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REFLECTION OF SOVIET ANTI- UKRAINIAN STEREOTYPES IN MODERN RUSSIAN PUBLIC OPINION

ABSTRACT

PURPOSE:

The aim of the article is to analyze the use of Soviet feature films as a means of anti-Ukrainian stereotyping of the Russian-language information space users in comparison with the effect of this influence, reflected in the results of sociological research.

METHODS:

Deduction technique has been involved to make conclusions based on the analysed facts and generalisation method as well. The analyses of social research results has been performed.

RESULTS:

It is generally known, that cinema has a significant impact on the mass consciousness and stereotypes formation. The Soviet Union made great efforts to create appropriate film images that broadcast Soviet ideology – the main function of Soviet cinema was to create a new Soviet identity. Everything that did not fit into the notion of “Sovietness” was directly or indirectly branded as hostile, alien and unacceptable to the Soviet man. Therefore, the image of the enemy in the the Soviet cinematography and the one of the Socialist Camp was formed with special care and clarity.

DISCUSSION:

Ukrainian-patriotic heroes of Soviet films are always antipodes to “correct” heroes and portrayed purely negatively, they are associated with stereotypes about their appearance, character, past, religious views. In such films, Ukrainians are portrayed as bearers of negative values and qualities – demonstrate criminal tendencies, willingly drink alcohol, appear as traitors, grounded people, primitive.

KEYWORDS: *stereotype, cinema, movie character, mirror neurons, information space.*

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that cinema has a significant impact on the mass consciousness and the formation of stereotypes. As P. Lenò describes, having enough time and means to maintain control over the media, miracles can be created in the construction of collective identity and public memory [Lenò 2014, 130]. And the advent of television in general has led to a change in the lifestyle of the Soviet man – the time previously spent on hobbies, now completely occupied by television. And appearance of television in general has led to a change in the lifestyle of the Soviet man – the time previously spent on hobbies, is now completely occupied by television. Soviet people were fascinated TV viewers and movie buffs – consumers of “correct” Soviet TV content. It can be stated that television became a real gift for the communist regime [Roth-Ey 2011].

SOVIET STENCIL OF THE CINEMATIC IMAGE OF THE UKRAINIAN

The Soviet Union made great efforts to create appropriate film images that broadcast Soviet ideology. According to the researcher of Soviet cinema O. Prokhorova, the main function of the Soviet cinema was to create a new Soviet identity [Prokhorova 2003, 23]. Everything that did not fit into the notion of “Sovietness” was directly or indirectly branded as hostile, alien and unacceptable to the Soviet man [Mayofis 2022; Monastireva-Ansdell 2017]. According to Lev Gudkov, “enemies are one of the key factors in the formation of Soviet identity”

[Gudkov 2005, 43]. Therefore, the image of the enemy in the cinematography of the Soviet and socialist countries was formed with special care and clarity.

In Soviet films, three types of Ukrainians can be defined:

- a positive hero – “a Soviet man” – a citizen of Ukrainian nationality who has lost his national identity and identifies himself exclusively as a “citizen of the USSR”;
- a negative hero, who causes disgust and decisive intentions of his re-education, – the Ukrainian who is marginalized in relation to the Soviet society, who was portrayed as greedy, dishonest, cowardly and a traitor;
- a negative hero, who provokes a desire for his physical destruction – the image of a Ukrainian nationalist.

The main reason for the extremely high level of negative attitude of the Soviet authorities towards Ukrainian patriots is well illustrated by the film “You Can’t Forget About It” [*Least We Forget* 1954] – a film about the fact that Ukraine has no right to exist without Russia. And all those who do not agree with this thesis are enemies.

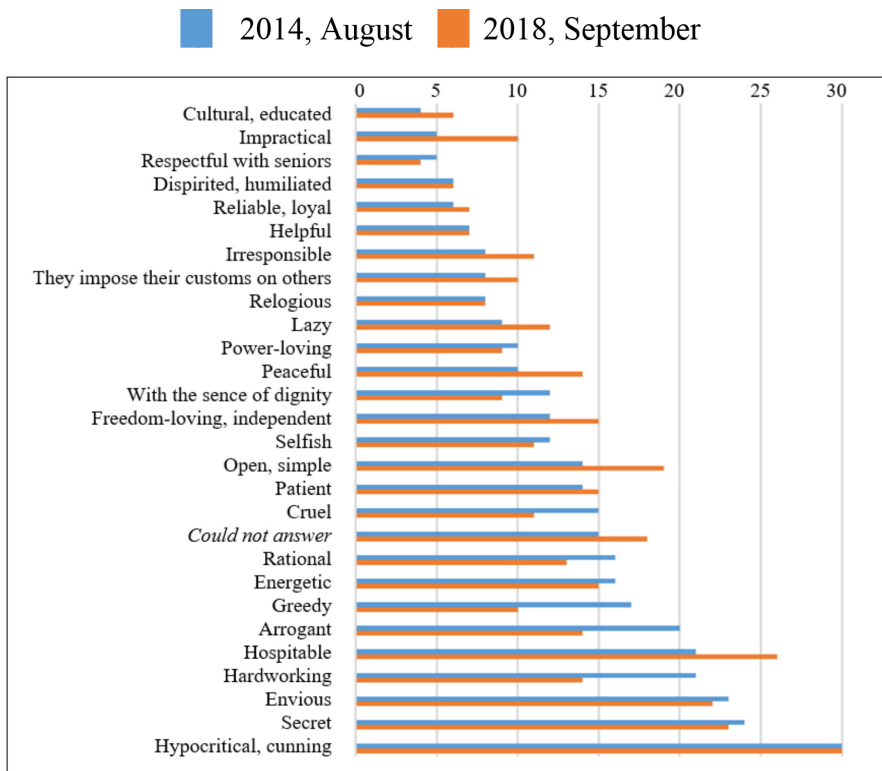
Myroslav Tomek in the article “The Ukrainian as an enemy – Ukrainian nationalists in Czechoslovakian and Soviet cinema”, having studied the original films and analytical materials on the topic, concludes that the image of Ukrainian nationalists is based on antitheses.

The positive characters of the main or secondary characters of the films, who are loyal to the communist ideology, are clearly idealized. While the Ukrainian-patriotic heroes of the films (mostly images of Bandera) – are always the antipodes to the “proper” heroes and portrayed purely negatively, “they are associated with unequivocal stereotypes about their appearance, character, past, religious views and typical allies” [Tomek 2015, 104]. According to the researcher’s generalizations, Ukrainian nationalists “always constitute bearers of negative values and qualities. They are cruel not only to the enemy, but also to each other. They don’t shun torture, show criminal tendencies, willingly drink alcohol” [Tomek 2015, 102; Stepanova 2020]. Negative heroes of propaganda films justify all their actions with love for Ukraine. Typical of the Soviet film industry is the statement of a nationalist from the film “Ivanna”, who says: For the united and independent Ukraine, I can disguise myself as the devil, I can sell my own father” [*Ivanna* 1959, 42:42 min].

STEREOTYPES OF MODERN RUSSIAN SOCIETY

Traditional anti-Ukrainian stereotypes, fueled by modern Russian cinema and other media, are reflected in the mass consciousness of Russians. Sociological research by the Levada-Center analytical center shows that Russians consistently consider hypocrisy and cunning, followed by secrecy and envy, to be the main character traits of Ukrainians. At least, according to Russians, Ukrainians are characterized by politeness and culture (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. Stereotypes of Russian citizens about the qualities of character of the people living in Ukraine



Source: [Rossiysko-ukrainskiye otnosheniya 2018].

The results of sociological polls shown in the diagram almost word for word replicate the qualities of the characters of Ukrainian characters depicted in Soviet films. The Soviet stencil of the cinematic image of the Ukrainian is actively used in modern Russian films.

This effect is explained by the results of neurological studies: observing another person's emotional state activates the same part of the neurons that is involved in experiencing an identical feeling [Wicker, Keysers, Plailly, Royet, Gallese, Rizzolatti 2003, 655-664]. This was explained by the discovery of mirror neurons, which have a direct impact on the neurological mechanism of transmission of others feelings to the recipient's own nervous system. It is with the help of mirror neurons that a person is able to understand the motivation of other people's actions and adopt their behavior [Churches, Terry 2010, 119]. Therefore, the effectiveness of the formation of anti-Ukrainian stereotypes by means of cinema is determined by the ability of films to evoke empathy for the "correct" characters of the film and hatred for negative characters. Then, with the help of the effect of mirror neurons, the feelings and stereotypes embedded in the film are transmitted to the real life of the audience.

The formation of the external image of the enemy is the most primitive, but very effective and rapid way of uniting society in the face of an imaginary "external threat" and uniting citizens in the opposition "my own – alien". Creating of such a scheme substitutes the implementation of several social tasks:

- mobilization and patriotic consolidation of a society that is very difficult to unite in any other way due to the lack of common values, such as the nation, democracy, civil rights and freedoms, etc.;
- strengthening of the leader's position and legitimizing his usurpation of power;
- removal of responsibility from the government for economic and social problems, justification of corruption and violations of democratic freedoms and rights of citizens;
- imitation of the crisis traditionally leads to strengthening of the black-and-white vision of the world in the society, which simplifies advocacy work that relies on emotions rather than reason [Pavlenko, Semenenko 2017, 200].

Lev Gudkov [Gudkov 2005, 7-79] emphasized that any propaganda can be effective if it is not based on certain hopes and demands of the mass consciousness and if it is not adequate to already existing ideas, legends, stereotypes, understanding of what is happening in history, if it is not the kind of mythological structures.

The analyzed data of sociological research and the reality of the Russian-Ukrainian war confirm that Soviet and Russian propaganda, mythologization and stereotypes have a significant impact on the aggressiveness of Russian society towards Ukraine.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of cultivating the stereotype of the Ukrainian-enemy is the formation and rooting in the mass consciousness of “ideologically correct” interpretation of history, the formation of an extremely negative attitude towards Ukrainian national liberation movements and the patriotic consciousness of Ukrainians. The essence of the stereotype is to present Ukrainians as hypocritical traitors and extreme nationalists. In essence, it is a negative heterostereotype related to the moral side of life.

The area of distribution of the stereotype is determined by the scale of distribution of USSR cinematography and modern Russian-language media space. The results of the stereotype are growing tensions in the society, approval of Russia’s anti-Ukrainian policy. The internal danger of the stereotype lies in the cultivation of anti-Ukrainian aggression by Ukrainian consumers of Russian information content, which leads to the ideological stratification of society.

The Soviet cinematic stereotype about the Ukrainian enemy continues to be actively cultivated in modern Russian films. For this reason, further research on the subject should focus on such directions: 1) the analyze Soviet stencil of the cinematic image of the Ukrainian in modern Russian films; 2) the finding effective means of fighting this and other anti-Ukrainian stereotypes, ways to protect the information space of Ukraine from Russian media influence.

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