Research article / Научная статья

Cinema and Identity: Criss-Cross Reflections

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Abstract. The paper focuses on how cinema shapes national, civilizational, and political identity and how it fosters civic identity as a driver for social development. The analysis is based on approaches inherent to identity studies and uses comparative methods; the empirical base consists of films selected through the purposive sampling method. The focus is on feature films, which provide extensive material for studying the trends of modern political development and its perception by contemporaries. Referring to examples of film production from various countries representative in this sense, the authors identify the mechanisms used by patrons and producers of films to influence the identity of the audience and the political picture of the world people identify with. Cinema is regarded as an effective tool for creating and revising historical narratives, for promoting new images and meanings and for exposing prospects for future social development. Special attention is paid to the genre of biographical films (biopics) portraying political leaders and individuals who embody the national ideal. The authors conclude that as of today, the expectation of a hero is an unmet public demand in contemporary cinema.

Keywords: identity, identity politics, interest groups, cinema, political leader, personalized identifiers, politics of memory, political picture of the world

Conflicts of interest. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Кино как зеркало идентичности, идентичность в зеркале кино

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Аннотация. Влияние кинематографа на формирование национальной, цивилизационной, политической идентичности, на утверждение гражданской идентичности как ресурса общественного развития входит в сферу интереса политической науки. Анализ построен на принципах идентитарного подхода, использованы компаративные методы; эмпирическую базу составляет фильмография по общественно-политической тематике, примеры отобраны методом целевой выборки. В центре внимания — произведения художественного кино, которые предоставляют богатый материал не только для изучения тенденций современного политического развития через их отражение в художественном творчестве, но и для осмысления восприятия политики и политического развития современниками сквозь призму обыденного сознания. На примере кинопродукции разных стран авторы выявляют механизмы, которые используются заказчиками и создателями кинофильмов для воздействия на идентичность и политическую картину мира аудитории. Показано, что киноискусство оказывается эффективным инструментом создания и пересмотра исторических нарративов и продвижения новых образов и смыслов, фиксируя разрывы и преемственность памяти поколений, и видение перспектив развития. Особое внимание уделено жанру биографического кино (биопикам), значимость которого связана с ролью персонифицированных идентификаторов в лице политических лидеров и личностей, воплощающих национальный идеал. На основе проведенного анализа авторы актуализируют проблему ожидания героя в современном кинематографе, рассматривая ее как неудовлетворенный общественный запрос.

Ключевые слова: идентичность, политика идентичности, группы интересов, персонифицированные идентификаторы, кинематограф, художественный фильм, (кино) герой, политический лидер, политика памяти, политическая картина мира

Introduction

In the field of visual culture, cinematography has firmly established a key role. Cinema performs not only interpretive but also projective tasks, forming patterns of behaviour and ideas about the horizons of social development, often creating and

promoting the image of the future. Having emerged at the dawn of the last century, the art of cinema has undergone and continues to undergo profound transformations in terms of content and technology. Significant changes in man and society are reflected in the trends we are seeing today. These include the processes of social fragmentation and individualization [Bauman 2001], the rise of new risks and threats, and the new social development opportunities brought about by the introduction of new technologies and their integration into daily life [Castells 2000, 2020]. Cinema artistically depicts the trends of social dynamics and changes in the image of the individual's world amidst drastic changes in the framework of the contemporary world order. These tendencies are mirrored in the complexities of individual and collective social identities, which cinema captures as a record of the time, representing the aesthetic preferences, cultural norms, and ideological standards of succeeding generations.

It would be unjustified to claim a comprehensive analysis of the influence of cinema on public life in one article, even specifically in the sphere of politics. According to an authoritative historian of Russian cinema, "cinema is a

huge and complex branch of culture, allowing for a wide variety of angles of examination and dissimilar aspects of study. The economics of cinema, sociology, history of film production, cinema technology and many others have become special scientific disciplines" [Zorkaya 2014]. Films can also be considered as a cultural policy object bearing in mind the interaction between art and political authority, and regarding customers and producers as identity politics subjects. Studying how films can be used as a tool for political socialization and resocialization is equally essential. In Russia the strategic document referring to the cultural domain — the Fundamentals of State Cultural Policy — sees cinematographic works as an integral part of the intangible cultural heritage; the state has been tasked with supporting the production and distribution of national films promoting moral, civic-patriotic values and positive cultural preferences of children and adults, as well as general knowledge and competencies[1].

Our interest in non-political instruments and mechanisms for the formation of identity, among which the art of cinema occupies an important place, is due to the targeted politicization of the cultural sphere, appealing to identity in its macro-political dimensions — national, civic, civilizational. These processes are most vividly reflected in feature films, and this article focuses on the analysis of selected examples of such films. The authors deliberately did not limit themselves to films about political events — the so-called political cinema; reviews of this field are the subject of special studies

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[1] On Amendments to the Fundamentals of State Cultural Policy, approved by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 24, 2014 No. 808: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of January 25, 2023 No. 35 // Official website of the President of the Russian Federation. http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/48855 (date accessed: 16.10.2024)

(see, for example [Dubois 2007]). Films that have become effective tools for the state and interest groups in promoting the identity policy agenda were chosen for analysis; the choice was based on a variety of criteria, including audience ratings, reviews from film critics, and presence in related cultural spheres.

Cinema as a tool for influencing individual and mass consciousness

Just "yesterday" we witnessed a "visual turn" in cultural communications, this consisted in the assertion of the dominant positions of visual means and methods in comparison with linguistic ones [Skorik 2018], in a kind of "surrender of positions" of the written word: two-thirds of the human population process information "with their eyes" — that is, through visual images — and the proportion of "visuals" increases with each new generation. In the structure of leisure time of young people in Russia, watching films at home and visiting the cinema occupy leading positions — they are among the top three types of activities in free time[2].

The functions of cinema in modern society are multifaceted, they cover all spheres of social life. As film director Andrei Tarkovsky once said, "the normal aspiration of a person going to the cinema is that he goes there for *time* — for lost or missed, or for hitherto unrecovered time. A person goes there for life experience, because cinema, like no other art, expands, enriches and concentrates the actual experience of a person, and at the same time not simply enriches, but makes it *longer*, significantly longer, so to speak. This is where the real power of cinema lies, and not in the "stars", not in the plots, not in the entertainment value" [Tarkovsky 2002]. The fact that modern cinema, movies intended both for the widest audience and auteur cinema, often do not satisfy such human needs and are unable to expand and concentrate human life experience, to rebuild the broken "connection of times" and to offer new positive, creative meanings, only indicates that cinema often does not fulfil its spiritual and cultural function, which is vital for individuals and for society.

Reflecting the past, recording the present (cinema as "captured time"), and often looking into the future, cinema offers reference points for cultural and political identity, builds a socially acceptable coordinate system, forms and transmits ideas about the cultural norm, which is reflected in political behaviour. Feature films play a key role in the socialization of a person, in the formation of his views on the world, his political and cultural preferences. Cinema can also act as a powerful and effective ideological and political instrument influencing mass consciousness, despite the fact that such an impact often has a delayed effect and may not be perceived as such by contemporaries.

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[2] Study: Russian youth prefer social networks and watching movies at home. *RIA Novosti: official website.* Retrieved April 04, 2024, from https://ria.ru/20171220/1511300915.html

Cinema optics promote ideas about historical memory, about the epoch as it is seen at the time of the film's creation. Analysis of shifts in the perception of historical realities records the memory of generations, and the environment present in the frame reflects a cross-section of rapidly changing everyday life, which is also a "talking document of the current times". Thus, in the 1960s, the interior attributes of a positive hero of Soviet cinema were shelves filled with books, a guitar and a portrait of Hemingway; in the 2000s, books disappear from the "model", socially approved interior, eloquently testifying to a change in cultural norms and, indirectly, political realities, or, more precisely, their perception by contemporaries. As a result, a special "cinematic reality" is formed — a type of virtual reality in which the viewer is included.

Cinema plays a significant role in the implementation of memory politics, in the interpretation of historical events, in the assessment of historical figures, including modern political leaders. Offering visible images of personified identifiers, cinema proves to be an effective tool of identity politics, which is promoted on behalf of the elites in power or in the interests of competing interest groups making political claims. In this sense, the key actors are "opinion groups" involved in the processes of promoting ideas and value systems on behalf of political actors, including the political and intellectual elites. The mechanisms for the formation of this identity politics agenda can be identified, for example, by analysing the thematic field of cinematographic production in the broad context of state policy in education and culture.

The possibilities and access points of non-state political actors depend largely on the models of financing and distributing film production, and the lobbying potential of certain interest groups and the possibilities of access to decision-making processes play a significant role here. This was noted by the authors of a pioneering study on interest groups and opinion groups in the USSR, conducted by two Canadian researchers in the 1970s, when the Soviet system was seen as a political monolith; the existence of "opinion groups" is indicated, in particular, by an analysis of the writers' community under the then dominant "culture of the word" [Skilling, Griffiths 1971]. It is obvious that the choice of topics and means of their artistic embodiment occurs in the process of political and cultural communications, in which customers and creators of artistic images are involved, and they often reveal ideological differences and contradictions, social and value divisions characteristic of divided societies. Censorship decisions reflect only the visible part of such contradictions. Cinema becomes an arena for the clash of identities and the "struggle for identity" of the audience to which it appeals.

At the same time, movies are usually perceived passively by people: unlike reading books, classical music, and even theatre with its obvious conventions, cinema offers the viewer ready-made samples that require almost no imagination and not always call for reflection. Sociocultural and ideological-political constructs, stereotypes, and forms of behaviour that a specific film production seeks to promote are often not recognized,

not reflected upon, and not critically comprehended. In many modern Russian films and TV series, the presence of hidden commercial advertising, the so-called "subliminal ads", when the characters drink tea and cook pasta of certain brands, drive cars of certain makes, etc is conspicuous. As a result, cinema becomes a powerful tool for introducing politically committed and economically motivated constructs, images, plots, and identity landmarks into the mass consciousness.

The image of a political leader in the mirror of historical memory

Models of political leadership and political decision-making are reflected in the best feature films about the outstanding political leaders of the 20th century — Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, John Kennedy, Mahatma Gandhi. At the same time, the images and actions of these political leaders are most expressively shown in complex, dramatic political situations that actually took place, when the choice of their country's path of development largely depended on each of them.

A dramatic political situation and the process of making a difficult and extremely important political decision are depicted in the film about Churchill, "Darkest Hour" (directed by J. Wright, 2017). In the military and political situation of the summer of 1940, when France is defeated by Nazi Germany, Churchill, who has recently become Prime Minister, faces a fateful choice. According to the idea of the filmmakers, Churchill's determination to confront Hitler and not negotiate under pressure from the "appeasers" — members of his own cabinet — appears after a meeting in the underground with ordinary Londoners who are unanimous in their readiness to fight if the fascists attack Great Britain. Churchill delivers his famous speech "We will fight on the beaches" in the House of Commons, after which the parliament gives him a standing ovation.

The film "De Gaulle" (directed by G. Le Beaumain, 2020; we refer to the feature film, and not the much weaker series that focuses on the twists and turns of the hero's personal life), tells about an even more difficult choice that General de Gaulle faced during the German offensive on France in 1940 and its occupation by Nazi Germany: at that moment, he was almost the only one who openly dared to call for a fight against the fascists, and this call formally violated military discipline — General de Gaulle's subordination to Pétain and Weygand. Thus, de Gaulle as a politician made a fateful political decision in a tragic personal and social situation.

The role of a political leader in the face of a real threat of a global thermonuclear war — the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 — is the subject of the film "Thirteen Days" (directed by R. Donaldson, 2000). Kennedy, who rightly feared the outbreak of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, made a last (and successful) attempt to reach an agreement with the USSR just three days before the planned strike. The president's desire to leave room for manoeuvre and separation of the conflicting parties in order

to prevent a global war is emphasized. Despite some historical inaccuracies, the film realistically shows the role of a political leader, the complex process of making political decisions, and, most importantly, the mortal danger to humanity posed by the inability of leaders of warring states to make mutual concessions and reach an agreement. Unfortunately, the current situation in the world demonstrates the inability or weak ability of the leadership of the United States to negotiate and make mutually acceptable concessions, hence the continuing relevance of films such as "Thirteen Days".

At crucial moments in history and socio-political development, an outstanding political leader personifies the national identity of millions of his fellow citizens, and the ability of the bearer of such an identity to take responsibility and make the right choice are the most important factors in making fateful political decisions. The acute public demand for a charismatic and trustworthy leader in various spheres of life is reflected in the massive production of fictionalized film versions of biographies of famous figures of the distant and recent past, the so-called biopics (i.e., biographical picture). Soviet film production focused on such pictures in the 1930s–1950s, when more than six dozen pictures with a single ideological focus appeared; in the best films, the poster-like and even stilted nature of the images was smoothed out by direction and acting. Interest in the genre continued to grow over the following decades, accompanied by increased attention to the personal aspects of the biographies and psychology of the main characters. In both domestic and foreign cinema, more and more characters with a "human face" from the spheres of culture, science, sports, and those who personified outstanding events in the history of the country appeared. In a long series of examples, "personificators" of national identity stand out.

In the last decade, the world has faced so many challenges that it invented the metaphor of permacrisis (permanent crisis) [Fadeeva 2023]. Not all representatives of the political elite are capable of formulating adequate responses to these challenges and acting as successors to Churchill, De Gaulle and other leaders of the past. Elements of an endless shocking show, the image of political freaks seem to have come to politics from the worst examples of absurd comedies. It is no coincidence that comedy series are popular, presenting exaggerated examples of the failure of the political class.

The situation in contemporary cinema can be characterized as *an expectation of a hero* who will differ from the current "gladiators of power". The image of a new cultural hero is called upon to embody and personify such values as a daring, constructive transformation of society; enlightenment, education and knowledge, positive meanings aimed at development. Social philosopher P. Berger regarded the ability to search for new meanings as the most important feature of a modern person: "We go through life, redrawing the calendar of our holy days, again and again erecting and destroying road posts — milestones of time on our way to constantly renewed goals" [Berger, Luckmann 1995]. It remains to be hoped that, in the current era of tectonic geopolitical transformations, attractive heroes will appear in new centres

of power, including thanks to cinematography — images reflecting creative social and spiritual experience — bearers of a sense of high responsibility to society.

The ups and downs of national identity in focus of the film industry: from national to transnational spaces

National history as the history of a people and its heroes has always been the focus of cinema. It is worth remembering that the history of Russian feature cinema began in 1911 with the film "Ponizovaya Volnitsa" ("Stenka Razin") and reached such heights as "Andrei Rublev" (directed by A.A. Tarkovsky, 1966).

The representation of national identity in the cinema of the last three decades is an integral part of memory politics, be it the affirmation of national statehood or the place of one's community in "grand" national historical narratives. Thus, the processes of devolution that gained momentum in Great Britain and the creation of the Scottish Parliament were supported by active work to create images of the heroic past in literature and cinema. The paradox was, however, that the open information space at the turn of the 21st century appropriated symbols that were created in the depths of popular culture using familiar stereotypes about this country and conveying them as national symbols. The box office hit "Braveheart" starring and directed by Mel Gibson contributed, according to a wide range of participants in the discussion that flared up around it, to strengthening the national spirit; however, it also revealed contradictions around the agenda of Scottish identity, "the difficulties in maintaining narratives about national identity in a globalizing world" [Edensor 2002]. Following the release of this Hollywood production, there was a noticeable increase in the flow of students wishing to study Scottish history (Ibid), and a flow of tourists seeking the same experiences as in the film at the scene of the events (it is no coincidence that the new monument to Wallace, erected in Stirling, is similar in appearance to Gibson's film hero, and this stimulated severe criticism). But we also witnessed, as stated then in the British press, an acute need in Scottish society for such a "vision of its history and culture that orients the nation in the 21st century"[3], a vision not limited to historical retrospectives and familiar stereotypes. In this logic historical plots about the internecine struggle of clans are replaced by plots of the struggle for independence, deliberately "correcting" the historical context to advance the current political agenda.

Accusations of "inaccurate adherence to the facts" inseparably accompany scripts based on historical events, despite the equally ritualistic reservations of their authors. The perception of film history as a real document about the past is a phenomenon widely

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[3] The Guardian. 18.05.1995.

ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ И СОЦИАЛЬНО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ РАЗМЕЖЕВАНИЯ

described in literature (the action shots of the storming of the Winter Palace in Sergey Eisenstein's feature film "October" dating back to 1927 were widely contemplated as documentary images). In modern cinema, this temptation remains, albeit in subtle forms: historical films are often perceived as real, living images of the past, while the director's political sympathies can contribute to a shift in political emphasis and interpretation. In the epochal film "The Wind That Shakes the Barley" (directed by K. Loach, 2006), dedicated to the struggle of the Irish against British rule in the early 1920s, which then ended with the establishment of British control over the new-born Irish Republic, the director pays great attention to issues of social reform. In the 1920s, they were not so vividly present on the political agenda, but they rose to their full height during the years of the "economic miracle", when the film was released. For this, the director received a fair amount of criticism; but this approach also shows the possibility of projecting the past into the present [Semenenko 2022].

The processes of identity hybridization, primarily related to global foreign cultural migration [Lolo 2013] or the discrediting of identity, have not escaped the attention of filmmakers. The film "Sami Blood" (directed by A. Kernell, 2016) tells the story of how the Sami people in the 1930s were brought up in the Swedish spirit, forbidden to follow customs and speak their own language. The fate of aboriginal children forcibly given to English families became one of the leitmotifs of the film "Australia" (directed by B. Luhrmann, 2008). The tragic consequences of the violent destruction of the traditional worldview and identity are shown in the New Zealand film "Once Were Warriors" (directed by L. Tamahori, 1994). Considered by both critics and the public to be the best work of New Zealand cinema, this movie dedicated to "the difficult adaptation of New Zealand culture to the modern identity of a Pacific nation" [Thompson 2003].

Cinema remains one of the effective instruments of "soft power" that shapes and promotes the image of a country, its heroes and people among foreign audiences. Different countries have developed variable models of direct or indirect influence of state structures on the process of film production and film distribution. The role of American cinema as an instrument of "soft power" has been studied in the most detail in the scientific literature, due not so much to the volume of film production as to the scale of its influence on the global audience [Artamonova 2020; Yusev 2017; Khalilov 2019; Pells 2012; Fattor 2014]. Meanwhile, the rapid rise of the economic role of the global East observed in recent decades has been accompanied by an equally rapid growth in the popularity of films produced in China, India, Iran and Turkey on a global scale. A particularly striking example is South Korean cinema, the most successful plots of which are now being repeated in American film production (it is enough to remember the TV series "The Good Doctor").

Spanish cinema strives to "dive deeply" into the contexts of national culture while maintaining comprehensibility and appeal to representatives of other traditions and

cultures. Every year, Spain promotes 24 film festivals abroad, purposefully projecting its images beyond national borders into the Spanish-speaking world. "Spanish cinema — the culture of Spain in miniature — represents a combination of people from different regions: Spanish cinema integrates Castilians (Almodóvar), Basques (Medem, Ulloa), people from Latin American countries (Chilean emigrant Amenábar), Catalans (Coixet, Luna), and Aragonese (Saura), each of whom leave their own mark on their works" [Kulikova 2023]. Cinema is a tool for the development of transnational cultural spaces — Hispanidad and the Lusofone World. In 1996, at the Ibero-American Summit, a decision was made to create Ibermedia, an Ibero-American audiovisual space, to stimulate joint film production among Latin American countries (such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Venezuela), Spain and Portugal [Kulikova 2023]. Film production is seen as an important "bond" of the Ibero-American world.

The world leader in the number of films produced (more than 1,500 films are made annually) and the size of the audience (about 2 billion tickets have been sold) is India [Naumov 2018]. Bollywood has become part of the country's national brand. The name is usually used to refer to all modern Indian cinema, but in reality it is a collective name for film studios and films produced in Mumbai in the Hindi language. In addition to Bollywood, there are other film studios in India that are not inferior in terms of the number of films produced and box office receipts (for example, Kollywood, based in the state of Tamil Nadu and making films in Tamil, or Tollywood, with its centre in the state of Andhra Pradesh, producing films in Telugu). Films in Tamil are primarily oriented towards Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and Fiji; films in Bengali are especially popular in neighbouring Bangladesh; the target audience for Punjabi language films is quite logically located in Pakistan. The linguistic aspect thus determines the geography of Indian cultural influence via film production in South Asia [Maini 2016]. By projecting Indian images beyond national borders, cinema contributes to the construction of a new centre of power in Asia.

Cinema becomes an effective tool for promoting the idea of the Great Turan as an ideological and political basis for initiating the integration processes of Turkic-speaking countries and peoples, a project inspired by Turkey. Sociologists record the "boom of Turkish soap operas" as a special socio-cultural phenomenon. One of the symbols of Turkey — "The Magnificent Century" — is a historical drama about the heyday of the Ottoman Empire under Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. Many films and series develop the message about the Turkic origin of the peoples of Central Asia; this plot is especially relevant in Turkmenistan. The model is "One nation, two states" (Turkish: İki devlet, bir millet), with the Turkmens acting as the pranation [Romanova, Chernichkin 2024]. Drawing the boundaries of the Turkic

world, a common civilizational space is formed across the borders of Turkic-speaking states, and cinema takes on the role of one of the symbolic resources of this space, claiming to represent a common identity and, in the long term, an emerging centre of power within these borders.

Representation of civilizational identity

Civilizational identity, understood as the identification or correlation of an individual, social or ethnic group, nation with a particular civilization — a stable, long-standing supranational and supraethnic community of people and states in a certain territory, which preserves and reproduces its integrity, its special cultural norms, religion, values, traditions and social practices that differ from other civilizations [Semenenko 2023; 2024], plays an increasingly significant role in the modern world. In the context of global instability and rapid changes in all areas of public life, civilization remains a stable entity, and self-identification with it allows an individual or social group to maintain stable value guidelines and continuity in development [Huntington 1996; Lubsky 2015; Semenenko 2023].

Tracing how civilizational identity is reflected and presented in cinema is a large-scale and multifaceted task that requires special, extensive and in-depth research. Within the framework of this article, we can only provide characteristic examples of how civilizational identity is constructed and presented in modern cinema. At the same time, it is important to note a circumstance that is not obvious at first glance, but historically logical: Western European civilizational identity is presented in European cinema, which is extremely rich in content and forms, in a universalistic, civilizing dimension, as the embodiment of civilization "in general". In particular, this was for decades the basis for the popular genre of the Western, one that crosses out all modern norms of Western political correctness.

National identity has generally been at the forefront of cinema in the past century. In Western Europe, the nation state has been the main subject and key political institution for centuries; and today, at the level of the European Union, European identity is "widespread, but less obvious and distinct than national identity, and is seen more as a complement to it than as an alternative" [Semenenko 2017]. Films that embody the phenomenon of "European cinema" draw primarily from classical literary sources: one can recall the series of screen adaptations of English classics — from the novels of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens (the leaders of literary preferences among the British, according to numerous surveys) to Joan Rowling, or the French screen adaptations of the works of Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and Honoré de Balzac. Such screen adaptations claimed to represent "civilizational" examples, albeit with a national flavour. However, their perception at the generational level can differ significantly, since cinema aimed at the mass audience strives (though

not always successfully) to respond to the needs of different target audiences simultaneously.

At the turn of the century, the national context began to lose its recognizable features; it was supplanted by the value systems of a multicultural society. The focus shifted to life in different cultures and their "soft" conflict ("East is East", directed by D. O'Donnell, 1999). The growing number of screen adaptations of the same English classics in a politically correct multicultural vein has come under scrutiny, and casting has become a political issue. The experience of "soft" satirical screen adaptations with multicultural casting, such as "The History of David Copperfield" (directed by A. Ianucci, 2019), where the English national character itself becomes a "player" in the theatre of the absurd, signals new approaches in the multicultural discourse.

Such well-known feature films, classics of Western European and world cinema and representing European social realities, as "The Damned" by the Italian director Lucchino Visconti, "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" by the Spanish director Luis Buñuel or "Europa" by the Danish director Lars von Trier, focus not so much on the European civilizational identity, but on the contradictions within Western European civilization itself and the societies that make it up. As a result, European identity in these and many other films remains in the background or is treated as the object of critical reflection.

On the contrary, the American national-civilizational identity with its peculiarities and characteristic features is explicitly or implicitly presented in many American-produced films, since it is the United States that has, throughout its history, claimed socio-political and cultural exclusivity and at the same time carried out first regional and then global expansion, characteristic of civilizational communities [Lerner 1992]. In many American films, especially those created in the 1980s — 2010s, there is a tendency to present the United States as a country saving the world from the invasion of various (including alien) "barbarians", and American identity and American popular culture are offered and often directly promoted as a model for other countries and civilizations.

In Soviet and partly Russian cinema, the problems of the complex and contradictory formation of Russian civilizational identity are clearly present in long-standing classics, such as "Alexander Nevsky" by Sergey Eisenstein, the epic film "War and Peace" by Sergey Bondarchuk — a screen adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's novel — and his "The Fate of a Man" based on the story by Mikhail Sholokhov, and, especially, "Andrey Rublev" by Andrey Tarkovsky. At the same time, in post-Soviet Russian cinema, the origins and features of Russian civilizational identity have received very scarce attention (with rare exceptions dealing with screen adaptations of literary classics, for example, Dostoevsky's novel "The Idiot" directed by Vladimir Bortko). And this despite the fact that these issues are widely discussed in public and occupy

a conspicuous place on the political agenda. Obviously the situation in cinema reflects both with the crisis of post-Soviet identity and the processes of commercialization and a certain degradation of Russian cinema. Large and profound topics are fragmented into smaller and more specific ones, while the desire for artistic generalization and understanding of history and modernity is lacking. A positive image of Russian reality is a relatively rare phenomenon for classic Russian literature, and this perception of critical realism has naturally migrated to cinema. The revival of the humanistic traditions of Russian cinema and its ability to express not momentary, opportunistic or "black", but truly urgent and important moods and images for Russia and its citizens is on the cultural agenda.

At the turn of the new millennium, in connection with the rise of non-Western civilizations, primarily China and India, the processes of growing civilizational self-awareness and strengthening the role of civilizational identity were reflected in Chinese and Indian cinema. Most films that touch on various aspects and problems of civilizational identity refer to the ancient or recent history of China and India. In Chinese cinema, examples of this kind include the films "Fearless" (directed by R. Yu, 2006) and "The Battle of Red Cliff" (directed by J. Wu, 2008–2009). The first of these films shows the story of martial arts master Huo Yuanjia during the decline and crisis of the Qing Empire in the early 20th century, with attention focused on the fact that many Chinese at that time literally groveled before the West, and foreign culture separated the Chinese people and Chinese civilization. At the same time, the movie "Fearless" aims to demonstrate the unbending spirit of the main character, who confronts internal and external opponents and asserts the primacy of Chinese culture over foreign culture almost single-handedly. The second film, based on the historical novel "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", tells about one of the greatest battles of the Three Kingdoms era in ancient China; the film itself is a kind of historical epic, which shows the formation of a single state and a single civilization in China.

In Indian cinema, the formation of the Indian civilization and Indian civilizational identity is the main subject of the historical series "Porus" (directed by S.K. Tewari, 2018). The plot is built around attempts to unite numerous Indian principalities in order to resist the conquest of India by the troops of Alexander the Great. It would seem that an appeal to such ancient history has no direct relation to the modern situation associated with Indian civilizational identity, but this is not the case. The complexity and numerous obstacles on the way to overcoming the dominance of local and tribal identity for the sake of forming a common civilizational identity to repel conquerors from the West, as well as the distinctive features of Indian culture and civilization (Bharat) are shown very expressively here. The series was filmed relatively recently, in 2018, and is directly related to contemporary challenges of the development of a common Indian civilization, by overcoming the dominance of local and caste identities that persists in modern India.

The appeal to identity as a civilizational choice is vividly reflected in the joint British-Indian production "Gandhi" (directed by A. Attenborough, 1982). Based on the biography of the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi, the film highlights the turning points in the life of the leader of the people fighting for national independence. In this struggle, it is the appeal to the civilizational sources of identity and the ideas of non-violence that proves to be the decisive factor in affirming the meaning of life for the individual and for the political future of the country.

It is no coincidence that Chinese and Indian films, in which civilizational identity and the problems of its formation are clearly expressed, have appeared in the first decades of the 21st century, when the rise of Chinese and Indian civilizations became obvious, and the need for a clearer civilizational self-awareness arose. At the same time, the formation and manifestation of civilizational identity reflected in Chinese and Indian cinema are also stimulated by the general change in the world order in the direction of polycentrism and interaction of different civilizations on new foundations.

The present is in the past, the past is in the future: cinema in the political picture of a turbulent world

Attempts to outline the horizons of the political future can be seen in the plots that touch upon the foundations of social structure in Italian cinema, reputedly the "most political" national cinema. In the 1950s, the country was rising from the ruins of World War II, its political class and intellectual elite sought to distance itself from the fascist past, and cinema played a major role in reconciling Italian society with country's difficult past. The events of the war were reinterpreted through the history of the anti-fascist Resistance movement ("Rome, Open City", directed by R. Rossellini, 1945; "The Seven Brothers of Hearts", directed by G. Puccini, 1968) and through the tragedy of those who fought on the side of Nazi Germany ("They Marched to the East", directed by G. De Santis, D. Vasiliev, 1964; the literal translation of the film's title is "The Italians Are Brave Fellows"). The classic films about the country's social problems in the neorealist style, released in the two post-war decades, created an indisputable reputation for "progressive" cinema in Italy; in the constellation of great directors, the majority (though not all) shared leftist views.

The twists and turns of Italian politics in the post-war decades — the penetration of the mafia and American intelligence services into the structures of the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), which had been "unsinkable" for almost half a century, on the one hand, and the erosion of the social base and mass support of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), on the other — are the subject of dozens of films of the next generation.

The perspectives on the same events have changed noticeably over time. A watershed in the political history of modern Italy, an event that determined the

trajectory of political development at the turn of the century, was the kidnapping of the chairman of the Christian Democratic Party and former Prime Minister Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades and his murder after 55 days of imprisonment. Eight feature films have been made to date about this Italian politician, his tragic death on May 9, 1978, and the investigation of the "Moro affair", many using documentary film techniques and materials. Italian critics see such a long list as evidence of "the responsibility of a generation for terrorism and for its rejection" and as a mechanism for the formation of collective memory of the "leaden" years of political instability and rampant crime [Greenburg Gilliom 2016] in an effort to turn the page on a difficult past.

Several years after these epochal events, which divided the political time in Italy into "before" and "after" the tragedy, the film "The Moro Affair" (directed by G. Ferrara, 1986) was released, starring the famous actor (and member of the PCI) G.M. Volonte. The film reproduces the chronicle of events, but the director also introduced fictional scenes and deviated in a number of episodes from the facts known at the time in order to emphasize the severity of the political confrontation and the scale of the human tragedy. In the film of the next historical period, filmed a quarter of a century later, after the end of the history of the First Republic and the disappearance from the political arena of its main protagonists — the CDP and the PCI — the focus is on the psychology of terrorism and the inner world of the executioners and the victim. The title "Bonjour, nuit" (directed by M. Bellocchio, 2003) clearly indicates the "beginning of the end" of the trajectory of political dialogue between opposing party forces, which was interrupted by the death of an authoritative Italian politician, and of the Italy in which ideological and political self-identification was a must for a significant part of its citizens. The most recent film, "Aldo Moro — The Professor" (or "Aldo Moro — The Teacher" in the Italian version, as the word "professore" has two meanings in Italian), was released in 2018 (directed by F. Micciche) and addresses a political message to the younger generation about responsibility for oneself and for one's choices. The politician is shown here in the guise of a university teacher, an activity that Moro loved and considered very important, and one to which the students reciprocated.

The tendency of external "depoliticization of the political" while maintaining the political message inherent in the best examples of Italian cinema and literature, can be traced back to the seventies in such widely known films as "Amarcord" (directed by F. Fellini, 1973), a largely autobiographical film in which anti-fascist motives are muted, but still resonate. "Tea with Mussolini" (directed by F. Zeffirelli, 1999) debunks the speculation about a "soft" dictatorship. The twists and turns of the museum project "the history of fascism", in the birthplace of the Duce in the vicinity of the city of Forlì, which was shelved (the museum was to occupy the building of the headquarters of the fascist party) and which is now to be promoted in the city of Salò on the shores of Lake Garda, where the fascist government of the

Italian Social Republic sat, testify to the fact that in the historical memory of post-war generations this page has not yet been turned. Monuments from the fascist era remain part of the landscape of the cities and towns of this "museum country", and busts of Mussolini can be bought in souvenir shops. In the film "I'm Back" (directed by L. Miniero, 2018), the fascist past and its contemporary perception are presented as a farce. This experience fits into the context of a fragmented politics of memory associated with the implicit need to rethink the legacy of Italy's fascist decades, to reflect on its influence on mass consciousness and on worldviews of post-war generations.

The controversy surrounding significant events in American history touches on virtually every aspect of American society and contemporary American culture. The assessments of key events are being challenged in the spirit of the ideologies put forward by the BLM movement and supported by radical liberals in debates around the essence, specificity, past and future of the American experience. Currently, the concept of the frontier is falling victim to the prevailing "cancel culture" in the United States.

Naturally, the adherents of absurd political correctness are trying to "bring order" to cinematography as well. One of the victims is the famous film "Gone with the Wind" (directed by V. Fleming), released in 1939. It was removed from the HBO Max service due to the "romanticization of racism"[4]. As Russian film critic A. Shpagin notes, "the fight against the harmonious patterns of the past testifies to the deep disharmony of the present, to the primitivization of relations. This will lead to major social shifts, although those who prohibit think otherwise"[5].

Of great interest for the representation of national and civilizational values are the images of "one's own" culture and history in the mirrors of "foreign" art. For Russia, American cinema, which was especially rich in the image of the enemy during the Cold War [Ryabov 2011], is rightly considered as such a "mirror of stereotypes", for the USA — similarly with the opposite sign, with a solid selection of literature on the topic (see, for example, Shaw, 2007). No doubt, "the interpretation of media texts is changeable and often subject to fluctuations in the courses of political regimes" [Fedorov 2013]. The image of Russia on Western screens is represented by diverse examples, with a number of films from the war years, when attempts were made to introduce the audience to an incomprehensible but worthy ally ("Days of Glory", directed by J. Tourneur, 1944), through the period of the Cold War into the 2010s. All in all, according to the calculations of a Russian researcher, this amounts to more than 800 titles of feature films

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[4] The day after Gone With the Wind was banned by HBO, its popularity on Amazon skyrocketed to the top of the sales charts.

[5] Strange Struggle. Film Expert Assesses Gone With the Wind Ban. Retrieved August 04, 2024, from https://radiosputnik.ru/20200610/1572771954.html

alone, including more than 200 screen adaptations of Russian classics. But the presentation of Russia as "alien to Western civilization" remains an integral characteristic of Western cinema (Ibid).

The literature on the image of Russia in Western cinema unexpectedly reveals that social deviations attributed to Russia as the "Other" — the erosion and deconstruction of family values or the "defeminization of women" [Ryabov 2011] — are as of today a distorted reflection of the inherent reality where these trends are now explicitly manifested.

Cross-cultural (In films representing different national cinematographic schools) and cross-temporal (at different stages of the formation of a national school) analysis in interpretations of the most important events of World War II is also indicative in this sense. Many films are dedicated to the Battle of Stalingrad as a turning point of the war, including the German film "Stalingrad" (1993) and the American "Enemy at the Gates" (2001). Russian interpretations include the Soviet film "Hot Snow" based on the novel of the same name by Yuri Bondarev in 1972, and the Russian film "Stalingrad" released in 2013 — on the novel "Life and Fate" by Victor Grossman. A penetration into the depth of human relations in the first case is supported by modest technical capabilities of film production in the early 1970s. The second has a star-studded international team, a colossal budget, stunning special effects, and huge box office receipts in Russia. The results of the audience voting speak for themselves: "Hot Snow" receives high ratings on Russian resources: 8.1 on Kinopoisk, 9.9 on Kinoteatr-Ru, while Bondarchuk's "Stalingrad" gets 5.7 and 4.4 respectively.

One of the authors of this paper had the chance to observe the reaction of first-year students while watching the film "Fate of a Man". The 1959 film is black and white, without any external effects and no one had ever advised students to watch it before — neither teachers nor parents. And the "digital" generation, overfed with blockbusters and sometimes speaking in slang incomprehensible to the uninitiated, watches it with tears in their eyes: the film speaks about the most important things in life — about love, fortitude, honour, and loyalty. In such a mass art form, a convincing embodiment of a person's inner world in combination with archetypal, recognizable characteristics of identity has determined and will determine the longevity of art.

Conclusions

The attention of political science to non-political phenomena of public life is still fragmentary, while these phenomena themselves are rapidly becoming politicized. Before our eyes, social and political time is becoming more compressed; we do not always have time to comprehend or even distinguish individual events within this flow.

But as time passes, the imprint of "fluid reality" manifests itself in figurative form in poetry, painting, and cinema.

Contemporary feature cinematography provides extensive material for studying the trends of political development and its perception by contemporaries. Sensitively, although not always adequately, cinema reflects the pressing or maturing problems of man and society, in particular, the crisis of culture, the degradation of political leadership, the emergence of new forms of social alienation and the search for pathways to overcome it. Cinema plays an important role in the formation of social identity and its political projections, in the transmission of values and cultural norms. Such an impact does not always correspond to the plans and intentions of its creators and patrons; it can also have a delayed effect, transforming the priorities of identity politics in accordance with public demand and contributing to their rethinking in relation to the past (cinema as a document of history) and the future (cinema as an image of what is to come).

For a new hero, a person of action and reflection, to emerge in the cultural space, new meanings and development goals have to be publicly acclaimed. In this regard, Russian cinema can gain from a turn to its own history and to other cultural experiences, and envisage positive guidelines for development (not limited to new technologies). The value of the individual spiritual and moral world is at stake in consumer society, and resisting attempts at dehumanization and depersonalization is a vital challenge. Cinema, willingly or unwillingly, will remain an arena for the clash of different, sometimes opposing moral and cultural norms, ideas and political preferences. For political analysis, it remains an underestimated source of reflection on the worldviews, values and identities of succeeding generations.

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