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Eradication of the National Element in Ukrainian Cinema in the 1960s–1970s

**Zwalczanie elementów narodowościowych w kinematografii ukraińskiej
w latach 60. i 70. XX wieku**

• **Abstrakt** •

W niniejszym artykule autorka analizuje zwalczanie elementów narodowościowych w ukraińskiej kinematografii w latach 60. i 70. XX wieku. Bada rolę i miejsce problematyki narodowo-patriotycznej w ukraińskim kinie, ukazuje ideologiczne zniewolenie filmowców, eksploruje warunki kreatywnej samorealizacji w warunkach Ukraińskiej SRR oraz analizuje wpływ czynników społecznych i politycznych na dziedzinę kultury ukraińskiego narodu w założonym okresie. Przedstawiciele ukraińskiej kinematografii od zawsze starali się przedstawiać narodowościowe cechy swej własnej nacji, ale w analizowanym czasie, ze względu na panującą cenzurę, ukraińskie kino zaczęło być zakazywane. Głównym powodem tego stanu rzeczy była walka z „ukraińskim burżuazyjnym nacjonalizmem”. Warunkiem wystarczającym dla podniesienia takiego zarzutu wobec filmu było nagranie go w ukraińskiej wersji językowej lub przedstawienie ukraińskich motywów. Do cech charakterystycznych ukraińskiej kinematografii z lat 60. i 70. XX wieku należą: podporządkowanie scentralizowanemu sowieckiemu systemowi rządowo-administracyjnemu, całkowite podporząd-

• **Abstract** •

In this article the author studies the elimination of the national element in the Ukrainian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. The author explores the role and place of national-patriotic issues in Ukrainian cinematography, shows the ideological enslavement of filmmakers, studies the conditions of creative self-realization in the Ukrainian SSR, and analyses the influence of social and political factors on the cultural sphere of Ukrainian people in the outlined period. The representatives of Ukrainian cinema has always tried to popularize national features of their own people, but in the specified period, for censorship reasons, Ukrainian cinema began to be prohibited. The main reason is the struggle with the so-called “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism”. For such an accusation it was enough to voice any film in Ukrainian and to fill its content with Ukrainian subjects. The characteristic features of Ukrainian cinematography of the 1960s – the early 1970s are as follows: subordination to the Soviet centralized command-administrative system, total control of the CPSU – CPU, russification, denationalization, persecution of all Ukrainian values

kowanie wobec KPU i KPZR, rusyfikacja, denacjonalizacja oraz zwalczanie wszystkich wartości ukraińskich pod pretekstem tworzenia zunifikowanego narodu sowieckiego.

Słowa kluczowe: kinematografia ukraińska, inteligencja twórcza, motywy narodowe, idea narodowa, narodowa samoświadomość, cenzura ideologiczna, represje, reżim totalitarny, ukraińskie środowisko etniczne, polityka językowa, rusyfikacja

under the pretext of forming a united Soviet nation.

Keywords: Ukrainian cinematography, creative intellectuals, national motives, national idea, national self-awareness, ideological censorship, persecution, totalitarian regime, Ukrainian ethnic environment, language policy, russification

Formulation of Scientific Problem and its Significance

Cinematography has always played a prominent role in preserving national identity, the formation of spiritual and aesthetic values of the Ukrainian people. However, during the 1960s – the beginnings of 1970s the Soviet government turned the cinema into a tool of propaganda of the Communist Party, which sought to eliminate all national differences in the Ukrainian SSR. In the confrontation between the Soviet leadership, which cultivated the idea of creating a new “united Soviet people” and Ukrainians who advocated for the preservation of their own national identity, the linguistic question was brought about. The state policy was aimed at russification, denationalization of Ukrainian culture and the life of Ukrainians as a whole. Ukrainian cinema, which qualified as a provincial and politically bribed, felt a tough system of control and imposition of the ideological dictate of the CPSU – KPU, the prohibition of national motives in the works of Ukrainian artists. But despite all the obstacles, the creative intelligentsia of Ukraine managed to reflect the national color of the Ukrainian people in its cinematic heritage and thus strengthened the desire of Ukrainians to fight for the preservation of their own national identity.

With the achievement of Ukraine’s independence, favorable conditions were created for the free study of the Soviet past of the Ukrainian people, rethinking their own history and culture. Therefore, the question of a comprehensive study of the prohibition of national motifs in the Ukrainian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s is extremely relevant and requires a special approach to its study. This problem today has a special significance in terms of preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the past for the development of modern Ukraine.

Research Analysis

The question of the position of the Ukrainian cinema of the second half of the twentieth century is partially covered in the writings of such authors as Vitali Vovk (2008), Lyubov Krupnik (2002), Ivan Romanyuk (2004), Natalia Khomenko (2006), Marharyta Chernenko (2011), and others. In the scientific field, only some aspects of the mentioned topic were covered, in particular, the satisfaction of the cultural needs of the urban population of Ukraine, the influence of the processes of destalinization on the consciousness of Ukrainians and the moral values of the Soviet society, studying the material and spiritual culture of the Ukrainian people. However, in the scientific literature, the subject under study remains insufficiently studied. This gives us the opportunity to continue working in this promising direction.

The Aim of the Article

Thus, we focus on the study of the prohibition of national motifs in Ukrainian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, the clarification of the place and role of national-patriotic issues in Ukrainian cinema, the demonstration of ideological enslavement of cinema-makers, the study of the conditions of creative self-realization in the Ukrainian SSR, and analysis of the influence of socio-political and social factors on the cultural sphere of the Ukrainian people in the determined period.

The Main Material and Justification of Study Results

At that time, national-cultural issues became part of the activities of such political figures as P. Shelest and V. Shcherbytsky (First Secretaries of the Central Committee of the CPU, 1963–1972 and 1972–1989 respectively). P. Shelest has repeatedly shown persistence in the development of the socio-cultural sphere of Ukraine and found neither moral justification nor practical justification in the ideologization or russification of the cultural life of Ukrainians, either, but this was one of the reasons for his removal from office (Korol, 2001). P. Shelest's successor – V. Shcherbytsky held anti-Ukrainian positions and did not oppose centralized control over the ideological situation and russification in the Ukrainian SSR.

Over this period, Ukrainian national culture has been subjected to devastating destruction, political repressions have sharply increased, political brutal pressure

on the creative intelligentsia has been intensified, and everything Ukrainian has been deliberately destroyed.

Ukrainian cinema was subjected to considerable harassment by the Soviet authorities. During the 1960s–1970s in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the number of Russian-language cinema increased, which in practice meant intensifying the russification of spectators, giving them love for art in a “common language”. Many films in the state language of the USSR were filmed by Ukrainian film studios (Knish, 1970). Beginning with the 1960s at Kiev Film Studio named after O. Dovzhenko from the two dozens films that were annually released, only two or three were filmed in Ukrainian, and the Odessa Film Studio named after O. Dovzhenko filmed all the films in Russian only (Slyusarenko et al., 2002). In addition, if for scriptwriters who worked at the Moscow studio there were four instances for films’ approval, then for the authors from Ukraine there were six of them, namely: the Kiev studio, the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR, the Artistic Council, the Main Committee of Feature Films, the USSR Ministry of Cinematography and the Artistic Council of the Union Ministry (Yurchenko, 1999). It should also be emphasized that cinema tickets were most often in Russian, and this became one of the almost imperceptible components in the overall system of assimilation of Ukrainians (Izhakevych, 1976). The main reason for the increased russification and denationalization of Ukrainian cinema was that the cinema in Ukraine at that time was directed by the Ministry of Culture of the USSR, who gave instructions not only on creative and organizational issues, but also on ideological ones. In fact, the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR was completely dependent on the Ministry of Culture of the USSR, and therefore constantly reported to it on the above issues.

There were instances when film studios were not allowed to release the films that were already filmed, if their authors were in opposition to the authorities. Soviet films were to be subordinated solely to the political and ideological interests of the state and could not cause ambiguity or deal with problems atypical for the Soviet life. All this contributed to the emergence of colorless, gray and non-emotional films, which were inadequate for the interests of many contemporary viewers, but they were always materially encouraged and given a more favorable environment than the others. In the cinema for such artistic products the limit of royalties was set – maximum 40 thousand rubles (Paradzhanov, 1994). In addition, the Soviet authorities tried to “tame” the artists through various methods, put them on the service of ideological principles of the CPSU–CPU, in particular, for the creation of ideologically correct cinematic works, awarded various honors, memorable medals, certificates. In parallel with awarding and granting of various

privileges, for those artists who followed party instructions, the authorities subjected dissenters to various harassment and repression (Malyuta, 2004).

It should also be emphasized that the financing of Ukrainian film studios was significantly lower in comparison to Russian film studios. For example, for the production of feature film for the film studio named after O. Dovzhenko they allocated 400 thousand rubles, and for “Mosfilm” – for the same movie – 550 thousand rubles (Krupnik, 2002), so the number of pictures created at the “Mosfilm” was constantly increasing. It should be noted that the creative atmosphere in the center was much more favorable. This situation stimulated the emergence of cinema schools in Russia, which were often created by people from Ukraine, which, in its turn, intensified the outflow of the best creative forces from the Ukrainian land. This tendency is reflected in the letter of the director C. Paradzhanov addressed to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPU F. Ovcharenko: “You know how many talented directors – from Chukhray and Bondarchuk to Alov and Naumov have left in recent years from Ukrainian cinema for other studios. The threat of such phenomena is now facing the younger generation of filmmakers in Ukraine. This should lead to deep anxiety of people who are responsible for the state of Ukrainian culture” (Paradzhanov, 1994). However, the Soviet system was not interested in the birth of talented national artistic centers in Ukraine.

The intensive policy of “fusion of nations” in the USSR, propaganda of Russian culture, assimilation of Ukrainians, and the prohibition of national motifs in the works of artists led to the fact that Ukrainian cinema was abroad perceived as Soviet and associated with the ruling Russians. The awards that Ukrainians gained at international festivals and competitions, as well as authority and fame, were addressed to the Soviet Union, which was often called just Russia abroad (Krupnik, 2002). In his diary, the Chairman of the State Committee on Cinematography of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR S. Ivanov described how he went in 1965 to the International Festival in the Argentinian town of Mar del Plata to represent a film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, along with actors L. Kadochnikova and I. Mykolaychuk. He noted: “We represented at the festival the Soviet Union, and we were not the Ukrainian, but the Soviet delegation. I was not offended by the words of greetings addressed to the Soviet Union (the crowd of Mar del Plata cried: ‘Viva Mosca’, ‘Viva Soviet Union’)... We were just representatives of a great people and they (the Argentinians) did not suspect the subtleties of relations within the two nations” (Shevchenko, 1999).

Another obstacle to the development of Ukrainian cinema was the fact that the national cinema production had to be approbated in Moscow, and only then was its future destiny determined. A typical example is the history of Ukrainian

poetic film *White Bird with a Black Sign* by Y. Illenko, which depicts the history of the resistance of the Ukrainian national forces against the communist regime after the Second World War. Due to national motives, this film was banned at the XXIV Congress of the Central Committee of the CPU, and only in 1972, having won the first prize at the 7th All-Union Film Festival in Moscow, it was released. However, the confrontation between the artist and the political apparatus continued – Y. Illenko and his films were treated with special caution.

Another prominent camera work of the film director was the well-known film under the screenplay of I. Drach *The Well for the Thirsty*, which the party leadership called “ideologically false”. On January 29, 1966, after discussing at a meeting of the artistic council and repeated remaking in the process of filming, the film was recognized as politically and artistically imperfect and unacceptable for production (Bryukhovetska, 2006). This was stated in the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine *On Certain Serious Flaws in the Production of Films at the Kyiv Studios named after O. P. Dovzhenko* dated June 30, 1966 (Lytvyn, 2006). Based on the above, the film was removed from the cinema and only in 1988 it was released on the screens.

Another famous screenwriter, world-class film director S. Paradzhanov felt the prohibition of national motifs on his creative path. During the premiere of his film *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (September 5, 1963) in the cinema “Ukraine” in Kyiv, a political protest of the intelligentsia broke out against the arrests of the figures of Ukrainian culture, initiated by I. Dzyuba, V. Stus, V. Chornovil, S. Paradzhanov, and others (Chernenko, 2011). Although the then authorities suppressed the decisive outcry of the patriotic forces, the given picture became history not only as the personification of identity, customs and national culture of the Ukrainian people, but also as a significant factor in the struggle for Ukrainian independence. Disagreeing with the political oppression of Ukrainian cinema in 1969, S. Paradzhanov wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Central Committee on the ideology of the CPU F. Ovcharenko, in which he emphasized: “I do not complain about anything and I do not ask for anything. I just want to know the answer: can’t the Ukrainian Soviet state, in the second half of the century, afford to allow a film director who proved his professional level and the creative scale recognized by the entire cinematic world to make films that could enrich the art of the Ukrainian people” (Paradzhanov, 1994).

But despite Parajanov’s repeated appeals to the representatives of the Soviet authorities, his eponymous script based on the novel by M. Kotsyubinsky *Intermezzo*, which raised the national question of Ukrainians, did not get permission for staging. According to the memorandum note of the Communist Party Central

Committee, the script was reworked twice and still it was recognized as being contrary to the Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPU *On the Further Development and Improvement of Cinema in Ukraine* of 05.01.1971 and distorting the sound of the short story by M. Kotsiubinsky (*The Memorandum of the Central Committee of the CPU...*).

S. Parajanov often dared to openly criticize the communist ruling elite. One of such situations was reflected in his speech in front of the audience at Kyiv Cinema House on December 1, 1971, in which he stated: "... Ukraine does not allow me to create a new picture. I live, get old and even blind, waiting" (Yaremchuk, 1994). Due to his active national position, the well-known world-class filmmaker suffered brutal political repressions and was expelled from the Union of Cinematographers of Ukraine.

Pursuing a policy of open russification, the Ukrainian SSR government demanded that the creators of the films depart from all that is connected with the national identity of Ukrainians. This led to the fact that the film of Ukrainian cinema director B. Ivchenko *Missing Diploma* (shot in 1972) was criticized for "admiring the Cossack past and distorting the character traits of the characters" (Demidenko, 1993). Realizing that this film is of great significance for the rise of the national spirit of Ukrainians, the Soviet authorities send it to the "notorious shelf" where it was kept for long ten years. Such a course of events is the result of the order of the Committee on Cinematography of the Ukrainian SSR of March 26, 1971, which declared that the main place in the long-term plan should belong to screenplays and films on the themes of socialist Soviet reality (Krupnik, 2002). As noted by the editor of the Kiev Film Studio named after O. Dovzhenko V. Yurchenko: "It is enough to document the history of any prohibited film, and it will become clear that the technique of transforming a talented plan into a failed film is reliable and trouble free" (Yurchenko, 1999).

The then creative career of such film-makers as L. Osyka, I. Mykolaychuk, M. Mashchenko, V. Denisenko and others was extremely difficult due to their firm national position. They also suffered persecution, and their works were often removed from the cinema.

By depriving Ukrainian cinema of national motives, the Soviet authorities promoted in the cinema the themes of work and life of the Soviet people, as well as historical and revolutionary subjects. In the period under study, the anniversary of the October Revolution, the anniversary of the reunification of Ukraine with Russia, and in 1968, all propaganda of the USSR was put to the service of the 100th anniversary of V. Lenin. All those who in their work used plots unsuitable for the Soviet cinema remained outside of the artistic process.

Conclusions

Consequently, based on the foregoing, the author can make the following conclusions. The characteristic features of Ukrainian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s were: a ban on national motives, subordination to the Soviet centralized command-administrative system, ideological enslavement, total control by the Communist Party, russification, denationalization, and persecution of everything Ukrainian under the pretext of the formation of a “united Soviet people”. The totalitarian regime did not allow Ukrainian cinema artists to fully demonstrate their potential, in fact “killed” their talent and professionalism, denied innovation, especially with elements of dissidence, and “suppressed” national self-awareness.

The film community with nationalist ideas were persecuted most of all by the Soviet authorities and accused of “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism”. Their works were acknowledged as “ideologically false”, politically, artistically imperfect, and, accordingly, unacceptable for production. Such prominent filmmakers, talented screenwriters as S. Paradzhanov, Y. Illenko and B. Ivchenko, felt the prohibition of national motifs on their creative path. Quite often their works either fell on the “notorious shelf” where they lay for many years, or, in some cases, were removed from the cinema. Such film makers as L. Osiky, M. Mashchenko, V. Denisenko, I. Mykolaychuk, and V. Yurchenko had complicated prospects. They were persecuted because of the national position, since the national motives in the works of Ukrainian cultural figures were strictly “dosed”.

However, despite the oppression and repression by the ruling elite of the Ukrainian cinema, well-known filmmakers, screenwriters and film actors tried to reflect on the national stability of the Ukrainian people in their cultural and artistic heritage, to preserve historical memory, multi-faceted Ukrainian culture and to demonstrate crime of the Soviet system to the whole world. The national-patriotic theme supported by them in the cinema, strengthened the Ukrainian people’s national will to national self-determination, united all into a single Ukrainian nation and became a major factor in national awakening in the determined period.

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