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Hollywood Western in Socialist Yugoslavia – Reception and Production

Abstract

This paper deals with social and aesthetic factors of the popularity of the American cinematic western with the Yugoslav audience, beginning in the middle of the 20th century. The author first examines sociological determiners of film audiences and analyzes social conditions under which their taste is formed. The empirical basis consists of the research into the preferences of film audiences, conducted in Belgrade from the 1950s to the 1980s. In this period the Western genre was the most popular one along with the adventure film. This was the phase of Westernization or “Americanization” of the Yugoslav society that served the purpose of decisive distancing from the policy of the Soviet Union. The second part of the paper contains the sociological analysis of the so-called partisan Western, a subgenre of the partisan war film produced in the manner of the Hollywood Western. Using the works of Yugoslav directors (Mitrović, Krvavac), the author shows how and why the Hollywoodization of films dedicated to the people’s liberation war waged by the Yugoslav partisans took place at that time. Cowboys in partisan uniforms rekindled the interest of the audience in the domestic war film. It is also worth mentioning that these partisan Westerns, apart from being financially profitable, played a socially desirable role as they performed the function of strengthening Yugoslav patriotism.

Keywords: *Western; Hollywood; Yugoslav socialism; partisans; film communication; audience*

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Introduction: The canonized features of the western

For most of the 20th century, the American western was one of the most popular film genres, both in the world and in the former SFR Yugoslavia. Its genre identity is recognizable by a number of characteristics, of which the action that takes place in the American West in the second half of the 19th century stands out, in typical places such as a small town in the West, a saloon or a desert. Western personalities are typified (sheriff, bandit, gambler, gunslinger), and the plots are built mostly around breaking or establishing law and order.² The plot of the Hollywood “cowboy movie” takes place in the pre-industrial period, in which there are characteristic conflicts, which are artistically stylized and brought to stereotypes - between wilderness and civilization, newcomers and Indians, thugs and law enforcement. The canonized features of westerns are essentially reduced to the collision of antagonistic forces of good and evil, and this conflict usually takes place on the main (often the only) city street, on the river bank or on a ranch of the O.K. Corral type. Among the standard props, the western includes a ubiquitous pistol, rifle, alcohol, gambling table, lasso, horse and mail carriage.³ The accompanying protagonists are, in addition to an attractive beauty - a naive woman or one of easy morals (usually a singer in a saloon), some good-natured funny old man, a doctor, a judge, an executioner and an undertaker.

It is characteristic that the action of the western never takes place in an American metropolis, but exclusively in a small and remote city, such as Abilene, Dodge City, Wichita or Gun Hill. As scenography, an inn, a casino, a sheriff’s office, a courtroom, a barber shop and a stable are enough. In addition to the obligatory heat, prairie and cacti, the classic western respects the old tradition: the tradition of *gunplay* (duel with guns) on the street and the tradition of *dancing hall*, full of smoke and noise, with the sounds of the obligatory piano, on which there is a strong and relentless pounding. This includes a group of beauties, which serve as a kind of decor. Their role is reduced to entertaining guys, eager for all kinds of adventures.⁴

By the way, many features of other film genres (action, historical, war, adventure) also flow into the western genre. The popularity of westerns is also evidenced by the considerable number of comedies recorded on “cowboy” themes. One of these is *Go West* (1940) by the Marx brothers (Marx bros), in

² Rafaela Moan, *Filmski žanrovi* (Beograd: Clio, 2006), p. 12

³ Radina Vučetić, *Koka-kola socijalizam* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2012), p. 125

⁴ Žan-Luj Rjeveru, *Vestern ili pravi američki film* (Beograd: Jugoslovenska kinoteka, 1960), p. 71

which the famous trio goes to the West in search of gold. American western comedies with Bob Hope, such as *The Paleface* (1948) and *Son of the Paleface* (1952), as well as films with the famous comedian Don Notts, also had a large audience. There is a famous film in which Jesse Donald Knotts plays a dentist in the Wild West (*The Shakiest Gun in the West*, 1968). Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were funny cowboys in the comedy *Pardners* (1956), and there are more hilarious comedies of more recent date, such as *A Million Ways to Die in the West* (2014), directed by Seth MacFarlane. There are also western comedies shot outside the United States. One of the most notable is the musical parody of the Czechoslovak production *Lemonade Joe* (1964), directed by Oldrich Lipský. In the area of the former Yugoslavia, some directors also tried their hand at this popular genre. The film *Around the World* (1964) by Soja Jovanović, in which there is a longer sequence with the Serbian peasant Jovanča Micić, as a cowboy-sheriff, achieved notable success with the audience. Radivoje Lola Đukić's western comedy *Zlatna pračka* (1967), which deals with the nature and behavior of our people in the Wild West, also met with great interest from cinema spectators.

Overall, the ambiance of the Wild West, in which the plot of a classic Hollywood western takes place, is very suitable for a film medium. This ambience, in addition to the mentioned cities that look like scenery, is made up of the picturesque natural beauty of the wonderful mountains of Arizona, the ban on cattle, post offices and crowded taverns, where people drink, play, sing and shoot.⁵ The entire panorama of landscapes and characters is ideal for aesthetic transposition, performed by a complete film crew led by a director.⁶ Observed from a sociological point of view, it is very important that the ambience and plot of the western is very attractive to a wide range of audiences, who are looking for entertainment in the darkened cinema halls. It is not enough to say that the Yugoslav audience in the 1950s and 1960s was simply in love with American westerns. The Yugoslav, so-called partisan westerns, made in the manner of classic Hollywood westerns contributed to that. Seen

⁵ Vladimir Petrić, *Razvoj filmskih vrsta* (Beograd: Umetnička akademija u Beogradu, 1970), p. 221

⁶ The structure of the western and the canons of the genre are respected, but the film manuscripts of the directors differ. There are many important authors, and several names stand out from that multitude. In every respect, the approaches of John Ford and Howard Hawks are typical. Ford is known for his heroic, idealized and epic westerns, in which he places his characters in the context of the history and mythology of American society, while Hawks in his “male” films deals exclusively with the existential problems of individuals and issues of friendship and solidarity within a small group. They were followed by directors such as Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher, who are considered the progenitors of modern psychological or “mature” westerns in which they develop a tradition opposite to Ford's - realistic and anti-heroic. For more see: Devid A. Kuk, *Istorija filma II* (Beograd: Clio, 2007), p. 114–118

in the context of Balkan studies and the culture of remembrance in the former Yugoslavia, the current sociological analysis of aesthetic affinities and preferences of this audience has gained special significance.

Sociology of film communication

Before considering the relevant reasons for the great commitment of the Yugoslav audience to Hollywood westerns, it is advisable to examine the phenomenon of film communication and determine the concepts of film audience and film taste. Film communication is a complex sociological phenomenon based on the interaction of viewers and film works.⁷

It is about a well-known artistic triad consisting of an author, a work and an audience, in our case a director, a film and a recipient. In film, unlike most other arts, this social relationship is multiplied, given that the art of film is very specific. In addition to the director, who signs the final film project, a whole team of creators participates in the creation of the film - screenwriters, producers, actors, editors, cameramen, etc. So, in the beginning we are dealing with a *collective communicator* or, communicologically speaking, the sender of messages which are contained in the work itself, towards the audience, who in the case of film is massive, socially layered and heterogeneous. Having in mind all these facts, it can be concluded that film, as a part of mass culture, has its artistic and industrial side. It is a typical representative of industrial culture, which is one big field where social classes communicate at the same time - "both worker and boss".⁸ If we agree that cinematography is an industry, and film is an art, then we will define film as a spiritual (aesthetic) product, adapted to the norms of industrial production. At the same time, its industrial component does not have to collide with its artistic expression.

The act of film communication as artistic communication is based on the close interaction of the artist and his work with the recipient. Sociologists base their view on this fact that artistic communication is a kind of social event - only when the artist is confronted with a real receptive subject, when they witness the reaction of the recipient of their work, and when there is a mutual dynamic process between them, that psychological process turns into dialectical, historical-sociological events.⁹ The film audience can receive only what the film industry offers them, but also vice versa - everything that is offered to them depends to a large extent on what the same audience has previously accepted. Because of all this, the film belongs to the group of arts in

⁷ Nikola Božilović, *Filmska komunikacija* (Beograd: Nezavisno autorsko izdanje, 1996)

⁸ Edgar Moren, *Duh vremena 1* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1979), p. 46

⁹ Arnold Hauser, *Sociologija umjetnosti 1* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1986), p. 9

which the hypothesis of the so-called “feedback” effect has found the widest application. To the extent that the film creates a certain audience, the audience, with its needs, preferences, tastes and desires, influences the creation of the film.¹⁰

Psychological and sociological elements of artistic, and therefore film communication, are complementary. Namely, art, according to Edgar Morin, is understood as a kind of affective gratification, which is in the realm of the imaginary. “Aesthetically imaginary” is intended for the viewer, who is aware of the absence of practical reality of what the film represents to them.¹¹ Affective need is an integral part of any artistic communication. Film communication, however, is by no means pure aesthetic communication because it always carries strong social layers. In that sense, film criticism is an inseparable link in the communication chain, and the film critic becomes in a way a mediator between the author and their work, on the one hand, and the audience, that is, its taste, on the other.¹² Interpretation and critique of a film do not have to be decisive and decisive in the choice of film viewers, but as expert recommendations they can be a kind of guide through the impassable jungle, in which films of unequal aesthetic quality intersect.

According to most of its characteristics, the film audience belongs to the category of mass audience, which speaks of its numerically unlimited and socially heterogeneous composition. Strictly sociologically speaking, this audience belongs to the order of a structural social groups, given the differences in terms of social origin, economic status, class affiliation and other differentiations, such as age, gender, educational level, professional orientation. Hauser speaks of the millions of people who fill thousands of cinemas around the world as a “unique alliance of the human race.” The only connection between these people is that they come out of the cinema as amorphous as they entered. That is why they can hardly be called a real “audience” - they remain a diverse, unconnected, shapeless mass, which does not belong to any single class or culture.¹³ Through the film, the key problems of the complex fabric of social and cultural life can be revealed. In this context, the words of Leo Rosten have a strong and convincing effect: “Hollywood can be placed under the microscope of the social sciences, as a tile that allows us to see, with enlarged and isolated details, the organic process of the whole social body.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Miloš Ilić, *Sociologija kulture i umetnosti* (Beograd: Naučna knjiga, 1974), p. 284; Hidajet Repovac, *Sociologija simboličke kulture* (Sarajevo: Fakultet političkih nauka, 2009), p. 168

¹¹ Edgar Moren, *Film ili čovek iz mašte* (Beograd: Institut za film, 1967), p. 75

¹² Nikola Božilović, „The Film Critique as a Factor of Film Communicativity“, *Facta universitatis: series Philosophy and Sociology*, Vol. 1, No 5, 1998, p. 494–495

¹³ Arnold Hauser, *Socijalna istorija umetnosti i književnosti 2* (Beograd: Kultura, 1966), p. 450

¹⁴ Cited according to: Enriko Fulkinjoni, *Civilizacija slike* (Beograd: Institut za film, 1980), p. 25

Viewers of films come from various strata of society and there are numerous differentiations in their tastes. Within the audience, as a social aggregate, a multi-layered stratification is created, which corresponds to different tastes, understanding of art and the power of reasoning of individual subjects. In that sense, not only different groups of consumers are created, but also sub-groups are created within each group, which do not have a clear social and psycho-physiological specification.¹⁵ As an audience, fans of the “seventh art” have some specifics through which they stand out from the group of other consumers of the content of mass culture. In this case, we are talking about the “youngest” audience, created and mature thanks to the invention of cinematograph, a great technical invention, which revolutionized the ways of social and cultural communication. Thanks to this device, unimagined and almost unlimited possibilities of communication with a large number of people in different places and in different environments were created. There was a breakdown of social (economic and class) barriers and the creation of conditions for communication on a planetary scale.¹⁶ Having in mind the heterogeneity of the film audience, the fact that that audience is not amorphous but diverse and layered, it is concluded that it should not be seen as a bunch of depersonalized people. Artistically valuable films influence the creation of aesthetic sensibility in individuals and contribute to the education of film taste. In that way, an educated and highly demanding audience is created, which has a feedback effect on the further production of films. Thus, when inviting a film audience, it should not be forgotten that the audience is composed of audiences. By losing sight of that fact, the taste of one of its part is universalized, and the motivation that leads its other part to the film screening hall is proclaimed the motive of all.¹⁷

Aesthetic taste undoubtedly has a psychological dimension, but it is a sociological category *par excellence*. Taste, from a social perspective, can be viewed not only from the receptive but also from the productive side, because artistic production takes place in constant interaction with the recipients of aesthetic content. In this sense, the classical aesthetic messages of Karl Marx are always relevant: “(artistic) production delivers not only material to the need, but also the need to the material”, hence “production not only produces the object for the subject, but also the subject for the object”.¹⁸ The connection between the tastes of the audience and the creativity is especially visible in the

¹⁵ Arnold Hauser, *op. cit.*, p. 130–131

¹⁶ Miloš Nemanjić, *Filmska i pozorišna publika Beograda: socijalno-kulturni uslovi formiranja u periodu 1961–1984*. (Beograd: Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka, 1991), p. 47

¹⁷ Milan Ranković, *Društvena kritika u savremenom jugoslovenskom igranom filmu* (Beograd: Institut za film, 1970), p. 17

¹⁸ Compare: Karl Marks – Fridrih Engels, *O književnosti i umetnosti* (Beograd: Rad, 1976), p. 66–67

film, which belongs to the arts that are produced industrially. The commercial side of the film requires producers to closely follow any sign of the audience's affection or aversion to certain genres and content. Primarily for financial reasons, it is approached to imitate, retell and paraphrase everything that was once crowned with success. Directors and producers take care to satisfy the taste of the current audience at all costs, because they see in it the reason for the existence of the film and their source of income.¹⁹

The theorists who saw the film as the largest and most powerful “taste factory”, and defined Hollywood as a “dream factory”, are right.²⁰ Hence, it makes sense to create and shape taste and raise it to a level from which the audience will be able to communicate with those works that have a complicated aesthetic structure. Béla Balázs expressed a concise statement about the two-way character of taste education, which sublimates the whole philosophy of artistic communication: “Art educated the taste of the audience, whose differentiated taste sought and enabled greater art.”²¹ This statement, which has the character of a message, is universally applicable, and thus also pertinent to the situation related to the production and reception of film and, in particular, the western film in the culture of the Yugoslav socialist society.

Audience of western film in Yugoslav society

From the moment it appeared, in 1895, the film has constantly shaped our lives in the sense that it sends messages, conveys attitudes and redefines our attitude towards everyday life. On the scale of art, the film, despite many oppositions, established itself as the “seventh” in a row. It is interesting that the inventors of the cinematograph and kinescope did not intend to create an artistic means of expression from “moving images”, but only to enable the visual recording of pictures from real life. This means that the invention of “film machines” preceded the birth of any awareness of their aesthetic potential, because cinema is in its material basis a technological form in which “technological innovation precedes the aesthetic impulse.”²²

However, the artistic in the film could not obscure its other social functions - ideological (cognitive), moral, educational, upbringing and others. Politicians of all colors were, above all, interested in the practical side of mov-

¹⁹ Žilber Koen-Sea, *Ogled o načelima jedne filozofije filma* (Beograd: Institut za film, 1971), p. 54

²⁰ Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950)

²¹ Bela Balaš, *Filmska kultura* (Beograd: Filmska biblioteka, 1948), p. 19

²² Dejvid A. Kuk, *Istorija filma I* (Beograd: Clio, 2005), p. 19

ing images, which referred to the propaganda and promotion of ideology. The post-war communist government in Yugoslavia tried to use the political-propaganda function of the film to indoctrinally shape the social consciousness of its citizens. There were many difficulties and controversies in the implementation of that idea, starting with the one according to which a capitalist (industrial, market) invention had to be adapted to the socialist (collective and state-directed) consciousness. This was especially true of film genres, such as westerns, which portrayed the atmosphere of the Wild West, quite different from that advocated by the socialist community. The question is how to fit violence, lawlessness, human intolerance, racial discrimination and imperialism into a society that cultivates the ideals of brotherhood and unity, political and military non-alignment, pacifism, philanthropy and socialist morality? In the first years after the liberation, it was difficult to reconcile the opposites of two seemingly irreconcilable social systems.

However, after 1948 and Tito's "no" to Stalin, there was a complete weakening of the influence of the Soviet Union in Yugoslavia and the strengthening of interstate relations with Western countries, especially with the United States. It was a real "Westernization" in which the film played a very important role. A special advantage for Yugoslav viewers was that the cinema was the cheapest and most affordable entertainment, in addition to being devoid of artificial glamor, etiquette and various forms of conventionality. The old cinemas were a feature of a time that was poor and exuded modesty in every way. Cinemas were the cheapest places to go out and have fun, so viewers did not pay attention to their technical shortcomings, such as poor picture and sound quality. It was not uncommon for wood and coal stoves to be lit in the halls on cold winter days, so the overall atmosphere was truly "homey". The satisfaction of the spectators was complemented by nibbling on seeds and peanuts, and cigarette smoke was inhaled secretly (in fear of strict distributors). With a murmur and occasional heckling (especially during some love scenes), everything together seemed free, relaxed, a bit comical, and sometimes debauched - similar to the cowboy way of life.

The first post-war decade of socialist Yugoslavia was accompanied by numerous difficulties, upheavals and controversies. The new ideology, which grew out of the war and the revolution, was established by strong propaganda in all spheres of life, in which the film was at the forefront. Social events could be followed, among other things, through the repertoire of cinemas and the number of foreign films in that repertoire. The screening of foreign films was determined by external and internal political circumstances. The period of consolidation of the new authorities was characterized by turning towards the Eastern bloc. At that time, the state was under complete Soviet influence,

and social-realistic films from the Soviet Union formed the backbone of the repertoire of Yugoslav cinemas.²³ The Sovietization of society, in the cinematic context, was obvious when it is known that, for example, Yugoslavia imported 169 films in 1946, of which 102 were Soviet, 9 American, 35 French, etc. So, 60 percent of the films, imported from the USSR, were the result of the state policy, which extended the screening and collective viewing of those films, which was taken care of by the Agitprop commission.²⁴

The year 1948 marked the culmination of the screening of Soviet film. This trend was programmed by the state, since these were films dedicated to the heroism of the Soviet people, their labor exploits and the time of socialist construction. It is interesting that the American and Western European film had a large audience, despite the fact that it was consciously declared “reactionary”, “idealess” and “harmful”. The year 1949 brought a real turnaround when it came to showing a foreign film in Belgrade.²⁵ During this year, Soviet film lost on screenings and ratings. This film dropped to 52.80% in the total number of viewers in the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, with a slightly better percentage of 55.88% in Serbia. At the same time, there was a strong expansion of American film in our area. The conflict between Tito and Stalin undoubtedly contributed to that, which the United States used to cause a rift within the communist world. In the first years of the Cold War, America provided political support, and then economic and military assistance to Yugoslavia, in the form of various loans and credits. A favorable atmosphere for cultural cooperation was created, and on that occasion there was an expansion of American film in Yugoslavia. During 1951, for the first time since 1944, American films with 53.26% occupied an absolute majority in the repertoire of Belgrade cinemas. Although the popularity of films about the Wild West was recorded over the past decade, for the first time in 1951, on the list of the ten most screened films, there were two “cowboys movies” - *Western Union* (1941) and *The Oklahoma Kid* (1939).

²³ Milan Dević, *Između zabave i propagande: strani film u beogradskim bioskopima od novembra 1944. do kraja 1955. godine* (Beograd: Filmski centar Srbije, 2015), p. 16

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 30–31

²⁵ Numerical indicators in this paper refer to the research of the audience of Belgrade cinemas. Belgrade was not only the capital of the Socialist Republic of Serbia (the state bears that name from the 1963 Constitution), but also the capital of Yugoslavia in every respect, especially in the cultural one. Therefore, although the results of the research of the film audience in Belgrade cannot be generalized, they can tentatively show the preferences and quality of the film taste of the Yugoslav audience, especially the youth. Given that the then federal regime emphasized ideological unanimity, the social consciousness of the Yugoslav “working man” was formed through strong ideological propaganda, so one could speak of the Yugoslav film audience as a solid, rather monolithic cultural aggregate.

The opening to the West was initially timid, as people had to be prepared to accept “other people’s ideals.” The decisive role in that was played by the mass and popular media. “Pro-Western xenomania” was mostly spread by musicians who had the opportunity to travel to the West, mostly music (heard from the radio), as well as films, which attracted the audience like a magnet to cinemas. The main point of “soft” power and propaganda is the high standard of living in the West, and especially in the United States.²⁶ In this regard, the film repertoire in Yugoslavia, especially from 1950 onwards, was dominated by foreign films of Western origin.²⁷ It is interesting that the genre of western film was almost always at the top of popularity with the Yugoslav audience. Although, in the first decade of the new socialist government, such a trend was not transparent. Given such a high ratings of the film, there was a type of crime in the former Yugoslavia, related to visits to cinema performances and ticket resale. Due to the large crowds in front of the cinemas, it was not easy to get the desired cinema ticket. Such a situation led to the institutionalization of “tappers” (ticket buyers and resellers). It is a matter of systematically organized and illicit trade, which was dealt with by the territorialized network of tapper “gangs”, with the “kings” of certain city districts. According to the perpetrators of these socially forbidden actions, the government was very rigorous, and the police solved all problems mainly through repression. Western in the cinema, “cowboyness” in front of the cinema.

During the 1950s, there was an absolute predominance of American films in Yugoslav cinemas, with the dominant genres being adventure and western films. Although Yugoslav film critics did not show any preference to the western genre, these films were at the top of the ratings. The most watched westerns of that period include: *Law of the West* (1949), *Rio Grande* (1950), *Winchester '73* (1950) and *Broken Arrow* (1950). That time in Yugoslavia, when it came to showing and watching movies, can be spoken of as the age of westerns. In that sense, *Viva Zapata* (1952) was highly ranked in 1953 and *Across the Wide Missouri* (1951), and in 1954, in addition to the longest-running film *Gone with the Wind* (1939), the list of most watched films in Belgrade also includes the western *Jesse James* (1939), *High Noon* (1952) and *The Duel at Silver Creek* (1952). The most shown ratings also match the most viewed ratings, so among the three most watched films in 1955 is the American cult western from 1953 - *The Naked Spur*. The whole trend showed a significant

²⁶ Zoran Janjetović, *Od Internacionale do komercijale: popularna kultura u Jugoslaviji 1945-1991* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2011), p. 186

²⁷ Until 1949, Yugoslavia was under complete influence of the Soviet Union, thus the new governing communist circle imported and showed primarily Soviet films that corresponded to the state ideology and values it advocated.

liberalization in terms of film imports and market thinking of the authorities, when it came to the commercial side of cinema. As far as the audience of American western films was concerned, the most numerous were young people, including students.²⁸ Statistics on the number of viewers of individual films show which films were the most watched, but not why, i.e. what was the structure of the audience. Therefore, we draw conclusions indirectly. As far as the Yugoslav audience is concerned, as a whole, it was mostly committed to light and entertaining contents. It did not stand out in taste from the majority of audiences around the world, to whom such films are offered the most. Hence, the most popular film genres belonged to entertainment and commercial achievements, which included adventure, historical, love and, of course, western films.²⁹

At that time, there were few relevant, methodologically exemplary sociological studies of the taste of the film audience. One of the rare ones referred to the examination of film taste in 1970 among high school youth (10th Belgrade Grammar School) and young people attending industrial schools (Electrotechnical “Rade Končar” and Leather school center). The sample included 200 respondents from these schools. Therefore, the research had a limited character, but its results provided an orientation insight for deeper and more comprehensive reflections on this issue. Empirically, it was shown on the basis of what young respondents made the choice of films they watched, what was the influence of “external”, i.e. non-film factors on film taste, how important film stars were in the choice of films and the like. As for the western, it was always at the top of the interest of young people, with the preferences of girls differing from the preferences of young men. The boys cited the western as a “first wish” (combined with an adventure film), while the girls listed this genre only as a “second wish”, coming after the first, in which they preferred films with social and historical themes. The research also showed a distinct differentiation regarding the choice of film genres, depending on the type of school that the respondents attend. The difference was especially obvious in relation to the western genre. Students of industrial schools opted for the western in an impressive percentage of 55.5%, while grammar school students expressed interest in this film genre with only 27.5%. The significantly higher commitment of male respondents to westerns can be attributed to the traditional masculine or *macho* pattern of western films that was characteristic of the culture of Yugoslav society, while the higher affinities of industrial school students towards this film genre, compared to high school students, can be explained by the breadth of educational program in grammar schools,

²⁸ More details in: Milan Dević, *op. cit.* p. 78–100

²⁹ Zoran Janjetović, *op. cit.*, p. 209–210

which developed the sensitivity to a variety of cultural (film) contents, raising the level of aesthetic taste and critical judgment.³⁰

Regarding preferences towards westerns, when it came to the age structure of the respondents, young people aged 16 to 17 voted for this film genre with 51.4%, young people aged 17 to 18 with 36.45%, and young people older than 18 opted for the western with 35.8%. In that way, the initial assumption of the research was confirmed, that the majority of young people would opt for adventure and western films, before those with love and war themes.³¹ The appeal of the theme of western films to young people is generally linked by John Cawelti to the myth, which evokes the experience of harmony that is established between him and the unconscious inner needs and tensions of the personality. According to him, the western reflects an archetypal pattern, such as the desire of adolescents to grow up, but also their fears of growing up.³²

Considering the number of cinemas and the cinema offer, Belgrade, as the capital and largest city, was in the lead in relation to other Yugoslav cities. Research shows that viewers were mostly interested in foreign films - primarily American, and then French, Italian and English. Thus, in the period from 1961 to 1965, the performances of foreign films were represented with over 80%, suggesting a tendency that would become even more pronounced in the following period. When it came to the ratings of western films, according to the report of "Belgrade Film" for 1974, out of a total of 210 premiered films, 39.0% belonged to crime and western films. In the same year in Serbia, out of the total number of performances, 40.1% were occupied by these two film genres, and out of the total number of spectators, 42.2% preferred crime and western content. The dominance of these genres, which have their origins in American national cinematography, was explained in part by the predominance of American films from total imports, and by another, in view of their artistic perfection, which played a major role in shaping film taste

³⁰ This observation is confirmed by other studies. Thus, at the beginning of the 1980s, an interesting tendency of the youth who went to Belgrade cinemas was noticed: while the student youth preferred the American ones, the working youth was much more in favor of domestic films. This testifies to the influence of educational and social status on the formation of taste. The young intelligentsia was more open to the new and the unknown, and the working class enjoyed watching the domestic and the familiar more. The division into intellectual (educated) and working (less educated) audiences was also noticed in a Slovenian audience survey from 1963, when more educated young people, although entertainment was their main motive for watching movies, cited the artistic value of film as the second most important motive (See: Janjetović, *op. cit.*, p. 214).

³¹ See: Aleksandar Todorović, *Filmski ukus kod omladine* (Beograd: Institut za film, 1971), p. 77–80

³² John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Ohio: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1971), p. 82

in the world. and in Yugoslavia. In the period from 1976 to 1980, visitors to American films continued to be the dominant category. As before, belonging to a film genre also played a significant role in shaping the taste of the cinema audience then. Of the 26 genres into which distributors categorized films, plays and viewers, between 80 and 90 percent fall into ten film genres, among which the western occupies an enviable place.³³

In the 20th century, the classic American western in the SFRY, according to many sociological indicators, was always highly positioned. Various factors contributed to this, and aesthetical ones were not primary. The denial of obedience to the USSR, turning to the West and accepting Western values, then the numerical superiority and quality of Hollywood film production, along with other social circumstances, had a large share in the ratings of American film. However, another fact could have contributed to the Yugoslav audience's choice of western. It is known that President Tito, a "dictator who loved westerns"³⁴, was a passionate film lover and a big fan of cowboy movies.³⁵ Tito's undisguised fondness for westerns and American film in general could also be interpreted as sending a certain political message that the doors were wide open to westerns and the country of their origin - not only cinema, but also the wider society. In connection with the mass reception of the American western in the whole of Yugoslav society, there was also the production of a specific subgenre of partisan film, which, in a way, became an alternative to the Hollywood western. Thus began the era of the so-called partisan western i.e. cowboy movie *made in Yugoslavia*.³⁶

Partisan western - universal characteristics and local features of the genre

The western film in socialist Yugoslavia can be viewed from the receptive, but also from the productive side. Following the example of the classic American western and its stereotypes, in the country of *light* socialism, films that possessed all the features of the popular Hollywood genre began to be made.

³³ Compare with: Miloš Nemanjić, *op.cit.*, p. 176–185

³⁴ Ante Perković, *Sedma republika* (Zagreb, Beograd: Novi Liber, Službeni glasnik, 2011), p. 28

³⁵ Zoran Janjetović, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Radina Vučetić, *op.cit.*, p. 125; Milan Dević, *op.cit.*, p. 72; Greg De Kjur, *Jugoslovenski crni talas* (Beograd: Filmski centar Srbije, 2019), p. 69

³⁶ Since the mid-20th century, American westerns spread across Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America. Beginning in the 1970s, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Japan began making their own western films (See: Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975, p. 5). Yugoslavia used its geographical space and cultural milieu to make partisan films in the spirit of American westerns.

The only difference was that they were placed in a new temporal and spatial environment - the years of the Second World War and the picturesque ravines and gorges of Yugoslavia. In the new context, the cowboys were replaced by partisans, and their opponents, instead of Indians and bandits, were now German occupiers and a lavish range of quislings (“domestic traitors”), led by Chetniks, Ustashas and ballists. As for the audience, it received the partisan “westerns” with undisguised enthusiasm and thus encouraged the producers to create other works of the newly established genre. Its taste had already been formed in classic western films and thus “prepared” for the reception of the domestic film subgenre. In that sense, it can be talked about a specific culture of film (western) communication, based on a built-in sensitivity to the visual, content and narrative components of the western - the classic Hollywood and the “newly composed” partisan.

Partisan war film was one of the most effective tools used by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia to maintain its collective myths. Similar to the Hollywood western that mythologized the creation of the USA (and became a kind of film archetype), such a task was performed by a propaganda partisan film, through identical conventions and iconography for SFR Yugoslavia. In both cases, there were simplified dichotomies and conflicts between good and evil, large expanses in the interior of the country, horses, rifles and shootings. In addition to exaggerated, mythical proportions, partisan films embodied a method that would fit the name of “romantic socialist realism.” As for the content of this type of film, it belonged to the genre of historical war film, more precisely it referred to the Second World War. These were mostly stories about brave Yugoslav partisans in the fight against the external and internal enemy, embodied, on the one hand, in the Nazi invaders and, on the other, in the domestic forces of royalist Chetniks and Nazi-friendly Ustashas. Partisan war film encompassed the basic genre conventions of westerns and, in a formal-aesthetic sense, followed the rules of classical construction. In the editing procedure, it adhered to the continuity of space and time, the style was uniform, the lighting was naturalistic, as well as the decor and acting, and the narrative followed the traditional structure in three acts.³⁷

Unlike most of the classic films about Yugoslav partisans described above, made in a patriotic manner with all the features of epics that glorify the revolution and the ideology of nationwide resistance to the occupying regime, in one period of Yugoslav cinematography films related to the same war period were made, with a completely different aesthetic and social orientation. Because these films were made in the manner of American westerns, they were colloquially called “southwestern”, “partisan”, “red” (“ostern” or “east-

³⁷ Greg De Kjur, *Jugoslovenski crni talas* (Beograd: Filmski centar Srbije, 2019), p. 61–63

ern”) westerns.³⁸ These films strictly adhered to the genre conventions of the authentic western, whose fame was spread by actors such as John Wayne, Gary Cooper or Kirk Douglas. While classic partisan films were inspired by communist ideology and portrayed resistance to the enemy with much pathos, as a mass movement of people sacrificially fighting for freedom and the ideals of a new society, a new subset of Hollywood partisanship with a typically Westernized plot highlighted fearless individuals endowed with fighting skills, similar to the ones seen in the classic “cowboy movies”. Our “heroes without flaws and fear” were unsurpassed in cowboy pugilism, and in some films they demonstrated their knowledge of techniques used in Eastern martial arts, such as judo, karate or jiu-jitsu! Yugoslav cowboys, in partisan uniforms, skillfully handled pistols, but they also showed dexterity in the use of ropes and knives in battles.³⁹ This “cowboyization of partisans” helped popularize the Yugoslav partisan film, which until then had not met with great understanding among young people.⁴⁰

The Partisan Western adhered to the tried and tested manners of its American role model, which means that the aesthetic settings of all elements of films about the Wild West were respected, from the script through directing, editing and camera to acting. The only difference was that certain local features (geographical, historical, cultural) of the environment in which the work of the “domestic” western was located were added to the universal genre conventions. The emergence of a new subgenre in Yugoslav film showed that not all films from the The National Liberation Struggle were monolithic, in the sense that they presented a one-sided picture of partisan warfare, but that some of them treated the war as an action spectacle, respecting elementary patterns of Hollywood narration. The similarity of the western with the Yugoslav marking and the older one, the American one, exists in the plane of their ideological and mythological sphere, and is manifested through at least two levels. The first is indicated in the explicit takeover of certain visual film conventions from the American genre, while the second refers to the implicit ideological contents and messages that exist in the images of both film genres.⁴¹

The classic plot of the Hollywood western was redesigned in the Yugoslav version so that the viewer could easily consume it. This “hypothesis” can be

³⁸ Nemanja Zvijer, *Ideologija filmske slike: sociološka analiza partizanskog ratnog spektakla* (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet u Beogradu, 2011); Radina Vučetić, *op.cit.*; Dragan Batančev, „Cenzura partizanskog vesterna Kapetan Leši (1960).“ *Historijski zbornik*, god. LXVII, No. 2, 2014; Greg De Kjur, *op.cit.*

³⁹ Actor Boro Begović in the role of Tihi in the Yugoslav film “Most” (1969) by Hajrudin Kravec showed all the knife handling skills, no worse than those demonstrated by James Coburn, as Brit, in the anthological American western “The Magnificent Seven” (1960) by John Sturges.

⁴⁰ Radina Vučetić, *op.cit.*, p. 137

⁴¹ Nemanja Zvijer, *op.cit.*, p. 49

confirmed in many domestic works, made in the manner of real “cowboy movies”. The first feature film by the Yugoslav/Serbian director Živorad Žika Mitrović, *Echelon of Doctor M* (1955), is characteristic of this. It is an action spectacle, which followed many elements of western dramaturgy: fierce confrontations, galloping horses through picturesque landscapes and a horse race, seen many times in the famous westerns of John Ford. With this film, Mitrović began to create a completely new poetics of the Yugoslav western.⁴² According to the application of genre conventions of the classic western, Mitrović’s film follows the universal patterns of this genre, which imply action and excitement in the Hollywood way, while in accordance with the place of action or events (Kosovo and Metohija), it bears certain local characteristics. In the landscape, which is irresistibly reminiscent of the gorges of the Wild West, a caravan travels (like American caravans of white immigrants) and is attacked by bandit-ballists, who replace the Indians from the well-known American “caravan” westerns.

Considering the place of the event, Žika Mitrović’s films carry the epithet of “Kosmet” westerns. The same type of film will be continued, elaborated and perfected by this director in some subsequent works, the most famous of which is the one called “Captain Leshi” (1960). The iconography of the westerns in this film is related to the exteriors, which were almost identical to those seen in the Wild West in American westerns, and are recognizable in canyons and gorges, where Albanian partisans and ballists move, gallop on horses and fight each other. And the scenes that were filmed in the taverns looked as if copied from the ambience of the Texas saloons. Even the characters were modeled on western patterns.⁴³ That is how the character of Captain Leshi was turned into a legend - he is a fighter for the “right thing”, an indisputable authority, who emerges victorious from all fights and conflicts. Women adore him and as the main protagonist, according to the postulates of the western, he also has a constant companion in charge of relaxing and comic scenes. His elderly friend, a certain Shock, who appears in this and the next Mitrović’s film “Obračun” (1962), is somewhat reminiscent of the character of Stampi from Hawks’ film *Rio Bravo* (1959). The exclusivity is that, thanks

⁴² Radina Vučetić, *op.cit.*, p. 133

⁴³ Mitrović opted for a model of national hegemony, judging by the fact that Albanian characters speak Serbian. In addition to the linguistic, the director resorted to standard solutions on the visual level as well. “Leši rides a horse like a cowboy and fires a gun, and the impeccably clean partisans are opposed by dirty ballists who wear traditional Albanian clothes, which underlines their conservatism.” Ballists hide in the mountains that look like rocky hiding places from the westerns of John Ford and Anthony Maine, and the final showdown with them takes place in the eerie ambience of the sculptural miracle of nature Đavolja Varoš“ [Dragan Batančev, „Cenzura partizanskog vesterna Kapetan Leši (1960)“, *Historijski zbornik*, No. 2, 2014, p. 368–369].

to these films, we also got the first Yugoslav film star, embodied in Aleksandar Gavrić, as Captain Leshi.⁴⁴

The mentioned films, including the first partisan ones, share one essential feature of the early westerns, in which the hero proves his loyalty to social values, by separating himself from the community in order to eliminate the enemy of the system. Some theorists in Westerns, and therefore in this partisan one, recognize the phenomenon they call *national cosmogenesis*, within which a group of immigrants of different nationalities, languages, religions and value systems want to create an integrated society embodied in a new nation and a new order. In that sense, Captain Leshi is presented as a soldier of the People's Army with a supranational identity. The idea of Yugoslavia in this film comes from below, from a hero close to the (Albanian) people, and not from above (from the supreme commander Tito and the Party), as later in the spectacles "Sutjeska" or "Užice Republic".⁴⁵

Other films by this director that do not concern the Second World War have dramaturgy with exciting action plots that are also reminiscent of westerns, of course in a local environment known only to Yugoslavs. These are "Mis Ston" (1958), "Solunski atentatori" (1961) and, above all, "Marš na Drinu" (1964). In the latter, which is done in the manner of Ford's "equestrian" westerns, there is a range of stereotypical characters, characteristic of many cowboy movies.⁴⁶ There is a budding commander, a passionate gambler, an irresistible lover, and a young and brave naive fellow called Veca, an inexperienced lieutenant who in a way represents a copy of the character played by Horst Buchholz in "The Magnificent Seven". The action film "Marš na Drinu" is similar to those westerns that are dedicated to the fight of the American army, especially cavalry, with various Indian tribes. The film ends with the scene of the death of Major Kursula, when the ancient ideal of victory in defeat and defeat in victory is symbolically merged, while a powerful

⁴⁴ Radina Vučetić, *op.cit.*, p. 134

⁴⁵ See: Dragan Batančev, *op.cit.*, p. 367–369

⁴⁶ The treatment of mythologized historical themes exists in many American, but also some domestic films. Two typical and similar ones are *The Alamo* (1960), directed by John Wayne, and "Boj na Kosovu" (1989), authored by director Zdravko Šotra. In the first, which takes place in 1836, a small unit of Texas fighters raises an armed rebellion against the Mexican government, with the goal of keeping the Mexican army and thus enabling their detachments to gather for a decisive conflict. At the same time, they die almost to the last man. In the second, the Serbian army led by Prince Lazar opposes the larger Ottoman army and through defeat "wins" the battle by allegedly saving Europe from the strongest onslaught of the Ottomans with the bodies of its heroes. In both cases, these are historical events, lost battles that have the power of triumph for their nations. Both films, with the exception of the historical and mythological dimension, have a Westernized plot that emphasizes the heroism and sacrifice of individuals in the struggle for the "common cause."

composition is heard as a musical background, composed precisely as part of this victory.⁴⁷ When it comes to comparisons concerning the film as a musical performance, the music from the aforementioned Sturgis Western is no less powerful, which is the dramatic leitmotif of the entire film. According to Will Wright, film is the only modern narrative medium, in which everyday events and language are connected with music, and in the western its mythical meaning is especially enhanced.⁴⁸

When it comes to the western *High Noon* (1952) or the Eastern, like *Captain Leshi*, the question arises as to how faithful these films are to the historical truth. This question opens another wider one, and it concerns the relationship between film and social reality. Since it is a work of art, and it is primarily a matter of imagination, then it is clear that film, as a construct, cannot (and should not) replace reality. And no matter how realistic it is, it is always equally distant from reality. Therefore, it is desirable for the recipient of the film to be aware of the discrepancy between historical reality and its film construction. Finally, credibility as such is not a predetermined category, but is firmly rooted in the social context and limited by its ethical, political, ideological or religious views.⁴⁹ Considering the issues of film credibility on the example of westerns, André Bazin stated in the Preface to Jean-Louis Rieueyrou's book on American western films that, in a purely quantitative sense, westerns that explicitly care about historical truth are a minority. The famous French film critic and theorist does not hesitate to say that in its most romantic and naive forms, the western is the complete opposite of historical reconstruction, but he believes that, even though they are primarily works of imagination, it is wrong to ignore their historical basis. "Because the relations between historical reality and the western are not direct, but dialectical. Tom Mix is the opposite of Abraham Lincoln, but he perpetuates his cult and memory in his own way."⁵⁰

There are other films of Yugoslav production in which there are traces of western dramaturgy and iconography. The most impressive are those from the opus of the Sarajevo director Hajrudin Siba Krvavec. Today, we consider his action films, made according to the pattern of American westerns⁵¹, to be cult achievements, which have strengthened the already laid foundations of

⁴⁷ Aleksandar S. Janković, *Redefinisanje identiteta: istorija, zablude, ideologije u srpskom filmu* (Beograd: Filmski centar Srbije, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti, 2017), p. 19

⁴⁸ Will Wright, Will, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*, Berkeley (Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975), p. 12

⁴⁹ Nemanja Zvijer, *op.cit.*, p. 15–16

⁵⁰ See: Žan-Luj Rjeperu, *op.cit.*, p. 8

⁵¹ „Diverzanti“ (1967), „Most“ (1969), „Valter brani Sarajevo“ (1972), „Partizanska eskadrila“ (1979)

a new genre in Yugoslav cinematography - the partisan western. In the good tradition of Hollywood action film dramaturgy, Krvavac created a “nationally useful western”. His example, as well as Mitrović’s, reveals the mechanisms that the Yugoslav government used to make American influences suitable for its own ideological needs. At the same time, a concession was made to the audience who got what they wanted to see. In an easy and attractive form, these films not only relaxed the viewers but also influenced their consciousness, thus fulfilling a certain “pedagogical” function.⁵² At the same time, they created a feeling of catharsis due to the economy of poverty in which they found themselves. From the very beginning of the film, so to speak, it was realized that this medium is an ideal means of imposing socially desirable values that, directly or indirectly, could be placed very suggestively and convincingly. In this case, they were tied to the politics and ideology of socialist society.

Greg DeCuir notices that the partisan westerns of the Sarajevo director, with the exception of one film, take place in the natural expanses of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was the main symbol of this genre. One of the reasons why the national liberation struggle was fought mostly on the territory of this Yugoslav republic was that with its mountains, canyons and “rainforests” it provided optimal conditions for maneuvering, and that best suited the guerrilla, partisan way of warfare. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina had another advantage over other areas of the former Yugoslavia - its multiethnicity was most conducive to nationwide resistance.

“Rural spaces and lush naturalism often included horses, just like in westerns. Chetniks, who supported the monarchy, were usually depicted riding horses in battle, in keeping with their rustic, perhaps provincial nature, similar to the simplified representations of these films. The Germans drive into battle on tanks, while the virtuous partisans move exclusively on foot, which should emphasize their modest origin. Accordingly, in these films, the portrayal of different types of movement has ideological implications.”⁵³

Yugoslav producers and, in general, film workers knew that the film image was one of the most important mediators in conveying a certain ideological message, that is, that the constitution of ideological meanings, through the film image, was in the function of direct and indirect political propaganda.⁵⁴ Film painting, as an ideological message, also played an important role in the partisan western as a very popular film genre. Hence the benevolence of the Yugoslav government towards the partisan spectacles, dressed in the spirit of westerns. The influence of politics here also existed exclusively for ideologi-

⁵² Radina Vučetić, *op. cit.*, p. 142–143

⁵³ Greg De Kjur, *op.cit.*, p. 66

⁵⁴ Nemanja Zvijer, *op.cit.*, p. 21

cal reasons. Allowing American influence, when it came to partisan action films, suited the authorities, in terms of diverting attention from the burning problems of society to everything that made up the essence of Hollywood - getting out of gray and gloomy everyday life into the false world of luxurious, fluttering and pink life. In short, the Yugoslav authorities desperately needed a Hollywood happy ending.⁵⁵ In this way, the socialist government, with the League of Communists as the “vanguard of the working class,” fulfilled a two-fold goal: on the one hand, it met the needs of the general public, indulging its tastes, and, on the other, achieving its vital political and ideological interests.

Conclusion

The post-war Yugoslav socialist society was characterized by numerous contradictions, which did not bypass the sphere of culture. At that time, it could be said that film was the leading art - not because of its aesthetic possibilities, which were undoubtedly there, but because of the great ideological and propaganda-political power of that medium, in that it could convey messages to a large mass of people in a short time. At first, the complete Sovietization of Yugoslav society was obvious, which, in the cinematic context, was marked by the enormous import of Soviet films. However, after 1948 and Tito's historic “no” to Stalin, there was a complete reversal and Westernization - the strengthening of interstate ties with Western countries (especially with the United States), in which the film played a significant role. From then on, Soviet film lost both its screenings and ratings.

Using the conflict between Tito and Stalin, the United States was given an incentive to cause a split within the communist world. In the first years of the Cold War, in addition to moral support, America provided Yugoslavia with assistance in the form of various loans and credits. A special kind of cooperation manifested itself on the cultural level, when there was a real expansion of American film in the SFRY. Since the early 1950s, American films had an absolute majority in terms of screenings and ratings. The genre of classic Hollywood western was at the top of popularity, especially among Yugoslav youth, and this tendency continued for the next few decades. The high positioning of westerns did not exist (only) due to the aesthetic qualities of that type of film or due to the artistic preferences of the audience, although these factors cannot be denied. American films, as well as westerns, were socially desirable, primarily because of the pro-Western orientation of the then political leadership.

⁵⁵ Radina Vučetić, „Kauboji u partizanskoj uniformi (američki vesterni i partizanski vesterni u Jugoslaviji šezdesetih godina 20. veka)“, *Tokovi istorije*, No. 2, 2010, p. 150–151

In addition to the fact that the American western in Yugoslavia was the leading film genre in the receptive sense, in the country of “soft” socialism, works based on the model of films from the Wild West began to be shot. It was the case of the so-called partisan western, created in the process of Hollywoodization of partisan film, which included the “cowboyization” of partisans. In the domestic social environment, cowboys were replaced by partisans, and Indians by various quislings, “domestic traitors” and collaborators of the occupiers. As for the genre conventions, they were respected, as in every western - there was a lot of singing, gunfighting, horseback riding, attacking caravans and the like.

Although the Wild West, as a word and as a syntagm, contains an a priori negative connotation - as a society of anarchy, anomie, lawlessness, crime, brutality and immorality, in Yugoslavia there were ways to emphasize some virtues, which were attributed mainly to heroes, who fought against these vices. They were characterized by courage, honesty, humanity and a protective attitude towards those weaker than themselves, which were, in fact, the values on which (at least declaratively) the Yugoslav socialist community rested. In this way, the antinomies between socialism, as a society of equal people, and capitalism, which was fraught with class antagonisms and a number of other social opposites, were somewhat overcome. By finding closeness in differences, through a western film, a twofold benefit was achieved - film producers were satisfied, but so was the audience, whose taste was nurtured in a spirit that impressed the manipulative political elite.

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