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PROBLEMS OF SHAPING SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY
THROUGH CINEMA IN AN ERA OF GLOBALISM

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Abstract

The processes of globalization and digitalization lead to the unification of humanity cultural codes and create a united socio-cultural space. On the one hand, it improves human interactivity, but on the other hand, it leads to a crisis of traditional values and interethnic conflicts. In the era of globalism, national cultures are increasingly undergoing the process of acculturation. The preservation of national integration becomes a particularly important problem. In this context, the problem of socio-cultural identity construction is actualized as a necessary condition of national unity and the uniqueness of traditional culture. At the present stage, cinema is becoming the most important instrument of political and ideological struggle. Motion pictures reproduce the existing reality and represent other visions of social reality. Cinema conveys the worldview, values, and ideas embedded in the structure of a person's spiritual culture. Thus, cinema is the most effective instrument for the formation of socio-cultural identity. The article reveals the essence of the socio-cultural identity through the analysis of Russian and foreign cinematography. The author shows the mechanism of visual imagery creation and peculiarities of identity construction through genre cinema. They define the necessary conditions for the formation of Russian socio-cultural identity and set probabilistic vectors for the development of global and domestic cinema in the global socio-cultural reality.

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1. Introduction

In the age of globalism and digital technology, culture has become increasingly standardized and simplified. National cultures undergo a process of acculturation and lose their identity. Attempts to preserve it through the construction and representation of socio-cultural diversity by media methods inevitably lead to a simplified, boilerplate reproduction of the historical and cultural heritage of a country, nation or ethnic group.

Identity is one of the most developed concepts in foreign and domestic philosophy and sociology. There is a certain interest in the work of Zajda and Majhanovich (2021), who undertook a systematic analysis of most identity theories. The research of Grineva (2017) describes the characteristics, features and problems of the construction of national identity at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Russian society, experiencing an ideological and value crisis in the context of globalism, faces a choice: either to submit to universal cultural standardization or, with state support, to form a new vision of national identity.

Many areas of the arts, including cinema, are experiencing a socio-cultural crisis. In its brief existence, cinema has changed from an entertainment medium to an ideological policy tool, an indicator of societal problems and a condition for shaping values and attitudes.

Deleuze and Corte (2019) lay the theoretical foundations for the study of cinema as a socio-cultural phenomenon. The role of cinema in the formation of national-cultural identity has been the subject of publications by Orestova (2017), Tumanov (2021), and Seung-hoon (2021). Zhabsky and Tarasov (2019) examined the use of films and serials in sociological research.

Despite the ideological clichés and censorship that existed in the USSR, the film industry set itself the task of achieving high spiritual and moral development. The language of Soviet filmmakers became an identifier of Russian culture: catchphrases from films entered everyday life, both older and young generations loved and revered actors and directors, etc. Such factors have helped to strengthen national unity and create cultural commonality.

However, since the late 1980s, visual images have gradually become stereotyped. Universal archetypes such as life, death, war, love, homeland and family have been deconstructed and criticized. And today, national cinema is torn between following the precepts of the great filmmakers of the Soviet era and the desire to make a buck and satisfy both the audience and the state.

2. Problem Statement

Thus, we can formulate the research problem as follows: under conditions of globalism, the socio-cultural identity of states, peoples and ethnic groups is eroding and losing its uniqueness. This is evident in all cultural spheres, including the film industry. It becomes relevant to study audiovisual art media from the perspective of identity construction and to highlight the essential features of this process.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the study is the role of cinema in the formation of socio-cultural identity.

Tasks of research include the following:

- i. Identify the essential characteristics of the concept of "socio-cultural identity" from the perspective of the sociology of cinema;
- ii. Use foreign and domestic films as examples to reveal the mechanism and characteristics of the formation of socio-cultural identity.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the paper is to examine film in terms of identity formation and to highlight the essential features of this process in the context of globalism.

Modern cinema is profit-oriented, so the key factors influencing viewer choice include budget, special effects, popularity of directors and actors. The social function of cinema can be both creative and destructive. Mass film production leads to a devaluation of moral standards and a negative attitude towards traditional institutions and virtues. This results in a conflict between the consumer preferences of viewers and their demands for spiritual and personal development.

We suggest that a critical reflection on the socio-cultural function of cinema will encourage a more careful choice of films and a reorientation away from mass culture towards authorial and classical cinema.

5. Research Methods

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is the principles and provisions of the visual paradigm in sociology, which is based on the study of social and cultural processes through the analysis of visual images, reflecting the characteristics of human existence.

In the course of the study, the authors applied the structural-functional method to identify interrelations in the socio-cultural space and to structure the phenomena of spiritual culture. In general, the material is presented in a logical sequence. There are syllogistic techniques for processing information.

6. Findings

Many humanities studies today rely heavily on identity theory. One of the most popular concepts is "socio-cultural identity". Sociocultural identity is a component of the value and attitudinal sphere of an individual. It is expressed in the awareness and realization of the subject's unity and belonging to a particular social group through the processes of interaction with cultural identifiers, transmitted by social institutions authoritative to the individual (Gerasimova & Ivanov, 2017).

The structure of socio-cultural identity distinguishes cultural stereotypes of behaviour; opinions and judgements shared by the majority of members of a social group, through which the individual constructs his or her own identity (Zajda & Majhanovich, 2021).

From the perspective of the sociology of cinema, our research highlights the understanding of socio-cultural identity as an active process of an individual's activity of familiarizing, selecting and fixing "basic cultural codes" in the structure of an individual's spiritual culture (Avagyan, 2019). When opposing cultural identifiers are assimilated, there is an acute crisis, both internal (personal) and group (societal crisis) (Grineva, 2017).

The cinema is today a major force in the process of constructing socio-cultural reality. Film production is the biggest entertainment industry, reaching a huge number of people. Film watching has the effect of transmitting patterns of behaviour, ways of interaction in different life situations, and attitudes towards oneself and others (Zhabsky & Tarasov, 2019). Cinema not only creates an imagined reality, but also reproduces historical epochs, i.e. it represents reality. There are no strict canons for motion pictures, which makes it possible to sidestep sensitive issues, or to present them neatly, but at the same time naturally, organically to what is happening on the screen (Gilles, 2019).

How is socio-cultural identity revealed through film? We will take the works of American cinema as an example. Thus, *Saving Private Ryan* (directed by Spielberg, 1998) reveals the archetype of victory through the construction of a triumphant American people who act on the principle of "violence as retribution" (Kylyk, 2020).

The motif of revenge is one of the classic images of American cinema. Films with a similar storyline are characterised by linear narrative and parallel editing. The cultural code of the "vigilante" is not neutral, so its distortion would lead to a critical perception of the main characters' image (Syrova & Chikishev, 2018). Nevertheless, in several scenes of *Saving Private Ryan* (a German prisoner digging graves for the dead; a weeping American soldier whose cowardice caused the death of his comrades), questions the image of the avenger, thereby creating a situation of conflict between the old ideology and the new democratic values.

The 'politics of memory' in the West and in Russia have, over time, turned historical and war cinema into the transmitter of contemporary ideas and an instrument of political struggle (Bespalova, 2021). For example, the films *Matilda* (directed by Uchitel, 2017) and *Death of Stalin* (directed by Iannucci, 2017), despite their initial positioning as "fictional stories set against the background of historical events", have been the subject of bitter controversy, provocation and even socially dangerous acts (the arson of a cinema in Yekaterinburg).

The representation of socio-cultural reality in contemporary Russian films is largely carried out through the violation of ethical norms and traditional laws of confrontation between good and evil (Orestova, 2017). The formation of a socio-cultural identity takes place through the reproduction of the same artistic images underpinned by the same moral and ethical values. There is the construction of a stereotype of behaviour common to most viewers (Corte, 2019).

This mechanism is as characteristic of war, space exploration and sporting achievements as of films of the comedy genre. However, its use often leads to a mismatch between what is desired and what is real. For example, the films *Stalingrad* (directed by Bondarchuk, 2013) and *Moving Up* (directed by Megerdichev, 2017) have distorted images of Soviet soldiers and athletes. In the film *Stalingrad*, a German officer is presented as a noble knight forced to fight barbarians who "have no concept of honour"

(Tumanov, 2021). In *Upward Bound*, the coach and players of the Soviet national team are presented as dissidents, acting against orders and common sense.

In our view, the appeal to the Hollywood clichés of “vigilante” and “madman” in the context of domestic cinema with its rich Soviet legacy is not justified in the formation of socio-cultural identity. The loss of the ideological core in the 1990s led to a free interpretation of historical events, an emphasis on the unpleasant aspects of Soviet reality, and the transformation of negative heroes into positive ones (Bosov, 2017). A prime example of such trends is the television series *Shtrafbat* (directed by Dostal, 2004).

At the same time, films in the genre of critical realism are gaining a new wave of popularity. In such films, the authors usually criticise the imperfections of Russian society and the state, while at the same time trying to create an image of an ordinary person with all his virtues and flaws. This context is perfectly suited to the films of Bykov and Zvyagintsev.

Although a large number of films of various genres are released in Russian cinemas each year, the Soviet era and certain works from the 1990s and early 2000s still remain truly iconic. What do Russians associate with New Year's Eve celebrations? Of course, with watching “*Irony of Fate*” (directed by Ryazanov, 1975). In our view, this is the most obvious example of an identity crisis. Domestic cinema is still in many ways inferior in quality to Soviet and foreign films. The viewer wants to see deep characters, strong emotions and interesting dialogues on screen. However, in the end, one has to settle for comedy surrogates such as *The Stalemate* (directed by Shippenko, 2019) or remakes of Soviet classics.

The institution of family and marriage, which is also in crisis today, remains a popular topic in film, but as with films of other genres, the situation is ambivalent. On the one hand, the value and importance of family preservation remain one of the basic principles of cinema (Azhimova, 2017). But on the other hand, the attainment of family well-being often comes not at the expense of the characters' actions, but simply by doing so. The *Yolki* franchise (produced by Bekmambetov, 2010–2021) is illustrative in this respect. Whereas the first two parts revealed the problem of family values through really moving and coherent stories, by the fifth film anthology began to break its own laws: the main characters began to leave the family, betraying their friends; violent ways of achieving love became the norm. The films *To Live* (directed by Sigarev, 2012) and *Unloved* (directed by Zvyagintsev, 2017) also violate the laws of ethics, but there it is shown not as a norm, but as one of the unsolvable issues of human existence.

What makes national cinema unique? German cinema, for example, is remembered for expressionism in the 1920s, Italian cinema – neo-realism in the 1940s, French cinema - surrealism and avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s (Seung-hoon, 2021). The significance of Soviet cinema in the development of world cinematography is traditionally associated with the pioneering work of Eisenstein and Vertov. In that respect, contemporary Russian cinema has nothing to offer as it is increasingly becoming secondary to Hollywood cinema.

So there is a crisis of the Russian socio-cultural model, in which cinema is one of the characteristic examples. Whereas in the West, filmmakers have long realised the full constructivist potential of cinema as a means of identity formation, in Russia this process is still very much delayed.

However, even mastering all the technical and narrative tools of cinema cannot provide effective socio-cultural identity formation. This requires identifying the specific features and components that underlie the cultural code of a people (ethnos). In our view, the construction of socio-cultural identity through film should take into account three main components:

1. Ideologically, spiritually and morally developing the concept of “socio-cultural identity” at state and academic levels.
2. Rethinking the role of the national cinema, treating it not as a means of making a profit but as one of the most important instruments of social and cultural policy.
3. Conducting media outreach aimed at reinforcing the value of national cinema.

7. Conclusion

How is the socio-cultural image represented in cinematic works? As in any other form of narrative art, identity is revealed through narrative: the place of action, the characters and their character. Each of these components underpins some kind of tradition embedded in historical patterns of development. So we recognize an Englishman on screen by his bowler and cane, his stately manner of speech, his love of tea, etc.

Cinema presents identity as a dialogue between history and modernity, juxtaposing national traditions and multicultural trends. It is likely that the further growth of globalism will erase the boundaries of identity and, in line with the melting pot theory, world culture will be a fusion of the cultures of small peoples and ethnicities.

In the cinema, these trends will firstly be reflected in the popularization of regional cinema (as we can already see with the Yakutsk and Ossetian cinema), and secondly, in a deepening of the identity quest in global cinema through gender, gender and racial representation.

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