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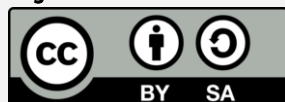
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1/ Hollywood and Moscow: Rewriting the USSR in Film Between World War II and the Postwar Period. A Case Study

Claudia FIORITO

ABSTRACT: *When the United States entered the war in 1941 alongside the United Kingdom, China, and the USSR, the American film industry aligned its production efforts with the war effort, aiming to reshape public perception of the Allies, and particularly of the Soviet Union. Films intended to “soften” the image of the former enemy – now a military ally – would, by the end of the conflict, become a source of embarrassment and even official condemnation among Hollywood studios, leading in some cases to rewrites and ideological reorientations for the postwar redistribution of those films. This article offers a philological analysis of two films – one Soviet, the other American – and their respective re-edited versions for the US market. These case studies are employed to demonstrate how the cinematic medium was reworked in response to shifting US-Soviet relations, from military alliance during the Second World War to the tensions of the 1950s. The films under examination are The North Star (Lewis Milestone, 1943), redistributed in 1957 under the title Armored Attack!, and the Soviet documentary Razgrom nemetskikh voysk pod Moskvoy (“The Defeat of the Nazi Troops Near Moscow”, Leonid Varlamov and Ilya Kopalin, 1942), released the same year in the United States as Moscow Strikes Back.*

ABSTRACT: *Quando gli Stati Uniti entrarono in guerra nel 1941 al fianco di Regno Unito, Cina e URSS, l'industria cinematografica americana allineò la sua produzione agli sforzi bellici, con l'obiettivo di ridisegnare la percezione pubblica degli Alleati, e in particolare dell'Unione Sovietica. I film pensati per “ammorbidire” l'immagine del vecchio nemico – ora alleato militare – sarebbero diventati, alla fine del conflitto, una fonte di imbarazzo e persino di condanna ufficiale da parte degli studi di Hollywood, portando in alcuni casi a riscritture e riorientamenti ideologici per la redistribuzione postbellica di quei film. Questo articolo offre un'analisi filologica di due pellicole – una sovietica e una americana – e delle rispettive versioni rieditate per il mercato statunitense. Questi casi di studio vengono utilizzati per mostrare come il mezzo cinematografico sia stato rimodellato in risposta ai cambiamenti nei rapporti USA-URSS, dall'alleanza militare durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale alle tensioni degli anni Cinquanta. I film analizzati sono The North Star (Lewis Milestone, 1943), redistribuito nel 1957 con il titolo Armored Attack!; il documentario sovietico Razgrom nemetskikh voysk pod Moskvoy (“La sconfitta delle truppe tedesche vicino a Mosca”, Leonid Varlamov e Ilya Kopalin, 1942), uscito nello stesso anno negli Stati Uniti con il titolo Moscow Strikes Back.*

Introduction

At dawn on December 7, 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, drawing the United States into the Second World War alongside the UK, China, and, most notably, the USSR. This event confronted the US government with a significant challenge in domestic cultural policy: the need to reframe the image of the Soviet Union for the American public. With the USSR now positioned as a military ally in the fight against the Axis powers, state

institutions were compelled to renegotiate the representation of a country that had, until that moment, been consistently portrayed in American political, cultural – and notably cinematic – discourse as the United States' primary ideological antagonist.

Unlike the film industries of Europe, operating within a continent devastated by war, Hollywood was experiencing a period of remarkable growth and productivity. Long regarded as primarily driven by commercial imperatives and the production of pure entertainment, the American film industry in fact functioned as a central instrument of domestic propaganda, in ways comparable to the Soviet one¹. By 1942, the Office of War Information (OWI), the main agency responsible for US wartime propaganda², had extended its influence into the entertainment industry through the establishment of the Bureau of Motion Pictures. This office regulated the ideological orientation of wartime film production by systematically reviewing scripts and production materials and recommending revisions designed to ensure the effective communication of the US war effort³. As a result, Hollywood – now serving as the main medium for documenting and communicating the war⁴ – was required to undertake a rapid narrative shift aimed at legitimizing a military alliance that remained deeply uncomfortable for large segments of the American public. The film industry responded swiftly to the OWI communicative demands, and the war years were thus marked by the emergence of a distinct “pro-Soviet cycle” in Hollywood production. Within this brief yet crucial period, virtually every major studio released at least one feature film⁵, all produced between 1941 and 1944, and designed to recast the USSR in a more favourable light by emphasizing the shared military struggle against Nazi Germany⁶.

¹ For a comparative reflection on the evolution of the bilateral film industries and propaganda efforts, see SHAW, Tony, YOUNGBLOOD, Denise J., *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2010.

² See WINKLER, Allan M., *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978.

³ CAMBI, Stefano, «Hollywood tra echi di Guerra fredda e prove di distensione: il negoziato cinematografico Usa-Urss (1945-1958)», in *Cinema e storia*, VI, 2017, pp. 115-130.

⁴ See KOPPES, Clayton R., BLACK, Gregory D., *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990; DOHERTY, Thomas, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999.

⁵ The major Hollywood studios active during the classical studio era comprised the “Big Five” – Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Warner Bros., 20th Century Fox, Paramount Pictures, and RKO Radio Pictures – and the so-called “Little Three”: Columbia Pictures, Universal Pictures, and United Artists.

⁶ COJOC, Andrei, «The Message of American Pro-Soviet Movies during World War II: *The North Star*, *Song of Russia*, *Mission to Moscow*», in *Journal of Global Politics and Current Diplomacy*, 1, 1/2013, pp. 91-104.

Film Title	Director(s)	Distribution	Release Year
<i>Miss V from Moscow</i>	Albert Herman	Producers Releasing Corporation	1942
<i>The Battle of Russia</i>	Frank Capra	OWI, 20th Century Fox	1943
<i>The Boy from Stalingrad</i>	Sidney Salkow Tay Garnett	Columbia Pictures	1943
<i>Mission to Moscow</i>	Michael Curtiz	Warner Bros.	1943
<i>Tender Comrade</i>	Edward Dmytryk	RKO Radio Pictures	1943
<i>The North Star</i>	Lewis Milestone	RKO Radio Pictures	1943
<i>Three Russian Girls</i>	Fedor Ozep Henry Kesler	United Artists	1943
<i>Days of Glory</i>	Jacques Tourneur	RKO Radio Pictures	1944
<i>Russian Rhapsody</i>	Robert Clampett	Warner Bros.	1944
<i>Song of Russia</i>	Gregory Ratoff	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	1944

By foregrounding the threat of a common enemy, these films sought to reshape the image of the USSR in ways that could resonate with American audiences. Rather than emphasizing affinities between the two military allies as such, they rather constructed points of identification between the two peoples at war. Political systems and governmental structures were set aside in favour of narratives portraying the Soviet Union as a country defending its territory and civilian population. Indeed, with varying degrees of effectiveness⁷, these representations drew parallels between Soviet and American values, stressing shared elements such as the attachment to the homeland and the centrality of family life.

The “cycle” encompassed a wide range of genres, from documentaries such as *The Battle of Russia* and *Moscow Strikes Back* to dramatic features and popular cinema – including *The Boy from Stalingrad*, *The North Star*, and *Three Russian Girls* – as well as action-oriented thrillers like *Miss V from Moscow* and even an animated comedy, *Russian Rhapsody*. Particularly prominent were the films that revolved around romantic narratives framed by the experience of war, most notably love stories

⁷ A notable exception among these productions would be Michael Curtiz’s *Mission to Moscow* (1943), a cinematic adaptation of a diplomatic memoir written by US diplomat Joseph E. Davies, who also collaborated on the screenplay. The parallels drawn by Davies are particularly forceful: the lifestyles of American and Soviet citizens are portrayed on screen as broadly equivalent, despite the profound material differences between the two societies, especially in light of the devastating impact of the war on the Soviet economy and everyday life. A telling example emerges from the film’s circulation in the USSR, where it exposed Soviet audiences to the significantly higher standard of living in the United States, ultimately provoking discontent among viewers. See BENNETT, Todd, «Culture, Power, and *Mission to Moscow*: Film and Soviet-American Relations during World War II», in *The Journal of American History*, 88, 2/2001, pp. 489-518; CULBERT, David, «Revisiting a Stalinist Puzzle: *Mission to Moscow*», in *American Communist History*, 12, 2/2013, pp. 117-135.

between American men and Russian women, such as those portrayed in *Song of Russia* and *Days of Glory*⁸.

At the end of the war, the Roosevelt administration had envisioned the continuation of cooperation between the two global powers even after the defeat of Nazi Germany. Following the president's death in April 1945, however, the transition to the Truman presidency, combined with growing mutual distrust between the two countries, rapidly undermined the fragile wartime alliance, bringing any prospect of sustained postwar collaboration to an end. In this shifting political climate, the pro-Soviet films were gradually shelved becoming not only a source of embarrassment for their production companies, but, in some cases, a cause of tangible repercussions. Notably, Eric Johnston, then president of the Motion Picture Association of America, was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), tasked with investigating alleged communist infiltration in the Hollywood film industry, and that eventually led to the widespread blacklisting and professional exclusion of writers, filmmakers and performers throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s⁹.

This article offers a comparative analysis of two case studies, encompassing four films, in order to highlight the evolution of Soviet representation in American cinema during and after the wartime alliance. The first case examines the Soviet documentary *Razgrom nemetskikh voysk pod Moskvoy* ("The Defeat of the German Troops Near Moscow", 1942)¹⁰ and its US adaptation, *Moscow Strikes Back* (1942)¹¹, re-edited and released on the American market in the same year. The second case focuses on *The North Star* (1943)¹², a pro-Soviet Hollywood picture produced by Samuel Goldwyn, and its Cold War-era re-release under the title *Armored Attack!* (1957)¹³, edited to conform to the renewed anti-Soviet climate.

The analysis operates on two levels. First, it addresses the re-editing of a Soviet documentary for American audiences during the crucial years of the wartime alliance, examining how the film was reshaped to align with domestic sensibilities. Second, it explores the transformation of an American-produced pro-Soviet feature into an explicitly anti-Soviet narrative, reflecting the altered geopolitical context brought about by the intensification of Cold War tensions.

⁸ See FIORITO, Claudia, *Moscow Strikes Back! Raccontare l'URSS nella Hollywood della Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, in CENERE, Barbara et al. (eds.), *Forme in movimento: Modelli, metodi e contesti tra continuità e innovazione*, Padova, Padova University Press, 2025, pp. 279-288.

⁹ DOHERTY, Thomas, *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2018. See also: CEPLAIR, Larry, ENGLUND, Steven, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2003.

¹⁰ VARLAMOV, Leonid, KOPALIN, Ilya, *Razgrom nemetskikh voysk pod Moskvoy*, Tsentralnaya studiya kinokhroniki, USSR, 1942, 66'.

¹¹ VARLAMOV, Leonid, KOPALIN, Ilya, *Moscow Strikes Back*, Artkino Pictures, USA-USSR, 1942, 55'.

¹² MILESTONE, Lewis, *The North Star*, Samuel Goldwyn Productions, USA, 1943, 108'.

¹³ MILESTONE, Lewis, *Armored Attack!*, National Telefilm Associates, USA, 1957, 76'.

1. *Razgrom nemetskikh voysk pod Moskvoy* ("The Defeat of the German Troops Near Moscow", 1942) and *Moscow Strikes Back* (1942)

The Soviet documentary *Razgrom nemetskikh voysk pod Moskvoy*, directed by Ilya Kopalin and Leonid Varlamov and produced by the Central Documentary Film Studio of the USSR, underwent a significant process of reworking for its circulation in the United States. Redistributed under the English-language title *Moscow Strikes Back*, the film exemplifies the adaptive strategies through which Soviet documentary cinema was reframed for American audiences during the war years. This moment gains even greater historical weight considering the recognition the film received in its American version, which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary at the 15th Academy Awards in 1943¹⁴.

The re-editing of the original footage for the American market was carried out by the US-based film company Artkino Pictures, Inc., officially the only authorized, albeit small, distributor of Soviet films in the United States at the time¹⁵. With the military alliance between the two powers in full swing, the company had just entered its golden age, thriving during a brief period in which Soviet cinema enjoyed greater acceptance within the US media landscape. Both the original Soviet film and its US counterpart shared the intention of presenting to the public the war mobilization not only of Soviet troops from a military perspective, but also of the civilian population, collectively portrayed as heroically engaged in resisting the advancing Nazi forces. Nevertheless, the two versions differ in substantial ways: the American release, titled *Moscow Strikes Back*, was significantly shortened from the original runtime of 66 to 55 minutes, while several sequences were cut or replaced with additional footage, and a major audio intervention was introduced through the use of a voice-over. Given the limited financial resources of the company, dubbing was not part of Artkino's standard production practices, and its films were generally released with English subtitles. In this case, the issue was resolved through the insertion of a voice-over recorded on US soil, thereby avoiding the use of subtitles altogether. For this purpose, the American actor Edward G. Robinson was hired to perform the narration, in what was a highly strategic choice: by the early 1940s, Robinson was a widely recognizable figure in Hollywood, with a long-standing association

¹⁴ It should be however noted that, alongside the Soviet production, three other films were jointly awarded the Oscar for Best Documentary that year, an outcome that clearly reflected the strategic importance of the Allies' wartime efforts. The awarded titles included *Prelude to War*, the first installment of Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series; *Kokoda Frontline!* by Ken G. Hall; and *The Battle of Midway* by John Ford.

¹⁵ For a better understanding of the company's activities, see KRUKONES, James H., «The Unspooling of Artkino: Soviet Film Distribution in America, 1940-1975», in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 29, 1/2009, pp. 91-112; FIORITO, Claudia, «From Moscow to Mainstream: The Soviet Quest for Cinematic Influence in the U.S.», in *Cinéma & Cie. Film and Media Studies Journal*, 25, 45, 2025, pp. 65-81.

with Warner Bros. His name appeared prominently in the film's opening credits despite his absence from the film's visuals, while pictures of him were heavily featured in US promotional materials¹⁶.

In the opening credits of *Moscow Strikes Back*, while Nicholas Napoli – president of Artkino – is credited as in charge of production, the writing of the English-language commentary is attributed to Albert Maltz, a writer and screenwriter who would later become infamous for being blacklisted as one of the Hollywood Ten. The credits conclude with the insertion of an intertitle featuring a quotation attributed to the writer Aleksei Tolstoy, which resonates with the wartime ideology shared by both allied countries, emphasizing the necessity of actively striking against Nazi-fascism: «Humanity has suffered severe trials during the past year and, with a knowledge that goes to the very core of things, it has understood that defense against Fascism is essential, and that the only effective defense is attack».

The background image of the intertitle, also present in the ending title, is another element not to be overlooked: it features the sculpture mounted atop the main building of the Soviet Arctic Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair: the sculpture depicts a worker raising a star skyward, illuminated in red¹⁷.

The documentary opens with an extensive prologue – entirely absent from the Soviet original – and crafted through the interpolation of both new audio and visual material. Albert Maltz's rewritten voice-over ushers in footage of what appears to be a Moscow civic parade, a grand celebration staged in August 1939, described by the narrator as «the feast-time festival in honour of the youth of Russia». As the voice guides us across Red Square and its principal monuments, it then introduces a procession that brings together people from the various Soviet republics, showcasing their local dances and traditions. The narrator even injects moments of affectionate familiarity – referring to a child as «little Misha and his gang», fiercely marching with the crowd – and playful mockery – calling a dancing woman «the type of northern blonde that Hitler would like to be».

This idyllic display of unity and peace is sharply undercut in the next sequences by the announcement of the German army's advance – a juxtaposition entirely absent from the original film. Further interpolations include new intertitles replacing the Soviet ones, situating each sequence within precise chronological and geographic contexts spanning 1940 to 1942. A striking example occurs at 00:09:55, where a map of the Moscow region appears, complete with swastikas

¹⁶ *Moscow Strikes Back*, film poster, undated, Artkino Fund, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA).

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of Soviet representation at the 1939 New York World's Fair, see SWIFT, Anthony, «The Soviet World of Tomorrow at the New York World's Fair, 1939», in *The Russian Review*, 57, 3/1998, pp. 364-379. It is worth noting that the USSR later withdrew from the fair without formal explanation, dismantling its monumental pavilion, constructed from granite, marble, and steel, and estimated to have cost approximately \$4 million. This withdrawal coincided with the Soviet invasion of Finland, a fellow participant in the fair. See also: «Russia Quits Fair», in *The New York Times*, December 2, 1939, p. 8.

and black arrows marking Nazi troop movements – information never shown in *Razgrom nemetskikh voysk*. Finally, on December 6, 1941, an intertitle proclaims: «Moscow strikes back!» to accompany the city's retaliation against the invading forces: the very moment that lends the film its English-language title.

The modifications made to the original Soviet film can be understood as a process of cultural re-contextualization for American audiences, chiefly through the extensive opening prologue, which simplifies the documentary's more detailed military reporting into a dramatized, novelistic narrative of liberation and Nazi terror. Combat sequences and technical war information are largely omitted to make way for a heightened, emotionally charged storyline: during the villagers' capture of German soldiers, Edward G. Robinson's voice-over brands them «a generation trained for murder», and, as a Nazi banner bearing the swastika appears torn on the ground, he quips, «the swastika learns its place». Sympathy for the fallen – both Soviet soldiers and civilians – is also amplified throughout.

On-screen depictions of Soviet fighters – the Women of the Red Army, armed civilians, and urban partisans – are deliberately paralleled, by Robinson's narration, with the American guerrillas of the Revolutionary War. He even highlights, when cutting to shots of Soviet aircraft, that a certain plane model was «patterned on the American Douglas», referencing one of the major US wartime aircraft manufacturers, a detail never mentioned in *Razgrom nemetskikh voysk*.

Whereas in the Soviet original the names of generals and troop commanders are clearly identified, in *Moscow Strikes Back* they remain superficial and are entirely omitted. Likewise, while the Soviet version offers precise, informative updates on the progress of the war in the Tula region south of Moscow – detailing the cities of Stalinogorsk (now Novomoskovsk) and Epifan; the northern towns of Rogachevo, Yakhroma, and Solnechnogorsk; Mozhaisk and Oreshki to the west; and Mikhailov in Ryazan Oblast to the south – the American cut retains only a handful of these place-names, each introduced through brief intertitles.

Nearly unchanged is the sequence depicting the Nazi army's devastation of the USSR's cultural landmarks, which the narrator emphasizes by focusing on the city where the famous writer Anton Chekhov once lived: his home had been converted into a museum, «until the Nazis arrived». Shots then follow of schools and libraries laid waste by enemy attacks, while the narrator invokes General von Reichenau, who allegedly declared that «no historic or artistic values in the East possess any importance». The film proceeds to Tchaikovsky's home in Klin, lauding «the immortal composer» as «a Russian whose symphonies belong to the world», before moving to Yasnaya Polyana – the home of Tolstoy – described as «a giant among world writers», with a nod to his novel *Anna Karenina*.

Whereas the Soviet documentary simply concludes with the expulsion of all Nazi forces from the Moscow region, the American version once again underscores the wartime alliance with the USSR. The final line, spoken by Edward G. Robinson just before the end credits, proclaims: «In a

dark hour, the will to victory found victory: the fighting unity of China, England, the United States, the Soviet Union, all the other free peoples must, can, will ensure final victory; on all of us rests the mission of world liberation».

2. *The North Star* (1943) and *Armored Attack!* (1957): A Change of Perspective

The films *The North Star* (1943) and *Armored Attack!* (1957), directed by the Moldova-born Lewis Milestone, reflect the United States' cultural policy shift from the wartime representation of the USSR as an ally to the postwar effort to reassert its image as an ideological enemy, an identity temporarily set aside during the years of military cooperation. Produced by Samuel Goldwyn and distributed by RKO Radio Pictures, *The North Star* stood as the company's expression of wartime solidarity with the Soviet Union¹⁸. Its transformation into a strongly anti-Soviet film in 1957, however, took place during a period of transition in US-Soviet relations. The years following Stalin's death in 1953 were marked by a rapid reconfiguration of bilateral relations, coinciding with the early Khrushchev era and the articulation of the policy of "peaceful coexistence". This phase would soon culminate in the 1958 US-Soviet Cultural Agreement, which included provisions for the exchange and commercial circulation of motion pictures¹⁹.

It is therefore necessary to consider the context surrounding the film's re-release in 1957. Following the end of the Second World War, pro-Soviet films were progressively withdrawn from circulation, while the repression of authorial freedom associated with the activities of the HUAC sealed the constraint of their distribution. Samuel Goldwyn may have therefore perceived the sale of the television rights to *The North Star* in 1957 primarily as an economic opportunity. The re-editing of the film was carried out by National Telefilm Associates (NTA)²⁰, and the modified version, retitled *Armored Attack!*, was released only a few months after the violent suppression of the Hungarian uprising in November 1956. The apparent haste of the release suggests that *Armored Attack!* was therefore presumably motivated rather by commercial considerations, capitalizing on the resonance in the West of the Red Army's repression of the Hungarian revolt. The film's final version, however, warrants close examination for the marked shift in its intended message, made explicit through editorial intervention and the insertion of a narrating voice that directly addresses – and admonishes – its Cold War viewers.

¹⁸ COJOC, Andrei, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ See KOZOVOL, Andrei, «A Foot in the Door: The Lacy-Zarubin Agreement and Soviet-American Film Diplomacy During the Khrushchev Era, 1953-1963», in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 36, 1/2016, pp. 21-39.

²⁰ «The North Star», in AFI Catalog of Feature Films, URL: < <https://catalog.afi.com/Film/594-THE-NORTH-STAR> > [consulted on 8 September 2026].

The North Star (1943) tells the story of a group of young Ukrainian students at the end of their school year, setting off on a journey from a village in Eastern Ukraine – named “North Star” – towards Kyiv. The group includes the young Damian Simonov (Farley Granger), son of the village leader Boris Simonov (Carl Benton Reid); Damian’s brother Kolya (Dana Andrews), an air force pilot; Damian’s girlfriend Marina Pavlova (Anne Baxter), daughter of the collective farm’s chairman Rodion (Dean Jagger); Kolya’s girlfriend Clavdia (Jane Withers); and Clavdia’s younger brother Grisha (Eric Roberts), both grandchildren of the village doctor, Dr. Kurin (Walter Huston). During their journey to Kyiv, the group is suddenly caught in the midst of the Nazi invasion of Eastern Ukraine. After Boris is fatally wounded while trying to deliver weapons to the village, the young protagonists take up the arms he was transporting and are drawn into the fight. Ultimately, they manage to bring the weapons back to their village, where they join the local resistance and succeed in repelling the Nazi forces.

A central element in the narrative is undoubtedly the loss of innocence among the younger generation as a direct consequence of war. This theme is voiced explicitly by Marina, who, after witnessing the first victim of the conflict – a child killed during an air raid – states solemnly: «we’re not young anymore». The motif is further intensified, even to the point of horror, when it is revealed that the occupying Nazi forces, led by Dr. von Harden (Erich von Stroheim), are draining the blood of village children to use for transfusions on wounded German soldiers.

From a visual standpoint, as in the previous case study, the film editing involves the elimination of sequences from the original version; however, no external footage is added. The overall running time is also significantly reduced, from the 108 minutes of *The North Star* to the 76 minutes of *Armored Attack!*. Whereas the opening credits of *The North Star* unfold over an extended shot of the Ukrainian countryside, accompanied by a jolly orchestral score that will later contrast with the progressive intensification of the Nazi occupation, *Armored Attack!* adopts a decidedly more direct tone, immediately immersing the viewer in the narrative of war. A martial trumpet score plays over combat footage – shots of Nazi warplanes that will reappear later in the film, in a duplication and displacement of images – onto which the opening credits are superimposed, beginning with the title itself, which explicitly foregrounds the action of war through the word «attack».

Similarly to the operation conducted for *Moscow Strikes Back*, *Armored Attack!* introduces a voice-over narration absent from the original 1943 film, a practice that proves particularly effective in ensuring greater narrative coherence across the newly re-edited segments. Shots depicting peaceful village life are accompanied by a voice that states:

Here in Eastern Europe there are times of peace and times of war, but across the years the sound of battle has predominated, and men’s dreams of peace have been shattered by the ruthless greed and lust of their leaders. This is the story of a people betrayed who defended their homes

and children, only to see them destroyed by the armored attack of a godless invader. This is the story of how they met the attack and fought back.

The narrating voice geographically situates the events in Eastern Europe, without explicitly identifying the population portrayed. In this context, the identification of the Ukrainian-Soviet population is indeed no longer necessary; rather, the historical events immediately preceding the film's release in 1957 invite the viewer to contextualize the drama differently. Eastern Europe, in fact, also includes Hungary, whose experience during the Budapest Revolution – and its violent repression by the Red Army in November 1956 – had become widely known in the West. The narrator instead points to the Communist leaders of the peoples of Eastern Europe, clearly judging and condemning the “betrayal” of the local population by those who were supposed to govern – and therefore protect – them.

The narrator then introduces the nationless characters as they appear on screen, replacing original scenes and dialogues with condensed exposition: «This is Dr. Kurin, who's a great man in the village, and his grandson Grisha». This strategy not only shortens the runtime but also reframes the narrative from the outset, as the voice-over introduces an explicit sense of impending catastrophe by openly anticipating the Nazi invasion: «For the village, this is the time of the false peace. The fields have been planted, and the quiet summer lies ahead. Marina is baking cakes for the holiday, and her father Rodion jokes with his wife... And 50 miles away, the armored juggernaut has begun to roll».

Another significant change at the level of the film's soundtrack concerns the systematic elimination of songs, which are far more frequent in the 1943 version than in the 1957 re-edit. One notable instance is the complete removal of the sequence depicting the university scholarship award ceremony, in which Damian is announced as the recipient of a grant to study in Kyiv. In the original film, this celebratory moment includes a choral performance by village children singing a hymn to the USSR. The lyrics – written by Ira Gershwin, in what is an English version of the Soviet patriotic song *Shiroka strana moya rodnaya* (“Wide is my Motherland”) – read:

From Great Moscow to the Farthest Border / From the Black Sea to the Sea of White
There is Peace where once there was disorder / There is dawn where once was blackest night.
Not a voice but sings of exultation / Not a heart but beats for liberty
Side by side, the peoples of our nation / Build a world where Man is ever free.
Soviet lands will give to us forever / We'll be loyal and free of fear or strife
To be worthy is our one endeavour / As we live a new and glorious life.

For similar reasons, following the Nazi bombing of the village, *Armored Attack!* also eliminates the scene in which a radio communication informs the border villages that the USSR is under

German attack, followed by the Soviet national anthem playing over shots of the village's devastation.

It is likely that the removal of these two sequences in *Armored Attack!* – both of which overtly glorify and ennoble the Soviet people – was motivated by political considerations tied to the Cold War climate. Similarly, the early summer festival sequence is entirely cut from the original picture: in *The North Star*, this scene features an extended folk-style song in which the villagers celebrate the personal backgrounds and virtues of the young protagonists. Also removed is the following morning's scene, in which the group, as it sets out on its journey, sings a song praising the beauty and idealism of youth.

Armored Attack! opens therefore roughly one-third into the narrative of *The North Star*, with the group already en route aboard a cart to Kyiv – just before the first aerial Nazi attack strikes. The narrator ominously announces: «Because their leaders have told them that there is no danger, the reports from the West have little meaning, and the sound of marching is still too far to be heard above the song. But not for long». It is at this moment that the first song retained in the *Armored Attack!* version appears – its narrative function is no longer to glorify the Soviet land or its ideals, but to create dramatic irony, as its cheerful melody masks the sound of the approaching Nazi aircraft.

In any case, the removal of the originally featured songs also serves a crucial function in the 1957 version, an operation that constitutes not only a recontextualization but, in effect, a de-contextualization. In *Armored Attack!*, any explicit reference to the setting as a Soviet or Ukrainian village is entirely omitted. Cyrillic writing remains visible on screen, as do Soviet symbols during the air raids on the village; yet, the film undertakes a deliberate effort of concealment that extends to the censorship of the original dialogue. In *The North Star*, for example, during the scene depicting the village leader's monologue following the Nazi strike, the man twice addresses the crowd as «comrades». In *Armored Attack!*, this term is removed through an edit to the audio track. By inserting a reverse shot of the crowd reacting to the village leader's speech, the editors were able to eliminate the word “comrades” from the audio track without resorting to a jump cut in the video track. A similar strategy is employed in the subsequent scene, in which the village guerrilla fighters take an oath: in *The North Star*, the commander declares: «I, who am about to become a guerrilla fighter of the Soviet Union, take this solemn oath». In *Armored Attack!*, the words “of the Soviet Union” are removed: the edit, however, produces an audible glitch that renders the commander's line partially unintelligible. At this point, a new voice-over is introduced, describing how the villagers bravely take up arms against the invading force.

Another, even less successful, example of editing occurs in the subsequent scene, in which Dr. Kurin confronts Dr. von Harden upon discovering that the Nazis have been extracting blood from children to treat their wounded soldiers. In *The North Star*, the Nazi doctor remarks: «I had forgotten

that Kurin the pathologist was Russian», a line that also reflects the common tendency to collapse all Soviet citizens under the label “Russian”, regardless of their actual national identity. In *Armored Attack!*, the word “Russian” is simply removed from the audio track, leaving the character’s line incomplete: «I had forgotten Kurin the pathologist was...».

Similarly, the term “comrade” is systematically cut from all instances in the dialogues. This is noticeable in several later sequences as well (e.g., at 00:19:38 in *Armored Attack!*, where “comrade” is erased from the audio without a corresponding visual cut; or at 00:20:00, where both the audio and the video are abruptly interrupted and replaced by a transition into the following sequence).

While references to the defence and honour of the people are preserved, the film’s political framework is fundamentally altered. By eliminating all references to the population as (Ukrainian) Soviet, and more specifically to their pride in that identity, the narrative recasts them as victims not only of Nazi aggression but also of their own Communist leadership, thus constructing a scenario of double oppression. Emotional identification is accordingly redirected: no longer toward the Soviet population as such, as in 1943 during the wartime alliance, but toward an abstracted figure of «Eastern European people», reframed as victims of both fascism and communism.

This shift is made fully explicit in the film’s concluding sequence. As in *Moscow Strikes Back*, the re-edited version ends with a newly inserted voice-over delivering a direct political message to the audience, a feature entirely absent from *The North Star*. The narrator states:

Marina spoke for all people everywhere. She wanted peace. And in the fullness of time, it came — but only for a moment. The Communist leaders wanted no peace. They fattened on war. And so, as the years passed by, one country after another fell before their armies, and a new conqueror was seen in Eastern Europe: the Red Menace. Today, as in all dictatorships, the lie, the double-cross, and the sellout build the Communist dream of empire. The Nazi war machine has been replaced by the armor of the Soviet. And once again, the people are fighting against the treachery of their leaders. In the years to come, the gallant struggle of the Hungarian freedom fighters will stand as a shining symbol of man’s love of freedom. Perhaps someday, there will be an end to this blood and slaughter. But until that day, every person and every nation must be aware of the menace of Communism.

This final monologue functions as an explicit reorientation of the film’s meaning, shifting its ideological alignment from the wartime narrative of solidarity and resistance to a Cold War rhetoric centered on anti-Communist paranoia. The Red Army is no longer depicted as a liberating force, but as a continuation of totalitarian violence, replacing the Nazi regime as the «new conqueror» of Eastern Europe. The reference to the Hungarian uprising as a symbol of freedom further anchors the re-edited picture in the political climate of the 1950s, transforming a wartime propaganda film into an overt Cold War warning.

3. Conclusions

The case studies presented in this article exemplify a dual effort within the US film industry to reshape public opinion in accordance with shifting geopolitical dynamics in the country's relationship with the Soviet Union. On one hand, the first case demonstrates an attempt to foster a sense of alliance with the USSR during the Second World War, while the other example reflects the ideological break during the Cold War years. The analysis of the selected films has revealed how re-editing and dubbing practices were instrumental in reframing the original narratives. In the case of *Moscow Strikes Back* (1942), the interventions aim to cast the Soviet struggle in a positive light, emphasizing shared values of freedom and resistance. By contrast, *Armored Attack!* (1957) represents a reversal of this position: while the depicted population remains the object of sympathy, it is now explicitly distanced from the Communist regime. The Soviet Union, which in *Moscow Strikes Back* is framed as an ally, is in *Armored Attack!* aligned with the Nazi occupiers, presented as an equally oppressive force. Through this reframing, the population is stripped of a specifically Soviet identity and recoded as a more generic Eastern European subject, portrayed as doubly oppressed: first by Nazi invasion, and subsequently by a Communist leadership incapable of protecting its people, while simultaneously embodying an imperialist threat. As suggested by the film's final voice-over, this condition is extended beyond the specific case depicted to encompass the Soviet sphere of influence more broadly, with the Hungarian population emerging as a symbolic example of an – albeit failed – honourable attempt to break free.

Through these two cases, the reworking of the original films reflects not only different narrative emphases, but an underlying ideological shift that mirrors the changing nature of US foreign policy and propaganda from the wartime alliance to Cold War antagonism. While the re-editing of films was a common practice in cinema history – especially in the context of transnational distribution, where cultural and ideological adaptations were often deemed necessary²¹ – these cases offer an outlook into the ways in which political and military alliances could shape the cultural afterlives of film. Examining such reworkings can contribute to a better understanding of how cinematic texts reflected, negotiated, or refracted broader geopolitical tensions, especially in moments of ideological realignment.

²¹ For instance, Giuliana Muscio highlights an early example of American ideological adaptation in *I'll Give a Million* (1938), directed by Walter Lang for 20th Century Fox, the US remake of Mario Camerini's 1935 Italian film *Darò un milione* (Novella Film). As Muscio argues, the English-language version was not simply a translation, but a substantial reworking on the ideological level. See MUSCIO, Giuliana, *Cinema americano in italiano*, in ID., *Piccole Italie, grandi schermi: scambi cinematografici tra Italia e Stati Uniti, 1895-1945*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2004, pp. 221-268.

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