

Posudek dizertační práce

Francesca Mazzali: The Kremlins' program for Patriotic Education and Russian War Movie (2000-2010). IMS FSV UK, 2016.

Francesca Mazzali's Ph.D. dissertation examines the effects of the Russian state program of patriotic education in Russian cinema. The first part describes the content of two five-year Programs of patriotic education of citizens of the Russian Federation, announced in 2001 and 2006, and identifies their goals and expectations in the media sphere. Then Mazzali defines six political principles, which are to be met, according to authors of the Programs, by artistic creations in order to be perceived as beneficial to Russian patriotism.

Mazzali then uses the identified political priorities as one of the criteria for the selection of a group of Russian war films. She focuses on a period of duration of the two Programs between 2001 and 2010. Director's personality is another criterion. To have his film included in Mazzali's study, a director must have a positive attitude towards Putin's political ideology and be an internationally recognized figure.

In the second part of her dissertation, Mazzali analyses the content of selected films and investigates how exactly the political expectations are transmitted through the film to the audience, and whether we can talk about continuity between contemporary Russian patriotic film and movies of the Stalinist era.

Mazzali concludes her work by summarizing the findings based on the analysis of eleven selected Russian war films. Taking into account few titles of western literature and several film reviews, she states that 1) in the context of patriotic education, there is a continuity of film narrative between Stalinist and Russian cinematography of the first decade of the 21st century; 2) war films serve the political purposes of the current Russian ruling class; 3) Russia defines itself as a country with the highest moral values (courage, loyalty, honour, patriotism, humanity, religious beliefs).

The assessed dissertation's strengths include the detailed analysis of both Programs in terms of aspirations in the field of media impact on Russian society. Mazzali systematically proves that the intention of these Programs is to shape an attitude of Russian society (especially of young generation) towards the homeland so that it could serve as a solid functional base of the main goal declared by President Putin: renewal of Russia's great power status. Mazzali clearly describes methods used in patriotic education to achieve this target and highlights those that are relevant to filmmaking. She stresses especially the effort to draw public attention to the heroic stories of the Russian past, which portray model Citizens willing to sacrifice themselves in military service to the Motherland, Fatherland and the Russian world Mission.

However, despite the author's apparent effort for a representative selection of Russian war films, this part of her dissertation is not convincing. Mazzali practically ignores Russian film theorists (N. M. Zorkaya, M. Zhabskij, S. Stishova, or collective monograph *Voyna na Ekране* of 2006, eg.) and her selection is only based on peripheral knowledge of Russian cinematography. Unfortunately, this has three negative consequences for her dissertation:

- a) There is no explanation provided why some other Russian war films of the period were excluded from the analysis. I am referring here particularly to the film *Poslednij poyezd* from

A. German (2004), or the film *Kukushka* from A. Rogozhkin (2002), which - though successful works of recognized directors – do not confirm Mazzali's findings on their most banal level. If Mazzali only examines patriotic war films of patriotically minded directors, she can hardly come up with other than positive response to her research question. Also, if the Mazzali's intention was only to prove the practical effect of the Russian Programs, then her findings cannot be applied to the entire Russian cinematography at the end. Also, under this assumption, one cannot be content with the absence of a systematic description in the dissertation of how the analysed films had been financed.

b) Mazzali's resources allow her to understand the genre of war film only partially. It is a specific area of film industry which tends to have strong patriotic content in any national cinematography. It is characteristic for war films that they offer the audience a hero-soldier. And it is also characteristic that essentially pacifist and humanist content of war films was minimized in the late 1990s not only in Russia - eg. also in the USA. These global circumstances question cast doubt on the conclusion that the return of patriotic films in Russia is directly related to the Programs of patriotic education declared by Putin's administration. Again, I would appeal here for deeper analysis of financial or personal links between the analysed films and the monitored Programs.

c) The dissertation examines the impact of the Programs during the period of their application between 2001 and 2010. It is therefore not clear why A. Balabanov's film *Brat-2* (2000) was selected for analysis and how it relates to the Programs. From my point of view, Balabanov's film *Voyna* from 2002 would respond to the needs of the dissertation much better. And again, it is not clear why this film was not chosen. In addition, the results of the analysis of the film *Brat-2* contradict Mazzali's assertions that Yeltsin's patriotic programs had no effect. After all – the release of the schematic patriotic film *Brat-2* just five months after Yeltsin's resignation proves that part of the Russian intellectual elite had considered the needs to foster Russian national consciousness by tendentious culture even before Putin declared his political programme.

I recommend the Ph.D. dissertation to be defended, with the reservation that the weaknesses mentioned above will be carefully clarified.

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