

OĐUZHAN MUTLUER HISTORY IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN CINEMA Bilkent University 2021

HISTORY IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN CINEMA, PATRIOTIC  
DREAMS, COMPLICATED MEMORIES

A Ph.D. Dissertation

by

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Ankara  
September 2021



*To my lovely daughter Dost (RIP)*

HISTORY IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN CINEMA, PATRIOTIC DREAMS,  
COMPLICATED MEMORIES

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences of

İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

Oğuzhan Mutluer

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in

THE DEPARTMENT OF  
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İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
ANKARA  
September 2021

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **HISTORY IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN CINEMA, PATRIOTIC DREAMS, COMPLICATED MEMORIES**

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September 2021

The politics of memory is a highly significant part of contemporary Russian politics. Reinterpreting history is a critical duty of the recent Russian administration to overcome the identity crisis that has emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Historical films emerged as an appropriate option for the leadership to construct a new societal memory by conveying patriotic messages with the help of creating myths. A patriotic filmmaking project has been initiated for this purpose. This dissertation aims to discuss the content of some notable contemporary Russian historical films by using historical film analysis. Analyzing historical films has been a common topic in historiography. The methodology that is used in the dissertation will be evaluated in the first part. Latterly, the history of Russian cinema concerning the industrial dynamics and the basis of historical films will be discussed. In the following chapters, a selected filmography will

be analyzed concerning their portrayal of Russian history. In conclusion, the notable setbacks and entanglements of the patriotic filmmaking project will be presented.

**Keywords:** History of Russian Cinema, Film and History, Contemporary Russian Cinema, Patriotic Film Politics

## ÖZET

### ÇAĞDAŞ RUS SİNEMASINDA TARİH, VATANSEVER HAYALLER, KARMAŞIK HAFIZALAR

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Doktora, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Hafıza siyaseti çağdaş Rus siyasetinin önemli bir parçasıdır. Rus yönetiminin geçmişi yeniden yorumlaması, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılması sonucu ortaya çıkan kimlik krizinin üstesinden gelmek için kullandığı önemli bir vazifedir. Tarihi filmler liderlik için yeni mitler vasıtasıyla verilen vatansever mesajlar doğrultusunda yeni sosyal hafızalar yaratmak adına uygun bir seçenek olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda vatansever film projesi hayata geçmiştir. Bu tezde çağdaş Rus sinemasından bir film seçkisi tarihsel film analizi yöntemiyle incelenecektir. Tarihi filmler, tarihçilik alanında üzerinde çalışılmış bir konudur. İlk etapta kullanılacak metodoloji ele alınacaktır. Sonrasında Rus sinema tarihinin temel endüstriyel dinamikleri ve tarihi film yapımı tartışılacaktır. İlerleyen bölümlerde belirtilen film seçkisi, Rus tarihini ne şekilde yansıttıkları çerçevesinde analiz edilecektir. Sonuç bölümünde

vatansever film projesinin belirgin sorunları ortaya konacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rus Sineması Tarihi, Film ve Tarih, Çağdaş Rus Sineması,

Vatansever Film Politikaları

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	iv
<b>ÖZET</b> .....	vi
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	viii
<b>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
I.I. Remembering the Past and Nostalgia in Putin's Russia.....	8
<b>CHAPTER II: LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	17
II.I. Literature Review.....	17
II.I.I. How to analyze a Historical Film?.....	22
II.II. Methodological Framework.....	32
<b>CHAPTER III: A CONCISE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN FILM INDUSTRY AND SOVIET/RUSSIAN HISTORICAL FILM MAKING, FROM TSARIST RUSSIA TO THAW</b> .....	38
III.I. Cinematograph in Tsarist Russia.....	38
III.II. Russian Film Industry after the October Revolution.....	46
III.II.I. The Policies of Goskino (1922-1924).....	49
III.II.II. The Policies of Sovkino.....	52
III.II.III. Films of the Period.....	56
III.II.IV. Revolutionary Films.....	56
III.II.V. Mainstream Films.....	61

III.III. Film Industry under Stalin 1928-1953.....	63
III.III.I. Cultural Revolution in Cinema, 1928-1932.....	64
III.III.II. Films for Millions, Purges and Socialist Realism.....	68
III.III.III. The problems in the industry and Soviet Gollivud.....	69
III.III.IV. Socialist Realism.....	72
III.III.V. Historical Socialist Realist Cinema.....	76
III.III.VI. The Soviet film industry during the Second World War.....	78
III.III.VII. Films of the Second World War.....	80
III.III.VIII. Eisenstein during WWI.....	89
III.III.IX. The Aftermath of war and Zhdanovschina.....	91

**CHAPTER IV: A CONCISE HISTORY OF SOVIET/RUSSIAN FILM INDUSTRY,  
FROM THAW TO 2000S.....95**

IV.I. Soviet Cinema during Thaw.....	95
IV.I.I. Films of the Period.....	100
IV.II. The Stagnation: Mainstream and Auteur Cinema 1967-82.....	105
IV.II.I. The Films of the Period.....	109
IV.II.II. Historical Films.....	110
IV.III. The post-Stagnation period.....	116
IV.III.I The films of the period.....	121
IV.IV. Russian Cinema during the 1990s.....	126
IV.IV.I. Films of the Period.....	130

**CHAPTER V: CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HISTORICAL BLOCKBUSTER  
FILM: PRE-ROMANOV PERIOD.....133**

V.I. <i>The Viking</i> (Andrey Kravchuk/2016).....	133
--	-----

V.II. <i>The Horde (Orda)</i> (Andrei Proshkin/ 2012).....	145
V.III. <i>Taras Bulba</i> (Vladimir Bortko/ 2009).....	155
V.IV. <i>1612</i> (Vladimir Khotinenko/ 2007).....	162
<b>CHAPTER VI: CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HISTORICAL BLOCKBUSTER</b>	
<b>FILM: ROMANOV PERIOD, WORLD WAR I AND THE RUSSIAN CIVIL</b>	
<b>WAR</b> .....	
	171
VI.I. <i>The Barber of Siberia (Sibirskiy tsiryulnik)</i> (Nikita Mikhalkov /1998).....	171
VI.II. <i>Turkish Gambit (Turetskiy Gambit)</i> (Canik Fayziev/ 2005).....	178
VI.III. <i>Matilda (Matil'da)</i> (Alexei Uchitel/2017)....	185
VI.IV. <i>The Battalion (Batal'on"</i> (Dimitri Meskhiev/ 2015).....	194
VI.V. <i>The Admiral (Admiral)</i> (Andrey Kravchuk/ 2008).....	203
VI.VI. <i>Sunstroke (Solnechnyy udar)</i> (Nikita Mikhalkov/ 2014).....	214
<b>CHAPTER VII: CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HISTORICAL BLOCKBUSTER</b>	
<b>FILM: FILMS OF WORLD WAR II AND THE POST-STALIN</b>	
<b>PERIOD</b> .....	
	223
VII.I <i>The Priest (Pop)</i> (Vladimir Khotinenko/ 2010).....	223
VII.II. <i>The Brest Fortress (Brestskaya krepost)</i> (Alexander Kott/ 2010).....	236
VII.III. <i>Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus and Citadel (Utomlennye solntsem 2: Predstoyanie, Citadel'</i> (Nikita Mikhalkov/ 2010, 2011).....	246
VII.IV. <i>Going Vertical (Dvizhenie vverkh)</i> (Anton Megerdichev/ 2017).....	254
VII.V. <i>My Dad Baryshnikov (Moy papa Baryshnikov)</i> (Dmitry Povolotsky/ 2011).....	263
<b>CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION</b> .....	
	276
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	
	286



## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is defined as the "great political passion of our time" by prominent scholar Jean Bethke Elshtain.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, nations have played a significant role in the last centuries of world history and the nation-state was the leading actor in contemporary world politics. Although the globalization process has somewhat undermined the nation-state's role, nationalism is still the primary determiner for the states in transition. Following the decolonization period and the disintegrations of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, new nations and their nation-building processes appeared. Russia was one of those states and experienced an indisputable transition accompanied by chaos and crisis started by reformation programs in the second half of the 1980s and continued throughout the 1990s. A new Russian national identity was demanded and Russia had to choose between an identity that depends on Western/democratic values or an authoritarian/nationalist one. With the rise of Vladimir Putin, this craving for national identity entered into a new phase, which examined new ways for relocating the Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Duncan S. A. Bell, "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity," *The British Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 1 (2003): 63.

state and nation as a global power in world politics.

Although the concept of nation is commonly used, it should be noted that there is no single definition as there are different interpretations connected with the notion. For instance, the modernist approach claims that nation is a socially and politically determined concept. It is a result of economic, social and political processes that started with the French Revolution. In other terms, it is the product of modernist progress, mostly tied to the events the Western nations had experienced. According to this perspective, the nations are social facts in humanity's history and nations exist ontologically. However, the postmodernist approach considers the nation as "...the artificial nightingale...a piece of social engineering...a composite artifact, cobbled together from a wide variety of cultural sources."<sup>2</sup> Rather than being ontologically present, it should be considered a text containing a particular historical discourse that depends on effective practices and beliefs. In this respect, the modern nation is thought of as a composite artefact that depends on history, symbols, myths and languages. This process is carried by elites, who created a cultural ideology using emotive symbols and myths through communicative mediums such as print and media. Using such a medium, the signifier and the signified became fused; thus, image and reality become identical. The reality and its representation create a single space where the nation has no existence out of it. The postmodernist theory states that nations are cultural constructions rather

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony D. Smith, "Gastronomy or Geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations," *Nations and Nationalism* 1, no. 1 (1995), 4-5.

than depending on social or political processes.<sup>3</sup>

Russian society followed a historical process different from Western nations. Russia was a multinational empire that was backward in terms of industrialization and technological innovation during the 19th century. Therefore, the leading social classes of modern times, bourgeois and working-class, were still inferior. Besides, the socialist experience had been unique in world history and the post-Soviet period was far from being stable until the end of the 20th century. For that reason, the nationalization process of Russia is not a deterministic one. Instead, one can talk about different nation-building processes in different periods of Russian history. It can be claimed that the Putin administration's national identity project depends on a patriotic discourse that can be seen in many different areas. It can also be argued that the current Russian national identity depends on symbols, re-invention of history and historical myths. This dissertation discusses the use of history in contemporary Russian cinema, which can be seen as a part of this patriotic discourse. It will be assumed that contemporary Russian films' historical themes are a significant part of Russian nation-building policy.

If it is accepted that contemporary Russian national identity depends on symbols rather than a historical process, history for politics can be seen as the central aspect of a patriotism project. Rewriting history is one of the critical tools for states to construct

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

national identity.<sup>4</sup> Russia is not the only example of utilizing the past, as many other states have been politicizing history writing for a long time to create or support their national identities. Notably, the states that have become newly independent and the states in transition attempt to create new national histories to construct new national identities. In this respect, any regime change or transition means a possible confrontation with the past.

Besides, reinterpreting history would hardly be an objective activity. As Eric Foner says, "a new future requires a new past."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, official interpretations of the past should contain more myths than historical facts. Myths are defined as simplified and dramatized stories that have evolved in society.<sup>6</sup> Duncan Bell develops this definition by claiming that;

Myths do not simply evolve unguided without active agency, in accord with the pervasive biological metaphor... We should understand a nationalist myth as a story that simplifies, dramatizes and selectively narrates the story of a nation's past and its place in the world, its historical eschatology: a story that elucidates its contemporary meaning through (re)constructing its past... Myths are constructed, they are shaped, whether by deliberate manipulation and intentional action or

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<sup>4</sup> Igor Torbakov, "History, Memory and National Identity: Understanding the Politics of History and Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Lands," *Demokratizatsiya* 19, no. 3 (2011): 209.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Foner, *Who Owns History? Rethinking the past in a Changing World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 77.

<sup>6</sup> Duncan S. A. Bell, "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity," *The British Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 1 (2003): 75.

perhaps through the particular resonance of works of literature and art.<sup>7</sup>

19th century French thinker Ernest Renan also states that national identity depends on sentimental roots rather than material interests. Besides, the nation is constituted by sharing memories and the will to live together. However, these shared memories should be selective. Mythicizing the selected parts of history bring motivation to hold the nation together. Therefore an imagined history is necessary for an imagined nation.

Contemporary thinkers also mention the importance of myths. David Miller argues that myths have two purposes: providing reassurance for the national community and performing a moralizing role.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Anthony D. Smith claims that elites use national instruments to create a culture-ideology of the community through emotional symbols and myths propagated by print and media.<sup>9</sup> He continues that myths create "attachment and belonging to mobilized populations"<sup>10</sup> by giving "meaning and purpose to cultural entities."<sup>11</sup> As many scholars make it clear, a national history constructed by myths should be seen as one of the most prominent aspects of creating a new nation. In other words, national memory is necessary for the transformation of society into a nation. At this point, the collective memory should be defined to proceed.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 36.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony D. Smith, "Gastronomy or Geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations," 5.

<sup>10</sup> Taras Kuzio, "History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 2 (2002): 247.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

History and memory can be defined as two interrelated concepts for analyzing and understanding the past. Whereas both concepts are interested in the same notion, they have distinct perspectives regarding the discussion of the past. On the one hand, history uses an empirical methodology to evaluate past events in their literary form and owns an objectivist cause in its ideal formation. On the other hand, memory is a subjective term relying on manipulation and reconstruction of the past as it is filtered through psychological or sociopolitical barriers. Whereas historians are interested in the question "what happened in the past?" memory is related to the question of "how is the past remembered?".

Reminiscing the past is not only an individual activity, as communities also have shared memories. The members of a community, society or nation usually gather around a collective remembrance of the past to create a common identity. This type of memory is called collective memory, which is generally shared by most members of a society and is receptive to modification of perceptions upon the past by the circumstances of the time. Slava Gerovitch describes collective memory as shaping social identities and providing narratives that influence individuals to remember the past and interpret the present.<sup>12</sup> Concerning the narratives that Gerovitch mentions, the central pillar of the collective memory is made of the myths usually produced by official histories. The myths with political outcomes feed the collective memory by providing content in terms of symbolic

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<sup>12</sup> Slava Gerovitch, *Soviet Space Mythologies: Public Images, Private Memories, and the Making of a Cultural Identity* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), .xii.

discourse. They are also instrumentalized to generate legitimacy for present institutions and political roles.<sup>13</sup> Thomas D. Sherlock claims that there is a cycle between myths and ideologies as myths provide a basis for ideologies, while ideologies promote myths.<sup>14</sup>

Cultural mediums play a significant role in the survival of collective memory by constructing myths in many forms, such as statues, jokes, novels or any form of visual media. While the preferences are many, this work focuses on the capacity of historical films to construct myths. Mainstream cinema can generate many myths about social roles, gender, economy and political notions, whereas independent or art-house films can produce counter-myths that would challenge the official ones. This work limits its analysis by specifying the nation, film genre and the production period. In this respect, the emphasis will be on Russian mainstream historical films that have been produced during the Putin period.

Though films have a high capacity to produce myths about the past, their lack of empirical quality generated tension among filmmakers and historians. Despite being a popular genre since the invention of cinematography, the academy's prejudice against historical films could only be softened in the last decades of the 20th century.

Considering the process that witnessed the relationship between film medium and historiography would help understand the tension and resolution of the problem.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas D. Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.

Following this process would also aid in clarifying the position of this work in this methodological debate.

### **I. I. Remembering the Past and Nostalgia in Putin's Russia**

Nostalgia is another concept that should be mentioned regarding collective memory. Everyone needs symbols to remember his/her experiences of the past. Sergei Ushakin refers to Voloshinov, who states that this experience may have meaning if only it can exist with real signs.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, societies need symbols to have a collective memory. During the Soviet time, the ideological occurrence of symbols and cultural materials were overly used. However, these symbols became invalid with the demise of the Soviet Union as the socialist ideology was not present anymore. Then a question arose: "What would be the new symbols of Russian society to believe in?"<sup>16</sup> Ushakin claims that post-Soviet Russian society lived aphasia, which he uses to define society's lack of symbolic interaction during the 1990s. In his study, which covers 178 written interviews and surveys among the first generation of post-Soviet Russia, he concludes that the lack of post-Soviet cultural and discursive production created a space without subjecting power, signifier and meaning.<sup>17</sup> This conclusion can be related to the identity crisis that Russian society had lived during the 1990s.

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<sup>15</sup> Serguei Oushakine, "In the State of Post-Soviet Aphasia: Symbolic Development in Contemporary Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 6 (2000): 1010.

<sup>16</sup> See Serguei Oushakine, "In the State of Post-Soviet Aphasia: Symbolic Development in Contemporary Russia."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The rise of Vladimir Putin in Russian politics became a milestone for turning back this aphasia. Being aware of the problem, Putin's administration started to search for new symbols linked to the Russian past. Instead of creating independent signs from Russian history, which depend on the slogans of the first years of the post-Soviet period, namely democracy and human rights, the glorious signs of imperial Russia and the Soviet Union would prevail after that time. Putin has also introduced himself as a new sign which supports the strong leader model. His own experience of the past was a struggle that can aid Russian society in overcoming its problems. In his autobiography, he mentions that;

I realized that in every situation – whether I was right or wrong – I had to be strong...I learned that I always had to be ready to respond to an offense or insult instantly...I just understood that if you want to win, then you have to fight to the finish in every fight, as if it was the last and decisive battle, you need to assume there is no retreat and that you will have to fight to the end. In principle, that is the well-known rule that they later taught me in the KGB, but I learned it much earlier in those fights as a kid.<sup>18</sup>

Russia's survival in a world with enemies can be seen as similar to the survivalist mode in his private life. He is an ex-spy, a judo master, marksman, skier, hockey player and firefighter. He is a sign that makes Russia strong in the memories and experiences of Russian society. In October 2014, during the annual forum named Valdai Discussion

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 89.

Club, which hosted Russian and foreign experts, the attendants agreed that "if there is no Putin, there is no Russia."<sup>19</sup> Stanislav Belkovsky concludes that "the search for Russia's national idea, which began after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, is finally over. Now it is evident that Russia's national idea is Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin."<sup>20</sup>

However, Vladimir Putin's charisma was not sufficient alone to promote Russian patriotism and the society should also embrace a new historical experience. Post-Soviet Russians were sharing a complex collective memory, which includes both suffering and pride. This complex memory brought an identity crisis for a new society that had lost its ideals. The new ideals should replace the old ones as the system had been changed. Therefore starting from the middle of the 1990s, Russian society started to embrace nostalgia as a phenomenon. It can be seen as a consequence of the economic, social and political crises that Russia had lived. Rather than constructing a future from a blank sheet, a future constructed in the light of nostalgia became the principal ideal.

Regarding the concept of nostalgia, we can make a separation between reflective and restorative ones. While reflective nostalgia is apolitical, restorative nostalgia aims to use the past for political interest. This is the case in the Russian context and it usually brings a distorted past while it seeks to adopt the past as a model for the future.<sup>21</sup> To achieve

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Kotkin, "Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia's Nightmare Dressed like a Daydream," *Foreign Affairs*, 94 (2015): 140.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, a Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2016).

this aim, the Putin administration shows no hesitation in controlling the past's general discourse. A glorious and prideful past and promotion of patriotism theoretically became principals of the Russian state's memory politics.

Discourse politics became one of the bases of the Putin administration's neo-authoritarian politics to achieve these goals. According to Van Dijk: "Those, who have greater control over increasingly more influential discourses (and over other discursive properties), are also more powerful."<sup>22</sup> The discourse on history becomes a critical point at this juncture. Stephen Norris indicates that history and ideology are all fused in contemporary Russia: "Rebuilt churches, sculpture gardens with Stalin next to memorials to his victims, nationalist food chains, red stars hung next to double-headed eagles: Russia's pasts confront the visitor everywhere as a mixed-up package."<sup>23</sup>

To implement a historical discourse policy, Putin declared war on the falsification of history via a government program in March 2001. The first step of this program was reviewing school textbooks and making what were deemed to be necessary revisions. A new textbook was mandated in 2007 that presented a favorable view of Soviet and Russian history. The chief ideologue of the Kremlin at the time, Pavel Danilin, who wrote the chapter entitled "Sovereign Democracy" in the new textbook, presents the main objective of the program consists; "not as a depressing sequence of misfortunes

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Miguel Vázquez Liñán, "History as a Propaganda Tool in Putin's Russia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010): 168.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Norris, "Packaging the Past: Cinema and Nationhood in the Putin Era," *KinoKultura* 21, July (2008), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2008/21-norris.shtml>.

and mistakes but as something to instill pride in one's country. It is precisely in this way that teachers must teach history and not smear the Motherland with mud".<sup>24</sup>

Similar to historical discourse, the media industry is also under the severe scrutiny of the government. Under Putin's leadership, the Russian press can be classified as "a neo-authoritarian media system, in which freedom is limited."<sup>25</sup> The pre-Putin era's media oligarchs were dismissed, and new oligarchs loyal to the regime were promoted.<sup>26</sup> Putin also signed a law that limits foreign ownership in Russian media. The head of the Hearst Group, Viktor Shkulev, stated that "foreign publishers will most likely be forced to hand over their projects to a small circle of trusted individuals close to the Kremlin."<sup>27</sup> The control of the internet also became increasingly strict. The Culture Minister called for a "patriotic internet" that limits Western influence<sup>28</sup> and his ministry focused on a program called "Foundations of State Culture Policy" that rejects liberal values. In response to recent US economic sanctions on Russia, well-known film directors even proposed a ban on American movies.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in many discourse fields, the Putin administration does not hesitate to intervene and promote patriotism.

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<sup>24</sup> Orlando Figes, "Shelved - Did Kremlin Make My Stalin Book Disappear?," *The Guardian* March 4, 2009), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/04/orlando-figes-stalin-publisher>.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Becker, "Lessons from Russia," *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 2 (2004): pp. 140.

<sup>26</sup> Markus Soldner, "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media," in *Media, Culture and Society in Putin's Russia*, ed. Stephen White (New York: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 166.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Pivovarchuk, "Russian Culture: Back in the U.S.S.R.," *The Moscow Times*, October 9, 2014, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/russian-culture-back-in-the-ussr-40245>.

<sup>28</sup> Anna Dolgov, "Culture Minister Wants 'Patriotic Internet' to Protect Russians," *The Moscow Times*, January 14, 2015,

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/culture-minister-wants-patriotic-internet-to-protect-russians-42857>.

<sup>29</sup> Anna Pivovarchuk, "Russian Culture: Back in the U.S.S.R."

A film industry independent of the government cannot be conceived with this state intervention level in other fields. Along with the political upheaval, the 1990s were a period of turmoil for the Russian film industry, as mentioned-earlier. During the mid-1990s, the number of films produced and their viewers dropped dramatically. Cinema attendance fell from twenty visits per person in one year in the 1970s to eight visits per person in a year.<sup>30</sup> While concerned with overwhelming economic problems and the Chechnya crisis, a concrete policy for the cinema industry was not immediately developed. Until "the Law on the Cinema" was passed in 1996, the government's interest in the film industry was limited. With this law, however, the industry began to be subsidized by the government.<sup>31</sup>

Like the five-year programs of the Soviet period, a five-year plan for culture was implemented after Putin's inauguration as president. Russian cinema revived with the state's support; the number of cinemas tripled from 2004 to 2012, and in 2009 Russia became the fourth most significant industry in European box office sales. However, this revival came at a cost. To be subsidized, a film must be social, or, in other words, it should support the government's vision.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it can be claimed that this program also has an ideological basis. Nikita Mikhalkov, the head of the Russian Cinematographers' Union and a current close ally of Putin, stated that the Hollywood model should be

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<sup>30</sup> Birgit Beumers, "Cinemarket, or the Russian Film Industry in Mission Possible," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 5 (1999), 871.

<sup>31</sup> Jasmijn Van Gorp, "Inverting Film Policy: Film as Nation Builder in Post-Soviet Russia, 1991-2005," *Media, Culture & Society* 33, no. 2 (2011), 250.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 252.

applied to create national heroes and the pessimistic view in the films of the mid-1990s should be avoided. Mikhalkov asks that “Who will become a hero to our children? Who will be a folk hero? Who will be the subject of anecdotes, the way Vasili Chapayev and Stirlitz are? Yet without this kind of folklore, there can be no cinema. Man cannot exist without a hero. He has to have a model, a symbol.”<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the Cinematographers' Union initiated a pro-government policy that invited the president to intervene in the industry to prevent cultural and moral degradation. According to the Union, Russia was in danger as modern Russian cinema was destructive; Russian films failed to generate love for one's country, and Russia's great history and culture should be used to overcome this problem. In other words, western culture should be restricted in favor of Russian culture. Film critic Daniil Dondurei and scholar Anatoliy Golubovskii stated that if Gogol's *Dead Souls* or *Overcoat* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* were contemporary works, they would be inappropriate by the current government for state-sponsorship.<sup>34</sup>

Institutional policies continued through the establishment of the Council for the Development of Russian cinema in 2008. Putin became the council's chair, and the state worked on financing war and history films, films for children and adolescents,

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<sup>33</sup> Nikita Mikhalkov, “The Function of a National Cinema,” in *Russia on Reels. The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema*, ed. Birgit Beumers (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999), 51.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Dondurei and Anatoly B. Golubovsky, “Pravda Khorosho, a Patriotizm Luchshe?,” *Iskusstvo Kino* No:2 (2013), <http://kinoart.ru/archive/2013/02/pravda-khorosho-a-patriotizm-luchshe>.

adaptations of literary classics, and first-time works.<sup>35</sup> The Russian leader also claimed that "We are all aware of the persuasive power of the cinema and its potential to convey human emotions. I believe that it should be a constructive force that elevates audiences."<sup>36</sup>

Greg Dolgoplov defines Putin-era cinema and television as a populism based on a domesticated national consciousness. He notes five basic tendencies in this period concerning cinema and visual media: a focus on the Great Patriotic War, official funding of films, rehabilitation of the dark secrets of the past, construction of good and evil in a more sophisticated way, and frequent use of serialized drama.<sup>37</sup> Three factors must be mentioned to understand the mythical structure of historical blockbusters under the Putin regime: state subsidy, rehabilitation, and complexity. Further specialization in the issue is needed to conceive the patriotic message and debunk the created myths. From this perspective, the relationship between feature film and the past should be scrutinized with respect to myth and memory concepts. In this respect, the following section focuses on the theoretical and methodological debates concerning the relationship between historical films and the past.

Secondly, Russian cinema's main industrial and generic heritage before the Putin era

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<sup>35</sup> Miguel Vázquez Liñán, "History as a Propaganda Tool in Putin's Russia," 174.

<sup>36</sup> "Working Day, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Chairs a Meeting of the Government Council on the Development of the Russian Film Industry," Archive of the Official Sites of the 2008-2012 Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, November 21, 2011, <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17167/>.

<sup>37</sup> Greg Dolgoplov, "Liquidating the Happy End of the Putin-Era," *KinoKultura*, no. 13 (July 2008), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2008/21-dolgoplov.shtml>.

must also be examined to achieve this goal. Russian cinema has a vivid history as the Soviet film industry was one of the major ones at its time and the state intervention to industry concerning commercial, administrative and stylistic terms was evident throughout the history of the Soviet Union. For this reason, it should be noted that the current patriotic cinema model has been unequivocally constructed upon a massive cinematic heritage. Understanding the fundamental dynamics of this heritage is necessary to evaluate the recent period's meaning and goals. For this reason, a concise history of the Soviet film industry and historical filmmaking will be the main topic in the further chapters. Afterwards, a selected filmography will be analyzed in the light of contemporary patriotic film policies.

## CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

### II.I. Literature Review

Historians usually dismiss historical films, especially for their inaccuracy in depicting the past, as they have to fictionalize the past events to present a coherent narrative. On the other hand, a critical type of historiography that discusses the possibilities of using films as empirical sources has grown since the last decades. This critical view did not emerge suddenly as some key works or developments had influenced the discussion. Four essential milestones directly or indirectly affected the emergence of this literature. The first one was Sigmund Kracauer's 1947 dated work, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, which can be named the first significant attempt to analyze feature films from a historical perspective. In this work, Kracauer claims that a film can only be entirely understandable by comprehending its nation's psychological pattern.<sup>38</sup> In line with this purpose, he presents psychoanalysis of the German nation in its path from the Weimar Republic to the period of Nazism by

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<sup>38</sup> Siegfried Kracauer and Leonardo Quaresima, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

analyzing German cinematic classics such as Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and Fritz Lang's *M* (1931).<sup>39</sup> Though Kracauer's attempt was mostly based on a psychological pattern and the films he used were not historical ones, his contribution was still significant for the debate.

The second achievement was the proliferation of television broadcasting during the post-WWII period. Television programs appeared as visual instruments to carry history on screen in this period. A.J.P. Taylor was one of the first prominent historians who made programs for television starting from the 1950s. These programs were usually televised lectures rather than dramatized shows; however, the psychological barrier between a historian and a visual medium was beginning to diminish. BBC series *The Great War* raised the level further in the next decade and the use of historical film for education became encouraged by distinguished historian George Kitson Clark who founded the British Universities Film Council.<sup>40</sup> Similar progress was also present in Germany as the *Referat für zeitgeschichtliche Filmforschung und Filmdokumentation* was established in 1953 in Göttingen. However, those efforts were limited within the narrow circle of education and did not discuss a new understanding of historiography regarding history within images.<sup>41</sup> The attempts to introduce films, especially to history students, continued throughout the 1960s as the Slade Film Department at University

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Smith, "Introduction," in *The Historian and Film*, ed. Paul Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

College London organized a conference named "Film and the Historian" in 1968.<sup>42</sup>

The year 1968 can be seen as the third milestone in the debate. The protests against the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement and the reinterpretation of Marxism all contributed to the proliferation of new themes in social sciences and cultural studies. New approaches based on interpretive methodologies became prominent in this period replacing a-historical perspectives such as linguistics and structuralism dominant in the cultural studies of the 1960s. As a result of this proliferation, film studies was established as a separate discipline during the beginning of the 1970s.<sup>43</sup>

The last milestone was the emergence of challenging perspectives in the discipline of history, namely, new historicism and postmodernist historiography. These critics' target was the new history movement that aimed to create a historical understanding depending on a broader context, which enables focusing on structures and generalization rather than dealing with the unique events inside a narrow border. Many historiographical schools such as American progressive history, the social-science oriented history, the Annales school, Marxist history and German social history have adopted the preferences of New History during the 20th century.<sup>44</sup>

The first challenge from new historicism was a more substantial part of discussing the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Mia E. M. Treacey, *Reframing the Past: History, Film and Television* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 56.

<sup>44</sup> Ernst Breisach, *On the Future of History: The Postmodernist Challenge and Its Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3.

relationship between literature and history. New historicism criticizes new history that claims the positivist and objectivist validity of the empiricist historiography. An empirically unproblematic representation of the past is considered impossible by this approach. Regarding this challenge, a British critic states that "Where the old historicism relied on an empiricist form of historical research, confident in its capacity to excavate and define the events of the past, New Historicism drew on post-structuralist theory and accepted history only as a contemporary activity of narrating or representing the past."<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, postmodernism should be considered as a broad concept that criticizes the notion of modernity in fields such as architecture, arts, music, anthropology, religion, ... etc. The challenge of postmodernist thought on history can be seen as the rejection of the modernist notion of progress and truth-finding methods. In social sciences and history, postmodernist thought challenged the concepts of truth, objectivity, and rationality. One of the most prominent postmodernist philosophers, Jean-Francois Lyotard, says that "the discourse of modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist...without the discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities."<sup>46</sup> Postmodernists argue that objective reality is non-existent and all kinds of knowledge (including scientific knowledge) are constructed representations of the facts by using texts. Texts are created by language, which is ambiguous and

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<sup>45</sup> Jürgen Pieters, *Moments of Negotiation: The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>46</sup> Brian G. Caraher, "A Modernist Allegory of Narration: Joseph Conrad's 'Youth' and the Ideology of the Image," in *Image and Ideology in Modern/Postmodern Discourse*, ed. David B. Downing and Bazargan Susan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 63.

influenced by culture/power. The words that signify concepts and things may have different meanings within different times and cultures. Relativity replaces objectivity concerning the relationship between humanity and reality.

Postmodernist history emphasizes the essence of a historical text's self-reflexivity rather than creating social theories due to causal explanations. The role of the historian is similar to a novelist by this perspective as both produce constructed texts. The proclaimed authenticity of historical texts is an illusion as they cannot capture the past but create a sense of truthfulness.<sup>47</sup> The text and context cannot be separated as language is not an objective tool to capture the past. Instead, the form and technique of narratives are crucial choices that have implications on the essence of historical representations.

One of the significant consequences of the postmodernist decline of reality is removing the hierarchy between high culture and popular culture. All cultural practices and events are defined merely as texts that construct representations of reality.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the cultural material concerning the past began to be treated as tools that construct reality, just as history books do. This major challenge opened the way for scholars of history to reevaluate fictional films' merits to represent the past.

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<sup>47</sup> Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1995), 304.

<sup>48</sup> Sol Cohen, "Postmodernism, The New Cultural History, Film: Resisting Images of Education," *Paedagogica Historica* 32, no. 2 (1996), 395.

Although postmodernism played a significant role in recognizing feature films by historians, the postmodernist approach is still based on a theoretical base, which broadly assumes that historical films are technically equivalent to written sources. This is a very bold claim as this dissertation does not seek such a theoretical or methodological outcome. Instead, the practical capacity of the films to modify memory will be highlighted. At this point, the literature upon history and film should be mentioned to draw the study's borders.

### **II.I.I. How to analyze a Historical Film?**

As it can be estimated, there is substantial literature on every kind of historical film. Therefore a selection of literature is necessary to avoid methodological confusion. In this part, some scholars like Paul Smith, Pierre Sorlin, Robert Rosenstone, Robert Brent Toplin and John O'Connor will be presented to determine the questions that will be asked to analyze a historical film.

One of the first attempts that focus on the implications of fiction films on history is Paul Smith's edited work, *Historian and Film*, published in 1976. Smith's introduction chapter discusses the impact of film on history and it refers to the previous works in the 1960s and assumes that historians were late to discuss historical films and the prior efforts were insufficient. Latterly, he distinguishes the commercial and entertainment aspects of fiction films as the main reasons for the negligence. He adds that another reason is the

historian's conservatism against new perspectives. Finally, the distrustfulness caused by films' trivial and superficial characteristics is considered the final reason for the historians' negligence. Smith assumed that those reasons do not have substantial grounds.<sup>49</sup> Instead, he offers a new perspective that does not ignore historical films but considers them valuable historical evidences.

In the beginning, Smith ignores any hierarchy of historical sources. He regards that a hierarchy can only be applied according to specific questions and aims. Smith also adds that there is no intrinsic purity or impurity concerning the historical significance of the sources as all sources are more or less impure. The written sources can also be partial, subjective, tendentious, emotive and even forged. Smith admits that films have limitations for presenting facts as they rarely portray an untainted and un-manipulated representation of the external reality. However, he adds that "reality inheres even in a fake."<sup>50</sup> He defines it as "real fake, the result of real events, mental as well as physical, composed of elements individually genuine, and can be usefully analyzed in that sense."<sup>51</sup>

Films represent the intentions and outlook of their producers and they can be seen as the records of society in the same sense. Although they do not transmit the external reality correctly, their fakeness means the presence of rich data that tells many things. Smith

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Smith, "Introduction," in *The Historian and Film*, 4-7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*.

continues that regarding films as less valuable sources is a matter of perception rather than an objective analysis. At this point, one can argue that historians should not ignore even a historically inaccurate film as a worthless source. The limitations of films portraying the actuality are the main point that makes them essential for historians because these limitations bring fabrications and this fictionalization reveals historical meanings that historians should analyze and criticize.<sup>52</sup> Smith draws the borders of a guideline for historians to focus on historical films. This guideline would be developed with further works in the 1980s and 1990s.

Pierre Sorlin's 1980 dated work, *The Film on History*, is another pioneering work on the issue, as it generates questions to analyze and understand a historical film. Sorlin's work is an early attempt for the debate and it does not have a clear distinction regarding the categories presented above. Therefore, both theoretical and practical assumptions are present in the work. Rather than discussing all aspects of *The Film on History*, some key points shall be conveyed below.

One of the most significant contributions Sorlin introduces is the term "comprehensive viewpoint." He suggests that films have comprehensive viewpoints that influence the audience regarding their knowledge, identity and attention. Some symbols verbally, visually or intellectually impact the reception of the viewers. In this sense, determining

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 8.

these symbols would aid in analyzing the myths that are generated.<sup>53</sup> It may also be thought that Sorlin's formula concerning a comprehensive viewpoint may work vice-versa as films can play a role in creating comprehensive viewpoints for the audience.<sup>54</sup> It would not be wrong to claim that visual media is presently much more prevalent in affecting knowledge, identity, and attention than in the 1980s. In this sense, different comprehensive viewpoints may compete among visual media produced by different sources.

Sorlin makes another crucial contribution by concluding that "historical film is an indicator of a country's basic historical culture, its historical capital."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the films should be understood in light of a country's national identity. At this point, the author specifies some questions for the analysis of historical films: "What facts does the film select? How does it develop them? What connections does it show between them?"<sup>56</sup> He claims that historical films indicate relationships between facts rather than questioning their subjects. Therefore, they are superficial rather than abiding by historical accuracy. Worrying about historical accuracy is a vague apprehension in this sense. The main point is the meaning of representation in the film, whether it is accurate or not, as both cases offer essential information. Sorlin also claims that "every film has its history,"<sup>57</sup> and it can be assumed that a scholar should analyze this "history." Rather

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<sup>53</sup> Pierre Sorlin, *Film in History, Restaging the Past* (NJ: Blackwell, 1980).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Pierre Sorlin, "How to Look at an Historical Film" in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. Marcia Landy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2001), 38.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

than a single comparison between history in film and written works, understanding the political logic of the inaccuracies should be the essential goal for the analyzer.<sup>58</sup>

The next scholar is Robert Brent Toplin, who focuses on Hollywood films, representing a prevalent and simplified depiction of the past. His work *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* can be regarded as an attempt to define the historical film genre. Toplin defines film genres as archetypical narratives that own similar iconography and themes. The forms of genres are determined according to the audience reaction and a reliable form would be repeated as a formula that can please the audience. On the other hand, genres can also adapt themselves to the changing social conditions and market priorities. While many genres can be easily detected, identifying the historical film as a genre is quite tricky as historical films portray many different historical periods from different perspectives depending on class, nation and culture. At this point, Toplin proposed to determine the generic conventions of historical films in the case of Hollywood.<sup>59</sup>

*Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* contributed to the literature by examining the generic codes of Hollywood's historical films, which should be seen as a crucial attempt for drawing the borders of historical blockbusters. Toplin begins with the limitations of the film medium as the simplification of historical evidence is always specific and many details were excluded. He argues that every historical film uses this formula by focusing

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History in Defense of Hollywood* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

on a limited part of the past to present a coherent story. Following the simplification process, historical films use three acts: exposition, complication and resolution, to narrate their stories. Films introduce their characters and conditions of time at the first stage. The plots usually depend on a partisan view of the past, which starkly separates the good and evil according to moral values rather than offering multiple perspectives. Besides, historical films may convey messages to the present time by portraying the past. Using romance in the plots is also a standard convention. Historical films highlight accurate details such as costumes and sets to provide an authentic feeling of the past. The image and sound are used effectively within storytelling to create meaning and consolidate the moral struggle between hero and villain. Toplin's formulation can be estimated as a successful generalization of genre within the border of popular cinema.<sup>60</sup>

Toplin's contribution is a significant one concerning blockbuster films as he introduces a set of generic codes that may help the researchers to compare historical films. Some generalizations over specific blockbuster films can be achieved by detecting and using similar codes. The effort of Robert Brent Toplin is also valuable for determining a historical film genre that may be called blockbusters. These films have generic codes that are keen to maintain the commercial success that would bring a self-reliant film industry. This has been a remarkable goal for the Soviet/Russian film industry throughout the last century and determining generic codes regarding historical discourse would be a valuable attempt in this sense. These generic codes and themes are necessary

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

to understand the Russian historical blockbuster as the similarities between these items may contain messages that can be generalized according to the historical periods represented through films.

John O'Connor's work *Image as Artifact, the Historical Analysis of Film and Television* should also be mentioned as it proposes a guideline that aims to enlighten the audience to be more critical viewers. A viewer should identify bias, interpretations of the past and subtle meanings using visual literacy to achieve this goal. At this point, O'Connor introduces a historical methodology that considers films and television programs as historical artefacts. He defines his primary goal to sensitize historians and the public on understanding historical films by using visual and sound elements.<sup>61</sup>

O'Connor's methodology has two stages: "gathering information on the content, production and reception of a moving image document" and "four frameworks for historical inquiry."<sup>62</sup> The first stage can be seen as a preliminary stage to assess the necessary information for further historical evaluation that would be carried in latterly. On the other hand, the second stage's first framework is named "The Moving Image as Representations of History."<sup>63</sup> O'Connor assumes that a film's expectations of portraying "the past as it happened" should be eliminated as no medium can achieve this goal, including written history. Therefore, complaining about the bias in a film turns out to be

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<sup>61</sup> John E. O'Connor, *Image as Artifact: the Historical Analysis of Film and Television* (Malabar: Robert E. Kreiger Publishing, 1990).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

idle. Every film interprets the past, which varies according to different perspectives of filmmakers and producers. The preferences for editing and cinematography are the notions that constitute the interpretation. Even when an argument is too distorted, studying how it is distorted can be an intriguing scholarship. Moreover, while O'Connor assumes that perfect representation of the past is impossible, he also claims that imperfect representations can help understand the past with its perceptions and historical mentality.<sup>64</sup>

The second framework, "The Moving Image as Evidence for Social and Cultural History," deals with social and cultural decoding. This framework's main objective is to analyze the representation of values and their relations to social and cultural factors. At this point, O'Connor refers to David Thorburn's concept of "consensus narrative," which can be seen as the articulation of a culture's mythology that is constructed by a wide range of cultural artefacts such as "stories, plots, cultural symbols and narrative conventions." Films are also part of these artefacts. Scrutinizing the films' production phase would strengthen the historical understanding of dramatic, political and commercial considerations.<sup>65</sup>

The third framework is focused on factual content related to specific historical facts. O'Connor discusses that the use of the image as factual information has both prospects and limitations. The facts on the image can go beyond what the cameraman intended to

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

show. Numerous details can be found in any single picture. On the other hand, the factual information on the images should be supported by different sources. O'Connor gives Nazi newsreels as examples on the big screen, which both have explicit and implicit evidence. The images of soldiers in action are explicit as they portray what happened precisely, while the intention of Nazi leaders and the methods used for representing these events, such as editing and the selection of images, are defined as implicit evidence.<sup>66</sup>

O'Connor also proposes a set of questions that can challenge the students to think analytically;

We can do this by challenging our students to think analytically about the historical films we show them in the classroom. To what extent do they seem to be based on the same level of research we expect to be the basis of good historical writing? What elements of historical interpretation are presented, either overtly in the narrative or characterization or more subtly through mise-en-scene and visual language? How, if at all, does the film relate the past to the present (the period of the film's production)? How do the inherent limits of the medium restrict the ways that a story can be told or an issue addressed? What alternatives might have been considered? Have the characters been unnecessarily simplified or modernized? Has time been collapsed or the order of events changed in significant ways? If fictional

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

characters or story elements have been added, where do the history end and fiction begin, and to what extent do the fictional elements intrude on the historical material? How does the material and the point of view presented conform with the available historical literature?<sup>67</sup>

Following the earlier works of Smith, Sorlin, Toplin and O'Conner, Robert Rosenstone, who can be considered as the most prolific historian working on historical films, published his seminal work *History on Film/Film on History* in 2006. *History on Film/Film on History* is easily distinguishable from the previous works mentioned as Rosenstone focuses on a more theoretical discussion based on historical films as empirical sources. He still defends this view in his recent works by stating that history films can provide all the necessary elements that historical works should have.<sup>68</sup> As a matter of course, Rosenstone focuses on some specific films, which do history, such as the American Civil War drama *Glory* or John Reed biography *Reds*.

Herein, Rosenstone presents the concept of the invention as a vital issue for judging a historical film. It is also the most controversial one simultaneously as written history always shuns inventions, whereas it is the primary tool for a historical film. At this point, the author argues that a common way should be employed to deal with the invention.

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<sup>67</sup> John O'Connor, "History in Images/Images in History: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988), 1207-1208.

<sup>68</sup> See; Robert Rosenstone, "Reflections on What the Filmmaker Historian Does," in *Film, History and Memory*, ed. Jennie M. Carlsten and Fearghal McGarry (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 191.

Feature films invent anything "from the smallest details to larger events" in the words of Rosenstone. Inventing characters, events, sets and conversations are all pieces of dramatic purposes. Rosenstone offers for types of fictional moves, namely, compression, condensation, alteration and metaphor. While some films reinvent historical facts, others may invent their narrative based on an accurate portrayal. The latter ones are usually more complex films that have meticulous scripts and production processes.<sup>69</sup>

On the other hand, films with bad inventions exploit films' emotional ability or reinvent historical cases for specific commercial or political reasons. The films that will be analyzed are not those that do history but those that distort it. Therefore, this dissertation deviates from the theoretical perspective and aim that Rosenstone supposes. The sample of this work is neither history films nor good inventions, but highly subjective ones. This subjectivity creates the basis for the historical debate that will be conveyed in the following chapters. At the same time, Rosenstone has a theoretical perspective that ignores the socio-political aspects of empirically inferior historical films.

## **II. II. Methodological Framework**

As there is a substantial body of literature, Carlsten and McGarry's approach to film and history should be considered a good starting point for the subject. In the introduction chapter of their edited work, *Film, History and Memory*, the authors focus on the

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<sup>69</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film / Film on History* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006).

medium's power over consciousness and memory rather than criticizing or praising the film's historical quality. Whether films have the empirical ability to "make history" or not, the significant point should be their massive capacity to influence people and mould their memory. This ability of films can be used as an instrument for multiple intentions and tasks as they can play an essential role in destroying already constructed myths or building new ones. They can disorient people against the established norms and traditions or they can strengthen them. Instead of discussing the theoretical and methodological aspects of the issue, the medium's practical ability needs more attention as it directly affects many fields such as politics and sociology. Therefore, this dissertation acknowledges Carlsten and McGarry's approach, which they define as "...how the medium of film shapes, reinforces or subverts our understanding of the past."<sup>70</sup>

Scrutinizing the medium's practical capacity, rather than its methodological function in historiography, nevertheless influences the type of historical films that would be analyzed. At first sight, historical films seem like a basic genre that depends on strict borders and a concrete list of generic codes. Inspired by this approach, one can assume that any film that portrays the past in some way should be defined as a historical film. This assumption is not wrong, but it is over-simplified. The historical film concept covers a broad range of interrelated samples with other distinct genres, codes, and styles.

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<sup>70</sup> Jennie M. Carlsten and Fearghal McGarry, "Introduction," in *Film, History and Memory*, ed. Jennie M. Carlsten and Fearghal McGarry (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

Therefore, historical films should be classified according to their relationship with the historical discourse rather than their cinematic attributions. In this respect, a taxonomy of historical film is proposed by Ofer Ashkenazi. He notes four types of historical film to discuss the issue: "history as film, film as philosophy of history, film as an agent of history, and film as history."<sup>71</sup>

The first paradigm, "history as film," focuses on historical films' approval as historiographical mediums. According to this view, films' historical inaccuracy should not be regarded as incompatible with the truth as written works also do not rely on a hundred percent objectivity. The inaccuracies induced by inventions should be reevaluated through a lens focusing on the overall historical quality of the film.<sup>72</sup> This paradigm is highly influenced by postmodernist thought and its traces can be found in the works of scholars like Robert Rosentone, who will be mentioned later.

The second category has a similar approach to the first one that evaluates the possibility of film to engage the discourse of history. This approach highlights that films reflect the nature of history rather than attempting to propose historical reality. Mostly art-house films that deal with the past can be attributed to this category.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the third paradigm focuses on historical films' impact on political and social processes.

Historical films have significant power to raise awareness on a specific subject that may

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<sup>71</sup> Ofer Ashkenazi, "The Future of History as Film: Apropos the Publication of a Companion to Historical Film," *Rethinking History* 18, no. 2 (2013), 291..

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 291-292.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 294.

challenge or strengthen the dominant historical views. This approach is limited in terms of theoretical discussion concerning the empirical value of films, whereas it puts forward the medium's practical capacity.<sup>74</sup> The last category highlights the practical ability of films to document the society of its time. The historical films carry the attributions of society that they are produced in and historical films may help the audience understand the period that films were made. In this respect, films are considered as socio-political heritages of the past. This approach is described as the least theoretical one regarding the studies on film and history.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, studying the historical film depends on different paradigms positioned according to the definitions of the term historical film regarding their theoretical or practical capacity. The first two paradigms can be seen as the outcomes of the postmodernist challenge mentioned in the prior part as they discuss the reality in the film by criticizing the reality in mainstream historical mediums and proposing a new methodological system to understand the past. On the other hand, the latter paradigms are more prone to evaluate films' socio-political role rather than their historiographical role. It is necessary to draw the borders of this dissertation to clarify the approach to be taken.

This study's sample, which proposes a model of critical analysis of historical representation in films, relies on the third paradigm. This means that this study does not claim that films can work as written history does, as some postmodernist historians

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 295.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 296.

argue. Rather than praising the history in film, the historical myths that are portrayed would be analyzed. This approach expands the borders of film and history as it argues that historians should deal with films from a critical stance. Nevertheless, films will always continue to affect memories and understanding the myths they generate should be a significant concern. The theoretical approach to history and film also matters, but it also further marginalizes films in the discipline as historian James Chapman criticizes.<sup>76</sup>

One can also make a distinction between theoretical and practical paradigms according to film samples. While the theoretical approach focuses on artistically more notable films, the latter approach is more inclined to mainstream ones. Popular films are indeed inferior to auteurist films regarding their artistic and empirical capacity; however, they have a more exceptional ability to reach people. In this respect, one can assume that the works of lower culture have a better chance to influence collective memory than the works of a higher one. This ability comes from their non-complex narratives and the subjective mechanism that uncovers society's emotionality. At this point, historical inaccuracy should not be seen as a defect of historical film. Instead, the distortion of historical facts should be regarded as the main instrument of historical film regarding its duty to support a socio-political discourse. Thus, criticizing and analyzing the significant inaccuracies would debunk the myths, which will uncover the messages that looked to be conveyed. On the other hand, detecting inaccuracies does not mean focusing on material factors such as the reliability of costumes or set decoration. Instead, the film's

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<sup>76</sup> James Chapman, *Film and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 87.

historical setting should be the primary concern as the re-invention of events and characters must be understood.

**CHAPTER III: A CONCISE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN FILM  
INDUSTRY AND SOVIET/RUSSIAN HISTORICAL FILM MAKING,  
FROM TSARIST RUSSIA TO THAW**

**III.I. Cinematograph in Tsarist Russia**

Russian society met with the invention of the Lumiere brothers, namely the cinematograph, in May 1896, just after a few weeks of the first film screening in history. The early screenings were held in St. Petersburg and Moscow, where the crowds welcomed this new entertainment medium excitedly. Cinema became a significant entertainment alternative for the Russian people quickly, and a lively film industry dominated by foreign film companies was established during this early stage.

The introduction of the cinema in the Russian state coincided with highly critical historical events in Russian history, such as the Revolution of 1905 and the Russo-Japanese War, while there were also economic and social problems. However, the artistic life was exuberant and the period between the 1890s and 1910s was known as the

"Silver Age of Russian Art." Cultural life attracted society to divert their attention from the harsh realities that were evident. At this point, the cinema came to the forefront as a practical option for its ability to attract both higher and lower classes simultaneously.<sup>77</sup> Denise Youngblood comments on the impact of the early films by stating that: "They were, in fact, an intrinsic part of Silver Age culture, expanding the possibilities of "high art" by providing a much-needed synthesis of high culture, entertainment, and technology as well as drawing on Russian folk motifs."<sup>78</sup> Everyone could find something for themselves in this new form of art and entertainment. The journalists and film critics of that time were also aware of this trend. Aleksander Serafimovich, who witnessed this period, suggests that:

If you look in the auditorium, the composition of the audience will amaze you. Everyone is there: students and policemen, writers and prostitutes, officers and girl students, all kinds of bearded and bespectacled intellectuals, workers, shop assistants, tradesmen, society ladies, dressmakers, civil servants, in a word, everyone.<sup>79</sup>

The first screenings of the time consisted of four or five short films and newsreels. The number of theaters increased gradually and Russian film companies started to make their

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<sup>77</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 7.

<sup>78</sup> Denise Jeanne Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror: Moviemaking in Russia 1908-1918* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Yuri Tsivian and Richard Taylor, *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception* (London: Routledge, 1994), 26.

presence felt in the Russian cinema in the second half of the 1900s. The rental system was introduced during 1907-1908. It was a profitable system for Russian entrepreneurs as some of them could accumulate significant capital by concentrating on rental business and owning theater chains. This capital would pave the way for the foundation of Russian national cinema.<sup>80</sup>

One of those entrepreneurs was Aleksandr Drankov, who produced the first Russian feature film *Stenka Razin* (Vladimir Romashkov), in 1908. Drankov owned a small photo studio in St. Petersburg priory and he became a photographer in State Duma. In 1907 he opened the first Russian film studio. After the revolution, he went to Constantinople and later to the USA, where he resumed his business. There is no further information about his stay in the USA.<sup>81</sup> When it comes to *Stenka Razin*, a folk rebel becomes emotionally confused by a captive Persian princess. This confusion concerns his men as it affects his fight against authority. It was a short film that lasted only ten minutes. Although the film is touted as the first Russian feature film, its artistic quality was questionable. It is regarded as a "clumsy" product by film historians.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from Drankov, another entrepreneur, Alexander Khanzhankov, a former Cossack captain, played a unique role in developing the Russian film industry in the same period.

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<sup>80</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>81</sup> N. M. Zorkaya, *The Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1989), 17.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 12. Other early examples of Russian feature films were whether the adoption of classic works such as *Song of the Merchant Kalashnikov*, *Idiot*, *the Fountain of Bakhchisarai* or historical films such as the *Death of Ivan Terrible* or the *Peter the Great*; see A. V. Bekher and C. L. Lonina, "Rossiskiy Kinematograf Nachala XX Veka," *PR i Reklama: Traditsii i Innovatsii* 7, no. 2 (2012)

One of the most significant achievements of his company was *The Defense of Sevastopol* (*Oborona Sevastopolya*), which is the first full-length Russian film. The film subjects the Russian defense in Sevastopol against the Allied forces during the Crimean War.

Prominent filmmaker Vasily Goncharov was assigned as the director and the premiere took place in 1911. Rather than narrating a story, the film consisted of battle depictions and original images of the war veterans.<sup>83</sup> The film became a sensation after its release and it can be considered a landmark in Russian film history.

Another significant Russian production company was Thiemann and Reinhardt, which was founded in 1912. The co-founder Paul Thiemann was a Baltic German who worked for film studio Gaumont previously. His partner Friedrich Reinhardt was a tobacco merchant initially.<sup>84</sup> The company produced one of the most influential films of the time, *Departure of a Grand Old Man* (*Ukhod velikogo startsa*), in 1912. The film was one of the first works of Yakov Protazanov, who would direct many prominent films both in pre-revolutionary Russia and the following periods. The film subjects the life and death of Lev Tolstoy and his relationship with his wife, Sofia Andreevna. Andreevna's negatively depicted imagery caused her protest and the company could not be audacious enough to screen the film in Russia. However, the film was released in Europe, where it was appreciated.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>84</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 10.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 14-16.

The number of Russian films had soared in the first years of the 1910s; however, the dominance of foreign production companies was still present. This dominance continued until World War I. The war affected the industry profoundly and foreign companies started to forsake the Russian market. Russian filmmakers broke free from foreign competition and the proportion of foreign films had fallen to 20% by 1916.<sup>86</sup> Besides, ticket sales increased due to the prohibition of vodka and daily problems such as high inflation and the bitterness of war.<sup>87</sup> In other words, films became a tool for escaping from the harsh conditions of wartime. However, the film medium also acquired a new function, namely political, during the period.

In the first years of the war, the Skobelev Committee, which would release patriotic postcards, newspapers, literature and propaganda films, was established and patriotic films became prominent on the big screen. Although Nicholas II thought that "cinema was something empty, useless and even harmful," the government did not hesitate to encourage studios to produce patriotic films. *Slava nam smert' vragam, Tayna germanskogo posol'stva, Tozhe vojna, Polk smirnoi Skobelevskiy marsh, Umer bednyaga v bol'nitse voyennoy, Liliya Bel'gii, Yamshchik, ne goni loshadey* were some of the patriotic films that were released for this purpose.<sup>88</sup> Besides, Nicholas II thought about the nationalization of film studios in February 1916; however, the February

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>87</sup> A. C. Kupriyanova, "Kino v Gody Pervoy Mirovoy Voyny," *Al'manakh Molodoy Nauki* 1 (2014): pp. 40-41.

<sup>88</sup> A. I. Fal'ko, "Rol' Kino v Formirovanií Obshchestvennogo Mneniya v Rossii Pervoy Poloviny XX Veka," *Ekonomicheskkiye i Gumanitarnyye Issledovaniya Regionov* 2 (2013): pp. 51-54.

Revolution in 1917 ended all Tsarist state's prospected politics on cinema.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, following the enormous defeats in the front, the interest in patriotic films would decrease in time.

Another prominent genre of the period was documentary. Novitskiy, Mutashevskiy, Ermolov, Rillo, Verigo-Farovskiy were brave and determined directors who did not hesitate to work in harsh conditions, including battlefronts, disaster areas and the most remote parts of the Russian land. The visual documents of World War I, the February Revolution, the Arctic explorations and the Russian cities and villages had reached to present day by courtesy of them.<sup>90</sup> In one sense, they ignited the war-documentary tradition of Russian-Soviet cinema, which would also be prominent during World War II. The following generations would inherit their courage.

Melodrama, in particular, came to the fore as a highly favorite genre concerning feature films. Besides, detective film was another genre that attracted attention. Regarding feature films, the most influential directors of the time were Yevgeni Bauer and Yakov Protazanov. While Bauer was working under Khanzankov Studio, Protazanov started to work with Ermoliev's company, which began to operate in 1914. Besides them, Ivan Mozhukhin and Vera Kholodnaia were the most famous film stars of the time.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Anna Mihaylanova Yevthushenko, “‘Velikiy Nemoy’ Na Sovetskoy Pochve Pervyye Shagi Gosudarstvennogo Kino v Bol'shevistskoy Rossii 1917-1921 Gg.,” *Vektor Nauki Tol'yattinskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 3, no. 25 (2013): pp. 323-328.

<sup>90</sup> A. C. Kupriyanova, “Kino v Gody Pervoy Mirovoy Voyny.”

<sup>91</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 18-20.

*The Queen of Spades (Pikovaya Dama/ 1916)* was a well-known example of pre-revolution Russian cinema. It was a product of the partnership between director Yakov Protazanov, producer Yosif Ermoliev and actor Ivan Mozzhukhin. Ermoliev founded his studio under his name and started to operate in 1914. The studio took attention, thanks to its contracts with Protazanov and Mozzhukhin after its establishment.<sup>92</sup> *The Queen of Spades* was an adaptation of Pushkin's story of the same title. The main character is a young officer named Ghermann, played by Mozzhukhin. He discovers a secret about the three cards from an old countess. Knowing this secret, he uses it in gambling to enter high society. The film has a non-linear narrative that depends on flashbacks and unusual camera movements were also used. These two aspects of the film reflect the psychological motivation of the protagonist.<sup>93</sup> The unorthodox style of cinematography and narrative put the film in a special place in the pre-revolutionary Russian cinema.

The partnership of this trio had continued in another project named *Father Sergius (Otets Sergiy/ 1917)*. The film is regarded as a masterpiece and one of the finest silent films not only in Russian film history but also in the history of world cinema. It was produced after the February Revolution, which did not bring significant changes in the film industry. *Father Sergius* narrates the spiritual evolution and salvation of Prince Kasatsky, who dismisses the social world because of its emptiness and corruption.

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<sup>92</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 20.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

During his spiritual journey, the audience experiences his torments and temptations. Moreover, Kasatsky has conflicts with authorities because of his Tolstoyan message. Ironically, the first screening of the film was held in the spring of 1918, just months after the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>94</sup>

While Yakov Protazanov had a long career spanned throughout the Russian Empire and Bolshevik Russia, Yevgeny Bauer lived a short but distinctive career compared to Protazanov. This short-lived career, however, was enough to make him a master of pre-Revolutionary Russian cinema. Film historian Georges Sadoul says that "... Bauer can rightly be considered the first true cinematic artist, not only in Russia but also, perhaps, in the world".<sup>95</sup> The audience praised his masterpieces such as *Children of Century* (1915), *Twilight of a Woman's Soul* (1913), *Child of Big City* (1914); however, neither film subjects historical stories.

The Russian film industry and the audience quickly and successfully adopted the film medium in a short time. One can argue that both artistically and commercially, a vivid cinema was present in pre-revolutionary Russia. However, the political changes would enormously affect the fate of Russian film art, as the Bolshevik Revolution shook political, economic and social life and influenced the cultural field, including film

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<sup>94</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 24-25. During the early years following the coup, the censorship policy of the new film administration was not clear yet. Indeed, there wasn't a centralized administration and the censorship would become a central subject only after 1928 when the cultural revolution was initiated.

<sup>95</sup> L. G. Myasnikova, "Yevgeniy Bauer - Arkhitektor Predmetno- Prostranstvennoy Sredy Kinofil'ma (K 150-Letiyu So Dnya Rozhdeniya)," *Dekorativnoye Iskusstvo I Predmetno-Prostranstvennaya Sreda. Vestnik Mgkhpa* 3 (2014).

medium/art. The Russian film sector would live its biggest crisis after November 1917. A well-functioned industry and an artistically qualitative cinema would disappear until the mid-1920s. Besides, politics and leadership interference would bring different motivations and consequences in every period of Soviet cinema from the beginning to the end.

### **III.II. Russian Film Industry after the October Revolution**

Lenin's famous quote about the cinema is a typical introduction for studies concerning the film politics of the young Bolshevik state: "Of all the arts, for us, cinema is the most important."<sup>96</sup> It was inevitable that the new socialist government was aware of the prospects that the films might offer. However, the film policies would be ambiguous, primarily until 1928, as it was a complicated period regarding industrial and economic aspects for the inexperienced Bolshevik leaders. Therefore, Lenin's words should be considered in light of the successes and failures of the early Bolshevik regime in using films as propaganda tools.

Propaganda and agitation were crucial tools for the socialist movement in pre-Revolutionary Russia. As a radical socialist party, the Bolsheviks were also keen on using those methods. However, the need for propaganda and agitation did not end with the victory in the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks could seize power in only a minor

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<sup>96</sup> Ian Christie, "The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents," in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents*, ed. Richard Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), xvi.

part of the country and they had to build a new society based on Marxist-Leninist principles while fighting against the remnants of the old regime and rival political groups. Therefore, the politics of propaganda and agitation kept their importance in the post-October period.<sup>97</sup>

Cinema was the perfect medium for Bolsheviks in theory. One of the main tasks in the post-revolutionary period was the education of society. Films had a significant advantage over literary resources as illiterates and non-Russian speakers could also understand them. Besides, films could be interpreted as signs of modernity and technology.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, the material realities were far from suitable to realize these pledges. The film industry collapsed evidently after the Bolshevik coup. Many studios migrated to Crimea, which was under the White Army's rule with the technical equipment they owned.<sup>99</sup> Despite presenting abstract and theoretical filmmaking prospects, a concrete implementation did not come out in the first years following November 1917.<sup>100</sup>

One of the main problems concerning the film industry was the lack of administrating

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<sup>97</sup> Richard Taylor, "From October to October: The Soviet Political System in the 1920s and Its Films," in *Politics and the Media: Film and Television for the Political Scientist and Historian*, ed. Michael J. Clark (Oxford: Pergamon, 1979), 31.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 30.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>100</sup> A. M. Yevtushenko "“Velikiy nemoy” Na Sovetskoy pochve. pervyye shagi gosudarstvennogo kino v Bol'shevistskoy Rossii 1917–1921 gg.," Besides one can argue that the Bolsheviks did not have a concrete program for the future. The impact of the Civil War and the inexperience of the Bolsheviks brought instability in many aspects. After granting control after the Civil War, they chose the method of terror to liquidate the remnants of all opposition while they retreated from the Marxist ideology concerning economics and introduced a semi-capitalist system named new Economic Policy. In such a situation demanding a concrete policy on cinema was impossible. For the history of the Bolshevik Revolution, see Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

bodies and decentralization. The date of 27 August 1919 is usually treated as the beginning of Soviet cinema because of the nationalization of the film industry in that year. However, there was not a discernible industry at all when the declaration was made. This decree can be seen as an attempt to centralize the cinema administration rather than asserting dominance over a well-working industry. Following the nationalization, the Moscow Committee transformed into All-Russian People's Commissariat RFSFR (VFKO) and it took Petrograd Committee under its umbrella. Although the decree did not bring a short-term consequence, it remarks on the first centralization movement in Soviet cinema.<sup>101</sup>

Apart from the decentralization in the industry, the political, social and economic problems also pushed the industry into background. The destruction caused by the Civil War, the famine of 1921, and the crisis such as the Kronstadt Rebellion and economic collapse halted the film production. Filmmaking was one of the least essential cases for the party in such a situation.<sup>102</sup> For this reason, the first years of the Bolshevik rule could not develop a stable and functional film policy. These years should be seen as a preparation period in the film industry when the Soviet state faced harsher problems.

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<sup>101</sup> The centralization policy would continue with the Lenin's 1922 decree which would be followed by the foundation of Goskino in the same year which would attempt leading the industry from the top, see A. M. Yevtushenko "'Velikiy nemoy' Na Sovetskoy pochve. pervyye shagi gosudarstvennogo kino v Bol'shevistskoy Rossii 1917–1921 gg."

<sup>102</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918-1935* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 2. The inexperience of the regime was evident in Cibrario Case. The shortage of films was especially crucial and emerged as the ultimate problem during 1920s. Jacques Cibrario, who was a private film dealer, was hired by the Moscow Cinema Committee to use his contacts in the USA to supply raw film. However, Cibrario embezzled the committee's millions of dollars at the end, see Kristin Thompson, "Government Policies and Practical Necessities in the Soviet Cinema of the 1920s.," in *Red Screen, Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* ed. Anna Lawton (London: Routledge, 1992), 20-22.

However, a more organized stance began to be taken by 1922.

### **III.II.I. The Policies of Goskino (1922-1924)**

The Bolsheviks were leading a devastated country that experienced an extended period of war, famine and rebellion. Unfortunately, they neither had a plan nor experience concerning politics and economics. Regarding economics, the solution they found was unexpected as they introduced an abrupt doctrine that retreated from Marxist ideals and gave concessions to private enterprises. The state would own the strategic resources and industries; however, creating a petit-bourgeois that would revive the trade in the country by accumulating capital was encouraged. In many sectors, state corporations would compete with private companies. Both private companies and state corporations were deprived of state subsidies and those institutions had to be self-sufficient to survive.<sup>103</sup> This mixed economy system with capitalist competition was formulated by Lenin in 1921 and labeled as New Economic Policy (NEP). It would be in operation until 1928 when the First Five Year Plan was declared under Stalin's leadership.

The case in the film industry was also similar and a mixed system was initiated in the industry. In this system, the distribution and the production were controlled mainly by the state, but film theaters belonged mostly to private entrepreneurs. The state required capital and foreign investment was encouraged to find cash. The industry was also

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<sup>103</sup> Vance Kepley Jr., "The First 'Perestroika': Soviet Cinema under the First Five-Year Plan," *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 4 (1996).

transformed in institutional terms. Before the NEP period, the lack of a centralized institution to manage the industry was apparent and there was no particular administration unit. Therefore, the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) ordered the foundation of Goskino, which would function as a new state cinema enterprise in 1922. This enterprise would monopolize the distribution; however, the monopoly of Goskino was challenged by three de-facto private companies, namely Sevzapkino<sup>104</sup>, Proletkino and Mezhrabpom.<sup>105</sup>

Although the production rates increased after the inauguration of Goskino, its effects on the industry were limited. The desired revitalization could not be achieved as many problems were still present. The lack of film production brought the import of foreign films that dominated the Soviet market. Ninety-five percent of the film in Russian theaters were foreign in 1924. The audiences were unquestionably preferring foreign films to Soviet ones.<sup>106</sup> Besides, the theaters were in idle condition. None of the 143 theaters in operation before World War I had survived by 1921.<sup>107</sup> Rental rates were high and a film shortage was acute. Finally, ticket prices were costly because of the high

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<sup>104</sup> Severo-Zapadnoye oblastnoye upravleniye po delam fotografii i kinematografii, North-West Regional Department of Photography and Cinematography

<sup>105</sup> Mezhdunarodnoy rabochey pomoshchi, International Workers' Assistance. Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 201.

<sup>106</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14-16.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*, 197.

taxes and post-war inflation.<sup>108</sup> As a consequence, the Goskino project was short-lived when all these factors were summed up.

The film critics and the authorities were also aware of the crisis that was going through in the industry. In 1924, a conference was organized by the All-Union Conference of Cinema Organizations to deal with the Mantsev Commission's findings, which had been working since September 1923 to analyze the industry's problems. The results recommended retaining the government monopoly on distribution; however, the committee suggested a joint-stock company had to be found to unify film organizations. The film critics and journals of the time were also aware of the problem that Goskino had been facing. The bureaucratic hierarchy was also criticized and the danger of *glavkism*<sup>109</sup> was underlined.<sup>110</sup>

Another crucial point in the conference was Lunacharsky's speech that praised films' propaganda and agitation function. However, he also stated that they needed commercial films to maintain the healthy functioning of the industry. Concerning the financial issues, A. Goldobin made a significant proposal that the high taxing policy should be abandoned and the film industry should be exempted from any tax.<sup>111</sup> The other underlying problems that Goskino had faced were the lack of labor force and the process

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<sup>108</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s*, 14-16.

<sup>109</sup> Bureaucratization.

<sup>110</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era: 1918-1935* (Austin, TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 1991), 22.

<sup>111</sup> Nadezhda Vladimirovna Shalayeva and Mariya Aleksandrovna Zorina, "Sovetskiy kinematograf kak nositel' proletarskoy ideologii v 1920-ye gg.," in *Kubanskiye istoricheskiye chteniya* (Krasnodar, 2012), 233-234.

of cinefication. These problems were chronic and they would play an essential part in the film industry for the following years. Many filmmakers, film personnel and actors left the country after the revolution. Moreover, the shortage of raw materials and economic problems prevented training new personnel on all levels. Raw film stock was a chronic shortage and the Soviet state lacked the technical capability and capital to establish a film industry. Besides, the lack of electric power and equipment caused insufficient lighting in films.<sup>112</sup>

The leaders of the Bolshevik Party were also aware of the situation. Stalin stated at the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in May 1924 that "Things are going badly in the cinema. The cinema is the means of mass agitation. The task is to take it into our own hands."<sup>113</sup> Trotsky had also underlined complaints about the problems in the industry. Whatever the intentions of the Bolshevik leadership might have been, the necessary steps were not taken by the government. No articles on cinema were published in *Pravda*, the party's leading newspaper, between 1917 and 1921.<sup>114</sup>

### **III.II.II. The Policies of Sovkino**

As a result of its ineffectiveness, Goskino would be replaced by Sovkino at the end of 1924. Sovkino was established as a joint-stock company just like the Conference of

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<sup>112</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era: 1918-1935*, 41.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 64.

<sup>114</sup> Richard Taylor, "From October to October: The Soviet Political System in the 1920s and Its Films," 34.

Cinema Organizations in May 1924 had suggested. Sovkino inherited a non-functioning film industry when it started to work at the beginning of 1925. Although Sovkino's financial capacity was much higher than Goskino's, it was still insufficient to resolve the infrastructural problems and enhance film production. Therefore, the Soviet film industry should decide on two contradicting views to move further. These contradicting views were between Narkompros's<sup>115</sup> Main Committee on Political Education and bureaucrats/producers working in the industry.

The first view was represented by Narkompros's Main Committee on Political Education (*Glavripolitprosvest*), which focused on the cinefication in the countryside and promoted educational film vs. avant-garde cinema and entertaining ones.<sup>116</sup> It was a revolutionary goal that neglected any commercial and financial aspects of the medium. On the other hand, the aim of bureaucrats and producers was the well-functioning of the industry. They thought that the industry should take form according to the audience's taste and foreign films should be imitated to provide box office income, which could revive the industry. The spokesperson of Sovkino Ilya Trainin and Anatoli Lunacharsky were the defenders of this view. Lunacharsky suggested that Soviet films should be no less entertaining than foreign ones.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Narodnyy komissariat prosveshcheniya, People's Commissariat for Education.

<sup>116</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, "Entertainment of Enlightenment? Popular Cinema in Soviet Society, 1921-1931," in *New Directions in Soviet History*, ed. Stephen White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 42.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

Trainin had a plan and it was simple: “solicit foreign investment, develop joint ventures, and make a few big-budget films that could be sold on the international market.”<sup>118</sup>

Under Trainin's rule, Soviet cinema was far from revolutionary ideals. The foreign films continued to dominate the box office as the latest hits were visiting without any delay.

Hollywood blockbuster *Thief of Baghdad* (Raoul Walsh/ 1924) was the biggest hit and provided a necessary income for Sovkino. The masses were excited when Douglas

Fairbanks and Mary Pickford visited Moscow in July 1926.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand,

Konstantin Eggert's big-budget film *The Bear's Wedding* (*Medvezhya svadba*) earned a huge box office and the film was advertised as “The first hit of 1926”.<sup>120</sup>

However, the chronic problems of the industry remained unresolved. Although the period between 1925-1926 was the years of achievement as masterpieces like *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*/ Sergey M. Eisenstein/ 1925) were released, the discontent among film critics and organizations continued. The basis of this discontent was mainly the treatment of the worker's clubs as they claimed that Sovkino only cared for its profit and disregarded such revolutionary and ideological clubs and organizations.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era: 1918-1935*. This debate would not live long enough as the cultural revolution began in 1928. The commercial interests of Sovkino and the non-ideological presence in the films would be abandoned. Instead, an ideological cinema which could reach masses was aimed to be realized. This view would evolve into the slogan of "films for millions" during the first years of the 1930s.

Considering the problems that the film industry had faced in the first decade of the Bolshevik rule, Jeffrey Brooks criticizes Lenin's quote and suggests that cinema was the least essential art during the 1920s.<sup>122</sup> The material needs and the failure of government agencies to overcome them resulted in the insufficient impact of the medium regarding propaganda and agitation. Fadeicheva also mentions the problems of the young Bolshevik state and its failure to use its soft power potential.<sup>123</sup> Investing in coal mining, metal processing, textile industry, shipbuilding, and seed banks' establishment were more critical than filmmaking for the Bolshevik state at that time of crisis.<sup>124</sup> The physical inabilities and the policies of the inexperienced Bolshevik leadership prevented the use of the film industry for socialist causes.

Nevertheless, the establishment of Sovkino positively affected the industry, though the problems of the industry could not be solved completely. The policies of Trainin offered a heterogeneous period of film selection for the Soviet audience. During that time, the Soviet audience could find the chance to select films from a rich repertoire, including the works of avant-gardes, foreign hits or indigenous entertainment films. Their range of choice would be dramatically decreased in the next decade and the Soviet audience would have to wait for the Thaw era to witness a varied film selection regarding style, politics and ideology.

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<sup>122</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, "Russian Cinema and Public Discourse, 1900–1930," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 11, no. 2 (1991).

<sup>123</sup> Fadeicheva Mariyanna Al'fredovna, "Kul'turnaya Pplitika Bol'shevikov: Upushchennyye Vozmozhnosti 'Myagkoy' Vlasti," *Vestnik Yuzhno-Ural'skogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Seriya: Sotsial'no-Gumanitarnyye Nauki* 232, no. 91 (2012), 122-125.

<sup>124</sup> A. M. Yevtushenko, "'Velikiy nemoy' Na Sovetskoy pochve. pervyye shagi gosudarstvennogo kino v Bol'shevistskoy Rossii 1917–1921 gg."

### **III.II.III. Films of the Period**

The Bolsheviks noticed that films were not only propaganda weapons but also commercial commodities. Therefore, the films of the time can be divided into two groups according to their stylistic and commercial success. On the one side of this division is the Golden Age of Russian cinema filmmakers, namely Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Dziga Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Aleksandr Dovzhenko, Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg. They were filmmakers and film theoreticians who contributed to filmmaking by introducing and adopting new techniques. They created an avant-garde style that brought many masterpieces. However, their works could not reach mass audiences as their style was too abstract for the ordinary Soviet audience. On the other side, other filmmakers such as Iakov Protazanov, Fredrich Ermler, Boris Barnet and Abram Room were also prominent directors with a more mainstream film style.

### **III.II.IV. Revolutionary Films**

Among the Golden Age filmmakers, Eisenstein, Dovzhenko and Pudovkin come forward with their interpretations of the Russian Revolution in their films. The most notable films of Eisenstein in this period were *The Strike* (Stachka/ 1925), *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (Oktaybr/ 1927). *The Strike* subjects a workers' demonstration in the pre-1917 period and the masses take the central role rather than a single character in the film. The suicide of a worker causes unrest and strike among other workers. Their peaceful demonstration, brutally suppressed by the police, turns

into a massacre of unarmed workers. A documentary style was used in the film, and Eisenstein focused on montage principles to depict the capitalist class and the police force. While the capitalist class is identified with their fat bellies and cigars, the police forces are identified with monkeys, owls and bulldogs for their depiction as sly, cunning and devious characters.<sup>125</sup>

The following film is *The Battleship of Potemkin*, which can be seen as Eisenstein's most famous work at that period. The film tells the story of the mutiny in the Battleship Potemkin, which took place during the 1905 Revolution. A group of sailors refuse to eat rotten meat and started a protest. The commandership orders to suppress the rally, but soldiers deny shooting their brothers, thanks to the efforts of the sailor Vakalinchuk, who would be shot by an officer latterly. The sailors take control of the ship and sail to Odessa. The people in Odessa mourn for Vakalinchuk and send supplies to the ship. However, the army advances in the city and suppresses the revolt.

Just like in *The Strike*, Eisenstein uses the juxtaposition of frames to create meaning in the film. A contrast is depicted between the linearity of the soldiers and unorganized masses by juxtaposing different sequences. The crew, people and the battleship itself are the main characters in the film. The mutiny in the battleship can be seen as a microcosm of the revolution in Russia. The upper classes oppress the lower ones and Vakalinchuk plays the role that Lenin had played. It was not the agitation but the exploitation that

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<sup>125</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 54.

makes people revolt.<sup>126</sup>

Eisenstein's following work is *October*, which the Bolshevik administration ordered for the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. However, due to production delays, the film could be screened in March 1928. Eisenstein was rebuked after the film's screening as the film bureaucrats demanded entertaining films with commercial value. Eisenstein used a symbolist narrative using the advantages of montage. This symbolist narrative was too complex for the ordinary film audience to understand. Alternatively, another master of the Golden Age, Vsevolod Pudovkin, focuses on the individuals' experience during a time of crisis. Pudovkin's style is defined as poetic montage, combining innovative cinema techniques with literary and stage techniques. *Mother* (Mat/ 1926) and *The End of St. Petersburg (Konets Sankt-Peterburga/ 1927)* can be seen as the peak of his career.

The first film, *Mother*, was adapted from Gorky's novel of the same name. It tells the story of Pelagaya Nilovna Vlasova, who became a revolutionary after the arrest of his son, Pavel. Vlasova is a simple and ordinary Russian woman who represents the exploited and the humiliated ones. When the film and the novel are compared, it can be seen that the father figure is more emphasized in the film. He is an oppressive figure over Vlasova and after his death, the heroine can break her chains and join the

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

revolutionary cause.<sup>127</sup> By focusing on the story of a single character, Pudovkin diverges from Eisenstein, who avoids using individual characters and professional actors in his films. Taking attention through a simple person, Pudovkin reaches a general expression through the particular. Vlasova depicts the inevitability of the revolution, a common theme of the films in the 1920s.<sup>128</sup> Pudovkin thought that the cinema was more than an artistic experiment. Therefore, he looked for the depiction of real-life rather than experimenting. As the novel has a deep narrative concerning the characters' psychology, Pudovkin uses montage to express the characters' emotions and psychology. This use of poetic montage creates a link between cinematography and literature.

The next film of the trilogy is *The End of St. Petersburg*. This time, Pudovkin tells the story of Lad, who is a young peasant proletarian who works in the capital. He lives in a poverty-stricken village. His mother is also a proletarian who recently had given birth to a baby. They have to work to feed the hungry family. Lad is a ubiquitous hero who represents the typical peasant proletarian in pre-Revolutionary Russia. He should be treated as an anonymous hero. Being more than an individual, he is “one of the millions.” Like *Mother*, *The End of St. Petersburg* also has an epic and lyrical style, and montage is used to depict metaphors. For instance, a placid dream of a child is juxtaposed with a sailboat gliding on the Neva.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 58-59.

<sup>128</sup> N. M. Zorkaya, *The Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema*, 76-77.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 79.

Aleksandr Dovzhenko is another master of the period. He was ethnically Ukrainian and he is called “the poet of Ukraine.” Like Eisenstein and Pudovkin, Dovzhenko was also interested in the theme of the October Revolution and he has two works, namely *Zvenigora* (1928) and *Arsenal* (1929), that depict the period. The first one, *Zvenigora*, tells the story of an older man and his two grandsons, Pavlo and Timoshka, during the revolution. While Pavlo is an idle boy who represents the bourgeoisie, Timoshka represents the opposite identity. The film takes its name from the place the grandfather tells stories about, the mountainous steppe Zvenigora where the Tatars and the Poles had fought in the past. While Timoshka takes side with the revolutionaries, Pavlo turns into a bandit and leaves the country. Later, he comes back to Ukraine and supports the counter-revolution with the money he illegally earned abroad. Although Pavlo tries to take the grandfather to his side, Timoshka wins him over. The myths of Zvenigora fuse with reality and Timoshka finds the meaning of life in the revolution.<sup>130</sup>

The next film, *Arsenal*, takes place in the following years of the revolution and places Timosh at the center of the story one more time. After the revolution, Timosh had become a worker at an arsenal factory. However, there are still conflicting forces against the revolution. Because of the unrest caused by the Ukrainian nationalists, famine has struck. In this desperate situation, Timosh continues his struggle with the nationalists and enters into a conflict against the counter-revolutionary Cossacks, who outnumber the revolutionary workers. Nevertheless, Timosh fantastically becomes invincible in this

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<sup>130</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 67.

fight as bullets cannot harm him. The revolution is the one that becomes invincible. Diverging from Eisenstein and Pudovkin, who did not break away from reality despite their heavy use of metaphors, Dovzhenko adopts a surreal narrative in the film.<sup>131</sup>

### III.II.V. Mainstream Films

Although the works of those great masters were highly acclaimed by the critics abroad, the Soviet audience did not show interest in those films. More than 95% of the films released were of foreign origin.<sup>132</sup> Mostly, Hollywood films were the popular ones in the first decade of the Bolshevik Revolution. However, there were also directors like Room, Protazanov, Barnet and Ermler, who made stylistically non-innovative but thematically important films. Peter Kenez suggests that their works were the most interesting in NEP Russia as they were interested in real people and how to attract them.<sup>133</sup> These directors' films reflect the characteristics of daily life better than the films which belong to montage cinema. Although their style is more mainstream and straightforward, their films focus on a more complex world not based on the heroes and villains of the revolution.

Protazanov was the most senior of these filmmakers as he already had a distinguished career in pre-revolutionary Russia. His work *His Call* (*Yego Prizyv*/ 1925) tells the story of a Russian emigre who comes back to Russia to find his hidden jewels. He falls in love

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<sup>131</sup> See Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 62-63.

<sup>132</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era*, 23.

<sup>133</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 68.

with the young worker who is residing in his old place. At the end, his identity is unmasked and the betrayed worker is forgiven. One of the interesting points of the film is the scenes about the death of Lenin. The film can be seen as a step for the initiation of Lenin's cult.<sup>134</sup>

While *His Call* is a politically correct film, Ermler's *Katka's Reinette Apples* (*Katka-bumazhnyy ranet/ 1926*) was more critical. The film tells Katka's story, who could not find a job in the factory and started to sell apples on the street. The film portrays the life of street vendors in the NEP period. In this world, the state has no control, as the police cannot prevent the illegal trade carried out by the film's villains.<sup>135</sup> Ermler's following film also portrays a dark view of the Soviet village. The protagonist of the film, Katia, is a pregnant girl abandoned by her lover and the villain, Andrei, is a member of Komsomol who deserts Katia.<sup>136</sup>

Room's work *Third Meshchanskaya Street* (*Tretya meshchanskaya/ 1927*) was a highly controversial work for the time. The story is set in 1920s Moscow and it tells the love triangle between Kolia, Volodia and Liuda. The film has an interesting finale, which cannot be treated as a happy ending. Kolia becomes impregnated after extramarital affairs and she leaves two men behind by also rejecting abortion.<sup>137</sup> Though there were many other significant mainstream films in this period, the share of local films in the box

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>135</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 70-71.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>137</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 64.

office could not increase to a considerable level. One of the main aims of the following leadership was to adjust this imbalance and promote domestic production by restricting film import. This policy had a commercial aspect and a political one as the ideological and commercial characteristics of the film medium would fuse into a single one under the Stalinist administration of the film industry.

### **III.III. Film Industry under Stalin 1928-1953**

The year 1928 was a significant milestone for the Soviet Union. The New Economic Policy gave its place to collectivization and a rapid phase of industrialization. The First Five Year Program was inaugurated and central planning became the primary trend in the Soviet economy. Many industrial projects were introduced in the following years and a massive transformation would become evident in all aspects of politics. Apart from this systemic transformation, the rise of Yosif Stalin in the Politburo of the Communist Party was another significant turning point in the fate of the Soviet state and society. Lenin's theory of the dictatorship of the vanguard party on behalf of the working class would be substituted by a new dictatorial system evolving through a leader's cult during the 1930s.

The cultural policies also got their share from this new type of dictatorship and centralization. A cultural revolution, which should reconstruct the norms and values of Soviet society, was triggered in the same year. On the other hand, the time of Stalin was an extended period that had different trends, themes and politics. Following the cultural revolution period, socialist realism would become the central doctrine of Soviet art,

beginning in the 1930s. During the 1940s, the Second World War and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of Zhdanov in the post-war period tremendously affected the industry. Maya Turovskaya summarizes the main aspects of the Stalin period as such:

Universalism and the construction of a new way of life, the rejection of the past in favor of Utopia of the future, and deconstruction, the search for new forms, pluralism and the competition between the -isms, involvement in the world cultural process – all these gave way to pragmatism, to the embodiment of the idea of the imperial state, to unity of method, socialist realism, to an orientation towards the past: the legacy of classics, the search for national roots, the ideal of beauty, popular accessibility, clear plot structures and the image of living man.”<sup>138</sup> Any divergence from this unity was considered as a great sin.

### **III.III.I. Cultural Revolution in Cinema, 1928-1932**

The primary concern in the Soviet cinema of that time was regarded as the inefficient use of films to create a Soviet culture that would empower the Soviet state and its legitimacy over society. As early as 1927, an anonymous report on the film industry stated the required policy: "Our films must be 100 percent ideologically correct and 100 percent commercially viable."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Maya Turovskaya, "The 1930s and 1940s: Cinema in Context," in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, ed. Richard Taylor and Derek Spring (London; New York, 1993: Routledge), 37.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

The necessary steps in institutional terms had been commenced in the following years. One of the first events was the 15th Party Congress in December 1927, which settled on the party's control over cultural life. In the following conference, the Central Committee met in March 1928 and the independent film policy of the NEP period was dismissed. It was declared that a purge of the film repertoire should be carried out and any harmful and alien substance to the USSR had to be eliminated.<sup>140</sup> The fuse of entertainment and the ideological message was a critical resolution in the meeting. Another essential settlement was the “proletarianization” of the film cadres, which the Central Committee declared in January 1929. However, the results that had been achieved were far from the desired level. Even after the purges during the 1930s, the working class had failed to lead the industry due to technical inexperience. Besides, the material deficiencies and primitive infrastructure would be significant restrictions.<sup>141</sup>

Regarding liquidation, the NEP supporters were the first victims. Political re-education was the goal and the training of new personnel consisted of workers and peasants was initiated. Thousands of administrative staff (economists, accountants and planners), who would adopt the film industry to the policies of FYP, began their careers.<sup>142</sup> The NEP cinema and foreign films were also under fire during the cultural revolution. Ideological

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<sup>140</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 92.

<sup>141</sup> See Jamie Miller, “Soviet Cinema, 1929–41: The Development of Industry and Infrastructure,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 1 (2006): pp. 103-124.

<sup>142</sup> Vance Kepley Jr., “The First “Perestroika”: Soviet Cinema under the First Five-Year Plan,” *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 4 (1996).

complacency during the NEP period prevented a proletarian film style with strict borders regarding style and themes. Hollywood films invaded Soviet film theaters throughout the 1920s and commercial profit did not have meaning without ideological needs. Although the number of film imports was drastically reduced between 1928 and 1932, the influence of foreign films upon people had continued.<sup>143</sup>

To achieve unity and overcome these problems, Sovkino was eliminated for new leadership in the industry named Soyuzkino with the decree entitled "On the Development of an All-Union Cinema Industry Combine" on 13 February 1930. Soyuzkino became responsible for "all matters concerning the production of cinema equipment" and "all matters of film production, rental and general use."<sup>144</sup> It can be described as a bureaucratic layer and tool that the Soviet government had invented to escape from day to day initiation of film affairs.<sup>145</sup> Soyuzkino could decide on behalf of all film organizations, except Mezhrabpom studio, which would be liquidated in a couple of years.<sup>146</sup> However, the technical deficiencies were still evident. Increasing censorship also affected film production. The number of films decreased to forty-five in 1934 from one hundred nine in 1928.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> See Denise J. Youngblood, "The Fate of Soviet Popular Cinema during the Stalin Revolution," *Russian Review* 50, no. 2 (1991).

<sup>144</sup> Jamie Miller, *Soviet Cinema: Politics and Persuasion Under Stalin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 18.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>146</sup> Mezhrabpom is the acronym for International Worker's Aid which was a Germany based pro-communist organization. The organization established an aid campaign for the famine in Russia and the residuary capital was used for establishment of a film studio. It continued to operate as a private film company throughout the 1920s. See Peter Kenez, *The Birth of Propaganda State*, p. 201-202.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

During the cultural revolution, the problems were evident; however, there was no concrete plan to overcome them. It was a time for searching in the words of Peter Kenez.<sup>148</sup> Mainly, there was no consensus on film style compared to the following Socialist Realist period, which could homogenize artistic style under a single and rigid doctrine. Regarding the search that Kenez regards, the feature films were on target by some film critics like prominent critic Boris Sutyryn. In the article named "*O sotsialisticheskoi' rekonstruktsii kinematografii*," he diagnosed the film industry's problems. He refers to the resolutions of the Central Committee meeting of the Art Worker's Union, which proposed a radical transformation in the industry and eliminating the commercial remnants inherited from the NEP period. Besides, the cinema should not be defined as an art and its public use should also be transformed. Instead of depending on its entertainment features, the films should be used for education and propaganda.<sup>149</sup>

One can also argue that this revolution was a tool used by Stalin against the so-called "opportunistic Trotsky - Zinoviev bloc." During the cultural revolution, RAPP and Communist Academy did the necessary liquidation for Stalin in the film industry.<sup>150</sup> Their expanded power had diminished with the end of the cultural revolution in 1932 when Stalin would look for other terms of repression and exclusion, which would lead him to the Great Purge in the following years. Therefore, it can be stated that the cultural revolution can be seen as an introduction phase of Stalinist repression in Soviet cultural

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<sup>148</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 167.

<sup>149</sup> Boris Sutyryn, "O Sotsialisticheskoi' Rekonstruktsii Kinematografii," *Proleterskoe Kino* 1 (1931).

<sup>150</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-32," *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, no. 1 (1974), 37.

life rather than proposing a concrete outcome.

### **III.III.II Films for Millions, Purges and Socialist Realism**

Apart from Stalin, the leading actor in the first decade of Soviet cinema during the 1930s was Boris Shumyatsky, who headed the Soviet film industry from 1930 to his purge in 1937. Shumyatskii was a man of duty in the revolutionary movement since 1903, when he joined the socialist movement in Russia. In his letters to Stalin, he stated that he could do any work within the movement. Before the revolution, he had participated in some strike committees and latterly, he took duty in some administrative positions in Siberia. Then he was assigned to Iran as the ambassador of the Soviet Union. Finally, in 1930 he was appointed as the chairman of Soyuzkino.<sup>151</sup>

Although Shumyatsky would become the most responsible officer in the industry, he knew nothing about film art, as it can be understood from his curriculum vitae. At first glance, this can be seen as odd, but it should be noted that the medium of film had already acquired a new conception that focuses on using the medium as a political weapon. "Films for millions" became the main motto of this initiation. His party bureaucracy experience and his devotion to Stalin were the main reasons for his promotion in the film industry.<sup>152</sup>

The policy of "films for millions" requested "artistically worthwhile, commercially

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<sup>151</sup> Olesya Tsuz, "Vozhd' Sovetskoy Kinematografii," *Rodina* 10 (2011), pp. 132-134.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

successful and politically correct films," which were hard to be satisfied altogether.<sup>153</sup>

Shumyatsky suggested that genres could be helpful in expressing optimism and mobilization of cheerfulness, laughter and emotion in his article published in *Iskusstvo Kino* in 1933.<sup>154</sup> The significance given to genres in the post-cultural revolution period creates a difference between film style during the cultural revolution and its aftermath. However, there were struggles that Shumyatsky should face. He proposed big plans with great ambition; however, whether his fate or industry's, one could not save each other.

### **III.III.III. The problems in the industry and Soviet *Gollivud***

The first step was encouraging scriptwriters to become more active in the industry.

Shumyatsky named the principal task of the Soviet cinema as “the battle for high-quality scripts.”<sup>155</sup> The silent cinema was foregrounding visual image over the word and this feature of the silent film led film masters to experiment as it surpassed the ideological message. The director stated that a film with no plot could not be entertaining.<sup>156</sup> On the other hand, the most critical attribute of scripts was their controllability. The authorities could decide on a script and made necessary revisions before the production began. In other words, it was easy to apply censorship to scenarios.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Peter Kenez, “Soviet Cinema in the Age of Stalin,” in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, ed. Richard Taylor and Derek Spring (London: Routledge, 1993), 54.

<sup>154</sup> The proposed genres were dramas that portray the vicissitudes of struggle and show the ascending of optimism, lyrical and satirical comedies and the films that promote science and technology. The themes supported were the socialist transformation of agriculture, the foundation of socialist industry, the transformation of social life, the contrast between old and new, cultural development of society and heroism of Red Army, see Boris Shumyatsky, “Zadachi Templan 1934 goda,” *Sovetskoe Kino*, 11 (1933).

<sup>155</sup> Peter Kenez, “Soviet Cinema in the Age of Stalin,”

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, 50-51.

<sup>157</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992),

However, there were still problems with the infrastructure. Regarding the technical deficiencies of the time, the transition to sound was the central struggle that the industry had faced. Despite the inventions of Soviet sound devices by Pavel Tager and Aleksandr Shorin, Soviet cinema was still beginning to develop sound technology in cinema. The qualities of the first experiments were significantly low and technical advice from the USA was proposed. New equipment should be imported and Soviet personnel should be sent to the USA for professional training. However, the progress in the transition to sound would be slower than the expectations of the authorities. Due to the lack of funds, only five films could be produced in 1931.<sup>158</sup>

Not only the transition to sound but also cinefication was another troublesome issue. Shumyatsky confesses the trouble in the industry in his article published in June 1931. He complains about the failures of the plans for manufacturing sound equipment for the theaters and he especially gives the example of the proposal for a thousand sound devices that fell through because of incapability and inflating costs. Moreover, he was aware that adopting the Soviet theaters to sound films was a massive issue as thousands of theaters were dispersed in a vast geography.<sup>159</sup> By the end of the first Five-Year Plan, the concerns were more explicit: Only 224 film theaters had sound projectors from 27.578 film theaters in total. The situation did not get better within the decade as

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<sup>158</sup> Jamie Miller, "Soviet Cinema, 1929–41: The Development of Industry and Infrastructure," 108.

<sup>159</sup> Boris Shumyatsky, "Zadachi Templana 1934 Goda," *Sovetskoe Kino* 11 (1933).

Molotov declared that the network of sound equipment should be increased six times during the Third Five Year Plan in 1939.<sup>160</sup>

At this point, Shumyatsky took Hollywood as a model to overcome the problems. The Fordist production model of Hollywood should be imitated to create a Soviet *Gollivud* and it was another deviation from the cultural revolution. Shumyatsky's ideas about Hollywood were consolidated after he visited the USA with a delegation in 1935.<sup>161</sup> Hollywood had produced 700 films in 1934 and 800 films in 1935. Shumyatsky realized that the main point of this productivity was the professionalism of each worker, updating equipment constantly and rational approach to labor as a whole, which can be seen as the outcomes of the Fordist production system.<sup>162</sup> He planned that Soviet cinema could produce 200 films in the first stage of the project and reach 800 films produced at the end of the 1930s.<sup>163</sup> He improved his ideas further and proposed his plan in 1936. Although he initially took Stalin's support, it was a megaproject that would cost hundreds of millions of rubles. As a result, the project was shelved, as many other projects were waiting for subsidies.<sup>164</sup> Besides, Shumyatsky could not persuade the leading figures in the industry. This opposition against the Hollywood project paved the way for Shumyatsky's liquidation during the purge in the Soviet cinema.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>161</sup> Richard Taylor, "Red Stars, Positive Heroes and Personality Cults," in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, ed. Richard Taylor and Derek Spring (London: Routledge, 1993), 75.

<sup>162</sup> Olesya Tsuz, "Vozhd' Sovetskoy Kinematografii."

<sup>163</sup> Valeriy Fomin, "Sovetskiy gollivud: raz'itie Mechti," *Rodina*, 5 (2006).

<sup>164</sup> Olesya Tsuz, "Vozhd' Sovetskoy Kinematografii."

<sup>165</sup> Valeriy Fomin, "Sovetskiy gollivud: raz'itie Mechti."

Another problem with the low production rates was censorship, making filmmaking almost impossible in the Soviet Union. From the first idea to the last shot, the party representatives interfered in every production stage as co-writers or co-directors. Studio's party officials, GUKF and Cinema Committee usually evaluated the films. Apart from this formal process, Stalin also appeared as the final decision-maker. From the mid-1930s to his last days, Stalin was the supreme censor in the industry.<sup>166</sup> Sarah Davies resembles his involvement in the industry to Renaissance culture: "Like the Renaissance cultural patron 'who was the real initiator of the architecture, sculpture and painting of the period... [who] played a significant part in determining both form and content', Stalin also participated actively in the film-making process itself."<sup>167</sup> He supervised directors, interfered in their scripts and even helped writing lyrics for the songs.<sup>168</sup> In many incidents, Stalin personally vetoed the decisions of Glavrepertkom and Orgburo, which were assigned to check and approve the films that would be screened.<sup>169</sup>

#### **III.III.IV. Socialist Realism**

While filmmaking was becoming harder each day, the Soviet cultural administration did not hesitate to systemize ideological filmmaking under socialist realism doctrine. Before its declaration, the Central Committee adopted a resolution in 1932 concerning the

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<sup>166</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*.

<sup>167</sup> Sarah Davies, "Stalin as patron of cinema: creating Soviet mass culture, 1932–1936," in *Stalin: a New History*, ed. Sarah Davies and James R. Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 204.

<sup>168</sup> Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: the Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 163.

<sup>169</sup> see Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society*, Sarah Davies and James R. Harris, *Stalin: a New History*.

restructuring of the literary organizations. It was decided that all literary and artistic associations would dissolve and become replaced by unions of Soviet writers, artists, architects and composers.<sup>170</sup> It was an attempt to unify all aspects of artistic life under the control of a single authority. In the next step, socialist realism would be adopted as the separate doctrine in the cultural consciousness. The term was first mentioned in the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. Maxim Gorky, Andrei Zhdanov and Nikolai Bukharin addressed the keynotes in the Congress. Concerning the aim of arts and culture, Stalin suggested that "the artist must give priority to the truthful presentation of the life and if he truly portrays our life, then he cannot but note, cannot but show, that it leads to socialism. This will be socialist art. This will be socialist realism."<sup>171</sup> Similar to Stalin's words, Gorky addresses the dependence of socialist realism on the continuous development of human abilities over nature for its sake. It was the depiction of the struggle for happiness.<sup>172</sup>

The main aim of the doctrine was to set a communist future in the present. A didactic style should be adopted and films must be educative beyond being just entertaining. To understand the features of Socialist Realist cinema, one can look at the Socialist Realist novel, which shares the same core features. In the Socialist Realist novel, the reader witnesses the hero's acquisition of consciousness: "Increased understanding of himself,

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<sup>170</sup> Denis Aleksandrovich Popov, "Sotsialilisticheskiy realizm: meotd, stil', ideologiya," *Istoricheskiye, filosofskiye, politicheskiye i yuridicheskiye nauki, kul'turologiya i iskusstvovedeniye* 12-2, 38 (2013), 162-163.

<sup>171</sup> Robert Hatch McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 154.

<sup>172</sup> N. I. Lubashova and A.C. Lukhtan, "Sosyalicticheskiy realizm sovetskogo kino," *Analitika Kulturogii* 3, 33 (2015), 97.

the world around him, the tasks of building communism, class struggle and the need for vigilance."<sup>173</sup> In this sense, the stories of Socialist Realist films usually turn around three central figures: the Party leader, the simple person, and the enemy.<sup>174</sup> The main themes that should be concerned were "nationality, the truth of life, partisanship, concreteness, critical realism and socialist humanism." On the other hand, though it is called socialist realism, the doctrine presents an artificial world that was exchanged with the real one. A single worldview was present and any deviation from it was seen as subversive and hostile. There is no place for irony and ambiguity in this world. Instead, a strict monopoly on cultural thinking had been looking to be achieved.<sup>175</sup>

Moreover, the purges in every aspect of the state also found their place in the film industry. The purging wave affected all levels of Soviet administration and reached its peak point during the Great Purge of 1936-38, starting in the late 1920s. Some figures were arrested and executed, including Shumyatsy himself. The purges between 1929 and 1936 had a minor impact due to the lack of professionals in the industry. On the other hand, the oppression in the industry became ruthless during the Great Terror.<sup>176</sup>

The names on the target were usually administrators rather than the artists. Directors of the Golden Age could save their lives, though they would experience problems in their

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<sup>173</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 158.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 157-159.

<sup>176</sup> Jamie Miller, "The Purges of Soviet Cinema, 1929-38," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 1, 1 (2006): 5.

future careers. Eisenstein was primarily targeted throughout the 1930s as his work *Bezhin Meadow* (*Bezhin lug*/ 1937), which compares peasants' old and new life by modeling Pavlik Morozov's denunciation of his parents for stealing grain, was halted. However, two million rubles had already been spent.<sup>177</sup> He could save his career only by declaring his formalist errors made in the 1920s. However, not all of the artists could save their lives. The famous cinematographer Vladimir Nielsen, who worked with Eisenstein in *October* and worked in many other prominent films, including Stalin Prize Winner *Volga Volga* (Grigoriy Aleksandrov/ 1938), was not that fortunate as he was arrested in 1937 and executed in the following year.<sup>178</sup> The common allegations for confinement or execution were spying, assassination or sabotage. Shumyatsky was also executed for the accusation of leading a terrorist organization that was organized to assassinate Stalin.<sup>179</sup>

Since the Stalin period was a long tenure spread over 25 years, the film style had changed vis-a-vis the transformations carried in the industry concerning production and aesthetics. Therefore, a distinct historical film style was present in different periods and each style will be considered following the part that describes the industrial transformations and aspects.

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<sup>177</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 100.

<sup>178</sup> "Vladimir Nielsen," *Kinoglaz*, accessed September 3, 2020, [http://www.kinoglaz.fr/u\\_fiche\\_person.php?num=5089](http://www.kinoglaz.fr/u_fiche_person.php?num=5089).

<sup>179</sup> Jamie Miller, "The Purges of Soviet Cinema, 1929–38," 18.

### III.III.V. Historical Socialist Realist Cinema

Regarding the socialist realist style in Soviet cinema, *Chapaev* (1934) is an illustrative example for its stylistics, commercial success and impact upon society. Vasiliev Brother's film can be treated as the ultimate example of how a socialist realist film should be. It was based on the novel of the Commissar Dmitry Furmanov, who worked with Chapaev in the same front. The directors Georgiy and Sergey Vasilev worked as editors during the silent film era and directed *Sleeping Beauty* (1930) and *A Personal Matter* (1932) before *Chapaev*. Their reputation in Soviet cinema relied on *Chapaev*, as it was the peak in their career. The film was premiered on 7 November 1934 when the 17th anniversary of the October Revolution was celebrated and it sold more than 50 million tickets.<sup>180</sup> Free tickets were also distributed at factories and offices.<sup>181</sup>

The film's success depends on the relation between the main hero, namely Chapaev, and the spectator. He is free from artistic expression and never attempts to patronize the viewer: He is a simple peasant who became literate two years earlier. He commands his army only in the fighting and he never diverts from the way of Lenin and the party. The directors were aware of their tasks concerning the creation of a hero. Their hero should be believed in by the viewers. Rather than presenting superhero abilities, his existence must be possible. The viewer should "believe in him, love him and imitate him." This creation is a part of the heroization policy that was initiated by the Stalinist state. The

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<sup>180</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, "The Fate of Soviet Popular Cinema during the Stalin Revolution,"

<sup>181</sup> N. M. Zorkaya, *The Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema*, 128.

heroism of Chapaev was the heroism of millions in one respect.<sup>182</sup>

While Chapaev was presented as a figure that enables identification with ordinary Soviet people, some discipline problems occur in the army and Chapaev lacks the attribute of being dignified in some cases throughout the film. At this point, Commissar Furmanov takes the stage to lead Chapaev in the way of being an accomplished commander. While Furmanov and especially Chapaev are sympathetic figures that the spectators could identify themselves, the commander of the White forces, Colonel Borozdin and his relation with this Cossack equerry Petrovich are told in a more sophisticated fashion. Colonel Borozdin is physically a fatherly figure who respects the strategic mastership of Chapaev. He is an aristocrat with high taste when it comes to culture. Moreover, he seems to have sympathy for his equerry. In one scene, Petrovich begs him to abolish his brother's capital punishment, who deserted the White forces. The colonel approves this request, but later it is seen that his brother is beaten to death.

Consequently, Petrovich changes his side and kills the colonel in a fight between Reds and Whites. While Colonel Borozdin has some positive attributes such as high culture and compassion, he lacks the identification power of Chapaev. He is a kind of symbol which represents the limits of old Russia. Although the colonel personally likes Petrovich, the system does not work for the good of low-class people.

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<sup>182</sup> Evgeny Dobrenko, "Creation Myth and Myth Creation in Stalinist Cinema," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 1, no. 3 (2007): pp. 239-264.

Two peasant characters in the division of Chapaev are the ones who will take the revolution to the future. These characters are henchmen/women of Chapaev, namely, Petka and Anna. The audience witnesses a socialist love story among these young fighters. Besides this romantic theme, Anna also represents the Soviet woman in the Civil War. While she could not fight when she joined the division, she quickly and willfully learned how to defend the revolution. The relationship between Petka and Anna will be the future of the revolution.

### **III.III.VI. The Soviet film industry during the Second World War**

Following the purges in the film industry, the Second World War in Russia was broken out in the summer of 1941. The German forces quickly advanced in Belarus, Ukraine and Western Russia. Leningrad was under siege and the German advance continued as far as the outskirts of Moscow. The Russian victory at the Battle of Stalingrad in February 1943 was a game changer. However, the liberation from the occupation would be severe and bloody following the victory in Kursk in July 1943. The advance of the Red Army ended in Berlin in May 1945 and the Soviet victory was proclaimed. The war was over, but its cost for the Soviet state and people was tremendous. Besides, the repercussions of the war continued in the postwar process as oppression and xenophobia would be the main trends in cultural politics until the death of Stalin in March 1953.

One of the main effects of the war on the film industry was transforming the official ideology and propaganda themes. Until that time, Marxism was the ultimate notion and

the Communist Party was the fundamental pillar of the Socialist Realist narratives. However, Russian nationalism would replace this ideological stance during the Second World War. A new type of nationalism, which depended on Russia's heroic past, was established and Stalin was glorified as the indisputable leader of the people. His cult of personality that had been cultivated during the 1930s reached its peak during the war.<sup>183</sup>

Despite heavy fighting and the catastrophe the Soviet state witnessed, the film industry never ceased its functioning. However, it was evident that the occupation affected Soviet cinema in industrial means. One of the most remarkable effects was the relocation of film studios in Central Asia. A new body named the Central Union of Cinema Studios (TsOKS), which took over the relocated film studios under its umbrella, was also founded. The most notable studios, namely Lenfilm and Mosfilm, began to operate in Alma-Ata.<sup>184</sup>

Another critical and intriguing point was the relaxation of censorship. Due to the immediacy of the situation, the authorities lacked the luxury to examine every film project up to its fine details as there was no time and necessary budget to dismiss the scenarios. Therefore filmmakers enjoyed relative creative freedom when it was compared to the censorship in the 1930s.<sup>185</sup> This relative relief from oppression brought

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<sup>183</sup> Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography, 1918-1991: Ideological Conflict and Social Reality* (New York: A. De Gruyter, 1993), 117-119.

<sup>184</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 56.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

peculiar films concerning both style and context. Valeriy Fomin states that the films between 1941 and 1945 were distinctively artistically rich films because of the variety in themes and style. Creative films that were produced in that period signaled the diversity of the pre-socialist realist period.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, Neya Zorkaya adds that the war brought liberty to Soviet cinema. She defines the situation as this freedom "as an exit to another state."<sup>187</sup>

### III.III.VII. Films of the Second World War

Beyond material one, a spiritual mobilization was also needed in the film industry.<sup>188</sup> In this respect, films became one of the foremost moral weapons against the Nazis. Vera Nikanorovna Morozova, a native of a village in the Chkalov Gamaleevka region who witnessed the war, states that the films were an integral part of their lives at that time: "Only in the films, we had at least some idea of what was happening on the front. In our village, films were screened once a month, so we have been waiting for it!"<sup>189</sup>

The first films of wartime were newsreels. They were short documentaries that inform the audience about the course of the war. In the first three weeks of the invasion, twenty film groups had produced more than 80 newsreels. These short documentaries were

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<sup>186</sup> Quoted in E. L. Khramkova, "Otechestvennaya Istoriaografiya Istorii Kino 1941-1945 Godov Na Rybeje XX-XXI Vekov," *Kulturologiya Iskusstvavedenie*, no. 78 (2008): 127.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Yuliya Vasilievna Hotina, Georgy Bezbedov and Lev Bezbedov, "Kino kak instrument podnyatiya boyevogo dukha v period velikoy otechestvennoy voyny," *Apriori. Series: Humanities* 4 (2015)

<sup>189</sup> V. A. Tipikina, "Rol' sovetskogo kinoiskusstva v gody velikoy otechestvennoy voyny," *Molodost'. Intellekt, Initsiativna. Materialy IV mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii studentov i magistrantov* (2016).

produced with great altruism. For example, during the newsreel shooting, assistant operator Smorodina would break out the Nazi encirclement twice. He gets wounded, but he could save his film.<sup>190</sup>

Full-length documentaries followed newsreels in time. *Moscow Strikes Back* (*Razgrom nemetskikh voysk pod Moskvoy*/ Ilya Kopalin, Leonid Varlamov/ 1942) can be considered as the most successful one. It won the State Prize and Academy Award for Best Documentary. Long queues appeared in front of the Soviet theaters while the film was also popular in Britain and the US. Other prominent documentaries of the period were *Leningrad in Fight* (*Leningrad v bor'be*/ R. Karmen, I. Komarevtsev, V. Solovtsov, Ye. Uchitel'/ 1942), which denotes the 365 days of the siege and the *Day of War* (*Den voyny*/ Mikhail Slutsky/ 1942) produced by a team of 160 personnel. Documentaries about Stalingrad and the Caucasian Campaign also played an enormous role in the spiritual mobilization.<sup>191</sup> The number of documentaries decreased with the initiation of the Soviet advance. Although the Soviets were keen on marching towards Germany, losses were in high numbers and it made the documentaries pushed into the background.

There are also very remarkable feature films depicting the war. Regarding the effects of war films, they played an essential role in the moral guidance of the people. However, feature war films' moral and spiritual role was different from the Socialist Realist

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<sup>190</sup> Yuliya Vasilievna Hotina, Georgy Bezbedov and Lev Bezbedov, "Kino kak instrument podnyatiya boyevogo dukha v period velikoy otechestvennoy voyny."

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

propaganda as the filmmakers could find a breathing space as the censorship was loosened. The films that can be nominated as canonical ones were Fridrikh Ermler's *She Defends the Motherland* (*Ona zashchishchaet rodinu*/ 1943) and Mark Donskoy's *Rainbow* (*Raduga*/ 1944). They constitute their stories on woman partisan protagonists rather than the ideal male hero of the 1930s, as it was the most well-known model of the time. The symbolic representation of women in Russian culture had a long tradition.<sup>192</sup> In this case, women symbolically represented the Russian country that was "assaulted, raped, defiled and revolted."<sup>193</sup> Moreover, the portrayal of the sufferings of women told that women could also take the initiative just like men.<sup>194</sup>

*She Defends the Motherland* can be seen as a prototypical Soviet war-time film. The conventional plot in this period depends on the murder of the husband, children or parents of a woman protagonist who survives and seeks vengeance. The heroine of the film is named Praskovia Ivanovna. After German troops kill her husband and baby son, the ideal wife/mother transforms into a relentless warrior named Comrade P., who organizes the survivors and leads an attack on soldiers with axes or bare hands. Youngblood comments on this scene as "It is a remarkable moment, and unimaginable in Allied war films: one would be hard put to envisage any comparable American or British heroine rushing into battle, hacking Germans with an axe, with grim

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<sup>192</sup> Lynne Attwood, "Sex and the Cinema," in *Sex and Russian Society*, ed. Igor Semenovitch Kon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 70.

<sup>193</sup> Françoise Navailh, "The Emancipated Woman: Stalinist Propaganda in Soviet Feature Film 1930–1950," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 12, no. 3 (1992), 208.

<sup>194</sup> See Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 177.

determination and not a sign of revulsion or remorse.”<sup>195</sup>

The vicious and physical severity that Pasha shows quickly separates her from the modest Socialist Realist heroine. Moreover, *She Defends the Motherland* has thematic diversions, which would be intolerable for the films in the 1930s. First, religious symbols are shown in the film, as this can be seen as a state policy that allowed the adoption of religious figures in daily life during wartime. The second diversion is more critical as the film narrates the contrary ideas of ordinary characters. They are different from ordinary saboteurs in the films of the 1930s because their motivation is based on fear and deprivation. They are ordinary citizens rather than villains and they represent the panic and horror that society had lived.<sup>196</sup>

Despite the brutal and severely ferocious identity of Comrade P., a critic of the time points to the theme of humanism, which comes forefront. According to the critic, the film is about a struggle between the people who have humanity inside or not. On the one side, some Germans have a bestial appearance with a lack of humanistic features like morality or consciousness, whereas the Soviets are the ones who believe in people and have hope inside. Therefore, it was argued that *She Defends the Motherland* is a humanistic film presenting the fight between humanity and those who have ceased to be human. The film was highly appreciated at that time as it was commented that "This

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<sup>195</sup> Denise J. Youngblood; "A War Remembered: Soviet Films of the Great Patriotic War," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 106, Issue 3 (2001): 42.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

truly humanistic work of art which is created in the difficult years of the GPW will bring joy to the hearts of all who love their homeland and defended it."<sup>197</sup>

The second film was Mark Donskoy's *Rainbow*, which is also stylistically remarkable along with its theme. The film has a more complex narrative than *She Defends the Motherland* as it has more characters owning more depth. The film takes place in a Ukrainian village under invasion. Motherly figure Feodosia, conspirator Pusia and her patriotic sister Olga and finally, partisan Olena are the main characters in the film. Olena is a confident and pregnant partisan who returns to the village to give birth to her baby. However, she is captured by soldiers and murdered after a graphically depicted violent torture because she does not provide any information. Her newborn baby is also killed during this torment. Germans are so ruthless that they kill another boy who attempts to bring food to prisoners. He was buried inside his home by his mother and his little siblings. At the same time, Pusia tries to bribe her sister Olga for defection, but she becomes unsuccessful. In the last part of the film, Soviet forces liberate the village and Pusia's partisan husband, who returned from fighting, kills Pusia. Feodosia made a speech that prevents the mass killing of German prisoners. Instead of killing them, they should be left alive to witness their defeat. In the end, a rainbow, which symbolizes good luck, appears over the village.

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<sup>197</sup> Yuri Rostov, "Ona zashchishchaet rodinu," *Iskusstvo Kino*, No. 2, March 1946, 18-19.

As can be seen, the *Rainbow* has interconnected stories while the *She Defends the Motherland* has a single one. Donskoy was successful in bonding all these stories in the common theme of suffering and sacrifice. The graphic reality of the film made it strong as it can be referenced as one of the inspiration sources for Italian neo-realism.<sup>198</sup> To ensure the level of reality, Donskoy visited liberated villages in Ukraine and interviewed the war victims. He also included some words of a peasant woman in the last speech scene. The film was highly praised abroad as it was specially screened for President Roosevelt in the White House.<sup>199</sup>

The first deviation in the film is little reference to the Soviet system and its ideology. Instead, the sacrifice of people during the war is the central theme and *The Rainbow* separates itself from socialist realism at this point. Moreover, this sacrifice is usually interpreted by critiques as a sacred one. The deaths of Olena and her baby are identified with the figure of Mary and Jesus. Olena represents Mary and she sacrifices her baby to save her people just as the death of Jesus means the salvation of humanity.<sup>200</sup> Donskoy also stated later that he filmed a Ukrainian Madonna.<sup>201</sup>

Other war films of the period portraying heroines were Yuli Raizman's *Mashenka* (1942), which takes place during the Winter War, Alexander Stolper and Boris Ivanov's home

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<sup>198</sup> Jeremy Hicks, "Souizdetfilm: The Birth of Soviet Children's Film and the Child Actor," in *A Companion to Russian Cinema*, ed. Birgit Beumers (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 130.

<sup>199</sup> Vida T. Johnson, "The Rainbow," *Directory of World Cinema: Russia*, ed. Birgit Beumers (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), 92.

<sup>200</sup> Francoise Navailh, "The Emancipated Woman: Stalinist Propaganda in Soviet Feature Film 1930–1950," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 12, no. 3 (1992), 209.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

front melodrama *Wait for me* (*Zhdi menya*/ 1943) and Lev Arnshtam's *Zoya* (1944), denoting the legendary partisan Zoya Kosmodemianskaya whom Germans executed. There were also films with male protagonists such as Ivan Pyrev's *The Regional Party Secretary* (*Sekretar raykoma*/ 1942) and Abram Room's *The Invasion* (*Nashestvie*/ 1944). In the first film, Stepan Gavrilovich is the leading protagonist. He is a Red Army officer who joined the partisans after a defeat against the Germans. He commanded victorious battles against the German army. As a result, the Germans send a spy named Orlov to infiltrate the partisan group. Stephan's right hand, Natasha, entangles with him and Orlov exploits her interest. In the end, Orlov's identity comes out and Natasha executes him. *The Regional Party Secretary* was satisfied with the audience and critics as it became a favorite action-based propaganda film with a realistic sense. It was shown in the front and well appraised.<sup>202</sup>

Another film focusing on partisan warfare was *The Invasion* (*Nashestvie*/ 1945), adopted from Leonid Leonov's play by Abram Room. Compared to *The Regional Party Secretary*, it was more complicated with the depth of the characters. The film focuses on the transformation of the upper-class Talanov family by the war. The family consists of Ivan Tikhonovich, a well-known doctor in the town, his wife Anna, daughter Anna and son Fyodor. The latter was sentenced for probably a political crime and newly released. While Fyodor opens a new sheet in his life as he turns out to be partisan, the parents notice the virtues of lower-classes and the love for the motherland. The film also has a

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<sup>202</sup> Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films, On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005*, 72-73.

native collaborator named Fayunin. Despite the ineptitude of German characters, Fayunin's artifice led them succeeded. The film was praised by critics and marked as a milestone in the career of Abram Room.<sup>203</sup>

The partisan heroes/heroines in the films left their principal protagonist roles to the Red Army soldiers after Stalingrad and Kursk victories in mid-1943. In this sense, Alexander Stolper's home front melodrama adapted from scriptwriter Konstantin Simonov's well-known poem *Wait for Me (Zhdi menya/ 1943)* sets its story on pilot-soldier Kolya and his expectant wife, Lisa. Kolya survives a plane crash on the front; however, Lisa cannot take any information from him. Although Kolya's crew admits his death, Lisa refuses to believe them. On the other hand, her friend Sonya is a different character who betrays her husband fighting in the front. Later she perceives her mistake, though her husband has passed away in the fighting. While Sonya experiences an internal feud, Lisa comes together with Kolya at the end as a reward for her fidelity. *Wait for Me* was defined as a landmark film reflecting that penetrates the subtlest and intimate feelings of the Soviet people. The film critics claimed that the film reveals the nobility of the Soviet people.<sup>204</sup> Another critic regarded Liza's fidelity due to her love of Kolya and her character type that is alien to treason, dereliction, and nastiness. In this sense, she portrays the ideal Soviet woman.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>204</sup> See O. Leonidov, "Zhdi menya," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, November 11, 1943

<sup>205</sup> M. Sokolsky, "Zhdi menya," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, November 20, 1943.

The theme of the Second World War was again a popular one in the post-war period. Sergey Gerasimov's *The Young Guard* (*Molodaya gvardiya*/ 1948) was a notable example. The film was an adaptation from Alexander Fadeyev's famous novel with the same name, which tells the story of a group of young partisans operating in Krasnodar in 1942. While defending the town, they become arrested by Germans and executed. The novel is a compelling case in the Soviet literature as its first edition in 1946 was heavily criticized for the lack of portrayal of the Party's role in organizing the partisan group. However, the second version published in 1951 turned out to be a phenomenon and the novel became one of the classics of Soviet literature concerning the Second World War. Gerasimov won the Stalin prize as a result of the film's success.

On the other hand, two films depict Stalin as the main hero, namely Vladimir Petrov's *The Battle of Stalingrad* (*Stalingradskaya bitva*/ 1949) and Mikheil Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin* (*Padenie Berlina*/ 1949). While Petrov's film focuses on Stalin's commanding prodigy, *The Fall of Berlin* portrays a God-like Stalin figure. The film was produced as a 70<sup>th</sup> birthday gift to Stalin. Grigoriy Mariamov expresses that Stalin liked the works of Chiaureli because of their "unrestrained eulogizing of his personality and the creation of legends which contained no truth."<sup>206</sup>

In *The Fall of Berlin*, Stalin's cult has been fused within a love story between worker Alyosha and teacher Natasha. While Alyosha is a record-breaking steelworker, Natasha

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<sup>206</sup> Quoted in David C. Gillespie, *Russian Cinema* (Essex: Longman, 2003), 133.

represents the intelligentsia as she is fond of classical music and poetry. They are invited to Moscow for Alyosha's award ceremony. Stalin welcomes them and advises their relation. However, the war breaks out and they become separated. Alyosha fights in many battles, including Stalingrad and they come together again in Berlin, where the Germans seized Natasha. Stalin joins them as he arrives at Berlin to salute people. He is the ultimate reason for the victory.

### **III.III.VIII. Eisenstein during WWII**

The prodigy of the montage cinema, Sergei Eisenstein, could only make a film in a decade later *October* which was produced in 1928. His film style, which depends on dynamic montage, was disfavored, and his artistic experiments were on target, especially after his unreleased *Bezhin Meadow* project. However, he could open a new page in his career, starting with *Alexander Nevsky*. The film was a success concerning ideology, commerce and artistic style. This success brought a new film project, which would be about Ivan IV. In the middle of January 1941, Andrei Zhdanov advised Eisenstein about the new plan. The film was part of a significant project that would resurrect, rehabilitate and exalt the memory of Ivan the Terrible. This duty's ultimate aim was to identify Stalin with Ivan: He managed to unite Russian land, defeated the enemy, and wiped out the traitors. Boris Pasternak was aware of this idea as he stated in February 1941: "Our benefactor thinks that we have previously been too sentimental and that the time has come for second thoughts. Peter the Great is no longer an appropriate model. The new passion openly confessed is for Ivan the Terrible, the oprichnina and cruelty. This is the

subject of new operas, plays and film scripts. I am not joking."<sup>207</sup>

Although Stalin aimed to rehabilitate Ivan the Terrible, Eisenstein differs from him as he thought that the film should not be an apologia for the tsar. In his memoirs, he stated that "We do not want to whitewash him, but to explain."<sup>208</sup> The film's pre-production coincided with the first years of defeats against Germans that brought a brief de-Stalinization period. The Stalinist myths constructed throughout the 1930s were being shaken, though the Stalingrad victory in 1943 changed the situation. However, Eisenstein did not give up on his thoughts. He thought of a two-part project in which the first part would be an apologia as it was commissioned. On the other hand, the second part would depict the tragedy. The film was screened in the Kremlin on 25 December 1944. It was approved by the leadership and Eisenstein granted permission to work on the project. Moreover, the two-part film project was converted into a trilogy.<sup>209</sup> The film won the Stalin Prize after its release.

The second part of Ivan the Terrible project was not as fortunate as the first part. The authorities chastised the film, not for its artistic quality but the interpretation of the past. The depiction of *oprichniki* was contrary to the Central Committee's perception based on the progressiveness of Ivan IV's special security force.<sup>210</sup> Stalin, who defines Ivan the

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<sup>207</sup> Leonid Kozlov, "The Artist and the Shadow of Ivan," in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema* eds. Richard Taylor and Derek Spring (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), 110-112.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 124-125.

<sup>210</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 217.

Terrible as “a great wise ruler,” disgraced the film as he stated that Eisenstein’s Ivan was indecisive and hysterical.<sup>211</sup> As a result, the second part was not allowed to be released until 1958.

### **III.III.IX. The Aftermath of war and Zhdanovschina**

Following the war, the warm relations with Western allies got bitter after the Yalta Conference and the Cold War was at the door. At that time of suspicion and non-cooperation, the Russian cultural life also turned out to be skeptical. Under Zhdanov's leadership, the film industry became nearly halted and functionless because of censorship and oppression.

Andrei Zhdanov was a prominent figure in Soviet cultural life since the 1930s. As a pillar of ideology, he took part in the development of socialist realism in 1934 and gained control in Soviet cultural life and carried out many purges in the field by 1936. In 1938 he became the director of propaganda and a member of the Politburo. Stalin appointed him to manage cultural affairs after the end of the war. He formulated the Zhdanov Doctrine in this post. The Central Committee issued a decree on the literature on August 14, 1946, which summarizes the doctrine:

The task of Soviet literature is to aid the state in educating the youth correctly and to meet their demands, to rear a new generation strong and

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<sup>211</sup> Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin the Court of the Red Tsar*, 558.

vigorous, believing in their cause, fearing no obstacles and ready to overcome all obstacles. Consequently, any preaching of ideological neutrality, of political neutrality, of 'art for art's sake' is alien to Soviet literature and harmful to the interests of the Soviet people and the Soviet state.<sup>212</sup>

Similar decrees were issued for Soviet music and cinema consequently. In all these decrees, formalism was condemned one more time and many writers, poets and musicians were persecuted, oppressed or expelled. The impact of the Zhdanov Doctrine on the film industry was negative as the film production was almost nearly halted. The numbers were the lowest for the Soviet cinema since the revolution: 18 films in 1945, 22 in 1946, 22 in 1947, 16 in 1948, 17 in 1949, 12 in 1950, 9 in 1951, 23 in 1952 and 44 in 1953, according to the catalogs of those years. Besides, many films counted cannot be described as feature films as they were recorded versions of theater plays.<sup>213</sup> Those numbers were far away from the output of Hollywood, which produced 400-500 films per year. The main reason for this decrease in numbers was not the economic and industrial disaster that the war caused but the ultimate censorship that was initiated. The rate of censorship during the postwar period easily surpassed the one in the 1930s. In other words, Zhdanovschina brought the death of Soviet cinema.<sup>214</sup> The industrial achievements that were achieved during the 1920s and 1930s were frustrated by the

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<sup>212</sup> Jonathan Green, Nicholas J. Karolides, *Encyclopedia of Censorship* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 667.

<sup>213</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, 210.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, 210-215.

Soviet power itself. In this case of film hunger, Soviet films could not supply the demand of society. During the postwar years, films were an essential choice for people to be entertained. Ironically, the film industry compensated for this deficit by Nazi films called "trophy films." Those were non-ideological films that were captured during the invasion of Germany.<sup>215</sup>

Regarding the censorship under the Zhdanov regime, it is easier to talk about the banned films than those released. One of the first significant films banned was the second part of Leonid Lukov's *A Great Life (Bolshaya zhizn/ 1946)*. The film tells the story of a former saboteur who has been atoned for his sins by collective miners. The complaints about Lukov's work were many. The film's synopsis, which lacks the portrayal of the Party's role, could be the sole reason for its prohibition. There were also other reasons for Zhdanov: too much concentration on private life and deriding reality by ignoring Soviet technological development in mining. Finally, the film neglected to emphasize the role of the party.<sup>216</sup> Pudovkin's *Admiral Nakhimov* (1946) and Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Simple People (Prostye lyudi/ 1945)* were the other films targeted by the Zhdanov doctrine.<sup>217</sup>

Anti-Americanism emerged as a central theme at this period. After Germany's occupation, the cooperation between US officials and former Nazis was highlighted in

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 216.

<sup>217</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 107.

*The Meeting on the Elbe (Vstrecha na El'be/ Grigoriy Alexandrov/1949). The Secret Mission (Sekretnaya missiia/ Mikhail Romm/ 1950)* subjected another US-German collaboration to halt the Red Army advance. In another intriguing example, namely, *Silvery Dust (Serebristaya pyl' Mikhail Romm/ 1953)*, American scientists who use Afro-Americans in experiments were under fire.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 108-109.

## **CHAPTER IV: A CONCISE HISTORY OF SOVIET/RUSSIAN FILM INDUSTRY, FROM THAW TO 2000S**

### **IV.I. Soviet Cinema during Thaw**

The death of Stalin in 1953 ended an era of agony and terror in Soviet history. Although the country was victorious in the Second World War and became a great power in the Cold War, the cost of these achievements was tremendous in humanitarian terms.

Totalitarianism was felt in every aspect of life in the country, including cultural life.

Socialist realism had dominated Soviet artists for nearly two decades and its effect on the film industry was out of the question. Once the leading innovative trend in world cinema, the Soviet cinema in the 1920s was buckled under Stalinist repression in the next decade and socialist realism emerged as the only favorable artistic. However, the dominance of socialist realism started to crumble in Soviet arts after the death of Stalin.

The new period was called thaw, inspired by writer Ilya Ehrenburg's 1954 dated novel. It was an ambiguous period with its complexities concerning politics and economy; nevertheless, it brought significant liberalism for arts after two decades of repression. This liberal atmosphere had continued barely more than a decade as there is no exact

date for the thaw's end. Khrushchev's deposition in 1964, Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the arrest and trial of Andrei Siniavsky and Yuli Daniel's seizure for their anti-Soviet publication or the shelving of films such as *The Commissar* (*Kommissar*/ Alexander Askoldov/ 1967) can be highlighted as the events that put an end to the period.<sup>219</sup> Though the thaw was short-lived, it was a time of ambiguous ideological liberation promoted by high artistic quality, making a genuine mark on Soviet art and culture. The period sparked the inspiration for emancipated art and a struggle between artists and the party would be evident in the following period until the days of glasnost and perestroika.

The challenge against the old system was imminent in literature and music just after Stalin's death. The detriments of the Stalinist period came to be questioned by significant writers and critics in popular periodicals like *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Sovetskaia muzyka*, *Komsomolskaia pravda* and *Kommunist*. The poet Olga Berggolts, the composers Aram Khachaturian and Dmitri Shostakovich, writer Ilya Ehrenburg and literary critic Vladimir Pomerantsev were some names who criticized the previous period. Despite this imminence in other fields, tardiness was present in the film industry. The main reason was the dysfunction in the industry, which became moribund, especially after the Second World War. The filmmaking was already proving to be troublesome before the war and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of Zhdanov made industry obstructed.<sup>220</sup> Film

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<sup>219</sup> Vida Johnson, "Russia After the Thaw," in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ed., *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1999), 644.

<sup>220</sup> Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000). 4-5.

production was a complex issue and time was needed for necessary revisions. The first signs of improvement came from some articles which used new concepts such as authenticity and unvarnished reality. The authentic portrayal of real life began to appear in critics. This trend became official when the Ministry of Culture requested more complex film characters inspired by ordinary Soviet men and women by the end of 1954. *Iskusstvo Kino* highlighted the same themes as it was mentioned that the new films should portray real life rather than a utopia. They must have complex characters with strengths and flaws.<sup>221</sup> *Pravda* had already criticized the state of affairs in drama and film for its one-sided approach since the Stalin period's last times.<sup>222</sup> However, the repercussion of these requests on cinema could only be realized with the beginning of the thaw.

Some bureaucratic replacements also affected the destiny of Soviet films in those years. Until that time, not filmmakers or critics but state officials directed the film industry. This trend was challenged by the assignment of prominent filmmaker Ivan Pyrev to leading studio Mosfilm as director. His directorate had continued until 1957. After his resignation, he devoted himself to establishing the Union of Filmmakers, founded in 1965.<sup>223</sup> Although his directorate was only a couple of years, he made crucial reforms, such as cinema professionals began to take offices in critical positions. This new trend substituted former NKVD officers with talented artists and paved the way for

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> N. M. Zorkaya, *The Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema*, 197.

<sup>223</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 115.

experienced filmmakers and younger cinema professionals. Among those experienced filmmakers, one can count Kozintsev&Trauberg, who won international acclaim with their interpretation of *Hamlet* in 1964, Mikhail Kalatozov, who directed one of the most sensational melodramas of the time, *The Cranes are Flying* (*Letyat zhuravli/ 1957*), after his exclusion from the blacklist and Mikhail Romm, who would open the way for future masters like Tarkovsky and Shukshin, during his duty as an instructor in VGIK.<sup>224</sup>

The Sixth Five Year Plan, which was inaugurated in 1955, implemented the film industry's resurrection. The aims were many: increased film production, expansion of facilities and equipment and seating capacity. Moreover, film festivals and questionnaires would be initiated to measure spectator responses. The Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 and Khrushchev's speech highly encouraged the resurrection. The dismantling of the Stalinist cult and a revitalized hope for utopian socialism without despotism brought a new soul to filmmakers. No longer they had to present a single perspective on their films. Instead, they gained the chance to work on different kinds of films that could offer multiple perspectives. Another essential institutional reform would be the re-foundation of Goskino. In 1953 the Main Directorate for Cinema became adhered to the authority of the newly founded Ministry of Culture. This submission lasted until the restoration of Goskino in 1963.<sup>225</sup>

New film themes depicted the ordinary lives of Soviet people and the genres like science

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<sup>224</sup> Ian Christie, "Back in the USSR," *Film Comment* 36, no. 6 (2000), 41.

<sup>225</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 116.

fiction, which were seen as obtrusive in the previous decades, became popular. While this progress in film themes was crucial, the Party's attitude against filmmakers was a mixture of repression and liberalism, as it was stated before. The Minister of Culture of the time, Yekaterina Furtsova, followed an ambiguous policy that depends on the political atmosphere of the time.<sup>226</sup> A rivalry between hardliners and reformers affected the rate of freedom, which varied in years. For instance, Boris Pasternak's refusal of the Nobel Prize, the defection of ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev, and poet Joseph Brodsky's exile can be counted as examples of the struggle between art and politics.<sup>227</sup>

Moreover, the unrest in Hungary in 1956 and crises with the USA also influenced domestic politics. Thus, there was not a time of monolithic liberalism for culture. Instead, the interference of the Party had varied according to the political atmosphere.

Nevertheless, a remarkable shift in the themes and styles was present in Soviet cinema in this period. More importantly, a new class of film filmmakers called *shestidesyatniki* emerged at the beginning of the 1960s. This new generation of filmmakers would be more unwilling to submit to authority. Therefore a momentum of dissidence against ideological power regarding arts and aesthetics, which would reach its ultimate point in 1986, was triggered on those times.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>228</sup> Ian Christie, "Back in the USSR."

#### IV.I.I. Films of the Period

Though Iosif Kheifit's *The Big Family* (*Bolshaya semya*/ 1955) is not a historical film, it is a decent example of the transformation Soviet cinema experienced. The film denotes the dissimilitude that thaw films owned when it is compared to socialist realist cinema. The film depicts the story of a multi-generational Zhurbin family whose members work in a shipyard devotedly. At first glance, they look similar to Socialist Realist heroes: they are easy to be identified and they are excellent workers. However, this idealism disappears regarding family relations. Son Viktor and his wife Lida have problems in their marriage, just as his brother Alesha and his wife, Katia.

Nevertheless, they could overcome their challenges and the family can keep its integrity except for the separation of Viktor and Lida. They end their relationship as two good and decent people. They are neither wrong nor guilty. The crucial point is that the party did not play any role in this course of events. The Zhurbins solve their problems by themselves and this was significant for the progress in Soviet cinema concerning the individualization of film themes.<sup>229</sup> In another melodrama named *Lesson of Life* (*Urok Zhizhni*/ Yuli Raizman/ 1955), the noble teacher Natasha forgives her callous and insensitive husband. The latter does not fit the decent socialist realist male protagonist educated by the party officer. The characters' individuality would be the central motif in themes depicted and the party-based ideological messages would be dismissed.<sup>230</sup> This transformation was also based on historical films, especially portraying World War II.

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<sup>229</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 129.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

The Stalinist authority initiated a program of nationalization of history that also had an impact on cinema. The greatness of the Russian nation and civilization under the incontestable leadership of Iosif Stalin was the ultimate motto that was denoted in any historical socialist realist Soviet film of that time. However, this theme had also changed with the easing of repression. The most significant deviation the thaw films achieved was to question the individual basis of the Stalinist heroism constructed in the previous decades.

*Immortal Garrison (Bessmertnyy garnizon/ 1956)* can be named one of the first films with a critical stance toward the Second World War. Zakhar Agranenko's film depicts the defense of Brest. The film directs attention to the enormous cost of Soviet victories rather than praising individuals' divine cost. Another remarkable example was *Soldiers (Soldaty/ Alexander Ivanov/ 1957)* screened in the following year. *Soldiers* moved the criticism one step further as it blames the Soviet state for its mistakes in the war. At every level, the commandership is questioned, and a captain, who orders a suicide mission, is put on trial.<sup>231</sup> While these films were courageous enough to challenge the Stalinist motto, the following examples would also take international attention for their artistic qualities and constitute an invaluable part of Soviet film history. *The Cranes are Flying, Ballad of a Soldier (Ballada o soldate/ Grigoriy Chukhrai 1959)* and *The Fate of a Man (Sudba cheloveka/ Sergey Bondarchuk/ 1959)* can be mentioned as the most

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 72.

remarkable examples of thaw films.

*The Cranes are Flying* is the chronologically earliest film and it was highly praised in the West as the director Mikhail Kalatozov won the Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festival in 1958. The film's plot mainly concentrates on the war experiences behind the front line, and it can be defined as a melodrama that recounts a story of love, betrayal, and renewal.<sup>232</sup> Veronika and Boris are the main protagonists in this complex story. They are seen as a lovely, happy and hopeful couple in the first scene, which denotes the pre-war times. The war gives this happiness a pause that will continue forever. Boris joins the army and Veronika loses her parents in a bombing raid. Unfortunately, Veronika cannot hear from Boris during wartime. In a situation of loneliness and despair, Boris's cousin Mark, who finds an illegal way to be exempt from fighting in the war, rapes Veronika and she resigns to her fate and marries Mark as a consequence. However, Veronika never becomes happy with Mark and continues to love Boris. At the end of the film, she learns Boris's martyrdom from his close friend, who returns home at the end of the war.

The film's plot is a typical melodrama; however, it subverted the themes concerning Stalinist cinema. The difference is the portrayal of Veronika, which is an example of the deviation of Thaw hero/heroine from the socialist realist one. The previous model stated that film hero/heroine should be patriotic, moral and he/she can sacrifice him/herself for

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<sup>232</sup> Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, 73-74.

the sake of those values. Veronika hardly fits this category. No matter how she loves Boris, Veronika betrays him by marrying Mark. However, she is not condemned or denounced by the director of the film. She is a sympathetic figure which Soviet women can identify with themselves. Rather than promoting morality, Kalatazov portrays the individual sufferings caused by the war and does not highlight any patriotic motif. Instead, the film questions patriotism and puts individual and humanistic values forwards. For example, Boris's eagerness and exploit for fighting in the war are not consecrated; instead, his family questions his enthusiasm. Boris's altruism only brings sorrow and despair for Veronika, as his martyrdom is not sanctified. He just died just like millions of people somewhere in some time.

Another film that mainly focuses on another story behind the front is Grigoriy Chukhray's *Ballad of a Soldier*. Like *The Cranes are Flying*, Chukhray's film was also praised in the West as it was nominated in the Academy Awards and Cannes Film Festival, while the film won the BAFTA Best Film Award. The film tells the story of a young soldier named Alyosha, awarded for destroying two enemy tanks. Alyosha requests to visit her mother to fix their home's roof instead of the award. He starts a long journey in which he meets with people who need help and never hesitates to help them, though he has a limited time. He manages to reach home; however, he can only meet with his mother for a very little time to hug her only. He turns back to the front and the audience learns that he dies during fighting at the end of the film. *Ballad of a Soldier* also undercuts the traditional model of heroism. His scariness when he is faced with two

enemy tanks was denoted straightforwardly. He destroys the tanks with the help of luck instead of confidence or courage. He shows the fears of a frightened soldier in the wake of death rather than the sacrificial exploit of patriotic feelings. Moreover, the heroism of Alyosha depends on his decency as a human being. The war devastates the country and the Soviet people behind the frontline are suffering as well. Alyosha helps people to put their lives in order by sharing their food or encouraging them to live. It is the heroism that is built on humanity rather than patriotism. Alyosha's sincere personality is much more valuable than his performance in battle in this sense.

The last film mentioned is *The Fate of a Man*, directed by acclaimed director Sergey Bondarchuk. Bondarchuk's film also tells the audience an individual story like the previous examples have done. However, *The Fate of a Man* goes beyond the individualization of the war and creates its character on a robust Stalinist taboo, namely, the fate of Soviet prisoners of war. Surrendering to the enemy was considered an act of treason by the Soviet authorities during the war. The ones who could return to the country faced execution or gulag. The Soviet state even reclaimed the prisoners who were liberated by ally forces. The same fate also confronted these prisoners. Therefore the film challenges an official sacred routine.

The main character in the film, named Andrey Sokolov, is a war victim who escaped from a Nazi camp and returned to his country. While he was fighting, he was captured by the Nazis and spent time in concentration camps confronting physical and

psychological struggles. The audience witnesses this process through flashbacks. He also learns that nobody from his family could survive. He is a devastated figure in all senses and no hope seems present for Sokolov. He has carried a significant burden on his shoulders; however, he does not mention any patriotic feeling. His primary motivation can be seen as survival and being moral in humanitarian terms. Though the USSR had won a victory at the end of the war, this victory makes no sense for him. Instead, he emerges as a victim of fate. Unfortunately, Sokolov has no material hope except the orphan boy with whom he tells his story. At the end of the film, they continued their way together without any inspiration for a better future. Neither ideology nor victory offers any bright future. Only another victim, the orphan boy, can company him in this devastated life.

#### **IV.II. The Stagnation: Mainstream and Auteur Cinema 1967-82**

The Khrushchev period was an ambiguous one with its complexities that varied between relaxation and oppression. However, a remarkable shift in the film themes was evident. This brief but significant period of artistic freedom brought distinct themes and artistic styles to Soviet cinema. The optimistic atmosphere of the Thaw period had begun to diminish with the deposal of Khrushchev from the leadership in 1964. A stagnation period would be present in the film industry in the following years, just like the Brezhnev period was defined with the same term in general. By 1967, the government's control had reached a point that brought the shelving of films, trials, exiles and arrests of cultural elites. The writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, poet Joseph Brodsky, Natalia

Gorbanevskaya, the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and his wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya were some of the dissidents who were trialed, arrested, exiled or incarcerated to psychiatric clinics.<sup>233</sup> This pressure created a distinct film industry which comprised struggling perspectives in itself. On the one hand, some artistically or ideologically dissident filmmakers launched Soviet auteurism and made many masterpieces though they had to strive.

On the other hand, some filmmakers focused on mainstream film styles and genres. It should be noted that some of these filmmakers would implement social criticism in their works, whereas one can find many politically correct blockbusters in this period. As a result of this complexity, the film industry should be seen as “the least stagnating art in the Soviet Union.”<sup>234</sup> The rise of cultural oppression was avid compared to the Khrushchev period; however, these constraints could not prevent criticism in films. Whether making entertainment films or art cinema, filmmakers showed the courage to compel the stylistic and thematic orthodoxy. The usual response of the authority against this courage was shelving the films. Many films were banned and they could only be released after 1985.

In some cases, more severe measures were taken, such as the confinement of Sergei Parajanov from 1973 until 1977. Some filmmakers also chose to go into exile, just like

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<sup>233</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, p. 148.

<sup>234</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51.

Andrey Tarkovsky, who did not return to the Soviet Union during the filming of *Nostalgia* in Italy in 1977 after having bitter experiences with the administration. However, the Soviet authority could not achieve total control over the industry as the Goskino, headed by Flipp Yermash, became an overly bureaucratized institution that struggled to adopt a centralized and efficient decision-making process.<sup>235</sup>

This relative freedom of expression can be seen as a result of cultural thaw, which created a new filmmaker class who had tasted artistic freedom during the prior period. Contrary to Stalin's time, many filmmakers had not always submitted to authority, whereas some dissident filmmakers would also suffer. In other words, the Soviet leadership took a hard line with cultural matters. However, it could not achieve total control due to its lack of totalitarian capabilities compared to the Stalinist period.

Another reason for the relative freedom can be seen as commercial circumstances. The authorities knew that the censorship during the Stalin era brought the film industry to a halt as the number of produced films dropped drastically. Moreover, TV became a vital rival for films as ticket sales decreased to 4.2 billion in 1977 from 5 billion in the 1960s.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, the authorities might find an optimum point between freedom and repression to derive a profit. Ideologically safe and commercially successful films were the ultimate goal for the Soviet administration. The last reason for artistic freedom can be named as the initiative of some personal figures in the industry. Nikolai Sizov's management in Mosfilm most particularly allowed many young filmmakers. While

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

Sizov had political connections, he also had an intellectual capacity compared to ordinary cultural bureaucrats. Sizov's deputy in charge of screenwriting, Leonid Nekhoroshev, was another critical figure who intellectually handles the film industry. It should also be noted that many filmmakers tried their chances, but usually some of them would be lucky enough to release their films even in highly limited copies.

Nonetheless, the All-Union State Institute of Cinema (VGIK) researched the features of films to appeal to the masses. A film should have the features below to attract the audience;

1. Contemporary theme
2. Russian production
3. Adaptation of a popular book
4. Fast tempo
5. Continuity (no flashbacks)
6. Simplicity
7. Spectacular (special effects, crowd scenes, and costumes)
8. Active and attractive leading characters
9. Appealing title.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 10.

However, the films of the stagnation period were not homogenous. Many genres, styles and auteurs could find the chance to operate in those years. Therefore films can be categorized according to different themes and styles.

#### **IV.II.I. The Films of the Period**

While historical films were popular during the stagnation period, a distinct genre that should be noted had also appeared. *Bytovoy* films, which can be described as popular movies portraying a slice of life in the Soviet Union, were the leading genre. Those films told stories about contemporary society, individual experiences, current problems and human values within a satirical style. Eldar Ryazanov and Vasily Shukshin can be named as the commercially and stylistically successful directors of this trend. While Ryazanov focuses on comedy as a film genre, Shukshin is best known for his dramas that take place in the countryside. Both Ryazanov and Shukshin share the view of auteur or experimental cinema that filmmaking should be free of political control; however, they prefer widespread accessibility over the stylistic experiment.

Regarding widespread accessibility, Shukshin's *The Red Snowball Tree* (*Kalina Krasnaya*/ 1974) was a sensational hit of the period. It sold more than 50 million tickets. The film was selected as the best film of the year by *Sovetskii ekran* and film journal *Iskusstvo Kino* wrote that “viewers of *Kalina Krasnaya* not only ‘watched’ the film, it

really stirred them.”<sup>238</sup> The film was adopted from Shukshin's novella with the same title published in the monthly journal *Nash sovremennik* in 1973. The novella also had significant applause from the Soviet readers.<sup>239</sup> The film tells the story of an ex-convict named Yegor Prokudin, who settles in a village to start over with a clean slate. A village resident Lyuba Baykalova helps him to begin a new life. However, his past never stops following him and his old gang murders him at the end of the film.

Another significant example was Ryazanov's comedy *Garage* (*Garazh*/1979). The film can also be named as one of the first examples of Soviet absurdism. The film subjects a meeting between a research institute for the protection of animals and the party committee. The institute signed a contract with the state to build some garages. However, the state changes the plan and the project is now canceled. After lengthy discussions, one of the participants eats the committee's constituent documents, and it became officially disbanded. The members will now look for their solutions without any authority.

#### **IV.II.II. Historical Films**

Contrary to the works of Shukshin and Ryazanov, mainstream Soviet cinema also produced hit films that support the Orthodox stance. The Soviet film industry reinvented a blockbuster genre during the stagnation period. Adventure films (*Pirates of the Twentieth Century*/ *Piraty XX veka*/ Boris Durov/ 1980), spy thrillers (*Tehran 43*/

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<sup>238</sup> Jim B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism*, 1983, 114.

<sup>239</sup> David Gillespie, “Kalina Krasnaya, Red Guelderbush” in *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Birgit Beumers (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 161-162.

*Tegeran-43*/ Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov) and disaster films (*Air Crew/ Ekipazh*/ 1980) are some of the genres that were used widely.<sup>240</sup> However, the most prominent Soviet blockbuster was *Moscow does not Believe in Tears* (*Moskva slezam ne verit*/ Vladimir Menshov/ 1979). The film had 85 million viewers and won the Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film. Although it is a melodrama, one can find an orthodox political subtext in the film. *Moscow does not Believe in Tears* tells the story of three friends, Katya, Tonya and Ludya, which stretches over twenty-five years.

The film takes place in the post-Stalin period. All three figures represent a different identity: Ludya is a parasite in society and her husband is an alcoholic. Tonya is an ideal wife, mother and peasant. Lastly, Katya is the carrier of the socialist flag. She made some mistakes in her life, but she can overcome them by sacrificing herself for the sake of the common good. She keeps working hard and turns out to be a model worker. She marries Goya and submits his authority in the family. Apart from denoting the ideal Soviet woman type, the film also compares Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods. While the earlier period was represented under a juvenile mood, the latter period's achievement is consecrated.<sup>241</sup>

The Stagnation period was also remarkable that some presently prominent Russian directors made their debut films in this period. Nikita Mikhalkov is one of those

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<sup>240</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 181.

<sup>241</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost, Soviet Cinema in our Time*, 19.

directors. While he was a well-known actor throughout the 1960s, *At Home Among Strangers, A Stranger Among His Home* (*Svoy sredi chuzhikh, chuzhoy sredi svoikh*/ 1974) at home is his debut film, which can be defined as a spaghetti western that takes part in South Russia just after the Russian Civil War. Main protagonists Sarychev, Kungurov, Shilov, Lipiagin and Zabelin, who fought as cavalrymen in the war, begin their new lives following the clash. They take an order to transport 500.000 pieces of gold, which are confiscated from the enemy to be used for starvation purposes. However, the remnants of the White Army capture the gold. Shilov, whose brother was fighting for the Whites, becomes suspicious of treason. He would try to recapture the gold to clean himself.

Regarding its western genre qualities, *At Home Among Strangers, A Stranger Among his Home* is usually defined as a Soviet "eastern." Besides its generical features, the film also has a socio-political perspective that questions the type of Brezhnev era characterization of "us" and "them." The main protagonist's orientation is primarily non-ideological and it departs from the socialist realist hero/heroine type. The main mistake that Shilov might make was betraying the brotherhood rather than the party by losing the gold. Therefore, Shilov's struggle can be considered personal values rather than socialist ideals.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Elena Prohorava, "Svoi sredi chuzhikh, chuzhoi sredi svoikh, At Home among Strangers, A Stranger at Home," *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Birgit Beumers (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 177.

*At Home Among Strangers, A Stranger Among His Own* is just the beginning of Mikhalkov's filmography that includes significant historical films and classical literary adaptations. Mikhalkov directed *Slave of Love (Raba lyubvi/ 1976)*, *Unfinished Piece for a Piano Player (Neokonchennaya pyesa dlya mekhanicheskogo pianino/ 1977)* and *A Few Days from the Life of I.I. Oblomov (Neskolko dney iz zhizni I.I. Oblomova/ 1980)* after his debut success. In the *Slave of Love*, the shooting of a silent melodrama during the occupation of Crimea was portrayed. In this case, Mikhalkov plays with film genres and uses the features of melodrama and historical film. The next film, *Unfinished Piece for a Piano Player*, is an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's play *Platonov*. In this film, Mikhalkov focuses on neuroses and the alienation of aristocracy and wealthy milieu. Their isolation and spiritual bankruptcy were emphasized. The following film *Oblomov* is also an adaptation of Ivan Goncharov's work. The infamous superfluous personality of the character is handled positively in the screen adaptation. Subjects like maleness, energy, progress, productivity and technology, which were hailed by socialist realism, are compared to poetic nature, daydreaming, ties with nature and feminine life. The film is considered an excellent example of tracing the change and evolution of values in post-Stalinist Soviet cinema.<sup>243</sup>

Another director who should be mentioned for his historical films is the elder brother of Nikita Mikhalkov, Andrei Konchalovsky. His four hours thirty minutes long epic work, *Siberiade (1979)*, is one of the most influential films in Soviet cinema. The film focuses

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<sup>243</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost, Soviet Cinema in Our Time*, 30-31

on the history of two families named the Solomins and the Ustyuzhanins living in Siberia by portraying the lives of three generations. The long-standing feud between aristocratic Solomins and peasant Ustyuzhanins spread throughout the 20th century of Russian history is the story's centerpiece. The central themes that are handled are the dualities between nature vs. technology and state vs. the individual. Rather than praising the progress in a triumphalist way, the *Siberiade* attests to the costs of development.<sup>244</sup>

Nevertheless, World War II was also a prominent theme for historical films. Aleksey German was one of the most brilliant Soviet directors of his time and began his career in 1967 with his debut film, *The Seventh Companion* (*Sedmoy sputnik*/ 1968). During the 1970s, he made two World War II films, which became prominent: *Trial on the Road* (*Proverka na dorogakh*/ 1971) and *Twenty Days Without War* (*Dvadtsat dney bez voyny*/ 1977). The first film was shelved until 1986 because of its sensitive theme concerning POW. The film was considered to distort Soviet history for “portraying a Russian collaborator who allows himself to be captured by partisans so that he can redeem himself by fighting the Nazis.”<sup>245</sup> The Red Army officer Lazarev is a POW who is seized by Soviet partisans during an ambush. German's latter film, *Twenty Days without War*, also subjects the times of World War II. This time, the ordinary people in the rear of the front are at the story's center. Throughout the film, the civilian suffering and

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<sup>244</sup> Louis Menashe, *Moscow Believes in Tears: Russians and Their Movies* (Washington, DC: New Academia Pub., 2010), 136.

<sup>245</sup> J. Hoberman, “Exorcism: Aleksei German Among the Long Shadows,” *Film Comment*, January-February (1999), <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/exorcism-aleksei-german-among-the-long-shadows/>.

casualties are declared as the costs of the war. The film tells the story of a reporter working on the front. The main character Lopatin travels to Tashkent to accompany a film shooting, which is adapted from his articles on the Battle of Stalingrad. Having experiences with the evacuees, he encounters the inaccuracies in the film's themes for its heroicizing and complimentary view of war. The main aim of German in *Twenty Day without War* is to explore the connection between truth and its representation in memory.<sup>246</sup>

Larisa Shepitko's *Ascent (Voskhozhdenie/ 1976)* is another World War II film that challenges the authorities. The story takes place in wartime Belarus. Sotnikov and Rybak are two partisans hiding from Nazis with a peasant woman. Although he is ill and weak, Sotnikov does not betray his comrades and does his best to hide. On the other hand, Rybak collaborates with the Nazis, though he is in excellent condition compared to Sotnikov. Consequently, Sotnikov is hanged, just like in a Jesus mode and Rybak, the henchman, takes the role of Judas.<sup>247</sup> In this respect, Shepitko debunks Soviet-type war heroism by foregrounding religion as the main martyrdom base. Sotnikov's struggle is a part of morality and consciousness rather than a vulgar promotion of patriotism and socialist idealism.

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<sup>246</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 173-174.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

#### **IV.III. The post-Stagnation period**

The stagnation period in the Soviet cinema was an intriguing era as the quasi-liberal atmosphere of the Thaw could not be suppressed despite the ideological conservatism the Party had implemented. Apart from the artistic attributions of the period, the Stagnation period was a time of re-establishing stability rather than proposing new hopes or liberal approaches for the Soviet state and society. However, stability did not mean prosperity. The policies of stagnation could not overcome the challenges that the socialist regimes were witnessing. The five year plans were unsuccessful in bringing wealth to the Soviet people. Moreover, the infamous Afghan campaign, which would continue until the end of the 1980s, was one reason that would cap off the hopes of people to create a socialist dream within the USSR's borders. Nevertheless, this disappointment had led to a turbulent reform period in the 1980s and the dissolution of the union, respectively.

After Brezhnev's death, the General Secretary's seat had hosted two leaders, namely, Konstantin Chernenko and Yury Andropov. However, their tenure was short due to their old age. Finally, a young prospect in the Politburo, Mikhail Gorbachev, proposed the most radical solution suggestions in USSR history by introducing politically and economically liberal values in an authoritarian system. The reflections of such a strong reform program on cultural politics and the film industry would be evident. The Soviet cinema entered a new phase in terms of administration and aesthetics after the initiation of Glasnost.

The Soviet cinema experienced a period of liberalization during the Thaw years, though it lasted a short time. Nevertheless, the tolerance that artists enjoyed had enabled the emergence of a generation of filmmakers with new styles and themes. The following period had witnessed this generation's dissidence against the authorities that looked for disabling the tolerance given previously. This confrontation between the two sides was evident at the time of glasnost and perestroika when they were declared in 1986. The impact of Gorbachev's reforms upon Soviet cinema was much more than tolerating the filmmakers as the structure of the film industry would drastically change in terms of administration and style. The Gorbachev administration paid attention to cultural matters for their ability to influence society. In this respect, a new model was aimed to be implemented to consummate the reform process in the film industry.<sup>248</sup>

Concerning administrative reforms, dissident or controversial filmmakers started to take office in relevant posts, such as Elem Klimov, who was elected as the First Secretary of the Filmmakers Union. Klimov's nomination was criticized by some filmmakers like Nikita Mikhalkov, who demanded the continuation of the old system. On the other hand, Klimov's nomination by Central Committee was a part of the reform process initiated from above.<sup>249</sup> Besides, nearly all minor and significant offices were re-assigned in the union, and the party members' percentage decreased drastically. The spirit of liberal administrative transformation continued in the Ministry of Culture and Goskino. The

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<sup>248</sup> Nicholas Galichenko, *Glasnost - Soviet Cinema Responds* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>249</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 187.

long-time head of Goskino Filipp Ermash was dismissed and Alexander Kamshalov replaced his position. After his dismissal, Ermash became publicly criticized for his conservative stance.<sup>250</sup>

On the other hand, Kamshalov was a Soviet bureaucrat with expertise in film studies as he authored several books on cinema and his new duty was appreciated with the hope of collaboration between filmmakers and the administration. Following the organizational transformation, the responsibilities of Goskino were also redefined. Goskino would be no more responsible for the ideological and financial control of the industry. Instead, it would collaborate with the Filmmakers Union in terms of planning and organization.<sup>251</sup>

Another major revision was on the policy of censorship. While the censorship was legally abolished in 1990 by the Supreme Soviet, it had been practically dismissed since the Filmmakers Union became the leading organization in the industry. There were no longer obstacles for filmmakers and they did not hesitate to work on a broad range of themes, including the controversial periods in the past or social problems like drugs, prostitution, corruption and other moral deficiencies. The concern for censorship was not limited to new productions and approximately 250 films that were previously shelved would be released after the approval of the Conflict Commission, which was newly

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 53-55.

established.<sup>252</sup> The Commission also carried out the rehabilitation of the dissident filmmakers who suffered in the prior periods.<sup>253</sup>

Abolishing censorship and re-assigning the industry officers were not sufficient for the revolutionary spirit of the time and the union proposed further reforms. The prospects are simple but not easy: “freedom of expression, managerial decentralization, self-financing economy, free market.”<sup>254</sup> The law on the new model was proposed as late as June 1990 by the Filmmakers Union. However, the decentralization of administration and the privatization process of film studios would complicate the situation by exploiting the lack of legal base for administrative reform.<sup>255</sup>

The new model proposed was named the *khozraschet* system, which meant the autonomous budgets for cultural organizations. *Khozraschet* and the following regulation over Law on Cooperatives brought independent budgets to film studios. By 1990, fifty-five production studios were registered as independent cooperatives. While the production became autonomous, the distribution was decentralized. The lack of control in distribution enabled American films to surpass the Soviet ones in popularity, which meant a significant commercial loss for the production companies, relying on their autonomous budgets rather than official subsidies. Decentralization of

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<sup>252</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 187.

<sup>253</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time*, 56-57.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>255</sup> Birgit Beumers, "Cinemarket, or the Russian Film Industry in Mission Possible," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 5 (1999): 874.

administration led to the loss of control over the industry and prepared the industry's collapse following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>256</sup>

Though the optimism was high in the first days, the industry could not transform itself into a self-reliant sector. The newly founded independent production companies were still bounded to Goskino due to financial inadequacy. The decentralization of distribution also brought disappointment with the proliferation of the video market in the country. While the administrative reform would not reach success, the artistic achievements opened a new page, which could be defined as the most heterogeneous one in the Soviet cinema.

It should not be forgotten that many auteurs had already emerged in the Soviet cinema despite the former artistic suppression. On the other hand, the Glasnost cinema could not reach the artistic climax previously achieved; however, they succeeded in focusing on the untouched and cumulative problems of the Soviet state and society. The end of censorship and political control gave way to filmmakers and film production switched from ideologically approved films to critical ones. The broad range of themes, low budgets and the amalgamation of Soviet popular culture figures in films brought a distinct amateur spirited aesthetics in the films of the time.

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<sup>256</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 188.

#### IV.III.I The films of the period

Intriguing the Soviet past was one of the essential themes that were prominent during the Glasnost period. Re-witnessing the facts of the dark past was an essential aspect of the new leadership. In this respect, undermining the former myths and historical patterns of Soviet history became one of the most remarkable tasks for many Glasnost filmmakers. While the historically critical films of the period were many, the most prominent ones will be under scrutiny in this part.

The first film to be mentioned is Alexander Askoldov's Russian Civil War drama *The Commissar*, shelved in 1967. Askoldov's work was a piece for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and it narrates a story based on the moral and philosophical tension rather than an ideological one. This narrative choice was censored for its depiction of the revolution as "a force that opposes the very essence of human existence, a phenomenon that destroys personal ties by causing alienation, despair, and uncertainty about the future."<sup>257</sup>

*The Commissar* was adopted from Vasily Grossman's story, *In the Town of Berdichev (V gorode Berdicheve)*, published in 1934. The film protagonist is a female political commissar named Klavdia Vavilova, a robust and masculine figure. She became pregnant during the conflict; however, she performs an abortion. She leads her forces to

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<sup>257</sup> Elena Monastireva-Ansdell, "Redressing the Commissar: Thaw Cinema Revises Soviet Structuring Myths," *Russian Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 230.

a town in Ukraine and settles in a Jewish family's home. The family Magazanik has already made a good life for themselves before the arrival of Vavilova. Their joy and happiness are due to their love for each other rather than ideological motivations or implications. The father of the family, Efim, is a petite nepman, not a worker or peasant. The tension between the relentless, rough and cold characteristics of a Red Army Commissar and the joyful life of Magazaniks is the primary aspect of the story. The fighting of the commissar, namely, taking arms for a political cause, is portrayed as futile. This assumption is portrayed through the sequences of war scenes that include the death of Vavilova's baby's father.<sup>258</sup> On the other hand, Vavilova's failure to adapt to the way of life that Magazaniks live at the end of the film underlines the pessimism for leaving the war behind.

The second film that should be mentioned is Alexei German's masterpiece 1983, dated *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (*Moy drug Ivan Lapshin*). Alexei German was one of the masters of Soviet cinema, though he witnessed many obstacles from the authorities throughout his career. In the case of *My Friend Ivan Lapshin*, which was adopted the novella with the name of *Laphsin* of German's father Yury German, the director had to wait until 1985 to release his work. The film narrates a controversial period, namely the 1930s. The main protagonist Ivan Lapshin is a police officer in a rural town. He takes duty against a group of criminals terrorizing the natives while a theater group visits the town during their tour across the region. The film's dark and static visual style depicts

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<sup>258</sup> David Gillespie, *Russian Cinema*, 70.

the banality of the people's lives and the hardships of the period, such as poverty, brutality, and lawlessness.<sup>259</sup> The theater group ironically works on Nikolai Pogodin's *The Aristocrats*, which is based on progressive idealism. The stark contrast between the myths of idealism and the realities of life challenges the structuring myths of the Soviet Union.<sup>260</sup>

*My Friend Ivan Lapshin* is an artistically sophisticated film regarding visuality and narrative. The story constrains heroizing because of its non-conventional narrative. Besides, Lapshin is an anti-hero, primarily for his illusionary faith for better days. Instead of telling a story, the film deconstructs a story based on idealistic dreams by using documentary features.<sup>261</sup> This choice of German also contradicts his father's novella as the latter one was so monophonic regarding narration and all characters share the Soviet ideals, including criminals.<sup>262</sup> Moreover, the film lacks a central narrator that challenges the audience to identify with themselves.<sup>263</sup> The film's cinematography also aims to alienate the audience by using black and white and color film stock together, a hand-held camera and out-of-focus frames. *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* is often described as the best film in Soviet cinema due to its artistic quality and maturity to deconstruct the dominant myths.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Anthony Anemone, "Moi Drug Ivan Lapshin/ My Friend Ivan Lapshin," in *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Birgit Beumers (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 210.

<sup>260</sup> Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 192- 193.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Benjamin Rifkin, "The Reinterpretation of History in Germans Film My Friend Ivan Lapshin: Shifts in Center and Periphery," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 3 (1992): 5-8.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

The film industry during Glasnost did not rely on blockbusters to assume its self-reliance. Rather it decentralized the production, which created a film style similar to contemporary independent filmmaking. Many films of the Glasnost were artistically non-mainstream and financially low-budget productions. Nevertheless, one can still find highly popular films with new themes that were once taboo. *Little Vera* (Malenkaya Vera/ Vasili Pichul/ 1988) which depicts prostitution and *Needle* (Iгла/ Rashid Nugmanov/ 1988) , which focuses on drugs, can be given as examples to glasnost cult classics. Alexander Proshkin's *The Cold Summer of '53* (Kholodnoe leto pyatdesyat tretego/ 1988) can be regarded as one of the historical cult films in the last years of the Soviet Union. The film won the popularity contest of the film journal *Soviet Screen*.<sup>265</sup>

*The Cold Summer of '53* portrays a specific and sensitive time. The instant period after Stalin's death and its effect on society upon the case of a general amnesty inaugurated just after his death. The story takes place in a remote village, terrorized by the criminals released from prison and concentration camps. Two political exiles living in the village organize the local people to defend themselves against the villains. Proshkin added the generic conventions of the western genre into *The Cold Summer of '53*. In this respect, *The Cold Summer of '53* resembles a Hollywood classic, *The Magnificent Seven*, a western adaptation of Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai*.

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<sup>265</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 96.

The difference between Proshkin's film from its Japanese and Hollywood counterparts is its discussion of essential but dangerous themes concerning the Soviet Union, such as order, criminality, political suppression, mock trials and labor camps. The transformation of the enemy of people into positive heroes would be a highly valiant attempt in the Stagnation period. The final scene of the film is significant concerning ideological criticism. At the end of the film, one of the political exile's family is informed about their father/husband's death. The family ignores the heroism of their father/husband with the fear of losing respectability due to his dissident image.<sup>266</sup>

The final film that should be discussed is Georgian Soviet director Tengiz Abuladze's *Repentance* (*Monanieba*/ 1984), representing the Glasnost cinema in terms of both style and content. Although the film was an allegorical surrealist work rather than a historical film, its impact was excessively high in challenging the official doctrine and Stalin's crimes. The film was produced in 1984, but Abuladze had to wait two years for its release. While the production company had intended to make the film for television broadcast, the film created a big sensation in the international base that was not expected.<sup>267</sup> Moreover, the huge box-office success and the many debates that followed the film's release made the *Repentance* a symbol of the Glasnost period.<sup>268</sup>

*Repentance* can be described as a highly metaphorical allegory of Stalinism. The film

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>268</sup> Milena Michalski, "Cultural Representation of Atrocity and Repentance," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 500.

has a complex narrative that is structured on non-linear techniques and non-clarity. Instead, it proposes chaos that is abstract but evident at the same time. Rather than depending on the factual portrayal of selected cases concerning Stalinist crimes, *Repentance* disorients the audience. It discusses Stalin and his ideology in a surrealist way, which does not touch hidden material facts, but the abstract aspects of his mind and totalitarianism. Abuladze portrays a holistic critic of the past by discussing the tyranny in the world's history using fantasy rather than being part of a puzzle that depends on material facts. Abuladze's preferences for narrative based on surrealism were both praised and criticized. While the Soviet film critics acclaimed the *Repentance*, which was also applauded in international film festivals, some viewers criticized the film claiming that a factual investigation of the past had to be carried out in Glasnost cinema rather than depending on symbols and metaphors.<sup>269</sup>

#### **IV.IV. Russian Cinema during the 1990s**

The Russian Federation was founded on the principles of democracy and a liberal economy in 1991 after the demise of the Soviet Union. However, the political and economic crises halted the transformation from socialism to capitalism. The political instability brought a rivalry between the presidency and the Duma, which led to the 1993 crisis. The war in Chechnya and the collapse of the economy followed the inner struggles. The disappointment emerged with the failure of liberal idealism. Consequently, hard-line nationalists and communists gained support throughout the state. Once a

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<sup>269</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time*, 158.

superpower, the Russian state was transformed into a chaotic regime with ideological and material inconsistencies.

The results of chaos and crisis certainly brought significant effects upon the Russian film industry. Like the Russian Federation, which inherited the legacy of the Soviet Union, namely a great power, the new Russian film industry inherited Soviet cinema, which was one of the leading film industries in the world in terms of artistic quality and production capacity. It should be noticed that the transformation of the film industry had already begun in the last years of the Soviet Union. The system was intended to be restructured into a new model, but the administrative reforms fell behind the joy of artistic freedom initiated after the Glasnost. Therefore, the new industry under a so-called democratic and capitalist system inherited a half-finished structure in administrative terms. The unsuccessful reform process was followed by another ineffective period of restructuring during the 1990s.

Until the 1980s, the Soviet film industry was a profit-making sector as the returns exceeded production costs and the industry was capable of producing approximately 150 films per year. The average ticket sale per year was 50 million, which was enough to finance auteur works in addition to mainstream films.<sup>270</sup> However, the inefficient reform and the popularity of the television and video market brought bitter consequences for Soviet cinema. One can assume that the Russian film industry inherited the troubles of

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<sup>270</sup> Birgit Beumers, "Cinemarket, or the Russian Film Industry in Mission Possible."

the Soviet film industry rather than its benefits.

While Soviet cinema was the least stagnating art during the Brezhnev years, it would become one of the most vulnerable cultural fields in the following decades. The disorientation concerning administration was due to the loss of Goskino's steering role. Rising financial costs for film production and the dissolute condition of film theaters were other significant problems. The ticket prices drastically increased from 50 kopecks in 1992 to 7000 roubles in 1998. The rise in average production cost was another problem. Fifty thousand USD was enough for a film in the last years of the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, the average cost became 500 thousand USD during the 1990s. Another problem was the emergence of opportunities for the Russian mafia in case of money laundering.<sup>271</sup> The cumulation of all these problems resulted in a decrease in production. The number of films produced was only twenty-six in 1996 and it was the lowest production rate since the time of Zhdanovschina.<sup>272</sup> The lack of audience interest also affected film magazines. Once had a 1 million print run, film magazine *Ekran* had reduced its circulation to 50 thousand copies during the 1990s.<sup>273</sup>

One of the remarkable developments concerning the administration of the industry was

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<sup>271</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time*.

<sup>272</sup> Birgit Beumers, "Cinemarket, or the Russian Film Industry in Mission Possible," 871.

<sup>273</sup> Alexander Fedorov, "The Cinema Market: What About Russia?," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 51, no. 1 (1999).

the 1996 dated Federal Law for the Support of Cinema. Unfortunately, the impact of the law was limited due to legal deficiencies. For example, the tax cut proposed for film studios was left worthless due to the inconclusive tax law, which prevents the mentioned cut. Moreover, video piracy was declared as a crime, but the criminal code had no articles for prosecution.<sup>274</sup> The ineffective legal procedures did not help private studios to finance domestic projects. The lack of central distribution made the old American films more preferential as their prices were lower than the Russian films. Nevertheless, only two to seven percent of the seats were filled.<sup>275</sup> Besides, some Western studios invested in the Russian film industry and many co-productions were released. These studios were looking for profit and interfered in production processes, limiting Russian filmmakers' artistic or thematic choices.<sup>276</sup>

Once a symbol of repression for Russian filmmakers, Goskino became a savior of the film industry. The ideological motivation of Goskino left its place to commercial concerns in the Soviet period. On the other hand, its role was still limited because of its insufficient budget that could only subsidize about a dozen films. At this point, the Filmmakers Union emerged as an alternative funding source in the industry. Although there were high hopes about the new model, the Filmmakers Union could not utilize its chance to sustain a concrete transformation in the industry.

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<sup>274</sup> Birgit Beumers, "Cinemarket, or the Russian Film Industry in Mission Possible," 873.

<sup>275</sup> Alexander Fedorov, "The Cinema Market: What About Russia?"

<sup>276</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time*, 100.

#### IV.IV.I. Films of the Period

While the problems were rampant and the number of films produced was limited, the 1990s still offered opportunities to filmmakers to reinterpret the past. One can notice that many contemporary filmmakers, who worked on major patriotic blockbusters, had approached the past in different perspectives that challenge the official myths of the Soviet period. Nikita Mikhalkov can be named as one of these directors and the 1994 dated historical drama *Burnt by the Sun* (*Utomlennye solntsem*) was his previous work before *The Barber of Siberia* (*Sibirskiy tsiryulnik*/ 1998), which commenced the patriotic blockbuster genre. Although *Burnt by the Sun* maintains a critical view of Stalinism, the director's approach would transform into a patriotic notion that fosters a national identity.

*Burnt by the Sun* narrates the last days of the Civil War hero, commander Kotov with his family and NKVD agent Mitia before his liquidation. Kotov is a robust figure and a lovely husband and father, though his tenure becomes obsolete. His henchman Mitia was the old-lover of Kotov's wife Marusia and this coincidence makes his mission not only political but also personal. Mitia spends a few days with Kotov's family without explaining his duty. He witnessed the joy and happiness of the family and a struggle between Mitia and Kotov over Marusia becomes inevitable. The struggle ends with the arrest of Kotov and the subsequent suicide of Mitia after his return to Moscow.

*Burnt by the Sun* deconstructs the sanctity of political ideals that caused the sufferings of

two men and a family. Neither Kotov nor Mitia question the outcomes of the myths that they embrace at the beginning. Kotov has a perfect life with his family and the socialist cause under Stalin's leadership serves as a set of values to adopt. At the same time, Kotov is just a piece of the puzzle regarding liquidation. The film juxtaposes the grand ideals and the ordinary lives of people in times of conflict.<sup>277</sup> While Kotov becomes a victim of the system, the personal suffering of Mitia turns out the system to be meaningless as he chooses death.

Vladimir Khotinenko is another filmmaker to be mentioned. While his two patriotic blockbusters, namely *1612* (2007) and *The Priest (Pop)* (2009), will be evaluated in the following chapters, his film *The Muslim (Musulmanin)* (1995) narrates the conflicting identities in a time of a search for national identity. *The Muslim* tells the story of ex-soldier Kolia, who returns to his native village after being captive in Afghanistan for seven years. He has ended up fighting by rejecting killing and surrendered to Afghan fighters. Latterly, he is adopted by an Afghan family and he converts to Islam during his captivity. His choice of faith becomes a case of contention with his family and neighborhood. Moreover, Kolia becomes threatened by an ex-soldier figure named “N,” who wants to kill Kolia for his surrender.

*The Muslim* debunks the great family myth that had been once present in the Soviet period. Lacking a central identity, the post-Soviet Russian community witnesses rival

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<sup>277</sup> Birgit Beumers, “Myth-Making and Myth-Taking: Lost Ideals and the War in Contemporary Russian Cinema,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 42, no. 1-2 (2000), 171-189.

identities. However, the contention between Kolia and his offenders does not portray a simple duality. The problem is the degeneration of ordinary Russian people's national and spiritual values in the family and the village. This identical illness had its roots during the Soviet period. People's ideology did not change but revised according to capitalism and the Orthodox faith. The ex-chairman of *kolkhoz* becomes a businessman and the religion replaces the party as an institution.<sup>278</sup> In this respect, Kolia's surrender to the mujahedeen was an act of leaving behind the system's illness. However, he sees that nothing has spiritually changed regarding the people.

Kolia's exclusion in the village is not only for his different faith. His rejection of corruption, including stealing, prostitution, alcoholism and sordidness, makes him a stranger in the village. Khotinenko criticizes Russian society for its degradation both in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. This corruption is related to the system and the inherently bestial identity of the people.<sup>279</sup> It can be assumed that the director rejects the historical progress the Russian society experienced in the last century. The conversion of Kolia underlines that *The Muslim* targets the Russian nation from a broad perspective rather than focusing on a limited timeline.

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<sup>278</sup> Alexander Prokhorov, "From Family Reintegration to Carnivalistic Degradation: Dismantling Soviet Communal Myths in Russian Cinema of the Mid-1990s," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 51, no. 2 279.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

**CHAPTER V: CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HISTORICAL  
BLOCKBUSTER FILM: PRE-ROMANOV AND ROMANOV  
PERIODS**

The history of Russia and Russians spans over centuries with distinct and contradicting characteristics concerning faith, politics, culture and social life. Among some of the critical headlines of Russian history, one can count the first political settlement under the Varangians, the “Tatar Yoke”, the emergence of Muscovy and latterly, the Time of Troubles. Then the age of Romanovs witnessed fierce civilization debates and conflicts began. The rise of anarchy and consequent revolutions ended with a radical socialist coup. World War II, humanitarian disasters, the socialist domination in the Cold War and its traumatic dissolution were other significant historical experiences in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Having a contradictory and conflict-based history does not apply only to the Russian nation. That is to say, nearly all nations had been through similar contradicting periods throughout their accounts. On the other hand, the difference in the Russian case lies at the core of the nation-building processes. The Western countries created their

official/national identities for a long time within a historical process. Conversely, Russian official history had witnessed many debates and transformations regarding identity, especially in the last century. The interpretation of the past has varied, answering to ideological circumstances during the process of transformation.

Since the inauguration of President Vladimir Putin, a new set of myths that promote the Russian sublimity has been created to support the idea of Great Russia that the new leadership looked to re-establish. In this respect, contradicting myths should be reviewed to create unity regarding the interpretations of the past. While it is not easy to reorganize a long history, the Kremlin leadership uses all its capacity to control the historical discourse in every field. Indeed, one may easily argue that historical blockbusters' promotion should be considered an essential part of this mission.

The new goal of this mission is to highlight the glorious times and rehabilitate the dark days of the past. The problem regarding the purpose is that these two codes are usually interrelated in Russian history. The most victorious times often coincided with human suffering, respectively. Therefore, the myths have to be constructed with subtlety since it is challenging, as previously mentioned. This work aims to detect, understand, and debunk the myths constructed in historical blockbusters using the historical film analysis method presented in the first chapter. As a result of the necessity to create unity among the Russian past, the historical themes and the periods portrayed in the films vary within the borders of an expanded time ranging from the 10th century Rus' period and the

Soviet Union's last years.

It is decided to categorize films according to the historical period subjected rather than following a chronological analysis that relies on the films' production years. This preference is due to the lack of an exact program concerning the promotion of specific periods in particular times. Instead of relying on a particular program, the film industry has bombarded the audience by presenting distinct myths about different periods. However, these preferences were sometimes influenced by historical anniversaries, market conditions and genre popularity.

The categories to be followed are the pre-Romanov period, Romanovs period, World War I & Russian Civil War, the "Great Patriotic War", and the post-Stalin USSR. A general pattern in myths concerning historical interpretations or generic style will be questioned under each category. "How does recent Russian historical blockbuster portray significant specific periods?" will be the ultimate question.

### **V.I *The Viking* (Viking/ Andrey Kravchuk/2016)**

The Orthodox faith constitutes a considerable part of the Russian national identity. Adopting Christianity in 988 as the official religion, Prince Vladimir should be considered as a leading Russian historical figure. There is no doubt that portraying the beginning of Orthodox Russia is an intriguing subject for the blockbuster film project.

Presenting Prince Vladimir in an action-packed blockbuster film would definitely have an impact on the popular historical discourse. Being acquainted with this opportunity, the director of Channel One, Konstantin Ernst, initiated the production in the late 2000s that lasted approximately seven years.<sup>280</sup> Internationally acclaimed filmmaker Andrei Kravchuk is chosen as the director. Kravchuk is well-known for his debut work *Italian* (*Italyanets*/ 2005), which won two awards at Berlin Film Festival. Though *Italian* can be considered as a festival film, Kravchuk would focus on mainstream cinema and historical blockbusters in his later career. His Russian Civil War epic *Admiral* had commercial success in 2008, and *The Viking* became his following project. *The Viking* is one of the most expensive Russian productions with a budget of over 20 million USD. The production granted generous sponsorships by significant state agencies.<sup>281</sup> The premiere took place on 29 December 2016 and the film grossed approximately 27 million USD in Russia and paid for itself.<sup>282</sup>

*The Viking* created a sensation after its release in terms of commercial success. While the film was ranked first in the box office concerning Russian films, its vulgar display of the Varangians and Prince Vladimir sparked debates among historians, clerics and audiences. The film critics praised the film's production quality in general, and some commentators highlighted it as one of the most acceptable Russian blockbusters in technical terms. On

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<sup>280</sup> “Masshtabnyy Rossiyskiy Fil'm ‘Viking’ Vykhodit v Prokat,” *TASS*, December 26, 2016, <https://tass.ru/kultura/3913962>.

<sup>281</sup> Damir Kamaletdinov, “‘Viking’ Ernsta: Denezhnyy Vopros Odnogo Iz Samykh Dorogikh Rossiyskikh Fil'mov,” *TJ*, December 28, 2016, <https://tjournal.ru/flood/39279-viking-ernsta-denezhnyy-vopros-odnogo-iz-samyh-dorogih-rossiyskih-film-ov>.

<sup>282</sup> “Sbory, Viking,” KinoPoisk, <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/707407/box/rus/>. Accessed at 1.7.2019.

the other hand, the underdeveloped plot and characters were the criticized points. It should be noted that film critics usually focused only on generic and cinematic aspects rather than the quality of historical interpretation. In contrast, historians scrutinized the historical accuracy of production and the representation of Vladimir's personality, while some draw attention to technical accuracy such as costumes, etc.<sup>283</sup> Historians' common issues are the use of *Tales of Bygone Years* in the screenplay. For example, historians like E.A. Melnikova and A. Nazarenko praised the film's historical accuracy regarding its reference to the *Tale of Bygone Years*.<sup>284</sup>

*The Viking* begins with a quote from Mao Tse-Tung: "History is a symptom, diagnosis is us." Then, a hunting party takes place on the screen. Prince Oleg, his advisor Sveneld and his fighters chase a colossal bison. However, the men of Yaropolk have also been after the bison. Both sides consider the bison as a wedding gift for Polotsk Prince's daughter. The contest over the hunt ended with the murders of Yaropolk's men by the Oleg team. After the murder, Yaropolk comes to the scene and Oleg runs to Polotsk city. At the gates of the city, Oleg dies because of an accident. Yaropolk blames Sveneld for Oleg's death and attempts to execute Sveneld. However, Sveneld escapes from the execution by the trick and escapes to join Vladimir. In the following scene, Vladimir and his army come to Polotsk to propose marriage to the daughter of the Polotsk prince. The

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<sup>283</sup> Roman Golovanov, "Istorik-Rekonstruktor Klim Zhukov: 'Khoteli Pridat' «Vikingu» Bleska Stariny, a Poluchilas' Pomoyka," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, January 9, 2017, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26627.5/3646619/>; Pavel Sadkov, "A Vmesto Serdtsa - Bronzovyy Topor!," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, December 28, 2016, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26625/3643506/>.

<sup>284</sup> Yulia Vital'yevna Kaporina, "Obraz knyazya Vladimira Svyatoslavicha v fil'me «Viking»," in *Istoricheskiye Issledovaniya: Materialy V Mezhdunar. Nauch. Konf.* (Samara: Obshchestvo s ogranichennoy otvetstvennost'yu "Izdatel'stvo, 2017), pp. 15-21.

proposal ends with failure and Vladimir attacks the city. Vladimir's army is victorious. The next stop is Kyiv, where Yaropolk sits on the throne. Vladimir can find neither Yaropolk nor Kievans as the city has been abandoned. However, it is a trap and Yaropolk has been waiting outside the city with a large army. Vladimir's scouts can seize the envoy of Irina, Yaropolk's Byzantine wife. The seizure makes Vladimir strong enough to persuade Yaropolk for negotiation. Yaropolk comes to the city to negotiate; however, he is assassinated and Vladimir becomes the grand prince. Yaropolk's men joined Pechenegs to conquer Kyiv and save Irina. Vladimir's army can repel the attackers, thanks to the tactic skills of Vladimir. Vladimir's Christian warrior Fedor is sacrificed for the victory, which makes Vladimir disillusioned. Moreover, the Pecheneg threat is still on the table and Vladimir agrees to give Irina to Yaropolk's man. Afterward, Vladimir sets up diplomatic ties with the Byzantine Empire. Vladimir agrees to help the emperor's army in Korsun. He discovered that Irina is also in the city. After seizing the city, he converts to Christianity and dismisses Sveneld. Rus' people become collectively baptized, following Vladimir.

One can argue that the Russian patriotic blockbuster film project has two primary goals. The first goal is to promote patriotism by portraying Russian history through the lens of a nationalist interpretation. This particular undertaking also aspires that films' production can compete with their Hollywood and other non-Russian rivals by constituting a self-financing system.<sup>285</sup> Although many Russian blockbusters satisfied the authorities

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<sup>285</sup> See Stephen M. Norris, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory, and Patriotism*

for their patriotic nature, some films failed in financial terms. In this respect, *The Viking* should be seen as a project that attempts to find an equilibrium between two goals. On the one hand, *The Viking* highly resembles the TV serial hit *Game of Thrones* and *Vikings* by adopting the action-based narrative, high rate of graphic violence/nudity and a plot based on intrigue. The title of the film is also remarkable in this sense as the Norsemen who established the Rus' state are called Varangians by Russians rather than using the term vikings.<sup>286</sup>

Moreover, *The Viking* should also be morally patriotic as it treats a sensitive case. A cynical interpretation of Vladimir would be welcomed neither by the authorities nor society. The producers claimed that the film was based on the ancient historical source *Tale of Bygone Years*, and historians were consulted during the production.<sup>287</sup>

Reclaiming historical accuracy complicates the issue further since the reinterpretation of history is the critical determinant of a patriotic discourse that usually relies on myths rather than facts. However, reclaiming historical accuracy should also be seen as a marketing tool. In this respect, *The Viking* can be considered as a project which aimed to be commercial, historically accurate and patriotic at the same time. Nevertheless, it was an onerous task, and *The Viking* made some audience disoriented by narrating the story of a saint prince, which had its fair share of brutality and sex. Nonetheless, the film was a hit at the box office. It became one of the most famous Russian films in the last years.

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(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>286</sup> See Yulia Vital'yevna Kaporina, "Obraz knyazya Vladimira Svyatoslavicha v fil'me «Viking».

<sup>287</sup> "Andrey Kravchuk: Za Kachestvo Fil'ma 'Viking' Ya Spokoyen, Ostal'noye — Kak Bog Dast," TASS, December 29, 2016, <https://tass.ru/interviews/3914356>.

For this reason, the film should be reviewed in light of these factors.

The main character of the film Prince Vladimir symbolizes the establishment of Orthodox Christianity in the Rus' land and the unity between principalities as he ended the strife between him and his brothers Oleg and Yaropolk after the death of Sviatoslav, the Grand Prince in Kyiv. He became the Grand Prince in 980 and ruled until 1015.

However, the so-called unity between principalities was loose and inner struggles would continue after Vladimir's reign. However, the integration of Rus', even in its symbolical meaning and the conversion to Orthodoxy, which would be one of the ultimate determinants of Russian civilization, made Vladimir a timeless saint-prince. *The Viking* will be analyzed by focusing on the main protagonist namely, Prince Vladimir. His depiction, role, motivations and reactions in the critical events may help scrutinize the film in terms of historical film criticism.

One can divide *The Viking* into two parts, namely the pagan and Christian periods. In the first part of the film, Vladimir is depicted as an impotent leader even after becoming the Grand Prince of Kyiv. In this part, Vladimir gains military and political achievements. However, these achievements are depicted as being controversial rather than heroic. The Polotsk campaign is an example of these achievements. The depiction of siege is a kind of barbarian warfare. The audience does not witness Vladimir fighting nor commanding his army during the invasion. He looks confused and loses his conscience after drinking a hallucinatory berserker recipe. Vladimir's Nordic mercenaries dominate the battlefield.

Controversy continues after the victory of Vladimir's army. Vladimir rapes the daughter of Polotsk's prince, Ragneda, in front of his family's eyes. Moreover, he does not restrain his men from killing the prince and his wife. He only regrets this brutality after the effect of the drink wears off. Thus, the scapegoat of this brutality was not Rus' culture and identity but the Nordic mercenaries and their berserker drink.

Vladimir's impotence continues in the scene he meets with his brother Yaropolk. Although he does not have any plans for killing him, his men, guided by Sveneld, Vladimir's Nordic advisor, takes the stage and sets up a trap for Yaropolk. A non-Rus character is responsible again for this unnecessary brutality. Vladimir also lacks leadership skills. In his fight against Pechenegs, he cannot convince his Nordic mercenaries, who demand gold to fight, to take arms. In another scene, he cannot prevent the murder of his Christian warrior Fedor and his son by pagan priests who look for a sacrifice to the Gods. These examples show that pagan Vladimir is not brutal in the heart but comes across as weak to prevent violence. The Nordic mercenaries and Pagan tradition dominate the Rus land in this part.

The murder of Fedor disillusioned Vladimir, and this event makes him more competent. As a consequence, he releases the prisoner princess Anna to learn about Christianity. He orders a visit to Constantinople for an alliance. The two sides agree upon the Kherson campaign, according to which Vladimir would free the city from the insurgents and marry Anna in return. At this point, Anna can be seen as a symbol for converting into

Christianity rather than a humanly figure. Anna is the grace of God and symbolizes faith rather than a romantic relationship.<sup>288</sup> This symbol opens the gates of a new world to Vladimir. He finds the chance for redemption from his past sins, be it stealing his brother's toys, killing his wife's family, the murder of his brother Yaropolk and sacrificing Fedor with his son. He also dismisses Sveneld after his redemption and Rus people follow Vladimir by collectively baptizing themselves within white clothes. The mud and dirtiness give way to pure white, not only morally but also visually.

There is no doubt that *The Viking* has many inventions in this story. One of the significant inventions is based on the characters. Sveneld is the scapegoat for the cruelty lived in the pagan period. He is a historical figure; however, there are many fabrications in his portrayal. He was a possible Varangian figure served to Grand Prince Svyatoslav. Although he is portrayed as the advisor of Oleg and latterly Vladimir, he served Yaropolk after Svyatoslav's death. He attempts to create strife between Oleg and Yaropolk in the scene of the hunting party. The event occurs in *The Book of Annals*; however, Sveneld serves Yaropolk against Oleg in the mentioned source. Yaropolk condemns and presumably dismisses him for Oleg's death as he does not take part in *The Russian Primary Chronicle* afterward.<sup>289</sup> Sveneld was known for his arrogant plans about the strife between the princes; therefore, the depiction of his characteristics seems accurate. His arrogance makes him a perfect choice to invent a scapegoat in the film. By utilizing Sveneld for this purpose, the filmmakers both achieved a semi-accurate

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<sup>288</sup> Yulia Vital'yevna Kaporina, "Obraz knyazya Vladimira Svyatoslavicha v fil'me «Viking».

<sup>289</sup> George Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), 56.

historical portrayal and invented a scapegoat who becomes responsible for the sins of Vladimir.

Regarding Vladimir's depiction in the film, he is not the responsible figure for the severity. However, *The Russian Primary Chronicle* tells a different story. In the case of raping Rogneda and murdering his parents, Vladimir was the one who ordered the killings as there was no data for rape in the chronicle.<sup>290</sup> However, the case of the marriage proposal and the decline of Rogneda is accurate word to word. *The Viking* presents a semi-accurate portrayal again. The assassination of Yaropolk is also semi-accurate. It is accurate that Varangians murder Yaropolk as it takes part in the film; however, Vladimir planned the murder by bribing Yaropolk's commander Blud.<sup>291</sup> The chronicle also states that Yaropolk's Greek Wife Irina became a tribute to Vladimir besides his other three wives and 800 concubines in total.<sup>292</sup> Finally, his effort and desperate cry for saving Christian warrior Fedor and his son are also invented. There is a case in which a Christian father fights to save his son and himself in the chronicle; however, the disillusion Vladimir lived does not take part in the text.<sup>293</sup> Vladimir ordered the setting up of idols in Kiev and people brought their sons and daughters to be sacrificed.<sup>294</sup> It should be noted that the pre-Christianity period of Rus' had been grimly

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<sup>290</sup> Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Showbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 91.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid*, 94.

<sup>293</sup> See Nora Kershaw Chadwick, *The Beginnings of Russian History: An Enquiry into Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>294</sup> Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Showbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, 93.

depicted in the chronicle. Therefore, human sacrifice may be a part of fabrication. However, the presence of human sacrifice at the time of Vladimir has been considered relatively reasonable in the discipline.<sup>295</sup> Thus, *The Russian Primary Chronicle* invalidates the critics concerned with the violence in the film. One can claim that Vladimir's real story and character may be much more severe than the story depicted on the screen.

Apart from the re-interpretation of violence in *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, a vital part has also been fictionalized, namely Vladimir's baptism. In the film, the primary motivation of Vladimir is his conscience that led him to redemption. However, *Tales of Bygone Years* tells a different story again. It is noted that distinguishing historical facts and myths is not possible for Vladimir's conversion. There are three reasonable assumptions regarding baptism. The first one tells that Muslim, Roman, Jewish and Greek missionaries visited Kyiv to introduce their faiths. The second one is similar to the first one, but Vladimir sent envoys to Muslim, Catholic and Greek lands to investigate monotheist faiths this time. Finally, the third view suggests that the Orthodox conversion resulted from the political alliance between Vladimir and Emperor Basil II after Vladimir's capture of Kherson.<sup>296</sup>

*The Viking* can fuse the blockbuster characteristics with a patriotic myth set by setting a

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<sup>295</sup> Lee Trepanier, *Political Symbols in Russian History: Church, State, and the Quest for Order and Justice* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 21.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

narrative that glorifies the Orthodox faith. The baptism of Vladimir is considered as the year zero for the Russian nation in the film. Narrating a story divided into black and white parts makes *The Viking* successful in praising Orthodox identity while adopting recent popular TV shows' visual style. This formula is crucial as it brings a pattern that most blockbusters can adopt regardless of the period portrayed in the film. Moreover, Sveneld, who prevails as the main villain, is another essential aspect of blockbusters. Demonizing a non-Russian character is a helpful way to praise the native identity.

## **V.II. *The Horde* (Orda/ Andrei Proshkin/ 2012)**

Andrei Proshkin's *The Horde* portrays the 14th century when the Russian principalities were under the “Tatar Yoke”. Though the film lacks the action-based narrative that blockbusters usually admit, *The Horde* is a big-budget production subsidized by the church and state. The prominent donors were the church-affiliated Orthodox Encyclopedia and Kino Fond, which is under state operation. The Orthodox Encyclopedia's role is more than financing the production, as Proshkin told that the project is offered to him, claiming that he did not choose the topic himself.<sup>297</sup> The film tells the story of Saint Metropolitan Alexis during his mission to Saray-Batu to heal the blind eyes of Taidula, the Khan Canibek's mother.

Andrei Proshkin is a 2000s generation filmmaker well-known for his 2002-dated debut

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<sup>297</sup> Veronika Gudkova, “Fil'm «Orda»: Tatory Vozmushcheny «Iskazheniyem Istorii,” *Argumenty i fakty*, September 14, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/culture/36127>; Viktor A. Khokhlov, “Fil'm «Orda»: Realii i Mify Russko-Tatarskogo Srednevekov'ya,” *Novyy Istoricheskiy Vestnik* 32 (2012): 101-104.

film *Spartak i Kalashnikov*, a family drama, and *The Horde* is his first historical film. When it is compared to *The Viking*, *The Horde* subjects a more controversial period. This complexity relies on the period and identity as Tatar rule over Rus' people was not a glorious time for Russian patriotism and there are millions of people who are the direct descendants of former Turkic-Muslim rulers living in the Russian Federation today. As a result, many debates on the historical inaccuracies and the vulgar display of "Mongol-Tatars" were triggered following the film's premiere.<sup>298</sup> Despite creating a stir, the film could not impact the Russian audience as the film's box-office return was approximately 2.5 million USD compared to the 12 million USD production cost.

The historical period that *The Horde* narrates is intriguing as it portrays a highly problematic period of the past. The story takes place during the "Tatar Yoke", which lasted approximately two and a half centuries. It was both a period of Tatar rule in the Russian land and a period that contained the traces of the rise of the Principality of Muscovy, which would establish the core of the following Russian state. Therefore, the "Tatar Yoke" should be considered as a complicated historical period in Russian history since it was not an era that was merely based on slavery.

There is no doubt that the Mongolian conquest, which began in 1237 under Chingiz Khan's grandson Batu's command, was a significant trauma for the people of the Rus' principalities. The Mongolian war machine devastated many cities that did not accept

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

their surrender conditions, and the Mongolian advance reached Central Europe. Only the death of Ogedei, the Grand Khan in the Karakorum, stopped the further advance, as Batu needed to turn back to compete for the Khanate. The Mongolian Empire was divided into several states and the Golden Horde, which would rule the Rus' land, was established. Over time, the state would convert to Islam and the identity of the state and community would lose its Mongolian identity to be replaced by the Turkic Tatar identity. The Tatar khans would make principalities of Rus' their vassals, and a symbiotic relationship became established between the two sides within time. The Mongol conquest had undoubtedly significant effects on the people of Rus'; however, contemporary historians think that the chronicles of the time exaggerated the rate of destruction as the sacked cities were limited, and the raided ones were rebuilt in a short time.<sup>299</sup>

The Russian historiography on the Mongol Tatar period is ambiguous due to its openness to many ideological interventions. The perceptions of the period have been constructed by the political conditions of the time. For instance, the Rus' Church, which was under the ecclesiastical power of the Patriarchy in Constantinople, gave up the prior pejorative narrative in the chronicles written after 1252 due to the cooperation between the Byzantium and The Golden Horde. A critical view of the Tatar past started to become established in the Orthodox Church in 1448, approximately two centuries after the Batu's

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<sup>299</sup> Morris Rossabi, *The Mongols: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Notably, the Muscovy would raise as a noteworthy trade hub, see Patricia Toht and Bob Moulder, *Daily Life in Ancient and Modern Moscow* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner, 2001), 13.

conquest.<sup>300</sup>

Another example can be given for the Romanov period, as the term yoke appeared in the 19th century to justify the Russian backwardness compared to European states, especially in Karamzin's works.<sup>301</sup> Besides, the Eurasianist historian George Vernadsky claims that the base of the Muscovite state includes Mongol elements and the emergence of Muscovite autocracy could be possible under Mongol tutelage.<sup>302</sup>

In effect, contemporary Russian historians are still interested and debate the period. In a 1997 issue of the journal "Rodina," the question "What is Yoke'?" was asked. While some scholars like Ishakov evaluated the Tatar rule as a favorable period for Russia, critics such as Darkevich opposed such positivity.<sup>303</sup> In this sense, one can argue that *The Horde* narrates a complicated period that does not have a consensus upon its interpretation. At this point, one can ask what is the place of *The Horde* in this ambiguous discussion. It would not be wrong to maintain that *The Horde* has many inventions and historical inaccuracies that directly influence the current perception of the Tatar rule. Further analysis of the film within the historical context is necessary at this point. Revealing the factual inaccuracies constructed in the film would lead the viewer to understand the meaning of the historical interpretation that *The Horde* maintains.

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<sup>300</sup> Donald G. Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304-1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 141.

<sup>301</sup> Boris Kagarlitsky, *Empire of the Periphery: Russia and the World System* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 45.

<sup>302</sup> See Vasilii Osipovitch Klyuchevsky, *A History of Russia* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1911).

<sup>303</sup> Yevgeniy Vladimirovich Nolev, "«Mongolo-tatarskoye igo»: ideologicheskii i metodologicheskii aspekty istoricheskogo diskursa," *Vestnik BGU*, №8, (2003), 94.

The film begins with a diplomatic visit to Sarai, composed by an envoy of priests from the Papal States. The Khan Tenibek does not kindly greet them. Instead, he humiliates the envoy for not bringing gifts. Later he threatens them to destroy their capital.

Meanwhile, his brother Canibek surprisingly kills Tenibek. He becomes the new khan immediately after being blessed by his mother, Taidula, former khan Uzbek's wife. After Canibek takes the throne, Taidula suddenly suffers a vision loss. Canibek summons Metropolitan Alexius to cure her mother. The cure has to be successful; otherwise, Moscow will be raided and burned by the khan. Alexius and his apprentice, Fedka, fail to cure Taidula initially, and they get punished by the khan. Alexius joins a slave convoy and becomes assigned to work on heavy duty. When Alexius is at the edge of death after being severely burned in the boiler, a miracle happens and Taidula regains her sight. Alexius admits that he only prayed and he did not initiate a miracle. However, Canibek saves Alexius and grants him tax privileges. After their departure, the son of Canibek, Berdibek, poisons his father and ignites a dynastic instability that will bring the end of the Golden Horde.

At first sight, one can claim that Proshkin achieved success regarding cinematography and casting within the historical world he invented. Regarding the visual preferences, the film creates a semi-dark atmosphere by using pastel colors that convey a dark and depressing past full of tyranny. The images of dust in the Saray and the endless steppes in the city strengthen this message. However, Proshkin's invention, which can be

described as highly caricatured, depends on a stereotypical orientalist view.

The strongest motivation of historical invention in the film is the comparison between Mongol-Tatar brutality and Russian piousness. Far from being objective or scrutinizing, Proshkin's Mongol-Tatar identity representation is highly subjective. The people and rulers of the Golden Horde are portrayed as blood-thirsty, primitive people with inferior mental capacity. One of the superb entertainments of Canibek and his men lies in the beheading of Russian slaves personally. The Turkic people are primitive barbarians who usually eat something with bare hands and make silly jokes that may result in murder and enjoy bloodshed. They are intolerant to the Orthodox religion as Khan's envoy does not hesitate to enter a church with the horses during the liturgy. Although the Khans are the ultimate rulers, they are not mighty ones. Canibek especially loves wizards and magicians. In one scene, Canibek praises an exotic magician, but later, he unriddles his trick and beats him to death afterward.

Moreover, there is an incest-like relation between Canibek and Taidula as Canibek says that he would marry her if she were not his mother while he is touching his mother's body. While Taidula is visually distinct from the Tatar stereotype, her appearance is similar to a witch/sorcerer as she performs shamanic rituals, and she wears make-up resembling corpse paint. It should also be noted that Canibek's successor Berdibek is portrayed as an androgen character resembling a figure from the outside world.

While the Mongol conquest of Rus' land was ruthless in many respects at its beginning, the film's story takes place more than a hundred years after Batu's campaign. In this extended period, invaders' nomadic identity had diminished, and the Kipchak people, who would lead the political order for centuries, adopted Islam as their official religion. Nomadic life had been abandoned and many Turkic cities from the Crimean Peninsula to Siberia emerged as centers of politics, trade and culture.

At this point, the work of prominent voyager Ibn Battuta can be highlighted as an essential source for understanding life in the Golden Horde at that time in general terms. While *The Horde* depicts Canibek and his closest subjects in maximum primitiveness, Ibn Battuta transcribes the story from a very different perspective. He met with Uzbek Khan, his wives, including Taidula, the crowns Tenibeg and Canibek, and Uzbek's daughter, during his visit to the Golden Horden. All these figures greeted Ibn Battuta with great respect. Moreover, the author transmits the ceremonies he attended in a particular way. Each ceremony was carefully planned as the places for everyone to sit were organized, and the distribution of work was evident among the servants.<sup>304</sup> For example, a particular server was skilled at chopping meat for the guests as the people were not in a rush to consume food, as portrayed in the film.

Ibn Battuta, who was excited throughout his travel in the Golden Horde, defines Uzbek

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<sup>304</sup> See Ebû Abdullah Muhammed İbn Battûta Tancî, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004).

Khan as one of the seven most exceptional leaders of the time.<sup>305</sup> Although the Mongolian state also had great discipline in the state system, conversion to Islam and leaving nomadism transformed the Mongol-Tatar rule to a different civilization level. Ibn Battuta was also delighted by the cities he visited at the Golden Horde, such as Solhat, Azak, Sarai and Hacitarhan, which were prominent centers of trade and culture contradicting the portrayal of Sarai in the film. He especially highlights the developed transportation system, security and women's rights in society, portrayed as hugely inferior in the film.<sup>306</sup> Conversely, Proshkin admits that he reconstructed Sarai by using his imagination rather than historical facts,<sup>307</sup> and the result is a dystopia composed of dirtiness and dust, despair and lack of any civilization spark. The Tatar broadcast Azatlık argued that the designers collected infamous tales and myths, especially for Sarai's portrayal.<sup>308</sup>

The general identity of the Golden Horde and the historical events portrayed are also reconstructed in the film. Therefore, it should be asked how events in the film are related to historical facts? Nearly all events in the film are invented except Taidula's blindness and Canibek's call of Alexius for help. The duty of Alexius regarding Taidula's blindness was narrated in the Orthodox chronicles.<sup>309</sup> According to the official story, khan's

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Anna Zagorodnikova, "Rezhisser Proshkin Nazval Svoy Fil'm 'Orda' Kartinoy o Sovremennosti," *RIA*, June 23, 2012, <https://ria.ru/20120623/680115687.html>.

<sup>308</sup> Viktor A. Khokhlov, "Fil'm «Orda»: Realii i Mify Russko-Tatarskogo Srednevekov'ya," *Novyy Istoricheskiy Vestnik* 32 (2012): 101.

<sup>309</sup> I Yu. Lapshina, "O tsaritse Taidula," *Aktual'nyye problemy istoriko-krayevedcheskikh issledovaniy*, 2015. 75-76.

mother, Taidula, went blind and Canibek Khan summoned the Metropolitan Alexius to cure her suffering. After the success of metropolitan, Canibek and Taidula rewarded him and his envoy with lavish gifts.<sup>310</sup> The threat of any raid in case of failure has not been mentioned. Besides, Alexius and Ivan Krasny were in good relations with Canibek as they benefited from cooperating with the Golden Horde. As it was mentioned, the Golden Horde played the critical role in the rise of the Principality of Muscovy, which would lead to the Russian unity established by Ivan III in the following century.

The film alters the actual miracle that refers to Aleksii's healing of Taidula and it creates a new myth, which is that Alexius saves Moscow from the raid of barbarian Mongol-Tatars with the mercy of God. The motif of God's mercy was a significant theme regarding the Mongol-Rus' relations in its early phases. The early destruction caused by the Mongols was considered God's punishment due to the sins of the Rus' people. This time Proshkin highlights the piety of Alexi, which would save Russia rather than punishing it. He creates a myth that extends the Mongol atrocity to the rule of the Golden Horde. The Russian people of that time could only save themselves from barbarians by praying to God, and keeping their faith within Orthodox Christianity is the ultimate message that Proshkin looked to transmit by bending the historical fact. The film also implies that only miracles from God can save the Russian nation. The portrayal of Muscovite Prince Ivan Krasniy is depicted as a meek ruler who has no initiation.

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<sup>310</sup> Gail Lenhoff, "The Chudov Monastery and Stepennaia Kniga," in *Religion Und Integration Im Moskauer Russland: Konzepte Und Praktiken, Potentiale Und Grenzen 14.-17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ludwig Steindorff (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 102.

Sergey Kravets, the head of the Orthodox Encyclopedia and the film's leading producer, claims that the end of the yoke can not be explained by earthly things such as historical processes.

*The Horde* is an expensive project and it can be considered a historical epic that portrays a controversial period for Russian Patriotism, namely “Tatar Yoke”. In conclusion, several approaches can be attributed to the film. First, the over-stereotypical portrayal of Tatar people brings a vulgar stereotype creation and the film conveys its message in an overly direct way. While the patriotic blockbusters reconstruct the past, the narrative's complexity and sustaining subtext make films more intriguing. On the contrary, Sergey Kravets adds that *The Horde* is a story between believers of God and infidels.<sup>311</sup> This lack of complexity simplifies a period that lasted nearly two centuries in a stereotype depending on a myth of disgrace.

Secondly, *The Horde* can not use the benefits of film genres. It is a story of pioussness lacking dynamism or other generic features that can attract the audience.

Hollywood-style film-making is one of the significant attributes of the Russian blockbuster film genre, but *The Horde* could not succeed in box-office by avoiding mainstream film genres' benefits. Thirdly, *The Horde* represents Orthodox fundamentalism's historical perspective rather than adopting a government-backed patriotic position. While Orthodox faith is invaluable for Russian patriotism, one should

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<sup>311</sup> Oksana Golovko and Sergey Kravets, “Orda: Fil'm Ob Otnosheniyakh Cheloveka i Boga,” *Pravmir*, September 20, 2012, [https://www.pravmir.ru/orda-film-ob-otnosheniyax-cheloveka-i-boga/..](https://www.pravmir.ru/orda-film-ob-otnosheniyax-cheloveka-i-boga/)

admit that patriotism is a secular notion. On the other hand, the Orthodox faith surpasses the role of the state in *The Horde*. In other words, Saint Alexius precedes Ivan Krasny in the film. Indeed, the film narrates God's will, which can be considered as the main protagonist. It is God who saves Taidula from blindness. Saint Alexius only prayed for his suffering. From this perspective, it can be argued that *The Horde* questions the hierarchy between state and church in Russian history by narrating a religion-based myth rather than a political and patriotic one.

### **V.III. *Taras Bulba* (Vladimir Bortko/ 2009)**

The portrayal of two significant periods of Russian history, namely the end of the 10th century, witnessed the conversion to Orthodox Christianity and the 14th century when the Golden Horde, in its most glorious period, was examined in the previous parts. The basic myths that occurred from these periods were the consecration of the Russian faith and the demonization of the other in a basic stereotypical way. The following film also relies on a narrative that promotes Russian identity; however, it adopts an epic novel based on a more complex relationship concerning an alternative identity. While the previous films are portrayed through a black and white narrative, *Taras Bulba* focuses on the Ukrainian identity, which has a kinship with the Russian nation.

*Taras Bulba* is an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's famous novel with the same title. The author of the novel, Gogol, is undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in Russian culture, and he can be defined as one of the founders of contemporary Russian literature.

Besides, he is also a national hero for the Ukrainian nation due to his ethnicity and his artistic career plays a significant part in the Ukrainian nation-building process. Indeed, Gogol has a hybrid identity based on two identities which the writer did not inhere totally.

At this point, one can ask: How did the Russian and Ukrainian spectators receive Bortko's *Taras Bulba*? *Taras Bulba* received a well-earned box-office return on the Russian side, as the film was the second most popular native film in Russia by grossing 17 million USD at the box office. Yet, it was not enough to compensate for its 20 million USD budget. Bortko's film was a state project for Gogol's bicentennial birthday. Before the premiere, Vladimir Putin declared his admiration for the author who played a significant role in the fraternity between Russian and Ukrainian nations. On the contrary, the Ukrainian nationalists dismissed Bortko's work for its Russophile messages. Indeed, the Freedom Party leader, Oleg Tyagnibok, claimed that the film is "Moscow propaganda."<sup>312</sup> An acclaimed film critic, Volodymyr Voitenko, also criticized Bortko by stating that the film "resembles Putin's leaflets."<sup>313</sup>

Nevertheless, Gogol is invaluable for the two nations, which have had a complicated relationship throughout the past. Despite coming from the same ancestry, Russian and Ukrainian nations had experienced different historical. Following the "Tatar Yoke",

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<sup>312</sup> Vladislav Tsyplukhin, "Ukraintsy Sochli Fil'm 'Taras Bul'ba' Produktom Informatsionnoy Voyny," *DP*, April 22, 2009, [https://www.dp.ru/a/2009/04/22/Ukrainci\\_sochli\\_film\\_Tar](https://www.dp.ru/a/2009/04/22/Ukrainci_sochli_film_Tar).

<sup>313</sup> Ellen Barry, "V Kul'turnoye Protivostoyaniye Vstupayet Dikiy Kazak," *InoSMI*, April 13, 2009, <https://inosmi.ru/panorama/20090413/248446.html>.

Ukraine stayed under the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom's influence and adopted a distinct nationhood idea. Throughout the centuries, Ukraine witnessed a power struggle between the Poles, Russians and Ottomans. This power struggle affected the identity of Ukrainians concerning the diplomacy they followed. The Ukrainian Cossacks appeared as one of the main actors in the region regarding this power struggle.

The history of the Cossacks is a complicated part of the Ukrainian past, and it is not easy to evaluate this long period in a limited space. Therefore, the main points of the subject should be presented to debunk the myth of Bortko's *Taras Bulba*. The separation of two nations, namely Ukrainians and Russians, resulted from the challenge between two foreign powers on the Rus territory. While the Golden Horde succeeded in controlling the Rus land in the following century after Batu's campaign, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania rapidly expanded through Ukraine and aimed to control the area between the Baltics and the Black Sea. The dynastical and political union between Lithuania and the Polish Kingdom, Muscovy's rise, and a declining Tatar power in the east would transform the struggle between a Polish-Russian challenge in the further centuries. Ukraine turned out to be a buffer zone between this struggle, and the Cossacks defined themselves in the region as freedom-loving, adventurous warriors.

*Taras Bulba* is the most nationalist work Gogol wrote. It tells the story of a Cossack who rebelled against Polish rule. While the Ukrainian rebellions against the Polish Kingdom had spread throughout an extended period, the date in the novel's story is not precise. In

this respect, it can be considered as a timeless story and a myth that portrays the century-long resistance against the Poles. The central myth that *Taras Bulba* covers in Gogol's work and Bortko's cinematic adoption relies on the sublimity of Russian idealism and the Ukrainian's proximity to this greatness. At the end of the film, *Taras Bulba* declares the coming of the Russian tsar, who will unite Russian and Ukrainian nations against the Western animosity represented by the Poles. The Russian tsar indeed subordinated the Ukrainian people in 1654; however, the Ukrainian-Russian brotherhood was not a smooth and homogeneous process to be understood. While the Cossacks aided the Russian state in many cases, degrading this partnership to a highly romantic, eternal fraternity will be too simplified a deduction. At this point, the Cossacks and their relations with major powers in the region must be scrutinized.

The Cossacks can be defined as independent mercenaries who brought service to the Polish Kingdom and performed as border guards. While some Cossacks were based in towns, some chose to settle in Zaporozhnia, located in the south Dnieper. Until the end of the 16th century, there was no strict difference between these two groups as they usually performed joint campaigns, and they both recognized the Polish officers as their hetmans. The difference came with the policy of registration, which was initiated by the Polish king Stephan Bathory. As a result of the policy, in a limited number of towns, the Cossacks became registered forces of the Polish Kingdom with some privilege, while the Zaporozhians remained independent mercenaries. Whether registered or not, the Cossacks emerged as a game-changer in the region with their fighting skills. Their

services to the Polish kingdom would bring expectations for better political and societal conditions for the Ukrainian people.

While the Cossacks were claiming more autonomy, the Polish kingdom could not satisfy them in most cases. This disagreement between the two powers created a cycle that shuttled between rebellion during peacetime and cooperation during wartime. Although there were seven major Cossack uprisings until the Great Revolt in 1648, neither group of Cossacks hesitated to serve the Polish king in significant conflicts, such as the Polish campaign against Muscovy in the 1620s and the Khotyn War against Ottomans in 1621.

Besides, the subordination to the Russian state was not an option until the Great Revolt in 1648, which was led by one of the most prominent Cossack leaders Bogdan Khmelnytsky. The revolt brought about the Pereiaslav Treaty, which meant the alliance between Ukraine and Russia. However, the Russian subordination was mainly a disappointment for the Ukrainian people as Ukraine was divided into the Polish and Russian spheres of influence with the Treaty of Andrusovo (1667), and civil strife became evident in Ukraine. After Khmelnytsky's death, the Russian project was over and the succeeding hetmans looked for various alternatives for suzerainty, including the Ottoman option. It is noteworthy that the Zaporozhians were much more inclined to Moscow protection at this period; however, they would also experience troubles with the Tsardom, just like their defection during the Mazepa revolt. Until the Russian forces' destruction of the Zaporozhian host in 1783, the Cossack community could not

implement a unified project that would serve the Ukrainian people's interest.<sup>314</sup>

Thus, the fraternity between Ukrainians and Russians was not a simple story as it is portrayed in Bortko's film. The Cossacks cooperated with varying actors for one motivation, which serves the rights of the Ukrainian people. The same objection can be directed through Gogol as his novel also creates a myth of brotherhood. Still, Gogol's novel should not be seen as a vulgar attempt that only promotes Russian nationalism by using simplified jingoism. While both works create myths, Gogol's ones are much more sophisticated than Bortko's *Taras Bulba*.

Concerning the novel, Saera Yoon argues that Andrii's defect to the Polish side is not a simple betrayal caused by a love story. Contrarily, it is a story of conflicting civilizations and distinct identities. She discusses that Andrii has a complex character that relies on the love of a woman, individualism and material beauty not present in the Cossacks culture. Yoon especially highlights Andrii's fascination when he sees the Polish cathedral after his defection. In this sense, Yoon argues that Gogol compares two different worlds, namely Polish and Cossack worlds. While the Polish one is materially beautiful, individualist but static, Cossack's society is lively, communal and based on nature. At this point, Andrii not only defects because of his Polish love. It is a choice of civilization. The love story is only a small part of a big desire for a different world.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> See Paul Robert. Magocsi, *History of Ukraine - 2nd, Revised Edition: The Land and Its Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 188-274.

<sup>315</sup> See Saera Yoon, "Transformation of a Ukrainian Cossack into a Russian Warrior: Gogol's 1842 'Taras Bulba,'" *The Slavic and East European Journal* 49, no. 3 (2005).

On the contrary, Bortko fails to promote such a notion as the patriotic feeling in the film is vulgar and trimmed simultaneously. First of all, there is not a clear picture of the enemy, namely the Poles. Their notion of material interests that is evident in the novel lacks in the film. The Polish army's detailed depictions, the city, and the Cathedral in the novel are also neglected. Poles' portrayal indicates that they are demonized aliens who are the natural enemies of the Ukrainian people. The lack of Polish portrayal turned out Bortko's story to be motivated only by seduction. Underlying xenophobia against Poles, who perishes innocent people and opposes the Orthodox faith, is introduced in the most vulgar way.

While Poles are demonized in the film, the anti-Islamic notion of the novel is abandoned. Gogol's character constantly insults the Turkish and Tatar people; however, Bortko's film overlooks Cossack's hate and simplifies the other side. The anti-semitism depicted in the novel is also overlooked. In the novel, the Jewish pogrom and the sufferings of local Polish people are given in a detailed way; however, these parts cannot be found in the film. Only the pogrom against Jewish merchants is present in a highly softened way. Bortko's *Taras Bulba* lacks Gogol's sophistication and secures itself by altering the number of enemies the original Taras has. In this way, a more focused message is conveyed in a politically safer way.

The main message of *Taras Bulba* lies in the present rather than the past. In this respect, the first and the last scenes of the film are significant. In the opening scene, Taras Bulba

makes a speech to his fighters just before attacking the Poles. He says that Russian comradeship is unique as it comes from the soul. He later blames the ones who betray comradeship for material interests and adopt foreign customs. They are sold souls who serve Poles. Nevertheless, these will regret their treason one day. Indeed, this scene occurs in the later episodes of the film; however, Bortko chose to use it as a flash-forward opening. Within the story, it will be apparent that *Taras Bulba* condemns his son Andriy in his speech, but Bortko's choice conveys a message for the present. One can simply match the traitors inside with the contemporary Ukrainian nationalists and the pro-Western Ukrainian government in 2009. The last scene also similar to the first one as Taras Bulba announces a future tsar and there will be no one in the world that one can not tame. This time *Taras Bulba* threatens the present traitors again.

#### **V.IV. 1612 (Vladimir Khotinenko/ 2007)**

*Smutnoe vremya*, in its English terms, the Time of Troubles (1598 - 1613), was a time of despair that turned out to be a significant trauma for the Russian people. The unrest and instability started after the death of Tsar Ivan IV in 1584 and ended with the succession of Mikhail Romanov as tsar in 1613. Ivan IV left no heir except the ill Fyodor, and this dynastic crisis brought the end of the Rurik dynasty and caused a crisis that would last more than a decade. Boris Godunov, Fyodor's regent, took the throne; however, his term as tsar was a time of disaster due to the severe famines. Things seemed dire in Russia, and this discontent brought conspiracies about Tsarevich Dmitry, who died suspiciously at the age of eight in 1591. A pretender claiming that he is Dimitry appeared in the

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and declared himself the successor of the throne. Granting the Polish support, he fought against Boris Godunov. After Godunov's sudden death, Feodor II ascended to the throne for a short period and afterwards False Dimitry became the legitimate ruler of Russia. However, his pro-Polish stance made him unpopular and he was dethroned by a coup organized by prince Vasiliy Shukshi, who declared himself the new tsar. Things did not get better as another false Dimitry appeared again, and Poles invaded the Russian land. Wladyslaw of Poland, the son of Polish King Sigismund III, ruled the country between 1610-13, following the Polish invasion. Despite experiencing many troubles, the Russian people gathered around a noble named Dmitry Pozharsky and a merchant named Kuzma Minin, who led an insurgency movement against Polish forces and emancipated the country from foreign rule. Mikhail Romanov was elected as the new tsar and decade-long chaos had ended.

This historical period, full of conspiracies, action, war, and resurgence, is a perfect case for promoting patriotism in contemporary Russia. It proposes very remarkable myths, such as the necessity of a strong leader in Russia. Stephen Norris notices that Time of Troubles resembles Russia's experience during the 1990s that had produced a contemporary myth. The bankrupt former superpower state was in a crisis of transition to political and economic liberalism, namely a Western ideology. However, Vladimir Putin emerged as a leader and his national identity became reinstated according to the myth mentioned. There is no doubt that memory of disorder and chaos means a lot for

authoritarian regimes to legitimize their rules.<sup>316</sup>

Putin administration has declared November 4, the date for the resurgence during the Time of Troubles, a national holiday in the name of Unity Day in 2005. However, the polls noticed that the society had been indifferent to the new national day. According to an opinion poll carried out by Levada Center, only 8% of the participants were aware of the context of Unity Day.<sup>317</sup> Kremlin commissioned a patriotic blockbuster project to attain a new set of public memory.<sup>318319</sup> Putin's ally Nikita Mikhalkov and Vladimir Khotinenko, a pro-Putin figure director, were ordered to work on the project.<sup>320</sup> In other words, a dream team was constituted for the production of *1612*. Many state institutions gave support to production and prominent national oligarch Viktor Vekselberg also funded a significant part of the project.

Vladimir Khotinenko is a well-known director who has noteworthy historical films/serials in his post-2000 career. Submarine action/drama *72 Meters* (72 metra/ 2004) and WWII drama *Priest* (*Pop*/ 2009) are prominent parts of his filmography. Adopting the Russian blockbuster genre well, Khotinenko chose to create an alternative story full

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<sup>316</sup> Stephen M. Norris, "Vladimir Khotinenko, 1612: A Chronicle of the Time of Troubles," *KinoKultura* (2008), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2008/22r-1612.shtml>.

<sup>317</sup> V. N. Efremova, "Den' Narodnogo Yedinstva: Izobreteniyе Prazdnika," *Simvolicheskaya Politika* (2012), 286-300.

<sup>318</sup> Kamil Tchorek, "Four Hundred Years of Xenophobia: Vladimir Putin, 1612 and All That," *Time*, May 7, 2012, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2114144,00.html>.

<sup>319</sup> Chris Baldwin, "Action movie an allegory for Putin's Russia," *Reuters*, November 3, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSIndia-30309520071103>.

<sup>320</sup> See Mariya Aleksandrovna Shteynman, "Nepoliticheskiiy potentsial politicheskogo mifa v massovoy kul'ture," *Vestnik RGGU. Seriya: Politologiya. Istoriya. Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya* (2009).

of love, fun, and action rather than portraying a historically accurate picture in *1612*.

Khotinenko suggested that filming the past is impossible and there is no historical truth in films.<sup>321</sup> His words can be discussed theoretically; however, his historical approach in *1612* was mainly about the necessities of the patriotic blockbuster genre. Attracting audience attention is definitely more crucial than historiographical quality in the case of implementing a constructed memory about Unity Day. Stephen Norris describes *1612* as "James Cameron history with a Russian flavor."

The film begins with the murders of Boris Godunov's son Feodor II and his mother in 1605. Following their death, False Dmitriy comes to Moscow. Meanwhile, a Catholic father in Rome is ordered to go to Moscow for political and missionary purposes.

However, the rule of Dmitriy is short as he becomes toppled down by the people. Then, the story jumps to the year 1610. Wladyslaw is declared as the new tsar in his absence.

Mercenaries from different nations flock into Russia in the meantime. The main protagonists, slave Andrei, Spanish mercenary Alvar and his aide Koska and Boris Godunov's daughter Kseniya Godunova, come across on a boat leading to Moscow.

Andrei, who worked in Godunov's house, recognizes Ksenia. He witnessed all murders during his childhood. Only Tsaritsa Ksenia saved herself from the massacre. Alvar buys Andrei for his service; however, he dies shortly after in an ambush. Andrei disguises under his master's identity and then gets hired by a Polish hetman, who kept Ksenia

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

captive. However, Andrey's identity is discovered, and he flees to the town Novolok, which is besieged by the forces of the Polish hetman. Andrey and Koska organize and motivate the Russian people to fight. The Polish army suffers massive losses, and this disadvantage brings their failure in their next battle, in which Dmitry Pozharsky gained a decisive victory. A fake family tree is prepared for Andrey to be elected as the new tsar. However, he chooses to come to fight as an ex-slave to save Ksenia from the death penalty. Mikhail Romanov is elected as the new tsar and Ksenia is sent to a monastery.

However, the blockbuster formula did not work well in *1612*, as it resulted in a meager box-office return by earning only half of its 12 million USD production cost. Though it crashed at the box office, the myths created are necessary to be debunked to understand the basis of the Putin regime's patriotic history project. The first myth can be considered as the necessity of a solid leader to keep Russia stable. There is no doubt that Putin's instrumentalization of the period serves this reason in the first place. In *1612*, Poles and Lithuanians invaded the Russian country, and the fighters from Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and many other states joined the invasion for their interests. This portrayal of various mercenaries can be understood as a sign that major Western powers would not hesitate to attack the Russian state in case of a crisis. A weak Russia is not only a target for nearby enemies but all the Western world.

The second message relies on the character of Koshka, the Turkic-Muslim comrade of Andrei. While Koshka lacks Andrei's charisma and leadership, he usually helps the main

hero in the most crucial times. Despite being an assistant rather than a partner, Koska is a sympathetic figure who can be the audience's favorite. However, the central message does not rely on his capabilities and character but on his identity. All it is known about Koska is his Tatar origin as there is no other clue about his roots and background. Still, his identity is sufficient to notice that Turkic-Muslim people played a role of assistance in the re-foundation of the Russian state after the Time of Troubles and the collaboration of the two sides is crucial for preventing hard times. It may be assumed that promoting a new type of brotherhood, similar to the one in the Soviet time, is conveyed through Kostka's character.

Muscovy's policy during the 16th century and non-Russian subjects' role must be understood to debunk the myth based on Koska. *1612* focuses on roughly sixty years later the annexation of Kazan and Astrakhan. While sixty years seem pretty long for integration between two ethnic groups, the case between Turkic-Muslim people and the Russian state was ambivalent. Even after a century after the annexations, the Russian state felt neither safe nor stable as it was stuck between the Crimean Tatars-Ottoman alliance and a large non-Russian and non-Christian population. The Crimean Tatar invasion of Moscow in 1571 and the Kazan Tatar uprisings during 1570-1572 can be given as examples of Russian caution. A ring of fortresses was built in the region to cope with this threat.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Galina M. Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 37.

Another solution was to grant privileges to the Tatar gentry in return for their military service. These noble classes would serve as frontier guards, just like the Cossacks. However, this cooperation was not anew as the Muscovy exploited the power struggle between Turkic-Muslim nobles previously. Before the annexation of Kazan, Tsar Ivan III had already been intervening in Kazan politics as he could achieve the succession of his protege khans decades before Ivan IV's campaign. The Russian historiography has considered the Kazan Khanate as a vassal of Muscovy since 1487.<sup>323</sup> Moreover, one of the main advantages of Ivan IV during the siege in 1552 was the local support.<sup>324</sup> One can estimate that the Turkic-Muslim people of the region aided the policies of Muscovy at certain times. However, this support was not unambiguous for all Turkic-Muslim people in the region as the Russian side successfully used the rivalry between the clans. It is usually stated that Muscovy initiated "a carrot and stick" policy regarding its relations with the Turkic-Muslim world.<sup>325</sup>

The response of Turkic-Muslim people of the Russian state upon the Time of Troubles had varied. The reaction of Kazan Tatars can be considered an exemplary case at this point. It was mentioned that Muscovy was cautious for its Turkic-Muslim subject.

However, Kazan Tatars did not exploit the power vacuum during the crisis to break their

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<sup>323</sup> Melvin C. Wren and Taylor Stults, *The Course of Russian History* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 81.

<sup>324</sup> Edward A. Guitierrez, "Kazan, Siege of (August– October 1552)," in *Russia at War: From the Mongol Conquest to Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Beyond*, ed. Timothy C. Dowling (Santa Clara: Abc-Clio, 2015), 399.

<sup>325</sup> Michael Khodarkovsky, "The Conversion of Non-Christians in Early Modern Russia," in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 122-123.; Andreas Kappeler, *Russian Empire: A Multi-ethnic History* (NY: Routledge, 2013), 28.

ties from Muscovy. Instead, many Tatar noble and military men took duty in the crisis to restore a legitimate ruler. However, legitimacy was a vague concept, and the Kazan Tatars declared their loyalty to each tsar until the ascension of Vasiliy Shuiskiy when they chose to submit to the False Dimitry and joined the revolt against Shuiskii in 1606-1607.<sup>326</sup> Nogays settled in Astrakhan also supported the rebellion under the leadership of Prince Istherek.<sup>327</sup>

On the other hand, some Kazan Tatars also participated in Pozharsky's army, which expelled the Polish forces out of Russia. This cooperation between Muscovy and Tatars during the Time of Troubles turns out to be a highly romanticized myth in *1612*. In other words, the symbiotic relationship between two sides is converted to a story of a hierarchical fraternity established between an elder brother and a little one. The reason behind the partnership can be seen as the successive imitation of Russia's carrot and stick policy, which was inaugurated long before the annexation of Kazan. The Muscovy benefited from the political divisions between Khanates and clans in this period.

Another critical point that should not be overlooked is the "fraternity" depicted in the film after the crisis. Though the Turkic-Muslim people are portrayed as the second founders of the Russian state, they would be the empire's disadvantaged subject in the following centuries. The region became pacified during the mid-17th century; however,

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<sup>326</sup> Matthew P. Romaniello, *The Elusive Empire: Kazan and the Creation of Russia, 1552-1671* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 46-50.

<sup>327</sup> J. Palenski, *Russia and Kazan: Conquest and Imperial Ideology, 1438-1560's*, 1974, 49.

the Orthodox Church would carry an anti-Islamic policy until the 18th century. During the time of Catherine the Great, the religious suppression left its place to liberal policies regarding faith; still, the Turkic-Muslim community had already lost their intellectual elites and became a peasant class who adopted a simple form of Islam.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Galina M. Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey*, 39-40.

## **CHAPTER VI: CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HISTORICAL BLOCKBUSTER FILM: ROMANOV PERIOD, WORLD WAR I AND THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR**

### ***VI.I The Barber of Siberia (Sibirskiy tsiryulnik/ Nikita Mikhalkov /1998)***

*The Barber of Siberia* is “the first blockbuster of the Russian Empire,” as film critic Yuri Gladilshchikov defines it, but one should ask that is it a genuine blockbuster or a prototype of the genre? This question arises from the production period, which coincided with the 1998 financial crisis under the Yeltsin regime. It was not a time of glory but a period of economically weak Russia defeated by a group of Chechen fighters a couple of years ago. Though the film industry was recovering compared to the first half of the 1990s, it was still far from competing with Hollywood in technical terms. Therefore, *The Barber of Siberia* should be considered within a context based on a patriotic film of a non-glorious period. In this respect, a critique of the film may offer opportunities to understand the latter phases that the genre had witnessed.

*The Barber of Siberia* was the most expensive European film by the year 1998, costing

46 million USD, it was a massive budget for the Russian film industry at that time, and the film was co-produced by Russian, French, Italian and Czech partner companies.<sup>329</sup> There is also an intriguing detail about the film, as the “first Russian blockbuster” was owned by a multinational European partnership sponsored by Eurimages, the European Union fund for film production. This immense amount of money should be assigned to a prominent name and Nikita Mikhalkov, a rising figure in the film industry and politics in post-Soviet Russia, took the director’s chair. He had already been an acclaimed filmmaker in the Soviet period; however, he gained worldwide prestige with his post-Soviet historical drama *Burnt by the Sun* (*Utomlennye solntsem/* 1994), which won an Academy Award for the Best Film in Foreign Language and Grand Prize of the Jury in the Cannes Film Festival. Besides his artistic success, his high-level nationalistic views made him a respectable figure for Russian conservatives in the second half of the 1990s.

Indeed, *The Barber of Siberia* was a long-delayed project with roots in the last years of the Soviet Union. Mikhalkov wrote the script in 1987-1988, but he had to wait until the mid-1990s for shooting because of financial insufficiency. After granting the budget, Mikhalkov conducted a wild marketing policy. Mikhalkov appeared in many TV shows to advertise the film. Many merchandises about the film, including barber sets, came onto the market. Nevertheless, the commercial contribution of such efforts had been limited. *The Barber of Siberia* had a huge budget and a famous director, but the

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<sup>329</sup> Belén Vidal, *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre and Representation* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2012), 61.

box-office income was nothing less than a disaster.

Apart from commercial disaster, Nikita Mikhalkov was disgraced by film critics due to imperial romanticism, Hollywood style myth-making and the primitive social/political messages in *The Barber of Siberia*.<sup>330</sup> It can be claimed that *The Barber of Siberia* can be seen as an unfortunate beginning for the patriotic blockbusters concerning artistic and commercial aspects. Whether a success or a failure, the Barber was an important event in the post-Soviet Russian cinema regarding its production capabilities. Although it was an unsuccessful beginning, the cultural administration would nevertheless carry the blockbuster project further by reviewing the experiences *The Barber of Siberia* provided.

At this point, a short synopsis is necessary for further analysis. The story begins with the letter of Jane Callahan to his son, who has a duty in the US army. The letter can be seen as a summary of Mrs. Callahan's experiences in Russia twenty years ago. The story then jumps back to 1885 when Jane and a young cadet Andrei Tolstoy meet on a train during Jane's visit to Russia. She has to assist US entrepreneur McCracken, who invented the machine named the barber, which efficiently cuts down forests. He looks for marketing his invention in the Russian Empire to be used in Siberia. The primary task of Jane is seducing General Radlov to ensure the approval of the barber. However, Andrei and Jane

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<sup>330</sup> Mikhail Brashinskiy, "Iz Rossii s Lyubov'yu," *Seans* 17-18 (1999), <https://seance.ru/n/17-18/rezhisser-film-kritik/sibirskiy-tsiryulnik/iz-rossii-s-lyubovyu/>; Dmitriy Savel'yev, "Aleksandrovskiy Sad Na Andreevskom Spuske," *Seans* 17-18 (1999), <https://seance.ru/articles/aleksandrovskiy-sad-na-andreevskom-spuske/>; Lyubov' Arkus, "Ya Sdelal Kartinu Dlya Sta Millionov Inostrantsev, Zhivushchikh v Moyey Strane," *Seans* 17-18 (1999), <https://seance.ru/articles/ya-sdelal-kartinu-dlya-sta-millionov-inostrantsev-zhivuschih-v-moey-strane/>.

have already fallen in love. Tension grows between Andrei and Radlov and Andrei becomes arrested after humiliating the general during his performance in the opera named the Marriage of Figaro. He is sent to Siberia and the lovers will not meet again though Jane comes to Siberia years later but can not find Andrei.

One can see that *The Barber of Siberia* portrays a love story with a tragic end. Still, this gloomy affair has many patriotic codes depending on a duality between Russia and the others. *The Barber of Siberia* constructs its perception of a distinctly Russian character, especially in discord with Western values. Mikhalkov promotes a Russian identity that has been built upon emotions like courage, self-sacrifice, humor, and, most importantly, honor rather than rationality.<sup>331</sup>

On the other hand, western people are rational in both economic and social terms. Greed and pragmatism are their essential characteristics. There are no intersection points in this duality. That is why Jane still could not understand Russian behavior even though she spent ten years in Russia. Therefore one can state that the film based its ideology on a distinctly Russian character that can not compromise Western values. Inspiring from this impossibility of mutual understanding, Gladilshnikov asserts that the Barber is a Russophobic because it shares the already present Russophobic feeling of westerners, relying on this impossibility.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Yuriy Gladilshnikov , "Pervyi Blokbaster Rossiiskoi Imperii," *Itogi* 10, no. 145 (1999): pp. 42-47.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

Some scenes may be focused on to strengthen this argument. In the opening scene, the vast Russian forests portray the Russian country's geographical significance. The American machine threatens vast and stupendous nature. In the following scene, young cadets get on a train where Jane and Andrei will meet. The cadets are joyful, and Andrei's friends make a joke by locking Andrei with Jane in the compartment. Andrei gets drunk and his officer welcomes Jane to Russia. At first sight, Russian cadets seemed undisciplined when they are compared to their American counterparts. While the American soldiers are trained under strict discipline to serve their state, Russian soldiers' ill-discipline can be traced from the jokes and superior-subordinate relations. Although it may seem like a deficit, the characteristics such as honor and courage are innately given to Russian cadets who do not need to be disciplined for duty. They are ready to serve Russia in any circumstances. Their love for the empire and tsar, which is delicately depicted in the oath-taking ceremony before Alexander III acted by Mikhalkov, should be seen as the ultimate essence of a soldier and this dedication is inherent in Russian cadets. Captain Mokin plays a vital role at this juncture by motivating them for duty and saving them from trouble in necessary times when he is compared to his American counterpart, who does not even consider his soldiers as individuals. Claiming an inverse proportion between practical discipline and sentimental values may be seen as an assumption resulting from these examples.

Another difference between the Americans and Russians are their cultural level.

Although the American cadets and officers are insensible about Mozart, the Russian ones

can perfectly perform *The Barber of Seville* by Rossini. The genes inherited from Andrei to his American son can also be traced to his love of Mozart and stubbornness against the American officer. This high cultural level among Russian characters implies that despite carrying a Eurasian identity, the Russian nation dignifies western cultural values such as Mozart and Rossini even better than the Americans who politically lead Western civilization. Besides, Russian people are also well aware of their tradition as the festive of *Maslenitsa* is celebrated with great joy and amusement in the film. Following the festive, Jane asserts that everything has been living on the edges in this marvelous country. Regarding the train scene again, Jane's voiceover says that she could get accustomed to anywhere globally, but she is not prepared for Russia.

It was mentioned that Mikhalkov attempts to create a patriotic sentiment based on eccentricity, but it was criticized for being an almost orientalist point of view.<sup>333</sup> The Russian identity, which comprises country, people and culture, is overly mystical which sharply diversifies itself from the Western world.<sup>334</sup> The main problem is mysticism, primarily relying on caricatured stereotypes that create characters on the edges, as Jane Callaghan also admits. One can argue that the Barber intensifies on asserting that the Russians are unique in every way. Still, the uniqueness meant to be based on honor and love for the country seems bizarre regarding its extremity.

The prominent film critic Tat'yana Moskvina criticizes Mikhalkov's portrayal of

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<sup>333</sup> Stephen M. Norris, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory, and Patriotism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 44.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

Russian cadets for their loyalty to the motherland, courage and heroism. She states that the characters of the Barber do not carry these characteristics as the hero of the film is a loser who sets free a terrorist and takes a penal code and leaves the army because of a love for a crappy woman. Moreover, the cadets' educators are idiotically portrayed characters, just like the school's commander, who is a drunken tyrant.<sup>335</sup> Moskvina also notes that *The Barber of Siberia* is lost somewhere between being a mainstream film and an artistic one. She considers the film as a Russian souvenir in English, which is too cyclic for a work of art and too artistic for a cyclic work.<sup>336</sup>

Inspiring from Moskvina, Mikhalkov can be criticized for the fusion of his former artistic integrity with the Hollywood-based melodrama genre supported by a loose but highly sentimental patriotism. The result of this formula is an overly mystic Russia which turns out to be unrealistic and excessively emotional rather than being political. One can argue that Mikhalkov had lost his concentration for making a work of art, a mainstream film or a patriotic work. This confusion makes the Barber of Siberia fit better to a pre-patriotic blockbuster concept rather than a contemporary blockbuster genre. Several reasons can be suggested for this assumption. First, *The Barber of Siberia* is a multi-national production financed by European companies and institutions. On the other hand, the Putin era blockbusters have usually been funded by the Russian state institutions.

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Tat'yana Moskvina, "Ne Govori, Chto Molodost' Sgubila," *Iskusstvo Kino* 6 (June 1999), <http://old.kinoart.ru/archive/1999/06/n6-article4>.

Secondly, the patriotism in the films is not based on a political level but a sentimental one. Mikhalkov prevails elements like love for country, dignity and honor in a love story rather than cultivating them in historical events as the patriotic blockbusters usually do. The sentimentality in the film makes patriotism too abstract and vague. Still, *The Barber of Siberia* comes closer to be a costume drama at first sight, but it also aspires to political purposes. This looseness makes the categorization of the film harder. The final reason is linked with the second one as this looseness can be seen due to Mikhalkov's mental confusion. *The Barber of Siberia* is neither a "bold" example of cinema art like Mikhalkov's *Burnt By the Sun* nor a pure patriotic action film like its sequels, namely *Burnt by the Sun 2* and *3*. Nevertheless, these reasons do not de-emphasize the significance of the film. Instead, the problems of the *Barber of Siberia* should be seen as lessons for the following patriotic blockbuster projects.

#### **VI.II. *Turkish Gambit (Turetskiy Gambit/ Canik Fayziev/ 2005)***

Erast Fandorin can be defined as one of the most famous fictional characters created in post-Soviet Russian literature. The detective's adventures started in 1998 dated *Azazel* and the creator of the character, Boris Akunin, published twelve more Fandorin novels until now. The series chronologically portrays the Russian Empire's last decades, starting from 1876 to the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Akunin is undoubtedly the best-selling novelist in contemporary Russian literature and this achievement nevertheless brought many screens and film adaptations of Fandorin's adventures.

The film adaptation of the second novel of the series, namely *Turkish Gambit*, which takes place in the Siege of Plevna during the 1877-1878 Russian Ottoman War, can be considered one of the most remarkable adaptations. The director Canik Faiziev was well-known for his documentary-style TV serials, namely, *Namedni 1961-2003: Nasha Era* (1997-2003) and *Russian Empire (Rossiyskaya Imperiya)* (2000) before *Turkish Gambit*. After the film's success in 2005, he directed and produced many works, including another significant historical blockbuster, *The Admiral* (Andray Kravchuk/2008). Channel One and Mikhalkov's company TriTe were the leading producers and Akunin adopted the novel to screenplay himself. The film was a box-office hit with a 19 million USD income, a record for a post-Soviet period Russian film. The strategy to adopt a best-seller into a film achieved success. On the other hand, patriotic blockbusters should also convey reliable political messages to implement a new set of patriotic memory. After all, *Turkish Gambit* was an outstanding achievement concerning popularity, but intriguingly, it subjects a demeaning battle. There is no doubt that the Siege of Plevna was a tough battle for the Russian army and it dramatically affected the course of the war and its aftermath. Therefore, one should focus on the narrative and its historical meaning to comprehend the set of memory film provides.

First, a brief synopsis should be given: The main protagonist of the film, Erast Fandorin, is a Russian intelligence officer who volunteers in the Serbian army during the Serbian revolt against the Ottomans in 1876. After being captured by Ottoman forces, he

coincidentally learns the plans of Enver Efendi, who is the mastermind of the Ottoman army. Fandorin escapes from captivity and seeks a way to inform Russian forces about the plan with his partner Varvara Petrovna, who tries to find her fiancé on the front lines of the battle. While trying to reach the front, they are attacked by Ottoman forces known as *bashibozouks* (irregulars). When a Russian army commanded by General Sobolev saves them, Fandorin tells Sobolev the plans of Enver Efendi. Still, he does not know that Enver is disguised in the team of Sobolev. A highly capable spymaster, Enver interrupts the Russian forces by obtaining intelligence first-hand and Ottoman forces quickly occupy Plevna with his assistance. While Fandorin tries to uncover the identity of the mole, Enver continues projecting his plans. While this struggle between the sides continues, a romance emerges between Fandorin and Varvara Petrovna.

The Siege of Plevna, which was the story's historical background, was a crucial battle of the Russian Ottoman War of 1877-1878. The war was a result of a Serbian revolt that also spread to Bulgaria in 1876. While the Ottoman army succeeded in defeating Serbian forces, the great powers of Europe organized the Conference of Istanbul, which remained inconclusive. Russia looked to intervene in the crisis inspired by Pan-Slavic aims and secured Britain and Austria's neutrality, thanks to diplomacy and negative public opinion against the Ottomans regarding the crisis. The Russian army passed the Rumanian territory quickly and crossed the Danube without any serious resistance. The fortresses of Tirnovo and Niğbolu fell consecutively. While the road to Constantinople was open for the Russian army, the forces of Osman Pasha occupied Plevna that would halt the Russian advance. The Russian army stormed Plevna three times, but each ended

with heavy defeats.

Being incapable of defeating Ottoman forces, the Russian army began a siege on 24 October that would be finalized with the surrender of Osman Pasha. Although Osman Pasha eventually surrendered, the Russian military lost five months in Plevna, a delay that prevented them from a quick occupation of Constantinople. Public opinion turned toward the Ottoman side during the siege and Russian gains in the Peace of San Stefano were reduced in the Berlin Congress.<sup>337</sup> Thus, the Siege of Plevna serves as one of the most crucial parts of the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and an analysis of its fictionalization is highly essential.

*Turkish Gambit* transforms the Siege of Plevna into a spy story supported by a romantic love affair. These generic features naturally prevail in fictionalization in historical films. Still, the audience should focus on the relationship between generic elements and historical re-construction with respect to the trivialization of the past. Generic codes are necessary for mainstream films to achieve box-office success. Nevertheless, the *Turkish Gambit* uses generic codes to reach the audience and re-narrate the historical truth. The spy film's generical features play a significant role in trivializing the story and creating

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<sup>337</sup> Paul K. Davis, *Besieged: 100 Great Sieges from Jericho to Sarajevo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 258-259. The Russian official history names the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878 as the liberating war. The aim and the consequence of the war was to emancipate Balkan Slavs from Ottoman Yoke. However the presentation of issue in contemporary school textbooks are limited. One subchapter is usually allocated to the war. While the Battles of Shipka are depicted as heroic, the Siege of Plevna is described in a couple of sentences without detail. See A. C. Orlov, A. Yu. Polunov, and Yu. Ya. Tereshenko, *Osnovy Kursa Istorii Rossii. 2-Ye Izdaniye. Uchebnik* (Moscow: Prospekt, 2015), 306.

an alternative history. For this purpose, the historical fiction invented by the struggle between Fandorin and Enver should be debunked to understand the mentioned utilization.

The first critical historical invention takes place during the occupation of Plevna by the Ottomans forces. The film suggests that the Russian forces were ordered to occupy Plevna to proceed in the Balkans. The army of Krüdener was informed about the plan and everyone was waiting for the occupation. However, the news is shocking as Krüdener invades Niğbolu rather than Plevna. No doubt, this is the work of Enver, manipulating the order that was telegraphed. Because of his intervention, the Ottoman army was able to occupy Plevna without resistance. What happened, however, is different from what is presented. There was a race between Ottoman and Russian troops to reach Plevna which the Ottoman army won the competition under the command of Osman Pasha. Before the Siege of Plevna, the forces of Osman Pasha were in Vidin. With remarkable foresight, Osman Pasha moved his troops to Plevna in a strategic maneuver. Osman Pasha suggested attacking the Russian forces that crossed the Danube from the rear. Osman Pasha also suggested holding the passages of Orhaniye, Tetven, and Turyan. If this plan had been applied, Niğbolu could also have been saved for the Ottomans. However, the general command dismissed these suggestions in light of misinformation from the ambassador of Vienna, which warned of Russian activity in Vidin. Intriguingly, this information was a product of Russian espionage and propaganda and one can assume that Russian intelligence worked better than the Ottoman

intelligence, which is portrayed vice versa in the film.<sup>338</sup>

Another invention is constructed in the first Russian attack after Osman Pasha seizes Plevna. The film portrays that the Russian army found an appropriate gap in the Ottoman defense, thanks to an air mission conducted by Fandorin and Petrovna. All preparations are made. Spirited and confident Russian soldiers began their advance. However, things change quickly. The Ottoman army has made preparations against Russia as if it knew where the Russians would attack. As a result, the attack is repelled and the Russian army suffers significant casualties. The reason for the failure, according to the film, was undoubtedly Enver, who informs the enemy about the attack plan. However, the reality is once again different. The Russian-Turkish War of 1877-78 was a peculiar clash, as the number of foreign observers, military attaches, and war correspondents in the war outnumbered that of previous wars. Many observers narrate the Siege of Plevna in a detailed manner. For example, American Lieutenant Francis V. Greene comments on the first attack by stating that “the almost criminal faults of this battle on the part of the Russian commander are so apparent that they hardly need to be pointed out.”<sup>339</sup> However, in reality, Russian commanders' ultimate failure becomes trivialized by the spy story that the film narrates.

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<sup>338</sup> H. Hikmet Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Askeri Tarih Yayınları, 1993), 155-157.

<sup>339</sup> Maureen P. O'connor, “The Vision of Soldiers: Britain, France, Germany and the United States Observe the Russo-Turkish War,” *War in History* 4, no. 3 (January 1997), 264-295, <https://doi.org/10.1191/096834497675386285>.

The same logic continues with the scenes depicting the next attack. The clash is severe this time as the Russian army proceeds through the town. Victory is near for the Russians and they only need reinforcements. A lieutenant rides through the headquarters to request reinforcements, but Enver assassinates him and the message can not be delivered. In reality, the Russian army leadership in the second and third attacks were highly criticized. Greene listed the failures of the Russians for the second attack in a particular way. Prussian military attaché Major von Lignitz also criticizes Russian commanders for attacking early from a great distance and insufficient reconnaissance of the terrain. However, the Ottoman forces were supplied with reinforcements and the fortifications were flawlessly built.<sup>340</sup> Russian nationalist historian Şirokorad also blames the indolence of the Russian commanders who were unable to occupy Plevna.<sup>341</sup>

As can be seen, the *Turkish Gambit* trivializes the Battle of Plevna by using generic codes that mold the historical reality and prevail excitement for the audience. Its visually vibrant style and adventurous narrative seduce the Russian audience of all ages. Besides the high level of audience attention, *Turkish Gambit* successfully re-narrates a highly problematic part of the Russian Empire. Those years can be named as the last decades of glory for the Romanov dynasty. The Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was the Russian Empire's final major victory, though it was similar to a Pyrrhic one. While the Russian forces were victorious in many war scenes, Plevna prevailed as an obstacle and it

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>341</sup> Şirokorad A. B., *Rusların gözünden 240 Yıl Kıran Kırana Osmanlı-Rus savaşları: Kırım-Balkanlar-93 Harbi Ve Sarıkamış* (İstanbul: Selenge yayınları, 2009). 425.

became evident that the Russian Empire was not strong enough to recalcitrate significant powers such as Britain at the end of the war. Therefore, the Battle of Plevna was a game-changer as it changed the war's destiny. White-washing the troubled days is a significant instrument for Russian historical film making and *Turkish Gambit* adopts a film style based on historical trivializing that depends on the spy film genre codes.

### **VI.III. *Matilda* (*Matil'da*/ Alexei Uchitel/ 2017)**

The last film of this chapter is Aleksey Uchitel's *Matilda* that created a sensation in Russian society. While the film narrates the love affair between the last Romanov Tsar, Nicholas II and his mistress, ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya, the controversy it created relies on the depiction of Nicholas II. He is an Orthodox saint and a mythical martyr regarding the memory of Imperial Russia. The depiction of such a sensitive figure in a story based on romance and adultery has agitated fundamentalist and ultra-conservative groups throughout the Russian country and *Matilda* turned out to be a controversial event before its release.

*Matilda* was not the first historical work of Uchitel, who has acclaimed biopics such as *Gisele's Mania* (*Maniya Zhizeli*/ 1995) that tells the story of famous Russian ballerina Olga Spessivtseva and prominent Russian writer Ivan Bunin's biography, *His Wife's Diary* (*Dnevnik ego zheny*/ 2000). Following these works' success, he continued his career with historical dramas such as *The Dreaming of Space* (*Kosmos kak predchustvie*/ 2005), Chechen war drama *The Captive* (*Plennyi*/ 2008) and *The Edge* (*Kray*/ 2010) that narrates

a romanticism between a troubled war hero and an ethnic German girl at the post-war gulag. While these works, which can be categorized as festival films rather than mainstream blockbusters, had positive receptions from film critics, *Matilda* opened a new page on Uchitel's career with the sensation it created.

*Matilda* should also be seen as an event besides its historical assumptions regarding the sensation it sparked, as was mentioned previously. The controversy about the film had started much earlier than its premier made in October 2017. The first seeds of the public reaction erupted after its official trailer, which included some adultery scenes of the canonized Tsar, was released in early 2017. Besides the public outrage that would even lead to molotov cocktail attacks on the production company's offices, some religious and official authorities also had a strong reaction against the film. The most notorious official critic of the film was the Deputy of State Duma Natalya Poklonskaya, who was infamous for being the former prosecutor in the newly annexed Crimea. Poklonskaya publicly criticized the film and appealed to the higher authorities for an official ban; however, she could not get any result.<sup>342</sup> On the other hand, the Speaker of the Duma abstained from expressing a definite opinion. Simultaneously, the chairman of the Duma Committee on Culture and prominent filmmaker Stanislav Govorukhin supported the film's release.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> "Nespokoynaya 'Matil'da': Chto Izvestno o Situatsii Vokrug Fil'ma Alekseya Uchitelya," *TACC*, October 24, 2017, <https://tass.ru/kultura/4005267>. For a timeline of the outrage the film created see, "Delo 'Matil'dy': Moy Kak Slon Uchitelya Stal Samym Skandalom v Rossii," *RBC*, September 15, 2017, <https://www.rbc.ru/society/15/09/2017/59b91d469a794721efb96438>.

<sup>343</sup> Aleksandr Gamov, "Stanislav Govorukhin - o Skandale Vokrug 'Matil'dy': Otkuda Eti Vizgi? Eta Merzost' Podnyata Iskusstvenno," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, August 11, 2017, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26716/3742406/>.

The public debate escalated further after the premier in October and Poklonskaya's critics were augmented. The deputy described herself as fond of the last Tsar and never hesitated to discredit the film and its actors. One of her most significant actions was defaming the German actor Lars Aidinger<sup>344</sup>, who played Nicholas II. She claimed that he is a satanist who acted in LGBTI-themed adult films by releasing a compilation of video footage consisted of some parts of Aidinger's previous works.<sup>345</sup> Following the activities of Poklonskaya and the vulgar public outrage, Aidinger declared that he would not attend the premiere, stating that he would not have security for life in Russia.<sup>346</sup>

Poklonskaya was not the only principal officer as Patriarch Kirill was also complainant about *Matilda* and urged filmmakers with an official statement not to confuse artistic fiction with dangerous lies. He noted that "History is a very convenient ground for ideological speculations, creating beneficial myths, both national and anti-national. When working with history, it is so easy to go into a crafty interpretation, even in small things. However, for an honest person, lies and slyness are unthinkable".<sup>347</sup> Intriguingly, the Patriarch is aware of the power of historical films on the memory as he makes a difference between beneficial and dangerous ones. While one can find some films which the Russian

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<sup>344</sup> It is also interesting that Aidinger who performed the role of Nicholas II is a German actor. His friendship with prominent Russian filmmaker Kirill Serebrennikov, who is still under house-arrest for financial fraud, was another case for controversy; see, "Aydinger Nazval Poklonskuyu Privlekatel'nyyu Zhenskuyu Rasskazchik »,” *RIA Novosti*, March 3, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20171025/1507555624.html>.

<sup>345</sup> "“Poklonskaya Ploshchad' v Sotsseti Otkrovennyy Rolik,” Telekanal "Zvezdaé, July 6, 2017, [https://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane\\_i\\_mire/content/201707061613-i7tm.htm](https://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201707061613-i7tm.htm); "Poklonskaya Nabrosilas' Na Aktera Za Nasmeshki Nad Khristianami,” *Dni ru*, August 31, 2017, <https://dni.ru/culture/2017/8/31/378970.html>.

<sup>346</sup> "Chetyre Aktera 'Matil'dy' Otkazalis' Priyekhat' Na Prem'yeru Fil'ma Iz-Za Ugroz,” *RIA Novosti*, March 3, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20171011/1506657831.html>.

<sup>347</sup> Aleksandr Isayev and Valeriya Savchenko,, "Patriarkh Kirill Vpervyye Vyskazalsya o 'Matil'de,”” *RIA Novosti*, October 12, 2017, <https://ria.ru/20171012/1506690677.html>.

Church praised for their suitability, *Matilda* stands on the opposite side.

The church also applied for the opinions and comments of particular historians to discard the film's delusion. Sergey Karpov and Sergey Mirinenko supposed that the film is far from historical facts concerning Matilda's case. They concluded that it is a work of fiction based on vulgarity and dirt. Finally, the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky and President Vladimir Putin spoke to normalize the crisis. While Medinsky defended the ministry policies by asserting that there is nothing offensive in the film<sup>348</sup>, Putin supported Aleksey Uchitel by submitting the director's patriotism and love for the country. Putin also stated that Russia is a big country with many complexities and differences that should be respected. Besides, he noticed that there were many controversial representations of the Tsar family in the past.<sup>349</sup>

At this point, the synopsis of the film may aid in understanding the core of the debates. The film begins with a flashforward scene portraying the coronation ceremony of Nicholas II in 1896. While wearing the crown, Nicholas loses consciousness after a young woman yells his name. Then the story jumps back to a ballet school and Matilda Kschessinska is introduced. The ballerinas of the school perform in an event in which young Nicholas is also present. Nicholas becomes attracted by Matilda. In the next scene,

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<sup>348</sup> Kseniya Boletskaya, "Medinskiy Obvinil Storonnikov Poklonskoy v Diskreditatsii Kul'tury i Tserkvi," *Vedomosti*, September 13, 2017,

<https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2017/09/13/733596-medinskii-obvinil-poklonskuyu>.

<sup>349</sup> "Putin o 'Matil'de': Byli i Gorazdo Boleye Zhestkiye Kartiny o Tsarskoy Sem'ye," *RIA Novosti*, June 15, 2017, <https://ria.ru/20170615/1496562386.html>.

the tsar family has a train accident in which Tsar Alexander III is severely injured. Latterly, Nicholas attends the military games, which ballerinas also watch. Nicholas approaches Matilda and offers her to be his mistress, but Matilda rejects. An ambitious lieutenant Vorontsov, who is obsessed with Matilda, attacks Nicholas and gets arrested.

Nicholas visits Matilda at backstage after a performance and they become lovers. He introduces Matilda to his family, but Empress Maria Fedorovna objects to Matilda for not being an aristocrat. Alexander III dies and Nicholas becomes disillusioned by the throne as he feels unprepared to rule the country. His future wife, Alix, comes to Russia; however, he continues to see Matilda. While Alix becomes annoyed by Matilda's presence, the young ballerina trains to participate in the wedding play to honor Nicholas's coronation. Nicholas and Alix leave Peterburg for Moscow to attend the coronation ceremony and Alix follows them.

Meanwhile, Vorontsov, interrogated by Colonel Vlasov for possibly political connections to murder the tsarevitch, escapes and abducts Matilda in Moscow. Colonel Vlasov plans a stage in which Vorontsov and Matilda will be killed. However, Matilda survives. Nicholas, who is unaware of her survival, hears her yell at the ceremony and falls. After the ceremony, he learns that thousands of people are killed by accident at the feast. He takes initiation from that time and closes the page of the love story with Matilda.

Tsar Nicholas II ruled the vast Russian Empire, which hosted many different nationalities

in the most turbulent period which Romanov dynasty had faced. The last half-century of the empire witnessed many debates and conflicts between political groups spread throughout a broad scope ranging from Orthodox fundamentalists to nihilists. While his grandfather Alexander II and his father Alexander III had tackled such instability by adopting liberal or conservative policies, respectively, the rule of Nicholas II could not bring order and stability to the country. Russian Empire witnessed humiliating defeats in the Russo-Japanese War and World War I. Two revolutions followed these defeats as the latter ended the rule of the Romanov dynasty forever. In this respect, the idea of producing a historically controversial film about Nicholas II's short-term mistress before his marriage needs special attention. Indeed, the romantic relationship between the Tsar and the ballerina was one of the least intriguing parts of his rule. In this respect, Matilda should be seen as a trivialization of a highly contested period by fabricating a love story.

Nevertheless, this trivialization obscured the failures of a politically holy figure by taking attention to a magazine-like love story. It also created a public sphere consisted of ultra-conservatives who found a chance to spread their ideology. However, this reaction was cooled down by state officials who blamed radical attacks. As it was mentioned, the love story was not even a loose adaption of the past. First, one should focus on historical aspects regarding the relationship between Mathilda and Nicholas on the one hand and the relationship between Nicholas and his wife, Alexandra. While the film emphasizes the love between a young ballerina and the Tsar, the audience may assume that this tragic story did change the destiny of the Russian state. In fact, the romantic relationship

between these two persons had a minor position throughout the life of Nicholas. Vice versa, his deep love for “Alix,” the empress of Russia, played a crucial role in his decisions to lead the empire. However, the film constructs its message on the story of the young Tsar who sacrifices his beloved one, namely Matilda, to rule his people and grows mature to be a real leader.

There is no doubt that Nicholas II was not a bright figure personally since his childhood. His lack of maturity, uncertainty and lack of confidence was highlighted many times by his father, Tsar Alexander III and foreign emissaries.<sup>350</sup> In one incident, when the Minister of Communications, Serge Witte, proposed the assignment of 24 years old Nicholas to the chairmanship of the committee, which would work on the Trans-Siberian project, Tsar Alexander III rebuffed the minister regarding the incompetency of the tsarevitch. Besides, his political views lack an ideological ground like his liberal grandfather or conservative father. Though he opposed liberal reforms, he could not expose the role of a strong autocrat. Alexander III’s sudden death brought him anxiety as he was not ready for any type of state duty. His sister Grand Duchess Olga would write about his despair latterly.<sup>351</sup>

Nicholas II emerged as an immature leader who did not know what to do in certain crises. His obsession with family values and the empress was another highlighted aspect of his weakness as he usually preferred to spend time with his family, even the state was in chaos.

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<sup>350</sup> Virginia Cowles, *The Last Tsar* (New York: Putnam, 1977), 36.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

Revolution became inevitable due to his lethargy and the Russian Empire suffered the most humiliating military defeats. All these factors played a role in the incapability of Nicholas II during his leadership. Mark Steinberg also proposes the spiritual fatalism of Nicholas as a significant indicator of his weakness. He interpreted all misfortune the country lived as God's will and this interpretation led to the lack of determination he had to perform in times of crisis. He always followed his inner voice and mystics like Rasputin rather than heeding his advisers or thriving prime ministers like Stolypin, neither socialist nor liberal but a monarchist reformer. His tutor Constantine Pobedonostsev, a mentor of the former tsar, developed an ideology based on a trinity between autocracy, orthodoxy and nationalism; however, Nicholas was inferior to adopt any ideological stance.<sup>352</sup>

While Nicholas was not a bright tsarevitch, his relationship with future-Tsaritsa Alix was full of romance and passion. On the other hand, his affair with Mathilde Kschessinskaya was flirt-based and it would be over by Nicholas and Alix's engagement in 1894. Though Kschessinskaya occasionally indicates her passion for Nicholas, she was a mistress as the young tsarevitch was waiting for his beloved Alix. Nicholas states that he loves Alix and feels passion for Mathilde in his memoirs, but his ultimate choice would be Alix, without a doubt.<sup>353</sup> While Nicholas was not dedicated to state affairs, he grew a definite love for Empress Alix since their first instance at the wedding of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich and Alix's sister Ella in 1884, where Nicholas II fell in love with Alix. Alix

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> See, Edvard Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar: The Life and Death of Nicholas II* (New York: First Anchor, 1992).

was the daughter of the Grand Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt Louis IV. His mother was the daughter of Queen Victoria and her grandmother raised her after her mother's early death. While young tsarevich grew a deep love for Alix since the first instance they met, they had to wait nearly ten years for engagement. There were several reasons for this delay. The first one is the royal marriage policy of Alexander III as he looked for a French princess as a wife for Nicholas II to strengthen an alliance between Russia and France.

On the other hand, Mathilda Kschessinskaya enters the life of Nicholas in 1890. She was a prominent ballerina at that time and the court knew her. Alexander III personally introduces Kschessinska to Nicholas to make him forget Alix. Though she was a tempting young woman, Nicholas would prefer to make a long trip abroad. After he arrives in Peterburg, another problem regarding their prospect with Alix would appear. Alix disagreed on conversion for a possible marriage. Being upset about this rejection, Nicholas began an affair with Kschessinskaya, which would end in 1894 after Alix accepted conversion and Alexander III gave permission for the marriage.<sup>354</sup>

Though royal marriages were prevalent, the young couple had to wait for a couple of years to unite their destinies. On the other hand, the relationship between Nicholas II and Matilda was insignificant, one which lasted for a short time and it should be assumed that it had not left an impact on the life of the young crown. In this respect, adultery in the film brought trivialization and ignited the closing of ranks between conservative groups.

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

Besides, the femme fatale character of Matilda becomes demonized regarding its impact upon a ruler. Nicholas II's quest was also a gender-based one as he needs to be masculine enough to leave romantic seduction and adopt manliness, which is crucial for the state's survival. The trivialization of the period kept spectators away from crucial points in the past. The film's premiere date, which coincided with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, is a politically intriguing detail. This already planned coincidence put the anniversary on the very background daily agenda. There is no doubt that the last Tsar's sensational love story was more exciting for people than remembering the Bolshevik coup on its centennial day.<sup>355</sup>

#### **VI.IV. *The Battalion* (Batal'on' / Dimitri Meskhiev / 2015)**

Dmitri Meskhiev's World War I epic *The Battalion* was one of the big-budget blockbusters released in the last years. Ten million USD was spent on the production and the box-office income approximately met the main cost. Vladimir Putin had declared the rehabilitation of the First World War in 2013.<sup>356</sup> *The Battalion* can be seen as a part of this rehabilitation as the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky visited the first day of shooting to wish good luck to the film crew.<sup>357</sup> The film was planned to be released in August 2014 to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> year of the First World War; however, the

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<sup>355</sup> Sergey Dobrynin, "Aleksi Uchitel": *Matilda* (Matil'da, 2017)," *Kinokultura*, no. 60, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2018/60r-matilda.shtml>

<sup>356</sup> "Putin: Nuzhno Privesti v Poryadok Mogily Pervoy Mirovoy V Kaliningradskoy Oblasti," *Novyy Kaliningrad*, April 2, 2013, <https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/news/community/1900506-putin-nuzhno-privesti-v-poryadok-mogily-pervoy-mirovoy-v-kaliningradskoy-oblasti.html>.

<sup>357</sup> "Vladimir Medinskiy Uvidel Pervyy's 'Yemochnyy Den'," *IA Regnum*, August 31, 2013, <https://regnum.ru/news/1701221.html>.

premiere could be made in February 2015.<sup>358</sup> Producer Igor Ugolkinov claimed that they made the Second World War the continuation of the First World War, and the Russian fighters' memory was mistreated as being forgotten.<sup>359</sup>

Dmitry Meskhiev is well-known for his acclaimed work *Our Own* (*Svoi*/ Dmitry Meskhiev/ 2004), which tells the story of three Russian soldiers who escaped from captivity. The film was a Second World War drama rather than a historical blockbuster. *The Battalion* is Meshkiev's second historical film. *The Battalion* begins with a summary: The political dissent has wrecked the county and army. 1917 is a challenging, chaotic and desperate year. Then a train comes to Petrograd station. A young lieutenant takes off the train and gets a coach. The coach driver complains about the Kerensky regime. The economy has collapsed and there is no law in the country. Meanwhile, Nadya learns that her fiancé has been killed on the front. She decides to join the women's battalion commanded by Bochkareva with her friend Vera. The battalion of a project of Alexander Kerensky, who rules the Provisional Government.

Many women from different social classes, including a general's daughter Tatyana, apply to join the battalion. Quarrels occur between the lower class women and nobles from the first day. Besides, heavy training begins and Tatyana becomes the deputy of Bochkareva. However, Bochkareva is arrested because of beating a lower-class soldier

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Elena Bobrova, "V Prokat Vyshla Voyennaya Drama Dmitriya Meskhiyeva 'Batal'on'," *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, February 18, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/02/18/batalion-kino.html>.

who wants to organize a soldier's committee in the battalion. She can only turn back to duty, thanks to the insistence of her soldiers. The battalion is deployed to the front after accomplishing the training. In the meantime, Tatyana finds out that she is pregnant and another upper-class soldier Dusia takes her duty. Bochkareva finds out that male soldiers have already ended their fighting, but her battalion is determined to fight. They can repulse a German attack. Bochkareva requested support from Lieutenant Borozdin but cannot succeed. Moreover, she gets battered by her husband, who takes charges under Borozdin. They can advance without reinforcements. The male soldiers get excited about the battalion's success and join the fighting at the end of the film.

The film was heavily promoted and the critics presented five reasons to see the film:

First, *Battalion* was created by the same team who worked on *Brest Fortress* and *Stalingrad*, which Russian spectators applauded. Along with its production quality, *Battalion* is also considered assertive for its historical accuracy as the state archives were used in production. Secondly, the character Bochkareva is defined as an inspiring figure for the audience as she never gives up on serving the state. Thirdly, the film has the potential to inspire Russian women to promote patriotism. Fourthly, the film cultivates the love for the motherland. Finally, it is considered an emotional film that can touch the senses and feelings of the people.<sup>360</sup> The reasons proposed were indeed related to the blockbuster project in general, rather than being particular for *Battalion*. However, the prospects for the war-themed production and the woman theme put the film in a special place in contemporary Russian cinema.

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<sup>360</sup> Stephen M. Norris, "Dmitrii Meskhiev: *Battalion* (*Batal'on*, 2015)," *KinoKultura*, no. 51 (2016), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2016/51r-batalion.shtml>.

While the creators are the same, *Brest Fortress*, *Stalingrad* and *The Battalion* have a particular discrepancy regarding the portrayal of “enemy” in the war. The previous examples set their stories upon the fraternity among Soviet people, but *The Battalion* narrates a more controversial period based on domestic conflicts. Besides, the women’s battalion can be seen as a forgotten page in the war compared to the mighty Brest defense and Stalingrad victory, which have already taken part in Russian patriotic memory. As a result, *The Battalion* proposes a less attractive case than *Brest Fortress* and *Stalingrad* have done from a heroic mythology perspective. On the other hand, the complexity of the case makes it a remarkable example concerning the contemporary blockbuster narrative on times of defeat, chaos and instability. In this respect, *The Battalion* should be seen as an attempt to fuse patriotism into a historical period that lacks a robust patriotic identity. It may be assumed that *Battalion* aims to create a new myth while *Brest Fortress* and *Stalingrad* have already been based on potent myths.

This new myth is based on a structure that does not lean over time's complexities but prevailing a necessary type of patriotism that supports unity among people during hard times. The nuances of the period and the women’s battalion project become so simplified and even Bochkareva has no depth as a character, except her troubled past concerning her husband’s tendency of violence. On the other hand, this simplification has bold meanings that enforce some myths concerning the memory of World War I and the Provisional Government. In this respect, historical inventions should be scrutinized to

acknowledge the basis of the myth creation.

The first myth is the responsibility of the Provisional Government for the chaos and defeat. The economy has collapsed and the defeat is near. There is no doubt that the February Revolution brought stability, but this does not overshadow another one indicating that the revolution was inevitable. Orlando Figes claims that the Romanov regime was not overthrown but collapsed due to its internal contradictions. It was not the peasants responsible for the revolution but Tsar Nicholas II, who underestimated any reform movement. The effects of the 1905 reforms were severely limited and Russia could not modernize in political terms, though the modernization of industry and economics were in process. Even the monarchist reformists like Stolypin experienced trouble with the court. The instability was especially evident in the empire since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>361</sup> Besides, the February Revolution was a public event and many parts of society supported the overthrow of the monarchy, including Bochkareva herself. She noticed her happiness after the news of *the* revolution in her memoirs.<sup>362</sup>

In this respect, the instability after the February Revolution was a continuing part of a long-term crisis. On the other hand, the Battalion never speaks about the reasons and conditions of war, the pre-revolution period and the revolution itself. The commercial

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<sup>361</sup> See Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia, 1891-1991* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2014).

<sup>362</sup> See Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka: My Life as Peasant, Exile and Soldier: As Set down by Isaac Don Levine* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1919).

interest is undoubtedly one reason for this simplicity, whereas some political meanings can also be deducted. The February Revolution can be seen as a transitional stage between two significant periods in Russian history, namely Romanov and Soviet Russia. While these two periods have bright and dark days, they both constitute significant positions in recent historical memory. The February Revolution lacks this significance as Alexander Kerensky, who can be seen as the most prominent figure of the time, can not be a sympathetic figure either for the devotees of Imperial or the Soviet periods at the same time. In this respect, the Provisional Government appears as being solely responsible for the chaos in the country.

*The Battalion* makes the Provisional Government a scapegoat for the instability and assumes that the government was also responsible for the defeat in World War I. In the first half of 1917, the story took place when the war was nearly over for Russia. The previous battles which had taken place since 1914 were never mentioned. Therefore, the audience may infer that the Provisional Government had not taken necessary measures for the war by watching *The Battalion*. On the contrary, World War I seemed to be nearly over for Russia when the February Revolution was produced. In this respect, it can be assumed that the February Revolution did not bring defeat, but the defeat brought the revolution.<sup>363</sup> The performance of the Imperial Army at the Crimean War, the 1877-1878 Russian-Turkish War and the 1904-1905 Japanese War had already signaled the problems in the army concerning tactics and technology long before 1914. The

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<sup>363</sup> See Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 75-92.

Russian military could not adapt to new warfare conditions as it was ill-prepared to fight at the beginning of World War I. While the Russian commanders lacked tactical capabilities, material insufficiency was evident.<sup>364</sup>

Consequently, the German army gained a massive victory at the Battle of Tannenberg in the summer of 1914, just after the war began. The humiliating defeat forced the Russian army to abandon Poland to German forces in the following spring. These humiliating defeats demoralized society and the opposition did not hesitate to rebuke the court. Nicholas II left Petrograd to join the army at the front to raise the soldier's morale, but this was a significant mistake that led Alexandra to take control of the state. She was already an unpopular figure in the people's eyes and society became much more alienated due to her arbitrary decisions. The collapse of the economy and the lack of the necessary measures to appease society inevitably created the conditions for the revolution.

Neither the Russian army nor the Russian people had any optimism for the war. They lost their faith in any chance of victory by the year 1917. Indeed, one of the greatest mistakes of the Provisional Government was to continue to fight in these circumstances. The Russian Commander-in-chief General Alekseev declared the impossibility of his army to mount an offense concerning the collapse of the soldier's morale and discipline. This mistake prevailed the Petrograd Soviet, which would be a rival administration to

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid, 58-59.

the Provisional Government.<sup>365</sup> Petrograd Soviet was a body that mainly consisted of workers and sailors led by socialist intellectuals, including Leon Trotsky.

While the Provisional Government was keen to keep Russia at war, the Petrograd Soviet would exploit this decision to gain popularity. Order No.1, which the Petrograd Soviet declared on March 1, 1917, abolished ranks in the army and foresaw the establishment of soldiers' committees to make decisions.<sup>366</sup> The women's battalion was Kerensky's last card to reinstate order and patriotism in the army; however, his project could not surpass Order No.1 on the front. *Battalion* never mentions the roots of Order No.1 and the presence of the Soviets are vaguely depicted. The order is supposed to be the reason behind the lack of order in the army throughout the film; however, the situation was vice-versa. The patriotism of soldiers and people had already vanished before the decision of Soviet. Therefore, Order no.1 should be seen as political exploitation of this moral decay.

Another intriguing part of the film is the presentation of social classes in the battalion. Bochkereva's soldiers are comprised of different classes ranging from peasants to aristocrats. The relations between these socially broad-ranged people are also a pivotal point to be scrutinized. The first thing to notice is the more positive portrayal of the

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<sup>365</sup> David French, "The Strategy of the Entente Powers, 1914-1917," in *World War I, A History*, ed. Hew Strechen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 63.

<sup>366</sup> Stephen Anthony Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16.

battalion's upper class and aristocratic women. They are aware of the situation better and they are more conscious and disciplined than their lower-class comrades.

On the other hand, the lower class women are inclined to lethargy and they are portrayed as sources of trouble. They had to be educated both physically and mentally by Bochkereva to serve the motherland. While some can be trained, the others come in front as traitors like Galina, beaten by Bochkereva for snitching on a soldier from the middle-class. After this incident, she reports Bochkereva's attitude and the commander is penalized. Only her soldiers will save Bochkereva by standing in front of the main headquarters, impressing the general by their devotion, discipline and determination.

While this incident is an invention, it was a fact that the participants of Bochkereva's battalion were primarily upper and middle-class women. It resulted from the discretion of the idea of nationhood by the Russian working class and peasants. Though the working class had been growing for a couple of decades, it was still a tiny group. On the other hand, Russia was a peasant dominant country. It can be argued that class consciousness was growing thanks to the socialists.<sup>367</sup> The regular soldiers in the army also lack a robust patriotism as none of the participants of the First World War experienced the rate of surrender which the Russian army faced. This negligence of patriotism can be seen as the consequence of non-representative autocracy and the

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<sup>367</sup> Melissa K. Stockdale, "‘My Death for the Motherland Is Happiness’: Women, Patriotism, and Soldiering in Russia's Great War, 1914–1917," *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 1 (February 2004), 96.

socio-economic factors such as the migration to cities as a result of industrialization. Thus, the film creates a distinction between Dusia and Galina. Though Dusia is a true patriot who is ready to die for the motherland, Galina is a misled, lower-class woman who puts forward liberal values rather than her love for the country. The lower class fighter's false consciousness conveys a message to the present that supposed the necessity to take action against harmful populism to prevent trouble.

*Battalion* portrays a time of trouble that is usually overlooked by Russian patriotic memory. 1917 was a crucial year that witnessed the end of a great time and the beginning of another glorious period. Both Romanov and Soviet periods have essential value for contemporary Russian patriotism; however, the transitional stage between the two periods was too controversial to create a historical memory that can satisfy Russian society in general. The *Battalion* finds a solution that simplifies the period and puts the Provisional Government forward for the responsibility of the crisis. In this way, the film offers a formula for Russian blockbuster films to handle the controversial cases in Russian history.

#### **VI.V. *The Admiral* (Admiral/ Andrey Kravchuk/ 2008)**

The year 2008 was remarkable for contemporary Russian cinema as the Russian Civil War bio-epic, *The Admiral*, broke a new record with approximately 35 million USD box-office income. It was the most expensive Russian film at that time, with a 20 million USD budget funded by the Ministry of Culture and Channel One. As a result of the

enormous commercial success, Kolchak's story was also adapted to a TV serial by Channel One. The film, which focuses on the activities of the White Army leader Admiral Kolchak during the Russian Civil War, was directed by Andrei Kravchuk, who has *The Italian* and *The Viking* in his filmography. Kravchuk stated that White Army generals are exemplary figures for contemporary Russian people and added that "These people have what we are severely lacking today – a sense of duty, honor, morals and an ability to remain dignified and composed in any circumstances."<sup>368</sup> He also remarked that *The Admiral* had a technical complexity that could not be achieved a few years ago. Konstantin Khabensky, who played Kolchak, also praised the film's cinematographic value and considered that a new epoch in Russian cinema had been opened. Besides, Sergey Bezrukov, who played another protagonist, General Kappel, focused on the historical accuracy portrayed.<sup>369</sup>

The Russian Civil War was a time of turmoil that began after November 1917 and continued throughout the early 1920s. The opposition against the Bolshevik regime took arms by 1918 and the Red Army led by Leon Trotsky had to repulse various anti-Bolshevik forces on many different fronts. By the year 1920, the Bolsheviks mostly eliminated their rivals and established their authority throughout Russia. The opponents of the Bolsheviks were named the White Army, a loose coalition mainly formed by

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<sup>368</sup> "Putin Makes 99-Year-Old Daughter of Tsarist General a Russian Again," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/30/putin-makes-99-year-old-daughter-of-tsarist-general-a-russian-again>.

<sup>369</sup> "'Admiral' - Samaya Gromkaya Kinoprem'yera 2008 Goda Na 'Intere,'" *Telekanal Inter*, April 8, 2009, <https://inter.ua/ru/news/2009/04/08/3673>.

liberals, conservatives and non-Bolshevik socialists. Besides the political heterogeneity, the White Army was geographically spread to distinct regions, which conveyed the turmoil to Siberia, Northern Russia, South Russia, Baltics, Central Asia and the even Far East. The intervention of foreign powers in the conflict made it more complicated. Enormous destruction, famine and the death of millions were natural results of the Russian Civil War.

Admiral Kolchak has been a controversial figure in Russian memory. While he was the hanger of Siberia, the accursed protégé of the Entente powers or the bloody ruler for opposers, his admirers define him as a talented naval officer, brave polar explorer and a patriotic soldier of the fatherland.<sup>370</sup> He began his duty as a naval officer in the Imperial Navy. He was awarded for his services in the Russo-Japanese War. In 1906, he began to serve on the Naval General Staff. During the First World War, he served in the Baltics and the Black Sea, respectively. In 1916 he was promoted to vice-admiral. While he welcomes the February Revolution, he considered the following Bolshevik coup as unacceptable. After negotiating with the British Army to serve in Mesopotamia, he turned back to Russia and eventually joined the anti-Bolshevik coalition. Kolchak had led an alternative government to Bolsheviks in the Siberian city Omsk by 1919 and his foreign-backed presence was a source of hope for anti-Bolshevik groups. Admiral Kolchak was neither the sole leader of the White Army nor his failure would end

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<sup>370</sup> Nikolay Fyodorovich Nedelko, "Raspyaty istoriyey (o zhizni i smerti A. V. Kolchaka)," *Sibirskiy meditsinskiy zhurnal (Irkutsk)*, 2010.

fighting; however, he was an ambitious figure to defeat the Bolshevik regime. His elimination was a symbolically significant incident for the anti-Bolshevik movement.

*The Admiral* can be seen as a rehabilitation attempt of the White Army by narrating a civil war story from a blockbuster perspective. Kolchak had undoubtedly been a state enemy during the Soviet time. The rehabilitation of Kolchak and other White Army officers in the post-Soviet period has been a complicated and controversial topic for several reasons. The Russian Civil War witnessed severe mass persecutions and exterminations, for which the White Army was also responsible. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new Russian authority declined to question the legality of the Soviet regime. It means that there is no legal obligation nor responsibility for the Russian state to judge the crimes under the Soviet regime. Therefore, the Russian courts do not have the legal power to take charges against the events in the Soviet period. This has obviously been a political choice as judging the controversial Soviet past may spark many debates in the present time. Rehabilitating the White Army officers is a case that may bring such debates. The potential restoration of the status of the White Army officers brings three options. In the first case, the White Army will be considered the victim of the Red Army and the Soviet regime has to be demonized. In the second case, both sides will be considered guilty of the crimes committed during the conflict and no justification will be pursued. Finally, the Red Army's violence will be justified against the White Army's betrayal of the regime. Neither option is acceptable for the authorities

as the Russian Civil War has already been politicized in contemporary Russia.<sup>371</sup> In case of such complicated legal procedures, promoting White Army figures in the cultural medium offers a non-legal but effective option to implement a set of memory.

At this point, the film's synopsis should be given to focus on the portrayal of the past and invented myths in *The Admiral*. The film portrays Kolchak's life between 1916-1920 by centering on his love affair with his friend's wife, Anna Vasilievna Timireva. The film opens with a film set during the Soviet period, which hosts Anna Vasilievna as a figurant actress. Later, a flashback takes the audience to the memorable 12 minutes long naval war scene in the Baltic Sea during the First World War. Kolchak has been assigned to lay mines against the German ships; however, the mighty enemy battleship Karl Friedrich interrupts them. The Russian side can miraculously evade Karl Friedrich, thanks to the tactical skills of Kolchak. Following the victory, he meets Anna Vasilievna during a ball. They became attracted to each other initially; however, Kolchak should leave Petrograd as he is ordered to command the Black Sea flotilla. He is also promoted to vice-Admiral rank by Nicholas II. Although they become separated, the lovers do not cut off communication.

The February Revolution breaks out and disorder prevails in the navy as sailors begin to kill their superiors. Kolchak has to leave his sword due to the infamous Order No. 1.

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<sup>371</sup> Marlene Laruelle, Margarita Karnysheva, *Memory Politics and the Russian Civil War: Reds Versus Whites* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 5.

Kerensky offers the Ministry of War to Kolchak, but he states that he can accept the duty only if he is allowed to reinstate the discipline penalty in the army. Kerensky rejects Kolchak's request and orders his exile to the United States. The time advances to a year later and Anna Vaislievna coincidentally learns that Kolchak returned to Russia to fight against the Bolsheviks. She leaves her husband working with Bolsheviks to go to Omsk, where Kolchak's forces reside. She joins the medics as a nurse, but she does not inform Kolchak. The White Army wins several victories under the command of Kolchak, but the Ukrainians under his command generate treason. Their defection urges Kolchak to leave Omsk for Irkutsk; however, his train gets interrupted as Irkutsk has been witnessing Bolshevik mutiny. Kolchak's ally, General Janin, who commands the Czech legion in the region, also betrays him. The Bolsheviks arrest Kolchak and Anna Vasilievna. The White Army General Kappel initiates an operation to rescue them; however, several adversities make the operation unsuccessful. Fearing retaliation, Kolchak is executed after brief captivity. After his execution, the story turns back to the film set at the beginning.

Introducing Admiral Kolchak to the contemporary Russian audience has similar complexity in the case of legal rehabilitation. The adversary of Kolchak was the Bolsheviks, who founded the Soviet state that constitutes a significant part of Russian history. *The Battalion* also has a similar complexity and it finds a solution to blame the Provisional Government while the portrayal of the Bolsheviks is usually neglected. In the case of *The Admiral*, Kravchuk looks for a balanced point of view which praises Kolchak but not demonizes the Reds. When one compares *The Battalion* and *The*

*Admiral*, the latter gives more room to the Bolsheviks; however, their role is not so profoundly intrigued. They are the rivals of the Kolchak, but the historical reasons for the war and the Bolshevik victory are not mentioned.<sup>372</sup> In an interview with Konstantin Khabensky, Anna Fedina notices that Chapaev was the hero in the past and it is Kolchak now and asks that did the latter hero cancel the previous one.<sup>373</sup> The answer to her question can be found in the director Kravchuk's statements. Kravchuk stated that his film is not about the fight between good and evil. Neither the White Army was good, nor the Red Army was bad for him. *The Admiral* focuses on the fate of people in a crumbling period.<sup>374</sup>

A milder polarization concerning the struggle between one and the enemy is present in *The Admiral*, and destiny determines the historical process. It was a time of chaos, but the reasons for this turmoil were not solid variables; instead, the circumstances that people lived were set by destiny. Prevailing destiny over material reasons aids the narrative to construct a war between brothers rather than enemies. The Reds were murderous, yet they seem like a mob that emerged from troubled times.<sup>375</sup> Moreover, Bolshevik sailors and commissars never hesitate to show respect to Kolchak during his dismissal and abduction. While they lacked the ideological or political motivation, Kolchak's forces have the moral capability to stand against chaos. However, crucial

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<sup>372</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, "The Admiral," *Revolutionary Russia* 25, no. 2 (2012), 219-220.

<sup>373</sup> Anna Fedina, "Akteur Konstantin Khabenskii: 'Kolchak Bez Zhenshchina Stal by Robotom,'" *Izvestiya*, October 3, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/341380>.

<sup>374</sup> "Rezhisser Fil'ma Andrey Kravchuk: 'Eo Ne Kino pro Khoroshikh Belykh i Plokhikh Kprasykh,'" *Izvestiya* (-, October 3, 2008), <https://iz.ru/news/341381>.

<sup>375</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, "The Admiral," *Revolutionary Russia*, 25

nuances and adversaries prevented them from being victorious. The conflict is a kind of brother's war as both sides' martyrs may share the same grave after fierce fighting.

There is no doubt that the Russian Civil War was one of the most fierce conflicts in Russian history. Such a balanced polarization is well defined with the help of three factors based on trivialization. The first one is based on the generic features of blockbusters as the production quality and romance that takes center place in the narration pacify the audience not to scrutinize the historical questions that may appear. The conclusion is neat as Kolchak was a forgotten hero with many positive traits. He was a charismatic gentleman and with an absolute love of country and God. He had a chance to end the conflict, but destiny did not allow it. His distinctive attributes also function as a cloak hiding the conditions of time and his opposing sides consisting of adultery, lack of commanding and political skills, anti-semitism and the love for cocaine.<sup>376</sup>

*The Admiral* is approximately two hours long. The first hour tells the story concerning Kolchak's duty in the navy until the Revolution, while the audience witnesses Kolchak's story during the Civil War. Two distinct periods are connected by a love story between the admiral and Anna Vasilievna. The melodrama that is created is a significant component of a blockbuster. It is worth noting that the naval battle scenes that take part

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<sup>376</sup> Richard Lockett, *The White Generals: An Account of the White Movement and the Russian Civil War* (Edinburgh: Longman, 1971), 311.

in the first hour are technically impressive, which is also a highly positive point for the general audience's approval. The second factor is the myth that carries the trivialization further by adopting a non-Russian character as the main villain. While the Bolsheviks are the main rival of Kolchak, the film's villain is French General Janin, who commands the Czech legion. Although Janin is an ally of Kolchak, he betrays him by letting the Bolsheviks arrest the admiral. It is a fact that General Janin aided the Whites in Siberia by commanding the Czech legions who were controlling the Trans-Siberian Railway and gave Kolchak to the new Bolshevik ally administration settled in Irkutsk. Nevertheless, Janin's betrayal was a personal blow for Kolchak as the war was near to ending.

Before focusing on the betrayal, one should be aware that the White Army had many disadvantages against the Bolsheviks, though they could manage some victories against the Red Army. Even when the White generals became a threat in its most exceptional terms, the possibility of an anti-Bolshevik victory had seemed futile and the impact of Kolchak upon the Red Army was very short-lived. While the film neglects to portray the events clearly, Kolchak took control in Omsk after a coup d'état initiated by Conservative White Army officers against a Socialist Revolutionaries dominated administration and he was chosen to lead the new administration. After the coup, Kolchak was declared the Supreme Ruler of Russia. Afterward, he marched through the west and acquired remarkable progress in the spring of 1919. This triumphant march was halted by the Red Army in June after the forces in South Russia were transported to the Eastern front.

Kolchak would never find the chance to regroup his army and constituted a threat again after the Red Army repulsed his march. By November, he initiated a retreat through Irkutsk with his exhausted army and the city had fallen after a Bolshevik-oriented coup before his arrival. Kolchak resigns from his position on January 4, 1920, after no hopes were left. He planned to join Allied missions after leaving the fighting, but General Janin handed him over to the new committee established in Irkutsk. After a short abduction, he was executed in February 1920. From this perspective, Janin's betrayal could not change the war's course but affects Kolchak only personally. However, the symbolical influence of this betrayal has still been in effect as French far-right politician Jean Marie Le Pen apologized on behalf of Janin when he attended a memorial service for Kolchak during his visit to Omsk in 2003.<sup>377</sup>

On the other hand, *The Admiral* has a co-hero named General Kappel portrayed as a courageous commander serving the government of Kolchak. The film recounts that his forces were the last hope for Kolchak and his Whites forces. While his forces fight bravely and come close to save Kolchak, the Bolsheviks execute him hurriedly. While General Kappel is an actual historical figure, his mission is reinvented in the Admiral. Kolchak had no political and military hope after the fall of Irkutsk and Kappel marched his army further after the execution of Kolchak rather than trying to save him. While it is believed that Bolshevik's ordered the execution quickly to prevent a rescue mission,

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<sup>377</sup> Nikolay Fyodorovich Nedelko, "Raspyatyiy Istoriyey (o Zhizni i Smerti A. V. Kolchaka)," *Sibirskiy Meditsinskiy Zhurnal (Irkutsk)*, no. 8 (2010).

Richard Pipes claims that this threat was a fictive one ordered by Lenin to justify a quick execution.<sup>378</sup>

Another remarkable historical truth that is neglected in *The Admiral* is the relationship between Kolchak and the Allies. Kolchak had remarkable connections with the Western powers, especially the United States and Britain. After his disposal in the summer of 1917, the United States navy was eager to draft him as a consultant.<sup>379</sup> He had a considerable reputation in the United States as he could meet with President Woodrow Wilson.<sup>380</sup> Kolchak was in San Francisco when the Bolshevik Revolution broke out. He eventually got in contact with the British Army to serve in the ongoing war in Mesopotamia. While he was on the road, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was signed. Thereupon, his place of duty had been changed and he was named the commander of anti-Bolshevik British units in Manchuria.<sup>381</sup> Kolchak could pass to Siberia with the help of the assignment. From this perspective, his return to Russia was neither heroic and patriotic. Besides, the Allied support for Kolchak was impressive as the defeat became inevitable after the aid began to decline due to the lack of British and French public support for the Russian Civil War. In his fight against the Bolsheviks, foreign intervention is not proper for his rehabilitation in contemporary Russia. Therefore, neither the foreign intervention in the Russian Civil War nor the Allies' influence over

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<sup>378</sup> Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

<sup>379</sup> Joan McGuire Mohr, *The Czech and Slovak Legion in Siberia, 1917-1922*, 97.

<sup>380</sup> Alexey Timofeychev, "Admiral Kolchak: A True Russian Patriot or a British Intelligence Agent?," *Russia Beyond*, November 28, 2017,

<https://www.rbth.com/history/326857-admiral-kolchak-patriot-or-agent>.

<sup>381</sup> Joan McGuire Mohr, *The Czech and Slovak Legion in Siberia, 1917-1922*, 98.

Kolchak is portrayed.

Dennis Youngblood notices that Kolchak is a more attractive figure than other White commanders in the Russian Civil War like Wrangel or Denikin. His love affair, personal charm and action-based war experience are more appropriate to portray in a blockbuster. It is also added that one can find historically accurate details in the film like Kolchak's throw of his Sword of Honor to the sea instead of giving it to the sailors or the dynamics of his love for Anna Timirieva. These small details do not affect the film's historical narrative and they should be considered material accuracy. Using such material accuracy may bring the audience's consent over the film's historical accuracy. The content of Kolchak's love letters seems more trivial than his activities during the Civil War. The latter part is neglected in the film. The audience is not informed about the reasons for the revolutions, the dictatorship of Kolchak in Omsk and the war crimes he committed. The negligence of such cases certainly brings a culturally rehabilitated Kolchak, though his legal rehabilitation seems to be controversial, at least in the short term.

#### **VI.VI. *Sunstroke* (Solnechnyy udar/ Nikita Mikhalkov/ 2014)**

In 2014, Nikita Mikhalkov released *Sunstroke*, a loose adaptation of the Nobel laureate Russian writer Ivan Bunin's two works, *Sunstroke* and *Cursed Days*. While *Sunstroke* is a story that narrates a night-long love story between a lieutenant and a mysterious woman at a Black Sea town in the year 1907, the *Cursed Days* is a set of memories documenting the troubled days of the Civil War. Mikhalkov's story combines two

different timelines by using flashbacks in the main story that takes place in the year 1920. Using two different timelines inspired by two different literary works, Mikhalkov also asserts his point of view regarding the reasons for the Russian Civil War. Mikhalkov's assumptions make *Sunstroke* different from *The Admiral* as the latter does not focus on historical conditions but relies on generic features. On the other hand, *Sunstroke* is directly politicized by asserting a more complicated historical perspective.

*Sunstroke* is a high-budget historical film, just like Mikhalkov's previous works like *The Barber of Siberia*. Mikhalkov's film company TriTe carried out the production, which had cost more than 20 million USD. Commercial success was out of the question as the film could earn only a little more than 1.5 million USD at the box office. This tragic three-hour-long Civil War drama with minimal action could not grasp the attention of the Russian audience for sure, but Vladimir Putin praised it for its resuscitation of the White Army officers' reputation.<sup>382</sup> The film's premiere was also highly political, as the year 2014 witnessed the occupation of Crimea by Russia. *Sunstroke* was firstly screened in Belgrade on October 3, 2014. This choice had a symbolic meaning as many Russian emigres had settled in Serbia during the mid-1920s and Serbia has been nevertheless a potent political ally of Russia in the post-Soviet period. More interestingly, the world premiere in Belgrade was followed by the screenings in Sevastopol and Simferopol, namely two significant cities of newly annexed Crimea. Mikhalkov narrates a bloody brother's war and questions why did all things happen in his film *Sunstroke*. In this sense,

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<sup>382</sup> Mariya Remizova, "Nikita Mikhalkov - 'KP': 'Putin Uzhe Posmotrel' Solnechnyy Udar ".," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, August 10, 2014, <https://www.irk.kp.ru/daily/26292/3169869/>.

choosing Crimea for such a didactical notion seems highly ironic as the land has historically belonged to Crimean Tatars and it was a part of the Ukrainian state for decades before the annexation. In other words, Mikhalkov questions a historical clash in a place where had not been belong to Russia for a long time.

While the liberal-oriented film critics chastised *Sunstroke*, the conservative-minded critics praised it. The liberal wing generally focused on the keywords like posterity, banality, arrogance, nationalism, boredom, vulgarity and ponderousness. The critics also belittled the film by naming it the Russian Titanic. *Sunstroke* is three hours long drama, which lacks blockbuster-type generical attributes. Therefore, the critics' intensity over technical aspects is apprehensible. On the other hand, the conservative wing remarks the complex narrative that neither demonizes the Reds nor idealizes the Whites.<sup>383</sup>

The story begins with the Red Army Commander Frunze's surrender request to White Army general Wrangel and continues in a Crimean POW camp where the White Army officers are registered to be disarmed and deported in 1920. The camp is led by a Bolshevik officer named Georgiy Sergeevich. The officer is responsible for the registration of the prisoners. He has a mild personality as he chats with prisoners and does not raise any difficulty to them. While the White officers from different ranks try to adapt to the conditions, the main protagonist, a nameless captain, begins to question the causes for this outcome by asking, "How did all this happen?". Then a flashback takes

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<sup>383</sup> A. V. Fedorov, "Obraz Belogo Dvizheniya v Rossiyskom Igrovom Kinematografe Na Sovremennom Etape (1992-2015)," *Mediaobrazovaniye*, no. 2 (2016).

the story back to 1907 when he coincidentally meets with a mysterious woman during a Volga boat trip. It is a decade before the Bolshevik Revolution and there is a vibrant life compared to the grim portrayal at the prison camp. Meanwhile, the prisoners debate on the circumstances of the war and disagreements appeared between liberal and conservative officers.

After spending a night together, he will never see her again. Being upset about losing her, he meets a child in the town named Egoriy. Their friendship leads the audience to witness the social decay that should be seen as the leading cause of future troubles. Turning back to 1920, the POWs are informed by Red Commissars Rosalia Zemlychka and Bela Kun that they will soon be evacuated by a ship. All POWs are taken on the ship without knowing their fate, as the Bolsheviks will sink the ship on purpose. The unnamed captain notices that Georgiy Sergeevich, who led the transportation, was Egoriy, whom he met in 1907 just before drowning.

The Sunstroke's difference from the *smuta* film is its subjectivity, which does not narrate the Russian Civil War as an event in the background. Instead, Mikhalkov escapes from the popular narrative. The previous example, *The Admiral* or other *smuta* films like *The Battalion*, do not attempt to discuss the reasons for the conflict. In contrast, Mikhalkov assumes that the conflict was evident for a particular reason, which relies on society's moral decay by adopting Western values such as secularism and the negligence of those responsible for protecting Russia. Therefore, contemporary Russian society should be

keen on protecting its values to prevent any possible *smuta*. At this point, one should ask Ivan Bunin's opinions regarding the causes of the revolution. There is no doubt that Bunin was an anti-Bolshevik figure who portrayed the Red Army-initiated violence.

Bunin asserts the failures that led to this violence. Bunin had criticized three groups: professionals, gentry and youth and the common people. The first group primarily consisted of intellectuals and Bunin criticized them for their obsession with Westernist thought, which was seen as the only remedy for the problems in Russia. On the other hand, the gentry and youth were criticized for their unwillingness to confront the struggles Russia faced. They turned out to be blind and they abandon the political stage to live their carefree lives. Finally, the common people were condemned for their unvirtuous character. They were hypocrites who both bow before icons during rituals and murder, rape and carouse without hesitation in times of chaos.<sup>384</sup> Mikhalkov adopts Bunin's mindset in his film, rather than merely portraying the events that Bunin wrote about; however, the reasons both Bunin and Mikhalkov asserted can be seen as a set of conservative self-criticism which lacks the historical background.

To begin with, the debate on Westernism was not a new subject at the time of the revolutions. The first significant traces of Westernism appeared at the time of Pyotr I during the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. While the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an expanding Russian Empire, the Tsaritsas, like Catherine, did not hesitate to use the benefits of

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<sup>384</sup> See Ivan Bunin, *Cursed Days, A Diary of a Revolution* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998).

western positivism. On the other hand, 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia became an arena of rival political ideologies, namely westernizers, Slavophiles and nihilists. Latterly many political groups would occur from these schools ranging from radical conservatives to radical socialists.

It should be noted that there were also moderate leftist and popular rightist political groups and parties. Though Imperial Russia lacked any democratic institution, a highly vibrant political life was present, especially in the late 1890s. Without any doubt, the negligence of the state guards brought instability and chaos, especially at the time of Nicholas II, yet this negligence does not mean being indifferent to dangerous ideologies and social decay, as Mikhalkov's protagonist does. Instead, the negligence of the Russian state relied on the lack of necessary political reforms to be adopted for a stable political system rather than a lack of a fight against Western-based political ideologies. The Russian court did not hesitate to suppress any political group when necessary, and Nicholas II even ignored any reform movement proposed by monarchist state administrators. Neither the Russian Constitution and the Duma, which were the achievements of the 1905 Revolution, could directly affect political decision-making. The heavy defeats in the Japanese War and World War I combined with the challenges brought by rising social classes and the imprudence of the Court to find solutions just exacerbated the problems. It was indeed a crisis of governance rather than neglecting the interference of Western thoughts in society. Not the indifference of Nicholas II, but his enmity to reform led to the conflict portrayed in the *Sunstroke*.

Another point that should be scrutinized is the Bolshevik identity that took part in the film. While the prior films have not deeply constructed Bolshevik characters, Sunstroke portrays some historical characters who took duty in the Civil War, like Rosalia Zemlychka and Bela Kun. The name of Frunze also takes part at the very beginning of the film. On the other hand, the chief of the camp, Grigori Sergeyich, is an invented character. The common point of demonized historical characters in the film is their non-Russian identity: Frunze's descent was Romanian, while Zemlychka and Bela Kun, who can barely speak Russian in the film, were Jewish. These foreign villains intoxicated the Russian Bolshevik Egoriy in ideological ways.

It is a fact that Zemlychka and Bela Kun were known for their atrocities conducted in Crimea during the Russian Civil War.<sup>385</sup> Mikhalkov constructs a message over these historical facts by creating the character of Egoriy. He was a simple Russian boy who assisted Orthodox rituals in the past; however, Western ideas, just like Darwinism, have perverted him. Finally, the brutality of non-Russian people makes him indifferent to violence, though he carries some last traces of Orthodox values inside. He asks Zemkyhcka for the compatibility of Orthodox Christianity and socialism; however, she harshly reacts to his question. He also attempts to cross himself while the ship was sinking but gives up at the last moment.

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<sup>385</sup> Arkadij Iosifovič Vaksberg, *Toxic Politics: the Secret History of the Kremlin's Poison Laboratory--from the Special Cabinet to the Death of Litvinenko* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 12.

While Mikhalkov considers the Bolshevik politics and the Civil War as a wrong notion caused by the state's apathy against the foreign values and exploiting this crisis by non-Russian interference, Bunin directly condemns Bolshevik values from bottom to top without the implementation of xenophobia. Instead, foreign intervention is considered salvation for Russia as he sorrows for the departure of Greeks and Frenchs from the Odessa and hopes for liberation that would be conducted by Germans, Romanians, Czechs or any other nation. Moreover, he also condemns the people of the lower class who became rejoiced by the Bolshevik occupation. He explicitly demonizes the Bolshevik power and any individual or social group who cooperated with them, even if they were not ideologically socialist.<sup>386</sup>

There is no doubt that Mikhalkov's *Sunstroke* preaches to contemporary Russian society to convey necessary warnings to prevent *smuta*. The guards of the state and the people should be vigilant against hazardous world views. Although it was noted that the *Sunstroke* is different from *The Admiral* by considering the reasons for the war, the message conveyed is far from being sophisticated. Mikhalkov has implemented the uniqueness of Russian identity in *The Barber of Siberia* and he takes the issue into a political sphere by focusing on an actual historical event in the *Sunstroke*. While *The Barber of Siberia* concludes that the Russian and Western identities are so distinct to live together, *Sunstroke* focuses on the dangers of interference of Western ideas on Russian identity. In this respect, it can be assumed that Mikhalkov has kept up his anti-Western

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<sup>386</sup> See Ivan Bunin, *Cursed Days, A Diary of a Revolution* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998).

perspective in his Russian Civil War drama.

## **CHAPTER VII: CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HISTORICAL BLOCKBUSTER FILM: FILMS OF WORLD WAR II AND THE POST-STALIN PERIOD**

### **VII.I. *The Priest* (Pop/ Vladimir Khotinenko/ 2010)**

The Second World War has been a complex set of memory in the contemporary Russian mind. On the one hand, it was a definite victory that made the Russian/ Soviet state a world power. On the other hand, the war was also a conglomeration of thorny memories, including suffering, repression and deportations. These memories take part on the edges of a scale that aligns the memories from negative to positive ones. Nevertheless, one can find historical events related to the Second World War that take part in the middle of the memory scale. The memories of these events are not easy to remind, especially in a political manner and their complexity makes taking sides a problematic case. At this juncture, the portrayal of such memory in contemporary patriotic Russian cinema emerges as an issue that needs to be scrutinized. *The Priest*, which portrays the Pskov Orthodox Mission's activities during the German invasion, can be seen as a case to be

discussed in this manner.

The production story of *The Priest* dates back to 2005 when Patriarch Aleksii II expressed his will about a film project that subjects the activities of Orthodox clergy in the regions under Nazi control to Sergei Kravets, the head of the Church-affiliated research center Orthodox Encyclopedia.<sup>387</sup> Kravets accepted the patriarch's idea and began the Pskov Orthodox Mission project, including one feature film and a novel. Historical novelist Aleksandr Segen was recruited for the novel and experienced blockbuster filmmaker Vladimir Khotinenko takes the director's seat of *The Priest*. The film's story would be based on Segen's novel, which was inspired by the memoirs of a former member of the Pskov Orthodox Mission, Aleksii Ionov. Segen said that Ionov was chosen as a prototype hero for the novel and the film, though historical inventions can be found in both works.<sup>388</sup> The marketing of the film was assertive: "made with the blessings of the deceased Patriarch of Moscow Aleksii II, under the patronage of President Dmitrii Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, with financial support from the Ministry of Culture of Russia, OAO Gazprom, Company "Renova Media" and the Federal Space Agency."<sup>389</sup> The premiere was made on Easter, April 4, 2010, in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior.<sup>390</sup> The selection of the cathedral for the premier can be

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<sup>387</sup> Seth Graham, "Vladimir Khotinenko: *The Priest* (Pop, 2010)," *Kinokultura*, 30, 2010.

<http://www.kinokultura.com/2010/30r-pop-sg.shtml>

<sup>388</sup> "Aleksandr Segen': Pri lyubikh obstayatel'stvakh nuzhno ostavat'sya lyud'mi," *Imperatorskoye Pravoslavnoye Palestinskoye Obshchestvo*, 6 June 2015,

<https://www.ippo.ru/news/article/aleksandr-segen-pri-lyubih-obstayatelstvakh-nuzhno--307594>

<sup>389</sup> Anthony Anemone, "Vladimir Khotinenko: *The Priest* (Pop, 2010)," *Kinokultura*, no. 30, 2010.

<http://www.kinokultura.com/2010/30r-pop-aa.shtml>

<sup>390</sup> "Prem'yera fil'ma "Pop" proydet v khrame Khrista Spasitelya na Paskhu," *RIA Novosti*, 1 April 2010, <https://ria.ru/20100401/217596081.html>

seen as a reference for the Orthodox clergy's repression experienced under the Soviet regime. The cathedral was demolished in 1931 during the anti-religious campaign and it was reconstructed and put into service again in 2000. Despite the generous financial support and sentimental symbolism, *The Priest* did not do as well as expected at the box office as it only earned approximately 1.7 million USD compared to its 6.8 million USD production cost.<sup>391</sup>

The Pskov Orthodox Mission is a religious project carried out by the Orthodox clergy led by Metropolitan Sergii (Voskresensky) in North-Western Russia during the German occupation. The project aimed to regenerate Orthodox Christianity by reopening the churches sealed by the Soviet regime before the war. Inspiring from this religious project, *The Priest* tells the story of the priest Aleksander Ionin, who takes duty within the Pskov Orthodox Mission in a village occupied by the Wehrmacht. The film attempts to portray the experiences of the mission by selecting a protagonist from the clergy. This preference implies a direct way of reconstructing and reinterpreting the mission's activities, which has been a controversial part of Russian history.

The Orthodox faith should be seen as one of the main pillars of contemporary Russian patriotism as post-Soviet Russian nationalism supporters have considered Orthodox Christianity as an essential base for the social and political order in post-Soviet

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<sup>391</sup> “10 samykh gromkikh provalov v istorii rossiyskogo kino”, *Forbes*, 06 December 2012. <https://www.forbes.ru/forbeslife-photogallery/231187-10-samyh-gromkih-provalov-v-istorii-rossiyskogo-kino?photo=3>

Russia.<sup>392</sup> In this respect, the Russian Orthodox Church has been an important institution in contemporary Russian politics. On the other hand, the Pskov Orthodox Mission had been supervised by the German authorities. This reality made the mission suspicious in terms of collaborating with the enemy during the war. This relationship was regarded as a deadly sin by the Soviet regime in the past. The memory of the mission became more complex in post-Soviet Russia as the Orthodox faith and the Second World War have been crucial substances of contemporary Russian patriotism. Keeping the official support to the film in mind, *The Priest* had to find a solution that should restore the mission's honor by reinterpreting the German connection, which was formerly condemned. In order to understand the message conveyed, the Pskov Orthodox Mission should be understood first.

Metropolitan Sergii (Voskresenskii) can be seen as the key figure in the emergence of the Pskov Orthodox Mission. He was a young and eager bishop who could survive the Great Purge during the 1930s. Before the German invasion, he was assigned to represent Soviet leadership over the local population in Volhynia, Poland.<sup>393</sup> It was a substantial duty as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact brought a dimension to Soviet religious politics. Orthodox Christianity had already been suppressed during the 1930s; however, newly acquired territories after the occupation of Poland contained a significant number of

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<sup>392</sup> Zoe Katrina Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 137.

<sup>393</sup> Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945* (Chapel Hill North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 48.

active churches and Orthodox believers.<sup>394</sup>

Sergii Voskresenskii was latterly sent to the Baltics for a similar duty and served as the Metropolitan of Lithuania and Exarch of Latvia and Estonia. Following the German army advance in late June 1941, he was arrested by German security. During his custody, Sergii persuaded authority for cooperation. This cooperation would include a religious revival that would accompany the German advance in the Soviet territory. Only with this mission, the German army could win the local population's support against the atheist Bolshevik regime. The Nazi leadership had already been inclined to temporarily allow some cultural institutions in the occupied zone for propaganda purposes. As a result of the cooperation, German authorities began to reopen churches by August 1941. However, the religious revival could only be possible in northwest Russia and the Baltics, whereas the Ukraine administration was not eager enough to exploit the soft power of the Church over the local population. It should also be noted that the religious revival also had grassroots characteristics as people in the region had already begun to build their own churches. The priests established a growing religious activity in the region from Pskov to the outskirts of Leningrad.<sup>395</sup>

The Pskov Mission was a success as approximately 220 churches were reopened in a year. However, the mission's political role remained to be vague. While the Soviet

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<sup>394</sup> Wassilij Alexeev, "The Russian Orthodox Church 1927–1945: Repression and Revival," *Religion in Communist Lands* 7, no. 1 (1979), 31.

<sup>395</sup> Johannes Due Enstad, *Soviet Russians under Nazi Occupation: Fragile Loyalties in World War II* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 138-141.

leadership denounced the mission's activities, the German authorities had also been skeptical about the religious revival in northwest Russia. The ambiguity continues today as the Pskov Orthodox Mission has been praised or blamed in Russian historiography.<sup>396</sup> It may be assumed that the mission's activities should not be considered on a black and white scale. The clergy's collaboration with the Germans had different levels.<sup>397</sup>

To begin with, some members of the mission tell in their memories that they refused any collaborative partnership with the Germans. However, one can still find instances of Orthodox clergy–German partnership. The most remarkable example was the greeting message to Hitler that was sent in August 1942. The message was rebuked by the Moscow Metropolitan Sergii and the Soviet authorities. Although this message can be seen as a definite proof for collaboration, the German side also knew that pro-German activities might be deceptive. Their skepticism was not wrong as the mission began to use a discourse focused on the Russian identity at the end of 1942.<sup>398</sup> This attitude would evolve into an anti-Bolshevik Russian nationalism within time.<sup>399</sup> Thus, the Pskov Orthodox Mission had a multi-layered relationship with the German authorities. This ambiguity makes the mission's appraisal from a religious/ patriotic point of view in contemporary Russia. At this point, *The Priest* should be seen as the most significant event/ example for such appraisal.

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945* (Boulder, Colorado: West Press , 1981), 489-490.

<sup>399</sup> Johannes Due Enstad, *Soviet Russians under Nazi Occupation: Fragile Loyalties in World War II*, 152.

*The Priest* begins in Latvia on June 21, 1941. The main protagonist Father Aleksii Ionin cuts saint paintings for children in a peaceful village. A Jewish resident of the village, Moses, visits the father to persuade his daughter Eva not to convert to Orthodox Christianity. He talks to Eva about the consequences of her decision. The father tells her that baptism is not enough for salvation as one should be wise enough after accepting Orthodox faith. He adds that God will forgive her if she does not want to leave her family behind by converting to another religion. The next day, the father continues to preach to people in their daily lives. He invites young soldier Kirill to the church for the All Saints' Day liturgy; however, Kirill rebuffs the father. While the communion is in practice, the vastness of the geography is portrayed through the eyes of a flying bird.

The announcement for the declaration of war follows the communion. On July 6, the Germans arrive at the village and Eva becomes baptized simultaneously. Latterly, the father is summoned to German-occupied Riga by his superiors. He meets with the clergy and becomes assigned to the Pskov Orthodox Mission. He is sent to Zakaty Village in Pskov to restore the sealed church. On his way, he makes acquainted with Colonel Freihausen, who is a Russia-originated German with Orthodox faith. Meanwhile, Aleksei, a runaway Soviet soldier, and Eva, whose family was murdered, come to Zakaty. Aleksei learns that his fiancé, Masha, was killed by German soldiers.

The church becomes restored with the help of cheerful local people. While the father and

his wife Matushka Alevtina adopt Eva, Aleksei joins partisans. Some youngsters join the German supervised police force, contrary to Aleksei. On the other hand, the father visits the concentration camp, which has severe conditions near his village. The father persuades Freigausen to bring food and clothes for the prisoners of war. Meanwhile, Freigausen tells them the Wehrmacht approaches Moscow.

Reminding the old days they were dancing at the people's club<sup>400</sup>, Aleksei visits the church. He comes across with the father. Aleksei threatens the father and the father offers Aleksei to baptize him before being murdered. Aleksei accepts; however he becomes confused after the baptism and left the church. After this incident, the father and his wife accept police chief Morozov to dinner. Morozov asks him whom he is working for. The father replies that he only works for God. Morozov tells his murder of civilians under German command and threatens the father by asking Eva's ethnicity.

Meanwhile, the prisoners of war attend liturgy that is supervised by German security. The partisans who secretly watched the liturgy condemn the father for his activities. While the father continues to adopt orphan children, the partisans attacked the village and kill Morozov. The father rejects to conduct their funeral by openly criticizing their actions. Then he learns that the patriarchy in Moscow excommunicated the Pskov mission. However, he agrees to continue their service.

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<sup>400</sup> The church was used as a people's club prior to German invasion.

Matushka Alevtina notices that she gets typhus after visiting the concentration camp and leaves home to save the father and children in the middle of the harsh winter. Suffering from his loss, Aleksii learns that Germans will leave the village as the Red Army advances. He chooses to stay in his place, though the Soviets will punish him. The commissars eventually arrest him and the story jumps forward to the year 1979. A group of youngsters taking a ride look for shelter as the rain is coming. The father, who turns out to be an old monk, invites them to the monastery. The closing credits tell that the father served his sentence at the camps along with many Pskov priests and the Germans killed the Metropolitan Sergii Voskresenski.

The Pskov Orthodox Mission has an ambiguous meaning in Russian memory. The mission has been considered as a traitor or a blessed by different groups' points of view. Besides, the mission had not a unique position in terms of relations with the German occupiers. Dissimilar experiences with the German authority can be found throughout the members of the mission. Nevertheless, *The Priest* presents a non-ambiguous approach in portraying the story of Aleksii Ionin.

It should be noted that screenwriter Segen was inspired by the memories of the priest Aleksii Ionov to create the story. However, one can find some deviations from Ionov's story in the screenplay. For example, Ionov left his place of duty for Germany with the Soviet advance; however, the audience sees that father Ionin waits for his destiny under

Soviet rule. Settling in Germany could not be an option for a sacred person; even a harsh punishment has been waiting for him. This dissimilarity between the memories of Ionov and the portrayal of Ionin is not the only concern that should be mentioned. While *The Priest* tells the story of a non-ambiguous protagonist, different levels of ambiguity can be found in the creation of some other characters. The main protagonist is definitely father Ionov and his wife Matya Alevtina and their adopted daughter Eva can be named as other protagonists. This group of characters has no visible flaws as the father and his family always behave wisely, humanly and divinely. It may be thought that their role in the film lacks political depth as one cannot find directly political messages conveyed by these characters. On the other hand, political implications can be deduced from their relationship with the other characters in the film.

The characters that will be mentioned in this part are the Soviet partisan Aleksei, Orthodox Nazi lieutenant Freihausen and local police Morozov. The actions of these characters allow the audience to interpret the political implications of the protagonists. While the father and his family lack moral depth, these characters have a more complex identity. This complexity both empowers the dramatic narrative and the political distinctiveness of the protagonists. To begin with Aleksei, his motivations to take arms against the occupiers depend on personal revenge as German soldiers kill his fiance Masha unintentionally. When he murders a German soldier carrying his lover/wife photograph, the revenge motive is highlighted. Moreover, the audience gets empathy with the German soldier, which questions Aleksei's partisan activity.

Aleksei's flashbacks are about the good old days with Masha and he lacks any patriotic motive. Besides the lack of patriotic motive, he threatens to kill the father. His motive was not only for collaboration allegations but also for his disbelief in God. However, the father persuades him to be baptized. After this incident, his identity begins to change, though it is moral enlightenment rather than a patriotic one. The lack of patriotic motive creates an ambiguity which makes the father's posture more reliable. It was a tough time and not every Soviet Russian had strong patriotic senses to pursue a fight against the Germans.

The second character that needs to be mentioned is lieutenant Freihausen who symbolizes the relationship between German occupiers and the mission. Apart from Aleksii Voskresenskii's activities in the German-occupied Pskov, the German-Orthodox partnership is narrated through the friendship between Freihausen and Father Aleksii. Intriguingly, Freihausen is a non-demonized character as the Second World War has been the ultimate myth in Russian memory and any empathy with the German side constitutes a complication. On the other hand, Freihausen is a neutral character, though he is not a positive one. Father Aleksii gets approval from Freihausen to help the Soviet prisoners of war when the Nazi newsreels are screened in the village. Freihausen tells the father his personal uneasiness about the situation in the concentration camps and adds that the Red Cross cannot intervene because Stalin has not signed the convention. Moreover, Freihausen helps Father Aleksii to adopt Eva legally. In this way, she can survive the

Holocaust. The consciousness of Freihausen is also portrayed in the scene partisans executed. Father begs him to stop the execution; however, the execution becomes initiated. The truck that carries the partisans that will be hanged gets stuck in the mud and Freihausen pushes the truck to avoid further pain. Latterly, he asks forgiveness from Father Aleksii, though the father rebukes him.

The relationship between father and Freihausen is limited within the borders of assisting the prisoners of war and the church's survival. There is not a trace of collaboration nor betrayal to the motherland. The film conveys the message that Father Aleksii does the right thing regarding his relationship with the German side. His duty was different from those who take arms against the enemy, though it is still invaluable as many people in the village, the Soviet prisoners and orphans in the region, benefited from Father Aleksii's efforts during the occupation. In the scene in which Metropolitan Sergii Voskresenskii informs the election of Patriarch Sergii in Moscow, they shared their joy and Father Aleksii tells Freihausen that the fascists and the communists will pass away; however, the Christ will stand forever. Thus, Orthodox Christianity, which has been seen as an essential ingredient of the contemporary Russian identity, prevails over socialism and fascism. The ideologies are temporal; however, the identity is permanent if it is protected in any circumstances.

The final character that needs to be mentioned is local police Morozov, who can be seen as the film's villain. He is a Russian native who joins the police force that the German

authority has established. He does not feel any sympathy for the partisans nor the church. His part in the story is to highlight Father Aleksii's patriotism. Being a patriot is undoubtedly a political duty. Therefore it is a secular feeling different from commitment to the church. Nevertheless, the role of Father Aleksii can be interpreted as highly pious throughout the film, though this spirituality has a patriotic subtext. On the other, the father takes a political initiative in the case of Morozov's funeral. The partisans kill Morozov together with a couple of local police members during an ambush in the village. Father Aleksii denies conducting the funeral service of the victims and blames them for their cruelty towards people and disloyalty to the motherland. This incident eliminates the ambiguity in the relationship between Father Aleksii and the German authority. Father Aleksii may have warm relations with Lieutenant Freihausen; however, he never undertakes a traitorous action against the motherland.

*The Priest* has a particularity in contemporary Russian patriotic filmmaking due to the controversial subject it narrates. The collaboration with the enemy during the Second World War is a complex case even for the Orthodox Church, which has an essential role in contemporary Russian patriotism. *The Priest* legitimizes the actions of the Pskov Orthodox Mission by narrowing down the incident to the experiences of a single member. The secondary characters in the film help the audience to identify themselves with the main protagonist Father Aleksii. It was not opportunism but the Orthodox spirituality that guides the father through his experience under the German occupation. The main message conveyed by the film can be summarized as Father Aleksii does

everything for the benefit of the church and its people. The Pskov Orthodox Mission's ambiguity in the contemporary Russian mind has been removed by creating neutral characters such as German lieutenant Freihasuen and Soviet partisan Aleksei.

### **VII.II. *The Brest Fortress (Brestskaya krepost/ Alexander Kott/ 2010)***

The Battle of Brest Fortress was a crucial clash in World War II as Soviet forces could resist German attack for a time while the Nazis were quickly advancing on the other fronts of Operation Barbarossa. However, the Soviet defense in the fortress could not interrupt the outgoing German advance on a large scale. The battle's significance has been due to the morality of the Soviet soldiers who died in the last-ditch. On the other hand, it was a battle of persistent patriotism and courage in which the fighters knew that they could not survive. This futile but courageous fighting has not gone unnoticed by the contemporary authorities in Russia and Belarus. The story of the defense belongs to two nations as the battlefield is currently present in Belarus and the Russian-led Soviet people were the main protagonists. Thus, the myth of the Brest Fortress can be utilized for the sake of both nations. In this case, memory utilization can also serve the fraternity between two nations with national ties.

The myth of the Brest Fortress has not been created by the contemporary Russian and Belarussian authorities. The origin of the myth dates back to the 1960s when the journalist Sergei Smirnov's book about defense was published in the Soviet Union. It was a time of glorifying the Great Patriotic War by creating myths to install a historical

memory, especially to the younger society. Although the Great Patriotic War has been presented as the most significant and glorious event in Russian history, it was not the case in the post-war period. The bravery of the Soviet people in the war had been demoted for not damaging the *vozhd* status of the only war-time hero Iosif Stalin.<sup>401</sup> The Cold War was at the doorstep and there should be no other hero that can challenge the leader cult in this new struggle. Therefore, Victory Day was downgraded from a holiday to a regular day.<sup>402</sup> The forgotten heroes/ heroines of the war began to be commemorated during the Thaw period. The honors of many former enemies of the state were also restored at that time. Latterly, Victory Day was inaugurated as a state holiday again in 1965. Reminding the war was essential for the Soviet authorities to mobilize the Soviet youth, who did not experience the bitterness of the war.

Moreover, the Soviet youth was confused about the legitimacy of the Soviet authority. The authorities could win youth support by convincing them about their elders' courage on the battlefield a couple of decades ago.<sup>403</sup> The contemporary Russian authorities have targeted a similar aim and the Second World War has been remarked as the most critical event in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to the official Russian view about the war, the USSR, from who the modern Russian state descended, signed a victory that saved Europe from the fascist invaders.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Nina Tumarkin, "The Great Patriotic War as Myth and Memory," *European Review* 11, no. 4 (2003), 597.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 600.

<sup>404</sup> See Mark Edele, "Fighting Russia's History Wars: Vladimir Putin and the Codification of World War II," *History and Memory* 29, no. 2 (2017), 90.

Although the defender's deed was heroic, their story was neglected by the Stalinist regime as the battle survivors had been. This defensive story of Soviet soldiers turned into a popular myth after the journalist Sergei Smirnov's book was published in the 1960s. During the 1970s, the First Secretary of the Belarus Communist Party, Peter Masherov, suggested making the Brest Fortress an ideological touristic brand for Belarus and the Soviet Union. The garrison in the fortress consisted of different Soviet nationalities and it makes the event and location a sacred one for its fraternal features. This mythical historical incident was an excellent idea for a film, and *The Brest Fortress* was produced as a Russian and Belarus joint project.<sup>405</sup>

At the beginning of 2007, the Broadcasting Organization of State started to work on a film that tells the story of Brest Fortress. The council approved the idea of ministers. Following the approval, the preparations for the film continued for two years. Simultaneously, the Broadcasting Organization conducted a sociological survey of Moscow school children about the Great Patriotic War in 2009. The results were not promising as many school children were unaware of the Brest Fortress and its history. It was vital as the film increased its importance in the patriotic education of the youth. Alexander Kott has been selected as the director of the film. *The Brest Fortress* is the first blockbuster in his filmography. While he is focused on drama and comedy films, notorious TV serials *Trotsky* is another crucial part of his directing career. The first

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<sup>405</sup> Anton Sidorenko, "Aleksandr Kott: *The Brest Fortress (Brestskaia Krepost'*, 2010)," *KinoKultura*, no. 30 (2010), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2010/30r-brest.shtml>.

screening was made on the 69th anniversary of the beginning of the war, at 4 a.m. on June 22, 2010. Kholm Gate of the fortress, where the first shots were fired, was selected as the premier place.<sup>406</sup> This highly patriotic premiere was a part of the patriotic sentiment that the film would convey. Moreover, the premiere became an event that boosted the marketing of the project.

*The Brest Fortress* recalls the memories of veteran Alexander Akimov, who tells the story to his grandson in front of the monument built for the Brest Fortress heroes. The grandson symbolizes the new generations of Russia and Belarus. In the film, three main resistance zones, headed by the regiment commander, Pyotr Mikhailovich Gavrilov, the commissar Efim Moiseevich Fomin and the head of the 9th frontier outpost, Andrey Mitrofanovich Kizhevator was subjected. The love story between Sasha and Anya is also a part of the story.

The story begins with the happy days of Soviet soldiers and NKVD troops on June 21, 1942. They are dancing and flirting with girls while the children were eating ice cream. The couples plan to watch a film at the cinema. The Commissar Efim Fomin cannot find any ticket to Daugavpils, where his family lives. He is stuck in Brest due to the crowd in the train station. The rumors about the war spread panic in the city. Meanwhile, the NKVD lieutenant Weinstein and Major Gavrilov discuss the war panic. Weinstein tells Gavrilov that he is ordered to stop such rumors about the war. On the other hand,

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

Gavrilov assumes that the war is near. He stressed to Weinstein about their incapability in case of a German attack. All Soviet forces in the city will be trapped in the fortress. Although the danger is coming, Gavrilov cannot persuade Weinstein, though he becomes confused about the situation.

In the evening, the German forces, disguised in Soviet uniforms, come to the city by train. Gavrilov is not the only one who suspects a German attack. Lieutenant Kizhevatov informs his wife about a Polish defector who gives information about the German attack. Meanwhile, Kizhevatov's daughter Anya and Sashka are flirting in the school. In the first hours of the new day, the German planes attack the city. The bombing is devastating. While Sashka loses Anya during the bombardment, Gavrilov, Kizhevatov and Fomin rush to the fortress to organize a defense. After the bombing, the German infantry begins the invasion process. Although they are outnumbered, the Soviet defense can resist the German attack on the first day. However, the situation will not be better in the following days. A rescued Soviet fighter pilot, whose fighter is shot over the fortress, informs Fomin that Brest has been fallen and the German forces are advancing. The remaining Soviet forces deprived of reinforcements continued their resistance. Besides, they should take care of civilians trapped in the fortress. Fomin organizes his units to make a breakthrough from the German siege. Sashka takes the duty to inform the other points of Soviet resistance about the breakthrough and he finds Anya in the ruins during his duty. Finally, he transmits the message to Gavrilov.

The breakthrough is a failure and civilians surrender to the German side. The German army, which could not seize the fortress, drops a massive bomb on the fortress yard. Then, finally, they can approach inside the fortress. The resistance ends. Fomin is immediately executed due to his Jewish origin. Gavrilov continues to resist alone for another couple of weeks. Finally, Kizhevatov is killed during the German capture of the fortress. The audience is informed that the remaining heroes of the fortress suffered from Stalinist repression. Therefore, the efforts of the three commanders should wait until 1957, when Yefim Fomin receives the Order of Lenin posthumously. Gavrilov received the Hero of the Soviet Union medal in the same year, and Kizhevatov was awarded the same medal in 1965 posthumously. At the end of the film, the story jumps forward to the present day as the older Sashka and his grandson visit the Brest Fortress memorial in contemporary Belarus.

*The Brest Fortress* is an action-packed action film that involves decent cinematography and well acting. Nevertheless, the myths of the film should be analyzed to figure out its meaning in patriotic filmmaking. To begin with, the film has the purpose of emphasizing the partnership between two post-Soviet nations. Therefore, it can be considered that *The Brest Fortress* is an attempt to consolidate a historical memory that may assist Russia to expand its historical memory through another ex-Soviet nation. The Second World War is an extraordinary historical event to forge such a relationship.

Belarus is one of the former Soviet republics, which became independent in 1991.

Unlike Ukraine and Latvia, Belarus follows a process of memory politics, which is closer to the Russian perception of the Great Patriotic War. In the first years of independence, Belarus looked for a nation-building process that depends on the memory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. While the Belarusian language was promoted, Belarusian history was both anti-Russian and anti-Soviet until the election of Alexander Lukashenko as president. Under the presidency of Lukashenko, Belarusian historiography turned back to pan-eastern Slavism, which has Russophile and Soviet aspects.<sup>407</sup>

According to Lukashenko's pan-eastern Slavic ideology, Belarusian identity is tied to Russia rather than Western Europe. The years under Soviet rule were beneficial to Belarus. Belarus is a junior brother in the USSR and Russians are not occupiers but the liberators. Soviet symbols are also essential in contemporary Belarus. Finally, the Belarus language is a rural dialect and using the Russian language as a mother tongue is assumed to be more progressive.<sup>408</sup>

Although Lukashenko pursued a policy close to Russian perception, he elaborated on Belarusian national identity in his second term. Throughout his first term, a union with Russia frequently came to the agenda in the relations between two states. This idea of a union was strengthened by the agreements between the two nations in 1996 and 1999;

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<sup>407</sup> Taras Kuzio, "History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 2 (2002), 254-255.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

however, Lukashenko gave up his demand for a union after realizing that Belarus would not be an equal partner in this union. Moving away from the idea of union, Belarus emphasizes a nationalist agenda that takes the Great Patriotic War at its center since 2002.<sup>409</sup> The assumption of Belarus national history claims that Belarus co-opted Russia in the Great Patriotic War. Although opposition supports ethnic nationalism and close relations with Europe rather than Russia, Lukashenko's authority does not permit any alternative discourse.<sup>410</sup> *The Brest Fortress* can be defined as a part of Lukashenko's pan-Slavic project.

On the other hand, *The Brest Fortress* is a notable example to understand the memory of the Second World War for the Russian leadership. It should be noted that the Second World War is the most popular subject in contemporary Russian filmmaking and one can notice multiple myths garnered by many different films. Therefore, it is assumed that *The Brest Fortress* presents a part of a bigger macro-memory. It was mentioned that the Great Patriotic War is a highly remarkable event that glorifies the past in contemporary Russia. However, the war has been a contested space of memory. It was the most significant clash humankind experienced and different perspectives have usually disputed the memories of the war.

A remarkable dispute burst in September 2019, when European Parliament adopted a

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<sup>409</sup> David R. Marples, "History, Memory, and the Second World War in Belarus," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 58, no. 3 (2012), 440.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

resolution that condemns the fascist and Stalinist crimes during the Second World War.<sup>411</sup> Enraged by this resolution, Vladimir Putin initiated a memory war and referred to the anti-Semite views of the Polish ambassador to Berlin at that time. He also blamed the Polish leaders for their incapability to fight against Germany.<sup>412</sup> Moreover, he targeted the Western powers for the “Munich Betrayal,” which allowed Germany to annex a significant part of Czechoslovakia. He also mentioned that the Soviet people “freed the countries of Europe from the black plague.”<sup>413</sup>

*The Brest Fortress* is a part of the patriotic film project of the Russian leadership and the messages it conveyed are in parallel with the official Russian memory. While the film promotes Russian courage and heroism, it neglects to touch upon some critical historical realities. The territory Soviet soldiers try to save in the film was Polish territory until 1939. The Soviet Union acquired Western Belarus with the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The presence of the Soviet forces in the fortress was as result of the Soviet-Nazi partnership. Indeed, the Soviet forces had taken control of the fortress from the German army, which occupied the region before the Soviet approach. Moreover,

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<sup>411</sup> “European Parliament Adopts the Resolution on the Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe,” *Migration and Home Affairs*, September 26, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/european-parliament-adopts-resolution-importance-european-remembrance-future-europe-2019-09-26\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/european-parliament-adopts-resolution-importance-european-remembrance-future-europe-2019-09-26_en).

<sup>412</sup> Ofer Aderet, “Putin Says Poland's Leaders Were to Blame for Their People's Suffering Under the Nazis,” *Haaretz*, June 20, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-putin-says-poland-s-leaders-were-to-blame-for-their-people-s-suffering-under-nazis-1.8935419>.

<sup>413</sup> “Putin on WWII Victory Day Says Russia Will 'Firmly' Defend Its Interests,” *The Moscow Times*, May 9, 2021, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/05/09/putin-on-wwii-victory-day-says-russia-will-firmly-defend-its-interests-a73842>.

Western Belarus had been a contested territory between Poland and Russian Empire in the last centuries. Therefore it can hardly be defined as a core territory of the motherland Russia.

Moreover, the Soviet invasion of Poland was ruthless in many aspects. Red Army started the invasion of Poland on September 17, 1939, and by September 24 whole area was pacified. Although Molotov announced that the Soviet invasion was for saving the Ukrainians and Belarusians living under the Polish rule as the Polish state was in internal bankruptcy, the invasion was not an innocent one. During the first days of the invasion, thousands of wealthier landowners and peasants, local officials and police officers, business people and politicians were killed or imprisoned. Any nationalist and anti-communist were liquidated. The Polish people also suffered deportation like many nations under Soviet rule. According to the NKVD, between 1939 and 1941, 300.000 Polish citizens (200.000 ethnic Poles, 70.000 Jews, 25.000 Ukrainians) and tens of thousands of Belarusians were deported. The total number of deported people in the Soviet Occupation zone before the war was 1.25 million from 12.5 million. Moreover, the Soviet regime signed the Katyn Massacre in which the Soviet administration killed thousands of Polish officers. Thus the romanticized soldiers and NKVD troops in the actual history were also “monster” figures like the Nazi soldiers.

With these features, *The Brest Fortress* is an excellent example of the patriotic cinema of Putin time. It is highly nationalized and depicts only a carefully selected small part of a more extensive history. Its geopolitical expansion does not contrast with the Belarusian

national memory, but it overlooks a historical state of that time, namely the Second Polish Republic, which lived between 1918 and 1939.

**VII.III. *Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus and Citadel (Utomlennye solntsem 2: Predstoyanie, Citadel'*/ Nikita Mikhalkov/ 2010, 2011).**

Nikita Mikhalkov has been a prolific figure in Russia for his filmmaking and political ambitions and duty in Filmmaker's Union. He rose in the cultural/political scene as a notorious conservative obsessed with the ideal definition of Russian identity. His obsession even led to the precedence of his political side over his artistic career. This conservative image had undoubtedly influenced his artistic career as his post-Soviet filmography had dealt with historical or political themes that had impacts over present Russia. While his most critically acclaimed work, *Burnt by the Sun* (1994), depicts a dream life turned into a Stalinist nightmare, *The Barber of Siberia* (1998) set the stage for the patriotic filmmaking project. Besides *I2* (2007), which was an adaptation of Sydney Lumet's classic, focuses on the Chechen problem and it was another internationally praised one. However, his impact on post-Soviet Russian cinema has been severely disgraced by the *Burnt by the Sun 2* project. The project consists of two films, namely *Exodus* and *Citadel*, that can be considered as sequels to 1994 dated *Burnt by the Sun*. While the project's total cost was enormous, its box-office performance was a disaster, as both films were defined as the biggest flops in Russian cinema history. At this point, scrutinizing the *Burnt by the Sun*, *Exodus* (2010) and *Citadel* (2011) is necessary to understand the transformation of Mikhalkov's conservatism in the light of

divergent dynamics of memory politics during the 1990s and the Putin era.

The premiere of the first part of the sequel was made at the Kremlin on 17 April 2010. Mikhalkov praised his work's technical quality during the film's debut and noted that he hoped to contribute to Russian national cinema, which was a fundamental issue for the filmmaker.<sup>414</sup> Mikhalkov's remarks about the film's technical aspects and the national cinema debate are intriguing concerning the director's earlier opinions about making films that resemble Hollywood counterparts. The premiere was not only limited to Kremlin as the film was also screened in thirty cities spread over Russia before its general release. The veterans of Afghanistan and Chechnya were invited to premiers along with representatives of regional administrations. The live bands played classical war songs and several theatrical and dance performances in the style of the 1930s and 1940s accompanied them.<sup>415</sup> During the premiere in Novosibirsk, Mikhalkov states that his film attempts the younger audience to imagine what happened during the war and put themselves in place of the ones who experienced the cold trenches.<sup>416</sup>

Stephen M. Norris describes *Burnt by the Sun, Exodus*, simply as a bad movie. He notes that the film is “too long, too preachy, poorly acted, poorly plotted, and at times laughable.”<sup>417</sup> While the remarks of Norris may sound exaggerated at first sight, his

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<sup>414</sup> “Prem'yera Fil'ma ‘Utomlennyye Solntsem 2: Predstoyaniye’ Proydet v Kremle,” *RIA Novosti*, April 17, 2010, <https://ria.ru/20100417/223325300.html>.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid

<sup>416</sup> “‘Utomlennyye Solntsem 2: Predstoyaniye’ Prem'yera v Novosibirske,” *Sibdepo*, April 19, 2010, <https://sibdepo.ru/news/utomlennyye-solncem-2-predstojanie-premera-v.html>.

<sup>417</sup> Stephen M. Norris, “Nikita Mikhalkov: *Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus (Utomlennyye Solntsem 2:*

critics should be considered objective. Kotov miraculously survives, Mitia, who committed suicide in the first film, continues his duty. Kotov's wife, Marusya and his daughter Nadia, who is supposed to be dead, also continue their lives after Kotov's liquidation. The linkage between the first film and the sequels is too loose as the audience cannot understand what is happening many times throughout the film.

Regarding Norris's remark about "laughable" scenes, the opening sequence can be given as a good example. The film begins with a birthday-like party for Stalin organized by Kotov and his wife, Marusya. Semyon Budyonny, Kliment Voroshilov and Lavrenti Beria are also attendees at the party. Laughing at Stalin's jokes, Kotov and Marusya present Stalin with a cake in the shape of his bust. The dreamlike sequence ends with Kotov choking Stalin by bursting his face on the cake. Kotov wakes up, screaming in a cell-like barracks. They are under arrest for being enemies of the state. Then the officer calls every prisoner under Article 58 except Kotov. It is declared that the Germans attacked the Soviet Union and the political prisoners are killed in a mass execution. Kotov miraculously escapes from the detention camp and the story begins. A joker Stalin, the cake sequence, the sudden German air attack, and a miraculous escape are fused in a single sequence that initially confuses the audience.

The bizarreness continues in a flashforward that takes place in 1943. Mitia, Stalin and Beria are discussing the fate of Kotov after his liquidation. Stalin is depicted as a humble

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*Predstoianie*," *KinoKultura*, no. 30 (2011), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2010/30r-bbts2.shtml>.

person who tries to play the piano and listen to Kotov's piano playing. The plot is confusing again, but one can still understand that Kotov was saved somehow and escaped from execution. Mitia was ordered to find Kotov and his family at the end of the meeting. While the audience will be enlightened that Kotov's survival depends on Mitia's initiative, Kotov's daughter Nadia, who works in a pioneer camp, is also saved by Kotov in a case she declines to renounce her surname that belongs to a political prisoner. To save Nadia, Kotov threatens the leader of the pioneers to keep silent as the leader enormously scares and pees himself.

Later the audience witnesses a disorganized evacuation leading through a bridge mistakenly blown up while people were still on it. On the other hand, the pioneers, including Nadia, are also evacuating on a Red Cross ship. The German planes cannot attack a Red Cross ship due to conventions, but they manage some strike exercises over the ship. A disillusioned pilot decides to deface on the head of the ship captain and he is shot in the head by a wounded soldier using a signal flare. This absurd duel ends with the bombardment of the ship by German fighters. Nadia can barely save her life after the attack by clinging to a sea mine. Then, a so-called priest comes from the fog to baptize her. The prayers save Nadia from the fighters as she can manage to reach the sail while the boat, which carries, state documents, luxury stuff and Stalin busts, is not that lucky to escape from the bombs. Interestingly, a sequence that begins with a German pilot's defecation ends with Nadia's journey to the Orthodox faith.

Meanwhile, Kotov joins a penal battalion that is ordered to stop a possible German attack. A reinforcement of elite cadets join them; however, the German tanks quickly eliminate them as Kotov and a couple of comrades can barely survive. The severely wounded battalion commander condemns the Moscow headquarters, including Stalin, for their incompetency to fight against the Germans only before shooting himself to death. In 1943, Mitia learns that Kotov was assigned to regular forces many times, though he rejected the promotion not to leave his comrades in arms. The following sequences depict the mass killing of villagers carried out by the Germans witnessed by Nadia and Kotov's miraculous survival in an abandoned church while chasing a German soldier. At the end of the film, Nadia becomes a medic and helps a severely burned tankman. She undresses in front of the dying soldier, who is a virgin and wished to see her breasts.

While the first of the sequel has a high level of bizarreness, the following also matches the same level. Beyond the bizarreness issue, it is similar to its predecessor in unconnectedness, excessive length, ludicrous dialogues, and ambiguity concerning the general message. Mitia learns that Kotov is assigned on the front of "citadel," a heavily guarded German stronghold surrounded by the penal battalion and regular Soviet forces. The drunken general on duty decides to attack the citadel by assigning the former prisoners to a death mission. In this way, the Soviet command will figure out the German defense strategy by locating the defense positions. While the penal battalion and Kotov are preparing for the attack, Mitia appears on the front and Kotov laughingly

starts to escape from him, which ignites an untimely attack on the citadel. The semi-comic operation ends with failure; however, Mitia and Kotov meet again after troubled, long years. Mitia gives Kotov a chance to kill himself after the troubles he caused in the past, but Kotov forgives him, reminding his murder of a priest during the Civil war. In the meantime, Nadia saves a pregnant woman who gives birth in the middle of a German bombardment.

Kotov and Mitia turn back to the dacha, where the first film takes place. While the residents are in shock, Kotov learns that Marusya has married a drunken man Kirill and the couple has a newly born baby. After spending some time with Marusya, the family left the town as Kotov does not prevent Marusya from leaving. Afterward, he neutralizes some gang members who try to seize his general's watch and joins a disabled veteran's wedding party and flirts with a widow. Once again, the unconnectedness between sequences is highly apparent again.

Finally, Kotov meets with Stalin and they can face the burden of the past. This part needs attention as Stalin's portrayal is not usually preferred regarding the Great Patriotic War films. The humbleness of Stalin continues in the scene, but this time he is more severe as the issue they talk about is a matter of life and death. Concerning Kotov's arrest, Stalin says that asking "why" is not a valid question. Instead, one should ask "for what purpose." Kotov is at the right place at the right time, Stalin concludes. In the first days of conflicts, The Red Army lost millions of forces and Kotov might be one of them

if he was not arrested. Besides, Stalin reminds Kotov of his past sins. Kotov was not also that innocent as he killed a priest with his own hands, sinks the ship carrying the White Army POWS and used poison gas over civilians who rebelled against the Soviet authority. No one was innocent at that time. Now, it is time for redemption and saving motherland. His past sins make him a perfect choice for commanding the final attack on the citadel. Kotov seems disillusioned but does not oppose Stalin's statement.

Finally, he takes duty as a general at the front. The officers prepare the assault group that includes the parasites Stalin mentioned by giving them only simple wooden sticks. It is indeed a suicide mission and some quarrels between the officers and the assault group members occur. However, Kotov leaves the command center and joins his men in the trenches. He takes a stick and begins to walk through the citadel. Officers, regular infantry and the assault group join him. While the Germans are surprised, a spider that appears in front of a machine gunner's aiming sight confuses him, which ignites a series of troubles that result in the severe explosions in the citadel and the Soviet forces become able to capture it. Kotov and Nadia coincidentally meet in a mine field during the battle. In the last scene, they are seen together in a tank aiming at Berlin.

At this point, the failure of *Burnt by the Sun*, *Exodus* and *Citadel* in terms of narrating a coherent story after its prequel may bring insights into some dynamics of the Russian patriotic cinema. Stephen M. Norris remarks that the *Exodus* looks like a sequel to *The Barber of Siberia* rather than 1994, dated *Burnt by the Sun*. Norris's assessment depends

on the generic similarities and diversities of the mentioned films.<sup>418</sup> While *The Barber of Siberia* can be considered as a prototype for patriotic historical filmmaking in Russia, the *Exodus* follows its path by relying on a prequel that does not fit the mentioned genre.

While Mikhalkov could succeed in presenting the base of a new genre that achieved remarkable popularity and convey a patriotic/nostalgic message, the sequels of the *Burnt by the Sun* flopped commercially and they present vague ideological messages. One can conclude that the generic formula that worked in 1999 did not fit the audience's demands in 2010.<sup>419</sup> The sequels' narrative incoherence brings another major problem that can be named as lacking to create a myth. Dmitry Bykov states that the myth of integrity of the Russian people in harsh times has been overly used and *Exodus* can not add a new aspect for its absence of conceptual unity.<sup>420</sup>

The main problem concerning the lack of coherent mythmaking is the disharmony between the first film and the sequels. While the first one debunks the Stalinist myth in the atmosphere of the 1990s, its followers attempt to strengthen a constructed patriotic myth during the 2010s. There is no doubt that *Burnt by the Sun* would not be welcomed if it was made in the 2000s. In this respect, the sequels can be considered an appropriate myth for the present by creating a story that modifies the prequel. In this way, the

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<sup>418</sup> Stephen M. Norris, "Nikita Mikhalkov: *Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus (Utomlennye Solntsem 2: Predstoianie)*," *KinoKultura*, no. 30 (2011), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2010/30r-bbts2.shtml>.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Dmitry Bykov, "Voyna Ne Spishet «Predstoyaniye» Nikity Mikhalkova Ne Spasli Ni Dekoratsii, Ni Deklaratsii," *Novaya Gazeta*, April 20, 2010, <https://novyagazeta.ru/articles/2010/04/21/3710-voyna-ne-spishet>.

anti-myth of the first film can also be reinterpreted in light of the following films.

Therefore, one can assume that Mikhalkov's project has two objectives; however, neither is easy to achieve.

#### **VII.IV. *Going Vertical (Dvizhenie vverkh/ Anton Megerdichev/ 2017)***

The course of Soviet history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be seen as a set of projects which intended to create an alternative system, politics and society. However, the ideological mindset behind the projects had to revise its priorities according to the conditions of the time. One of the main pillars of the Soviet project, namely the competitiveness in sport, was an indispensable aim, especially during the Cold War. The politics of sport had surpassed the idealization of homo Sovieticus in terms of physical abilities, as it turned out to be a tool of recognition and propaganda. For this purpose, the Soviet administration did not hesitate to implement particular policies, including the initiation of the systemic use of doping. In this respect, the Olympic Games had been an integral part of the Cold War competition. The Soviet team was victorious in the games and its legacy had a massive impact on Soviet memory.

Reminding the sportive glory of the past should be seen as a significant part of memory politics in contemporary Russia. *Going Vertical*, which portrays the legendary basketball final in the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, is an example to introduce a sense of nostalgia to the current Russian youth. Ironically, Russian sport was declining in the post-Soviet period. This decline has been due to a lack of sportive success and many

scandals, including doping and bribery. Since 2010, Russian sport has been faced with serious allegations of systemic doping policy and Russian athletes had been prohibited from many competitions, including the 2018 Winter Games in which Russian athletes had participated as neutral competitors without carrying a Russian flag. Moreover, many bribe allegations were made in the bidding process of Russia's host to the 2018 World Cup. Once the leading state in sports, post-Soviet Russia has lost the sportive prestige and introduces sportive nostalgia to attract the society.

The 1972 Munich Games is mainly remembered for the hostage crisis that ended with the murder of Israeli athletes. While it was undoubtedly one of the most tragic moments in sports history, the basketball final in the games was another unforgettable moment. The Soviet team ended the US dominance in basketball by a controversial last moment score. The final match constitutes a significant case to be remembered and the box-office record of *Going Vertical* is not a coincidence regarding the subject's attraction. The film is produced by Nikita Mikhalkov's TriTe and subsidized by CineFond and the Russian Ministry of Culture. The director Anton Megerdichev is a well-known filmmaker for his action-based works, including *Dark World* and *Metro* (2013), which had commercial success. His former works were attractive for the younger audience as *Dark World* narrates a fantastic story among students and *Metro* was adopted from Dmitriy Safanov's trendy novel with the same name.

*Going Vertical* begins with a father and a son practicing with a basketball hoop. The son is in a wheelchair, and his father is named coach Garanzhin who is waiting for administrators' decision regarding his future duty, namely, the USSR National Basketball Team coach. Coach Gomelsky was dismissed from his duty by top administration and Garanzhin prevails as a new prospect who wants to set up his system. His main aim is to defeat the USA at the Munich Olympics, which is seen as a mission impossible. However, his ambition for victory is not due to sportive greed but the disability of his son. Defeating the USA may open doors for his son to travel abroad for his treatment. He sets up a new team in this respect and initiates non-traditional training methods. However, he becomes distressed by the Soviet authorities because of his statement about defeating the USA. Besides, he has to overcome some problems, such as coaching a team that is consisted of athletes from different nations. The Lithuanian star of the team Modestas Feliksovich is a dissident who has relatives in Western Germany. Moreover, Garanzhin learns that youngster Aleksandr Belov has a rare heart condition during the USA training camp. The hostage crisis makes the thing complicated; however, the Soviet team chooses to play the final. Nevertheless, the Soviet team succeeds against its rival after a nail-biting three seconds. The victorious athletes give their winning bonuses to Garanzhin for the surgery of his son. The ending credits flow with the images of the Soviet and Russian athletes who triumphed in several competitions.

*Going Vertical* exploits the blessings of the blockbuster sports film genre in every sense. It is based on a real story that can be seen as one of the most remarkable moments in

sports history. It casts famous actors like Vladimir Mashkov and Sergei Garmash. The thrilling story is supported by emotional side-stories such as Shura's surgery and the heartbreaking love story of seriously ill Alexander Belov. The protagonists comprehend the importance of becoming a team and give up being selfish. The underdog team overcomes the obstacles one by one and wins a legendary victory at the end. The lovers unite again and the money needed for surgery becomes collected.

The high dependence on generic codes brought criticism to the film for its similarity to the Hollywood film *Miracle*, which portrays the American version of the Olympic victory, namely the hockey victory against the Soviets in the 1980 Lake Placid Winter Olympics.<sup>421</sup> Although *Going Vertical* is not innovative in terms of plot structure, it benefited from using standard generic codes and it became the highest-grossing Russian film of all time. By the end of January, the film even beat *Avatar* in terms of the first four-week box-office performance.<sup>422</sup>

The commercial success of *Going Vertical* is indisputable. At this point, the main message in the film should be considered. As previously noted, commercial success and patriotic messages are the primary goals of patriotic blockbusters. For this purpose, past events should be reconstructed according to political and commercial interests.

Nevertheless, the plot of *Going Vertical* has many historical inventions that should be

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<sup>421</sup> Beach Gray, "Anton Megerdichev: *Going Vertical (Dvizhenie Vverkh, 2017)*," *KinoKultura*, no. 61 (2018), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2018/61r-dvizhenie-vverkh.shtml>.

<sup>422</sup> "Fil'm «Dvizheniye Vverkh» Oboshel Po Kassovym Sboram «Avatara»," *Izvestiya*, January 22, 2018, <https://iz.ru/698654/2018-01-22/film-dvizhenie-vverkh-oboshel-po-kassovym-sboram-avata>.

considered concerning the mentioned interests. One can find many historical errors in the film. For example, the game style of the 1970s was not that dynamic and the athletes usually did not make dunks that much. Shura and Belov's health conditions are reinterpreted as Shura did not need surgery as he had cerebral palsy and the heart disease of Belov had not yet been diagnosed before the Olympic Games. There are no data for the street match against local African Americans and the dissidence of Paulauskas. Besides, the coach had not created any speculation about the match by promising victory before the match. The eyesight problem of Alzhan Jarmukhamedov was a fact, but he would need lenses after the Olympic Games. Lastly, Belov's girlfriend could not be a part of the Soviet delegation as the women's basketball became staged in the 1976 Montreal Olympics Games.<sup>423</sup>

The historical errors mentioned above depend mainly on generic codes as they are utilized to attract the audience by impressing emotionality and excitement. On the other hand, one can also find some political messages in these codes. First, Garanzhin is portrayed as a change-maker and the reasons for the departure of former coach Gomelski is mainly stayed out of the plot. The audience is only informed that the decision comes from top executives regarding the previous defeats. Gomelski is only seen in one scene, which portrays his last training with the team. Gomelski has been described as the "Father of the Soviet Basketball," however, he had troubles with the KGB due to his

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<sup>423</sup> Dmitry Somov, "Fil'm 'Dvizheniye Vverkh'. Chto Pravda, a Chto Vymysel," *Sport Ekspress*, January 6, 2018, <https://www.sport-express.ru/basketball/reviews/film-dvizhenie-vverh-cto-pravda-a-cto-vymysel-1355811/>.

Jewish identity throughout his career. His son Vladimir Gomelsky admits that the KGB had sanctioned him from going abroad seven times.<sup>424</sup> His dismissal before the Munich Olympics was due to prevent his possible defection to Israel.<sup>425</sup> Distrust against Gomelsky was not a temporary sentiment as he was fired after winning the gold medal at the 1982 World Basketball Championship. He left the team camp during the USA tour for three days to visit Israel and it was seen as the reason for the denouncement.<sup>426</sup>

This reinvention of Gomelsky's case should be attributed to the portrayal of the Soviet state in the film. While the sports policy was a central part of Soviet governance, Garanzhin and his players are more autonomous in their tournament preparation. The high-rank administrators are primarily seen in the first meeting that Garanzhin is appointed and the scenes that they distressed Garanzhin for his positive statements about the USA national team. The administration warned Garanzhin about a possible failure. Criminal investigations of the team members will be carried out in the case of defeat. One signal of this intimidation is the scene in which the European Champion team's pieces of luggage are searched one by one. While the team members become disappointed with the procedures, Paulauskas swears to the officers in Lithuanian. The crucial part of this scene is the end of the search when the officer calls back Garanzhin

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<sup>424</sup> Ruslan Karmanov and Anton Shadrin, "Vladimir Gomel'skiy: «Stat' Marshalom Basketbola Pape Prikazal Zhukov»,» *Krasnaya Zvezda*, January 19, 2018, <http://redstar.ru/vladimir-gomelskiy-stat-marshalom-basketbola-pape-prikazal-zhukov/>.

<sup>425</sup> Andrey Sentsov, "Otets Russkogo Basketbola Ne Dozhdalsya Pobedy Skonchalsya Velikiy Trener Aleksandr Gomel'skiy," *Lenta*, August 17, 2005, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2005/08/16/gomelsky/>.

<sup>426</sup> Marat Araslanov, "V. Gomel'skiy: Papa Byl Armeyskim Fanatikom," *Championat*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.championat.com/basketball/article-3324755-vladimir-gomelskiy--ob-aleksandre-gomelskom-v-den-90-letnego-jubileja.html>.

and congratulates him for the victory. The message conveyed in this sequence conveys the message that state administration should trust its subjects. It should direct the people rather than controlling and checking caused by the distrust. The main problem with the Soviet state in *Going Vertical* is the lack of faith in the capacity of the national basketball team. This mismanagement demotivates the members and pushes them to be dissidents, as in the case of Paulauskas.

That state should perform like Tereschenko, the responsible administrator of the team and the coach Garanzhin. They both emphasize discipline; however, the discipline is not enough to reach the goal. They also take the initiative at necessary times. Moreover, especially Garanzhin is open to change and he does not hesitate to use US training methods. This flexibility is also invaluable for the management of the team. While Tereschenko and Garanzhin show the ideal way of being an authority, the character of Sergey Belov performs the ideal individual under an authority. First, he is the captain of the team and he knows his responsibilities. He is the most hardworking player. He is also courageous as he bought a Bible from Essen during the European Championships. His only defect is his self-confidence, but Garanzhin teaches him how to play for the team.

Finally, the scene that portrays the Georgian wedding represents the shared joy between the Russians and the former Soviet people. The film usually has interior scenes regarding the scenes in the USSR. However, the wedding scene consists of pastoral

outer shots that portray the beauty of the Georgian highlands. While the groom was Georgian player Mikhail's brother, the organization owes to Garanzhin. He catches Mikhail, who left the camp without permission in the airport and decided to take his team to Georgia. Garanzhin also makes the wedding speech, which represents the big brotherhood of Russia in the post-Soviet land. Garanzhin can be seen as the perfect authoritarian. He never abandons discipline, but he also understands the nuisances of his players as he takes care of them.

Another critical part that should be mentioned is undoubtedly the portrayal of the final game. The match scene takes more than 45 minutes, which approximately makes more than one-third of the film. While the sport type is different, the beginning of the scene can be seen as similar to the famous *Rocky IV* (Sylvester Stallone/ 1985). The Italian American boxer is the ultimate underdog against the Soviet boxer Ivan Drago.

Simultaneously, Drago has been trained within ultimate standards, with no chance given to Rocky before the match. The Soviet team has been prepared with limited means, just like Rocky, while even the US college teams have superior capabilities. This code of being the underdog is also used in *Going Vertical*. The US team enters the arena with ultra self-confidence as the audience excitingly chant. On the other hand, the USSR team is booed.

Another sports film cliché was also used in the match scene. The Soviets correctly begin the match; however, the American coach Iba orders his players to foul Belov in the film. In only this way, the American team can compete against the Soviets. Perhaps the most

crucial character in the scene occurs, namely, the General Secretary of the Federation of International Basketball Association, R. William Jones. He was a symbolic figure for the development of basketball in Europe and he was one of the co-founders of FIBA in 1932. He was also one of the people who made the inclusion of basketball in the 1936 Berlin Olympics.<sup>427</sup> Jones is one of the spectators in the match as it is also a historical fact.

While Garanzhin complains about the challenging game that the US team plays, Jones comes to the scorer table and says that the US players play dirty, but they compete within the rules. There is no data neither for this conversation nor the intentional fouls. This fabrication is necessary as Jones takes part at the end of the game again. At the end of the game, Doug Collins made two free shots and the score comes to 50-49. The match begins, but the turnout demand of Garanzhin is neglected. The match begins and ends with only a couple of seconds were left. At this point, Jones comes to the scorer's table again and claims that three seconds should be replayed. These sequences are portrayed according to historical facts.<sup>428</sup> The controversy about the decision comes from the interference of Jones as he had no authority. The referees accepted his interference to replay the three seconds. The fabrication of intentional foul tactics and Jones' interference against Garanzhin aims to neutralize the final decision as Jones becomes interfered with the game both for the US and the USSR teams.

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<sup>427</sup> John Grasso, *Historical Dictionary of Basketball* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2011), 182.

<sup>428</sup> Beach Gray, "Anton Megerdichev: *Going Vertical (Dvizhenie Vverkh, 2017)*."

*Going Vertical* can be seen as one of the most significant patriotic blockbusters in contemporary Russian cinema. It is a commercial success as it may hold the box-office record for a long time. Moreover, it opened the way for other sports-oriented blockbusters. *Going Vertical* helps the sports genre prevail as a popular theme by reminding the former sportive successes. In this respect, the film portrays the ideal relationship between authority and the youth without demonizing the Soviet past.

**VII.V. *My Dad Baryshnikov* (*Moy papa Baryshnikov*/ Dmitry Povolotsky/ 2011)**

*My Dad Baryshnikov*, which tells the story of teenage Boris/Borya Fishkin during perestroika and glasnost initiation, is the first feature film of Dmitri Povolotsky. The director also wrote the screenplay that selected a crucial period to depict. Indeed, *My Dad Baryshnikov* can not be considered a blockbuster because it has a modest production budget without notable sponsorships as only the Russian Ministry of Culture aided the production. The film can be defined as a festival film that took part in domestic and international festivals, including Sochi Open Russian Film Festival, Kinotavr and Moscow International Film Festival. For this reason, it can be assumed that *My Dad Baryshnikov*, has focused on festival success rather than box-office income.

On the other hand, several reasons can be asserted to include Povolotsky's film in this work. First, the film has a non-complex story that can please the audience. In this respect, it can attract the audience just like patriotic blockbusters. The film's box-office failure

was probably due to limited screening and lack of marketing because of the modest budget. Secondly, the period depicted in the film is intriguing concerning the lack of noteworthy patriotic blockbusters that subject the last years of the Soviet Union. The year 1986 was a turning point in Soviet history as Mikhail Gorbachev made his historic speech that inaugurated the perestroika and glasnost program. Since then, nothing would be the same in the Soviet state as ensuing transformations proceeded in social and political fields. The portrayal of such a heated period is intriguing for scrutiny to understand the perception of that time in contemporary Russian cinema. Thirdly, the production was supported by the Russian Ministry of Culture, which makes *My Dad Baryshnikov* a state-sponsored film. As it was mentioned, there are some criteria for official bodies to support film productions. The support of the Russian Ministry of Culture approves that *My Dad Baryshnikov* fits the mentioned criteria. Finally, *My Dad Baryshnikov* touches the issues like the absence of a father, paternity, patriarchy, and women's role in society, which can be attributed to the relationship with masculinity and patriotism in Putin's Russia.

The main protagonist of *My Dad Baryshnikov* is a teenager, Borya, who is a student at the Moscow Choreographic Institute. The film begins with a photo album and a lady cuts photographs of a couple in the middle, excluding the male person. Then a voice-over begins to tell the story that takes part in the year 1986. A young ballet, Borya, lives with his flirty mother in Moscow and he does not know any information about his father's fate. Although the Soviet leadership initiated perestroika, there is no reform program in

Borya's school. The strict discipline in the school caused trouble to Borya in everyday life and there is no doubt that he has little talent when he is compared to his classmates. Apart from his dance education, he sells Soviet items to foreign tourists in the black market with his friend Sasha. One day, his mother gives him a videocassette of Mikhail Baryshnikov, the world-famous ballet, who had defected to the USA in the 1970s. He is a defector and even talking about him is forbidden in the academy at that time. Borya becomes fascinated by the dance performance and he notices a psychical resemblance between him and Baryshnikov. After learning that his mother had flirted with Baryshnikov once, the young man becomes sure that his father is Baryshnikov.

While the Baryshnikov issue turned into a hot topic between his colleagues, Borya is expelled from the academy because of illegal trade business. Just in time, his real father comes up after long years. He had been in prison for illegal currency exchange and became released after an amnesty. While Borya cannot accept the fact that Baryshnikov is not his father at first, he gets acquainted with his father, Mikhail, in time. Mikhail encourages Boris to apply to the academy again. Borya worked hard with his father's support; however, he performed an embarrassing audition performance. At the end of the film, Borya tells the audience that he continued in trade and has become a businessman but still loves ballet. The film ends with a poster of the "Sleeping Beauty" performance hanged at the Bolshoi Theater entrance. The sponsor of the performance is indicated as Boris Fishkin in the poster.

*My Dad Baryshnikov's* central theme can be named the troubles to attain an identity during a highly significant period of a two-level transformation. The first level transformation is the adolescence period of teenager Borya and the second one is the transformation of a country under the title of perestroika. The lack of paternity can be considered as a catalyzer in this two-level transformation. Both levels have many challenges in themselves and only a mentor, such as a father, can benefit the one experiencing such transformation. While the story of Borya seems to be specific at first sight, the paternity issue in *My Dad Baryshnikov* can also be generalized as a problem for the Soviet Union, which lost its identity during perestroika.

*My Dad Baryshnikov* neither depicts a patriotic story as war films do nor focuses on a historical figure in Russian history, excluding Mikhail Baryshnikov, who informally participates in the film. However, one can find highly significant conservative messages that are appropriate for the current patriotic film project. First of all, the story portrays the country's socio-economic situation at the beginning of the reformation process. In one scene, the voice of the elder Borya says that they all lived in similar apartments, wore similar clothes and dreamed of being different. This statement can be seen as the underlying concern of the perestroika youth. In light of this assumption, the presence of two different worlds in which Borya loses his path can be debated. As mentioned previously, the academy director claims that they will have no perestroika in their school. The school is decorated with Lenin busts and photographs of politburo members. Military training is a part of the curriculum and the directors follow a strict discipline

program, always expressing the legacy they have to protect. All these codes can be affiliated with the old orthodox regime and Soviet Russia before perestroika. The orthodox attitude in the dance academy is not praised for sure. The directors and instructors are hardly sympathetic figures. From this point of view, *My Dad Baryshnikov* does not create a restorative nostalgia regarding the depiction of orthodox Soviet values. Instead, it focuses on the troubles in case of making appropriate choices in a time of change.

The second world is an arena of struggle to break off from commonality. The elder Borya remembers the year 1986 as an unforgettable one. He even says that he cannot remember the time before perestroika. There are two things in need in the country, according to elder Borya. The first one was meat and the second one was freedom, which was much more valuable at that time. Indeed, his lack of memory before 1986 is a sign of the ordinariness and dullness of Soviet life before perestroika. The visual codes, like wall-papers, types of furniture and apparel, are mainly used to depict the everyday life of the time.<sup>429</sup> Lack of meat is also a significant part of commonality as the queues in front of the meat store is another visual code the film expresses. Then perestroika comes and many things begin to change; however, the transformation needs time. The teenager Borya seeks the difference in Western popular culture as many other youngsters also do. The walls of Borya's room are full of the famous western bands of that time. He prefers listening to Boney M. instead of the Soviet national anthem during the school

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429 See Yelena Alekseyevna Yeliseyeva, "Izobrazitel'nyye Resheniya Novogo Otechestvennogo Kino," *Vestnik Moskovskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Kul'tury i Iskusstv* 4, no. 60 (2014), 227.

ceremony and he makes a disco ball to impress Marina, Borya's favorite girl in the academy. He is lucky enough to own a walkman, thanks to his mother's connections and he can only impress Marina by wearing blue jeans. Boris, his trade partner Sasha and a disabled Afghanistan veteran, sell watches, badges, t-shirts and similar items to foreigners in exchange for US dollars, blue jeans, chewing gums, cigarettes and even bananas. Once, Sasha calls Borya that "it is time to sell Motherland" when they are going to the Red Square for business. The depressed Afghan veterans, underground disco parties and break dancers on the streets are the other remarkable codes that depict another world at the time.

The problem of Borya and the Soviet youth is that they want to be different by ignoring commonality, but the difference they seek produces another commonality, namely western popular culture and its style of consumption. The blue jeans, walkmans and disco songs become the subjects of another commonality as Soviet items become replaced with Western items. At this confusion, Baryshnikov comes out as a hero for Borya to find his identity. In this way, Borya can finally set a concrete plan for himself, seeking to be a significant dancer like Baryshnikov and settling in the USA. However, Baryshnikov is not the right option for Borya as he is neither his biological father nor an appropriate figure for Soviet youth. At this point, one can question the significance of the father for a boy in the adolescent period. While Borya lacks a father figure, he has a mother, grandparents and school administration who can lead him to a better future. The answer to such a question relies on the issue of patriarchy in the Soviet Union. Therefore

the film needs a further analysis concerning paternity and women's question during perestroika.

*My Dad Baryshnikov* is a family drama that tells the story of Borya, who can not achieve the support from his mother and absent father to become a man, which is underlined many times throughout the film. Indeed, the absence of paternity has been an acute problem in post-Soviet Russia. Fathers who abandoned their families or neglected their paternal responsibilities have brought a legacy of lack, as Goscilo and Hashamova indicate.<sup>430</sup> During the Soviet period, the state leaders and screen personalities had filled the mentioned gap as virtual fathers, but there has been a lack of public figures who can compensate for such duty in post-Soviet Russia.<sup>431</sup> A similar problem can be detected in *My Dad Baryshnikov*. This paternity problem also affected Russian cinema and film critic Alexander Sekatskii coined the term *ottsepriimstvo*, which indicates that “an attempt to eliminate the existential deficit has arisen there, where the transformation of a boy into a man traditionally transpired.”<sup>432</sup> *Ottsepriimstvo* exactly defines the identity crisis that Borya experiences. At this point, the role of Borya's mother, Larisa, should be highlighted to understand the problem of paternity. To better understand the story, themes like the Soviet family and the emancipation of women issues require further debate.

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<sup>430</sup> Helena Goscilo and Yana Hashamova “Introduction, Cinepaternity: The Psyche and Its Heritage,” in *Cinepaternity, Fathers and Son in Soviet and Post-Soviet Film*, ed. Yana Hashamova and Helena Goscilo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1-2.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, 3.

Larisa is a light-hearted young mother who does not care for Borya as a parent. She has many extra-marital relationships as Borya has to visit his grandparents periodically and Borya's exile to the academy's dormitory is portrayed as an opportunity for Larisa. The freedom that Larisa experiences can be attributed to the freedom that perestroika ignited. She can be considered as a negative example of women's emancipation in this sense. Thus, the film takes a conservative line by portraying the mother as an immoral and inadequate parent who does not care for her son. However, the women's question in the Soviet Union was not that simple and it had been a long-debated issue throughout Soviet history.

The Soviet Union had produced many myths like social justice and social equality or proletarian internationalism, which dissident voices had criticized at various levels at different times. Women's emancipation was also another myth, albeit it had not found the chance to be seriously debated throughout Soviet history.<sup>433</sup> On the other hand, the issue became prevalent during perestroika; however, the critics had a primarily conservative perspective that aimed to reinstate a patriarchal family model in society. At that time, the women's question was based on assumptions like the "over-employment of women" and "the forced detachment" from family. In this respect, the solution to the problem was to reduce the female labor force in replace of the maternal role of women as the bonds in the family became a romanticized subject.<sup>434</sup> The so-called emancipation

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<sup>433</sup> Olga Voronina, Nicole Svobodny, and Maude Meisel, "Soviet Patriarchy: Past and Present," *Hypatia* 8, no. 4 (1993), 97.

<sup>434</sup> Valentine M. Moghadam, "Patriarchy in Transition: Women and the Changing Family in the Middle

of women was the main problem for the suffering Soviet women had been experiencing.<sup>435</sup>

Indeed, the Marxist ideology and early periods of the Bolshevik rule had theorized the women's question and women's emancipation, though their assumptions were only articulated in terms of class struggle and socio-economic relations. The socialist revolution was the only option for women to emancipate, but the result was not as expected.<sup>436</sup> Socialist emancipation had two levels. First, women should be mobilized in the workforce. Secondly, the traditional perspective on women should be disgraced to overcome social constraints and injustices. For this purpose, legal equality, revising the laws on family and prospects for education were presented for women.<sup>437</sup> However, women's role in society had become deeply embedded in economic goals, and reinforcing a new gender model based on another hierarchy became reinstated. Feminism could not flourish in the Soviet Union as it had been labeled as a bourgeois notion since the early days of the Bolshevik rule. Lenin stated that they had to "draw a clear and ineradicable line of distinction between our policy and bourgeois feminism" during an interview in 1920.<sup>438</sup> A prolific theoretician of women's question, Alexandra Kollontai, was called "the scourge of the bourgeois feminists," though she radically criticized the notions of women's role in family and sexuality that Lenin and other

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East," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004), 138.

<sup>435</sup> Olga Voronina, Nicole Svobodny, and Maude Meisel, "Soviet Patriarchy: Past and Present," 97.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>437</sup> Maxine Molyneux, "Socialist Societies Old and New: Progress Towards Women's Emancipation?," *Feminist Review* 8, no. 1 (1981), 25.

<sup>438</sup> Marylyn J. Boxer, "Rethinking the Socialist Construction and International Career of the Concept 'Bourgeois Feminism,'" *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (January 2007), 140.

Bolshevik leaders mostly rejected.<sup>439</sup>

The denunciation of feminism continued in the following decades, and the Communist Party's orthodox perspective prevented any critic of the model implemented.<sup>440</sup> The socialist revolution had already given the so-called emancipation to the Soviet women, according to the authorities. It can be considered that the granted rights of the Soviet women, by the ratification of the UN agreement for the elimination of discrimination against women in 1981, could not turn into practice. There was an asymmetric correlation in politics and administration, which indicates that more powerful political institutions have fewer women representation in themselves.<sup>441</sup> The Soviet women were segregated in the spheres of labor and decision-making. Women were paid averagely paid less 30 percent less than men and they had an inferior chance to make a career as there was a division between male and female “professions.”

The authorities expected both women labor force and increased birth rate that brought a double burden for women. Before perestroika, the Soviet family had been disintegrating due to high divorce rates, alcoholism, crime and abortion. The working mother who was absent at home was considered as the primary solution to reinstate the families.

Therefore, women's role at home began to precede their workplace role during the 1970s

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>440</sup> Maxine Molyneux, “Socialist Societies Old and New: Progress Towards Women's Emancipation?,” *Feminist Review* 8, no. 1 (1981), 26.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

and 1980s.<sup>442</sup> The myth of emancipation was replaced with another myth, namely, “the holiness of motherhood” during perestroika. While society was trying to become more democratic, the degradation of women’s role was in every aspect of social and political life.<sup>443</sup> The women’s question not only concerned the authorities as the civil society had also assumed a conservative stance on the question and neither civilian groups, namely nationalist, socialist, liberal, nor religious ones, focused on any feminist commitment in their prospects for the future.

From this perspective, the freedom and carelessness that Larisa lived is the depiction of the problem of “women’s emancipation” in the eyes of the Soviet authorities. As a result of the mother’s inadequacy, the school takes the stage as Borya is sent to the students’ dormitory. The academy administration can be seen as a state tool to bring up the youth as decent Soviet citizens. However, the year in the film is 1986 and the state’s authority was declining fast in that period. By decreasing the repression over social and political life, the Soviet state would soon fall into a situation of dissolution. Although the head of school announced there would be no perestroika in their school, their thought and disciplined governing style were also in decline. For example, the older students do not hesitate to bully the younger ones, or the male students can secretly pass to the girl’s dormitory. The strict discipline of the school/state becomes just a formality as Borya can continue to trade in the black market even he is confined in the boarding school.

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid, 27-30.

<sup>443</sup> Olga Voronina, Nicole Svobodny, and Maude Meisel, “Soviet Patriarchy: Past and Present,” *Hypatia* 8, no. 4 (1993), 99-101.

The savior of Borya would be his father, who was in prison for illegal currency barter, takes an amnesty and suddenly reappears in the lives of Borya and Larissa and the absent father figure disappears. Before the return of Borya's father, Borya has found a father figure in the political-cultural figure of Baryshnikov. This dream-like story and his ultimate belief in it are the solutions for Borya to overcome his problems resulting from the nihilistic absence of his father, as he does not know anything about his father's identity. However, replacing Baryshnikov with the absent father does not work because of Baryshnikov's identity. He was a harmful figure in the Soviet Union as he defected to the USA during his campaign in the 1970s. Being the son of Baryshnikov can give him the prestige to impress his friends. However, this type of paternity would not bring him to embody the motivation for his further reason to live. On the other hand, his biological father can accomplish this duty.

Examples of films that use the theme of dance can be found in contemporary Western cinema. The films like *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997), *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000), *Fish Tank* (Andrea Arnold, 2009) and *Silver Linings Playbook* (David O. Russell) posit the dance theme to motivate their characters releasing from a depressing situation.<sup>444</sup> On the other hand, *My Dad Baryshnikov* follows a different path and introduces a plot twist at the end of the film. Borya has never had the necessary talent to become a primary ballet. On the other hand, he acquired the support and motivation

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<sup>444</sup> Vincent Bohlinger, "Dmitrii Povolotskii, Mark Drugoi: *My Dad, Baryshnikov (Moi Papa, Baryshnikov, 2011)*," *KinoKultura*, no. 34 (2011), <http://www.kinokultura.com/2011/34r-baryshnikov.shtml>.

which he lacks before. Although he cannot succeed in the audition, he discovers that he has to do something different. The mentorship of his father should be underlined not for absolute success but for motivation to try something. The final audition is a disaster for Borya, but it closed a door and opened a new one. In this new path, Borya walks through with his father, who brings him self-confidence.

## CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION

It was stated that the current Russian memory has been living a state of aphasia since the end of socialism. The rich but complicated historical experience has brought a society that has complicated and conflicting memories. Patriotic historical films have emerged as a remedy to enhance this troubled imagination. This dissertation aims to understand the content of historical films and their reinterpretation of the past to fill the gap in the minds of the Russian society rather than scrutinizing film's impact and success in molding the contemporary Russian memory. In order to understand the impact of the films, their reception by the audience should be analyzed and it can be the subject of another study that needs to use a different methodology, including inquiries.

Nevertheless, some deductions can be reached about the fundamental aspects of patriotic historical films in the light of Russian film history. With the help of these deductions, the project's achievements and constraints can be better understood. The common points and the discrepancies between the former film industry and the current one need to be compared considering the pre-Putin Russian cinema heritage. This inquiry has two levels.

In the first level, the general purpose of the film industry in the past and present will be discussed. What kind of films had been chosen to be produced is the question in this part. In the second part, the entanglements of the patriotic film project will be discussed.

Putin administration has not been the first authority to utilize historical filmmaking based on national solidarity for political purposes. By acknowledging this reality, the contemporary historical, patriotic cinema Project inherited a remarkably long filmmaking tradition. The founding years of the Russian cinema during the tsarist regime had a limited political leaning due to the upheaval mood of the time. On the other hand, the use of films to gain legitimacy and consent had a special status, especially during the Soviet era. However, the Soviet heritage was not a monolithic structure as it has different dynamics at different periods. This heterogeneity brought some certain similarities and differences between the Soviet experience and the current patriotic film project. The politicization of filmmaking began with the Bolshevik Revolution, though the technical and administrative difficulties prevented a well-performed political filmmaking policy. The politically agitative films of the period were too complex for the ordinary audience and the mainstream films were mostly far from being political. Therefore, the political effects of the films were limited and they could not prevail as decent examples for the current leadership.

The similarities between the past and the present began with Boris Shumyatsky's project, namely, "films for millions." Shumyatsky had worked to build a film industry

resembling the Hollywood model; however, the produced should be politically agitative at the same time. The audience should enjoy the films made while the patriotic consciousness becomes instilled inside their mind. However, the plans of Shumyatsky collapsed due to the technical difficulties and the political terror of the time. In this respect, the recent patriotic project can be seen as the realization of the “films for millions” project. The current leadership stated that Russian films have to compete with their Hollywood counterparts. This competition is a three-level process based on commercial success, technical capability and political utilization. For this purpose, Hollywood-style filmmaking has been adopted on mainstream blockbuster genres and technical aspects. The difference between the Russian film industry and Hollywood has been the production system as the state institutions prevail as the leading donors to fund the blockbusters. Although Shumyatsky had failed, traces of his project can be found in the present.

Shumyatsky’s plan was a failure and his plans became quickly replaced by the necessities of socialist realism. Socialist realism can be seen as the ultimate point of political filmmaking. Many socialist-realist historical films can be found between the beginnings of the 1930s and the outbreak of World War II. However, socialist realist art was a strictly rigid doctrine that forbids any complex narrative and foreign films that can distract the audience from the agitative message conveyed. Although the patriotic blockbuster project aims to install a political set of memory into the audience’s mind, such rigidity contradicts the heterogeneity in the present global film industry. Neither the

Putin regime can adopt such a strict cultural policy initiated during the 1930s and Zhdanov period, nor can the audience be satisfied by such rigidity. Although the taxation of limitation of Hollywood films has come to the table, the Putin administration could not take a risk, probably to avoid unpopularity as Hollywood films still dominate the Russian theaters. Therefore, the task of the Putin regime is more challenging today, as their control over the industry is limited compared to Stalinist Russia, though it still has authoritarian dynamics. The goals of the Stalin regime and the Putin regime have similarities in terms of industrial aspects, though the conditions of each period are different and this difference has produced peculiar practices.

The experiences of the film industry during the Thaw period are also not applicable to the present. The Thaw cinema had a liberal mood, especially compared to the previous era. The foreign films were introduced to the Soviet audiences and a new generation of filmmakers could work on artistically invaluable films that hardly suit the generical features of politically agitative films. In the present day, one can also find non-mainstream filmmakers who have stylistically prominent and politically critical historical films in the filmography. However, this class of filmmakers primarily relies on independent film studios or international funds. Therefore, they cannot be included in the sample set of this study. The traces of the Thaw cinema can be found in these examples; however, the mentioned period does not seem to be applicable to the state-led historical filmmaking in the present.

The second inherited model can be seen as the stagnation period of filmmaking. While Shumyatsky's project creates a base for commercial and political filmmaking, the stagnation cinema put it into practice. As it was stated, film art had been the least stagnated one during this period. The real blockbusters appeared at that time and it can be assumed that they created models for the current film industry. The blockbusters of the era followed a formula framed by the leadership. According to this formula, the films should attract the audience and the commercial aspect of films came to the front. The goal of the industry was to sustain a self-reliant film industry that fulfills the leisure time necessities of Soviet society. While film politics was not liberal, a well-educated filmmaker class could produce satirical and critical films at that time. This brought significant heterogeneity to the film portfolio.

The present patriotic filmmaking also has a commercial base. The films have to attract the audience and the dominance of the Hollywood films should be averted. However, it also has the goal of utilizing a new set of historical memory. Thus, a two-level stage has been present in the current filmmaking politics. It may be assumed that the blockbuster model of the stagnation period has been adopted on a filmmaking model that also looks for political purposes. Needless to say, that patriotic blockbusters are not the sole film genre in contemporary Russian cinema. One can find examples of mainstream genres and more sophisticated art films that attend international film festivals. However, these films cannot be seen as the product of a single discourse policy.

On the other hand, one can categorize the patriotic blockbusters, which have a discourse designed and controlled by a single authority. This case looks similar to the socialist realist model, which controls the production process of every single film. The difference is that the current authority allows heterogeneity in the film industry to a certain extent, while socialist realism admitted a rigid homogeneity that should be protected at any cost.

After evaluating the outcomes of the Soviet heritage, the outcomes of the historical, patriotic films may be discussed. Sergei Ushakine suggested that the Russian society had lived a state of aphasia. His use of the term aphasia has implied that the post-Soviet Russian society lacked the cultural base to construct positions that can produce an identity for the society. This problem was primarily due to the chaotic experiences in the Russian state in the second half of the 1990s. The aphasia was a particular case at the beginning of the 2000s; however, one can find a significant effort to provide a national identity in the last two decades. National self-pride, the dichotomy between the Western and Russian identity and the geopolitical expansionism fostered a new Russian identity. As stated previously, reinventing history in contemporary Russian films has been part of a macro-policy based on this identification policy.

While the early post-Soviet identity confusion has ended, the construction process of the new identity has some significant challenges. The most significant drawback is the complexity of the history that the Russian nation had experienced. The Putin administration initiated a catch-all type of historical memory, aiming to utilize all

periods in Russian history, including the Rus' period, the Romanov reign and the Soviet era. None of these historical periods are easy to be reinterpreted from a macro point of view that appreciates all of them. Filmmaking has been found out as a remedy to overcome this drawback. However, gratifying all members of society who identify themselves with different and contrasting periods in Russian history has not been easy. Besides, the patriotic film project also has commercial goals as it has been stated that Russian films should compete with their Hollywood counterparts.

The first entanglement of the patriotic film project is the complexity of some significant periods. For example, the representation of Tatars has a different set of images concerning the samples of this dissertation. While the Tatar rule has been narrated as a time of tyranny in the *Horde*, the image of the same group in *1612* has been friendly and obedient. Thus, it may be assumed that some significant subjects like the non-Russian people's representation in films may depend on the historical circumstances. In the case of submissiveness to the Turkic people, a darker and brutal image takes place. On the other hand, the same group becomes sympathetic and identifiable during Russian rule over the Turkic people. Both representations have subjective bases, as was stated previously in the film analysis part.

The second problem, in this case, is the complex subjects such as the Civil War. The films in this dissertation struggle to find a middle way between the Whites and the Reds in representing the war on the big screen. Demonizing the Red Army has been avoided

in the *Admiral* and the scapegoats of the Civil War have been labeled as the non-Russian characters in the *Sunstroke*. These solutions are subjective again and their reception by the audience may be unconvincing. As mentioned previously, the patriotic film project pursues a catch-all memory policy and the veneration of the White Army brings complexity, which the film administrations could not find a proper solution.

The third entanglement is the presence of the church as a prominent actor in the patriotic film project. The Russian government funds patriotic films using administrations or companies like the Ministry of Culture, the Cinema Fund or Gazprom. On the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Church prevails as a separate administrative body that can independently fund film productions. In this dissertation, the *Horde* and *The Priest* are church-funded patriotic films. In both films, the religious figures come to the front while the political figures stay in the background. It was God's will that saves Moscow in the *Horde* rather than the political achievements of Ivan Krasniy.

Similarly, the priest Aleksei struggles to save the Orthodox faith and the Russian state without a state body. This prominence of religious protagonists over political bodies signals a new hierarchy between the church and the state in the patriotic films funded by the Russian Orthodox Church and its affiliated bodies. This hierarchy implies that the role of the church may supersede politics. A contest between religiosity and patriotism, a secular and political concept, can be found concerning these examples. While the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church have a successive partnership,

this implication indicates possible power competition.

The third entanglement is the controversies that patriotic films brought. *Viking* and *Matilda* can be included in this sample. While they narrated highly sensitive subjects, the box office expectations had caused some stir sensations. In the case of *Viking*, it was due to the dilemma between commerciality and historical sensitivity. An ordinary story of Prince Vladimir would probably not satisfy the audience to attend the theaters. On the other hand, the inclusion of adultery and brutality might offend the sacrality of the canonized prince. The solution has been creating a non-Russian scapegoat again. On the other hand, the case of *Matilda* was more scandalous as many far-right groups took the stage to offend the film. While their response was outrageous, this scandal drew a veil on the historical imprudence of Nicholas II, especially at a time of the commemoration of the Bolshevik coup.

The fourth entanglement is the narration of the Second World War. The portrayal of the war in *The Brest Fortress* has brought some geopolitically expansionist narratives. There is no doubt that the Second World War is the most critical event in the historical memory politics of the current administration, which assumes that it was the Soviet Union who saved Europe from Nazism. However, there is no recent agreement over this assumption. On the contrary, the European Union blames Stalin's policies for the outbreak of war, as mentioned previously. *The Brest Fortress* portrays a highly controversial period of the war. It was undoubtedly a heroic defense; however, the story's background has been set

on the infamous Nazi-Soviet partnership. While the film aims to convince the local audience, its portrayal of Nazi-Soviet relations cannot bring a convincing narration.

The final entanglement is about the commerciality of the project. The art of cinema can be named as the most field in popular culture. According to data from Russian newspaper *Vedomosti*, every third Russian film cannot pay off its production cost. There are undoubtedly recent box-office hits such as *Viking* and *Three Seconds* which earned 20 million USD and 40 USD, respectively. However, the state administrations which funded these productions have limited acquisitions from these box office incomes. While the Cinema Fund usually pays for 60-70 percent of the productions cost, the profits have been mostly distributed among the production companies and the distributors. Thus, a film policy that can refund itself seems unachievable at the moment. Besides, box-office hits are mostly rare, and many films, including those in this dissertation, hardly pay off their production costs. The officials are aware of this problem as Olga Lyubimova, the head of the Cinematography Department of the Ministry of Culture and Vyacheslav Telnov, the Executive Director of the Cinema Fund, state the reluctance to spend resources for non-promising projects.<sup>445</sup> Deciding on the prospect of films is not an easy task and box office flops can still be potential in the future.

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<sup>445</sup> Kseniya Boletskaya, “Kazhdy Tretiy Rossiyskiy Fil'm Ne Okupayet Gosraskhodov Na Yego Proizvodstvo,” *Vedomosti*, October 22, 2019, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/technology/articles/2019/10/22/814314-tretii-film>.

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