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The Empire Strikes Back. Russian National Cinema After 2005

Abstract

The article provides a critical analysis of the latest wave of Russian national cinema (2005-2013), considered one of the key instruments of Vladimir Putin's nation-building cultural policy. The analysis, focused mostly on historical films and war films, reveals the concept of an 'imperial nation' as the main concept underlying this policy. The new Russian nation-concept binds various elements from two former Russian imperial traditions: the tradition of the Great Russian Empire and the Soviet tradition, thus trying to overcome the identity crisis in contemporary Russia.

Keywords: national cinema, Russian cinema, cinema and politics, imperial nation, politics of memory.

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The revival of Russian national cinema which could be observed in recent years, seems to be a powerful answer to the identity crisis in which the Russians found themselves after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This particular attempt at overcoming the crisis by redefining Russian national identity is definitely the widest-ranging and most spectacular project carried out after 1991. Patriotic filmmaking has recently become one of the key instruments of Russian nation-building policy, generously subsidized with public money and strictly determined by the assumptions of the dominant cultural policy.

In the 1990s, the political elites of the newly created Russian Federation turned their attention to national identity issues with some delay, after a period of intense nostalgia for the just-collapsed Soviet Union. The politics of Russian nation-building in the Yeltsin era, based on the concept of *rossijskij* nation (the classic idea of 'civic' nation that was to form the basis for collective solidarity within the new territorial boundaries) and advocated by the president since 1994, was not implemented consistently. In spite of the 'civic' rhetoric, Yeltsin was, in fact, constantly balancing between 'ethnic' and 'civic' nation-concept (Shevel, 2011, p. 190). Simultaneously, due to the main focus on social and economic problems resulting from the system transition to capitalism, he clearly neglected cultural policy. According to Jasmijn Van Gorp (2011, p. 250), critics of the president accused him of being late in recognizing the role of film as a key nation-builder, as well as of ineffective implementing the "Law on Cinematography", formally introduced in 1996. Consequently, a great chaos in the system of Russian cinema-financing was a reflection of wavering cultural policy under Yeltsin's presidency.

After coming to power in 2000, president Vladimir Putin initially seemed to continue the ambivalent nation-building policy of his predecessor. However, according to Vera Tolz (2004, p. 169), he understood much better the political importance of the identity issue. Convinced of the need to (re) build Russian national identity as soon as possible, he made 'the promotion of patriotism' one of his policy's priorities. Another one was, of course, the centralization of the country in order to fully concentrate the whole state power in the hands of the president. For Russian cinema this meant, on the

one hand, implementing a well-considered cultural policy followed by a serious increase in state-financing of film and, on the other, increasing state control over artistic production (Van Gorp, 2011, pp. 252–254).

Oxana Shevel claims that it was 2006 (during the anti-Georgian campaign preceding military intervention in that country) when the significant shift from the ‘civic’ rhetoric towards the concept of an ‘ethnic’ nation occurred and the adjective *rossijskij* was replaced by *russkij* in the language of the political elites (Shevel, 2011, p. 191). Simultaneously, as the state was constantly centralizing, the political sentiment for the imperial past of the Soviet Union was increasingly coming to the fore. This is probably the reason why some researchers, such as Emil Pain (2009, p. 75), characterize Putin’s policy after 2006 as ‘imperial nationalism’ which, on the one hand, seeks to rebuild a strong, authoritarian and potentially expansive state as a significant point of reference for the whole population of the former Soviet Union, while on the other it claims the right to protection of Russian minorities in these areas and determines the privileged role of the Russian ethnic majority within the current boundaries of the state.

Taking into consideration the variety of possible interpretations of the concept of ‘national cinema’ that range from open definitions stating that the concept includes every film made in a particular nation-state (White, 2004, pp. 211–232), through definitions pointing at particular criteria that determine the national specificity (Hill, 1992, pp. 10–21), to more narrow definitions stressing the dimension of an ideological production (Higson, 2002, pp. 52–68), we prefer the last interpretation. Thus, we understand ‘national cinema’ as a current designed for proclaiming a coherent vision of collective identity, as well as to promoting a stable set of founding meanings and values (Higson, 2002, pp. 53–54). It is also worth noting that, although so understood Russian national cinema is primarily seen here as an instrument of Vladimir Putin’s nation-building policy, it would be a mistake to reduce the current solely to state propaganda. It appears to be rather an opportunity for the conservative Russian cultural elites¹ to express their minds within the general ideological assumptions of the nation-building policy. Political authorities affect the movie content indirectly, by subsidizing (mainly through the state Cinema Fund officially called ‘Federal Funding of Social and Economic Support for the National Film’) mainly those projects which fit the nation-building policy assumptions best.

¹ Russian national cinema is being made by the most famous Russian mainstream film directors, such as Fyodor Bondarchuk, Nikita Mikhalkov or Vladimir Khotinenko as well as by the whole range of the second-class directors, such as Vladimir Bortko, Aleksandr Buravsky, Aleksandr Kott and more.

In this paper, we reflect on the shape of the new Russian national identity that emerges from the latest wave of Russian national cinema, as well as on the founding values of this identity. Taking a closer look, we focused mostly on historical films and war films² (leaving aside film adaptations of literary works as well as youth films³) as two genres which, in our opinion, offer the most coherent and wide-ranged vision of national identity. Furthermore, we took into account only films produced after 2005 – mainly due to the fact that the particularly dynamic development of the Russian national cinema seems to go hand in hand with the aforementioned tightening of the political direction. The latest story of the Russian nation seems to be centered around three main pillar-concepts that interpenetrate in particular films. These are: the root, the essence and the difference.

The Holy Empire

It is mostly historical film that is meant to provide a strong foundation for the new Russian national identity. However, the Russian variant of this genre seems to completely give up claims to represent any “objectivity” or “historical truth”, deliberately stylizing the past on a legend. During the infamous Time of Troubles (ros. *smutnoye vremya*) depicted in *1612* (Mikhalkov & Khotinenko, 2007) directed by Vladimir Khotinenko, prince Dmitry Mikhaylovich Pozharsky, who tries to mobilize the Orthodox peasants to fight against the Polish-Lithuanian offensive, is constantly accompanied by a white unicorn symbolizing the forthcoming revival of the great Russian state. In Vladimir Bortko’s *Taras Bulba* (Zlatopol’skiĭ & Bortko, 2009), the film that discusses the situation on the eve of the seventeenth-century Polish-Cossack wars, Polish nobility measure themselves against a mythical hero – after all, the eponymous character is the ideal type of a Cossack Ataman. Finally, Andrei Smirnov in *Zhila-była odna baba* (*There was a woman*; Prudnikova & Smirnov, 2011) inscribes the Russian myth of Kitezh, the underwater city⁴, into a social history of the collapse of the

² War film understood as a genre focused on the Great Patriotic War as well as on the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

³ The only exception here is *Taras Bulba* (2009), the adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s novel under the same title; not only did we include *Taras* because he perfectly fits into the historical film genre, but also because the film is purposefully based on the second edition from 1842, turned by Gogol into the nationalist one.

⁴ According to the folk legend, in the 13th century the city of Kitezh was sank by God in the lake, together with all the praying inhabitants in order to ensure the eternal protection to the Russian people against the pagan Tatars. Kitezh would stay underwater until the whole world eventually turn into house of God.

tsarist regime and the beginning of the October Revolution. In general, Russian historical film resembles a legend in which real historical events coexist harmoniously with the supernatural order, seemingly reserved only for folk tales.

The 'historical fairy tale' traces Russian national identity back to the 10th century, when, as we find out in Dmitry Korobkin's *Yaroslav. Tysyachu let nazad* (*Yaroslav. A Thousand years ago*; Surkov & Korobkin, 2010), the Kievan prince Yaroslav the Wise lays the foundation for the future, multi-ethnic Russian Empire. In the struggle with the pagan bandits, Orthodox Yaroslav stands as an uncompromising leader relentlessly suppressing all manifestations of devotion to any alternative social order. On the other hand, he is unusually willing to enter an alliance with those pagans who are ready to make concessions to him. For the pagans, he seems to be an enlightened ruler bringing a highly developed civilization to the wastelands. In *Yaroslav...*, Korobkin seems to legitimize Russia's territorial conquests (starting with the medieval Kievan Rus') by presenting them in terms of 'friendly expansionism' – smaller and weaker communities voluntarily give themselves up to the protection of Russia since they recognize the alliance as advantageous. Not only does the director argue that the idea of the Russian Empire existed from time immemorial, but also claims that it was based not so much on authoritarian rule, but rather on a peaceful coexistence of different cultures.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the very core of the Russian Empire is solely made up of the indigenous people. Introducing Herald – a character of Varangian origin – and making him a close ally of Yaroslav who eventually turns out to be a traitor, Korobkin strikingly dissociates himself from the popular thesis of the Nordic origin of the Rurik dynasty⁵. He claims that the first Russian princes were most certainly indigenous Slavs. Furthermore, Zaporozhian Kossacks from Bortko's *Taras Bulba* or even the hundreds of Orthodox Slavs from the works of Khotinenko and Smirnov, seem to be equally indigenous as Yaroslav's people. All the filmmakers firmly argue that the Russian man is not a stranger in his own land.

The element of fundamental importance in bonding the Empire together, but first of all in justifying its very existence, seems to be Orthodox religion. Highly significant scenes, in which the pagans conclude the alliance with Yaroslav under the Orthodox cross, Taras Bulba's Cossacks get killed with 'Russian Orthodox faith' on their lips, and the end of the Time of Troubles is preceded by the prophecy uttered by the Orthodox monk, make the

⁵ Although this thesis seems to be highly unattractive to the Russian nationalists, at the same time it is seriously taken by some historians; see more: Fomin (2005).

Russian 'historical fairy tale' a sacred story. The Russian Empire, equated with the Holy Land, appears now as a perfect form of statehood. Belonging to it is the supreme honour and dying in its defence is fulfilling the noble duty. Furthermore, depicting the state in terms of the Holy Empire seems to be a way of legitimizing arbitrary actions within the process of law-making. Since the state law becomes synonymous with religious dogma, it cannot be liable either to rational analysis, or any criticism.

Besides, it is worth noting that in Russian national cinema the category of 'faith' goes far beyond the realm of religion. Film directors seem to be inevitably guided by the famous motto of Fyodor Tyutchev stating that [Russia's] *soul is of a special kind, by faith alone appreciated*⁶. Thus, 'faith' seems to be the only factor that could explain the Russian 'national past' – from the dawn of history until today. Consequently, it is the main motivation that drives each and every action taken by film characters.

The Russian Hero

On the foundations of the Holy Empire, a modern Russian national community is to grow. Her constitutive elements exposed by Russian national cinema seem to be directly derived from the heritage of the Soviet Union. Although they appear repeatedly in each of the analysed films, it is war cinema focused on the Great Patriotic War (22 June 1941 – 9 May 1945) that definitely plays a major role here. The war triumph is selected to be a defining moment for the modern Russian nation, thus being a simple continuation of the Soviet rhetoric which also consistently glorified this victory.

Russian directors seem to agree on how to interpret the very beginning of the war. According to them, the idyll of harmonious Soviet life was destroyed by the treacherous attack of the fascist aggressor. In a single moment, the quiet and peaceful life of Russian troops (first of all, they appear as exemplary husbands and fathers, and only next are they political officers) in *Brestskaya krepost'* (*The Brest Fortress*; Ugol'nikov & Kott, 2010) by Aleksandr Kott, falls apart. The same German raid in *Match* (*Match*; Neretin & Maliukov, 2012) by Sergei Bezrukov, brutally interrupts the

⁶ This is the fragment of the famous Fyodor Tyutchev's quotation from 1866: *Who would grasp Russia with the mind? / For her no yardstick was created / Her soul is of a special kind / By faith alone appreciated* (trans. by John Dewey); the quotation has been used, among others, by Nikolai Berdayev to explain the 'Russian mentality', see more: Berdiaev (2010). It became the cultural motto which was to illustrate the 'Russian irrationality' as the primary way of interpreting the whole Russian history.

nascent love between Anna and Nikolai – the latter being a rising football star, the Russian goalkeeper of Ukrainian FC Dynamo Kyiv, Russia⁷ – an innocent victim of the aggression – is then brutally forced to defend the last outposts in the interior of the country, as in Fyodor Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad* (Mel'kumov & Bondarchuk, 2013) or Aleksandr Buravskii's *Leningrad* (Mel'kumov & Buravskii, 2009).

Filmmakers of Russian national cinema seem to argue that the limits of heroism actually do not exist, but also that each and every Russian is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of the Homeland. The Red Army soldiers invariably turn out to be the avant-garde of heroism – they repeatedly charge on tanks only with a shovel in their hands⁸, and they commit 'patriotic suicides' – both individual and collective – in order to take a few more fascists together with them to the grave, either to prevent the enemy from gaining a strategic stronghold⁹ or even to prevent their own family members from falling into the hands of the fascist slaughterers¹⁰. Military heroism is widely supplemented by countless examples of civilian heroism of women and children. The latter is best illustrated by militiawoman Nina from *Leningrad*, who is constantly helping the civilians to escape from the besieged city and rescuing them from dying of starvation. Another good example can be Sasha Akimov, a twelve-year-old cadet from *Brestskaya krepost'* who miraculously manages to take away the red banner from the besieged fortress, thus saving, in fact, the symbol of an ultimate victory¹¹. Obviously, the depiction of Russia as war victim additionally sanctifies every heroic death, giving it the status of a morally right act.

Not only do all the mentioned operations aim at constructing an inclusive model of an everyman-hero (allowing every spectator to identify himself with such a concept – at least to some extent), but they also seem

⁷ Nowadays, the Great Patriotic War is entirely inscribed into Russian national narrative; the name of 'the Soviet Union' never appears in any of the analysed films – it is completely replaced by the notion of Homeland.

⁸ Those scenes clearly correspond with the best traditions of the Soviet cinema: Sergey Bondarchuk's *Oni srazhalis za rodimu* (*They fought for the homeland*, 1976), Yuri Ozerov's *Osvobozhdenie* (*The Liberation*, 1969), Aleksandr Ivanov's *Soldaty* (*The Soldiers*, 1956).

⁹ Perhaps best illustrated in *Stalingrad*. The entire film plot develops around the small squad of Russian soldiers who defend the ruined house near the Volga river. In the last scene, the surviving soldiers who are no longer able to resist the Germans, decide to commit mass suicide – after asking the Soviet aircraft to bomb their own positions, they are buried alive during the air raid.

¹⁰ Perhaps best illustrated in *Brestskaya krepost'*, when colonel Kizhevatov, after finding himself in a hopeless situation, commits a suicide together with his wife.

¹¹ *Krasnoye Znamya* (*The Banner of Victory*) is the banner raised by the Red Army soldiers on the Reichstag in Berlin on the day that Adolf Hitler committed suicide (30 April 1945); nowadays, *Krasnoye Znamya* as a symbol of victory in the Great Patriotic War, is annually presented during the celebrations of *Dien Pobiedy* (*The Victory Day*) in Moscow, 9th May.

to try to establish the national monolith as the main collective character of each of these stories. At this point, Russian national cinema follows the well-known scheme borrowed from the Soviet cinema. It emphasizes communitarian, collective values over liberal, individual ones, thus marginalizing the psychology of the film characters and submitting all their actions to realization of the main collective purpose, namely – defence of the Homeland. Consequently, all the individual destinies intertwine into one collective national destiny, thus achieving a perfect unity. In such an order, where everyone perfectly knows his or her place, loyalty to the comrades becomes the supreme value. When Taras Bulba shoots his own son for treason and fighting against “his own”, he even puts this loyalty over family. In the face of consolidated collective power (embodied in *Gorod-geroy* of Leningrad, *Krepost'-geroy* of Brest, etc¹².) not only does the enemy have to inevitably surrender, but so do the forces of nature – in starving Leningrad it is only the effort of a collective will that seems to overcome them, thus preventing the people from turning into beasts. Although the food rations constantly decrease, they do not fight at all costs for every slice of bread, but rather distribute what they have among all members of the community. On the other hand, nature itself visibly helps the Russians to survive. It becomes mostly clear in the opening scene of Nikita Mikhalkov's *Utomlyonnye solntsem 2: Tsitadel* (*Burnt by the Sun 2: Citadel*; Mikhalkov, 2011) when a mosquito saves the life of a Russian soldier and then a spider distracts a German sniper trying to shoot a band of unarmed civilians. Furthermore, Mikhalkov in *Utomlyonnye solntsem 2: Predstoyanie* (*Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus*; Mikhalkov, 2010) proves that the evident contradiction between the forces of nature and God is not at all a problem for him. He suggests that it is only divine custody over the just-baptized daughter of the main character that saves her from drowning in the sea. Thus, the Russians seem to be protected by the whole universe – natural, as well as supernatural.

The basic principle that internally organizes the national monolith, seems to be egalitarianism. Obviously, in the national cinema the best embodiment of egalitarianism is the Red Army, in the ranks of which people of various cultures and religions from all over the Soviet Union fight and die alongside ethnic Russians. Besides cultural affinity, struggle in defence of the homeland transcends also gender and age, equally involving old men, women and children, such as the aforementioned Nina from *Leningrad* or Sasha from *Brestskaya krepost'*. Finally, when it comes to the issue of social origin, Russian national cinema faithfully reproduces the Soviet rhetoric.

¹² *The Hero City, the Hero Fortress* – honorary title awarded by Soviet authorities for exceptional heroism during the Great Patriotic War; the term is widely used in today's Russia as well.

If the question of origin is raised, the main character always turns out to be a commoner. Not only does it apply to Lyuty, a poor youngster from the orphanage who is the only one to survive the offensive of Afghan fundamentalists in Fyodor Bondarchuk's *9 rota* (*The 9th Company*; Matila & Bondarchuk, 2005), but also to the peasant Andreyka from *1612*. Andreyka is the only main fictional character who eventually outshines all the historical characters presented in the film. It seems that the director introduces him in order to marginalize the role of the boyars in stirring up a popular uprising that ended the Time of Troubles, thus empowering the folk.

Filmmakers of Russian national cinema seem to be deeply convinced both of the uniqueness of their own national monolith (after all, *There was nowhere such an alliance as there was on Russian soil* [Taras Bulba 00:00:53; Zlatopol'skiĭ & Bortko, 2009]) and of its eternity. On the one hand, Soviet values are sometimes projected onto the distant past, while on the other, they are indicated as crucial for further generations. The latter becomes mostly clear in *Stalingrad* and *Brestskaya krepost'* which strongly emphasize the crucial role of an intergenerational message which should confer immortality upon the nation.

Enemies of Russian Civilization

Regardless of the fact that Russian national cinema does not set clear boundaries of its own community (actually, one can be pretty sure that they lie far beyond the borders of the contemporary Russian Federation, although it is difficult to say whether they coincide more with the area of the former Soviet Union or rather the area where the Orthodox religion is dominant), the filmmakers are able to doubtlessly describe 'the Other'. While the basic characteristic of each 'Other' appearing in the films seems to be its immanent enemy-status, the same enemy-status is liable to gradation.

It is fully understandable that the Tatars were assigned the role of the least dangerous enemy, having only the status of an amusing curiosity – after all, this group has not posed a threat to Russia for several centuries. For the same reason, as it seems, Russian national cinema marginalizes the Poles, perceiving them – at best – as a poor imitation of the West. Although in historical film, both the medieval Mongolian State and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth periodically threaten Russian political boundaries, at the same time they seem to be completely uninterested in strangling 'Russianness'. Consequently, the East appears to be mostly a

distant object of misunderstanding (as in *Orda*; Kravets & Proshkin, 2012, by Andrei Proshkin) or simply of mockery (as in *Taras Bulba*; Zlatopol'skii & Bortko, 2009), while Poland seems to be the land of hypocrisy, deceit and excessive ambitions of the local nobility. Not only are the Polish noblemen (vividly portrayed particularly in *1612*; Mikhalkov & Khotinenko, 2007), greedy, cynical and power-hungry, but most of all they feel unreasonably superior to the Russian people, no matter – peasants or aristocracy. In turn, the Polish Catholic priest is not only a devoted servant of the Pope, devoid of any spirituality and humbly filling his most ridiculous orders, but he also constantly incites his ward, Tsarevna Xenia Borisovna, to treason by converting her to Catholicism. Eventually, after being humbled by the wisdom of the Orthodox monk who, much in advance, predicts the failure of the Poles, the Catholic priest finally realizes that his helplessness in trying to understand Russia does not result from Russia's alleged wilderness, but rather from the limitations of his own (implicitly: Western) way of perceiving the world. He is not able to go beyond the rational categories that turn out to be completely inapplicable to Russia.

The actual threat to the national community seems to be not so much the aforementioned political enemy, but rather the civilizational enemy, which – either in the form of German fascists or Islamic fundamentalists – aims at annihilating the very existence of the nation. Despite a number of common features that serve equally to create the image of the fascists and the Taliban as dehumanized Evil (both enemies take the form of a black, boundless and nameless crowd, wreaking destruction and flooding the Russian defence positions with a sea of fire), the key difference lies, however, in reference to the civilizational order. Namely, the fascist enemy symbolizes the civilization of evil, while the Islamic enemy represents lack of any civilization at all.

As a consequence of inscribing the anti-fascist struggle into the civilizational struggle between Good and Evil, the fascist in the war film – whether a German or a Ukrainian¹³ – appears as the moral enemy that constitutes the complete opposite to a Russian. Despite introducing single fascist characters who are doubtful if they actually going the right way – the case of *Stalingrad* or *Leningrad* – the boundaries of the national

¹³ The ambivalent attitude towards the Ukrainians seems to be worth noting here, as it reflects the ambivalence in Russian rhetoric during the political crisis in Ukraine (February – April 2014); on the one hand – as in *Myatch* – a Ukrainian appears as a fascist collaborator, conformist and hypocrite who cheats on Russians, and on the other – as in *Taras Bulba* – Zaporozhian Cossacks are not portrayed as proto-Ukrainians (which would go in line with the current Ukrainian politics of memory), but rather as Russian patriots; by depicting a Ukrainian either as a fascist or as a Russian, the national cinema produces a double symbolic legitimacy for the real expansion into Ukraine.

community always remains impassable and ‘a good German’ remains an unknown category to Russian national cinema. Furthermore, victory over the civilization of evil takes almost a mythical form – not only is the enemy defeated by the unique attributes possessed by the national community, but also he is defeated forever.

In turn, the anti-Islamic struggle is inscribed into the struggle between civilization and barbarity, the latter represented primarily by the fundamentalists from Afghanistan¹⁴. Not only is a member of the Taliban a masked terrorist, who – as in Fyodor Bondarchuk’s *9 rota* – attacks out of nowhere, or – as in Sergei Makhovikov’s *Tikhaya zastava* (*The Quiet Post*; Kononov, Fedorova, & Makhovikov, 2011) – turns Russian women into Islamic terrorists, or – as in Andrei Kavun’s *Kandagar* (*Kandahar*; Neretin, Todorovskii, & Kavun, 2010) – kidnaps a Russian plane, thus performing a symbolic attack on the state, but he is also a wild beast. A Taliban lives in a filthy mud hut, feeds on half-raw meat, beats his wife and murders his companions. In contrast to fascists, whose offensive looked more like a single occurrence, a hurricane, the Afghan guerrillas pose a permanent threat, constantly pulsating on the outskirts of Russian everyday life.

While the anti-fascist struggle reveals the crystalline good inherent in the Russian national community, the anti-Islamic struggle rather exposes the superiority of Russian civilization. In *Tikhaya zastava*, where Russian soldiers sew shoes for the poor Afghan child, and in *Kandahar*, where the Taliban learn from the captured pilots how to play football, the Russians appear to be the enlightened mentors, who carry the civilizing mission into the darkness of barbarism.

Conclusions

Recent Russian national cinema seems to offer a vision of ‘Russianness’ as a synthesis of selected elements from the two imperial traditions and for this reason it could be called ‘imperial nation’. On the one hand, the new Russian identity is to be rooted in the pre-revolutionary Russian Empire – the sanctified Orthodox land where, since the early Middle Ages, all the indigenous cultures peacefully coexist under the leadership of the equally indigenous ethnic Russians. On the other, the key reference point for the present time seems to be the legacy of the Soviet Union, mostly condensed in the Great Patriotic War story. Furthermore, such Russian identity seems

¹⁴ Thus, the Russian national cinema inscribes the war in Afghanistan from the 80s into the current – both Russian and American – rhetoric of ‘war against terrorism’; by establishing this continuity, the Russians may appear as the world pioneers of this war.

to be founded not only on an unwavering faith in its own uniqueness and inherent might, but also on the conviction of moral superiority over the West and civilizational superiority over the barbaric world of Islam.

It seems that analysing recent Russian national cinema can be an aid in better understanding the assumptions of Vladimir Putin's nation-building policy after 2006. Taking into account the category of 'imperial nation' as the main symbolic reference point of this policy, one may be far less surprised by the broad social legitimacy for the authoritarian policy pursued by the current president.

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Filmography

- 1612: Khroniki smutnogo vremeni (1612: the Time of the Trouble's chronicles)*, director: Vladimir Khotinenko; screenplay: Arif Aliyev; cast: Pyotr Kislov, Michal Zebrowski, Artur Smolyaninov et al.; country of production: Russia; year of production: 2007; length: 147min.
- 9 rota*, director: Fedor Bondarchuk; screenplay: Yuriy Korotkov; cast: Fedor Bondarchuk, Aleksey Chadov, Mikhail Evlanov et al.; country of production: Russia, Finland, Ukraine; year of production: 2005; length: 139min.
- Brestskaya krepost' (The Brest Fortress)*, director: Aleksandr Kott; screenplay: Aleksey Dudarev et al.; cast: Aleksey Kopashov, Pavel Derevyanko, Andrey Merzlikins, et al.; country of production: Russia, Belarus; year of production: 2010; length: 138min.

- Kandagar (Kandahar)*, director: Andrei Kavun; screenplay: Andrei Kavun; cast: Alexandr Baluev, Vladimir Mashkov, Andrey Panin et al.; country of production: Russia; year of production: 2010; length: 100min.
- Leningrad*, director: Aleksandr Buravsky; screenplay: Aleksandr Buravsky; cast: Mira Sorvino, Armin Mueller-Stahl, Aleksandr Filippenko, et al.; country of production: Russia, the Great Britain; year of production: 2009; length: 110min.
- Match (the Match)*, director: Andrei Malyukov; screenplay: Igor Sosna, Timofey Sergeychev, Dmitri Zverkov; cast: Sergey Bezrukov, Elizaveta Boyarskaya, Dirk Martens, et al.; country of production: Russia; year of production: 2012; length: 117min.
- Orda (the Horde)*, director: Andrei Proshkin; screenplay: Yuri Arabov; cast: Maksim Sukhanov, Roza Khayrulina, Innokenti Dakaiarov et al.; country of production: Russia; year of production: 2012; length: 129min.
- Stalingrad*, director: Fedor Bondarchuk; screenplay: Ilya Tilkin, Sergey Snezhkin; cast: Pyotr Fyodorov, Thomas Kretschmann, Mariya Smolnikova et al.; country of production: Russia; year of production: 2013; length: 135min.
- Taras Bulba*, director: Vladimir Bortko; screenplay: Vladimir Bortko; cast: Bohdan Stupka, Magdalena Mielcarz, Igor Petrenko et al.; country of production: Russia, Poland, Ukraine; year of production: 2009; length: 129min.
- Tikhaya zastava (The Quiet Post)*, director: Sergey Makhovikov; screenplay: Sergey Makhovikov; cast: Andrey Chadov, Sergey Selin, Igor Savochkin et al.; country of production: Russia; year of production: 2011; length: 90min.
- Utomlyonnye solntsem 2 (Burnt by the sun 2)*, director: Nikita Mikhalkov; screenplay: Nikita Mikhalkov et al.; cast: Nikita Mikhalkov, Oleg Menshikov, Vladimir Ilin et al.; country of production: Russia, France, Germany; year of production: 2010; length: 180min.
- Yaroslav. Tysyachu let nazad (Yaroslav. A thousand years ago)*, director: Dmitri Korobkin; screenplay: Marina Koshkina, Natalya Nazarova; cast: Aleksandr Ivashkevich, Svetlana Chuikina, Aleksey Kravchenko et al.; country of production: Russia; year of production: 2010; length: 100min.
- Zhila-byla odna baba (Once there was a woman)*, director: Andrey Smirnov; screenplay: Andrey Smirnov; cast: Darya Yekamasova, Vladislav Abashin, Maksim Averin et al.; country of production: Russia; year of production: 2011; length: 150min.

Imperium kontratakuje. Rosyjskie kino narodowe po 2005 roku

Artykuł zajmuje się krytyczną analizą filmów najnowszej fali rosyjskiego kina narodowego (2005-2013), uważanej tu za jedno z kluczowych narzędzi polityki kulturalnej Władimira Putina obliczonej na budowanie narodu. Autorzy artykułu skupiają się przede wszystkim na filmie historycznym i wojennym, odsłaniając pojęcie „imperialnego narodu” jako konceptu stojącego u podstaw oficjalnej polityki. Nowe rosyjskie pojęcie narodu łączy w sobie dwie tradycje rosyjskie: tradycję Imperium Rosyjskiego oraz tradycję Związku Radzieckiego, próbując w ten sposób przezwyciężyć kryzys tożsamościowy współczesnej Rosji.

Słowa kluczowe: kino narodowe, kino rosyjskie, film i polityka, imperialny naród, polityka pamięci.

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