenal of entertainment" and "militarization culture." Those terms refer to American leadership in the modern world order. In other words, it is about turning culture into a geopolitical weapon.¹⁹

To clearly see the impact of US geopolitics on Hollywood, let's consider two periods.

After the Second World War (1946-1991) in American films, the USSR was presented mainly as a world evil. The best example of such films is the "Rambo" series of films, which was one of the instruments of the Cold War.

However, in cinemas, the picture was completely opposite during 1943-1945. Then the USSR and the USA were allies. In the films of this time, the citizens of the USSR were presented as heroes. "Mission to Moscow" (directed by Michael Curtis, 1943) showed friendly relations between the USSR and the USA and was also shown in the USSR. It was based on the book by Joseph Davis, the American ambassador to the USSR. Already in 1947, the American Congress accused the film crew of spreading Soviet ideology and anti-American activities.

The key to the success of American leadership in the world is that it follows a combination of attitudes (spectacle) and technology. It represents the "arsenal of entertainment", the biggest number of which is made up of movies, series and cartoons. First of all, the film has the ability to relax the viewer's mind, to encourage him to surrender to the power of his own imagination to **weaken his ability to think critically**.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

In addition, film production can serve as a catalyst for changing the behavior of an individual or a group. It is used most often due to a conscious or unconscious desire to copy the lifestyle and habits of the main characters of a particular film or series.

Why is this so important to official Washington?

The current role of the United States in the world system is determined not only by having the greatest “power” compared to any other country. But it is also by the fact that **a significant number of countries directly or indirectly recognize the legitimacy of American dominance**.²⁰ Much of this recognition plays on the United States’ ability to distribute mass entertainment. It helps to dampen potential opposition to American influence in the world and maintain a positive image as the most powerful nation on the planet.

Contacts between the US government and Hollywood continued without a break even after the Cold War, despite the fact that the concept of a global ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union, within which the mechanism of relations was largely formed, lost its relevance. Like geopolitics in general, this direction has successfully adapted to the new foreign political reality, for example, the confrontation between the United States and Islamic terrorism. After the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, at least 40 top film industry executives met with Karl Rove, chief policy adviser to President George W. Bush. The meeting, which was initiated by the White House, was represented by almost all leading film studios and television networks, as well as the Motion Picture Association of America. Rove highlighted several messages that Hollywood needed to spread through its work: **“The US in Afghanistan is waging a war on terrorism, not Islam”**; “every member of society can help the army”; “American military and their families should be supported”; “the 9/11 terrorist attack requires a global response”; “this is the fight against evil,” and **“the government and Hollywood are responsible for making sure kids feel safe.”**

This highly unusual “planning meeting” was followed by another behind closed doors. The result was DC 9/11: “A Time of Crisis,” produced with the support in the form of a consultation of the White House, and featuring President George W. Bush Jr. After Hollywood’s consultation with Rove, Jack Valenti, then president of the Motion Picture Association of America, announced that it was Hollywood’s duty to convey

²⁰ See: Зоран Милошевић (2014), “Може ли Америка спасти светски поредак?”, *Печат*, бр. 338, 3. октобар, 46-49.

to Muslims around the world the message of the benevolent role of the United States: America “clothed and fed millions of people around the world without asking for anything in return. We have educated hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world at our universities.” Many short films and commercials were made to entice people to serve in the US military and cooperate with the CIA.²¹

The most famous examples of Hollywood involvement by government agencies in geopolitics are films produced with the support of the military or intelligence agencies. The US Department of Defense works closely with the “dream factory”. The film industry makes extensive use of tips and props provided by the military to reduce the cost of producing a film and make it more authentic. In return, the Pentagon, as a rule, receives scenarios that form a positive perception of the US Army in society and affect its attractiveness as an employer. Sometimes this amounts to a significant rewrite of the script and a review of the projections for senior officials. Of course, in the case of films whose plot does not coincide with the official American view of events related to military operations, the government and the military command refuse to help in the filming. For example, this happened with the film “Apocalypse Now” in 1979.

Examples of films made with the help of the Pentagon are “True Lies”, “Independence Day”, “Iron Man.” In these films the United States of America is presented as a fairly good force, and the manifestation of its military power abroad brings positive results for all humanity. In many of these films, the most Hollywood allows itself is to criticize American interference in the internal affairs of other countries. In other words, it allows a plot in which a plan based on purely good intentions can go wrong, and the Americans themselves become victims. It is obvious in the films “Black Hawk Down” and “Munich”. Also, cases of excessive use of military force can be criticized in the plot of the film, but not American military power and not the American army per se.

Most high-grossing movies assume the US military has every right to conduct military operations in any “trouble spot” on the planet it chooses. Films of this kind are often silent on the transnational global interests behind these operations, on who pays for them and who benefits. Also, the Pentagon does not allow scenes that discredit the US military: robberies, violence against civilians, and corruption in the military become

²¹ See: Зоран Милошевић (2018), “Ко контролише производњу филмова у Холивуду”, *Печат*, бр. 525, 21. јун, 44-47.

either random episode or a reason for refusing cooperation. When one of the most famous American producers, Jerry Bruckheimer (“Pirates of the Caribbean”, “Gone in 60 Seconds”, “National Treasure”, “Prince of Persia”), after the 9/11 attacks, was asked while making a documentary series about American troops in Afghanistan if they would agree to show a major military failure, he answered: “The Pentagon pointed to human rights violations.” If the US Department of Defense requests changes to the scenario in exchange for its assistance, the parties’ obligations are stipulated in a separate agreement. The technical advisor is responsible for ensuring the shooting takes place according to the agreed version of the script. After the completion of the filming process, the Ministry of Defense waits for a preliminary screening of the film to ensure there are no violations of the agreement. It may also make further recommendations at this stage.” According to one of the technical advisers, David Giorgi, “If they don’t do what I tell them, I’m going to take my ‘toys’ and leave.” In addition to refusing to provide the equipment, the Pentagon can also prohibit the use of information provided by the military and filming on the territories under its jurisdiction. Such measures can lead to significant financial losses and even to the interruption of the release of the film.

There is also a financial interest in Hollywood’s relationship with Washington. For example, John Bryson, the former US Secretary of Commerce in the administration of President Barack Obama, was simultaneously on the board of directors of the Walt Disney Company and the Boeing Company. Each of the Councils has a dozen members. It makes for a fairly direct connection between the world’s leading family film brand and the world’s largest manufacturer of military equipment. Lewis Coleman, who simultaneously held positions in the film studios Dream Works Animation SKG and in Northrop Grumman Corporation also held the American military-industrial company General Electric. That company invests in high-tech military aircraft, surveillance technologies, etc., and is closely associated with the US Department of Defense. Coleman was also the majority shareholder of Universal Studios until 2011.

During the Cold War, Hollywood’s ability to influence large audiences began to be actively used by the US Central Intelligence Agency.²² In the late 1990s, Frances Stonor Saunders, a British journalist and

²² Фильмы про ЦРУ, <https://likefilmdb.ru/list/filmy-pro-cru/> (films in which the CIA is advertised are, for example: “Mind Games”, “The Bourne Identity”, “Operation Argo”, “Cruel Measures”, “Agents of A.N.K.L.”, “Apocalypse Now”, “Anna”, “Mission Impossible”, “Access Code Cape Town”)...

historian, and David Eldridge, a professor at the University of Hull, discovered Cold War-era letters. Thanks to that discovery they proved regular correspondence between a Paramount studio employee and the CIA. The employee talked about what he achieved in promoting stories for this service. Eldridge suggested, based on a comparison of the contents of the letters and biographical facts, that Luigi Luraschi, a Paramount employee, was the head of censorship at Paramount Studios. Luraschi reportedly wrote in correspondence that he had succeeded in getting the consent of several casting directors to subtly introduce “properly dressed blacks” into films (1953).

In other films, at his suggestion, scenes of the questionable treatment of Native Americans by American authorities, especially with the Apache tribe in the Westerns of 1953, were cut. These changes in the scenarios were deliberately made to deprive the USSR of the opportunity to use them for its own purposes the downplay the negative experience of the United States in the matter of race relations. In addition, scenes in which Americans used alcohol were subjected to removal in several films.

Daryl Zanuck, co-founder and vice president of 20th Century Fox, was on the board of the National Committee for a Free Europe. This Committee was created in 1949 by the CIA to expand American influence in Europe and combat Soviet influence. S. D. Jackson, a former psychological weapons specialist at the Office of Strategic Services, which is a predecessor organization to the CIA, said Zanuck could easily “fit the right ideas” into scenarios. Michael Fitzgerald, a specialist in film and television history, in his analysis of Zanuck’s achievements, highlights his film “The Longest Day” (1962). According to Fitzgerald, in this film, he “absolutely erased the role of communists in the victory over fascism in Europe.”²³

In the 1950s, the CIA’s Office of Policy Coordination and the Board of Psychological Strategy successfully collaborated to acquire the rights to and invest in the production of the cartoon “Animal Farm”, based on George Orwell’s work of the same name. It should be clarified that from 1948 to 1952 the Political Coordination Division was the wing of the CIA responsible for covert operations. In 1952, it merged with the Office of Policy Coordination, which led to the formation of the Directorate for Planning. In turn it was renamed the Directorate for Operations in 1973.

²³ ЦРУ как продюсер: Фильмы и сериалы, к которым приложили руку шпионы, <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/media/article/2929513/> (accessed on 7/24/2023).

As for the second unit, the US Executive Committee (existed from 1951 to 1953), was in charge of psychological operations and propaganda. On the advice of the CIA, the ending of the animated film was modified to encourage revolutions against communist dictatorships. And after the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, under the patronage of the CIA, became aware of the film “1984”, there were changes to make “Big Brother” more associated with communism.

Corrections of this kind did not always just delicately shift the emphasis, sometimes they fundamentally changed the meaning of the work. In the story “The Quiet American” by Graham Greene, the main character, a CIA agent, is responsible for the bombings in Saigon. That is why he is killed by the communists. In the 1956 screen adaptation, the blame for the explosions fell on the communists, but they still killed the main character. This “correction” was made at the recommendation of CIA officer Edward Lansdale.

Intelligence officials are reluctant to share information about their involvement in the film’s production. According to D. Leeb, author of a book about the CIA’s role in the production of the cartoon “Animal Farm,” he has never been able to get “reasonable information” on the matter. Apparently, this department uses its influence in Hollywood less formally than the Pentagon. The CIA only opened its Entertainment Liaison Office in 1996. Its official mission is to ensure a positive image of the organization’s employees, who must be “portrayed in films as authentically capable, modern, brave and dedicated to public service.” The agency offers its assistance in achieving the greatest authenticity of the films. They answer questions, debunk myths, organize visits to the CIA headquarters and sometimes allow filming on their territory.

Employees in this division advise film producers. For example, Michael Frost Buckner, screenwriter of “The Agency” and “Spy Games,” said that his consultant Paul Berry often suggested plot twists aimed at scaring terrorists. The principle of cooperation, in this case, is the same as with the Department of Defense. The CIA offers its help, but in return expects its wishes regarding the script to be taken into account. Otherwise, the use of the given information may be banned.²⁴

Some studies confirm that films made with the support of the CIA have an impact on public opinion. A group of researchers led by University of Dayton professor Michelle Potz, interviewed respondents

²⁴ В интересах страны: как ЦРУ, Пентагон и правительство США влияли на кинематограф и массовую культуру, <https://dtf.ru/life/204819-CIA> (accessed on 7/25/2023).

before and after watching one of the films “Zero Dark 30” or “Argo.” They found that after watching the audience’s level of trust in the CIA, the US government and the White House increased. It’s same with the belief that the United States, in a political sense, is moving in the right direction. At the same time, after watching, about 30% changed their opinion about the aforementioned institutions to a more positive one.

For the film to serve as an instrument of geopolitics, the script does not have to center the US military or intelligence services, or even politics as such. It also does not need to have official agreements with the relevant departments. In any classic film plot, whether it is a comedy, a detective story or a melodrama, there are many details that work to maintain a positive image of the United States. Beautiful houses with lawns are a symbol of the well-being of the population; entrance doors with stained glass windows – a symbol of life safety; realizing the main character’s dream, because he believes in himself – a symbol of social justice, etc. In this regard, it is enough to recall the houses of the residents of the dysfunctional “black” neighborhood in Tillman’s film, “Stranger’s Hatred” (2018). There the film’s heroes “barely make ends meet”, and there are such moments in other films as well.²⁵

It is precisely such “allusions and metaphors” that make popular films a more effective tool for conveying ideas to the public than films with a “simple ideological message”. Leading filmmakers have learned to present questionable moments in a way that either minimizes their negative effect or neutralizes their significance. Negative factors are not excluded from the scenario, but are presented in a strictly defined manner. The injustice of officials, corruption, cruelty, indifference are presented as the actions of rare “black sheep”, which a just and highly moral society will inevitably punish.

In a large number of films, the problems of American politics are simply ignored. In their place stereotypical plots are planted that bring the most profit to the producers. At the same time, it cannot be said that no films are made that criticize American government institutions or even certain social phenomena. However, for several reasons, they do not interfere with the implementation of the geopolitical function of strengthening the positive image of the United States in the eyes of the foreign public.

²⁵ See: Бен Аффлек: «Голливуд полон агентов ЦРУ». Какие голливудские фильмы Пентагон и ЦРУ переписывали годами. https://dzen.ru/a/YlwPhkH_GlbLV36_ (accessed on 7/25/2023).

HOW THE GEOPOLITICAL OPPONENTS OF THE USA ARE PORTRAYED IN HOLLYWOOD FILMS

From its beginnings, Hollywood has acted as if it has a deed to historical truth, which it rewrites to suit the geopolitical interests of the West. This is why young people exposed to this kind of film production think the Americans defeated Hitler; the liberation struggle of Vietnam is a negative event; the Serbs and Russians are the usual villains, who are not discussed based on history books, but based on interests.²⁶

Thanks to the power they concentrated in their state, American (geo)politicians allowed themselves considerable “leaps” in labeling their opponents.²⁷ Even Hollywood did not resist this trend. Namely, it is known that this film industry used to announce through films and series who they would attack and those nations were portrayed as evil. Neither Serbs, nor Russians, nor numerous other attacked nations escaped this fate.

Responding to this misuse of “film art”, the daily newspaper “Politika” published an interesting article on this topic on August 11, 2022. “While every Serbian film, the few that were filmed, was greeted both in our own environment and in the Western world with condemnations due to “provocations” or with silence, there is no lie about the Serbs that has not been translated into a film or series. Every attempt to show the suffering of Serbs in the recent and distant past through a feature film or documentary, by our former fellow citizens in the common state, and by the majority of Western officials and the media, is declared as “outrageous Serbian propaganda”. The last example of such an attitude is the reaction to the showing of the trailer for the movie “Storm.” As much as they affect us, we ourselves contributed to them by forgetting and remaining silent in the name of “greater interests”. The rest was completed by Western propaganda during the

²⁶ See: Дејан Р. Дашић (2015), „Кинематографија као средство креирања негативних стереотипа о Србима”, *Социолошки преглед*, vol. XLIX (2015), no. 1, стр. 25–46, vol. XLIX, no. 1, 26.

²⁷ “Serbs are a people without law and religion. It is a nation of bandits and terrorists” (Jacques Chirac, former president of France). “Serbs are not particularly smart. Serbian children will no longer laugh” (Lawrence Ongleberger, US Secretary of State). “Serbs are criminal assholes” (Richard Holbrooke, US Assistant Secretary of State...). See Preface to the scientific work collection *Говор мржње и култура памћења*, приредили Зоран Милошевић и Милош Кнежевић, Институт за политичке студије, Београд, 2020, стр. 9 – 10. See also: Бранко Ковачевић, *Од говора мржње до „хуманитарних интервенција”*, у зборнику *Говор мржње и култура памћења*, приредили Зоран Милошевић и Милош Кнежевић, Институт за политичке студије, Београд, 2020, 64-125.

wars of the 1990s, then translated into dozens of films and series in which Serbs are exclusively criminals. Changing such a narrative will be a painstaking and long-term process”.²⁸

While “Dara from Jasenovac” was being shown on another, more influential Western channel, a film about the British journalist Mary Colvin, who died in the Syrian city of Homs in February 2012, was also shown. In that film, Colvin talks to a fellow journalist from a western agency, describing to him the horrors she saw while reporting from Afghanistan. Then he tells her about the “horror he witnessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” The man says how he saw “Serbs who took pictures with the severed heads of their opponents and were still proud of it”! The only photos from Bosnia and Herzegovina with severed heads were those taken by members of the “El Mujahedin” unit in Alija Izetbegović’s army. The heads are Serbian, but nobody cares about that.²⁹

Several episodes of the series “FBI” were also shown, in which a Serb plants explosives in the sneakers of a marathon competitor in an American city; also a Serb, who is part of a Serbian terrorist organization, and tries to carry out a nuclear terrorist attack... All of them are, of course, discovered in time and prevented. In the French film series “Alex Hugo”, a Bosniak woman recognizes a Serb in a respected French doctor. He took the surname of his French wife to cover up his crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is shown that he took organs from Serbian opponents and sold them! Tom Cruise’s “Mission Impossible 4” was also shown then... There were others, with less terrible “Serbian criminals”.³⁰

Another analysis also confirms the (mis)use of film art for (geo) political purposes. “The global news portrayed the Serbs as barbarians and insane ethnic cleaners. Certain Western intellectual circles raised such stereotypes to the rank of the concept of opposing the Serbs as the antipode of civilization. And the Hollywood film industry already had reserved roles for us.”³¹

The author of the same analysis states that “Since the early days of the development of the film industry, Hollywood’s world view through

²⁸ Српска „пропаганда” и холивудска „истина”, <https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/514138/Srpska-propaganda-i-holivudska-istina> (accessed on 7/26/2023).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Kada su Srbi postali negativci?, https://www.b92.net/zivot/pop.php?yyyy=2010&mm=09&d=28&nav_id=461527 (accessed on 7/26/2023).

its ‘products’ has projected, consciously or not, a particular vision of the world. The role of positivity was reserved for some phenomena or personalities, and the role of on-call villains for others.”³²

During the war against Nazism, the Hollywood machinery filmed the propaganda film “Chetniks – fighting guerillas”. Draža Mihailović was portrayed as a “modern Robin Hood”. In Yugoslavia, it was not possible to see how James Bond in the movie “From Russia with Love” had to deal with Tito’s spies, because of censorship. The cult spy film “The Mask of Demetrios” portrayed Belgrade as a decent European metropolis, while it portrayed Sofia as an oriental casaba.^{33 34}

The breakup of Yugoslavia and the civil war in the Balkans began their Hollywood life only in the middle of the ninth decade. Of course it was in full accordance with the interpretations of American and Western geopolitics. Not surprisingly, Serbs became movie villains overnight.³⁵

In the opening scene of the film “The Rock” (1995), which admittedly has nothing to do with the further action of the film, Nicolas Cage is an FBI explosives expert. He dismantles a bomb hidden in a children’s doll and sent by post by Serbs from Bosnia. In the movie “The Peacemaker” (1997), George Clooney and Nicole Kidman pursue a Bosnian Serb. He received a nuclear warhead from the Russian mafia and radical military factions and intends to detonate it in Manhattan.

Such a matrix soon begins to repeat itself in B-production films. Despite the fact that the Serbs did not show tendencies towards terrorism throughout the 1990s, they were often classified as terrorists.

Thus, in the film “Diplomatic Siege” (1999), the fictitious group Serbian Liberation Front takes hostages in the American embassy in Romania. They barter for Colonel Petar Vojnović, indicted for war crimes in The Hague. They are, of course, prevented from doing so by Hollywood film heroes. Even at the beginning of the new millennium, there was no change in the treatment of Serbs in Hollywood and other Western films.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ Of course, at that time Tito’s Yugoslavia was implementing Trotskyist policies, and Bulgaria was part of the USSR bloc. Therefore, sympathies were on the side of Yugoslavia. See: Зоран Милошевић, Ванда Божић, (Нео)троцкизам и његова историја као инструмент савремене геополитике, in the scientific work collection *Историја као инструмент геополитике*, приредио Зоран Милошевић, Институт за политичке студије, Београд, 2022, 89-139.

³⁴ Kasaba is a smaller provincial Muslim place of open type, whose population was mainly engaged in the city economy. – transl. note.

³⁵ Kada su Srbi postali negativci?, https://www.b92.net/zivot/pop.php?yyyy=2010&mm=09&dd=28&nav_id=461527 (accessed on 7/26/2023).

In the movie “Sniper 2” (2002), Tom Beringer is a professional marine-sniper. In a strange way, one scene irresistibly anticipates the assassination of March 12 of the following year. From an apartment opposite the Serbian government building on the stairs, he kills a Serbian general – a politician responsible for mass crimes in Kosovo.³⁶ We can, therefore, list a number of other films, but the message is the same.

At the same time, every film that shows Serbs in a positive light is criticized “because it undermines peace in the Balkans.”³⁷ Ana Manojlović cites the following films that portray Serbs as negative:

1. “Welcome to Sarajevo” – a war story in which a journalist and an American humanitarian from Sarajevo try to rescue a Muslim girl.
2. “Hunt for a Fugitive” – a story about a journalist trying to catch a war criminal.
3. “Peacemaker” – a film in which the Serbs want to plant an atomic bomb in the United Nations building.
4. Angelina Jolie’s film about the camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which Serbs mistreat Muslim women, completely fit into that story.³⁸

It is clear, therefore, that films are used as a means of geopolitical propaganda, in order to justify the policy of the West towards Serbia.³⁹

The Russians did not escape this narrative, but neither did numerous other nations.⁴⁰

Translated by Dajana Lazarević

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Ана Манојловић, Балканска међа између пропаганде Русије и Запада, <https://www.rts.rs/magazin/film-i-tv/3488236/balkanska-medja-izmedju-propagande-rusije-i-zapada-.html> (accessed on 7/26/2023). After the Moscow audience cried and the Serbian audience cheered at the premiere of the film “The Balkan Line / Balkanska meda”, the British “Times” assessed that this film undermines regional peace. The realization that Serbs are the good guys and Albanians are the bad guys came about after several decades in which Serbs were the favorite villains of Hollywood movies.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ See: Дејан Р. Дашић (2015), “Кинематографија као средство креирања негативних стереотипа о Србима”, *Социолошки преглед*, vol. XLIX (2015), no. 1, стр. 25-46, vol. XLIX, no. 1, 25-46.

⁴⁰ See: Зоран Милошевић (2012), “Спасители мира на желтых экранах”, *Простор*, No 7, 182-184.

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