

Magdalena Lejman

**SHAPING THE IMAGE OF SOVIET COMMUNITY
IN FICTION FILM OF THE RSFSR (1932-1956)**

Thesis Supervisor: dr hab. Jakub Sadowski

Abstract

The thesis analyses evolution of the image of the Soviet community pictured by fiction film on the territory of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) in the period of 1932-1956. The main focus of the research paper is the shape, attributes and role of the community specific for different stages of its evolution. The USSR social and national policy, which had a major impact on the cinematic production at that time by means of censorship and general atmosphere created in the artistic circles, serves as the point of reference.

To retain unity and cohesion of the Soviet community, although not implemented by a separate political programme, was probably the biggest challenge for the Soviet authorities. The multi-ethnicity and some considerable ideological and economic changes in social life (nationalisation, industrialisation, and collectivisation) had to be dealt with. Giving an opportunity of transforming tedious language of political directives into lively, straightforward images that resembled real life, cinema was an ideal tool for indoctrination.

Considered in the USSR “the most important of all arts”, cinema was given a special didactic role by the Soviet authorities. Due to its massive reception (during collective film shows) and capability of reaching any audience (including illiterates), it was considered more an agitation and propaganda instrument than an area of artistic creativity. Film stories, written in the right way, would evoke a specific vision of the country in the public consciousness, develop invisible ties with the rest of the society, and visualise aims and threats that would integrate the community. Not only was film an attractive entertainment, but also a mean of social mobilisation.

The analysis starts with presenting the originality of Lenin’s national programme that, to a large extent, was the reason of the Bolsheviks’ success in 1917, when in the crucial time it assured the necessary support of various ethnic group of the Empire for their political programme. The political context of social transformations taking place in the 30s-50s (from

the so-called “great socialistic offensive”, to centralisation and unification of the country’s social and political life, to the Great Patriotic War, to post-war tensions in relations with the West and the so-called antic cosmopolitan campaign) serves as an introduction to the further analysis of the films.

The research section of the thesis investigates the collected film material in a chronological order, in relation to the most important challenges of socio-political life of the USSR in the analysed period. Each chapter is preceded by a description of the Soviet cinematography presenting main themes and its prevailing attitudes at a given time. The subsequent sections of the analysis end with short summaries highlighting the most important changes in self-perception of the community.

Cinematography of the thirties (prior to the Great Patriotic War, starting in 1941) has been divided into three parts. The first one is dedicated to films produced at the beginning of the decade, dominated by the industrialisation imperative. The work enthusiasm and socialistic competitiveness, particularly evident in the Soviet music comedy, are the themes discussed separately. The last part of the chapter concerns the motif of internal and external threat that pervaded the Soviet cinema at the end of the 1930s.

The period of the Great Patriotic War, in view of its specificity related to both, motifs and construction of a film story, has been analysed in a separate chapter. The film material from 1942-1945 was divided into two sub-sections: first one covers films of the initial phase of the war, when cinema becomes the mean of social mobilisation against the invaders, the other one describes the film production after the breakthrough at Stalingrad, when cinema starts to emanate a conviction of the forthcoming victory.

The final section of the thesis is dedicated to the cinematography of the post-war period. It begins with an analysis of the role that the so-called antic cosmopolitan campaign, growing hostility towards the West and the simultaneous applause for everything that is Russian, plays in the process of the changing film image of the Soviet community. What follows in this chapter is a portrayal of the period between Stalin’s death and 1956, when at the 20th Party Convention, the personality cult was condemned, and an analysis of the vision of a community without a leader, finding itself at the edge of political and cultural thaw.

The research focuses on the elements of the film story which show the actual relations between an individual and the collective, define a hero’s tasks and status within the pursuit of collective aims. Central for the analysis is the idea of motherland, integrating all the inhabitants of the USSR, evolving – in parallel with the community – from the specific ideological concept to a territory with clearly defined borders and ethnic centre.

The research, covering 25 years in total – from the first 5-year plan to the initial ideological reassessments after the death of Stalin – gives an opportunity to observe a long-term transformation of the Soviet community. Offering no clear political declarations, it evolves from a class which proclaims slogans of international solidarity to a nation which is evidently national and chauvinistic in character.