

Anti-fascist films - Bulgarian cinema during the People's Republic of Bulgaria period

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Abstract. Antifascist themes in Bulgarian cinematography are characteristic of the entire People's Republic of Bulgaria (PRB) period. It served to strengthen the desired attitudes of members of socialist society and to consolidate the interpretation of modern history accepted by the authorities. It also turned out to be an extremely important tool of political propaganda. This immanent component of Bulgarian socialist culture has never been fully subjected to thorough, critical and objective analysis, although its influence left a lasting mark on the perception of social phenomena and attitudes characteristic of Bulgarian society with the emergence of socio-political myths of the 20th century.

Keywords: Bulgarian cinematography, socialist propaganda, ideologization of the past

The consequence of the radical political, social and cultural change that took place in Bulgaria as a result of the political coup on 9 September 1944, was the nationalization of the film industry (in 1948). As a result film production began to be a subject to very clear, centrally imposed political and ideological influences, and the authorities could create "correct" attitudes of the members of the Bulgarian society.

The tasks set for the creators of culture were subordinated to the ideological expectations of the party and state authorities, which ordered already in 1945 to praise the heroism of "partisans and conspirators in the fight against fascists" (Dimitrow 1979, 70). They were meant to awaken and strengthen devotion to the socialist homeland, and show in a negative light the tsarist past of the state¹,

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¹ "... develop devotion and love for the nation and homeland, it will deepen the hatred of fascism and all enemies of the people, it will lash everything that is rotten and that decomposes the healthy body of the nation [...], it will cleanse the Bulgarian air of the miasmas of Great Bulgarian chauvinism and great obscurantism, [...] will educate in the spirit of [...] eternal friendship with our liberator, the great Soviet nation" (Dymitrow 1979, 70).

and finally, to present the events of the recent past and the participation of the USSR in the “liberation” and the changes that took place in the country after September 1944 in an appropriate, centrally sanctioned approach.

The recommendations contained in the official document of the Science, Art and Culture Committee issued in 1948 should be considered the birth of a new genre: historical-revolutionary film and anti-fascist themes in Bulgarian cinema (Bratoeva-Darakchieva 2007, 97-99). Party’s decision-makers demanded releasing three realistic films per year. The filmmakers had a task to create images glorifying the heroic struggle of the nation against foreign occupation and fascism, and especially the actions of the entire nation aimed at building socialism (Grozev 2011, 338). The first film that fully implemented the ideological assumptions expressed in the late 1940s was the movie *Trevoga (Alarm)* (1950), directed by Zahari Zhandov based on the script by Angel Wagenstein and Orlin Vasilev². Anti-fascist topics were continued by Bulgarian filmmakers until the political changes in the late 1980s. Its importance is demonstrated by a text published in 1983 in the journal *Filmovi novini (Fim News)*, in which film critic Albert Koen argued for the fundamental importance of anti-fascist themes for the creation and development of Bulgarian socialist film art: “... it is the most intimate, organic, and enduring [...], the pillar of Bulgarian cinema” (Koen 1983, 3). Appeals to search for desirable ideas along with aesthetic and moral values in the recent, glorified revolutionary past were still valid. Despite that 60 years had passed, the centrally imposed and controlled interpretation of the events of the first half of the 1940s had not changed in the slightest.

...It has now been sixty years since our people took up arms to begin their struggle against fascism and the old exploitative system. That struggle long ago ended in victory, opening the path to socialism. Yet through art [...] it [...] will continue, transforming into the historical memory of the heroic course of the revolution and its heroes, becoming a source of inspiration and lessons for our ongoing advance toward the heights of socialism and communism, for the education of today’s and tomorrow’s generations. The revolution remains, now as ever, the first and most cherished theme of Bulgarian cinema (Koen 1983, 3).

During the People’s Republic of Bulgaria (PRB) period, over seventy cinematic pictures and television series were created dealing with anti-fascist themes - from psychological dramas through action films to the grotesque. The time frame defining the boundaries in which the events presented in the films take place was set extremely broadly - from the beginning of the 1920s and the so-called the September Uprising until the beginning of September 1944 and the tragic end of the Bulgarian Tsardom.

Members of the ruling camp, which took over the government of the country for four and a half decades, needed legitimization for their actions. The process of radical and total reconstruction of the country required justification, as well as actions that stigmatized its internal and external enemies indicated by the

² Based on his own play of the same title.

party-state apparatus. The propaganda-proven demonstration of the socialist ideas being rooted in the distant past was helped by the cinema celebrating distant, medieval history where the events and the heroes were presented in a contemporary light, saturated with propaganda messages³. However, the complex intervention of the state reflected in the problematic updating of events (Marszałek 1984, 37) was expressed most clearly and most numerous in artistic examples of the correct interpretation of the events from the recent past. Those procedures built and perpetuated among the recipients clearly negative image of the Bulgarian state until 1944. Discrediting the overthrown government and administration as well as cultural activists and portraying as oppressors of the nation that bloodily eliminated all forms of opposition as well as the criticism of the international policy pursued by the tsarist government (alliance with the Third Reich) were important elements of the political and ideological use of the latest history conducted by the authorities of the Bulgarian People's Republic. This was an almost classic example of the abuse of history - its deliberate and conscious creation in order to use it in the process of rationalizing the policy in the eyes of society (Chwedoruk 2020, 17-19).

The goal that was supposed to guide the creators of anti-fascist cinema was to help create and strengthen a consciously created and shaped political myth, which was extremely important for the socialist government in Bulgaria. As Georges Sorel noted, that was not only an idea, but also a model of the future and a kind of action programme and expressed the emotionally accepted aspirations of the people, it was "a tool of struggle that arms the group, party, class" (Biernat 1989, 40). Being an extremely important initiating factor and a constitutive component of every social transformation, the importance of which could in no way be undermined by its obvious fictitiousness, the Bulgarian "anti-fascist" political myth was a specific form of social consciousness, shaped/imposed by the authorities, as "a correlate of specific information and cognitive processes as well as emotions, causing a predictable, irrational attitude to reality, modifying this reality by creating its image" (Biernat 1989, 75). The fundamental components of the anti-fascist political myth, which was to be reflected in cinematography, were the story of the almost universal opposition of the nation to the actions of the tsarist authorities. It was expressed in full acceptance of the actions of partisan units, declared sympathy for socialism and attachment/love to/of the USSR. This also meant creating and strengthening the image of the Red Army, not as an aggressor attacking a neutral country, but as a liberating force (Sharlanov 2009; Vezenkov 2014).

An inherent component of this very ideologically saturated narrative was the construction of the enemy figure in the film, which made it possible to alleviate potential social tensions caused by acts of lawlessness committed by the state apparatus of repression. The myth of the enemy made it possible to explain current events while preserving "the basic shape of the information structure of individuals (belief in law and justice), which [...] can be treated as an important

³ See more on this topic: Milev 1982; Józwiak 2013, 309-320; Józwiak 2017, 169-180; Józwiak 2021, 210-221.

condition for the acceptance of political power” (Biernat 1989, 156). The myth of the enemy-fascist, created and reinforced by socialist cinematography, fulfilled a cognitive function, and thanks to the mechanisms of introducing changes in the information structure about a certain (extensive) fragment of nearby reality and extremely active influence on the shape of the object of cognition, there was no room for any doubts (Biernat 1989, 157). A properly formed and strongly ideologically based myth of the enemy-fascist meant that anyone could be considered an enemy and any behaviour could be considered a manifestation of hostility. Hence, as characteristic of the type of films discussed (which is also closely related to the centrally imposed, political interpretation of events in the country’s recent history), the concept of a fascist was extremely vague and therefore very broad. Not only members of the tsar’s family and the ruler’s court or members of the government (or rather governments since the mid-1920s) were portrayed as fascists, but also state administration officials at all levels, officials of the justice system (judges and prosecutors), police, officers of the tsar’s army and owners of enterprises and landowners, as well as directors, managers and supervisors working in those. Every hidden or openly expressed dislike of the new regime (and the USSR) and attachment to the old system, unmasked, in an ideologically saturated interpretation, a fascist who deserved the highest contempt and severe punishment carried out by the people (or on their behalf). The fascist was portrayed not only as a class enemy, but above all as a traitor to the nation who, for his own benefits, adopted a clearly inappropriate (from the point of view of the PRB authorities) position during the political crises of the 1920s and the international conflict of the first half of the 1940s. Their guilt and responsibility were not subject to any discussion, and no one could count on *perpetua oblivio et amnestia* (Taylor 2016, 257).

According to the principle expressed by Tadeusz Biernat - information constituting a myth, both for those who believe in the myth and use it, is always true, even if the current state of knowledge (or even one’s own, hidden experiences) would indicate that it is partially or entirely fictional. The anti-fascist narrative expressed in Bulgarian film images was constructed according to its own order. It praised a mostly imaginary reality with a pseudological/mythological frame of reference in relation to the outside world (Biernat 1989, 96).

Siegfried Kracauer noticed that the reception of a film resembles a hypnosis session, during which the viewer “captivated by the glowing rectangle in front of his eyes - which resembles a shiny object in the hypnotist’s hand - cannot resist the suggestions that attacks his mind without any obstacles” (Kracauer 2008, 195). Making the recipient to accept the conveyed idea requires providing not only convincing arguments, but also various stimuli reaching, even subconsciously, to their senses, influencing the viewer’s psychological reactions. Thus, the propaganda message, even if it is intellectually rejected by the recipient, will be accepted by him/her through emotions, through subconscious impulses (Kracauer 2008, 195).

Thanks to its “hypnotic” effect, the anti-fascist epic in Bulgarian cinema - which persisted for nearly forty years - gave rise to a curiously enduring phenomenon, as described by Pierre Sorlin. As a result of the imposed interpretation of the recent past, a common, only correct vision was created,

which, thanks to numerous film productions that were very popular among viewers, was perceived as a series of images taken from the cinema, creating a tight barrier preventing the perception of events in “verifiable historical categories” (Sorlin 2008, 283). This mechanism led to the creation of metahistory - a construct imperceptible to the recipient, which is a suggestive (persuasive) and fragmentary reconstruction of events taking place in Bulgaria from the early 1920s to the mid-1940s.

“One of the basic tasks of our literature is [...] to present the process [...] of spring awakening, both in its ordinary [...], mass and exceptional moments, [...] particularly expressive manifestations of what is usually called the subjective factor” (Bakałow 1979, 109). This postulate of Georgi Bakalov (one of the first Bulgarian propagators of socialism) expressed before the outbreak of World War II can be considered the ideological and programmatic basis of Bulgarian anti-fascist cinema. Spring Awakening - a propaganda-saturated narrative about the fight against the cruel forces of the state oppressing the nation required the creation of new types of heroes - also a film presentation of the “hagiography” of new saints from the atheistic pantheon.

Нас червеното знаме роди ни,
нас не ще ни уплаши смъртта -
ние сме на всеки километър
и така - до края на света.

Пада другарят в смъртен бой,
пада за теб, свобода,
за да изрее и стане мой
малка червена звезда.

Нас далечни победи ни викат,
нас ни чака в зори радостта -
ние сме на всеки километър
и така - до края на света.

(Valchev)

[A red flag gave birth to us,
death would not frighten us -
we are at every kilometer,
and so - until the end of the world.]

A comrade falls in mortal battle,
he falls for you, freedom,
so that he may rise and become
a small red star.

Distant victories are calling us,
joy awaits us at dawn -
we are at every kilometer,
and so - until the end of the world.]

The poem by Nayden Valchev, written for the extremely popular television series *Na vseki kilometar (Every Kilometer)* (the first season 1969, the second season 1971)⁴ and used as the lyrics of the opening song of each of the 26 episodes, was a kind of artistic manifesto of socialist anti-fascist heroism. It was also showing the mechanism behind the creation of a heroic, “exemplary” individual as envisioned by the party and state authorities (an individual who, until the aesthetic shifts of the 1960s, was conceived as part of a collective). This model was characterized by the faith in the idea symbolized by the red banner, fearlessness in the face

⁴ The series was directed by Nedelcho Chernev and Lyubomir Sharlandzhiev, and written by Svoboda Bachvarova, Evgeni Konstantinov, Kostadin Kyulyumov, Georgi Markov, and Pavel Vezhinov.



Fig. 1. Scene from the film *A byahme mladi* (*We Were Young*), 1960 (Zhelyazkova 1960)

of death, and a readiness to give one's life for the cause, belief in the countless comrades, belief in "salvation" after death, in the fight for the freedom of the homeland. At its core was faith in a place within the socialist paradise - a kind of Valhalla for socialist warriors - where the hero, experiencing a kind of *theosis*, would be granted the honour of being transformed into a red star.

Bulgarian cinematography showed political prisoners with long prison sentences or death sentences as martyrs of the new idea who gave their lives in defense of their beliefs. Convicts isolated on the Black Sea island of St. Anastasia (Bolshevik)⁵ whose fate depended on the whims of the commandant⁶, chained to a heavy chain, a fugitive with a death sentence chased by the police⁷, betrayed by a police provocateur prisoners waiting to be hanged⁸, young men who, as a cruel gesture of mercy, on the eve of the execution, allowed to marry⁹, women subjected to numerous harassments in prison¹⁰, interwar political activists arrested, tortured and killed accused of criticizing the authorities¹¹ - these are, in the artistic film interpretation, specific victims of the new socio-political order introduced since September 1944.

⁵ *Na malkiya ostrov* (*On the Small Island*) (1957), dir. Rangel Valchanov, scr. Valeri Petrov.

⁶ "We don't know each other yet, but we will. I'm strict, but fair. And like this - I'm your king, I'm your commandant. [...] I want iron discipline. This is a prison, not a boarding house" (Valchanov 1957).

⁷ *Verigata* (*The Chain*) (1964), dir. Lyubomir Sharlandzhiev, scr. Angel Wagenstein.

⁸ *Pleneno yato* (*Captive Flock*) (1962), dir. Ducho Mundrov, scr. Emil Manov (based on his own novel).

⁹ *Vula* (*Bull*) (1965), dir. and scr. Nikola Korabov.

¹⁰ *Poslednata дума* (*The Last Word*) (1973), dir. and scr. Binka Zhelyazkova.

¹¹ *Dopolnenie kam Zakona za zashtita na darzhavata* (*Amendment to the Law on the Protection of the State*) (1976), dir. Lyudmil Staykov, scr. Angel Wagenstein; *Po diryata na bezsledno izcheznalite* (*On the Tracks of the Missing*) (1977), dir. Margarit Nikolov, scr. Nikolay Hristozov (based on his own novel of the same title).

The Promethean death of a communist imprisoned in a fascist prison was supposed to be a testimony that victory deserved the highest sacrifice, and the convict's sacrifice was to become an important point of reference for the followers of the new "religious" cult (Zwierzchowski 2006, 95-134). In the film, the convicts on their way to execution perform an act that was consistent with heroism in the absolute sense defined by Joseph Campbell (Campbell 2009, 147), when the hero goes beyond the normal range of human achievement and gives his/her life "for something bigger than oneself" (Campbell 2009, 144). In this case, that greater cause is the nation and its liberation from fascist oppression. It is an almost specifically Christomimetic image of ultimately (as moments of doubt are sometimes shown) voluntary acceptance of death (Fig. 1).

The conquest of the fear of death is the recovery of life's joy. One can experience an unconditional affirmation of life only when one has accepted death, not as contrary to life but as an aspect of life. Life in its becoming is always shedding death, and on the point of death. The conquest of fear yields the courage of life (Campbell 2009, 173).

The hero's attitude towards death presented by Campbell was characteristic not only of the prisoner-martyr, but also of representatives of the second extremely important model of a fighter, reinforced by the creators of anti-fascist films - a partisan or an urban conspirator/member of a sabotage group. "Stalin's Red Army is crushing the German hordes; it is coming to liberate us" (Zhandov 1950) - this quote from the 1950 film *Trevoga (Alarm)* by Zahari Zhandov may justify the actions of members of all the fighting underground units whose fate was presented in Bulgarian cinema. There were images of partisan life full of sacrifices, fighting but in fact repelling attacks by police and army units and the



Fig. 2. Scene from the TV series *Na vseki kilometar (Every Kilometer)*, 1969 (Chernev, Sharlandzhiev 1969)



Fig. 3. Scene from the film *Osmiyat (The Eighth)*, 1969 (Heskia 1969)

temporary “liberation” of villages and towns¹², sabotage activities carried out in cities - sabotage of German military equipment and helping Jews¹³. Among the achievements of anti-fascist Bulgarian cinematography were also productions characterized as *socaction* - depicting battles fought by undefeated fighters sent from the USSR¹⁴, or glorifying the perpetrators of terrorist acts committed by communist militias in Sofia during the second quarter of the 20th century¹⁵, and, finally, an adventure series about an internationalist hero¹⁶ who fought fascism both on the Bulgarian internal front and across nearly all of Europe - from the Spanish Civil War to the glorified September 9, 1944 - eventually becoming a “professional revolutionary” (Gencheva 1988, 364) (Figs 2, 3).

I’ll kill them all, every last one of them, like dogs. From Colonel Gatev to the last village policeman. [...] The cause for which Vela and the Student died is the cause of our Party; it is the Party we serve above all. That’s why we must carry on their mission and punish the murderers. [...] We came here not only to live, but to die (Heskia 1969).

In the ideology-saturated Bulgarian film, an anti-fascist fighter is the personification of the punishing arm, justice administered in the name of the nation. He was certainly more attractive as a new model of a hero - a savior

¹² *Boy posleden (The Last Battle)* (1976), dir. Zako Heskia, scr. Nikola Rusev, Svoboda Bachvarova, Zako Heskia (based on the partisan epic *Umiraha bezsmartni (They Died Immortal)* by Veselin Andreev).

¹³ *Zvezdi (Stars)* (1958), dir. Konrad Volf, scr. Angel Wagenstein.

¹⁴ *Osmiyat (The Eighth)* (1969), dir. Zako Heskia, scr. Todor Monov, Petar Hristov-Vedrin (based on Gen. Stoyu Nedelchev-Chochoolu’s autobiographical text *Boyat nastana (The Fight Has Begun)*).

¹⁵ *Chernite angeli (The Black Angels)* (1970), dir., scr. Valo Radev (based on Mitka Grabcheva’s memoir *V imeto na naroda (In the Name of the People)*).

¹⁶ *Na vseki kilometer (Every Kilometer)* series, first season (1969, 13 episodes), dir. Nedelcho Chernev, Lyubomir Sharlandzhiev, scr. Svoboda Bachvarova, Evgeni Konstantinov, Kostadin Kyulyumov, Georgi Markov, Pavel Vezhinov.

of humanity, whose appropriately interpreted history provided society with “ordering images” that were important from the point of view of legitimizing the political and social changes introduced by the authorities (Jarecka 2009, 11). These are characters constructed like Campbell’s hero of the monomyth of the expedition, who (by choice or not) leaves his world and ventures into the unknown abyss, where he finds something that, according to him, was missing in the world he had inhabited so far. Convinced of the validity of the discovery, he returns to give it to the community (Campbell 1997, 47-188; Campbell 2009, 149).

Communist warriors, like the medieval knights described by Johan Huizinga, experiencing “the thrill of crossing the limits of narrow egoism at the moment of immediate threat to life, the deep emotion caused by the bravery of colleagues, the pleasure resulting from fidelity and self-sacrifice” (Huizinga 1992, 98), they fully accepted the real possibility of death in combat, compensated by faith in the renewal (a kind of resurrection) of the country and nation. The fights conducted by the red star fighters were an element of, as was clearly and irrefutably proven, just a war, which made the sacrifices useful and necessary (Jarecka 2009, 162). Movies very often showed the exalted death of the hero, who often, with his last breath, managed to shout out a promise of revenge or warn the executioners of their inevitable defeat¹⁷.

An extremely important - and in some sense, fundamental - component of the anti-fascist film is the figure of the hero’s antagonist: a fascist, above all a hated Bulgarian traitor, and an equally reviled German occupier (Figs 4, 5).



Fig. 4. Bulgarian officer as the enemy figure in the film *Boy posleden* (*The Last Battle*), 1976 (Heskia 1976)



Fig. 5. German officer - representative of the “Other” and his Bulgarian ally in the film *Chernite angeli* (*The Black Angels*), 1970 (Radev 1970)

¹⁷ An example is the scene of the killing by a Bulgarian police unit one of the supporting characters of the series *Every Kilometer*, who, before his death, managed to shout at the attackers: “We are at every kilometer from here to the end of the world!” The scene was used in the opening credits of each episode of the first series of the production, so it had a chance to be perfectly encoded by the viewer.

In artistic interpretations, because of their actions, all of them deserved to hear the slogan pronounced by the young heroes of the film *Chernite angeli (The Black Angels)*: “In the name of the people, you are sentenced to death” (Radev 1970). Cinematic images contributed to consolidating a clear, politically charged boundary between the “Own” and the “Other”, the criterion of which was determined by the attitude towards the ideas represented by the fighters. The presented situation, which Bernhardt Waldenfels characterized as “phenomena of a breakthrough [...] when ways of life collide with each other or are split, with the lack of a superior order that would regulate this transition” (Waldenfels 2002, 34), predestined the depiction of the “Other” in its extreme form. Above all, it made possible the symbolic exclusion of Bulgarian fascists from the framework of the nation.

Strangeness has obviously been identified with threats. The fascist presented in films was a threat to the indisputable right of existence of a specific group, they were called an enemy, the perpetrator of “existential negation of another being” (Waldenfels 2002, 45). This appropriative concept of the “Other”, expressed in an extremely extended emphasis on the opposition between “one’s own being and a hostile counter-being” (Waldenfels 2002, 45), was characteristic of a player who fully succumbed to the government’s pressures.

The “Other” was presented primarily as a “subversive force threatening [...] paradise” (Tismaneanu 2000, 185), the creation of which was declared by anti-fascist fighters. Revulsion and hatred towards the enemy were to be aroused and maintained by depictions of atrocities which representatives of the tsarist apparatus of power and force were said to have committed against their compatriots such as political assassinations carried out on the orders of the authorities¹⁸, ruthlessness and sadism of officers interrogating captured communists¹⁹. Importantly, the repressions against the Bulgarian population were committed by representatives of the tsarist forces, not by German troops - which may call into question the message about the occupation of the country.

In addition to cruelty, contempt for the enemy (Bulgarian fascists) was also to be evoked by recurring portrayals of cowardice and the complete lack of combat value among rank-and-file policemen (gendarmes) and soldiers, as well as the demoralization of the officer corps, which was eagerly fraternized with Wehrmacht officers, to whom they consistently displayed a submissive attitude.

The group of anti-fascist films certainly must also include the series dedicated to Georgi Dimitrov - the first leader of socialist Bulgaria, responsible for the outbreak of the 1923 uprising, and also (and in the discussed context, even primarily) the winner of the Leipzig trial (1933), in which he was held

¹⁸ E.g. *Amendment to the Law on the Protection of the State* (1976), dir. Lyudmil Staykov, scr. Angel Wagenstein; *On the Tracks of the Missing* (1977), dir. Margarit Nikolov, scr. Nikolay Hristozov.

¹⁹ E.g. *We Were Young* (1960) dir. Binka Zhelyazkova, scr. Hristo Ganev; *Alarm* (1950), dir. Zahari Zhandov, scr. Angel Wagenstein; *The Eighth* (1969) dir. Zako Heskia, scr. Todor Monov, Petar Hristov-Vedrin; *The Last Battle* (1976) dir. Zako Heskia, scr. Nikola Rusev, Svoboda Bachvarova, Zako Heskia.



Fig. 6. Scene from the film *Nakovalniya ili chuk (Anvil or Hammer)*, 1972 (Hristov 1972)

responsible by the authorities of the Third Reich for setting fire to the Reichstag. As many as three cinematic pictures devoted to this event²⁰ helped to establish the figure of the Bulgarian leader in a proper, prominent place in the communist firmament, making him a tireless defender of peace and a debunker of fascist slanders (Fig. 6)²¹.

The film interpretation of Dimitrov's character, saturated with ideology, as an adamant, decisive and uncompromising people's official, stood in opposition to the cinematic image of Tsar Boris III²² - basically the "great absentee", whose character has not been analysed in the film. In anti-fascist cinema, the tsar appeared in episodic scenes or was mentioned in dialogue, without a developed portrayal. A rare attempt to visually represent him was Valo Radev's film *Tsar i general (Tsar and General)*. Also in this case the ruler of Bulgaria was used only as

²⁰ *Urokat na istoriyata (The Lesson of History)* (1957), dir., scr. Lev Arsham (co-production with USSR); *Nakovalniya ili chuk (Anvil or Hammer)* (1972), dir. Hristo Hristov, scr. Lyuben Stanev, Ivan Radoev (co-production with GDR and USSR, based on Lyuben Stanev's novel *Zaledeniyat most (The Ice Bridge)* and Ivan Radoev's play *Cherveno i kafyavo (Red and Brown)*; *Preduprezhdenieto (The Warning)* (1982), dir. Juan Antonio Bardem, scr. Juan Antonio Bardem, Lyuben Stanev (co-production with GDR and USSR).

²¹ See more on this topic in Jóźwiak 2014, 152-163.

²² *Tsar i general (Tsar and General)* (1965), dir. Valo Radev, scr. Lyuben Stanev; *Amendment to the Law on the Protection of the State* (1976), dir. Lyudmil Staykov, scr. Angel Wagenstein; *On the Tracks of the Missing* (1977), dir. Margarit Nikolov, scr. Nikolay Hristozov.

a background to present the attitude of General Vladimir Zaimov²³, shot in 1943 for collaborating with the USSR.

Anti-fascist topics in Bulgarian cinematography were an extremely characteristic phenomenon for the entire PRB era. Naturally, filmmakers presented very different artistic levels, different degrees of saturation of the film work with political and ideological content, and some even tried to use them to challenge the imposed patterns and aesthetic - artistic canon²⁴. This thematic trend was similar to the *resistenza* in Italian cinema (Miller-Klejsa 2013), but unlike in Italy, the Bulgarian interpretation of the presented events and the assessment of the political ideals of oppositionists were not subject to evolution. Due to its importance in legitimizing the government, justifying foreign alliances, and preventing the emergence of sentiments referring to the crossed-out pre-September tradition, the anti-fascist theme in Bulgarian cinema was not subject to redefinition, confirming the image of the heroes of the Bulgarian - this time socialist - "resurrection" as endorsed by the authorities.

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²³ Although this attempt failed and the director was ultimately accused of focusing too much on the figure of the ruler.

²⁴ E.g. *On the Small Island* (1957) dir. Rangel Valchanov, scr. Valeri Petrov; *Bednata ulitsa* (*Poor Man's Street*) (1960), dir. Hristo Piskov, scr. Petar Donev, camera Georgi Alurkov, Todor Stoyanov.

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