

## **Soviet fictions on WWII : post-colonial perspectives**

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World War II left Soviet cinema in a state of economic, physical and psychological trauma: the war killed over 26 millions of people in USSR and cinema in the Stalinist context was after 1945, no more a priority. The Stalinist period of the 1950s also proposed a return to traditional values, to be brought about through the representation of a sterilized version of the past. In the same way a few biographical films were produced between 1946 and 1953 glorifying Soviet heroes of the war. During the Thaw years in USSR, from Stalin death in 1953 to Krushchev's rule in the late 1960s, Soviet society experienced major transformations. But so did also cinema. New films began to appear by the end of 1950's, even if few were focused on WWII. The Cold War was going on and some Soviet filmmakers were choosing to treat WWII in their last movies.

Three majors Soviet movies appeared during the Thaw, awarded outside Soviet Union and cheered by the public as by the western critics: "*The Cranes are flying*" by Mikhail Kalatozov in 1957 who won the Grand Prix at Cannes festival in 1958, "*Ballad of Soldier*" (1959) by Grigorii Chukrai who was also a prize winner in different festivals as Cannes, Berlin and San Francisco, then "*Ivan's childhood*" (1962) by Andrey Tarkovsky who won the Golden Lion in Venice for his first feature film. During the Cold War, these movies announced to the world that a kind of revival was taking place within the Soviet cinema. But what was behind the screen and how these movies were perceived inside Soviet Union? Since 1956, they seem to express after the Stalinist years a kind of new freedom but others questions about these three movies should be here pointed. What do they show of the war and what kind of representation of the enemy (traitor, spy...etc) do they offer? What is the relationship of these Soviet fiction cinema representations to the reality of WWII? Why have they been produced and brought into use, 15 years later after the end of WWII from 1957 until 1962? These movies were surrounded in 1956 by the Hungarian revolution and in 1962 by a period of international uncertainty with the missiles crisis in Cuba and the threat of a new 3rd world war, despite the fact that Soviet Union was claiming its peaceful intentions. In this East-West context, how these movies were instrumentalized? Could we consider that this specific film production on WWII combined the internal situation inside Soviet Union with this international context? Warmly welcomed during

the Cold War, these movies became until today, popular success in Europe, widely regarded as great postwar epic.

Numerous films today are contemporary takes on the themes of war or they seek to set new nationalist values. Russian society as a whole has been unable of proposing a clear analysis of its own history through WWII. In practice generational traumas – the Revolution and civil wars, Stalinism and the Gulag, WWII, destalinization and the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya – have imposed rupture in the narrative lines. They have also led to the fragmentation of any general historical account. So “*May 9 th*” as a day of Victory remains symbolical as Russia is haunted by its Sovietism, by the agonies of its past, while at the same time it gravitates around its Russian-Soviet Imperial identity. Relationship between history and memory is still complex when history resides in the silence of the victims, the witnesses of a history which when all is said and done, is always recounted in an official version.

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