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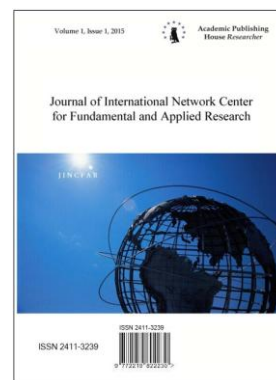
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Ukrainian Rebels of the 1940s – 1950s in the Mirror of Modern Ukrainian Screen

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Abstract

The author, basing on the unit of media criticism and media texts' analysis methodology, proposed by U. Eco, L. Masterman and A. Silverblatt, compares trends and stereotypes of O. Yanchuk's films about the activities of the Ukrainian rebels (1940s – 1950s), including a socio-political analysis, an ideological analysis, an iconographic analysis, a narrative analysis, the analysis of the characters and others.

Keywords: media criticism; analysis; Ukraine; media literacy education; Ukrainian rebels; screen; cinema; film.

Introduction

World War II – one of the most difficult and controversial chapters in the history. The struggle of various rebel groups in western Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic States in the second half of the 1940s – the first half of the 1950s was a terrible and controversial echo of this war. Naturally, the global screen reflected this painful subject (*Ashes and Diamonds* of A. Wajda, *Nobody Wanted to Die* of V. Žalakevičius, *Forest Violets* of K. Kiisk, *White Bird with a Black Mark* of Y. Ilienکو and others). For example, in the *White Bird with a Black Mark* (1970), a multi-faceted talent of Yuri Ilienکو manifested in the symbolism of folk images, metaphorical film language, in a refined plastic image, amazing musicianship. All this has been fused with a tragic time for the Ukraine of the 1930s – 1940s. Undoubtedly, the ideological orientation of the 1970s did not allow Y. Ilienکو to reveal the dramatic events of the pre-war, war and post-war years, when hostility separated people of one nation and language. However, despite this, the picture is remembered for its expressive drama, directing and bright actors' work.

However, manners change with the times, as they say... Moreover, for the last twenty years, the current director of Alexander Dovzhenko's studio and People's Artist of Ukraine, Oles Yanchuk, has shot a series of films (*Atentat. Assassination in Munich*, *The Undefeated*, and *The Company of Heroes*) entirely devoted to the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), Ukrainian nationalists of the 1930s - 1950s, and their leaders - Stephan Bandera (1909-1959) and Roman Shukhevych (1907-1950).

O. Yanchuk's appeal to this topic is completely justified: the abolition of the communist censorship and access to many archival documents could have brought significant benefits to comprehension of the tragic pages of Ukrainian history. However, in fact, we see the screen version of events with extremely idealized and decisively positive interpretation of UPA's activities.

Western researchers [Baraban, 2012, p. 312] write about romanticizing of S. Bandera, R. Shukhevych and their allies in the films by O. Yanchuk. It is obvious that when creating a cinematic hymn to UPA, A. Yanchuk and his co-authors (writers V. Portyak and M. Shayevich) had to convince the audience of the correctness of their position. Apparently, the easiest way to achieve this was to rely on the rich experience of Soviet films about partisans and undergrounders of the Great Patriotic War (*The Young Guard, Girl Seeks Father, Call the Fire for Ourselves, War under the Roofs, Poem of Kowpak, Front Without Flanks, Front Beyond The Frontline*, et al.), since the stereotypes of these films dominated in the military theme on the USSR screen for forty years.

Presumably, O. Yanchuk did realize that the use of Soviet "guerrilla film series" stamps – i.e. replacing of the positive Soviet partisans / undergrounders with positive UPA rebels / guerrillas / undergrounders - would conquer the hearts of contemporary Ukrainian viewers and, potentially, the world's audience.

Materials and methods

Let us prove it with the help of case studies. On the one hand, we depend on media criticism that enables us to examine and evaluate a flexible range of diverse media relations, between media texts and the audience and the society as a whole [Korochensky, 2003, p. 8]. In addition, on the other hand, we rely on the methodology for media texts analysis proposed by Umberto Eco [Eco, 2005], Len Masterman [Masterman, 1997], and Arthur Silverblatt [Silverblatt, 2001]. We compare the trends and patterns of the above-mentioned films (including a socio-political analysis, analysis of stereotypes, an ideological analysis, an identification analysis, an iconographic analysis, a narrative analysis, the characters' analysis).

Cinematographic stereotypes of Soviet feature films (dominant genre - drama) associated with a guerrilla theme historical period, scene of action: any period of time from 1941 till 1944, German-occupied Soviet territory, the USSR, Germany.

furnishings, household items: modest dwelling places and household items of ordinary Soviet characters, Spartan living conditions of Soviet partisans - dugouts, a scanty meal by the fire, shabby clothes, etc. Significantly better life conditions of the Nazi occupationists: they are dressed in good uniforms and eat well. Soviet partisans, undergrounders, when on duty can also be dressed in good clothes and live under more or less decent living conditions.

methods of representation of reality: idealized, since any deviations from positive characteristics of Soviet partisans (as happened, for example, in the film by Alexei German *Checks on the Roads*) were penalized by censorship. Similar censorship framework existed for the image of partisans' opponents - German occupationists and their collaborators: they were given only negative qualities.

characters, their values, ideas, clothes, physique, vocabulary, facial expressions, gestures: positive characters (guerrillas, undergrounders) with Soviet communist values and ideas; negative characters - German occupationists and their supporters - with inhumane, Nazi ideas. Separated by ideology and philosophy (communist, Nazi), characters are usually presented according to the targets of a mediatext source: Nazi characters seem to be rude and violent fanatics (and sometimes sadists, rapists) with a primitive vocabulary, angry faces (and if they sometimes smile, their smiles being false and disgusting), an unpleasant and harsh tone of voice... Screen Nazi collaborators from the local population sometimes look even more disgusting. And, by contrast, Soviet partisans, undergrounders are shown exclusively on the positive side: as patriots. However, they are usually romantically in love with their wives and brides, adore children, protect and defend the civilian population. The Soviet characters sing soulful songs and dream of happy post-war prospects. Civilians in the Nazi-occupied territory are shown as poor, frightened, suffering, but still at any moment ready to help the guerrillas to hide the wounded, to share the last crust of bread.

a significant change in the lives of the characters: negative characters (the Nazis) suddenly attack the Soviet Union and attempt to bring to life their inhuman ideas (to occupy territories and to enslave the Soviet people).

a problem: the life of positive characters (as well as the life of the whole Soviet people) is at risk.

finding a solution to the problem: positive characters struggle with negative ones.

solution: the destruction / capture of negative characters, return to civilian life. Variant: the heroic death of some positive characters from ruthless hands of the Nazis.

Case studies of the films: *Young Guard (1948)*, *Girl Seeks Father (1959)*, *Call the Fire for Ourselves (1964)*, *War under the Roofs (1967)*, *Front Without Flanks (1974)*, *The Poem of Koupak (1976)*, *Front Beyond The Frontline (1977)* and others.

Cinematographic stereotypes of Ukrainian feature films by Oles Yanchuk (dominant genre - drama) associated with the rebel, partisan theme

historical period, scene of action: any time interval from the 1930s till the 1950s, Ukraine, the USSR, Germany, Poland.

furnishings, household items: modest dwellings and household items of simple Ukrainian characters, Spartan living conditions of Ukrainian insurgents, guerrillas - dugouts, scanty meals by the fire, shabby clothes, etc. Significantly better living conditions of Nazis, Soviet and Polish invaders: they are dressed in good uniforms and eat well. Ukrainian nationalists - rebels, undergrounders, when on duty can also be dressed in good clothes and live under more or less decent living conditions.

methods of representation of reality: idealized, since any deviation from positive characteristics of Ukrainian UPA fighters can destroy the entire structure of romanticized "Bandera series" by O. Yanchuk, and here the self-censorship of these media texts authors comes into action.

characters, their values, ideas, clothes, physique, vocabulary, facial expressions, gestures: positive characters (Ukrainian nationalists - insurgents, guerrillas, undergrounders) - national carriers of humanistic values and ideas of the Christian faith; negative characters - Soviet, German and Polish invaders with inhumane Communist and Nazi ideas. Separated by ideology, belief, religion / atheism, the characters tend to be presented according to the settings of the media source: Soviet and Polish characters (mostly undercover men, army men) are rude and cruel people (and sometimes sadists, rapists) with a primitive vocabulary, angry faces (and if they sometimes smile, they give a false smile), with unpleasant and harsh voice timbres...

Nazis on Yanchuk's screen look less disgusting. In addition, since even Oles Yanchuk and his co-authors have to show (though in passing) that the Ukrainian nationalists of 1941-1942 actively collaborated with Nazis (in particular, Roman Shukhevych, who served in these years in the Wehrmacht army). By contrast, Ukrainian UPA fighters, guerrillas, undergrounders are shown exclusively in the positive way. In this case, they are usually romantically in love with their wives and brides, adore children, protect and defend the civilian population. They do not forget about the religious ceremonies, chorus soulful songs and dream of a happy future of independent Ukraine. Civilians in the occupied territory are shown as poor, frightened, suffering, but still at any moment ready to help Ukrainian UPA partisans, to provide a shelter to the wounded, share the last crust of bread.

a significant change in the lives of characters: negative characters (Communists, Nazis, the Poles) are unwilling to recognize the independence of Ukraine and try to realize their inhuman ideas (to occupy territories and to enslave the Ukrainian people).

a problem: the life of positive characters (as well as the life of the whole Ukrainian people) is at risk.

finding a solution to the problem: positive characters struggle with negative characters.

solution to the problem: extermination of a significant number of negative characters, but a greater part of UPA fighters and their leaders also die fighting against odds.

Case studies of the films: *Atentat. Assassination in Munich (1995)*, *The Undefeated (2000)*, *The Company of Heroes (2004)*.

The comparison between Soviet fiction films related to the theme of guerrillas and the cinematographic stereotypes of Oles Yanchuk's feature films about UPA shows that they are based on a common stereotyped pattern which idealizes positive characters. However, with an important ideological difference - Ukrainian nationalists who actually worked closely with Nazis in 1941-1942 are shown as exclusively positive heroes. It is clear that now the supporters of Bandera argue that they fought against the Stalinist and Communist regime and desired to release their people from it.

However, the so-called “heroes” who wanted to “liberate their people” collaborated with Nazi Germany. It is well known now what kind of the so-called “liberation” Nazis were spreading and how much did Belarusian, Russian and other peoples (especially, Jewish) suffer.

One more thing. Can we say that the films by Oles Yanchuk about UPA activities were his personal initiative that does not coincide with the position of the Ukrainian leadership? Certainly not, since the pro-Bandera position of either *The Undeclared (2000)* or *The Company Of Heroes (2004)* (the production of these films was funded by various sponsors, mostly – from the West), fully correlates with the actions of the Ukrainian authorities: the installation of dozens of monuments and opening of museums to S. Bandera and R. Shukhevych, renaming of a number of Ukrainian city streets in their honor (not to mention the fact that during his presidency Victor Yushchenko awarded Bandera and Shukhevych the titles of Heroes of Ukraine).

As for the artistic level of *Atentat. Assassination in Munich (1995)*, *The Undeclared (2000)*, and *The Company of Heroes (2004)*, the Ukrainian media criticism, even nationalistic, rated this level as very low. For example, O. Bryukhovetskaya believes that *The Company of Heroes* is a naive movie, and, like any naive, it has its charm. In fact, this is an amusement ride movie, in which the narrative logic is almost entirely absent [Bryukhovetskaya, 2004], and E. Cherednychenko writes that this film “resembles a paper certificate that passed an incredible number of institutions and whereby became blue with the same number of seals and stamps” [Cherednychenko, 2004]. The personality of the OUN Bureau head is painted in one color – ideally immaculate. And what kind of person Bandera was, as a matter of fact we did not understand then, since according to Yanchuk, everything human is alien to him” [Cherednychenko, 2004].

A. Rutkowski believes that Oles Janchuk in *The Undeclared (2000)* “persistently stigmatizes and exposes the Soviet totalitarianism, but he does it as he was taught, i.e. in the Soviet style - elementary, conformally, indiscriminately, without any remorse” [Rutkowski, 2000].

In my opinion, the artistic level of Oles Yanchuk’s films could have been warmer - despite all their idealizing and posterizing there are well-played parts, skillfully stylized Soviet partisan representation, and musical emotionality. However, let us not forget that, Yanchuk’s films are primarily ideological, propaganda products, not art. And in this guise, being frequently rerun on Ukrainian TV channels they probably fulfill their mission, i.e. offer a distorted, one-sided version of complicated and contradictory events of the 1930s–1950s both to the younger and older generations.

Conclusions

The tragic and controversial events of the war years, of course, need adequate understanding. However, in Oles Yanchuk’s movies *Atentat. Assassination in Munich (1995)*, *The Undeclared (2000)*, *The Company of Heroes (2004)* the images of the Bandera movement are romanticized and idealized. In fact, they are copies of idealized images of heroic partisans from screen series of Soviet times, which, alas, does not contribute to an objective analysis of the subject.

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**Украинские повстанцы 1940–1950-х гг.
в зеркале современного украинского экрана**

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Аннотация. Автор, основываясь на методологии медиакритического анализа, предложенного У. Эко, Л. Мастерманом и А. Сильверблэттом, сравнивает тенденции и стереотипы фильмов О. Янчука о деятельности украинских повстанцев (1940–1950-х годов): социально-политический, идеологический, иконографический, нарративный анализ, анализ характеров и т.д.).

Ключевые слова: медиакритика; анализ; Украина; медиаграмотность; украинские повстанцы; экран; кино; фильм.