

The Ideology of image in Albanian films of socialist realism

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Abstract

By means of this paper, I will try to introduce you with a very clear analysis of the important impact of Albanian cinematography, where films like: *Mountains covered of green* (Malet me Blerim mbuluar) or “The bride and the curfew”(Nusja dhe shtetrrethimi) had an essential role in promoting communist ideology, as well as movies such as „Rambo“, „Full Metal Jacket“ or „Rocky that were also characterized by the reflection of American conservatism in the late 80s, a period that reached its peak with President Reagan coming in power. This analysis will be accomplished through a comparative approach of these kinds of films that publicly show the heroism of a nation as well as a clear boundary between the good and the bad, the hero and the coward, being characterized often by a kind of delirium outbreak of racial superiority. This culture of collective image perceived as art, will be analyzed in ideological field that the culture itself intends to convey to operative mechanisms of images policy. In this theoretical journey, I will rely on analysis that Douglas Kellner made for Hollywood movies in his article: “Films, politics and ideology: Reflections on Hollywood Film in the age of Reagan”.

The reality through image

The image and reality should not be treated as elements that constitute themselves, but rather as a movable ground, where there is a domination of antagonist forces that set in motion the gears of a social building. For this reason the attention will be focused not to the image itself, but rather to constructs of social categories and their covering with dominant ideology that image performance favors.

In relation to the objectivity of the images that it transmits, it can be said that the cinema is most important art of a communist regime with obvious trends toward the objectivity. Thus Lenin's famous phrase “of all the arts, the most significant for us is cinema” (Anagnosti: 2009) can be very clearly understood. On one hand, cinematographic art of that time was completely the opposite of what really happened in reality (cruel executions against any improvised “enemy”). On the other hand, it was exactly the fiction itself that kept the existing reality alive (wasn't the national liberation war so much deified in these movies, exactly the ideology that kept communist system alive?) Being an idealized version of reality, the film fitted quite well to propagandistic mission of the previous regime. For example, the national liberation war at “Mountains covered of green/ Malet me blerim mbuluar” looks like it adds some images to Enver Hoxha speeches about the bravery of partisans and cowardice of enemies. The way the party sought to build the system is almost identical to the way that such movies introduced the reality, as a broken border between the good and the bad, the brave and the coward or between the self and the other. If we replace dualisms of good/bad or brave/coward with those of partisan/Ballist or communist/retrograde, the fiction and reality would mean the same thing. Somehow the radical separation itself between the self and the other is the reflection of political regime of that time, which offered only two solutions: you could either be the ally of the homeland, or the enemy of the homeland, without any intermediate way. In

“Mountains covered of green” (Malet me blerim mbuluar) this kind of dualism is even clearer due to the presence of an Italian soldier among the partisans, during the battle against the Nazis. Somehow, the fact that Italian soldier was on the same side of partisans increases the nationalisms doses of the movie, thus promoting innumerable differences between Italians and partisans heroism. The movie itself contains two types of conflicts: initially there is an armed conflict that serves as a background for the construction of other antagonisms. The second is the hidden antagonism between Albanian and Italian that is highlighted more, since the two parties are allies during the war and the context creates similarities between them despite the fact that during the movie their “natural” features earn their predominance (Pelicelli: “You are brave, but I am a coward”) There is an essential element that rises from these two antagonisms which marks the final separation between the self and the other. In short, we as Albanians cannot be friends with strangers, because even if we fight on the same side and we have the same enemy, in fact we are extremely diverse “by our nature”. This thing can be showed by frequency of usage of compound words such as “we” and “you” through the whole movie, that are always placed in the mouth of the Italian soldier as a call of evidence in the event: “we Italians may not be good soldiers, but we are good people”, or “no one of our soldiers (Italian) would do what you did (addressing Kabos)”..... you are brave and we are cowards” (“Mountains covered of green/Malet me blerim mbuluar”: 1971).

Up to here, we are dealing exactly with the field of movies such as Rambo or "Full Metal Jacket" which, at this point are very similar. After all, the reduction of the enemy in a person that is not us and that threatens the integrity of our existence is an identical content to almost all the movies that include war. What's really characteristic in these movies is that beyond the idealism of these wars, the movie gives shape to the events and ideology that dominate inside of these wars, in the features where the gap between you and the other is shaped. Regarding to this point, in the movie “Mountains covered of green/ Malet me blerim mbuluar”, the real essence is not the war against invaders. In fact, Germans appear only in the beginning of the movie and in the end of it, while all the rest deals with the way of how communism is structured in this country.

The most interesting drama of the movie - and the part which occupies the biggest space of the scenario - is the dualism between family (tribal) and communism elements: the father that doesn't want to let his son go with partisans in his wedding. This kind of dualism between tribal connections and political power may be considered as a characteristic element of Enver Hoxha's dictatorship. (Hoxha: 2009). It should be said that tribal elements are present in majority of Albanian movies of socialist realism period. Starting from “of socialist realism” Mountains covered of green/Malet me blerim mbuluar”, “The bride and the curfew/ Nusja dhe shtetrrethimi”, “The silent duel /Dueli i heshtur” (where in this case tribal elements appear as the final cause of character collision) or even at: “SmallSiege/ Rethimi I vogel”, the tribal element is present everywhere, as a symbolic order from which the whole drama begins. So, along with bi-polar character of observing things, movies of socialist realism as well as the regime of that time, have in common the tribal character that could be easily identified within any conflicts between characters. Transmission of these kinds of messages from the visual medium constitutes itself a collective solution to individual dilemmas, thus strengthening the conservative trends of tribal element, which is very characteristic of our communist society. In this way, communist ideology being cemented within tribal connections, became more understandable in public semantic codes and at the same time the heroes of movies, being involved in the network of tribal connections, became not only more reliable, but also the ideal example of a devoted communist. In these circumstances, images transmitted during movies with partisans cannot be treated as a fiction that is raised by mechanisms of power of that

time, but instead as an ensemble of images, symbols, myths, narratives as well as belief and behavior systems created by society for centuries. The fact that a small group of partisans can face German occupation cannot be considered by any means as idealism of reality, because these images are decoded from a public that is imbued with the myth of bravery, patriotism and communist idealism. The images are simply an alternative form of displaying what history books, books of institution of Marxist- Leninist Studies, or leader's speeches transmit in different ways and forms. As philosopher Jacques Ranciere writes "extracts of novels or poems, or titles of books or movies, create quite often links that give meaning to images and sometimes they turn the pile of visual fragments into 'images' (Jacques Ranciere: 2007: 12)"

Regarding the Albanian cinema of socialist realism time, the well known director Dhimiter Anagosti, during an interview few years ago, stated that cinema intended to convey to people the ideas of creating a society according to the socialist model of collectivism. The target was the society; neither the individual, nor his individual values. So, society was the recipient of these messages. Consequently there have been added many economic laws, common properties laws, elimination of private property laws and of everything that was private, to make it possible that individual could depend only on government in all possible aspects. It was a glorifying of Central Committee policy, of Party, of Government, and of course of the first secretary of Albania. The model came always from the inspiration of the positive hero that was always the shouldered worker or the cooperativist (collective farm laborer) that invented something and symbolized innovators. In documentaries the positive hero is glorified and nothing negative is displayed, while in artistic films, a dichotomy between the positive hero and the negative one was created. In the framework of mythologization of labour heroes, a very interesting case to analyze is the film of Dhimiter Anagosti "Brother and Friends/ Vëllezër dhe shokë", which was banned from broadcasting due to death of the commissioner from tuberculosis in the end of the movie, while generally the protagonists should have more glorious diseases due to the positive hero example that they had to transmit. The commissioner had to die as a hero, not while lying in bed as an ill person. The positive hero should wear all doctrine ideals and has to die, if he must really die, as a hero in his duty. What is really essential about the movies of previous regime, as Mr. Anagosti claims, is that "the leader was the first person to watch every new movie" which also shows the important impact of the movie in the field of reproductive ideology. The first copy of movie passed from movie studio in private cinema of Enver Hoxha and if he said "good, acknowledge the filmmakers" the movie was approved and was ready to be projected. But if the movie was refused and objections were made to it, it had to be created from the beginning. For example, about the movie " Poppies over walls/ Lulëkuqe mbi mure" Enver Hoxha expressed himself "these are the sons of our Party". Thus, the movie had the right to be displayed. So, the cinema was controlled from the top of communist pyramid, from Enver Hoxha. The film could be banned even earlier, if a provisional controller watched, or when the minister or any member of Politburo watched it; in general Ramiz Alia was the person to approve screening of the movie, but the one who had the right of veto was the dictator. The hierarchy of control started from the ministry, the central committee and then the dictator. In this regard only could be explained the extremely massive audience of cinemas during the period of socialist realism. Being filtered through means of spiritual production, the dominant ideology was promoted in every movie theater of almost every city. Through the medium of the screen, the cinema was somehow the place where leadership had direct contact with people. Given the characteristics of the hero of the movie, there were defined ideal features of devoted communism in different times: starting from the partisan that abandoned his family for fighting against enemies, to the soldier who kills his fellow revisionists on behalf of the Party; from the idealist director who

abandons his personal interests on behalf of the Party's idealisms, to the devoted worker who tries and works hard to realize his dream to come to Tirana and create his family. In short, every hero character presents a fragment of human time, in a period where around 400 movies were produced in a very short time. You should bear in mind that – as Doctor Dhimiter Anagosti explains- “The studio movie was created for the purpose of having an institution that would have popularized and promoted the Party and its leader ideals, in a country like Albania. There was no place in the world to produce 40 documentaries, so many newsreels and 13 or 15 artistic movies. It was an extraordinary investment and we don't know how much was the cost of all this, because Albanian government never published the expenses at that time. This extraordinary investment was part of advertising costs and no one knew how much did the government spend for this purpose. ..”

The cinema as means of ideology reproduction through image processing is the most effective form of glorification and freezing of an image, because it creates to its images an unlimited lifespan. In his book: “What is cinema?” (Bazin: 1972) the French filmmaker Andre Bazin writes:” the Egyptian art aimed to preserve images through practices of mummification in the same way, but this wasn't the best solution because pyramids and aisles couldn't protect mummies from absorber impact of the time. This religious tradition of image glorification through its preservation was later followed by building statues, preservation of life via representation of life. However, Bazin continues, mummies and statues are not the only forms of this representation of life. For example, ‘mummification’ can be the case of Louis XIV who ‘froze’ inside Charles le Brun's paintings“ (Bazin: 1956). But, unlike this period, during movies of socialist realism, cinematic images are not anymore about death or survival issues, but a much wider concept: They are about creating an ideal world, a world that resembles the real one; “an ideal world represented by the movie which society tries to copy”. A kind of cinema that constantly remains focused around the image of domination of the leader that tries to glorify. As Ranciere would say “a glorified essence of the image, provided by the model of material production. As director Dhimiter Anagosti clearly explains to us, we are dealing with a kind of image distribution that is strictly inspected within a cemented society around the image of Enver Hoxha leader as its center.

Hollywood movies and those of socialist realism

In his essay "Reflections on Hollywood film in the age of Reagan" (Kellner, 1991) Douglas Kellner explains how Hollywood movies from 60s' up to now are closely related with political movements and trends of the time. One of his main conclusions in this paper is that "Hollywood Movies as well as American society should be seen as a ground of continuous clashes and movies can be interpreted as a clash of representations on how to create a social environment of our daily lives. In the field of images ideology, Douglas Kellner supports the approach according to which the film offers a reality that is fundamentally conditioned by the social-political configuration of a society. According to him, what is characteristic about Hollywood movies is that even "the most critical films of society, always provide solutions to social problems on an individual basis, thus strengthening the conservative tendencies with individualistic trends as well as an attack for public." Consequently, the author argues that, if we read the Hollywood movies of 80s in a political way, we could make a prediction for coming to power of former President Reagan and the domination of the New Right in the late 80's, explaining that conservative trends of movies and popular culture had an important role in preparation of an atmosphere that would welcome the victory of Reagan and conservatives. Regarding this kind of cinematic function, it would be appropriate to take a look at ideology criticism of "Rambo" movie, so that we could clearly understand the impact of ideology in cinema.

In the scenario of this film-as Kellner explains - it is appeared not only a military and imperialist ideology, but also the way how militarism and imperialism inside the film serve to the interests of American capitalism legitimating their intervention in Southeast Asia, Central America or elsewhere. In this film (as in "Mountains covered of green/Malet me blerim mbuluar ") we are dealing with transmission of a certain pattern of behavior, if we observe how representation of women, men, Vietnamese or Russian is an integral part of the ideological text and traditional American values.

Rambo (1985) is one of the films of returning in Vietnam, that started with extreme success of "Uncommon Valor" in 1983 and was followed by three movies of Chuck Norris "Missing in Action" of 1984-1986. All these films follow more or less the same line of representing the return of a veteran group to Vietnam, a super-man or a veteran super-man type like Rambo, to rescue a group of American soldiers who are still imprisoned by Vietnamese and their Soviet allies. All syndromes of such post-Vietnam films reveal an American hero to come out the winner this time, thus showing a lack of ability to accept the defeat (Douglas Kellner, 1991). Simultaneously, they provide some symbolic compensation for the loss, shame and guilt by presenting Americans as "good" and victorious this time, while their Communist enemies appear as the reincarnation of "evil" that this time deserved the loss. Here we have again the same way of putting an unbridgeable gap on all ethics between self and the other as it was showed in German films of socialist realism period. However, according to Kellner, what is really interesting to notice in "Rambo", is the way how his role comprises all counterculture motifs that flourished during the war in Vietnam in the late 60s. "Rambo has long hair, a bandage on his head, eats only natural products (different from General Murdock who prefers Coca Cola), is sensitive to the nature and against bureaucracy, government and technology - ie it describes exactly the ideas of the majority of 60s' anti- culturalists". In fact, as Russell Berman reports (1985: 145) "the real enemy of Rambo is governmental mechanism, its massive technology and political motivations with boundless bureaucracy. Rambo is anti-conformist, anti-bureaucratic who opposes state, the new individualist activist. "Thus Rambo appears as the 'preferred hero', an image of institutionalized individualism that explains how ideology of Reagan- era proved itself capable of assimilating elements of counter-cultures, as fascism managed to provide a "cultural synthesis" of previous nationalistic, primitive, socialist and racist ideologies (Bloch, 1986). This trend of films that makes anti government individuals heroes is constituted by an important turn of cultural industry that since 70s' moved to assessment of anti-conformism and individualistic heroism in this new era of capitalism fame. The way how ideology expected to be performed is radically the same with the period of films with partisans in Albania after the war, but now, we do not have any apotheosis of the group, or of the collectivity of partisans, or of clan ethnicity or putting common interests over individual ones. On the contrary, we are dealing with an extreme glorification of the individual image; entity that opposes community, personal strength against repression that is reflected by government bureaucracy, anti-conformism that opposes conformity. Two different modes of images that suit the material conditions of context where they are created while simultaneously performing the latter. In case of Albanian films, we are dealing with a centralized economy where government was the owner of everything; family followed the typical patriarchal model and society as a whole was based on clan myths constantly actualized by communist ideology of Enver Hoxha. Prior of loving himself, the individual should love his family and over all, he must be ready to die for his homeland. The opposite appears in movies like Rambo or "Delta Force" with Chuck Norris. Community does not matter anymore, because it's the period of late capitalism where individualism sets in motion all gears of ideology

reproduction in society. To be a devoted American you should rely only on yourself, because otherwise you will be transformed into a mass, into a Vietnamese massacred by a super-hero manufactured by individualism. Movies ideology of American wars can't be better explained than in "Full Metal Jacket" (1987) of Stanley Kubrick where, during a dialogue with a marine the colonel advises him: "We should help the Vietnamese buddy, because within each 'yellow muzzle' there is a hidden American who wants to come out; therefore, we need to help them by killing them off ". Just as in movies with partisans , the most important thing was performance of collectivity under the reflection of daily dramas of family life in Albania; In American movies of this period, it appears the performance of individual power that seeks to "undress" Vietnamese or Soviet communists from their collectivity. Here, the images of dramas and dilemmas in family, or at work are transformed into individual's struggle with himself. He is fighting with his own nerves against his clouded conscience caused by suffering, the majority of which - as in the case of Rambo- was caused by the state machine. In Rambo, Vietnamese and Russians appear as - to mention a phrase of Douglas Kellner - "The Alien Others" (Douglas Kellner, 1991). Vietnamese are portrayed as thugs, rogues, and non-efficient crawler of Soviets or as cannon fodder for Rambo power, while on the other hand the Soviets appear as sadistic torturers, non - humans or mechanized bureaucrats. The impact of this film has been extremely important on the perception of American society, while former President Reagan himself, at that time, would state that " I just saw Rambo and now, I know how to act next time" thus giving an important message to the public as if he was convinced that violence was the best way to solve conflicts. Not surprisingly, Oliver North and other secret members of Reagan staff were labeled as "Rambo-s" when they were involved in some illegal and criminal operations, so called "confidentially" (Covert Operations).

Even though USA was denied victory in Vietnam, they tried to cope with popular culture. This phenomenon explains some of the political functions of popular culture (pop culture), which includes reimbursement for previous losses by making sure that everything is going well with American political body. The popularity of movies such as Rambo or Chuck Norris suggests that Hollywood - and unfortunately large segments of the country - have embraced the outlook of Hollywood films whereby the "enemy" is so bad and "we" are so good that only violence would be able to eliminate threats to our welfare. Thus, the most "popular" actions of Reagan was military intervention in Grenada and bombing of Libya - exactly the kind of glorified actions in "Rambo" movie or other military movies of the time.

CONCLUSIONS

In both cases, we are dealing with a kind of cinema that functions as the main medium of reproduction of the dominant ideology. Patriarchal features of Albanian movies of Enver Hoxha's period, that are very clear at least of all men during a partisan's wedding, is a kind of alternate version of individualistic grounds of American capitalism of 80s', embodied in the image of a hero completely disappointed by government and communalism . The medium in both cases is the main instrument of glorification of actuality, where culture appears as the most solid part of ideological reproduction. This kind of "cultural industry - if we use the term of Theodor Adorno (2001) - achieves higher effectiveness because, it relies not only on the parade of ideology or the appearance of the true nature of things, but mostly by breaking the gap between skepticism and belief, or between trusting and mistrusting, by including all these contrarities inside a unity "(Adorno, 2001). The whole parade of wars against the "bad" and its mythologization in the form of cinematographic images presents exactly the reproduction of the existing order, thus establishing an inaccessible demarcation border between the self and the enemy, that in other words can be defined with abbreviation of George Orwell "war is peace" (George Orwell: 2005: 6) or even with modern concept of military interventions called

"humanitarian wars" (Jacques Ranciere: 2010). As we understood from this paper, the cinema of 90s' was clearly created by conditions of material reality, thus making the fiction be just a consequence of reality and the main function of it was the freezing and conservation of reality.

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