

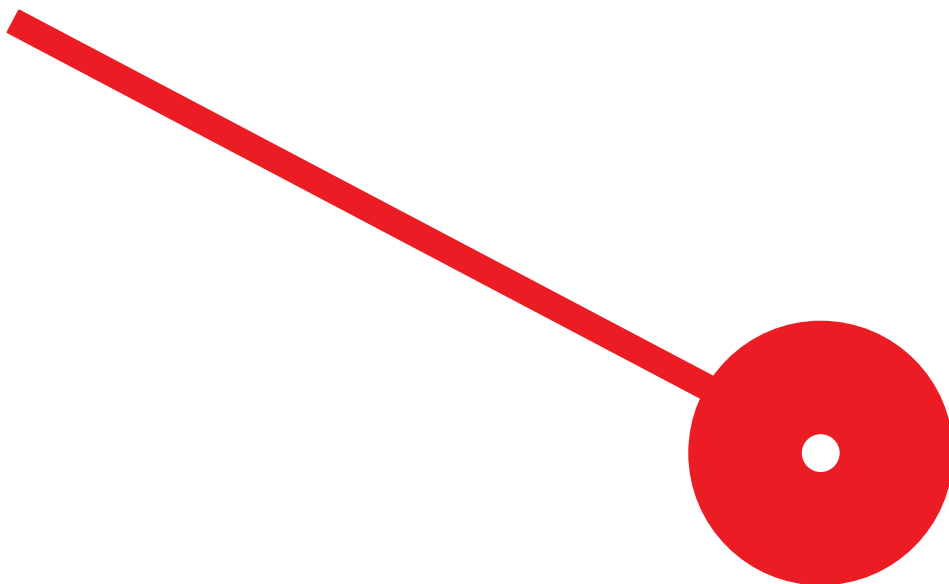


Exploring the Cinematic Legacy of the Cold War: "Rambo" as a Propaganda Tool

Alexandra Araújo

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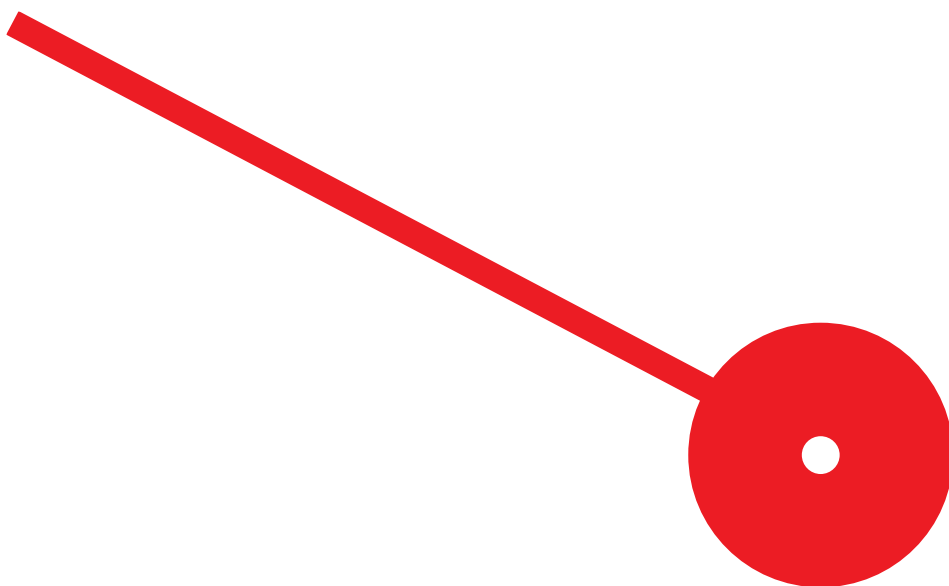
Exploring the Cinematic Legacy of the Cold War: "Rambo" as a Propaganda Tool

Alexandra Araújo

Dissertação de Mestrado

**apresentada ao Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração
do Porto para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos**

**Interculturais para Negócios, sob orientação da Professora Doutora
Clara Sarmento**



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Finally, thank you to whoever is reading this. I hope you enjoy it and take some lessons from it.

Abstract:

This dissertation intends to prove that the three movies of the “Rambo” franchise produced in the 1980s decade were used as a Cold War propaganda tool. With that being stated, there is also the presentation of the concepts of Popular Culture and Mass Culture as well as the historical and political context of the Cold War, with a chapter specifically dedicated to cinema during this conflict.

The object of study of this dissertation is the series of three movies, “First Blood” (1982), “Rambo: First Blood Part II” (1985), and “Rambo III” (1988), that will be used as a standpoint to analyse the Vietnam War, the Afghan War, Rambo’s character as the all-American hero, and the Soviets as the villains, all of them considered as elements of Cold War propaganda. Themes such as the role of action movies in the construction of stereotypes as well as the massification of the War during the 1980s are also going to be explored. Besides this, the dissertation also tries to understand whether Cinema during the Cold War can be considered as a vehicle of intercultural communication.

In order to achieve this purpose, the methodology used is based on qualitative methods of investigation. To elaborate this work, the study of articles, books, images, movies, newspaper articles, and other existing dissertations on the topic was fundamental.

Key words: Popular Culture, Cinema, Action Movies, Cold War, Propaganda.

Resumo

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo comprovar que os três filmes do franchise “Rambo” produzidos na década de 1980 foram utilizados como uma ferramenta de propaganda durante a Guerra Fria. Nesta dissertação, também são desenvolvidos os conceitos de Cultura Popular e Cultura de Massas, bem como a apresentação do contexto histórico e político da Guerra Fria, com um capítulo especificamente dedicado ao cinema durante este conflito.

O objeto de estudo desta dissertação são os três filmes: “First Blood” (1982), “Rambo: First Blood Parte II” (1985) e “Rambo III” (1988), que serão utilizados como um instrumento para analisar a Guerra do Vietname, a Guerra do Afeganistão, a personagem de Rambo como representação do herói americano e os agentes soviéticos como representação dos vilões, todos eles considerados como sendo elementos de propaganda da Guerra Fria. Serão também explorados temas como o papel dos filmes de acção na construção de estereótipos, bem como a massificação da Guerra durante a década de 1980. Além disso, a dissertação procura também compreender se o Cinema durante a Guerra Fria pode ser considerado um veículo de comunicação intercultural.

Para atingir este objetivo, foram utilizados métodos qualitativos de investigação, como o estudo de artigos científicos, livros, imagens, filmes, artigos de jornais e outras dissertações existentes sobre o tema.

Palavras chave: Cultura Popular, Cinema, Filmes de Ação, Guerra Fria, Propaganda.

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List of abbreviations

P.O.W. – Prisoner of War

U.S. – United States

U.S.A- United States of America

U.S.S.R. - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The key function of Mass Media is to communicate across a diverse range of outlets, such as television, movies, advertising, radio, the internet, magazines, and newspapers, to name but a few, in order to reach the widest possible audience. Consequently, the impact of mass media on society is very significant, because it informs, educates, and entertains people in a broad variety of ways.

Certainly, a notable moment in the context of communication was the invention of films. Cinema constitutes a form of mass media that has undoubtedly become a powerful tool since the day it was introduced to the world. The film industry has grown rapidly in the past years and brought a lot of changes in society, as films have become a reflection of culture, for both the present and the past.

According to Alison Landsberg, in *Prosthetic memory: The transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture* (2004), cinema seeks to make visible what, for economic or social reasons, remains beyond an individual person's reach. In part, cinema was a revelation, in both senses of the word, but it was also transportation, that is to say, the capacity to carry viewers to faraway places and alternative temporalities.

Moreover, film is imagined as an instrument with the power to "suture" viewers into pasts they have not lived. Cinema offers spectators from various backgrounds and ancestries a shared archive of experiences. As Miriam Hansen contends, theatres in the beginning of the classical period, were neither ethnically segregated nor segregated by class but were a place for crossing over, instead. Therefore, from its beginning, cinema has authorized and enabled people to inhabit subject positions and pasts which they might not have lived and to which they had no "natural" connection. Cinema, then, can be imagined as a site in which people experience a bodily, mimetic encounter with a past that was actually not theirs (Landsberg, 2004, p.14).

Cinema has a great impact on society in many ways. Through their stories and concepts, movies have raised the world's awareness about several important topics. But, at the same time, they tend to idealize or generalize some topics for maximizing profit, which adds to the controversy and may even deceive or harm the public feelings.

As a main topic of recent history, the Cold War was reflected in culture through music, books, television, and other media, as well as in sports and cinema. Major elements of the Cold War included the presumed threat of a nuclear war, annihilation, and espionage. The use of film as an effective form of widespread propaganda transformed cinema into another

Cold War battlefield alongside the arms race and the space race. Films from both the United States and the Soviet Union can be seen as artifacts of propaganda as well as of resistance.

As this is stated, the series of Rambo films starring Sylvester Stallone can be considered as a powerful and widely disseminated representation of this conflict. So, this dissertation has as its main goal the analysis of the Rambo movie franchise – specifically the movies produced in the 1980's decade – as a case study, in order to research topics and questions such as: a) the way the United States utilized its cinematic superiority as a way to effectively impact public opinion; b) the way the communist block was represented in the movie as a mirror of how they were represented in Western society; c) the role of Mass Media in the construction of stereotypes; d) action movies as a propaganda tool; e) the portrait of the American hero and of the Soviet villain.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first one is about Popular Culture and Mass Culture, developing topics such as the mass media, cinema as mass media, action movies as a massified genre, and the role of action movies in the construction of stereotypes. The following chapter is dedicated to the Cold War, referencing subjects such as its historical and political context, as well as its massification during the 1980s, both in the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. The third chapter focuses on the cinema during the Cold War, mentioning themes such as action movies as a propaganda tool, and portraits of the American hero and of the Soviet villain. Lastly, the fourth chapter corresponds to a case study of the three Rambo movies of the 80s decade: “First Blood” (1982), “Rambo: First Blood Part II” (1985), and “Rambo III” (1988). Cold War elements such as the Vietnam War, the Afghan War, and Rambo's character as the all-American hero are going to be explored. This last chapter applies what has been presented and discussed in the previous chapters of the dissertation, through the specific case study of Rambo films. That is, the three films of the franchise are analyzed as a product of popular culture as well as a reflection of the society and context of where they were produced. Hence, the analysis will focus on elements such as the Vietnam War, the Afghan War, and the portrayal of the Soviet Union as the villain, for instance.

The main goal of this dissertation is to describe and analyse how the Cold War propaganda was present in popular culture, specifically in Cinema, affecting how people perceived the world and viewed the conflict. Cinema is one of the most important mediums of cultural expression in society, as during this period cinema was used to help promote the war effort,

raise people's spirits, and share victories. It is also a powerful mode of communication, as it reflects the beliefs and opinions of different groups of people. Therefore, I will also try to answer the question “could Cinema during the Cold War be considered as a vehicle of intercultural communication?”.

The media industry is vast, large, and ever-growing, with a wide variety of roles available, as it encompasses all businesses that allow information to be shared. In turn, the visual media entertainment itself is a multi-billion-dollar business, as the film industry produces movies that can collect billions in profits in a single film, due to ticket sales and branding deals, for instance, just to name two sources of income. Besides, the movie industry belongs to the creative field, which employs millions of people due to its different areas, such as acting, graphic design, video editing, and writing, for example. U.S. cinema, often referred to as Hollywood, has had a profound effect on cinema across the world, since the early 20th century. It is also the oldest film industry in the world and the largest film industry in terms of revenue. American film studios collectively generate several hundred films every year, making the United States one of the most productive producers of films in the world. As for the “Rambo” movies, the film series has grossed 819\$ million in total, \$300 million of which were generated by the most successful film, “Rambo: First Blood Part II”.

In this train of thought, cinema shapes cultural attitudes and customs, reflecting the values, beliefs, and experiences of different societies and cultures. Therefore, the first issues that are going to be explored in this dissertation are the concepts of Popular Culture and Mass Culture, developing topics such as the mass media, cinema as mass media, action movies as a massified genre, and the role of action movies in the construction of stereotypes.

CHAPTER I– POPULAR CULTURE AND MASS CULTURE

1.1 Defining Concepts

To better understand the concept of popular culture, making some remarks on the term “Culture” is indispensable. According to Terry Eagleton, “culture” is said to be one of the two or three most complex words in the English language” (2000, p.1). “Culture” may be broadly conceived as “the customs, beliefs, art, music, and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time” (Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture 2005, p.336). In more recent times, the idea of culture has become a universal area of concern across the social sciences and the humanities, given the pervading influence of cultural studies as an inter, post, and trans-disciplinary domain, concerned not only with this notion but also with the cultural practices determined by power relations in society. Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (2000, p.83) highlight the idea of culture as “a way of life” and theorize the existence of a major distinction between “high culture” and “popular culture”. Stuart Hall, a founding father of cultural studies, succeeded in bridging the traditional divide between “high culture”, that is, “the sum of the great ideas as represented in the classical works of literature, painting, music and philosophy” (1997a, p.2) and “popular culture”, that corresponds to “the widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing, art, design, and literature, or the activities of leisure-time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of the majority of ordinary people”. In this sense, according to Hall, the term culture refers to whatever is distinctive about the “way of life” of a people, community, nation or social group. This has come to be known as the “anthropological” definition. Alternatively, the word can be used to describe the “shared values” of a group or society—which is like the “anthropological” definition, only with a more sociological emphasis (Ramón-Torrijos & Gregorio-Godeo, 2017).

Indeed, culture is a complicated and contested word because the concept does not represent an entity in an independent objective world. The multitudinous ways that culture has been talked about within academia include culture as a whole way of life; as a language; as constituted by representation; as a tool; as practices; as artifacts; as spatial arrangements; as power; as high or low; as mass and as popular. This variety of ways of comprehending culture does not represent cases of “objective right” against “objective wrong”, for none of the definitions of culture is erroneous in the sense of misdescribing an object. However, they do achieve different purposes and may be more or less applicable in different times and places. The concept of culture is thus political and contingent and to explore its meaning(s) is to trace its uses and the consequences that follow from this. In so far as contemporary

cultural studies have a distinguishing take on the concept of culture, it stresses the intersection of power and meaning to promote social change and improve the human condition. For instance, Matthew Arnold's (19th century) view was that acquiring culture was the means toward moral perfection and social good. Here culture as human "civilization" is counterpoised to the "anarchy" of the "raw and uncultivated masses". For Raymond Williams (20th century), culture is the meanings and practices of ordinary men and women that compose culture. In this view, culture is constituted by the tapestry of texts, practices, and meanings generated by everyone, as people conduct their lives. (Barker, 2004).

Defining popular culture is a challenge reflected in the various ways that scholars have conceptualized it. For a large period, it has been used to refer primarily to the opposite site of high culture, in an equation of bad versus good. This understanding of a hierarchical distinction of culture has had lasting effects and has been hard to overcome, both within and outside the intellectual/academic field (Pereira & Cachola, 2015).

During the period of industrialization and its consequences, specifically for the field of cultural relations and the development of the capitalist market economy, the concept of popular culture was not only excluded by intellectuals but also denied any possibility of constituting a serious and valid topic for academic debate. Up until the mid-20th century, popular culture was often linked to a poor and simplistic form of entertainment and pleasure and was even deemed morally and ethically questionable, not to mention aesthetically. It was particularly after the 1950s that new perceptions came to alter this in very significant ways, especially with the emergence of Cultural Studies and the influence their project had on both sides of the Atlantic (Grossberg, 1997). This wave of enthusiasm surrounding the concept of popular culture led to the impossibility of assigning it to a restricted meaning or a delineated category (Pereira & Cachola, 2015).

From the moment Raymond Williams claimed that "culture is ordinary" and represents a whole way of life "which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art but also in institutions and ordinary behavior" (Williams, 2001, p.57), efforts at applying a hierarchical matrix to cultural manifestations were no longer possible. The presumed distance separating the popular and the erudite was overcome when the emphasis was projected on the uses of culture (Fiske, 1992; Certeau, 1988) and the way cultural objects construct social relations. The popular ceased, then, to be defined as an aesthetic feature of specific objects to become

a much broader category also involving the social relations between the publics, images, objects, and events. At the same time, access to the consumption of cultural products improved significantly, therefore enabling the inclusion in the domain of popular culture of new artistic and vernacular expressions (Pereira & Cachola, 2015).

Moreover, the distinct definitions of popular culture express different assumptions and political orientations. Traditional distinctions between high and popular culture have been fueled as much by political concerns as by defensible moral, aesthetic, or intellectual ones. Likewise, paralleling popular culture with mass culture often assigns to it the negative valuations characterizing the concept of mass culture/society itself: that such culture is alienating, atomized, formulaic, and unable to nourish “true” creativity or critical judgment (Grindstaff, 2008).

Raymond Williams (1983) identified four common uses of the term “popular”: that which is well-liked by many people; that which is deemed unworthy or inferior; that which works deliberately to win favor with people, and forms of culture made by people for themselves. Indeed, diverse approaches are not mutually exclusive, nor do they map precisely onto specific disciplinary traditions or methodologies. Rather, they represent different, and often historically specific, ways of conceptualizing the relationship between popular cultural forms and the society that they both shape and reflect (Grindstaff, 2008).

According to Grazian (2010), popular culture refers to the aesthetic products created and sold by profit-seeking firms operating in the global entertainment market. This definition implies that culture itself is designed to be sold and consumed for profit globally.

Popular culture can also be considered as the set of practices, beliefs, and objects that embody the most broadly shared meanings of a social system. It includes media objects, entertainment and leisure, fashion and trends, and linguistic conventions, among other things. It is often considered that popular culture is ultimately (despite how we, as audiences, might perceive and consume it) designed to make money. In this sense, all popular culture is associated with commercial products such as, for instance, CDs, books, movies, magazines, etc. And this is because profit is the key motive in the dissemination of popular culture, as commercial products have a dual purpose: they enable more profit to be earned and they serve as a method to further promote and advertise the popular culture they are associated with (Moscovis, n.d.).

According to Moscovis, concepts such as Globalisation, Westernisation, and Technologies play a significant role in the spread of popular culture. In this sense: Globalisation, because it represents the connections between countries and the operation of multi-national organizations; Westernisation, because it represents the emergence of Western culture as dominant in the global marketplace; lastly, Technologies, because they change the distribution channels for popular culture, specifically for music, television, and film. Originally, it was only possible to listen to music by going to a concert and then cassette tapes made music more portable, re-mixable, and sharable; CDs allowed greater volume and more content to be stored on a device, and then the MP3 players came, followed by online music stores, for instance (Moscovis, n.d.).

Another crucial point to define popular culture is the fact that it has to be accessed by a large segment of the population, taking into consideration that access to it also depends on the social and physical environment. Radio, CDs, films, phones, and computers, as well as the Internet, all contribute to the access and spread of popular culture. As these types of products become cheaper, barriers to accessing popular culture have decreased, and the speed by which popular culture spread has increased. Furthermore, institutional power also influences access to it. Governments have more access than individuals and can prevent access to unwanted, unsafe, or offensive material (Moscovis, n.d.).

As popular culture simultaneously influences society and is influenced by it, as society changes, popular culture will change as well. Even durable popular culture items that have existed for multiple generations (music, films, TV shows) evolve and adapt to the values and preferences of the current society (Moscovis, n.d.).

Popular culture has been associated with mass media as mass media can introduce and encourage the adoption of certain trends. Thus, mass media are an inevitable aspect of modern life as they can be considered a form of communication, whether written, broadcasted, or verbal that reaches an audience. Every day people read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch television, and browse the Internet. Indeed, popular culture allows large heterogeneous masses of people to identify collectively. It can have an inclusionary role in society as it unites the masses on ideals of acceptable forms of behavior. Nowadays, both mass culture and popular culture pervade life under the global hegemonic influences of capitalism, both doing their part in ensuring the duality of production and consumption.

The discussion around the concept of mass culture was predominantly developed in the United States immediately following World War II by authors such as Bernard Rosenberg, Leo Lowenthal, and Dwight Macdonald, who embraced a pessimistic view of mass culture as contributing to individual alienation, passivity, manipulation, and social dehumanization. However, the most significant contribution to this debate was offered by the authors of the Frankfurt School, especially Theodor W. Adorno, whose writings remain highly influential up to the present day, owing to his vision of the culture industry as a promoter of standardization and homogenization. According to the Frankfurt School, mass culture and communications stand in the center of leisure activity, are imperative agents of socialization, and mediators of political reality, and should consequently be seen as major institutions of contemporary societies with a variety of economic, political, cultural, and social effects (Pereira & Cachola, 2015).

Furthermore, from the perspective of the Frankfurt School, mass culture was the widespread American “low” culture that had developed during industrialization. It is often said to have replaced agricultural, pre-industrial folk culture (cultural traditions that are done at a local level, and which are derived from longstanding traditions and or cultural practices) (Kellner, n.d.).

Victims of European fascism, the Frankfurt school experienced firsthand the ways that the Nazis used the instruments of mass culture to produce submission to fascist culture and society. While in exile in the United States, the members of the Frankfurt school came to believe that American “popular culture” was also highly ideological and worked to promote the interests of American capitalism. Controlled by giant corporations, the culture industries were organized according to the strictures of mass production, churning out mass-produced products that generated a highly commercial system of culture which in turn sold the values, lifestyles, and institutions of “the American way of life” (Kellner, n.d.).

Mass culture can be considered synonymous with popular culture (the preferred term in cultural studies and where the focus is on uses rather than production), although some theorists distinguish it from traditional folk culture because it is oriented toward profit and is organized according to the laws governing commodity exchange (Chandler & Munday, 2011).

Mass culture can also be defined as cultural products that are mass-produced, distributed, marketed, and for mass audiences. Examples incorporate mass-media entertainment such as

films, television programs, popular books, newspapers, magazines, popular music, leisure goods, household items, clothing, and mechanically reproduced art (Chandler & Munday, 2011).

Mass culture is disseminated through mass media, which utilizes technologies for mass production, and seeks to maximize profit by using mass forms of communication, such as film, tv, and the internet for everyday enculturation (the process through which individuals learn their group's culture, through experience, observation, and instruction). Mass media then manufactures cultural values and ideas arising from a population's common exposure to the same cultural activities, music, film, television, and art (Gautam, 2021).

In fact, popular culture and cinema are reciprocally influenced. Movies are based on culture, and culture is influenced by movies, as the development of film also leads to the development of culture. At the same time, movies can reflect the popular culture, beliefs, and values of every group in a given country or society.

As this dissertation concentrates on U.S. cinema, the analysis of the American film industry is crucial. As a matter of fact, American films occupy most of the market share and play a leading role in the whole film industry. The music in American movies, the text, and the American customs illustrated on the screen can be indicators of the various stages of the country's cultural development. Moreover, since the film is a mass cultural product, it needs to please people from different backgrounds and cultures (Chen, 2023).

The film has been the prime medium for storytelling, depicting and exploring the world, and engaging and shaping the human senses and emotions, memory, and imagination across different cultures. Films combine visuals, movement, sound, theatre, and music all in one. Therefore, they can communicate successfully and create an impact that cannot be created by any other media. Therefore, it is one of the best types of mass media one can use to study a certain culture, as it can entertain, educate, or explore critical social issues.

1.2 The Mass Media: Concepts and Evolution

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, mass media can be defined as the different methods of giving information to a large number of people, for example, through newspapers, television, magazines, and radio.

However, mass media can be considered a misleadingly simple term involving countless institutions and individuals who differ in scope, purpose, method, and cultural context.

Indeed, it includes all forms of information communicated to large groups, ranging from handmade signs to an international news network. There are also no constraints on the type of information being presented. Additionally, it is important to denote that there is no requirement for how large the audience needs to be before communication becomes "mass" communication (Musaeva, 2021).

Mass communication is the process of exposing and exchanging information through mass media to large population segments. It is related to various forms of media, as its technologies are used for the dissemination of information, of which journalism and advertising are part. Mass communication diverges from other types of communication, such as interpersonal communication and organizational communication, because it focuses on particular resources transmitting information to numerous receivers. The main concern of mass communication consists of how its content encourages or otherwise affects the behavior, attitude, opinion, or emotion of the people receiving the information. Additionally, mass communication can also be seen as the process of massive circulation of information within regions and across the globe. Mass communication allows information to be rapidly transmitted to many people, who are mostly distant from the sources of information. In this modern era, mass communication is used to disperse information at an accelerated rate, often about politics and other topics.

Mass media have an extremely powerful impact on how people view the world, nowadays. Nearly everything people know about current events and politics comes from the media, while only the most local and personal events are experienced firsthand (Musaeva, 2021).

According to Altheide (2019), mass media corresponds to the information technologies that permit "broadcasting" and communication to a large audience. The mass media are critical carriers and definers of popular culture. Traditionally, these media have included print (e.g., books, newspapers, magazines, billboards) and electronic media (e.g., cinema, radio, television), and more recently, various computer communication formats, particularly the Internet. They also include personal communication devices, such as audio CD players and game players (Gameboys), as well as pagers and cell telephones (Altheide, 2019).

Mass media are technological modes of communication in society, especially electronic and print media. Media can be found in artifacts from lost civilizations thousands of years ago. Paintings on cave walls, pottery, or even field sculptures of stones all represent some of these ancient forms. Several types of media have been developed by civilizations, being

transmitted through such social elements as territory, dress and fashion, language, clocks and calendars, dance, and other rituals. But in the modern world, these types of media have been dominated by newspapers, radio, and television. Groups ambitioning to have power seek to gain influence and legitimacy through media. In addition, select media promote a public portrayal of everyday life and political power according to the logic of the dominant institution (Altheide, 2019).

It is also important to consider that a “medium” is every social or technological technique or device employed for selecting, transmitting, and receiving information.

According to Hartley (2012), “the media” were the content industries committed to reaching large popular audiences and readerships in print (newspapers, magazines, popular publishing), screen (cinema, TV), and aural (recorded music, radio) media. During the 20th century, these “mass” media were characterized by their centralized address, standardized content, high capital costs and technological innovation, and their tendency towards repertoire and genre. Despite their desire for rankings and reach, in the “mass” media, audiences choose from among a repertoire of finished products, in whose creation they did not participate.

Furthermore, mass media are amongst the most significant methods of integration into a society and its culture. Information, entertainment, persuasion, and cultural transmission are examples that the media offer. Whether positively or negatively, media helps define people’s worldviews, knowledge, and behaviors as individuals and their respective actions as social actors. Frequently, the impact of media is discussed in the context of individuals. However, media both influence and is influenced by social groups, institutions, and social contexts, such as neighborhoods, communities, and nation-states (Galea, 2007).

The media fulfills a function for society. First, it disseminates information but not all that information is created equally. Some media focuses on protest and outcry while other forms of media are less conspicuous and controversial. The media also mold and shape public opinion while reporting current events. When the news media select a story, they monitor the opinions of those who watched it and the indicators which show public interest in it. If it proves to be of enough interest, then they will provide more coverage. If not, they let it go (Grazian, 2010).

Since this dissertation focuses on the USA, the assessment of the impact of mass media in this country is important to consider. For instance, because media corporations have rather

strict control over the stories they tell, in the U.S., often citizens don't even find out about many salient international issues. These issues may even be crucial to non-U.S. citizens but are not reported by U.S. media outlets, which often leads to the U.S. being criticized for its narrow worldview (Grazian, 2010).

To comprehend mass media better, it is necessary to enlighten the progression and expansion of media. To begin with, in pre-agricultural societies, most people lived in small groups as hunters and gatherers. Rather than written language, these individuals depended on the spoken word to communicate, as they did not have well-developed alphabets or systems of writing. On the other hand, in agricultural societies, people created a written language for easier and wider communication, as these societies were more settled and complex. However, the circulation of books was still very limited then, as they were created entirely for the literate elite ruling class (Zhen, 2016).

With industrial societies, mass media emerged and flourished. Johannes Gutenberg invented movable metal types and mechanical printing in 1455, which made the appearance of mass media possible. The Gutenberg Bible was the first ever mass-produced book and its introduction into society marked the beginning of the printed media. Gutenberg not only invented the printing press, but he also facilitated the ability of the masses to learn how to read. He also created a logical cultural process in Western Civilization in which most people learned how to read, think, store, and process information. By 1500, millions of books were printed, and the price of books declined considerably, leading to mass literacy and mass communication. Literacy and reading started to alter the way people thought and behaved. Books could make culture, history, and religion available to everyone. With industrialization and technical innovation thriving, other print mass media such as newspapers and magazines appeared and boomed. However, the enlargement of readership was still hampered by illiteracy and lack of money, which were called cultural capital and economic capital, respectively, by Pierre Bourdieu:

Economical capital is essentially a person's wealth. Economic capital tends to determine what kinds of media someone can have access to. Cultural capital is based on education, family background, and other sorts of learning. These sources provide a kind of intellectual capital that people use in understanding things. Cultural capital tends to determine what kinds of things people like, can use and can understand (Zhen, 2016:24).

At the beginning of the 20th century, many people in the United States had neither the economic capital nor the cultural capital to buy or read print media products. Echoing the situation, the film came into being, which ushered in the new age of electronic media. Electronic media has since been joined by radio, television, and the Internet. Also, the rise of electronic media paralleled the coming of the mass production of cultural products (Zhen, 2016).

Consequently, with the advent of mass production, businesses began to think about mass distribution and mass consumption. In the process of creating a mass-consumption society, advertising on mass media proved to be of critical importance in terms of shifting the masses' belief in self-denial and frugality to that in consumption and materialism. Thus, mass media became an indispensable part of the process of mass production and consumption in post-industrial society, also referred to as the mass consumption society. When human societies entered the information age, information itself became a commodity, which paved the way for the dominance of mass media in contemporary societies, the mass-mediated information societies (Zhen, 2016).

Changes in information technology within a capitalistic context have altered mass communication processes, products, and social impacts. Indeed, information technology has increased media access remarkably, particularly in industrial countries. Moreover, changes in information technology had profound effects on how the "audience" was conceived, including what motives and capabilities were attributed to audience members by those who owned, operated, and regulated mass communication. "Broadcasting" has changed to "narrowcasting," or more specific marketing. It was the commitment to reach a mass audience, which in turn would produce the highest possible advertising revenue, that led programmers to define their "target audience" to include a heterogeneous audience (Altheide, 2019).

Over the last 30 years, the rules of reading and gathering information through the media have been changing with the advent of the Internet. Presently, the Internet allows the connection of over a billion online users worldwide. While the paper form of media is bound by its physical mass, the Internet is limitless, facilitating the sharing of information never seen before (Grazian, 2010).

Surely, the media plays a very important role in ensuring that societal norms, ideologies, and customs are disseminated. That is, it allows culture to be transmitted to large numbers of

people. Therefore, different societies can share languages, traditions, customs, roles, and values. Moreover, the relationship between mass media and popular culture is one of influence. Because of its effectiveness, mass media influences trends in popular culture and these trends could include how people think, eat, listen, drink, and dress, for instance.

1.3 Cinema as Mass Media

The film industry is believed to be one of the biggest media industries around the world because of the revenue generated and the publicity received by these films. Film/video is a communication channel for disseminating vital information, with the intent of bringing changes in society. Thus, information from television, films, and mass media in general has impacted considerably on how people spend their lives. With this, television and film are a huge part of popular culture. A person's dress code, speech behavior, eating habits, family lifestyle, and understanding of the world are constantly reflected and influenced by radio, television, and the film industry.

The movie industry originated in the 19th century due to a succession of technological developments: the creation of photography, the discovery of the illusion of motion by combining individual still images, and the study of human and animal locomotion. Since then, the industry has seen extraordinary transformations, some driven by the artistic visions of individual participants, some by commercial necessity, and still others by accident (McFadden, 2016).

In the 19th century, as people moved from farms to centers of industrial production, urban areas began to hold larger and larger concentrations of the population. At the same time, film, and other methods of mass communication (advertising and radio) developed, and their messages concerning tastes, desires, customs, speech, and behavior spread from these population centers to outlying areas across the country. The effect of early mass-communication media was to wear away regional differences and create a more homogenized, standardized culture. Film played a key role in this development, as viewers began to imitate the speech, dress, and behavior of their common heroes on the silver screen. Therefore, the film industry has an enormous power as a medium to influence public opinion. It is also important to consider that, more and more, films address social issues which have a strong influence on cultural attitudes and contribute to significant change (McFadden, 2016).

Furthermore, in 1891, Thomas Edison, together with William Dickson, created the kinetoscope, a device that would become the predecessor to the motion picture projector. This device was a cabinet with a window through which individual viewers could experience the illusion of a moving image. The images viewers could see in the kinetoscope captured events and performances that had been staged at Edison's film studio: circus performances, dancing women, boxing matches, and even a tooth extraction by a dentist. Because Edison hadn't secured an international patent for his invention, adaptations of the kinetoscope were being copied and distributed throughout Europe. This new form of entertainment was an instant success, and several mechanics and inventors began playing with methods of projecting moving images onto a larger screen (McFadden, 2016).

However, in 1895, the brother's Auguste and Louis Lumière patented the "Cinématographe" (from which derives the term cinema), a lightweight film projector that also functioned as a camera and printer. Unlike the Edison kinetograph, the cinématographe was lightweight enough for easy outdoor filming, and over the years the brothers used the camera to take well over 1,000 short films, most of which depicted scenes from everyday life. With a demand for motion pictures growing at a rapid rate, soon representatives of the Lumière Company were traveling throughout Europe and the world, showing half-hour screenings of the company's films. Indeed, while cinema initially competed with other popular forms of entertainment such as circuses, theater troupes, magic shows, and many others, eventually turned out to become the main commercial attraction. Nevertheless, the public's perception of film as a medium was considerably different from the contemporary understanding (McFadden, 2016).

By 1900 movies had become a popular attraction in amusement arcades, music halls, traveling fairs, wax museums, and vaudeville houses in many countries. By 1901 many studios were created due to an increase in the demand for films. By 1913, the American Director D.W. Griffith defined the art of motion pictures and some of his techniques such as altering camera angles, dramatically using close-up, and breaking scenes up into multiple shots, are still used nowadays. This led to the mass production of films in 1915 and, by 1925, most of the Hollywood motion-picture studios were established, namely, Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Paramount, United Artists, Universal, and Warner Brothers. By the 1930s, some of the most popular dramas of the time were musicals, gangster films, and occasional horror films (Makamani, 2009).

The late 1930s and early 1940s are sometimes known as the “Golden Age” of cinema, a time of unparalleled success for the movie industry. By 1939, the film was the 11th largest industry in the United States, and during World War II, when the U.S. economy was once again flourishing, two-thirds of Americans were attending the theater at least once a week (Britannica Online). However, postwar inflation, a temporary loss of key foreign markets, the advent of television, and other factors combined to bring that rapid growth to an end (McFadden, 2016).

Given the opportunity to watch “movies” from the comfort of their own homes, the millions of Americans who owned a television by the early 1950s were attending the cinema far less regularly than they had only several years earlier (Motion Pictures). To win back diminishing audiences, studios did their best to exploit the greatest advantages film held over television. For one thing, television broadcasting in the 1950s was all in black and white, whereas the film industry had the advantage of color. In the 1960s, movies that displayed a sentiment of unrest toward conventional social orders and that included some of the earliest instances of realistic and brutal violence in film began to attract younger people (McFadden, 2016).

In the 1970s, the computer-generated special effects that were available at this time also contributed to the success of several large-budget productions. Introduced in 1975, the VCR became nearly universal in American homes by 1998, with 88.9 million households owning the appliance. The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of the blockbuster, with films like *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *The Godfather*. The adoption of the VCR by most households in the 1980s reduced audiences at movie theaters but opened a new mass market of home movie viewers. Improvements in computer animation led to more special effects in film during the 1990s, with movies like *The Matrix*, *Jurassic Park*, and the first fully computer-animated film, *Toy Story*. The 1990s saw the rise of two divergent strands of cinema: the technically spectacular blockbuster with special, computer-generated effects, and the independent, low-budget film. The capabilities of special effects were enhanced when studios began manipulating films digitally (McFadden, 2016).

The film industry has grown rapidly in the past years and has brought about a lot of changes in society. It was particularly during the 20th century, that film became a mass medium with the growth of mass media driven by technology, which contributed to the duplication of the material. Physical duplication technologies such as printing, record pressing, and film

duplication allowed the duplication of books, newspapers and movies at low prices for huge audiences.

Indeed, film is one form of mass media that has an important role as an agent to modify ideas and concepts. Films are produced not only for entertainment purposes but also contain messages that are sometimes not realized by the audience. Cinema can introduce people to various art forms and help them acknowledge how different people live their lives, as they can reach various groups and diverse backgrounds. Above all, it enhances the imagination powers of people as it is a way of showing the world from the perspective of the director, inspiring other people to broaden their thinking and imagination (Films: A Medium of Mass Communication, n.d.).

Nowadays, cinema addresses plenty of controversial topics such as religion, terrorist attacks, homosexuality, and social inequality, for instance. Through their narratives and concepts, movies have successfully brought awareness about all these topics to the world. But at the same time, it is important to consider that they tend to idealize or generalize some topics and representations for maximizing profit, which adds to the controversy and may even deceive/harm the public sentiments (Films: A Medium of Mass Communication, n.d.).

1.4 Action Movies: a massified genre

Action movies can be considered, among contemporary genres, the most common, with greater popular appeal, greater commercial success and, simultaneously, of greater critical disdain, due to their tendency towards stereotyped narratives, as well as the lightness with which the themes are approached. In fact, they can be considered a film genre where action sequences, such as fighting, stunts, car chases or explosions, take precedence over elements like characterization or complex plotting. The action typically involves individual efforts on the part of the hero, in contrast with most war films. The genre is closely linked with the thriller and adventure film genres.

Being a category that was recognized as such in the mid-1980s, action movies, however, thematic, technical, narrative, and dramatic familiarities with other genres. From war films to adventure films, from disaster movies to epics, from gangster movies to peplum¹, from sword movies to martial arts, from superheroes to police, there are many characteristics that

¹ Subgenre of films that usually take place in an imaginary past, often having biblical references or being set in Greek or Roman times.

these genres share with action movies, being the dramatically intense action the key aspect (Nogueira, 2010).

This genre tends to favor aspects such as famous stars, capable of attracting a vast and loyal audience; special effects capable of working as an unprecedented achievement and spectacular attraction; extravagant, exotic, or grandiose scenarios that favor enchantment and escapism. These types of movies usually portray scenes and sequences of intense action, whit dizzying chases, grandiose battles and blunt duels or grand explosions. These films are associated with hyper-activity, usually featuring physical clashes and chases, at times with rescue operations, escapes, and destructive crises (e.g., floods, explosions, natural disasters, and fires) and tend to be expensive, requiring big budget special effects and stunt work. The shrapnel that involves the character in the wildest shootouts; the explosion of slashing cities, buildings or even planets; the splashes of blood that represent violence; the tangents of bullets that, miraculously, never hit the lonely and invulnerable protagonist are routinely used. In these films, good people are depicted fighting and usually overcoming bad people. Heroes and villains are clearly characterized and contrasted, often using easy-to-understand solutions, such as clothing or appearance (Nogueira, 2010).

This genre assumes itself as entertainment, not aiming to discuss controversial issues or problematize ambiguous situations. Hence, its main goal is to provide the spectator with an experience of great hedonism. Its morphology is based, above all, on an application of easily recognizable formulas: a hectic pace of the montage that contributes to the rapid development of the action and the intensification of the dramatic peaks; the planning stylistically classic and secure, reserving for each shot a very specific and unmistakable narrative and dramatic function; and the use of music that emotionally underlines the tone of a situation or state of a character (Nogueira, 2010).

Indeed, a film genre corresponds to an aesthetic or thematic category for motion pictures based on similarities either in the narrative elements, aesthetic approach, or the emotional response to the film. In this sense, action movies differentiate from adventure films given that adventure movies usually focus on exploring new and exciting places, uncovering hidden treasures, or facing challenges in the great outdoors. They also often feature a hero or group of heroes who use their wit, intelligence, and resourcefulness to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. Both action and adventure movies can be visually remarkable, with thrilling special effects and exciting action sequences. Yet, the focus of the two genres is

different. Action movies tend to focus on physical action and excitement, while adventure movies tend to emphasize exploration and problem-solving. Moreover, martial arts films are a subgenre of action films that feature numerous martial arts combats between characters. These combats are usually the films' primary appeal and entertainment value, and often are a method of storytelling and character expression and development. War movies correspond to an action film subgenre that portrays warfare, typically about naval, air, or land battles, with combat scenes central to the drama. The fateful nature of battle scenes means that war films often end with them. Themes explored include combat, survival and escape, camaraderie between soldiers, sacrifice, the futility and inhumanity of battle, the effects of war on society, and the moral and human issues raised by war (Action and Adventure Films Encyclopedia, n.d.).

Whitin the category of action movies, there is also a distinction between action drama, which blends action set-pieces with serious themes, character insight and/or emotional power; action comedy, which corresponds to a mixture of action and comedy usually based on mismatched partners; action thriller, which has elements of action/adventure such as car chases, shootouts, explosions and of thriller, such as plot twists, suspense, hero in jeopardy, for instance (Action Movies - Filmbug, n.d.).

In the West, during the 1920s and 1930s, adventure films were popularized by actors such as Douglas Fairbanks and Errol Flynn, but the settings were often period ones. It was in the 1980s that action film became a fully recognized and immensely popular cinematic form. However, since the 1970s, the action film has emerged as a distinct genre in which physical action and violence have become the organizing principle, from the plot to the dialogue and the casting. It was with the increase of stunts and special effects in this period that "action film" had its expanding. The phenomenal success of the James Bond series in the 1970s helped to promote the concept of the modern day action film in more recent years. The early Bond films were characterized by quick cutting, car chases, fist fights and ever more elaborate action sequences. The series also established the concept of the resourceful hero, who can dispatch the villains with a ready one-liner (Action Movies - Filmbug, n.d.).

Advancements in computer-generated images (CGI) have made it cheaper and easier to create action sequences and other visual effects that required the efforts of professional stunt crews in the past. However, reactions to action films containing significant amounts of CGI

have been mixed, as some films use CGI to create unrealistic, highly unbelievable events (Action Movies - Filmbug, n.d.).

As this dissertation centers on an American movie, we shall now focus on the American action genre. Early American action films usually focused on maverick police officers, as in *Bullitt* (1968), *The French Connection* (1971) and *Dirty Harry* (1971). These were among the earliest films to present a car chase as an action set-piece. In the 1980s, these types of movies were popularized by actors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis, and Sylvester Stallone (Action and Adventure Films Encyclopedia, n.d.).

Action films usually are expensive, needing considerable budget special effects and stunt work. As such, they are regarded as mostly a Hollywood genre, even though there has been a substantial number of action films from Hong Kong, which are predominantly modern variations of the martial arts film. Because of these, Hong Kong action films typically focus on acrobatics by the protagonist, while American action films typically feature big explosions and modern technology (Action Movies - Filmbug, n.d.).

It should be noted that remarkable action movie actors from the 1950s and 1960s, include Steve McQueen, Lee Marvin, and John Wayne, for instance. The 1970s were shaped by actors such as Bruce Lee, Tom Laughlin, Charles Bronson, Chuck Norris, Clint Eastwood, and Sonny Chiba. In the 1980s, Mel Gibson and Danny Glover became popular string because of the *Lethal Weapon* franchise. Actors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone used automatic weapons in a number of action films during the mid-1980s. Bruce Willis played a Western-inspired hero in the popular *Die Hard* series of action films. In the 1990s and 2000s, Hong Kong actors such as Jackie Chan, Jet Li and Chow Yun-fat acted in various Hollywood action films, after attaining international stardom in the previous decade. American actors Wesley Snipes and Vin Diesel both played many roles in action movies of great success, during the same period (Action Movies - Filmbug, n.d.).

Indeed, the relationship between movies and culture involves a complicated dynamic; while American movies influence the mass culture that consumes them, they are also an essential part of that culture, a product of it, and therefore a reflection of prevailing concerns, attitudes, and beliefs. In the relationship between film and culture, it is central to keep in mind that, while certain ideologies may be prevalent in a certain era, not only is American culture as diverse as the populations that form it, but it is also constantly changing from one period to the next. As movies reflect the anxieties, beliefs, and values of the cultures that produce

them, they also help to shape and solidify a culture's beliefs. Sometimes the influence is trivial, as in the case of fashion trends or figures of speech. But in some other occasions, cinema plays a key role in the development of mass culture, as viewers begin to imitate the speech, dress, values, and behavior of their common heroes on the silver screen (McFadden, 2016).

1.5 The role of Action Movies in the construction of stereotypes

As communication methods reach essentially every part of the world, mass media is becoming more relevant than ever, since it shapes how people see and understand themselves and others in the world. As a powerful social force that makes the most of visual, audio, and textual techniques, it can shape civil society, its discourses, policies, and the built environment all around us. Hence, media are not insignificant audio-visual outlets that simply entertain and inform, but they are culturally expressive conduits that have the power to transform the popular imaginary into real-world practices of love and hate, peace, and violence (Castañeda, 2018).

The media can be considered persuasive and pervasive, which is why stereotypes continue to persist. Given the deep influence mass media has on cultural perceptions and attitudes, the creators of media content need to tackle ethical issues.

Furthermore, the word stereotype originated in the printing industry as a method of making identical copies, and the practice of stereotyping people is much the same, a system of identically replicating an image of an "other." Also, a stereotype can be considered a generalized belief about a particular category of people. It is an expectation that people might have about every person of a particular group, as this expectation can differ. For example, it can be an expectation about the group's personality, preferences, appearance, or ability (McFadden, 2016).

Stereotypes are sometimes overgeneralized, inaccurate, and resistant to new information, but can occasionally be accurate. While such generalizations about groups of people may be useful when making quick decisions, they may be inaccurate when applied to particular individuals and are among the reasons for prejudicial attitudes.

Empirical evidence shows that the mass media's stereotypical portrayals of social groups influence people's thinking, feelings, and behaviors. Indeed, stereotypes are developed and maintained by exposure to these commonplace media representations. The media's influence

on stereotype formation perpetuates certain values held within society. These stereotypical values may be used as tools to maintain beliefs about justice and to make sense of others' misfortunes. It is also important to denote that, as stereotypes are formed and maintained, they become harder to change and the more people develop and rely on stereotypes, the more durable they will become (Gilmour, 2015).

Within mass media and related to stereotyping, cinema can be highlighted as one of the most important diffusion agents as it disseminates crucial information. Films are a huge part of popular culture, as a person's dress code, speech behavior, eating habits, family lifestyle, and understanding of the world are constantly reflected and influenced by the industry. Characters that appear in movies significantly affect how people worldwide perceive gender relations, race, and cultural communities. Because approximately 85% of worldwide ticket sales are directed toward Hollywood movies, the American movie industry has been responsible for portraying characters of different cultures and diverse identities to fit into stereotypical categories. This has led to the spread and persistence of gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes seen in the movies. For example, Russians are usually portrayed as ruthless agents, brutal mobsters, and villains in Hollywood movies. Nevertheless, over the decades, many different races and nationalities have had their moment in the evildoer spotlight. Around the time of World War II, Germans appeared as villains in US films, as well as the Japanese (Brook, 2014).

Since the moment it was created, action cinema has evolved considerably and continuously, to carry on right with the tastes of the masses. Certainly, action movies have a few universally definable traits, making them recognizable everywhere. The most identifiable characteristic corresponds to the white masculine hero, that has fixed attributes such as being a male; practically always American (and almost always Caucasian); usually a former soldier or police officer; very rarely in active service; he can also be an ex-convict instead, or in addition to any of the above; uses handguns as his signature weapon; and has a dead relative, a dead friend or is only in the action hero business because he has to save a loved one (Action Genre Hero Guy, n.d.).

In this sense, as the typical action film centers on the perspective of a white male hero, non-white, non-male characters are generally portrayed as "other." The treatment of characters that are identified as "other" might be seen as a reflection of the beliefs and fears of

mainstream society. In addition, this treatment tends to perpetuate the marginalization of women, non-whites, and minorities (Moore, 2014).

Furthermore, women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, and nurturing. Men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold. The common thread between many of these roles for women is that they drive the action by affecting other characters, rather than showing off their own thoughts, feelings, or development. The separation between the physical male, who controls the scene, and the female, who is almost always the object, is very clear in most action films, as female characters in most action films are nothing more than objects, a prize for the winner, hostages, or loving wives, for instance. They make life tougher for the hero, provide a sounding board or give motivation. Besides, filmmakers often rely heavily on stereotypes, because they are quick and simple ways to establish a movie character's traits (Fedorova, 2023).

Undoubtedly, there is a lot of stereotyping in the media to make TV, newspapers, and films more appealing. In this sense, it is important to consider that stereotypes can often lead to prejudices, which are formed opinions about a person that are not based on experience or reason and could lead to favoring one person or group against another. As this dissertation focuses on the analysis and cultural contextualization of the Rambo action movies produced in the 1980s, remarks about race, politics, and gender are going to be based on the most common stereotypes of that period. Moreover, portraying the Russians as villains has a long history. According to James Chapman, Professor of Film Studies at the University of Leicester: "Even before the Cold War, Russia was represented often as a geopolitical threat to the West,"; "But [that stereotyping] takes on a particular ideological inflection during the Cold War when you get the association [with] not just Russia but also Soviet communism." (Brook, 2014).

Movies shape cultural approaches and customs, as audiences adopt the attitudes and styles of the characters they watch on screen. Therefore, popular culture has a huge impact on the cultural activities, practices, and beliefs of the masses within a society. As films are inserted within the cultural values of the society in which they are created, during the Cold War, movies not only reflected the conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but also shaped how the mass audiences and political actors in both states understood the conflict. Consequently, popular culture centered on a model of good versus evil, which occurred not

only in politics but also dictated social standards. All these issues are going to be explored and discussed in the next chapter.

2.1. Historical and Political Context

According to Bernard Baruch, Roosevelt's advisor, the Cold War corresponds to the period between the end of World War II (1945) and the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). Also, according to Raymond Aron, this period was characterized by an "improbable war, impossible peace" since nuclear dissuasion prevented the two rival superpowers - USA and the Soviet Union - from breaking into war, but peace was also impossible since the two actors were opponents (Sousa & Mendes, 2014).

According to Immanuel Wallerstein, this period presents four essential characteristics: the USA was the hegemonic power in a unipolar world system, with its power based on the overwhelming advantage of its economic productivity, from 1945 onwards, and in a system of alliances with Western Europe and Japan, that reached its peak between 1967 and 1973. The USA and the Soviet Union were involved in a formal (but not real) conflict. The Third World had imposed its presence on the US, the Soviet Union and Western Europe, claiming rights that the countries of the North neither anticipated nor desired. The 1970s and 1980s were periods of global economic stagnation, of US resistance to its own decline, and of disenchantment with the Third World's, strategy of imposing their presence and claiming their respective rights (Sousa & Mendes, 2014).

Although not implying an armed conflict between the Soviets and the Americans, the Cold War had several conflicts and crises: the Berlin Blockade (1948-1949); the Korean War (1950-1953); the Suez Crisis (1956); the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961); the Cuban crisis (1962); the Vietnam War (1964-1975); and the Afghan crisis (1979) (Sousa & Mendes, 2014).

The fundamental cause of the Cold War was the serious conviction, both by the Soviet Union and the USA, that the confrontation, imposed by ideological incompatibility, was inevitable. Soviet leaders believed that communism would triumph in the world and that the Soviet Union was the forerunner of a socialist state on the way to a global communist era. They also believed that the "Western imperialist" powers were historically destined to try to prevent the triumph of communism and, therefore, to pursue an aggressive policy against them. On the other hand, American and other Western leaders believed that the Soviet Union was determined to strengthen its political and economic power to continue its mission, a communist world led by the Soviets. Indeed, communism defended a non-democratic system and a centralized economy regulated by materialistic values. On the other side, the ideology

defended was a democracy, with a market economy, sometimes regulated by Christian values (Sousa & Mendes, 2014).

Moreover, the Cold War was at the center of world politics for forty-five years. It dominated the foreign policies of the two superpowers and deeply affected their societies and their political, economic, and military institutions. Besides the U.S. and the Soviet Union, it also shaped most other nations' foreign policy and domestic politics worldwide. In fact, few countries escaped its influence (Leffler & Painter, 2005).

By the time World War II ended, most American officials agreed that the best defense against the Soviet threat was a strategy called "Containment." In his famous "Long Telegram," the diplomat George Kennan (1904-2005) explained the policy: the Soviet Union, he wrote, was "a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with the U.S. there can be no permanent *modus vivendi* [agreement between parties that disagree]." As a result, America's only choice was the "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." "It must be the policy of the United States," he declared before Congress in 1947, "to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation...by outside pressures." This way of thinking would shape American foreign policy for the next four decades (History.com Editors, 2009).

Therefore, the United States and the Soviet Union gradually built up their own zones of influence, dividing the world into two opposing camps. Europe, divided into two blocs, became one of the main theatres of the Cold War. In Western Europe, the European integration process began with the support of the United States, while the Eastern European countries became satellites of the USSR. This period brought the rise of nuclear weapons as a global threat, the Space Race, and several proxy wars² (Jackson School of International Studies, 2017).

It is also important to note that there were nine presidents of the United States that took office during the Cold War. During the same period, the Soviet Union was led by six different men. The actions of these leaders helped define the Cold War (Richard Nixon Foundation, 2022).

The Cold War begins with President Truman's pledging that the United States would help any nation resist the spread of communism. During the Dwight D. Eisenhower

² Armed conflict between two states or non-state actors, one or both of which act at the instigation or on behalf of other parties that are not directly involved in the hostilities.

administration, from 1953 to 1961, the American foreign policy focused on building up a stockpile of nuclear weapons and nuclear delivery systems to deter military threats and save money, while cutting back on expensive Army combat units. President John F. Kennedy assumed office in 1961, with the goal of reenergizing the foreign policy establishment. However, Kennedy's assassination in 1963 brought his Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson, to the function. Following the election of Richard M. Nixon, Johnson left office in 1969. President Gerald Ford continued President Nixon's policy of détente³ with the Soviet Union from 1974 to 1977. Jimmy Carter's presidency began in 1977 and ended in 1981, following his defeat by Ronald Reagan. When Ronald Reagan became president in 1981, Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982) was still the leader of the Soviet Union. With President Bush taking office at the beginning of the end of the Cold War, in 1989, Reagan's presidency finished (Richard Nixon Foundation, 2022).

The Soviet Union had six leaders during this period of conflict. Unlike countries in which a president or prime minister is the designated head of state, the leaders of the USSR mostly assumed power by becoming the head of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, in addition to any other roles they may have taken on along the way (Little, 2022).

On the Soviet side, the Cold War began with Joseph Stalin as he took office in 1924, until his death in 1953. After Stalin's death, Malenkov became the leader of the Communist Party in the USSR. However, within a very short period, Nikita Khrushchev gained control of the party away from Malenkov. By the end of the year, Malenkov was no longer the Soviet Union's main leader. Thus, in 1953, Khrushchev became president and he ruled the Soviet Union during the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Even though he and U.S. President John F. Kennedy got off to a bad start, the leaders developed a relationship in which they understood that neither of them wanted nuclear war. Leonid Brezhnev was the second secretary of the Communist Party in 1964 when he arranged for Khrushchev's ouster. With Khrushchev gone, Brezhnev took his place as the Communist Party's first secretary and, with it, the leadership of the Soviet Union. As he died in 1982, Yuri Andropov became the USSR leader until his death in 1984. The strained relationship that Brezhnev had had with U.S., President Ronald Reagan continued with Andropov. Konstantin Chernenko took over as the Communist Party's general secretary

³ Détente corresponds to the process of managing relations with a possible hostile country to preserve peace while always maintaining vital interests. In practical terms, the Détente led to formal agreements on arms control and the security of Europe.

in 1984. Yet, due to suffering from poor health he died from complications just over a year after taking control of the party. Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded Chernenko as general secretary after Chernenko's death in 1985 and was the last leader of the Soviet Union. He introduced the period of perestroika and glasnost, in which the Soviet Union loosened restrictions on the press and personal expression. Gorbachev oversaw the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which officially ended in 1991. That year, the Russian Federation elected its first president, Boris Yeltsin (Little, 2022).

The end of the Cold War, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, the reunification of Germany, and the disintegration of the Soviet empire, not only profoundly altered the structure of Europe and the political borders in the two continents, but also had repercussions on the international society (Sousa & Mendes, 2014).

2.1.1 The Berlin Blockade

As World War II ended in 1945, a pair of Allied peace conferences at Yalta and Potsdam determined the fate of Germany's territories. Disputes between the three Western nations (United States, Great Britain, and France) and the Soviet Union over what to do with postwar Germany appeared straightway. Consequently, they decided to split the defeated nation into four "allied occupation zones". The eastern part of the country went to the Soviet Union, while the western part went to the United States, Great Britain, and France. The capital, Berlin, was also divided between the three powers (Jackson School of International Studies, 2017).

Even though Berlin was located completely within the Soviet part of the country, the Yalta and Potsdam agreements split the city into similar sectors. The Soviets took the eastern half, while the other Allies took the western. This four-way occupation of Berlin began in June 1945 (History.com editors, 2009).

The Soviet Union, which underwent much greater casualties than the other allies during the II World War, wanted to decide the fate of Berlin and feared Western plans to reunite Germany, a country that had recently invaded and devastated the USSR. Negotiations broke down and, in 1948, the USSR announced that the highway and rail lines connecting West Germany to Berlin would be closed (Jackson School of International Studies, 2017).

West Berlin was effectively cut off from the rest of the world. Instead of retreating, however, the United States and its allies supplied their sectors of the city from the air. This effort, known as the Berlin Airlift, lasted for more than a year and delivered more than 2.3 million tons of food, fuel, and other goods to West Berlin. The blockade finished in 1949. Also, in 1949, the United States joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the first mutual security and military alliance in American history. The establishment of NATO also encouraged the Soviet Union to create an alliance with the communist governments of Eastern Europe, formalized in 1955 by the Warsaw Pact. The Warsaw Pact included the Soviet Union and seven satellite states, including Poland and East Germany, reinforcing the ideological and military barrier between Eastern and Western Europe that Winston Churchill had dubbed the “Iron Curtain” in a 1946 speech (History.com editors, 2009).

The next year, the Western powers helped establish the Federal Republic of Germany, which would come to be known as West Germany. The Soviet Union responded by establishing the German Democratic Republic, a socialist state based on the Soviet model. As east-west tensions rose in the ensuing years, East Germany built a wall dividing East Berlin from West Berlin. The Berlin Wall became one of the defining symbols of the Cold War. The Berlin Wall divided the city until 1989, the year communism began to fall in Eastern Europe (Jackson School of International Studies, 2017).

2.1.2 The Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall was established in 1961, as a response to the millions of East Germans that ran away to West Berlin and West Germany. Between 1949 and 1961, about 2.5 million East Germans fled from East to West Germany, including a rising number of skilled workers, professionals, and intellectuals. Thus, their loss threatened to destroy the economic viability of the East German state. The construction of the Berlin Wall stopped the flood of refugees from East to West and defused the crisis in Berlin. The Berlin Wall was also a symbol of the Cold War’s division of East from West Germany and of Eastern from Western Europe (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

By the mid-1980s, life behind the Iron Curtain had changed. Democratic uprisings were percolating in Soviet bloc nations, and the USSR itself struggled with economic and political chaos. In 1989, East Germany’s communist leadership was forced from power during the wave of democratization that swept through Eastern Europe. By 1991, the Soviet Union had lost most of its bloc to democratic revolutions, and the Warsaw Pact was formally dissolved.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the USSR, opened his country to the West and instituted economic reforms that undercut institutions that relied on nationalized goods. In November, the East German government opened the country's borders with West Germany (including West Berlin), and openings were made in the Berlin Wall through which East Germans could travel freely to the West. From this time onwards, the Wall stopped functioning as a political barrier between East and West Germany. The reunification of East and West Germany became official on October 3, 1990, almost one year after the fall of the Berlin Wall (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

2.1.3 Cold War Worldwide

Indeed, the latent conflict of the Cold War expanded to Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The struggle to overthrow colonial regimes frequently became entangled in Cold War tensions, and the superpowers competed to influence anti-colonial movements (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, n.d.).

In 1949, the communists triumphed in the Chinese civil war, and the world's most populous nation joined the Soviet Union as a Cold War adversary. In 1950, North Korea attacked South Korea, and both the United Nations and the United States sent troops and military aid. Communist China intervened to support North Korea, and bloody campaigns stretched on for three years, until a ceasefire was signed in 1953. With the Korean war, the Cold War became progressively global in scale. The decade after the Korean War, few nations of the world managed to escape the ensnaring web of superpower rivalry, competition and conflict (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, n.d.).

In 1954, the colonial French regime collapsed in Vietnam. The United States reinforced a military government in South Vietnam and worked to prevent free elections that might have unified the country under the control of communist North Vietnam. In 1955, in response to the threat, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was formed to prevent communist expansion, and President Eisenhower sent 700 military personnel as well as military and economic aid to the government of South Vietnam. The effort was foundering when John F. Kennedy became president (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, n.d.).

Indeed, the Vietnam War, (1954–75), was a protracted conflict that opposed the communist government of North Vietnam and its allies in South Vietnam, known as the Viet Cong, against the government of South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. The

purpose of the conflict was the desire of North Vietnam, which had defeated the French colonial administration of Vietnam in 1954, to unify the entire country under a single communist regime identical to the Soviet Union and China. Contrarywise, the South Vietnamese government fought to preserve a Vietnam more aligned with the West (Spector, 2018).

By 1969, more than 500,000 U.S. military were stationed in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union and China distributed weapons, supplies, and advisers to the North, which in turn provided support, political direction, and regular combat troops for the campaign in the South. The costs and casualties of the growing war proved too much for the United States to carry, and U.S. combat units were withdrawn by 1973. In 1975, South Vietnam fell to a full-scale invasion by the North. The human costs of the long conflict were cruel for all parts involved. It was only in 1995 that Vietnam released its official estimate of the deaths caused by war: 2 million civilians on both sides and estimated 1.1 million North Vietnamese and Viet Cong fighters (Spector, 2018).

In Latin America, the Cuban resistance movement led by Fidel Castro deposed the pro-American military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959. As a result, Castro's Cuba instantly became militarily and economically dependent on the Soviet Union, therefore becoming a soviet ally. This had a huge impact because the United States' main rival in the Cold War had established a foothold just ninety miles off the coast of Florida (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, n.d.).

The Cuban Missile Crisis corresponds to the most dangerous Soviet– American confrontation of the entire Cold War, because it was when the two superpowers, and the world, came closest to the wreckage of nuclear war. The crisis broke on October 1962, when a U-2 reconnaissance plane photographed some intermediate-range missile sites under construction in Cuba. Two days later, the intelligence community presented the president with incontrovertible photographic evidence that the Soviet Union had placed missiles in Cuba. The CIA assessed that the missiles would probably be operational within a week and, once mounted with nuclear warheads, would be able to cause as many as 80 million casualties if launched against major US cities (McMahon, 2021).

The Cuban Missile Crisis also deserves recognition as one of the Cold War's critical turning points for other reasons. Having peered into the nuclear abyss, US and Soviet leaders recognized the need to avoid future Cuba-type confrontations and began to take some

significant steps in that direction. In June 1963, a “hot line” was installed between the Kremlin and the White House to enable direct communication in times of crisis. In August of the same year, the United States and the Soviet Union signed a limited test ban treaty, eliminating all but underground nuclear tests. Two months later, they also approved a UN resolution prohibiting nuclear weapons from space (McMahon, 2021).

The Cold War, during this phase, effectively moved from the center of the international system to its periphery. Both the Americans and the Soviets detected essential strategic, economic, and psychological interests in the developing areas of Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, and sought to acquire resources, bases, allies, and influence there. By the 1950s, those areas had emerged at the very heart of the Soviet–American struggle, a position they would retain throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (McMahon, 2021).

2.1.4 The Space Race

To prove their exceptional technological capabilities, both countries began developing massive nuclear arsenals and rockets capable of hitting targets throughout the world. But, in the mid-1950s, both countries simultaneously announced plans to use these rockets to propel artificial satellites into space. While the U.S. scheduled a 1958 launch, the Soviets quietly resolved to defeat the Americans (McKeever, 2022)

Space discovery acted as another arena for Cold War competition. In 1957, a Soviet R-7 intercontinental ballistic missile launched Sputnik, the world’s first artificial satellite and the first man-made object to be placed into the Earth’s orbit. To most Americans, Sputnik’s launch was seen as a bitter surprise. In the United States, space was seen as the next frontier, and it was crucial not to lose too much ground to the Soviets. Besides, this demonstration of the tremendous power of the R-7 missile, seemingly capable of delivering a nuclear warhead into U.S. air space, made the gathering of intelligence about Soviet military activities very urgent (History.com editors, 2009).

The launch of the first Sputnik signaled the opening of another phase of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1958, the U.S. launched its own satellite, Explorer I, and President Eisenhower created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), a federal agency dedicated to space exploration, as well as several programs seeking to explore the military potential of space. Still, the Soviets were one step ahead, launching the first man into space in April 1961. President John F. Kennedy stated that the U.S. would land a man on the moon by the end of the decade. His prediction came

true on July 1969, when Neil Armstrong of NASA's Apollo 11 mission, became the first man to set foot on the moon, effectively winning the Space Race for the Americans. Indeed, U.S. astronauts came to be seen as the ultimate American heroes as Soviets, on the other hand, were pictured as the ultimate villains, with their enormous, ruthless efforts to surpass America and prove the power of the communist system (History.com editors, 2009).

Indeed, this dichotomy between the U.S and the Soviet Union was felt throughout the entire period of the war, with the 1980s being the last years of this conflict. However, this period was still marked by an intense increase in hostility between the two superpowers that was felt not only in political terms but also had a big impact in culture and society.

2.2. The 1980s: The massification of Cold War

The Cold War represented much more than just a battle of power between West and East. Not only were people frightened about losing their lives, but the very nature of their existence also came into question. Besides, a cultural war took place. Despite the attempt to exclude outside influence, both East and West felt the impact of each other's cultural movements (Robbins, 2017).

The war was not only a military conflict, but also a universal struggle of ideologies. In this "war of words", choreographed mass media campaigns, clandestine psychological operations and cultural infiltration programs were amid the favourite weapons. This cultural Cold War not only had a deep impact on the human and social sciences, but also shaped entire disciplines and fields of research, as the conflict penetrated many aspects of social life and blurred the borders between the domestic and the international public sphere (Nietzel, 2016).

Indeed, popular culture reflected the worries and anxieties that developed between the United States and the USSR, as the two nations became progressively agitated by reciprocal suspicion. This state of continuous tension became a subject and theme in films, fiction, television, and other genres. In many cases, popular culture served to subvert Cold War anxieties by questioning the reigning assumptions of both the government and the public (Encyclopedia.com, 2019).

However, it is important to denote that the development of media and popular culture in the USA and the Soviet Union was anything but a parallel history. In reality, they played very different roles, accomplished diverse functions and were subject to significantly different

developments in each of the two Cold War superpowers, due to the fundamental differences in their political and social systems (Zhuk, 2014).

2.2.1 The USA

The 1980s decade exhibited a dramatic transformation in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. During these years, the threat of a nuclear war between the superpowers retroceded as the Cold War ended promptly, nearly entirely peacefully, and on U.S. terms (Office of the Historian, 2019).

Certainly, when Ronald Reagan was elected in 1981, such results were beyond belief. The Soviets had invaded Afghanistan, conducting President Jimmy Carter to withdraw a strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT II) from Senate ratification, boycott the 1980 Olympics Games in Moscow, and ban U.S. grain sales to Moscow. Simultaneously, the Détente strategy yielded to confrontation (Office of the Historian, 2019).

With the goal of reestablishing U.S. power and reversing strategic imbalances, President Reagan developed a modernization of U.S. nuclear and conventional forces and attempted to reduce communism in South America, Africa, and South Asia. At the same time, he wrote to Soviet leaders Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko, imploring them to alleviate Cold War tensions and negotiate arms reductions. He was also able to lift the grain embargo as a show of good faith, but the crackdown on Solidarity and the declaration of martial law in Poland in December 1981 led the President to declare further economic sanctions against Moscow and curtail U.S.-Soviet academic exchanges (Office of the Historian, 2019).

Indeed, the relationship between Washington and Moscow remained tense throughout Reagan's first term, although formal talks towards nuclear arms control continued. Ronald Reagan branded the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and introduced the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars"), which Soviet leaders found extremely threatening. In the mid-80s, with Mikhail Gorbachev becoming General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a viable negotiating partner was provided to Reagan. In 1986, Reagan and Gorbachev discussed the prospect of abolishing all nuclear weapons and signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which eliminated an entire class of missiles. In May 1988, standing in the middle of Red Square in Moscow, Reagan declared that the term "evil empire" belonged to "another era". However, fearing that Reagan had accepted too quickly Gorbachev's good intentions as well as the viability of Perestroika, Glasnot and of his own

economic and political agenda, President George H.W. Bush ordered a strategic review of U.S. objectives toward the Soviet Union, in the first months of 1989. As Gorbachev's economic reforms failed and his political base collapsed in the end of the 1980s, and after speaking to Gorbachev on the telephone, President Bush addressed the nation from the Oval Office to announce that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist (Office of the Historian, 2019).

During the conflict, the American public's perception of Russia and Russians was largely shaped by the media, whether it was news or entertainment, and it was self-perpetuating. The presentation and portrayal of Russia and Russians in Western popular culture was negative and the frequency of the use of Russians as characters in shows and films tended to resemble events happening in politics (Van Jelgerhuis, 2015).

Indeed, the portrayal of Russia in Western popular culture fulfilled a number of purposes. With a few exceptions, Soviet citizens, mainly Russians, were shown as, alternately, backwards peasants and rival enemies (Van Jelgerhuis, 2015).

In the 1980s, a new conservatism arose in social, economic, and political life, characterized by the policies of U.S. President Ronald Reagan. The 1980s, often remembered for its materialism and consumerism, also saw the rise of the "yuppie," an explosion of blockbuster movies and the emergence of cable networks like CNN and MTV, which introduced the music video and launched the careers of many iconic artists.

Like many other American leaders during the Cold War, Reagan believed that the spread of communism anywhere threatened freedom everywhere. As a result, he was anxious about social change and the apparent loss of American power and influence on the global stage. Leading the Reagan Revolution, he appealed to voters with the promise that the principles of conservatism could halt and revert the social and economic changes of the last generation (History.com Editors, 2018).

Furthermore, the Reagan administration was a complicated era of social, economic, and political adjustment, with many trends operating at once and occasionally at cross-purposes. As the 1970s were defined as the era of the hippies, the Newsweek magazine declared 1984 to be the "year of the Yuppie." Yuppies, whose name derived from "(y)oung, (u)rban (p)rofessionals," were similar to hippies in being young people whose interests, values, and lifestyle influenced American culture, economy, and politics. Conversely, unlike hippies, yuppies were materialistic and obsessed with image, comfort, and economic prosperity. Thus, they articulated a dominant ideological and cultural paradigm for American society in

the 1980s. Yuppies were also seen as extremely competitive in their pursuit of the American Dream. Later on the decade, the Yuppie expression and its connotations shifted toward the negative, especially as they began to be associated with social issues regarded as problematic, such as gentrification, racism and sexism. Even though Yuppies attracted a great deal of attention in the press as symbols of the rising economy promoted by the Reagan administration, they were not the majority. It is also important to consider that the 80s were a decade of social extremes. In addition to Yuppies, Christians and Skinheads also obtained media attention, and had a substantial influence on American popular culture (Manning, n.d.).

2.2.1.1 Televison

Throughout the Cold War, news media in the United States frequently reported the conflict between the U.S. and USSR along with the many other wars during this time that opposed Capitalism to Communism. By the end of the Cold War, television had surpassed the printed media in America, as it was more meaningful and more powerful than any other previous forms of media. The rise of television had a codependent relationship with the Cold War as the war intensified, and so did the consumption of television and film to portray the incidents (Allen, 2022).

As the Cold War was ending, American media differed greatly from what they had been thirty years ago. The heavy government-controlled media and propaganda switched towards faster and more accessible news coverage. Though not completely opposing to go the government, journalists were still willing to print the truth. However, the 1980s were marked by the new influx of cable television and a rise in the number of network television news stations, and the field of journalism became much more competitive. This competition led to the increased journalists' attention to stories encompassing scandal and drama. The competitive journalistic market, coupled with President Reagan's loosening of government regulations on the media, did not work towards ensuring the accountability of networks (Allen, 2022).

An event that had a huge television coverage was the transfer of power from Mikhail Gorbachev to Boris Yeltsin. Never had the images of such a large change in power been broadcast to several nations at the time of its occurrence. Within hours, almost all major nation's leaders had answered to the transfer of power on their own country's networks. The innovations in technology and the many other changes in American television news that took

place during the Cold War all led up to the moment Americans would be able to see within their own living rooms the leader of the Soviet Union stepping down from his position. The Cold War was over, and unlike ever before, every American was able to watch the war they had been born in, grown up in and fought in, come to an end (Allen, 2022).

Furthermore, and according to the website “The Impact of Cable And home Video from 1980–2000 - Television - Film, Movie, Tv, News” the fast development of cable television and home video in the 1980s, followed by a new round of consolidation in the media industries, disrupted the balance of power in the television industry and led to the complete integration of television networks and Hollywood studios. Videocassette recorders (VCRs) turned into a regular feature in American homes during the 1980s. In 1982, 4% of American households owned a VCR, and by 1988, the number increased to 60%. As a result of the rise of cable and home video, the motion picture industry developed new release patterns that channeled movies from their debut in theaters to their eventual appearance on television (The Impact of Cable And home Video from 1980–2000 - Television - Film, Movie, Tv, News, n.d.).

Also portrayed as the “great communicator,” Ronald Reagan became the United States first televisual president. Reagan transformed the usage of television, as he blurred the lines between popular and political culture. For instance, Reagan exhibited real photographs and videos to reinforce his speeches and verbally described moving scenes to evoke great emotion from his audience in radio addresses (Robbins, 2017).

2.2.1.2 Music

Shifting to music, during the 1980s, popular music, specifically in the United States, England, and West Germany, focused on the deconstruction of Western culture’s immediate past. However, this conflicted with the regimes of President Ronald Reagan, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who attempted to create a society based on the idea of regressive modernization. The answer to these new administrations created a variety of subversive genres of music and music culture, by using these leaders’ own tactics against them (Robbins, 2017).

The musical styles that best represent this deconstruction of Western culture’s immediate past and demonstrate techniques that subverted political leadership are post-punk, industrial, new wave, and even mainstream pop. Although these types of music had their own characteristics, all of them portrayed issues such as dissatisfaction with the status quo,

criticism of the state of society, protest about the escalating tensions between the two superpowers, or even an attempt to promote international peace. Songs metaphorically showed the superpowers going to war, as in the song “Two Tribes” by Frankie Goes to Hollywood. This song's MTV music video showcased caricatures of President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko in a wrestling match. Other songs expressed fear of World War III, as in the Sting’s song, “Russians”, with lyrics such as "I don't subscribe to his (Reagan's or Khrushchev's) point of view". Also, the music “Land of Confusion” by Genesis portrays the Reagans as foolish puppets, caricatures with exaggerated voices and body language. Full of references to Cold War enemies and events, the music video and song take a very Reagan-critical stance (Robbins, 2017).

Additionally, the fear caused by the 1986 Chernobyl disaster intensified Cold War tensions. This anxiety is felt in songs such as David Bowie’s “Time Will Crawl”, released in 1987, directly influenced by the Chernobyl disaster (Robbins, 2017).

In 1981, the Music Television, or MTV, a television channel was launched. Attracting teenagers and young adults, MTV aired music videos on programs hosted by VJs (video jockeys). The first image shown on the channel was a montage of the Apollo 11 moon landing in 1969, suggesting that MTV, like the Apollo 11 mission, was one giant leap for mankind (Robbins, 2017).

The first music video to air on MTV was British duo the Buggles’ “Video Killed the Radio Star.” While music videos existed beforehand, the launch of MTV truly stimulated the music video’s place in music and popular culture. As televisions filled nearly every American home, musicians found another way to make an impact on their audience. MTV’s impact was so massive, that it reinvented the meaning of entertainment. Within the music videos, visual messages could also be sent. For example, several musical artists wore military uniform-like costumes or included the army in their music videos, as a reflection of the increased feeling of militarism seen in the 1980s, as for instance, "Born in the U.S.A." by Bruce Springsteen and “In the Army Now” by Status Quo (Robbins, 2017).

2.2.1.3 Sports

Since the first modern Olympic Games were held in 1896, international politics have often played a role in sports. During the Cold War, however, the Olympics became a continuing battleground between the Soviet Union and the United States and their respective allies. Although the Olympic ideal was to place sport above politics, in reality there were often

political goals and messages promoted through the games. The media promoted mega-events between capitalist and Communist athletes as surrogates for diplomatic and military tension.

In 1980, the United States conducted a boycott of the Summer Olympic Games in Moscow to protest the late 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan the international community largely condemned the action. Thus, President Carter responded with a series of measures designed to place pressure on the Soviets to withdraw. These measures included the threat of a grain embargo, the withdrawal of the SALT II agreement from Senate consideration, and a possible boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics, scheduled to be hosted by Moscow (US Department of State, 2019).

The Carter Administration set a deadline by which the Soviet Union should pull out of Afghanistan or face consequences including an international boycott of the games. When the deadline passed a month later without any change to the situation in Central Asia, Carter made U.S. allies withdraw their Olympic teams from the upcoming games. However, international support for the boycott varied. U.S. allies to join the movement against the Moscow games included Great Britain, Australia, Canada, West Germany and Israel. Most of the Islamic nations also joined the boycott, although Afghanistan itself sent eleven athletes to compete. Other nations refusing to send teams to Moscow included Chile, Haiti, Honduras, Paraguay, South Korea, and the People's Republic of China. Some nations that did not attend the games in Moscow did so for reasons other than the boycott, such as financial constraints (US Department of State, 2019).

By organizing the boycott and gathering support for it, the Carter Administration wanted to express the extent of international displeasure with the invasion of Afghanistan, and to pressure the Soviets to pull their armies out of the conflict. But the conflict lasted until 1989, and the Soviets reacted to the boycott by retaliating and leading a communist-bloc boycott to the 1984 Summer Olympic Games held in Los Angeles. These Olympic boycotts were just one manifestation of the cooling relations between the United States and the Soviet Union in the early 1980s (US Department of State, 2019).

Despite the US led boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow under President Jimmy Carter's administration, preparations in the United States for the Soviet team's participation in the 1984 Summer Olympic Games proceeded with the expectation that they would compete. President Reagan clearly wanted the Soviet Olympic Team to participate in

the games, so that the United States could demonstrate their athletic, cultural and economic superiority over their communist competitor (Lieser, 2014).

In 1984, Los Angeles hosted the Olympic Games, but the Soviet Union boycotted these games. According to the USSR, the reason was because of the safety of their athletes in what they considered an anti-communist environment, claiming that athletes wouldn't be safe from protests and possible physical attacks. However, this action was an obvious response to the 1980's boycott. The Soviet allied countries also joined the boycott. However, despite the absence of the Soviets and their allies, the 1984 Games had 140 countries competing, with the American team winning over 80 gold medals. Therefore, the impact on the games themselves was immense. Without competition from the Soviet Union, East Germany, and other communist nations, the United States won an olympic record of 83 gold medals (US Department of State, 2019).

Most of the Warsaw Pact nations refused to compete. Cuba and East Germany, both athletic powerhouses, also did not send athletes to the United States. The People's Republic of China joined for the first time since 1952. Taiwan participated under the name Chinese Taipei, which athletes still compete under nowadays (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022).

2.2.1.4 Film

Films reflect and impact the cultural values of the society in which they are created. During the Cold War, films not only reflected the conflict between the U.S. and the USSR, but also influenced how the mass audiences and political actors in both these states understood the conflict. However, it is important to consider that the movies produced during this period aren't exclusively "propaganda", as the line between propaganda and art can be falsely thin (Movies, a Visual Guide to the Cold War, n.d.).

In literature and film, the dominant theme was the fear of an invasion and the use of nuclear weapons, but there was also a fear of being psychologically manipulated or having one's mind entirely hijacked by the communists. Conspiracy theories played an important role during this era. Additionally, the Soviets were always portrayed as the terrorizing villains, as the KGB officers, gangsters, or scientists in the Hollywood canon (Landwehr, 2022).

Additionally, several American films featured sport as propaganda, the sort which demonized communism and told audiences in no uncertain terms that they were at war. Boxing and martial arts featured relatively highly in this category. Other sports, like football

and tennis, also appeared but often in more interesting, roundabout ways. U.S. screen productions rarely portrayed the United States as a passive target of Cold War espionage. Instead, they showed American secret agents fighting and winning what came to be known, significantly perhaps, as the spying game (Shaw & Youngblood, 2017).

Particularly in the early 1980s, due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the election of Ronald Regan in 1980, the rhetoric of Cold War became increasingly aggressive, violent and direct in both American and Soviet films. Both cinemas created action-adventure films in which the opposing state was the ultimate enemy (Movies, a Visual Guide to the Cold War, n.d.).

2.2.2 The USSR

The 1980s began with Yuri Andropov becoming the new general secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. Andropov initiated a campaign against the corruption that had grown under Brezhnev. Dozens of incapable politicians and officials were dismissed, while a campaign was launched against alcoholism and poor discipline in the bureaucracy and the military (Llewellyn & Thompson, 2016).

Andropov's leadership was also marked by international tensions and crises, including the failure of arms reduction talks, the shooting down of a Korean civilian airliner, the unveiling of Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) and Reagan's labelling of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" (Llewellyn & Thompson, 2016).

However, he died in 1984 and was succeeded by Konstantin Chernenko. Konstantin Chernenko was the leader of the Soviet Union for a very short period in the mid-1980s. During his term, Chernenko pursued to restore Moscow's trade and diplomatic relations with China and he barely contributed to alleviate US-Soviet relations. Chernenko also decided the Soviet boycott of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984. He died in 1985, after just 13 months as General Secretary (Llewellyn & Thompson, 2018).

Mikhail Gorbachev followed Chernenko, serving as the eighth and final leader of the Soviet Union, from 1985 to the country's dissolution in 1991. His first mission was the recovery of the Soviet economy, which was almost collapsing. Gorbachev's solution turned two Russian

words especially famous: Perestroika and Glasnost⁴. His other weapon for dealing with the stagnation of the system was democracy (BBC, 2022).

Furthermore, there were free elections for the Congress of People's Deputies for the first time. Consequently, this relaxation of the oppressive regime led to a stirring among the several nationalities that encompassed the USSR. Gorbachev wanted to end the Cold War, successfully negotiating with President Ronald Reagan for the abolition of an entire class of weapons through the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty. And he announced unilateral cuts in Soviet conventional forces, while ending the occupation of Afghanistan (BBC, 2022).

The end of the USSR began in the Baltic republics of the north. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia broke free from Moscow, initiating a rollercoaster that spread to Russia's Warsaw Pact allies. It all culminated on November 1989 when the citizens of East Germany were authorized to cross freely into West Berlin (BBC, 2022).

2.2.2.1 Television

The Soviet mass media were strictly structured and organized, performing as an instrument of government's control and influence over the flow of information. Thus, it played a central part in establishing an information network for the countercultural youth and acting as a mouthpiece for the cultural desires and aspirations of the young people of the Soviet state. Specialized media organs appeared under the supervision and authority of the appropriate governmental organizations, state departments and ministries, and professional unions (Von Faust, 2014).

Indeed, television in the USSR was relatively underdeveloped, offering very limited programming, as the national press played a central role in relating the official policy and reflecting the mass public opinion. The Central Television of the USSR was the state television broadcaster of the Soviet Union and, similarly much of the other Soviet media, CT USSR regularly promoted the agendas of the Communist Party. Also, unlike the West, a large portion of television programming in the Soviet Union was political or educational, with a heavy prominence of the political (Von Faust, 2014).

Soviet television news were always in direct competition with radio news broadcasts by the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Deutsche Welle. Soviet surveys revealed,

⁴ Glasnost corresponds to the openness and transparency in government institutions and activities in the Soviet Union. Glasnost reflected a commitment of the Gorbachev administration to allow Soviet citizens to publicly discuss their system's problems and possible solutions.

moreover, that Soviet people were listening and comparing Soviet news unfavorably with their Western competition. Soviet news was slow, boring, and left too much of real life out. Besides, the monotone delivery of Soviet television news threatened to affect the viewers' perception of the content of that news. This was extremely impactful because news had become the most important medium for Soviet Cold War counterpropaganda (Evans, 2010).

A big difference was felt in the mid-80s, with Gorbachev's relaxation of censorship. With the easing of the official censorship's restrictions, the media received greater freedom and control over the content and manner of coverage than ever before. With Mikhail Gorbachev, Television became a powerful tool in the ongoing campaign to change the perception of Communism (Von Faust, 2014).

Moreover, for the first time in its existence, Soviet television was allowed to criticize the government and to present events as they actually were, rather than as the rulers wished them to be. More programs began to be broadcast live and television programming was at the forefront of the revolution. In addition, Soviet television also began to demonstrate the positive achievements of the West and exposed the corruption both within the government and the Party. The Soviet audiences were shocked with all these changes. Opinions which in the past could lead to imprisonment, banishment or even death were now regularly expressed on television news programs. For the first time in Soviet history, the mass media publicized what was wrong rather than what was right in the country (Bazyler & Sadovoy, 1991).

2.2.2.2 Music

During the 1980s, music revealed increasing Cold War tensions and escalating fears about a nuclear war. Behind the Iron Curtain, music was contributing to unite the people of communist countries in a desire for cultural change and increased personal freedoms (Clark, 2015).

The impact of Western music, especially heavy metal, was a clear threat to Soviet ideology, and the messages of many metal performances contributed to the bond of fans in the Western world with fans in communist countries. This generated an underground network of global heavy metal fans who refused to quietly accept any government's reliance on nuclear threat to gain power and to foster hatred and distrust between communist and capitalist countries. These fans forged their own identities as citizens of a global community opposed to government interference in music and nuclear proliferation. (Clark, 2015, p.35).

Indeed, Soviet restriction of certain styles and themes made listening to certain bands a political action nonetheless and transformed many types of non-political music into a cultural battleground. This cultural frontline was recognized by Soviet leader Andropov in a 1983 speech, when he said, “It is intolerable to see the occasional emergence on a wave of popularity of musical bands with repertoires of a dubious nature,” and suggested “special counter propagandist efforts” to protect Soviet youth from Western degeneracy and confusion (Clark, 2015, p.30).

Despite Andropov’s secret police background, his position on the state’s role in the censorship of the press was not as overbearing as one might expect from a former chief of the KGB. Although he “cited the need for candor in official reporting but not in the information and cultural media in general,” Andropov “never spoke of a general media liberalization, or of publishing long-suppressed or ideologically suspicious works.” Nevertheless, Andropov’s view on the issue of rock music’s pernicious influence over the young Soviet citizens echoed the hardline sentiments of his more traditionalist Party colleagues, as he cautioned against “ideologically harmful” artists with “suspicious repertoires” (Von Faust, 2014, p.21).

Soviet leader Chernenko viewed rock music as a dangerous and corruptive influence of hostile imperialist ideology, and contended that “through rock, the enemy is trying to exploit youthful psychology.” He considered the “Old Guard” of the Communist party the only fitting authority for the overseeing of the proper ideological upbringing of youth (Von Faust, 2014, p.20).

The campaign against the “ideologically alien” popular music continued well into the following year, forcing more liberal publications to severely curtail their usual reporting on Western popular music, particularly heavy rock and punk, unless those genres were presented in a strictly negative way (Von Faust, 2014).

In the mid-80s, the Perestroika and its policy of openness to other countries and consumption of Western culture, led to a new impulse of consumption of American pop culture. Consequently, the increasing romanticization of the West in the late Soviet period allowed a new appreciation of rock music and the creation of the Leningrad Rock Club, the most successful rock club in the USSR (Adams, 2021).

The Leningrad Rock Club was the leader of this movement and exposed Soviet citizens to the ideas of the West, fostering more protests against socialism within Russia. The Leningrad

doubled as a Communist party-licensed venue for concerts by several famous Russian rock musicians, including Boris Grebenshchikov of Aquarium, who had a big social impact in this particular period (Adams, 2021).

Likewise, and involved in the Leningrad rock scene as well, Viktor Tsoi was the lead singer of Kino, the most influential Russian rock band to form. Tsoi's image, with his long hair and carefree attitude, became a symbol of counterculture in the USSR against oppression and the rejection of all-controlling governments. Kino's song, "Хочу перемен," translated to "I Want Changes" in English, became a Russian protest anthem, as he sings in the chorus: "Our hearts require the changes / Our eyes require the changes / Into our laugh and our tears / And into pulse of veins. / Changes! / We are waiting for changes" (Adams, 2021).

The rock counterculture came to an end in the early 90's with the closing of the Leningrad Rock Club and the fall of the Soviet Union. However, the closure of the Leningrad did not affect the fact of the once underground rock culture becoming more public, gaining international attention and praise (Adams, 2021).

2.2.2.3 Sports

The meaning of sport for the Soviet Union changed with the Cold War period. The context of sport turned into a crucial element of the state and public life of the USSR. Joseph Stalin ordered the creation of the system of state support for sports at the local, regional, national and international levels.

Indeed, from childhood to adulthood, the Soviet population was continuously encouraged to participate in physical exercise activities. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union officially declared that one of its most important goals was "a formation of a harmonious personality combining spiritual wealth, moral purity and physical perfection". Thriving Olympians and football players became role models for ordinary citizens (Vladimirova, 2020, p.12).

The most famous sports brand of the Soviet times is The Red Machine ("Krasnaya Mashina"), as it became the nickname of the national ice hockey team. This team won nearly every world championship and Olympic tournament between 1954 and 1991 and never failed to gain medals in every International Ice Hockey Federation tournament they competed (Vladimirova, 2020).

For Soviet organizations and companies, whose athletes were among the winners, such results were not only a huge joy but also a huge relief. For athletes themselves, gold medals were an opportunity to improve their quality of life (which would become higher by Soviet quite modest standards). It was also a rare chance to travel abroad, although athletes were always accompanied by KGB agents (Vladimirova, 2020).

The 1980 Summer Olympics could have become the most significant point in the history of the Soviet sport, as they were expected to be a symbol of Soviet success. However, due to the boycott, only eighty nations were represented at the Moscow Games. More than 60 countries supported the United States' decision to boycott the event in response to the military actions of the Soviet army in Afghanistan (Vladimirova, 2020).

2.2.2.4 Film

Soviet cinema and censorship have always had an entangled relationship, since the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922. During the Cold War, cinema was viewed as one of the most essential resources for developing patriotic feelings among Soviet citizens, and for the creation and maintenance of a multinational, socialist-oriented, anti-bourgeois people. The education, or molding, of new Soviet citizens through cinema and other cultural forms remained among the most important objectives of the Communist Party (Klimova, 2013).

Indeed, the Soviet state often encouraged filmmakers to produce films that would target young citizens and teach them how to be true members of Soviet society. The Central Committee demanded various organizations - such as the Union of Filmmakers of the USSR, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, and the State Committee of the USSR on Professional and Technical Education - to increase the number of children and youth films, to distribute them widely in all Soviet republics, and to be more actively involved in controlling the aesthetic and ideological quality of film production (Klimova, 2013).

In 1983, US feature films, American filmmakers and movie stars attracted thousands of Soviet filmgoers to the public showing of American movies at the 13th Moscow International Film Festival. But despite the promotion of these films by the Soviet experts, Soviet censorship did not allow the majority of these US movies to be shown in Moscow (Zhuk, 2014).

Furthermore, in the Soviet cinema, Americans were stereotyped as either morally deplorable or totally naive, and always filthy rich. Through cinema, Soviet authorities were able to

exploit the weaknesses of American society in order to further help their own government's ideological goals and keep their population in check (Piper-Burket, 2017).

Indeed, throughout the Cold War, propaganda cinema was always present. It served as a channel to spread and promote religious, political, and cultural ideas, both in the communist block and the capitalist block. This type of movies were produced so that the viewer would adopt the position promoted by the propagator and eventually act towards making those ideas generally accepted. This is the topic that is going to be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III – CINEMA DURING THE COLD WAR

During the Cold War, cinema was an important propaganda element. Similar to other conflicts, the Cold War was fought not only with weapons but also with words and images. Indeed, films not only reflected the ongoing conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union but also molded how the mass audiences and political actors in both states understood the conflict. Therefore, cinema during this period reflected the societies, ideologies, and political climates in which the films were produced.

As wars are also fought through words and images, propaganda was central during the Cold War. After the Second World War came to an end, propaganda images and messages became a key strategy during the forty year conflict between the Eastern and the Western blocks. Images were a powerful tool to shape the perception and the general understanding of the conflict. When recognizing the potential of the cinematic sector, politicians and public opinion makers realized it was mandatory to interfere in the filmmaking process (Rossi, 2023).

Consequently, cinema became another terrain on which to fight. The film industry was also very attractive financially, as it was a very lucrative and potentially highly profitable business for both American and Russian filmmakers. Images and sounds proved to be the most effective means to clarify or create what had been perceived as obscure, unclear, and abstract (Rossi, 2023).

As diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. worsened, Hollywood rapidly established a set of anticommunist values and discourses to validate and justify that deterioration. For this reason, in the late 1940s, the American cinematographic industry decided to declare war on international communism by releasing its first Cold War movie, “The Iron Curtain”⁵ (Rossi, 2023).

During this period, the main purpose was to prevent the production of any movie with any form of communist ideal. Also, the FBI oversaw the detection of communists in the cinematographic industry and prevented them from releasing movies appealing to communist propaganda. Furthermore, the FBI also produced movies that would foster a positive image of this government department as the protector of US citizens. In most movies produced during this time, communists were portrayed as cowards, diabolic and inhuman agents who only followed the party's instructions. They were also usually portrayed as poorly

⁵ Released in 1948, the film narrated the story of Soviet cipher-clerk Igor Gouzenko who was designsted to the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, Canada, to reveal the extent of Soviet espionage activities directed against Canada.

dressed and as murderers. On the other hand, Americans were depicted as heroes, humble, brave, intelligent, democratic, and capitalist (Rossi, 2023).

In the 1950s, American movies positively promoted American values such as material prosperity and freedom of thinking. These were years of economic boom, fueled by the profits of the defense industry, which led to extraordinary economic wealth. Films showed the U.S. as the land where everything was possible, rich in opportunities and material well-being, where anyone could live the American dream. However, cinema attendance was strangely declining in the 1950s, and Hollywood understood that it was vital to expand abroad. To facilitate this expansion, the American government decided to eliminate tariffs and tax barriers, leading to Hollywood exporting its production sites abroad, where labor costs were much lower. Through the “runaway productions”, the U.S. were expanding their sphere of influence to other parts of the world, mainly to Western Europe, Latin America, and Asia, but also offsetting the rising costs of filmmaking on the national territory (Rossi, 2023)

The 1960s was one of the most unstable decades in American history, with the 1962 missile crisis in Cuba, the beginning of the Vietnam War, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, political protests moved by the rising feminist and black power movements, and the advent of new drugs that shocked the established order of society. As a result, Hollywood’s movies were greatly influenced by such events, and the depiction of the Cold War trailed these political changes. The general uncertainty was reflected in films depicting the US as having lost their primary role in the Cold War. The new narrative conveyed the message that it was time for both the West and the East to find a peaceful agreement and stop playing with the probability of destroying the world. Movies of this period essentially critiqued American foreign policy and were harsh on the existence of the Cold War, wondering whether or not it was necessary to lengthen this conflict further. For instance, Stanley Kubrick’s “Dr. Strangelove”⁶ satirized the Mutual Assured Destruction Theory by ridiculing American political leaders (Rossi, 2023).

In 1980, the election of Ronald Reagan marked the transition of American politics to the right, and the idea that the Cold War was no longer relevant was eventually swept away. The fight against the communist bloc was revitalized from an ideological and strategic point of view.

⁶ Released in 1964, the film satirizes the Cold War fears of a nuclear conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. It was also the first liberal assault on the American political and economic apparatus.

American politics focused again on propaganda through traditional media, the cinematographic industry was once more employed to convey the dominating political ideas. Films were again made to depict the communist world as the “evil empire”. In 1985, with Mikhail Gorbachev’s Glasnost and Perestroika, filmmakers thought that a potential Soviet American reconciliation was possible. Movies started to depict American and Soviet people as more similar than what it used to be believed. For instance, Rick Rosenthal's movie “Russkies” (1987) tells the story of the friendship between three American boys and a Soviet sailor. The year 1988 was also symbolic as it was the first time Moscow hosted a major American Film Festival. By 1990, the political tensions between the two superpowers were drastically reduced to the point that Gorbachev had already declared peace with the U.S. Additionally, “The Russia House” (1990) by Frederic Schepisi was the first U.S. movie shot in the USSR (Rossi, 2023).

In the U.S.S.R, after the Second World War, Soviet films also focused on the construction of a negative image of the enemy. Even though the Cold War was shaping the film trade between the nations in a most evident manner, Soviet filmmakers thoroughly studied the work of Americans and mastered the advanced techniques of Hollywood productions. Indeed, post-II World War Soviet films were predominantly Stalinist and Soviet centered. Yet, they incorporated stylistic elements commonly associated with American cinema and aimed to reach Hollywood’s level of quality. The latter aspiration should be considered a consequence of Stalin’s imperial ambition of creating a universal language, understood by everyone, domestically and internationally, capable of communicating the sensation of grandeur that haunted the Soviet leader until his death (Kapterev, 2009).

However, even though the Soviet government had identified the importance of cinema as a propaganda tool, these years were characterized by a severe decline in film output. This decline happened because the country was dealing with the rising costs of postwar reconstruction. Another contributing factor was Stalin's pervasive and oppressing presence in the filmmaking process. He not only boycotted many film scripts, but also preferred to stop the mass production of movies and instead have a few of them released every year (5 or 6 per year)., These higher quality movies were essential for Russian propagandists to respond to Western accusations. Indeed, Soviet propaganda focused on responding to the Western allegations by exposing the Allied troops' destructive behaviors and depicting the

Marshall Plan⁷ as a trap to export American imperialism. “Encounter at the Elbe” (1949), directed by Grigori Aleksandrov, is an example of this standpoint. Therefore, the first Soviet Cold War movies did not directly represent the conflict but instead focused on the demonization of the enemy and the emphasis on the Soviet peaceful nature (Rossi, 2023).

During this period, and besides cinema, the imperialist characteristics of the postwar Stalinist style were also expressed in Soviet architecture, literature, and music. Particularly in cinema, they were represented mostly by high-profile ideological productions, the scale of which was supposed to impress viewers even if the latter disagreed or did not understand the films’ political message. Such creations employed static compositions and stately rhythms, which personified the grandiosity of communist construction and, simultaneously and paradoxically, their intrinsic link with the classic Russian art (Kapterev, 2009).

During the late 1940s, there were also “trophy films”, which corresponded to the movies, which were brought from Germany by the Soviet administration after World War II. Many foreign films released in the Soviet Union after the war also belonged to this category. Due to the collapse of Soviet film production during the Second World War, there were limited Soviet movies available for domestic consumption. Only 18 films were released in 1949, 10 in 1950, and 9 in 1951. Consequently, this void was filled with foreign trophy films: 1531 American, 906 German, 572 French, and 183 British films (Zhuk, 2014).

From 1955 to 1980, there was an era of positive legitimation using positive propaganda. With the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, there was a significant change in Soviet culture. In 1956, with Nikita Khrushchev, censorship was eradicated, writers started to publish again, and Western values began infiltrating some cultural circles of universities and academies. The most important part of this process was the US-USSR agreement about cultural exchanges. In 1958, an agreement between the two superpowers was signed, defining not only academic exchanges, but also exchanges in science and technology, agriculture, medicine, public health, radio, television, and motion pictures (Zhuk, 2014).

The Main Administration of Cinema Affairs was also created, becoming a new organ of the Ministry of Culture and replacing the old Ministry of Cinematography. This led to a greater deal of freedom for Soviet filmmakers, whom the government no longer restricted since

⁷ The Marshall Plan corresponded to a U.S. sponsored program intended to rehabilitate the economies of 17 western and southern European countries and to establish stable conditions in which democratic institutions could survive in the aftermath of World War II.

cinema was no more under the direct influence of the Party. At the end of the 1950s, movies such as “The Cranes are Flying” (1957) and “The Ballad of a Soldier” (1959) were released and had great success both nationally and internationally. Even with the election of Brezhnev in 1964, a highly disciplinarian leader, this era of greater freedom continued until the end of the 1970s (Rossi, 2023)

In 1980, particularly in 1961, the Soviet Ministry of Culture planned to buy 160 foreign films, while Soviet filmmakers released only 120 motion pictures during that year. Afraid of this Western film invasion, Soviet ideologists tried to limit and control the import of foreign movies, especially those from capitalist countries. However, all over the country, the administration of Soviet movie theatres and the Houses of Culture still preferred showing films from the West, especially U.S. films, which attracted millions of people and guaranteed financial profits. Consequently, there was a further influx of American movies in the cinemas of Moscow from 1964 to 1967. In 1966, 213 films were released, of which 113 were Soviet movies, and 100 were foreign films, including the U.S. films “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Some Like It Hot” (Zhuk, 2014).

In the 1970’s, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 stood out, contributing to the further opening of Soviet society to Western influences in the media. The Soviet government bought official licenses to produce popular music records from the West. Officially licensed Western movies were shown on Soviet television, which also broadcast the concerts of popular Western musicians. Western rock and disco music were incorporated into official Soviet television shows, Western pop stars performed live for the Soviet public in the USSR, and fragments of those concerts were shown on Soviet television (Zhuk, 2014).

In 1980, the refusal of the US to take part in Moscow's Olympics and the election of Ronald Reagan raised new tensions. Additionally, the war in Afghanistan aggravated the international political climate. From a cultural point of view, there was a comeback of the anti-American rhetoric in Soviet movies, as during Stalin's era. In this sense, Hollywood was depicted as anti-democratic, and American people were depicted as uncultured and ignorant. For instance, “TASS Is Authorized to Declare...” is a 1984 Soviet spy miniseries directed by Vladimir Fokin, portraying the struggle between Soviet and American intelligence agencies. However, with Gorbachev’s policy of Perestroika and Glasnost, there was a rapid decentralization of the Soviet cinematic industry. Hollywood was no longer perceived as an enemy to defeat but rather as an example to follow (Rossi, 2023).

Therefore, propaganda films contributed to the spread of the political and economic values of the period, always with the intent that the viewer would adopt and disseminate the position promoted by the propagator, whether it was the U.S. or U.S.S.R. Within all the movie genres, action movies from this period also promoted propagandistic ideas, especially through their protagonists and through the inclusion of espionage-related topics on the plot. In fact, espionage was a common narrative trope from this period, an issue that is going to be addressed in the next section.

3.1. Action movies as a propaganda tool

Right after the end of the II World War, instructional films emerged as a potent tool for waging an ideological battle within the educational system. Conceived during World War II in response to the demand for large-scale and quick training for wartime duties, instructional films provided an efficient channel of information and propaganda (Hope, 2011).

Despite using different mediums, techniques, and degrees of subtlety, Cold War propaganda always promoted the benefits of one political system and/or criticized and demonized the other. This tendency reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s, a time when pro-American values were being widely promoted in film, television, music, literature, and art (Llewellyn & Thompson, 2018).

Indeed, and unlike many other art forms, movies produce a sense of immediacy. A film's ability to create the illusion of life and reality allows it to be used to present alternative ideas or realities, which the viewer perceives as an accurate depiction of life. By making audiences experience different emotions and new perspectives, action movies became a useful propaganda tool during the Cold War.

When watching movies, society is broadly watching someone else's interpretation of culture, of the world and the people in it. Indeed, this is most evident in films written for mass appeal, blockbusters, or Hollywood films, because of the audience they must appeal to. When watching a Hollywood movie, audiences are exposed not only to the world view of one writer or team of script advisors, but also to the world view of the board of individuals funding the film who, in order to draw as large a crowd as possible, produce what they think people want to see and believe. Consequently, studying the reception and points of view of films aimed at mass consumption contributes to the study of the society of that period (Walters, 2012).

During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union had a history of particularly poor relations, each one vilifying the other country, which contributed to cultural stereotypes that were massified into action movies and still persist nowadays. Many Cold War Americans had never met a Russian person, and so their entire experience with Russian culture was based on what they saw in the media, meaning that, in large part, films from this period were not just a mirror of society's views, but also their primary source (Walters, 2012).

Particularly in Western culture, action movies include stereotypes that everyone is familiar with: the Russian spy diabolically executing their evil plans before being ruined by a classic hero; the evil terrorist from the Middle East who wants nothing but chaos, only to be defeated by a special op CIA agent going rogue to save the world; the political activist who started from a genuine place but just went too far, taken down by heroes who say they are fighting for change but are actually pushing the status quo, are some of the most common examples (Bercovici, 2021).

According to the website Moviweb, from samurai sword-toting warriors to worldly adventure seekers, from reluctant saviors to skilled assassins, cinema is home to epic action heroes. Indeed, movies introduced audiences across the world to some iconic and danger-prone characters who electrify and entertain with their thrilling exploits and fierce attitudes. These monumental figures are courageous and daring, tenacious and tough, oftentimes putting themselves in precarious situations for the greater good and looking mighty impressive while doing so.

As this dissertation focuses on an American film, the following examples are also going to be focused on American movies. Beginning in the 1960s, there is the movie "From Russia with Love" (1963), the second in the James Bond franchise, demonstrating propagandistic references through stereotypes, especially the portrayal of the Soviet Union as an evil empire.



Fig.1: Movie poster used to promote the movie “From Russia with Love”.

(Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/From_Russia_with_Love_%28film%29)

The film has two main Russian characters, both women, who portray two of the most well-known stereotypes about Russian women. There is the crueler of the two Russian women, Rosa Klebb, who previously worked for the KGB, and is now doing “freelance evil”, accepting a job from the enemy organization of the whole Bond saga, SPECTER. She plays an extremely cold character, who enjoys violence, as it is evident in the interview scene, when she punches the assassin, she is hiring in order to test him. She is short, stout, unattractive, and clearly conniving, portraying what American men considered old Russian women to be. In contrast, there is the young Russian woman, Tatiana Romanov, whom this older agent hires to seduce and distract Bond. She constitutes the opposite of Rosa Klebb, as she is considered a beautiful woman, who was once a ballerina before working for the Soviet Army Intelligence (Walters, 2012).

Another propagandistic idea can be seen in Bond’s dominance over Tanya, possibly symbolizing the dominance of the West over Russia. There is also the depiction of Russian belief in the superiority of their technology, when a random Russian male character states that “Russian clocks are always correct”, just before the Soviet Army Intelligence Center is blown up (Walters, 2012, p.12).

“James Bond’s obsession with Russia has long signaled Western discontent with its Soviet enemy of old; indeed, the Bond franchise has always been at its most lewdly outlandish and politically confrontational when it has Bond facing down Mother Russia,” according to Ian Kinane, a professor of popular literature and culture at the University of Roehampton and the founding editor of the *International Journal of James Bond Studies* (Roberts, 2022).

Indeed, the 1960s saw a large number of images of hostile, threatening Russians, represented as cold, sneaky and unemotional spies or KGB members, with an overwhelming desire for violence, in a Russia buried under snow and destroyed by Communism. In the next decade, the relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union were still not at their best, and Russians were very easy to cast as villains in films, so the use of Russia as “the enemy” in films continued (Walters, 2012, p.17).

In the 1970s, due to the Détente, the Cold War rhetoric in films calmed down, but was still present indirectly. There was also the Vietnam War, which gathered a lot of attention. During this decade, there was an increase in the production of martial arts films and spy films, considered both subcategories of the action genre. “The Kremlin Letter” (1970), directed by John Huston and related to the Cold War, is the adaptation of a novel by Noel Behn, loosely based on the author's own experiences in the Army's Counterintelligence Corps.

This movie is about a US Navy officer, Charles Rone (Patrick O'Neal), who was released from the military to be recruited by a spy company. His mission is to gather a group of former spies who, under the orders of Ward (Richard Boone), will execute the plan designed by the famous Highwayman (Dean Jagger), a trusted man of a former spy on his own, known as Sturdevant. The mission is to enter the Soviet Union and discover the compromising letter that the former double agent, Polyakov, was going to deliver to a high Soviet official when he was captured by the counterintelligence agent, Colonel Kosnov (Max von Sydow), who would later marry Polyakov's wife, the beautiful and unstable Erika (Bibi Andersson) (Jc, 2015).



Fig.2: Movie poster used to promote the film “The Kremlin Letter”.

(Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Kremlin_Letter)

Regarding propagandistic references, the movie has as a backdrop the heavy Cold War environment, with references to China, practices of torture and genocide. Using the streets of Helsinki to simulate Moscow, “The Letter from the Kremlin” stands out for its constant tension, in a film where the world of espionage is presented as something dark, dishonorable, and bitter (Jc, 2015).

The 1980s decade was one of the most remarkable in the action film category, as it was during this time that the action movie category was officially recognized as a genre. It was also a period of increased tensions between the US and the Soviet Union, with growing diplomatic, military and economic pressures. Consequently, during this period, there were numerous action movies that depicted the U.S.S.R in a negative way, emphasizing the positive aspects of the U.S. and the West. The Western side of the conflict always seemed to be the good one. Top action movies from the 1980s include “Red Heat” (1988), “Rocky IV” (1985), “For Your Eyes Only” (1981), “A View to A Kill” (1985), “Rambo: First Blood” (1982), “Rambo II” (1985), “Rambo III” (1988), “Octopussy” (1983), “Red Dawn” (1984) and “Top Gun” (1986) (FrostCall, 2022).

“Red Heat” is a 1988 American action film directed, co-written, and co-produced by Walter Hill and starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Soviet policeman Ivan Danko, and Jim Belushi as the Chicago police detective Art Ridzik. Finding themselves in the same case, Danko and Ridzik work as partners to catch a cunning and deadly Georgian drug kingpin, Viktor Rostavili (Ed O’Ross), who killed Danko’s previous partner. Most of the scenes set in the Soviet Union were actually shot in Hungary.



Fig. 3: Movie poster used to promote the film Read Heat.

(Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Heat_%281988_film%29)

Regarding propagandistic references, this movie also portrays the U.S. and the Western society as the good ones, as opposed to the dark and evil Soviet society and their characters. Ivan Danko is described as an incredibly strong, manly officer who uses brute force because all Soviet officers use brute force. He lives in a grey, snowy Moscow but, due to a case involving drug dealers, Ivan must go to the US, where he teams up with the stereotypical good cop. This cop and his fellow officers can again be seen as a stand-in for the views of the typical American “manly man,” with the cop immediately voicing his stereotyped idea that Ivan will not speak English. His fellow officers express the idea that Russians have different rules for the leaders and for the people and that living under Stalin has compromised their national strength. Ivan is also very cold and serious around foreigners, does not smile, blames Capitalism, and argues with his partner that Soviet guns are better than American ones. He is very competitive, but still admits that Russia is changing. This last point prefigures the future of Russia-US relations. The final line which makes it clear that relations are heading towards the right direction happens when Ivan offers his friend his watch at the end as a gift and says: “We are police officers, not politicians, it is okay to like each other” (Walters, 2012, p.22).

The 1980s were characterized by numerous negative stereotypes, just as the 60s, but there was also a serious shift in feelings towards the possibility of peace between the nations. Therefore, this decade was a period of slowly changing opinions, in both film and in the real world, culminating with the almost complete disintegration of the USSR, which would finish in the early 1990s (Walters, 2012).

Whether changing the story or watching the action unfold in the film, all these movies come down to one objective: portraying the Soviet Union always as the bad one; the “Evil Empire”, where everything bad and criminal happens. Labelling Russians as “evil” allows filmmakers to get away with villainizing an entire country’s citizens with as little backlash as possible. Therefore, these movies always contained propaganda references, as they tried to spread and promote ideas highlighting the West versus East dichotomy.

3.2. Portrait of the American Hero

As stated before, cinema is a very powerful medium that has often been used as a weapon for conditioning the representations and points of view of mass audiences, rather than as a source of actual knowledge.

During the 1950s, the “hot war” category films emerged, depicting America’s righteous war against those who threatened its national security. The enemy could be of all kinds, but the important point is that America always symbolized the right side. For the films under this category, the industry was provided with military equipment. Movies from this category include “The Halls of Montezuma” (1950), “Steel Helmet” (1951), “Battlezone” (1952), “One Minute to Zero” (1952), “Desert Fox” (1951), “Hell and High Water” (1954), “The Court Martial of Billy Mitchell” (1955), “Bombers B52” (1957), and “Thundering Jets” (1958), for instance (Şengül, 2005).

The 1960s were marked by movies such as “Seven Days in May” (1964), “Fail Safe” (1964), “Dr. Strangelove” (1964), “The Manchurian Candidate” (1962), “The Planet of the Apes” (1968), that successfully dealt with the “rationality of war”. Instead of cursing the Soviet Union as the aggressor, these films delineated the undercurrents of “war mentality” (Şengül, 2005, p.39).

To this critical stance, we must add the bad bureaucracy and total skepticism about the nature of the Government that was dominant during the 1970s. The Nixon Administration’s decision to invade Cambodia in 1970, the Watergate scandal, and the illegal activities of FBI and CIA were represented in the movies, in which individual heroes would undo the activities of the Government. The movie industry responded to this process with the films “Three Days of Condor” (1975), “All the President’s Men” (1976), “The Conversation” (1974), and “Chinatown” (1974) (Şengül, 2005).

The idea of an “American hero” specially thrived during the 80s. During these years, filmmakers had lived through many substantial transformations with counterculture, social justice movements, Vietnam, and political mistrust. After the end of the war in Vietnam in 1973, U.S. focus shifted back to the Soviets. The Reagan administration significantly increased defense against the USSR and shifted back towards the Cold War nuclear threat. Many adults of that time had been born into the Cold War or had spent a significant portion of their life hearing about the threats from the Soviet Union (Dupler, 2023).

The 1970s were a period of uncertainty and negativity towards American ideals, but the 1980s brought back the idea of American morality and heroism in the face of a Soviet threat. External threats are antagonists that come from somewhere else and do not share the home or values of the protagonist. When America is the homeland, the antagonist would be from outside national borders. Internal government distrust due to the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal were certainly themes in films of the 1970s, however, there was often a bigger, more objective threat beyond those ones. Especially by the 1980s, the end of Vietnam War and the start of a new presidential administration refocused the general attention on the Soviet Union and the fear of external threats (Dupler, 2023).

Therefore, heroism was defined by traditional American values, which were brought back to the forefront of many minds under the conservative Reagan administration. After a long decade of mistrust, America was ready to be the hero again and, to embody such purpose “Superman” (1978) placed the superhero in a small, midwestern farm - the heart of everyday American people. Indeed, “Superman” had a clearcut moral code that everyone could rally behind. Superheroes like Superman fight the bad guys, and no one had to wonder if he was right or wrong. Good must prevail over evil, as it is up to the morally righteous to secure peace (Dupler, 2023, p.27).

In the end, American heroism was built and based on sacrifice, hard-work, and a commitment to achieving moral good. When faced with a challenge, these heroes always chose to overcome and put aside their personal feelings to do the right thing. The heroic qualities harkened back to traditional American values, which encouraged patriotism and a sense of moral superiority. If America was the hero, America could do no wrong. If the Soviets were the villains, Americans had every right to destroy them for their evil deeds (Dupler, 2023).

Certainly, the 1980s were a time when America could finally become the hero again. By calling out the Soviet Union directly and indirectly in film, Hollywood reinforced the political tensions on a cultural level. In many ways, Hollywood heightened this tension by bringing an oversimplified version of this conflict to ordinary people. While people were already very familiar with the Soviet Union and the nature of the conflict, films integrated this narrative into everyday life's entertainment and leisure spaces. Action films were particularly able to respond to the international context by providing potentially real scenarios or by constructing a fictionalized narrative to process real issues. The Reagan administration's values-based culture flashed through in the morality of heroes and villains. People were reminded to feel a sense of patriotism and pride for their nation, emulating the hero of their own real life action movie. Even as militarism and nuclear anxiety increased as a result of Reagan's policies, Hollywood did not paint the United States as provocative or capable of bad policies. On screen, the enemy would always be the Soviets, who were responsible for the whole dilemma (Dupler, 2023).

3.3. Portrait of the Soviet Villain

The treatment of the Soviet enemy by American film, television, and popular magazines of the Cold War era was as complex and multidimensional as the conflict itself. These media offered a readily accessible source of knowledge about America's adversary that shaped the average citizen understanding of the conflict. In combination, these media played a critical role in the Americans' perception of the "war" they were fighting. While reporting on news and current events, magazines and television programs would select stories that hold the audience's interest. In fictional storylines, films and television would choose and create recognizable archetypes of Soviet characters and tell tales that were identifiably drawn from current events.

To an American citizen exposed to media representations of the Soviet enemy during the early days of the Cold War, the Soviet state itself became a character, its monstrous proportions described as a leviathan, a machine of war and production with the ability to consume whole weaker nations. Magazine features would line up the capabilities of the United States and those of the Soviet Union side by side, creating alarming visuals to show that the non-individualistic authoritarian government had enabled the Soviet Union to produce a massive military machine (Hohe, 2010).

As the Cold War came to a deadly freeze in the 1940s and 50s, anti-Soviet and anti-communist messaging pervaded American culture. U.S. government propaganda pushed warnings resulting in the “Red Scare,” spreading fear about communist espionage wide and far. The political firestorm also extended to Hollywood. The infamous House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) interrogated those in the industry suspected of communist ties on often flimsy evidence. At the height of the Red Scare, under pressure from the government and trying to prove loyalty, Hollywood began to make vehemently anti-communist films, featuring one-dimensional, fist-clenching Soviet spies (Tan, 2022).

Between 1945 and 1991, with a few exceptions, Soviet citizens were characterized as astute enemies in Western popular culture. This kind of stereotyping was evident even before the Cold War, as Russia had been, historically, a threat to the West. Nonetheless, such stereotype clearly increased during the Cold War because of Soviet communism. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the interest in Russian villains faded in favor of Muslims and Chinese (Bertolaso, 2023)

In Davis’ paper “Some Sources of American Hostility to Russia”, the author discusses why Russians were almost always portrayed as the villains in movies. According to Davis, there were obvious economic and political reasons, in addition to sociological reasons, why America was hostile towards Russia. America felt threatened by Russian attitudes towards property and women’s rights, their lack of value for Calvinism-based “radical individualism,” which Americans valued so highly, lower unemployment, atheism, and many other traits (Davis, 176). America wanted to glorify its own ideals and bolster its national ego and, as Davis says, one of the best ways to do this was “by playing down a potential rival.” (Davis, 177) In other words, by making Russia seem weak backwards, and able to be dominated by the U.S. (Walters, 2012).

This idea of U.S. domination of Russia can also be seen in the different stereotypes held for Russian men in comparison to Russian women. Indeed, women are usually seen as keepers of a country’s purity, and this is the reason why, when two countries are at war, soldiers will often rape the women of the other country in order to demoralize the country and assert their home nation’s dominance (Gal and Kligman, p.15). This, to a less violent extent, can be seen in films, where often weak Russian women are seen submitting to powerful American men. This base urge could be a large part of the reason why Russian women are often portrayed as very sexy and alluring, while this does not hold true for the men. However, the image of

weakness is completely reversed when the woman buys into Communist ideals, and quite often when she is old and has lost her “feminine traits,” two aspects which are often portrayed as evil in film (Walters, 2012).

Until the end of the Cold War, Russians were seen as disciplined, serious, strong, cold, restrained, obedient, hardworking, proud, oppressed, orderly, secretive, conniving, conservative, competitive, patriotic, rigid, intelligent, conforming, traditional, persistent, and uncivilized. Russia was also a harsh, mysterious land where it was constantly snowing, and everyone wore shapkas and headscarves. After the Cold War, Russians could be seen as “taxi drivers, nurses, doctors, journalists, schoolteachers, engineers, fighters, dancers, writers, reporters, pilots, translators, and accountants” (Goering) (Walters, 2012).

When talking about the common stereotyped soviet, they were usually represented with caricatured and terrible accents. Usually, their names are Dimitry, Vladimir, Ivan, and Boris. Men are usually short, with slicked-back hair and flashy gold chains, while women are very tall and sexy, and if the villain is a woman, they are usually spies (Bertolaso, 2023)

Nonetheless, it is important to consider that the American media did not vilify the Soviets as a people in general. Rather, a more complex situation developed. While Soviet leadership and undercover spies were repeatedly cast as Cold War villains, the media were careful never to tar the Soviet people with the same brush. Indeed, average citizens of the Soviet regime were portrayed as subjects of American pity, enslaved by the monster of Soviet communism. The Soviet people would have appeared to members of American society during this era as victims, rather than villains. Magazines dwelt on stories of oppression and exploitation that further indicted the regime and the state while exonerating its citizens. In the popular media’s depiction of the Cold War, those living under the heel of communism were most often treated as non-combatants (Hohe, 2010).

Indeed, cinema in general contributed immensely to the definition of stereotypes which, in turn, contributed to the propaganda spread during the Cold War. With the defined establishment of the "American Hero" and the "Soviet Villain" in action films, people grew up and thrived in an environment that clearly demarcated the notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, this one, always associated with the Soviet Union. The next chapter will continue to tackle this theme through the analysis of the movies “Rambo: First Blood” (1982), “Rambo II” (1985), “Rambo III” (1988). Elements such as the Vietnam War, the Afghan War and

Rambo's Character as the all-American Hero will be analyzed and explained, as these can also be considered propaganda.

CHAPTER IV – ANALYSING THE MOVIE FRANCHISE “RAMBO” AS A COLD WAR PROPAGANDA TOOL

4.1. The “Rambo” Movie Franchise

The “Rambo” franchise is a long-running action film series revolving around the character John Rambo, a former Green Beret and Vietnam War veteran, whose War experience traumatized him but also gave him superior military skills, which he has used to fight corrupt police officers, enemy troops, and drug cartels. Sylvester Stallone not only was the film star but was also a co-writer and a producer in the later films, performing a large role in the accuracy and success of the franchise. The movies begin with “First Blood” (1982), “Rambo: First Blood Part II” (1985), “Rambo III” (1988), “Rambo: The Fight Continues” (2008), and “Rambo: Last Blood” (2019). “First Blood” is an adaptation of the 1972 novel “First Blood” by David Morrell. The film series has grossed \$819 million in total, \$300 million of which is from the most successful film, “Rambo: First Blood Part II”. The franchise also generated an animated television series, “Rambo: The Force of Freedom”, and comic books, novels, and video games. “Rambo” brought a great deal of attention to trauma experienced by most veterans, and the political issues of the war. From Vietnam to Afghanistan, Rambo has no issues taking matters into his own hands when the government won't help (Brajer, 2022).

Rambo began with David Morrell in his debut novel “First Blood” (1972). In 1968, while working on his doctoral dissertation at Penn State University, Morrell was motivated to write a book about the American experience in Vietnam. Morrell found it unnerving that the newscasts reporting the war in the Southeast Asia jungles were disturbingly similar to the footage of social unrest across the U.S. Combining these real-life events, Morrell projected the story of John Rambo, a decorated Green Beret that returns home after fighting in Vietnam, only to find a profoundly polarized American society. Suffering from nightmares, survivor's guilt, social alienation, and post-traumatic stress disorder, Rambo brings to U.S. soil the disturbing experience of combat in Vietnam (Lanzagorta, 2008).

The Rambo franchise had and still has an overwhelming impact on popular culture, as they appealed to international audiences, were huge successes at the box office, and continue to be popular titles on video games. Also, the first films of the Rambo series defined the narrative and visual structure of the action genre during the 1980s and beyond. The franchise has become the representation of America during the Reagan years, as President Ronald Reagan referred to Rambo in public speeches to exemplify his ultra-right political ideology and aggressive foreign policy. For instance, in the 1985 Beirut hostage crisis, President

Reagan stated at a press conference: “Boy, after seeing Rambo [First Blood II] last night, I know what to do next time this happens” (Lanzagorta, 2008).

Truly, very limited cultural products have had such an extensive and profound impact worldwide. While the “Star Wars” or “Star Trek” sagas have a stronger fan following than the Rambo films, their cultural diffusion has been more limited. Despite being ignored, maligned, and despised by a number of critics and academics, the Rambo franchise emerges as an important building block in the history and characterization of American popular culture (Lanzagorta, 2008).

Indeed, “First Blood” can be seen as an allegory to what Reagan considered the failures of the Carter administration. “Rambo: First Blood II” corresponds to a metaphor for Reagan’s goals, values, and political ideology. In the sequel, Rambo is sent back to Vietnam on a top-secret mission to photograph Prisoner of War (POW) camps. When the authority institutions backstab Rambo when he attempts to rescue the POWs, he takes matters into his own hands. As expected, the “Rambo” solution to the problem resulted in the total annihilation of all the Vietnamese and Soviet advisors that conspired against America. In addition, by the film’s end, Rambo also violently confronts the deceitful government official that abandoned him in the jungle. “Rambo III” also embraced Reagan’s ideology, as it remains the most ideological of the entire franchise. For instance, even though Rambo had an opportunity to fight the Soviets in “Rambo: First Blood II”, in “Rambo III” the Cold War conflict is far more explicit. Rambo joins ineffective and untrained freedom fighters and then leads them to fight Soviet expansionism. Therefore, “Rambo III” boils down to a militaristic fantasy where a single man, embracing the noblest American ideals, is able to destroy an entire invading army (Lanzagorta, 2008).

Furthermore, one of the major domestic accomplishments of the Reagan administration was to attack the welfare state as incessantly bureaucratic and completely incompetent. Just as the postmodern heroes of the era, Reagan had to fight both Congress and skeptical citizens to carry out his political agenda. Therefore, it is undeniable that Rambo swiftly embodies the national characteristics and the conservative political ideologies promoted by Reagan. More explicitly, Reagan often referred to “Rambo: First Blood II” as a model for his domestic and foreign policies. For instance, in his 1985 Labor Day speech, Reagan stated that he would clean the federal tax system “in the spirit of Rambo”. Reagan also used Rambo to exemplify his attitude towards the Soviet Union, the Middle East, and Nicaragua. Quite

amusingly, Reagan was so deeply linked to Rambo, that he was often called “Ronbo”. Such an intriguing relation was made visual in a humorous image of Reagan with the body of Rambo, which was quite popular during the 1980s (Lanzagorta, 2008).

“First Blood”, released in 1982 and directed by Ted Kotcheff, is the first film in the “Rambo” franchise. Adapted from David Morrell’s novel, the film remains the template for 80s action cinema, a thriller packed with shootouts, car chases, explosions, and other displays of heavy artillery and set-splintering pyrotechnics. Stallone’s Rambo is a force of near-immortal resilience, but his psychic vulnerability is the supporting force that makes him seem more human than he would otherwise. The movie set a standard that many films followed but only a handful were able to match. The natural backdrop, with British Columbia serving as an impressively overcast Washington, has enough wilderness for Rambo to reacquaint himself with jungle warfare, but the setting has the melancholy feel of other films set in the region. The essential point of “First Blood” is that Rambo may be back in America, but the place doesn’t feel like home. He is a drifter in more than the literal sense (Tobias, 2022).



Fig.4: Movie poster used to promote the movie “First Blood”.

(Retrieved from: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rambo:_First_Blood)

The movie begins several years after Rambo left the war, in the American Northwest, in 1980. Rambo is searching for one of his friends from his unit, Delmar Berry, but he quickly discovers from Delmar's mother that he has died a few months earlier from cancer due to Agent Orange exposure. Although not yet revealed to the audience, Rambo knows he is now

the last surviving member of his unit. The scene fades to Rambo entering the small town of Hope in Washington State, looking for a meal and possibly a hotel to spend the night. With his military-style coat, he is spotted by the town's paranoid sheriff, Will Teasle (Brian Dennehy), who quickly drives Rambo out of town. A defiant Rambo heads back toward town immediately, but Teasle arrests him for vagrancy and for carrying a large combat knife as a concealed weapon (First Blood (1982) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

Rambo stands his ground against the officers at the station and is brutalized and harassed by Art Galt (Jack Starrett), the sheriff's cruel head deputy and closest friend. When they attempt to dry-shave him with a straight razor in preparation for his court appearance, Rambo has a flashback to being tortured in a North Vietnamese POW Camp and loses control, instinctively using his military training to beat Galt and his comrades. He fights his way out of the station, retrieving his large knife. Teasle chases him into the wilderness but ends the pursuit when his car overturns. Rambo ventures further up the mountain, into the forest (First Blood (1982) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

The deputies are eventually forced to search for Rambo and after spotting Rambo from a helicopter, Galt attempts to shoot him in cold blood. Rambo drops off the cliff into a mass of trees and cornered, throws a rock at the helicopter in self-defense, causing Galt to fall to his death. Teasle, who did not see Galt's attempt to kill Rambo, vows to avenge his friend's death. After tending to a deep cut in his upper arm, Rambo attempts to surrender, he's shot at by Teasle's men and retreats into the woods. Teasle leads his deputies on a manhunt into the rugged forest and Rambo quickly disables the team using non-lethal guerrilla tactics and traps, severely wounding all the deputies and takes one deputy's walkie-talkie (First Blood (1982) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

A base camp is assembled near the site and the National Guard is called in. The National Guard informs Rambo (who is listening in on the radio he had stolen) that he is surrounded by their forces. United States Special Forces Colonel Sam Trautman (Richard Crenna) arrives, taking credit for training Rambo and tells the sheriff that Rambo has been trained to survive in harsh environments and to engage superior numbers in combat. He is surprised to find any of the deputies still alive and warns that it would be safer to let Rambo go and find him a few days after the situation has calmed down, suggesting that Rambo can be apprehended without a fight. Fueled by a mixture of scorn and pride, the hot-headed Teasle refuses to heed the advice. Teasle allows Trautman to talk to Rambo. Trautman tries to

convince Rambo to give himself up, however, Rambo refuses, citing his deplorable treatment by Teasle and his men. Eventually, Rambo is cornered by the National Guard troopers at the entrance to an abandoned mine, where he has taken refuge. They assume Rambo is dead but, undiscovered to his pursuers, Rambo has escaped into the tunnels of the mine. Using his experience with guerrilla tactics, Rambo takes out power transformers, blacking out part of the town. Rambo shoots up and destroys a sporting goods shop, spilling gunpowder and ammunition over the floor and igniting it. The tactic works as a distraction and Rambo spots Teasle on the roof of police headquarters (First Blood (1982) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.). After shooting up the building, Rambo carefully enters the police station. Aware of Teasle's presence on the roof, Rambo darts under the skylight to draw fire as bait to reveal his exact location. Teasle immediately fires at Rambo who notes his position and returns fire. Teasle falls through the skylight onto the floor. Rambo is about to shoot Teasle, but Colonel Trautman appears and tells him that there is no hope of escaping alive. Rambo, now surrounded by the police, rages about the horrors of war in Vietnam and the difficulties he has faced adapting to civilian life. He says that he is tired of being misunderstood, and how in the Army he was a war hero but back in America he could not even be trusted to work parking cars. Rambo then turns himself into Trautman and is arrested. The credits roll as he and Trautman exit the police station (First Blood (1982) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

“Rambo: First Blood Part II” (also known as “Rambo II”, “Rambo II: The Vendetta” and “First Blood Part II”) was released in 1985 and directed by George P. Cosmatos, being the first sequel to the 1982's “First Blood”.

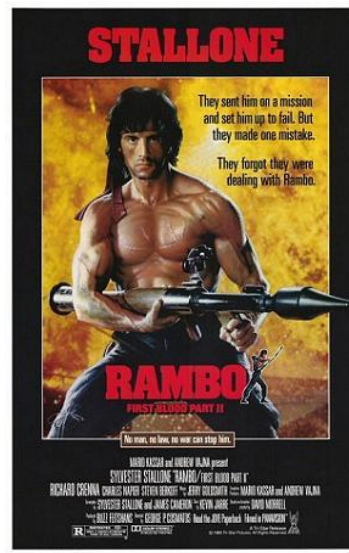


Fig 5: Movie poster used to promote the movie “Rambo: First Blood Part II”.

(Retrieved from: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rambo:_First_Blood_Part_II)

Set around three years after “First Blood”, John is working in a labor camp prison somewhere in the U.S. when he gets a visit from his former commander, Colonel Trautman. Trautman offers Rambo the chance to be released from prison, after being convicted by a military court for the events of the first film, and given full clemency, but on the condition of taking a mission where he will infiltrate Vietnam to search for American POWs still held by the Vietnamese (Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.). Rambo travels with Trautman to Thailand and meets Marshal Murdock (Charles Napier), an American bureaucrat who is in charge of the operation, and his right-hand men, freelance military contractors Ericson (Martin Kove) and Lifer (Steve Williams). Murdock tells Rambo that the American public is demanding knowledge about the POWs, and they want a trained commando to go in and search for them. Rambo is briefed that he is only to photograph the POWs and not to rescue them, nor is he to engage any enemy soldiers due to the unstable situation between the USA and Vietnam. Rambo reluctantly agrees and he is then told that a CIA informant named Co will be there to receive him in the jungles of Vietnam. Before he leaves on his mission, Rambo tells Trautman that Murdock is lying about his combat experience. Rambo tells Trautman he's the only person he can trust (Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

Rambo parachutes into the Vietnamese jungle and, miles from his landing spot, Rambo is met by a woman named Co-Bao (Julia Nickson), who introduces herself as his contact (Murdock had incorrectly identified the contact as a man). Rambo is led to a nearby camp

commanded by Captain Vinh (William Ghent). After dispatching a guard with a throwing knife, Rambo finds an American, Banks (Andy Wood), hanging from a makeshift crucifixion and frees him. Banks warns that several other American POWs are being held there. A patrol discovers the dead sentry, and Vinh's second-in-command, Lieutenant Tay (George Cheung), heads out into the jungle in search of the intruder. Rambo, Co, and Banks escape with a group of pirates, but are attacked by a Vietnamese gunboat and are promptly betrayed by the pirates, who fear the military's reprisals should they not cooperate. Rambo sends Co and Banks to safety and manages to destroy the gunboat and kill all the pirates. Rambo radios and calls for extraction. Trautman, Ericson, and Lifer head out in a rescue chopper. However, once it becomes apparent that Rambo has a live POW with him, Murdock radios the chopper, ordering them to scrub the extraction and return to base. Ericson tells him they have their orders (implying that he doesn't like it either), but Trautman denounces them both as mercenaries. Rambo and Banks watch helplessly as the helicopter flies off and are forced to surrender as Tay's squad advances. Co, having escaped, watches from the jungle nearby (Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

Back at the base in Thailand, Trautman angrily confronts Murdock, accusing the whole mission of being a sham, because Rambo wasn't supposed to find anything there. He suspects that the whole situation is really about money; the US government refused to pay war reparations to Vietnam, and the Vietnamese apparently kept American POWs for revenge. Murdock tells Trautman that the political situation is far more delicate than he realizes, and he needs to swallow his pride and let this go. Trautman refuses, while also insisting that Murdock should be more worried about Rambo (Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

Rambo is tortured but is briefly interrupted by the arrival of Vinh's Soviet Liason officer, Lt. Col. Podovsky (Steven Berkoff) and his henchman Sergeant Yushin (Vojislav Govedarica). Podovsky orders Rambo to contact the American military and tell them that they should not send any more commandos for rescue operations in Vietnam. When Rambo refuses, Yushin tortures him. This yields no results, so they bring in Banks and threaten to kill him. Rambo grudgingly agrees to Podovsky's condition. Meanwhile, Co enters the camp as a prostitute and comes to the hut in which Rambo is held captive. Rambo uses the radio to contact the US base in Thailand, but instead of relaying Podovsky's message, he uses this opportunity to swear retaliation on Murdock. The two fight their way out of the camp and, once they are safe, Co implores Rambo to take her to the U.S. Rambo agrees, but they are

attacked by Vietnamese soldiers and Co is killed by Tay, who escapes. Rambo kills the remaining Vietnamese soldiers and then buries Co's body in the jungle (Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

Following his escape, the camp's Soviet and Vietnamese soldiers are sent to look for him. Rambo assembles his weapons and, using guerrilla warfare tactics, kills a large number of enemy troops, including Vinh. He proceeds to a nearby enemy camp and destroys it by pouring gasoline in a nearby reed field, setting it afire and taking out several vehicles with explosive arrows. He comes face-to-face with Tay and kills him with an explosive arrowhead. Yushin appears in a UH-1N Twin Huey and drops a firebomb on Rambo's position. Rambo escapes, hijacks the Huey helicopter after killing Yushin, and proceeds towards the POW camp. He destroys most of the camp and rescues all the POWs, heading towards the American camp in Thailand (Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

Although Rambo's helicopter is heavily damaged by Podovsky's helicopter, he lands his helicopter on a river, then plays dead. When Podovsky carelessly approaches the downed Huey, Rambo fires a rocket at Podovsky's chopper, obliterating it. Rambo then returns to the base and enters Murdock's command center, shooting all of Murdock's hi-tech equipment to shreds. He threatens Murdock, challenging him to find and rescue the remaining American POWs in Vietnam. As Trautman prepares to leave the camp, Rambo says that he will be staying in Asia in an attempt to find himself. Trautman agrees that their government gave them a raw deal, but he asks Rambo not to hate his country for it. Rambo insists that he doesn't, he only wants his country to love its soldiers as much as its soldiers love their country. The film credits roll as Rambo walks off into the distance while his mentor watches him (Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

“Rambo III” was released in 1988, the third film in the Rambo franchise. It was directed by Peter MacDonald and co-written by Sylvester Stallone and, at the time of its release, it was the most expensive film ever made, with a production budget between \$58 and \$63 million.

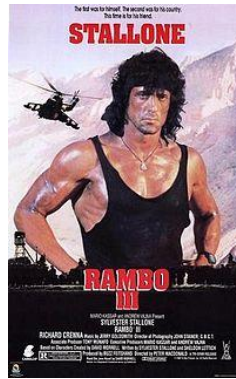


Fig. 6: Movie poster used to promote “Rambo III”.

(Retrieved from: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rambo_III)

The film begins with Colonel Sam Trautman returning to Thailand to enlist the help of Rambo once again, who has settled in the country since the events of “First Blood Part II”. Trautman visits the construction site of the Buddhist temple Rambo is helping to build and asks Rambo to join him on a mission to Afghanistan. The mission is meant to supply weapons to the Mujahideen, Afghani rebels, who are fighting the Soviets in the Soviet-Afghan War. However, Rambo refuses and Trautman chooses to go on his own (Rambo III (1988) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

While in Afghanistan, Trautman's troops are ambushed by Soviet troops. Trautman is imprisoned in a Soviet base and coerced for information by Colonel Zaysen (Marc de Jonge) and his henchman Kourov (Randy Raney). Rambo discovers about the incident from embassy field officer Robert Griggs (Kurtwood Smith) and convinces Griggs to give him an unofficial operation, despite Griggs' warning that the U.S. government will deny any knowledge of his actions if killed or caught. Rambo immediately flies to Peshawar, Pakistan, where he meets up with Mousa Ghanin (Sasson Gabai), a weapons supplier who, after Rambo threatens him, agrees to take him to Khost, a village deep in the Afghan desert, close to the Soviet base where Trautman is kept imprisoned (Rambo III (1988) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

The Mujahideen in the village, led by the village's main leader Masoud (Spiros Focas), are hesitant to help Rambo in the first place. When their village is attacked by Soviet helicopters, after one of Mousa's shop assistants has informed the Soviets of Rambo's presence, they agree to help him. Rambo shoots down one Soviet helicopter but the village is destroyed. Rambo makes his way to the Soviet base and starts his plan to free Trautman. He infiltrates

the camp's prison and finds Trautman but cannot free him. After escaping from the base, Rambo tends to Hamid's wounds and sends the boy and Mousa away to safety, before cauterizing his own wound with gunpowder from a round of ammo and an open flame (Rambo III (1988) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

The next day, Rambo returns to the base to rescue Trautman from being tortured with a flamethrower. After rescuing several other prisoners, Rambo steals a helicopter and escapes from the base. However, the helicopter is damaged as it departs and soon crashes, forcing Rambo and Trautman to continue. After a confrontation in a cave, where Rambo and Trautman eliminate several Soviet Spetsnaz commandos, including Kourov, they are confronted by an entire army of Soviet tanks, headed by Zaysen. But just as they are about to be overwhelmed by the might of the Soviet Army, the Mujahideen warriors, together with Mousa and Hamid, ride onto the battlefield by the hundreds in a cavalry charge, overwhelming the Soviets. In the ensuing battle, in which both Trautman and John are wounded, Rambo commandeers a Soviet tank and kills Zaysen by driving the giant gun barrel into the Soviet colonel's helicopter. Rambo survives the explosion and gets out of the tank. At the end of the battle, Rambo and Trautman say goodbye to their Mujahideen friends and leave Afghanistan to go home (Rambo III (1988) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

“Rambo: The Fight Continues”, the sequel to the 1988 “Rambo III”, was directed and co-written by Sylvester Stallone, corresponding to the fourth movie in the “Rambo” franchise. The film is dedicated to the memory of Richard Crenna, who had died in 2003 and played Colonel Sam Trautman in the previous films. In the film, Rambo leads a group of mercenaries into Burma to rescue Christian missionaries, who have been kidnapped by a local infantry unit. In Thailand, John Rambo lives a peaceful life, catching snakes and transporting people and cargo in an old boat. When a group of Christian missionaries asks to be transported to the war zone in Burma to help the locals, Rambo only accepts when Sarah Miller presents her point of view about their humanitarian mission. Rambo leaves the group in the requested location, but the village where they are working is attacked by the army of Major Pa Tee Tint, the locals are slaughtered, and the missionaries are abducted. Later, a member of their church meets Rambo and asks him to transport a group of mercenaries hired to rescue the missionaries. The film ends with Rambo walking back to his home, wearing his green army jacket and carrying a bundle over his shoulder (Rambo (2008) - Plot - IMDb, n.d.).

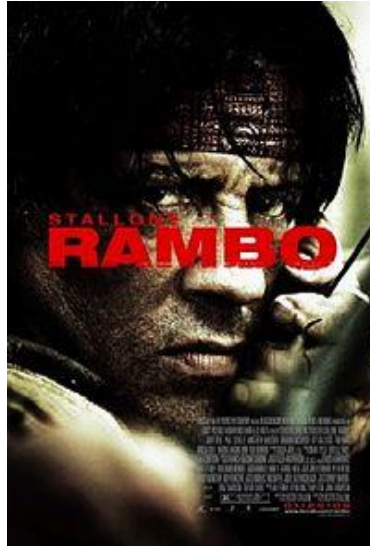


Fig 8: Movie poster used to promote “Rambo”.

(Retrieved from: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rambo_%28filme%29)

“Rambo: Last Blood” was released in 2019 and directed by Adrian Grünberg. The movie was co-written by Matthew Cirulnick and Sylvester Stallone, based on a story from Dan Gordon and Stallone. A sequel to “Rambo: The Fight Continues” (2008), it is the fifth and last (to date) film in the “Rambo” franchise.

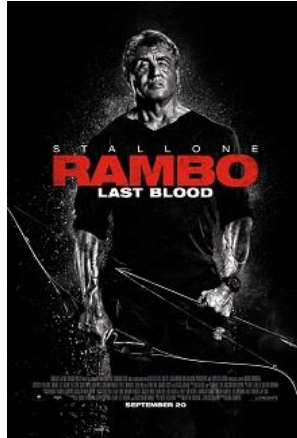


Fig 9: Movie poster used to promote “Rambo: Last Blood”.

(Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rambo:_Last_Blood)

With a past marked by violence, John Rambo decided to retire, now living on a ranch in Arizona, close to the border with Mexico. He runs a simple and modest life. Although the years have softened some of his most painful experiences, he still has many wounds to heal. But when a friend is kidnapped by a dangerous Mexican gang, Rambo realizes the time has come to face the ghosts of his past and rescue her. Rambo goes up against a Mexican cartel in what’s reported to be his last adventure. Towards the end of the movie, a weakened Rambo sits on the porch of his father's house, vowing to continue fighting and keep the memories of his loved ones alive. During the credits, flashbacks of Rambo's battles from the past films are shown, with Rambo saddling up his horse and riding off into the sunset (The Movie Database, 2019).

It is important to consider that, for this dissertation, the movies that are going to be used for discussion are the first three from the franchise: “First Blood” (1982), “Rambo: First Blood Part II” (1985), and “Rambo III” (1988), because the dissertation focuses on analyzing these Cold War cultural products as a propaganda tool. Besides that, the dissertation focuses on the Cold War conflict and these three movies were the ones produced and released during the Cold War.

4.2. Analysis the Rambo Franchise as a Propaganda Tool

Rambo extended well beyond the film’s enthusiastic audience, and by 1987 both the British and the American press had begun to speak of the “age of Rambo”. By the end of the decade, “Rambo” had made it into the updated edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. John Rambo

is the hero of five films to date, though the character originally appeared in David Morrell's 1972 novel *First Blood*. An outcast hero, Rambo achieved a massive rhetorical significance in the mid-1980s. When writers, critics, politicians or other spokesmen talked of "Rambo-style films", they were referring to what was perceived to be a disturbing new phenomenon, a type of violent popular cinema to which Rambo could give a name. Indeed, specialists bounded together cultural and political concerns, as they considered the young male American audience for Rambo as the "new right" voters who had supported Reagan. The following sections are going to focus on the elements used in the movies that could be considered as propaganda (Tasker, 1993/2002).

4.2.1 The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War has been present in American culture ever since it started, through every form of media, from movies to video games, from music to literature. Many films about the Vietnam War won major awards, were box office hits or started acting careers. More significantly, they contributed to modeling the way generations of Americans would perceive this war, not only at the time of their release but also decades later. Besides, these movies also expose how Americans reinterpreted the war long after it had ended (Guenther, 2022).

1978 was the year when cinema about the Vietnam War seriously began. In many ways, those first movies would be Hollywood's attempt to come to terms with the fact that America had lost the war. The way those films represented that defeat grants insight into how Americans dealt with the complex consequences of the war. "The Deer Hunter" and "The Boys in Company C" from 1978, are examples of this period of American cinema (Guenther, 2022).

Furthermore, one of the reasons why Ronald Reagan became president was his engaging with the Vietnam War. The raging cultural debate over the 60s, in general, had become an issue Reagan actively exploited, as Reagan himself was always a supporter of the war at that time. Reagan and Republican congressional candidates campaigned on the idea that, under Democratic rule, America had become weak in the face of threats from the Soviet Union and that America was afraid to use its power or intervene when needed. The oil crisis, economic recession, and various diplomatic crises were all tied to the decline of the American power, which seemed to have started with the defeat in Vietnam (Guenther, 2022).

Both sides (but particularly conservatives) operated under the belief that the American people had become tired of foreign engagement and of the loss of American blood for non-Americans. Many experts referred to this weariness as "Vietnam Syndrome." The last straw was the Iran hostage crisis. Enough Americans could see a clear example of weakened American influence in which the government could not rescue citizens from some backward country. It is no surprise that Reagan defeated President Jimmy Carter by promising to make America great again and end the Vietnam Syndrome (Guenther, 2022, p.38).

Truly, Reagan would be the first president to mention Vietnam in an inaugural address, as he effectively related the sacrifices of soldiers in Vietnam to the patriotic sacrifices of all other American wars. However, President Reagan also had no problem referring to Vietnam vets being rejected by their country while affirming that things had changed. This political and cultural drift towards acknowledging the troops demonstrates the country's mood in the 1980s, as there was a genuine belief that the country had left Vietnam veterans behind, and it was time to honor them (Guenther, 2022).

In the beginning of the 80s, movies such as "Apocalypse Now" and "Platoon" expressed complex feelings about America's first lost war and the general decline of the 70s. The Vietnam War movies also tried to memorialize the war and come to terms with the veterans. Although the topic of war remained controversial, citizens could still rally around the characters that portrayed those who had served in Vietnam. Hence, Vietnam War movies of the 80's attempted to memorialize the sacrifices of the Vietnam veterans and finally give those men the honor they had failed to receive at the time (Guenther, 2022).

However, the intense focus on the soldier's personal experience had its roots well before the 1980's. It matched a rising conservative discourse about the war and the natural feeling on the part of Americans during the 1970s. Prisoners of War (POWs) are one significant carry-over from the previous decade, who remained on American minds throughout the eighties (Guenther, 2022).

"First Blood" is the more political of Stallone's movies. Although the sequels tended to lean more and more on mindless violence and increased body counts, the original Rambo story had a lot to say about the condition of Vietnam veterans in America in the 1980s.

The movie begins with John Rambo, a Green Beret and Vietnam veteran, looking for one of his friends who served along him in the same unit, only to find out that he had died of cancer. This scene reveals some of the issues that veterans faced during and after the war, as

Rambo's friend developed cancer due to being exposed to Agent Orange, a chemical used by the American military in Vietnam. Rambo then goes into Hope's town and is confronted by sheriff Teasel, who assumes that Rambo is some type of wanderer due to his long wild hair. The sheriff's attitude towards Rambo can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the United States and its treatment of Vietnam veterans, many of whom, upon returning from Vietnam, suffered from ridicule and mistreatment by their own country, despite having risked their lives for the flag (Perez, 2018).

While in jail, Rambo receives a shave from one of the officers, but this episode triggers him, leading to flashbacks of his time as a prisoner of war (POW) in Vietnam. In this moment, it becomes clear that the horrors of the Vietnam War left Rambo mentally scarred. The war flashbacks that Rambo experiences are among the many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that Vietnam veterans commonly experienced and that were often dismissed or ignored. It was difficult for veterans of Vietnam to seek help and find sufficient treatment for mental issues as the public dismissed them for fighting in an unpopular war, which is the film's biggest issue. As a veteran, Rambo does not receive the help of his country and, instead, is forced to deal with his problems on his own, whether they are financial, physical or mental (Perez, 2018).

Therefore, the main message that "First Blood" tries to convey is the poor treatment that Vietnam veterans suffered. Many did not want to be in the war but had no choice, as they were recruited. The film also brought up topics that were controversial at the time and even suffered from rejected scripts due to hostile reactions. "First Blood" pushed the limits in portraying Rambo as a heroic Vietnam veteran despite being at odds with his government and people. In fact, "First Blood" is one of the first mainstream films to address Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the lasting impacts of war on surviving soldiers. Moreover, "Rambo: First Blood" is a distinctive work of art as it paved the way for the action hero genre, while also falling under the Vietnam War genre (Perez, 2018).

A 1991 Wall Street Journal/NBC poll would find that 69% of Americans believed Vietnam still held American prisoners. The media and Hollywood gave credence to the idea, with multiple movies like the second Rambo being all about freeing secret POWs. Senator Bob Smith passed around photos of men he claimed were still captive POWs, and Reagan would criticize Vietnam several times for not giving a "full accounting" of POWs (Guenther, 2022).

Like many other movies produced in the late 70's and early 80s, "First Blood Part II" is related to the war but does not depict it. Besides, the POWs and the feeling of abandonment or betrayal by those back home still prevails in this second movie, being best summed up when Rambo asks, "are they going to let us win this time?" (Guenther, 2022, p.40).

Along with Ronald Reagan's electoral victory, the United States started a new phase of reaffirmation of national pride reflected in the many attempts to recover their traditional glory. The U.S. intervention in Vietnam, for its part, remained a field of on-going cultural and political concern, and the political ambiance favored the rehabilitation of the veterans and the acceptance of the war itself. In fact, this time, the representation of war was very different from the one of the antiwar movements in the 60s and early 70s. In the 80s, the Vietnam veteran came into the art world as a hero (Eusebio & Llácer, 1998).

In order to portray the Vietnam War as a cultural product, the American society had first to confront some questions about the reasons that led the U.S. to the intervention. However, these questions could not be answered without the admission of guilt. That is the reason why even the 70's films avoided any political declaration about the defeat and, much less, about the feeling of guilt that seems to have been hovering over American society since the 60's (Eusebio & Llácer, 1998).

The reason for this general attitude is that guilt is not an easy feeling to accept, so it must be transformed, and movies are as good a means as any political discourse. The mechanism most used, always according to Studlar and Dessler, is that of victimization, because "to be a victim means never having to say you are sorry". First, one must change such knotty questions as "Were we right to fight in Vietnam?" into more acceptable ones, like "What is our obligation towards the veterans of war?". Then, the change of aggressors into victims becomes the next predictable step (Eusebio & Llácer, 1998).

"Rambo: First Blood Part II" (1985) is the movie that better resumes this attitude. When Rambo successfully returns with an American soldier, the rescue helicopter hovers over them as the enemy approaches and, suddenly, Murdock, the government agent, aborts the mission and the helicopter leaves. Rambo is imprisoned and tortured but, finally, he manages to escape. Perceived as a Comic book hero, all muscles and oil, he does not only conquer the enemy in the jungle by himself, but he is also able to overcome all the obstacles. His fight is legitimized as opposing a cruel enemy that still holds American prisoners. His fight, as

related to both ungrateful superiors and ruthless enemies, has made of him, the American soldier in Vietnam, a victim (Eusebio & Llácer, 1998).

While it's not odd to see Vietnamese military in Vietnam, the appearance of Soviet troops in the country was an unexpected shift halfway through the film. However, the Soviet Union had been strong allies with Vietnam throughout the 20th century and even supported their fight against the U.S. during the War, providing military aid and advisors. After Rambo's capture, Soviet military personnel arrive with a small contingent, including Lt. Col. Podovsky, who is brought in to interrogate Rambo, in order to uncover his reasons for being there. Podovsky suspects this is because of the POW's, which he refers to as "war criminals". Podovsky wants Rambo to radio his headquarters to say he's been captured and will be held for espionage, serving as a warning to never attempt such a mission again. As this movie was produced during the height of the Cold War, this particular scene, amongst others, provided an opportunity for Rambo to fight the Soviets. This was easy to work into the script, given the actual diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Vietnam, no matter how unrealistic it was to see Russians called in to interrogate an American prisoner (Shirley, 2022).

This film justifies not only the war, but also the means of the intervention. The film emphasizes some tortures perpetrated by the Vietcong soldiers that, in the 60's and 70s, were actually attributed to the American army by international human rights organizations. Also, the Vietnamese appear as dirty, sweaty, cruel and lascivious, being even inferior to the demanding Russian advisors (Eusebio & Llácer, 1998).

Some popular magazines in the United States, as *The New Yorker* or *The Wall Street Journal* criticized the movie's "narcissistic chauvinism". Stallone, on his part, considers the movie neither as right wing nor left wing, but rather as simply representing "ordinary people" (Eusebio & Llácer, 1998, p.7).

According to Scott Mendelson, the movie was received as something of a fantastical "what-if" scenario, operating under the notion that the Vietnam War was lost because the US government wouldn't allow one-man-armies like John Rambo to do what they were trained to do. So, this time, John Rambo, and by proxy the American public, got to re-fight the Vietnam War and win a certain measure of victory and, thus, national pride. But the film remains a fascinating example of reception versus intention (Mendelson, 2015).

Viewed outside of its pop culture impact, the story of John Rambo doesn't fit into easily designated political boxes. He is a Vietnam vet sent to fight and die by Lyndon Johnson (a Democrat) and Richard Nixon (a Republican) only to be bullied into aggression by American authority figures who don't like his hippie long hair and the fact that he fought in a "lesser" war (as opposed to Brian Dennehy's sheriff, who fought in the allegedly superior Korean War). He then gets set up and sent to his likely death by a federal government (during a time when Republican Ronald Reagan was in office) who didn't want the can-do spirit of post-Carter America soiled by pesky details like forgotten POWs from last decade's scarring war. We may conclude by saying that "It is a somewhat U.S. equals good, Foreign baddies equals bad action-adventure drama that arguably only became a political pinata due to its box office glory and critical reception, as well as to the current sensitivities associated with such simplistic entertainments" (Mendelson, 2015).

4.2.2 The Afghan War

"Rambo III" (1988) corresponds to the main movie of the trilogy that does its best to be a propaganda piece concerning Afghanistan. More violent than "First Blood" and "First Blood Part II", the movie introduces the American audience (who most likely had heard little of it prior to the Soviet invasion) to a heroic, praised portrait of the Afghan people, while demonizing the Soviets as hypocrites, who were acting as genocidal aggressors in Afghanistan, at the same time they were talking peace and disarmament with the U.S. (Arthur, 2020).

The movie presents the war in Afghanistan⁸ as a heroic struggle of a virtuous Afghan people against a barbaric Soviet force, whose outrages are framed in the same over the top terms used to demonize the German forces in World War II, for instance. The film ends with an on-screen tribute to the brave people of Afghanistan in their struggle against the Soviet occupation (Arthur, 2020).

According to Cavanaugh (2017), for Rambo and the U.S., war is a personal affair, fought by individuals who come together in brotherhood under a common cause. The soldiers retain

⁸The Soviet-Afghan War was an armed conflict fought in the Soviet-controlled Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) from 1979 to 1989. It saw extensive fighting between the occupying forces of the Soviet Union, the DRA, and allied paramilitary groups against the Afghan Mujahideen, foreign fighters, and smaller groups of anti-Soviet troops. While the Mujahideen were supported by various countries and organizations, the majority of their support came from Pakistan, the U.S., the U.K., China, Iran, and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The War caused massive destruction throughout Afghanistan and was also considered a significant factor that contributed to the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., formally ending the Cold War.

their individuality and their value, as country comes first, but the war is a personal affair. Contrariwise, the Afghans don't share the attitude of the individual, only wanting the success of the whole. They don't care if they or their friends die, which makes them a dangerous opponent, as they will sacrifice more people than the American warrior.

At the beginning of the film, Rambo is reluctant to accept Trautman's mission to intervene in the territory, as he intends to distance himself from the conflicts and maintain a simpler lifestyle. However, as Trautman is kidnapped, Rambo immediately leaves for a new mission, reinforcing the role of the United States in the "mission" of getting involved on the conflicts that were occurring worldwide during this period (Lima Veras, 2019, p.10).

In the first act of "Rambo III", Rambo shoots down a Soviet attack helicopter with a mounted machine gun. Again, in the second act of "Rambo III", Rambo shoots down a Soviet attack helicopter with an explosive arrow. And, in the final act of Rambo "III", Rambo takes down a Soviet attack helicopter with a tank. The Soviet Hind-D attack helicopters were fearsome, well-armed machines and the muscled, glistening Sylvester Stallone shooting them down represents the American jingoistic patriotism of "Rambo III". The idea of an American super-commando helping the Mujahideen strikes hints of imperialism. It symbolizes the proxy wars America and the USSR fought, while their own Cold War went on (Carroll, 2018).

However, the film ends with a tribute to the Mujahideen, a detail that, after the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, forced a change in subsequent copies of the film, given the fact that this group, after the expulsion of the Soviets, would eventually form Al-Qaeda (Lima Veras, 2019).

Indeed, as this movie is the last one of the 1980s decade, the propaganda against the Evil Empire can still be seen, despite the fact that the Cold War was coming to an end.

4.2.3 Rambo's Character: the all-American Hero

The character John Rambo, the American Vietnam War Veteran, became the U. S's most important cinematic Cold War icon. From a political point of view, Rambo was the visual representation of the bullish spirit present in many parts of the U.S. during Reagan's presidency, carrying the message that being anti-communist was cool again. In this sense, a new expression was devised: "Rambo-ism", which envisioned this new feeling of revitalized patriotism in the hearts of American citizens (Rossi, 2023, p.62).

The image of Sylvester Stallone as Vietnam veteran John Rambo, displaying a rocket-launcher whilst parading his musculature, became an icon of American masculinity in the mid-1980s. Rambo provided the most publicized, most visible image of the figure of the muscular male hero who had come to dominate the American action cinema of the 1980s. At the same time, his character echoed unsettling images from the past, through their implicit evocation of a fascist idealisation of the white male body. Combining an ability to signify both concerns about the future and the horrors of the past, the box-office appeal of the male bodybuilder provided a resonant image for the 80s (Tasker, 1993/2002).

Indeed, Rambo's muscular body visually represents the military force of American foreign policy that Reagan adopted at that time. Even though the Reagan administration had no part in the movies, they acknowledged its value in depicting American values of patriotism, honor, and responsibility, as it is reported that the movies had been shown to soldiers in the Middle East to boost their morale. The name "Rambo" was practically synonymous with American military might. It had become a vehicle for valorizing the soldiers who were carrying out the United States' increasingly interventionist foreign adventures, as well as an emblem of moral and muscular dominance. In the 1988's "Rambo III", the character represented both American military involvement as a necessary, if uncomfortable, force of change in the world, and the myth of the rugged individual, the army of one who, through his incalculable courage in combating the forces of evil, achieves a superhuman stature (Beam, 2018).

Even in Russia, many Russian artists condemned the movie on the grounds of its anti-Russian phobia. Soviet cinema was much more focused on showing that the Soviet Union was fighting for world peace, as shown in the movie "Incident at Map Grip 36-80". However, it must be noted that the spirit of anti-Americanism present in these movies was nothing compared to Rambo's spirit of anti-Sovietism, which was not accidental but carefully devised with political and cultural maneuvers (Rossi, 2023).

John Rambo, almost always alone, demonstrates the ability to use the most diverse quests to effectively combat numerous enemies, from guerrilla tactics to the use of instruments contrasting with the adversaries' considerable arsenal (the use of bow and arrow, for instance). The character is complemented by an almost mystical charisma, compared to an indestructible force of nature, which is reinforced in great part by the framing of the character in the scene, portraying him in isolation and, when in planes with the Vietnamese, from

angles that set him apart from the other elements on stage (Kellner, 2003, p. 67) (Lima Veras, 2019).

Sylvester Stallone's character has become a true symbol of the American cinematography, portraying elements such as heroism, individualism, masculinity, and a predisposition to “sacrifice” for justice (Boggs, 2010, pp. 18-19). It also represents the American foreign policy of the 80s, with the demonstration of the Cold War anticommunism through a set of characteristics such as “stereotyping” and villainizing the other, as well as exacerbating the values entrenched in the heroes (Lima Veras, 2019).

Stallone has often been reluctant to admit, in interviews, that Rambo is a right-wing role model. Still, Rambo posters have been used in Army recruitment offices, despite the protests of Army men like Medal of Honor winner Bob Kerrey, who said that “First Blood: Part II” made [the war] look like fun,” and U.S. Army Recruiting Command spokesperson Lt. Col. John F. Cullen, who pointed out that “[Rambo’s] an ex-convict...not the kind of guy we want for our poster boy” (Abrams, 2019).

Therefore, the Rambo trilogy demonstrates how films were very influential in shaping people's appetite for propagandistic Cold War entertainment, proving how fierce the conflict still was in the 80s. Even though the movies could suggest that the East-West confrontation was about to escalate again, peace was unexpectedly around the corner (Rossi, 2023).

4.2.4 Opponent characters: the bloody villains

Hollywood has always been known for turning any real-world political adversary of the United States into villains in the film world. Especially between 1945 and 1991, the enemies were usually the communists. Whether taking aim at Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, or the Soviet Union, for over four decades Americans had pierced into their minds that anyone who wasn't a flag-waving, democracy-lover was pure evil (Serafino, n.d.).

William "Will" Teasle is the main antagonist of the 1982 film “First Blood”, as he is characterized by his heartless actions. He is a feverish sheriff of the Ligget County Sheriff Department and is best described as a redneck and control-freak who is willing to abuse his power to get undesirable people out of what he thinks of as his town (Will Teasle, n.d.).

Despite being a cop, this character despises Vietnam veterans and is willing to kick them out of the town, loathing them out of rancorous jealousy, for upstaging the sacrifices the forgotten Korean War veterans like himself made, and for how Vietnam veterans are usually

unemployed and chaotic. This explains why, when he first met Rambo, he was immediately able to recognize (and consequently to obsess over) him. However, Sheriff Teasle is not completely cruel nor a ruthless killer since he actually cares for the welfare of his townspeople and his deputies. Even so, his obsession in disposing of Rambo in violent ways, combined with his recklessness, jealousy of Vietnam vets and his lust for revenge, makes him as horrible and as cruel as the killers that Rambo faced in the past, which results in the town's almost complete destruction (Will Teasle, n.d.).

Indeed, if Rambo represents all the soldiers who came back from Vietnam and were met with antipathy, Sheriff Teasle represents the antipathetic institutions responsible for that social climate. Although this character does not directly represent an element of Cold War propaganda, he still depicts a villain due to his corruption, abuse of power and hate crimes, as well as due to his commitment to arrest Rambo (Sherlock, 2021).

In “First Blood: Part II”, the type of characters chosen can really be considered as Cold War Propaganda agents. Indeed, Colonel Podovsky, Sergeant Yushin, Captain Vinh, and Lieutenant Tay are the three characters portrayed as the movie villains. They are Soviet soldiers displaying cold, hostile, bitter, aggressive, as well as brutal, and ruthless qualities. Indeed, through these characters the goal was to spread and promote the idea that the U.S.S.R was the Evil Empire, the ultimate enemy.

In the movie, Colonel Podovsky is working along with the North Vietnamese in a prison camp where American troops have been held since the war. He is a ruthless, brutally efficient Soviet commander that interrogates John Rambo and later resolves to hunt and kill him. He’s an evil communist and the scene where he tortures Rambo ranks amongst the franchise's most intense. Besides, he is also a complex, hypocritical, and sinister sociopath. Aside from torture, Podovsky also knew other ways to obtain information, such as blackmail, by threatening to kill others (Serafino, n.d.).

This character can also be considered a reference to the tortures occurred during the Vietnam War. Indeed, North Vietnamese brutally and systematically tortured and persecuted American prisoners to force them to confess war crimes and participate in staged propaganda activities, or to try to get military information. However, prisoners did their best to avoid cooperating, but torture can push people beyond the limits of human endurance.

Sargent Yushin, played by Voyo Goric, is the complement to Colonel Podovsky in “Rambo: First Blood Part II”. He’s completely mute, but his intimidating physical appearance ends

up being extremely terrifying. Yushin is a purely physical threat who can match, and possibly exceed, Rambo's strength. He is a Soviet military torturer, loyal to his ideals and to the colonel, as they both take part in the torture of Rambo. However, Yushin meets a dreadful fate, as Rambo proves that the only good communist is a dead communist. This character specifically represents the duty of the military and the sentiment felt towards Americans during the War (Serafino, n.d.).

Captain Vinh, portrayed by William Ghent, is a Vietnamese army captain who serves as the regional commander of a POW camp under the orders of Lieutenant Colonel Podovsky. This character is known for committing crimes such as attempted murder, conspiracy, torture and War crimes, and his main (failed) goal was to kill Rambo (Captain Vinh, n.d.).

Lieutenant Tay is a Vietnamese army Lieutenant who is the right-hand man of Captain Vinh. He is a corrupt and vile character who likes to sadistically beat prisoners of war. He was portrayed by George Cheung. Tay, who tortures the POWs and Rambo when he is captured, is ultimately killed by Rambo in revenge for the death of Co-Bao (Lieutenant Tay, n.d.).

“First Blood: Part II” was also an important vehicle to spread the message that Moscow was conspiring with the Vietnamese government to imprison innocent Americans. The enemy is depicted as heartless, with the Vietnamese killing women and treating prisoners as sub-humans, and the Russians torturing Rambo simply for fun. In stark contrast, Rambo represented a mighty America that could stand alone for freedom and justice (Rossi, 2023).

The film “Rambo III” is a product of the Cold War context, with troops from the Marxist government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and soldiers from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Both aimed to maintain the Afghan government's status quo against revolutionary rebels, who organized themselves into fundamentalist and modernist guerrilla groups, such as the Mujahideen. Most factions were Sunni Islamists and received military support from nations such as Pakistan, the United States, and the United Kingdom, among others.

In “Rambo III”, there is a new introduction to the plot with the Soviet - Afghan War. And again, the villain of this movie continues to be the Soviets. The main antagonist in the 1988 film is Colonel Alexei Zaysen, as Marc de Jonge played a sadistic Soviet commander who runs a prison camp during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. His main goals are to crush the Mujahideen and kill John Rambo, but they all fail. Colonel Zaysen is known for committing crimes such as terrorism, mass murder, war crimes, torture, and kidnapping.

Throughout “Rambo III”, Zaysen is painted as a killing machine devoid of emotion or humanity, even when he surrounds Rambo with an entire army at the climax (Butters, 2021).

There is also Sergeant Kourov, portrayed by Randy Raney, the secondary antagonist of “Rambo III”. He is a Soviet army sergeant who serves as the right-hand man of Colonel Alexei Zaysen.

Indeed, Hollywood has always tried to capitalize on public opinion in terms of cultural, social and political preferences, which is why Communists have so often been depicted as the center of America’s problems. This tendency translates into the Rambo movies produced during the 80s, as the stereotype of Evil that emerged from the Cold War is symbolized by those specific characters.

Popular culture corresponds to the set of practices, beliefs, and objects that express the shared meanings of a social system (Goel, 2022). As popular culture simultaneously impacts society and is affected by it, as society changes, popular culture will change as well. Even lasting popular culture items that have existed for several periods change and adjust to the values and preferences of the existing society. Indeed, popular culture can have an inclusionary role in society as it connects the masses around concepts of acceptable forms of behavior, allowing large heterogeneous masses of people to identify collectively (Moscovis, n.d., p.45).

In fact, popular culture and cinema (a cultural product that is mass-produced, distributed, and marketed for mass audiences) are reciprocally influenced. Movies are based on culture, and culture is influenced by movies, as the progress of film also leads to the development of culture. At the same time, movies can mirror the popular culture, beliefs, and values of every group in a given country or society. Therefore, they can communicate successfully and create an impact that cannot be created by any other media, as they combine visuals, movement, sound, theatre, and music, all in one single cultural product.

Movies are a communication channel for spreading vital information, with the goal of bringing transformations to society. Thus, information from television, films, and mass media in general has impacted considerably on how people spend their lives. Particularly the film industry has grown rapidly and has brought a lot of changes for humanity, as films are produced not only for entertainment purposes but also contain messages that are sometimes not immediately realized by the audience.

Certainly, the relationship between movies and culture involves a complicated dynamic. While American movies influence the mass culture that consumes them, they are also an essential part of that culture, a product of it, and therefore a reflection of established concerns, attitudes, and beliefs. In the relationship concerning film and culture, it is vital to consider that, while certain ideologies may be predominant in a certain time, American culture is as diverse as the populations that form it and is also continuously changing from one period to the other.

During the Cold War, movies not only mirrored the conflict between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. but also influenced how the mass audiences and political actors in both these territories understood the conflict. Cold War propaganda always promoted the benefits of one political system and/or criticized and demonized the other. The war was not only a

military conflict but also a universal struggle of ideologies. Thus, choreographed mass media campaigns, clandestine psychological operations, and cultural infiltration programs were amongst the favorite weapons. Yet, it is still important to consider that the movies produced during this period aren't all completely propaganda. But as diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. worsened, Hollywood rapidly established a set of anti-communist values and discourses to validate and justify that deterioration. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union vilified the other country, which contributed to cultural stereotypes that were massified into action movies and still persist nowadays.

In this train of thought, the three movies of the "Rambo" franchise produced in the 1980s decade - "First Blood" (1982), "Rambo: First Blood Part II" (1985), and "Rambo III" (1988) - can be considered as propaganda tools, and there are several reasons to sustain this position. To begin with, the "American hero", who especially thrived during the 80s, is represented by Rambo's character, who became the U.S.'s most important cinematic Cold War icon, as the character depicted American morality and heroism in the face of a Soviet threat. When faced with a threat, Rambo always chose to overcome and put aside his personal feelings to do the right thing. Therefore, Stallone personified American heroism and the values of sacrifice, hard work, and a commitment to achieving moral good. These heroic qualities were related to the traditional American values, which encouraged patriotism and a sense of moral superiority. It is implied here that, as if America was the hero, America could do no harm. Besides, Rambo's physical appearance also carries symbolism, representing the military force of American foreign policy that Reagan adopted in the 80s. The movies were also shown to soldiers in the Middle East to boost their spirits and determination and became a vehicle for valorizing American soldiers in foreign lands, as well as an emblem of moral and muscular dominance. Also, Rambo's ability to use diverse fighting strategies and guns, such as guerrilla tactics or the use of bow and arrow, for instance, demonstrates the character's ease with several types of weapons and ways of fighting. Therefore, Sylvester Stallone's character became a true symbol of the 80^s American cinematography, depicting elements such as bravery, individualism, masculinity, and the importance of sacrifice for justice.

Another Cold War propaganda reference is the use of the Vietnam War as the background of the two first movies, and the fact that John Rambo himself is a Green Beret and Vietnam veteran. Moreover, it is important to consider that the Vietnam War was one of the main political reasons why Ronald Reagan became president. According to Reagan and the Republican congressional candidates, America became fragile due to the threats from the

Soviet Union, in the aftermath of the defeat of the US in the Vietnam War. Although not explicitly set against the Soviets, “First Blood” portrays the negative effect that the war had on American veterans and the poor treatment they received back in America, as well as the fact that John Rambo still is the typical American white heroic Vietnam veteran, despite being at odds with his government and people.

In “First Blood: part II”, there is an evident propaganda scene when Rambo is captured by Podovsky and is forced to admit to his headquarters that he was held for espionage. This situation alludes to the importance and magnitude of espionage during the Cold War. It also presented an opportunity for Rambo to fight the Soviets, representing the actual diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Vietnam, no matter how unrealistic it was to see Russians called in to interrogate an American prisoner.

The film also portrays Vietnam as a horrific country, emphasizing the tortures perpetrated by the Vietcong soldiers, and spreading the message that Russia was conspiring with the Vietnamese government to imprison innocent Americans.

The Afghan War is also used as a propaganda element, but the villains of this movie continue to be the Soviets. “Rambo III” demeans the Soviet Union, portraying the situation in which the Soviets were still killing people in Afghanistan while, at the same time, talking about peace and disarmament with the U.S. Several scenes of Rambo shooting down Soviet helicopters occur, representing American power and patriotism. Indeed, the Soviet state itself became a character, described as a war machine, with the ability to consume whole weaker nations. Besides, an American hero helping the Mujahideen conveys hints of imperialism. Contrariwise, Afghan people are praised and presented as heroic people who are being destroyed by the evil empire (which changes in following copies of the film, due to the fact that this group, after the expulsion of the Soviets, would eventually form Al-Qaeda).

Lastly, the typical Cold War stereotype of the Soviets as enemies is another propaganda element that can be seen through characters such as Colonel Podovsky, Sergeant Yushin, Captain Vinh, and Lieutenant Tay. They portrayed soviet villains displaying emotionless, aggressive, sour, and violent, as well as vile, and ruthless qualities. Through these characters, the goal was to promote the idea that the U.S.S.R was the ultimate enemy.

Regarding the question proposed in the Introduction: “could Cinema during the Cold War be considered as a vehicle of intercultural communication?”, the answer is no.

To begin with, interculturalism involves moving beyond the passive acceptance of stereotypes and essentialist representations of the multiple cultures that exist in a society (Sandu & Lyamouri-Baija, 2018, p.17). Instead, interculturalism promotes dialogue and interaction between cultures. Intercultural communication corresponds to the study of communication across different cultures and social groups and describes the many communication processes and related issues among groups of individuals from varied cultural backgrounds (Arasaratnam, 2013, p.48).

Whether produced by a Hollywood corporation or a small-budget independent group, the film will provide insight into the cultural values and beliefs of the filmmakers and the places they are from or most familiar with. In intercultural communication, foreign films can provide insight for people from other countries into a country's history, heritage, and elements of culture that make that country unique. But viewers must be careful, as not all films about a country can be regarded as true representations. Hollywood producers have the tendency to make many films about other countries and their history, and these films potentially contain engrained preconceptions within. Also, films may be one-sided if taking on political issues within the country. In this regard, films need to be viewed with a critical eye and viewers need to be aware that what they are watching is not an absolute truth, but rather a reality perceived by the filmmakers. This can lead to misrepresentations and misunderstandings of culture resulting in possible stereotypes and generalizations (Hansen, 2011).

And this is what happens when it comes to Cold War cinema, due to its use as a propaganda tool. During this period, the majority of the films reflected the constant conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and also modeled how the mass audiences and political actors in both states understood the conflict. It is also to consider that many Cold War Americans had never met a Russian person before, and so their entire experience with Russian culture was based on what they saw in the media, meaning that, for the most, films from this period were not just a mirror of society's views, but also their primary source. Therefore, American movies were instruments against communism and tried to demonize the Soviet Union, whilst Soviet movies tried to vilify capitalism as well as the U.S.

Moreover, the dominant theme in both states was the fear of invasion and the use of nuclear weapons. Besides, American films portrayed the Soviets as terrorizing villains, while further demonizing communism.

Consequently, Cinema during the Cold War contributed to the development and consolidation of stereotypes that preserved certain values held within society, centered on a model of 'good' *versus* 'evil', always contributing to the hostility between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.

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