Article

The Influence of War on the Evolution and Themes of Ukrainian Cinema

Nadiia Bondarets[1], **Volodymyr Danyliuk**[1], **Tetiana Zhuravliova**[2], **Oleksii Nosenko**[1], **& Artem Parokonnyi**[1]

[1]Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts and [2]I. K. Karpenko-Karyi Kyiv National University of Theatre, Cinema and Television

Correspondence: nadiiabondarets@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examines the impact of war on the evolution of cinema, focusing on its functions, themes, and technical aspects, with a particular emphasis on Ukrainian cinema amid the Russian-Ukrainian war. It analyzes Soviet and contemporary Ukrainian war and post-war films to identify trends in cinema as a tool of historical memory, propaganda, and humanitarian discourse. The research includes both feature and documentary films across genres such as drama, psychological thriller, and disaster films. Findings reveal that war transforms cinema into a medium for propaganda, public mobilization, and sentiment shaping. Modern films, particularly Ukrainian productions, extend beyond these functions, serving as a platform for depicting the realities of war, addressing humanitarian concerns, and exploring psychological challenges. Ukrainian cinema demonstrates a distinct genre diversity, addressing the traumatic consequences of war, the challenges of social adaptation faced by both military personnel and civilians, and the transmission of the emotional experiences of its protagonists. Documentary films hold a special significance, capturing events, creating an archive of historical memory, and offering a deeper understanding of the conflict through an objective lens. Feature films, in contrast, delve into moral dilemmas and the collective wartime experience. Ukrainian cinema is increasingly gaining international attention through global film festivals, which spotlight the war and foster global solidarity. The study concludes that post-war cinema holds potential for exploring themes of national reconstruction, rehabilitation, and social adaptation. Overall, cinema emerges as a powerful medium for cultural revival and preserving historical memory in societies shaped by military conflict.

Keywords: documentary, ideology, narrative, national identity, post-traumatic stress disorder, reintegration of veterans

Introduction

The study of the role of cinema in depicting military conflicts is becoming increasingly relevant, as cinema serves as a powerful medium for influencing public opinion, preserving historical memory, and fostering an understanding of tragic events. The issue addressed by this study arises from the fact that modern wars present new challenges for both society and art, particularly the film industry. In the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, the examination of Ukrainian cinema has gained special significance, as cinema has become an essential tool for documenting events and garnering international support for Ukraine. At the same time, there is a need to systematize existing research and address gaps in understanding the impact of war on the evolution of genres, themes, and strategic approaches in filmmaking.

For example, Slocum (2023) analyzed Hollywood's role in portraying military conflicts, focusing on cinema as a tool for fostering patriotic sentiments. Slocum highlighted the significance of heroic narratives that promote societal cohesion and create a positive image of the military. However, this analysis did not sufficiently explore the nuanced perception of war among different social groups. Similarly, Short (2021) conducted a detailed study of propaganda in World War II cinema, examining the influence of films on mass consciousness and population mobilization. However, Short's research did not address modern documentary filmmaking techniques, which provide a deeper exploration of the emotional dimensions of war experiences. Additionally, Nornes & Yukio (2021) investigated the interplay between Japanese and American cinema, focusing on the cultural context of World War II. While their study offered valuable insights, it did not consider the transformations in cinematic genres brought about by modern conflicts.

Fernández-Montesinos (2023) analyzed how concepts of war are embodied in cinema through symbolic imagery and metaphors that reflect profound cultural and philosophical ideas. Particular attention is given to understanding war as a universal phenomenon capable of transforming societal values and shaping historical memory. However, the research primarily focuses on a theoretical level, leaving a gap in exploring the practical aspects of how these concepts are implemented in contemporary films addressing current military conflicts. Marshall (2022) investigated the aesthetics of asymmetric warfare, examining how modern cinema interprets emerging forms of conflict in the twenty-first century. The study highlights innovative narrative and visual techniques that push the boundaries of traditional depictions of military events.

Nevertheless, the role of documentary filmmaking is underexplored, particularly its function as a medium not only for reflecting reality but also for

preserving historical truth. Berman (2023a), in analyzing the works of Serhiy Loznytsia, explored the cinematic portrayal of the Russian-Ukrainian war, underscoring the significance of Loznytsia's films in understanding the conflict's context. Despite the in-depth analysis, the study focuses on the local impact of these works, neglecting the potential of Ukrainian cinema to generate international support and influence through global platforms.

Ukrainian cinema is increasingly becoming a pivotal research subject, as it plays a critical role in shaping national identity and fostering cultural dialogue. Alforova et al. (2021) examined the integration of Ukrainian films into the European cinematic space, highlighting their participation in international festivals and the development of new collaborations. However, the authors primarily concentrated on cultural interactions, overlooking the internal transformations within Ukrainian film production.

Of particular interest is documentary filmmaking, which Marchenko (2023) explored. The author concentrated on historical themes that dominate films from the independent period, highlighting their role in preserving memory. However, the study does not address the evolution of modern documentary cinema, which increasingly focuses on contemporary social challenges and transformations. Similarly, Rosinska & Tymińska (2023) examined strategic narratives in documentary films, particularly those centered on the 2022 war. Their detailed analysis focused on methods for creating films aimed at an international audience, but artistic genres fell outside the scope of their research.

The cultural context of cinema was examined by Shlikhar (2020), who analyzed its role in the struggle for historical memory between Russia and Ukraine. While the study centers on cultural warfare, it does not consider cinema's potential as a tool for fostering understanding. Meanwhile, Khardel et al. (2020) explored the role of cinema in information warfare, identifying it as a powerful medium for influencing historical consciousness. However, their research primarily emphasized propaganda aspects, neglecting cinema's broader social and artistic possibilities.

These studies provide a substantial knowledge base but leave several questions unanswered regarding the impact of war on the genre diversity, thematic evolution, and international significance of Ukrainian cinema. This study seeks to address these gaps by focusing on the transformation of Ukrainian cinema under the influence of war, its international role, and potential directions for future development.

This study aims to analyze the changes in themes, genre spectrum, and the role of Ukrainian cinema during wartime. To achieve this goal, the following objectives were set: to investigate the impact of war on the development of Ukrainian cinema,

including changes in thematic and genre priorities, the expansion of film production, and the emergence of new approaches to filmmaking; to analyze how cinema portrays the realities of modern military conflict, with particular attention to war dramas, documentaries, and the psychological dimensions related to the societal consequences of war; to determine the international role of Ukrainian cinema, focusing on its participation in global film festivals, the production of films for foreign audiences, and its ability to attract international support for the development of the film industry.

Methodology

The research employed an interdisciplinary approach, combining historical and cultural analysis, content analysis of films, thematic analysis of narratives, and comparative analysis of cinematic traditions across different countries. The primary objects of the study were films influenced by war events and literature addressing cinema in conflict situations. The research encompassed the cinema of Soviet and modern Ukraine while also considering global trends in the cinematic depiction of war.

The following films were selected for analysis:

1. Ukrainian Soviet Cinema: *"Ukraine in Fire"* (1943) by O. Dovzhenko, *"Shchors"* (1939) by O. Dovzhenko, *"Ukrainian Melodies"* (1945) by I. Zemgano and I. Ignatovych, *"Secret Agent"* (1947) by B. Barnet, *"Marina's Destiny"* (1953) by V. Ivchenko and I. Shmaruk, *"Spring on Zarechnaya Street"* (1956) by F. Mironer and M. Khutsiev, *"Chronicle of Flaming Years"* (1960) by Y. Solntseva, *"Only 'Old Men' Are Going into Battle"* (1973) by L. Bykov, *"One-Two, Soldiers Were Going... "* (1976) by L. Bykov, *"Two Soldiers"* (1943) by L. Lukov.

2. Contemporary Ukrainian Cinema: *"Atlantis"* (2019) by V. Vasyanovych, *"Donbas"* (2018) by S. Loznitsa, *"Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die"* (2017) by A. Seitablaev, *"Homeward"* (2019) by N. Aliyev, *"This Rain Will Never Stop"* (2020) by A. Gorlova, *"Bad Roads"* (2020) by N. Vorozhbyt, *"Klondike"* (2022) by M. Er Gorbach, *"Rhino"* (2021) by O. Sentsov, *"Women in War"* (2017) by M. Kondakova. *"War Note"* (2020) by R. Lyubiy, *"Call Sign Banderas"* (2018) by Z. Buadze, *"Invisible Battalion"* (2017) by S. Lishchynska, A. Gorlova, and I. Tsylyk, *"The Tribe"* (2014) by M. Slaboshpytskyi, *"The Guide"* (2014) by O. Sanin, *"My Grandmother Fanny Kaplan"* (2016) by O. Demyanenko, *"Pamfir"* (2023) by D. Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, *"My Thoughts Are Quiet"* (2019) by A. Lukich, *"Stop-Zemlia"* (2021) by K. Gornostai, *"Mavka. The Forest Song"* (2023) by O. Malamuzh and O. Ruban, *"Slovo"* House: Unfinished Novel (2024) by T. Tomenko, *"Crazy Wedding"* (2018) by V. Klimchuk.

The films were selected based on their thematic and cultural significance, aligning with the purpose of the study. A qualitative content analysis of the films was conducted to systematize the data. Each film was analyzed in terms of its themes,

genre characteristics, symbolism, and its portrayal of the impact of war on society. Thematic analysis of narratives was utilized to identify key ideas reflecting the psychological and social consequences of war, humanitarian challenges, and the role of cinema in shaping public sentiment.

The literature for the study was selected using leading scientific databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. The search was performed using the following keywords: *"war and cinema", "war films", "psychological effects of war in cinema", "Ukrainian cinema", "war propaganda in film", "historical memory in cinematography", "documentary films about war",* and *"Ukrainian Soviet films about the war".* The inclusion criteria for the sample of scientific articles, monographs, and dissertations were publications in English or Ukrainian from 2020 to the present, addressing the evolution of cinema during wartime and its social, cultural, and psychological aspects. Materials that were not peer-reviewed, contained duplicated information, or were superficial were excluded from the sample. At the initial stage of the search, 150 scientific sources were identified that met the basic requirements. After applying the selection criteria, the sample was narrowed to 32 sources. These works were included in the final analysis, providing a robust foundation for substantiating the research results.

At the initial stage, a historical analysis of the development of cinema in the context of wars was conducted. This analysis identified the stages of transformation in the functions and themes of cinema. The examination of Soviet Ukrainian films considered their themes, directorial approaches, and ideological context, reflecting both public sentiment and state policies. Key films were selected to represent various stages in the development of cinema, particularly its role in shaping historical memory and constructing heroic narratives.

The next stage focused on analyzing the genre and thematic approaches of modern Ukrainian cinema, highlighting the unique aspects of the Ukrainian experience. The final stage centered on the role of Ukrainian films in the international context, including their participation in global film festivals and their contribution to shaping humanitarian discourse.

A study of the context of film production complemented content analysis and thematic analysis methods. It included examining the involvement of state and international resources and the contributions of new directors and screenwriters. This approach uncovered the relationship between war and creative innovations within the cinematic field. Particular attention was devoted to the social and psychological consequences of war depicted in the films, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, the reintegration of veterans, and the struggles faced by the civilian population.

Results

The Evolution of War Themes in Cinema: From a Propaganda Tool to a Means of Humanitarian Understanding

The early stages of the film industry's development marked the emergence of cinema as a significant artistic and social phenomenon. At the end of the 19th century, the inventions of the Lumière brothers in France and Thomas Edison in the United States initiated the development of cinema as a new visual art form (Dumbrăveanu, 2021; Donnelly, 2020). Cinema quickly established itself as an influential social phenomenon, enabling the dissemination of ideas to the public. For instance, in the Russian Empire, even before the revolution, films gained popularity because they offered ordinary people the opportunity to see scenes from other cities and countries – experiences often inaccessible to the average viewer. Similarly, the development of cinema as a social phenomenon can be observed in the United States, where, during the 1910s, the entertainment film industry began to evolve into a powerful enterprise based in Hollywood (Cobb, 2020).

The First World War profoundly influenced cinema, altering its themes and functions, particularly in the context of war, as a socially significant phenomenon. With the outbreak of hostilities, cinema emerged as a potent propaganda tool, employed by governments to maintain public morale, attract recruits, and shape perceptions of the enemy. Britain and France were among the first to recognize cinema's value as an instrument of influence (Betts, 2023; Anthony, 2024; Xuereb, 2023). Governments actively funded the production of propaganda films, portraying Allied troops as heroic figures fighting for justice and peace (Koniratbay et al., 2023).

The impact of war on cinema led to the development of new filming and editing techniques that enhanced the ability to convey the tragedy of war. Cinematographers employed increased frame rates and dynamic scenes, enabling viewers to immerse themselves more deeply in the on-screen events (Howard, 2020). By the end of the First World War, cinema had evolved from a source of entertainment to a powerful medium of emotional and political influence, shaping public sentiment and fostering a deeper understanding of the tragedy of war.

World War II marked a period when cinema assumed a crucial role as a tool of influence, extending far beyond its entertainment function. In many countries, including the United States, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Great Britain, and Germany, the film industry became subordinated to war propaganda needs (Spytska, 2023a). War films emerged as the dominant genre, with governments aiming to depict not only the events of the war but also the ideological foundations of the struggle and the necessity of unity against the enemy. Following the end of World War II, cinema underwent significant transformations, gradually shifting from a propaganda instrument to a platform for critical reflection on war and its consequences (Spytska, 2023c). This period saw the emergence of films that moved

away from glorifying soldiers and military actions, instead focusing on the tragedy of war and the profound psychological trauma it inflicted on millions of lives. These films began to portray the realities of war, not just its external heroism but also the moral dilemmas, fears, and guilt experienced by those who fought on the front lines (Kalmár, 2020).

The cinema of Soviet Ukraine held a prominent position within the ideological system of the Soviet Union, functioning as a powerful propaganda tool. The theme of war, particularly in Ukrainian cinema, became a central focus, as authorities used it to promote ideals of heroism, patriotism, and ideological loyalty (Table 1). Films from this period depicted World War II events and constructed the official narrative of the "Great Patriotic War" as a heroic struggle by the Soviet people against fascism. Ukrainian cinema played a key role in this process, benefiting from significant material and technical resources, particularly at the Kyiv and Odessa film studios (Hicks and Machulin, 2024). War films from this era frequently highlighted the heroism of Soviet soldiers, their sacrifices for victory, and the unity of the peoples of the USSR. For instance, the film Ukraine in Fire was among the first to attempt to portray the tragedy of war on Ukrainian territory. However, its content was heavily adapted to meet the demands of censorship.

Table 1. Ukrainian Soviet Films Dealing with War Themes and the Consequences of the War

Movie title	Year of release	Director	Brief analysis
Shchors	1939	O. Dovzhenko	A historical and revolutionary drama portraying the struggle for establishing Soviet power in Ukraine through the character of Commander Shchors, the film idealizes heroism.
Ukraine in Fire	1943	O. Dovzhenko	The film highlights the tragic consequences of Ukraine's occupation during World War II, with a focus on the suffering of the civilian population.
Ukrainian Melodies	1945	I. Zemgano and I. Ignatovych	A musical film that uses lyrical narratives to depict the restoration of peace after World War II, highlighting the unity of the Soviet people
Secret Agent	1947	B. Barnet	A spy drama portraying the actions of a Soviet intelligence officer in occupied territories, the film underscore's themes of patriotism and loyalty to the state.
Marina's Destiny	1953	V. Ivchenko and I. Shmaruk	A psychological drama about a woman's arduous journey during the war, in which she loses her family but finds the strength to rebuild her life
Spring on Zarechnaya Street	1956	F. Mironer and M. Khutsiev	A social and domestic drama depicting the initial steps of recovery after the war, focusing on the restoration of human relationships and work

Chronicle of Flaming Years	1960	Y. Solntseva	An epic film about the heroism of the Soviet people during World War II, based on a story by Oleksandr Dovzhenko
Only "Old Men" are Going into Battle	1973	L. Bykov	A drama about front-line aviation during World War II, blending the heroism and tragedy of everyday military life through the character of a squadron commander
One-Two, Soldiers Were Going...	1976	L. Bykov	A drama focusing on the tragedy of war losses and human destinies, depicting the strength of human unity in the face of the enemy

An important aspect of Ukrainian Soviet cinema was incorporating local context, including portraying Ukrainian heroes and reflecting national characteristics. In films such as "Two Soldiers", an attempt can be seen to showcase the multinational composition of the Soviet army, including Ukrainians, as an integral part of the victory over fascism. This approach contributed to forming a positive image of Soviet power among the Ukrainian population.

After the war, the themes of cinema shifted towards a reflection on its consequences. For instance, *"Secret Agent"* explores the moral dilemmas and complexities spies face during wartime. This film became a key example of using military themes to construct the image of the Soviet person as a moral and ideological hero. Simultaneously, the focus shifted to depicting peaceful life after the war, an important theme in restoring public confidence in the Soviet system. Cinema also highlighted the participation of civilians in the war, particularly women, children, and older individuals who remained on the home front. Films like *"Chronicle of Flaming Years"* not only showcased the heroism of soldiers but also emphasized the sacrifices made by the civilian population, reinforcing the idea of the unity of the front and rear as the foundation of victory.

Additionally, the Soviet system actively used cinema to shape historical memory (Sheikh, 2014). Through film, an official narrative of the war was crafted, designed to consolidate the heroism of the Soviet people in the public consciousness and justify the sacrifices made for victory (Demesinova, 2024). Ukrainian films played a significant role in this process, demonstrating Ukraine's contribution to the all-Soviet effort.

During the 1960s and 1970s, war themes remained significant, but elements of more complex analysis began to emerge in cinema. For instance, in *"Only 'Old Men' Are Going into Battle"* (1973) by L. Bykov, the drama of front-line life is depicted through a blend of tragic and comedic elements. This approach allowed the film to bring cinema closer to the real experience of war while still preserving its ideological component.

Modern cinema demonstrates new trends in understanding and portraying war, focusing on the humanitarian aspects of conflict and human stories that extend beyond the scope of military hostilities. The documentary genre has gained

prominence, as technological advancements enable filmmakers to present the realities of war more directly, with minimal interference in depicting events (Aubakirova, 2015; Auanasova et al., 2024). Documentary films on war have become a crucial means of preserving historical memory and raising awareness of humanitarian crises (Kushenova et al., 2025; Zhussip et al., 2020; Yerdembekov et al., 2025). Modern filmmaking techniques have also significantly impacted the genre of war films, introducing new levels of realism. Handheld cameras, documentary-style filming, and advanced special effects create an immersive experience, allowing viewers to feel the presence of soldiers and civilians in conflict zones (Marchenko, 2023).

In addition to realism, contemporary cinema increasingly focuses on humanitarian aspects, such as psychological trauma, civilian casualties, and the impact of war on local communities (El-Jaichi & Sheikh, 2020). The new generation of films not only emphasizes action but also explores the characters' emotional experiences, their relationships with their families, and the moral dilemmas they face during war.

The Development of Ukrainian Cinema During the Russian-Ukrainian War

The war in Ukraine has brought about significant changes in Ukrainian cinema in terms of subject matter and the organization of production processes. Above all, films dedicated to military events and people's lives during the war have emerged. Ukrainian filmmakers have actively engaged with modern realities, capturing both the heroism of the military and the tragic experiences of civilians. This increase in military-themed films is a cultural phenomenon and a social response to events that have radically transformed the country and its citizens (Briukhovetska, 2023).

The shift in film production priorities has spurred the inclusion of new specialists in the industry. Young directors and screenwriters are eager to express their vision of the war, portraying it through the stories of ordinary people. Films such as Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die (2017) by A. Seitablaev, which tells the story of the defenders of Donetsk airport, highlight their resilience and patriotism. Like many others, this film has become a milestone in Ukrainian cinema, drawing attention to real events and emphasizing the significance of national identity. At the same time, state funding for film projects has expanded, supporting cultural initiatives crucial for forming a national spirit in wartime. The State Film Agency of Ukraine plays a key role in promoting the production of films on war and social themes, providing grants and organizing festivals to popularize Ukrainian cinema (Olzacka, 2024). The involvement of international funds has also become an important factor in this development: international organizations, particularly European ones, have financed numerous projects, recognizing the importance of supporting Ukrainian culture during the war.

The themes of Ukrainian films about the Russian-Ukrainian war deeply immerse the viewer in the realities of the modern conflict, portraying the lives of both military personnel and civilians who have become part of it. One of the central elements of this theme is the attempt to depict not only the fighting itself, but also the

psychological experiences of those on the front lines. The films cover a wide range of stories, from personal losses to everyday heroism, highlighting not only the physical but also the moral resilience of the Ukrainian people.

Often, the main characters are military personnel, for whom war becomes a part of everyday life. An important role in the disaster film genre is played by the film Atlantis (2019) by V. Vasyanovych, which depicts a future Ukraine attempting to recover from the war, mired in economic and ecological crises. In this film, post-apocalyptic imagery strongly intersects with themes of loss and survival. It portrays how war leaves a deep imprint on life even after active hostilities have ceased, forcing people to adapt to a new reality in which restoring everyday life seems nearly unattainable. In the psychological thriller Rhino (2021) by O. Sentsov, although the war acts merely as a backdrop, the mental consequences of the social problems arising in the shadow of the conflict are clearly revealed.

A significant place in Ukrainian cinema is occupied by documentaries that create a sense of real presence on the battlefield. Thanks to footage from the front lines and interviews with combatants, they allow viewers to grasp the accurate scale of the conflict. This genre also holds cultural and historical value, as it documents events and provides future generations with an important source of knowledge about the war. Directors take risks in filming this footage to authentically portray the ongoing events, which gives documentaries a special power to influence the viewer. Projects such as Women in War (2017) and War Note (2020) feature real footage from the front lines, where the heroes are real people who have personally experienced the war. These documentaries capture the events and the emotional state of the conflict's participants, including their fears, dreams, and aspirations.

Personal stories of people forced to change their lives due to the war are central to many Ukrainian war dramas. These films explore the emotional experiences of the protagonists, highlighting not only their courage but also the difficulties of making moral choices in times of conflict. They demonstrate how war forces people to confront psychological dilemmas, particularly in films that move away from glorifying war and instead focus on its horrors. This approach allows viewers to perceive the complex nature of these situations and better understand the cost of war. Another key theme is the stories of volunteers and civilians impacted by the war. Films such as Homeward (2019) by N. Aliyev address internal conflicts and pain outside of the fighting but are integral to the experience of war. This film reveals people's difficulties as they try to find their place in a world transformed by war.

The diversity of genres in Ukrainian cinema that address the theme of war highlights a multifaceted approach to depicting the war experience (Ivanytska et al., 2024). Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Ukrainian film industry has sought to cover various aspects of the war, from profound emotional experiences to social and cultural consequences. It enables it to attract a broad audience, with each genre offering a unique perspective, thereby deepening the understanding of the tragedy of war.

Destroyed cities and abandoned buildings are prominent images in disaster films that focus on illustrating the consequences of military actions on the civilian population and infrastructure (Kadataeva, 2022). In these films, directors craft powerful scenes emphasizing drama, often drawing the viewer closer to post-apocalyptic imagery. Here, war is portrayed not only as a destructive force for individuals but also as a national tragedy, heightening the sense of devastation and the threat posed to Ukrainian society (Kalinichenko, 2023).

A deep exploration of the inner experiences of war heroes is evident in psychological thrillers, where the focus is on moral conflicts and psychological trauma. The psychological aspects of the conflict, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder, emerge as key themes that directors explore through the stories of their protagonists (Efremov, 2025). This genre allows for a more profound understanding of the mental consequences of war, showing that its impact reaches far beyond the battlefield.

Ukrainian cinema increasingly addresses the psychological and social consequences of war, a crucial topic for understanding the long-term impact of conflict on society. One key aspect is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in veterans, which affects many combatants (Moore et al., 2021). Soldiers returning from the front lines face difficulties adapting to civilian life, as exemplified in the film *"Call Sign Banderas"* (2018) by Z. Buadze. The characters in this film demonstrate how the experience of war leaves a deep imprint on their psyche, affecting relationships with loved ones and their perception of reality.

Cinema also draws attention to veterans' social challenges after returning from the front. Soldiers accustomed to extreme conditions often feel "out of place" in a peaceful society (Spytska, 2023b). The films portray how veterans overcome these barriers, searching for new meaning in life and striving to find work that aligns with their changed needs.

An important theme in Ukrainian films is the hardship faced by the civilian population, who also experience stress and must adapt to life during wartime. The film "Donbas" (2018) by S. Loznitsa reveals the social tensions in regions under fire, illustrating how war penetrates people's everyday lives, fosters distrust between neighbors, and shifts values and attitudes. The impact of war on civilians is often depicted through a pervasive sense of insecurity and the challenges of adjusting to new conditions. The film "Invisible Battalion" (2017), which focuses on the role of women at the front, shows how war transforms the lives of soldiers and civilians, who are compelled to find new ways of surviving. This theme is crucial for understanding how war impacts the overall psychosocial structure of society.

International Support, Post-War Perspectives, and the Development of Non-War Themes in Ukrainian Cinema in a Time of War

Cinema is crucial in building international support for Ukraine, highlighting the realities of war for a global audience and serving as a cultural bridge between Ukrainian society and the international community. Films depicting wartime events

in Ukraine narrate the resilience of the people, their struggle for freedom, and their hope for a peaceful future. These films convey important messages to foreign audiences about the tragedy of war, which disrupts daily life and alters entire generations. As a result, the global community better understands the scale of the conflict and the humanitarian situation that demands urgent attention.

The presence of Ukrainian films at international film festivals further reinforces this support. Films such as *"Atlantis"* by V. Vasyanovych, which received recognition at the Venice Film Festival, and *"Donbas"* by S. Loznitsa, awarded at the Cannes Film Festival, help bring global attention to Ukraine through their distinctive approach to cinematic art ("Atlantis" by Valentin…, 2019; Ukrainian Film *"Donbas"* …, 2018). These films not only depict the events of the war but also explore the psychological state of Ukrainian society, using symbolic and sometimes experimental techniques to reflect the depth of the nation's experience.

In addition, international partners actively support Ukrainian filmmakers by providing financial and technical assistance to implement key projects. European organizations such as Eurimages and European Film Promotion, as well as individual countries and private foundations, allocate funds to finance Ukrainian films (About Eurimages – European…, 2025). This support contributes to creating new films and enables filmmakers to enhance their skills and exchange experiences with colleagues from other countries.

The international distribution of Ukrainian films is also significant, offering foreign audiences a deeper understanding of Ukraine. Films that cover wartime events, particularly documentaries, serve as *"messengers"* of Ukrainian truth, shedding light on real events and the experiences of those caught in the conflict zone. For instance, the film *"This Rain Will Never Stop"* (2020) by A. Gorlova garnered international recognition due to its unique style and in-depth analysis of the war's consequences. The participation of this film in international festivals contributes to shaping a more comprehensive understanding of Ukraine and its society in the context of conflict.

Through cinema, the international community can support Ukrainians not only with words but also with tangible actions. The collaboration of Ukrainian filmmakers with foreign counterparts helps raise awareness of the situation in Ukraine, and financial assistance ensures the creation of new films that continue to inform and remind the world of this conflict. Cinema, therefore, becomes a powerful tool of diplomacy, amplifying the voice of Ukrainians and ensuring it is heard far beyond the country's borders, resonating with viewers around the globe (Bakirov & Petrenko, 2023).

Ukrainian films created during the war that focus on non-military topics are crucial in supporting national culture and preserving the creative spirit, even under challenging conditions (Table 2). At a time when cinema often centers on conflict, these films offer an opportunity to uphold other social and cultural values, helping to preserve and strengthen national identity. They reflect the everyday lives and current

challenges faced by Ukrainians, addressing social issues that remain significant regardless of the political climate.

Table 2. Ukrainian Films of Various Genres, Released in 2014-2024

Year	Movie title	Genre	Director	Short description
2014	The Tribe	Drama	M. Slaboshpytskyi	The story of a deaf or hard-of-hearing teenager who joins a criminal organization at a boarding school
2014	The Guide	Historical drama	O. Sanin	An American boy becomes a guide for a blind kobzar during the repressions of the 1930s in Ukraine.
2016	My Grandmother Fanny Kaplan	Biographical drama	O. Demyanenko	Biography of Fanny Kaplan, known for her attempted assassination of Lenin
2017	Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die	Military drama	A. Seitablaev	A story about the defense of Donetsk airport by the Ukrainian military in 2014
2018	Donbas	Drama	S. Loznitsa	A series of short stories about life in the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine
2019	My Thoughts are Quiet	Comedy, drama	A. Lukich	A sound engineer goes on an expedition with his mother to record the sounds of rare animals.
2020	Atlantis	Drama	V. Vasyanovych	A post-apocalyptic story about life in Donbas after the future victory of Ukraine
2021	Rhino	Crime drama	O. Sentsov	The story of a former gangster who tries to change his life
2022	Klondike	Drama	M. Gorbach	The events unfold during the MH17 crash in Donbas, focusing on a pregnant woman.
2023	Pamfir	Drama	D. Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk	A man returns to his family and is faced with the need to return to his criminal past.
2023	Mavka. The Forest Song	Animation, fantasy	O. Malamuzh and O. Ruban	An animated adaptation of Lesia Ukrainka's work about the love of Mavka and Lukash
2024	"Slovo" House: Unfinished Novel	Documentary drama	T. Tomenko	The history of the "Slovo" house in Kharkiv and its residents, Ukrainian artists of the 1920s-1930s

One of the main features of these films is their focus on human stories and issues that resonate with a broad audience. For instance, the film "Pamfir" (2023) by D. Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk explores the protagonist's difficult choice in a small Ukrainian town. The film addresses family relationships, moral responsibility, and preserving traditions in modern society. Although its plot is not centred around military actions, the film still conveys the importance of national values and cultural roots.

Another example is *"Stop-Zemlia"* (2021) by K. Gornostai, which delves into the experiences of teenagers in contemporary Ukraine. The film focuses on themes such

as growing up, the search for identity, and friendship, while also addressing the challenges the younger generation faces. This film has gained popularity among young audiences and adults, who appreciate seeing how modern Ukrainian directors portray the lives of young Ukrainians, paying attention to their social and psychological struggles. In difficult times for the country, comedies and dramas are significant, helping Ukrainians maintain a sense of humor, make sense of life's difficulties, and find hope even in challenging circumstances. Comedies serve as a form of psychological relief and a means of supporting morale. They often engage with the realities of everyday life, adding lightness and irony, which helps viewers momentarily escape from the trauma of war and view life from a more positive perspective. For example, the Crazy Wedding series, with its good-natured humor, has become popular for its exploration of traditions, relationships, and family values – topics that remain relevant for Ukrainians, even during a crisis.

Drama films, conversely, delve deeper into Ukrainian society's social and psychological challenges. As a genre, drama allows filmmakers to explore various aspects of life, including personal tragedies, interpersonal relationships, and the difficulties arising from social change (An et al., 2024). For example, *"Bad Roads"* (2020) by N. Vorozhbyt is a collection of stories that portray people's lives in eastern Ukraine, depicting situations where each character confronts moral and emotional dilemmas.

Films in the melodrama and romantic comedy also find their audience, allowing viewers to experience joy and hope even in difficult times. Romantic stories or humorous adventures offer a brief escape from hardship, providing emotional uplift and brightness. For instance, the melodrama *"My Thoughts Are Quiet"* (2019) by A. Lukich skillfully blends humor and sincerity, telling the story of a young sound engineer and his mother who embark on a journey through Ukraine. It is a light yet touching narrative about a family, helping to reveal national values and the unique Ukrainian spirit.

It is anticipated that after the war, Ukrainian cinema will undergo significant changes in content and structure (Olzacka, 2024). The theme of reconstruction will become central in many films, exploring not only the physical rebuilding of the country but also the profound social, cultural, and emotional transformations of society. The war has left a deep mark on the minds of Ukrainians, so future films may focus on how the country grapples with the aftermath of the conflict and strives to restore its identity.

Ukrainian films' themes will address trauma and the strength of spirit and national revival. It is expected that directors will create films that reflect the process of reintegrating veterans into civilian life, reconstruct destroyed cities, search for justice, and restore truth (Ivanytska et al., 2024). Screenwriters may focus on the personal stories of those who have experienced loss, while also celebrating national symbols and places that became iconic during the war. These films will help preserve the memory of the war's events, creating an archive of national remembrance for future generations.

In addition, the future development of Ukrainian cinema will likely include an expansion of genre diversity. After the war, Ukrainian cinema may incorporate new genres, such as films about rehabilitation and cultural revival. There may also be growing interest in psychological and historical thrillers that tackle the complex issues of reconstruction and social adaptation. Documentaries with a humanitarian focus will continue to explore themes of loss, victory, and recovery, highlighting the Ukrainian people's capacity for rebirth and resilience.

Some initiatives and films are already hinting at the direction Ukrainian cinema will take after the war. For example, the development of the film industry during wartime through projects such as *"Culture for Change"* and *"House of Europe"* demonstrates that, even in times of crisis, Ukrainian filmmakers can create competitive projects. As a result, after the war, with even more opportunities, this industry will be poised to flourish.

Discussions

The study's results indicate that wars significantly influence the evolution of cinema, transforming its functions, themes, and technical aspects. War, as a large-scale social phenomenon, has prompted the transformation of cinema from an entertainment medium into a powerful tool of ideological influence. For example, Iordan (2018) examined front-line footage and propaganda films during the First World War, highlighting their mobilization function. Films from that period played a key role in shaping patriotic sentiments and maintaining the fighting spirit among the population. These observations align with the conclusions of this study, which emphasize the importance of cinema as a potent tool of ideological influence during wartime. However, modern cinema demonstrates a more multifaceted role in conflicts. The study results suggest that war is no longer solely associated with propaganda; it now drives cinema to preserve historical memory, highlight humanitarian aspects, and create a space for critical reflection. Documentaries, in particular, have become an important means of recording events as they unfold and transmitting testimonies to future generations (Petkov, V. 2025). This perspective, however, is only partially addressed in Iordan's work, which primarily focuses on the ideological function of cinema, leaving its humanitarian role underexplored. Thus, modern cinema has expanded its functions, offering a new approach to reflecting conflicts through the lens of human stories and collective experiences.

The psychological and social consequences of war have become central to contemporary Ukrainian cinema, as reflected in numerous films about the Russian-Ukrainian war (Stępniewski, 2024). Ukrainian filmmakers explore how war affects people's psyches, focusing on post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional turmoil, and the moral dilemmas faced by soldiers and civilians (Krymets et al., 2025). Berman (2023b) analyzed the portrayal of the soldier as both victim and aggressor in war films, emphasizing the internal conflict of characters struggling to reconcile a sense of duty with moral principles. This approach aligns with the findings of this study, which

revealed themes like those in Ukrainian films. However, unlike Berman's analysis, contemporary Ukrainian cinema focuses not only on individual destinies but also on the collective experience of society. Filmmakers frequently depict communities' collective struggle, resilience, and ability to support one another (Khan et al., 2025). These films reflect national traumas while emphasizing the desire to restore social harmony. It distinguishes Ukrainian cinema from B. Berman's conclusions, which primarily concentrate on individual conflicts, leaving the social dimension largely unexplored.

The ideological component of interwar cinema, which was studied in detail by Bezruchko et al. (2020), proved to be a key factor in forming national identity. During this period, cinema was actively employed as a tool for influencing society, reflecting key political ideas through powerful symbolic imagery that not only conveyed the values of the time but also served as a means of uniting communities. According to the authors' conclusions, such films reflect universal ideas of freedom, equality, and national unity, creating a mythology that shaped collective consciousness. The results of this study confirm that Ukrainian wartime cinema also actively promoted national ideas, but with a focus on local aspects. Themes of the struggle to preserve language, culture, and independence became central narratives, which were not always framed within a broader international context. This emphasis on local issues highlights a significant difference in focus: Ukrainian cinema concentrated on reflecting the specifics of the national experience. At the same time, the study by Bezruchko et al. primarily analyses general trends in the cinema of the interwar period. This comparison underscores the unique role of Ukrainian cinema as a vital tool for preserving and popularizing national identity in the face of historical challenges.

Ukrainian cinema during the war significantly expanded its international reach, actively participating in world film festivals and drawing global attention to the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Rexhepi et al., 2023). The participation of Ukrainian films in events such as the Cannes, Berlin, and Venice Film Festivals not only increases awareness of the situation in Ukraine but also fosters cultural dialogue between countries. Ladygina (2022) examined the hybridity of Ukrainian films, particularly their ability to integrate documentary and artistic elements to convey the multifaceted nature of war. However, the results of this study offer a broader perspective, focusing on the cultural function of cinema, which contributes to the formation of national identity within an international context. It highlights that Ukrainian films not only convey the truth about the war but also represent the uniqueness of Ukrainian culture, thereby strengthening its presence on the global stage. This approach was not central to Ladygina's study, which primarily focused on technological and media aspects.

The genre diversity of Ukrainian cinema is a key characteristic of contemporary cinema, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the complexities of war and its consequences (Putiatytska et al., 2024). Documentaries, psychological thrillers, dramas, and even genres that go beyond traditional formats create a multidimensional

view of the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Szymański's (2020) analysis, which focused on using genre approaches to depict the Spanish Civil War, highlighted how cinema can reveal complex social and political issues. A similar multifaceted approach is evident in the results of this study, which demonstrate how various genres of Ukrainian cinema contribute to a deeper understanding of the experience of war. Documentary filmmaking occupies a special place in modern Ukrainian cinema, preserving historical memory and providing an accurate account of events (Pylypiv et al., 2025). It becomes a means of transmitting information and a way of shaping national identity, allowing dramatic war events to be recorded for future generations. This aspect was not sufficiently addressed in Szymański's work, which primarily focused on artistic genres. At the same time, in addition to documentaries, Ukrainian cinema also develops psychological thrillers that explore the inner worlds of characters caught in the chaos of war and dramas that focus on social and moral dilemmas. It highlights the versatility of Ukrainian cinema and its capacity to reveal individual and collective experiences.

The prospects for developing Ukrainian cinema after the war present significant opportunities for its transformation into a powerful tool for cultural revival. Shumylovych (2023) emphasized that cinema in wartime contributes to the preservation of national culture and aids society in adapting to the challenges posed by conflict. The results of this study confirm this thesis, highlighting that cinema can play a cultural and social role, contributing to the formation of new social bonds and strengthening collective identity. A special emphasis is placed on the role of cinema in the reintegration of veterans, the restoration of destroyed communities, and the documentation of the processes involved in rebuilding the country. An important prospect is the genre expansion of Ukrainian cinema. In particular, the development of themes related to the rehabilitation of society, the study of cultural revival, and social adaptation is anticipated. In the future, Ukrainian filmmakers can create films that address the complex issues of national recovery, including the psychological aspects of transitioning back to a peaceful life. It adds depth to Shumylovych's conclusions, emphasizing the potential of cinema not only as a means of reflecting war but also as a mechanism for shaping a positive future.

The significance of the results of this study lies in the fact that they not only underscore the role of cinema as a tool for reflecting war but also reveal its potential as a cultural, social, and diplomatic instrument. In comparison with the works of other authors, including foreign scholars, the findings of this study offer a deeper understanding of the specifics of Ukrainian cinema in wartime, its functions, and its possibilities. It highlights the importance of further research into the impact of cinema on post-conflict societies, particularly in terms of preserving national memory and facilitating cultural reintegration.

Conclusions

The research established that wars significantly influence the evolution of cinema, transforming its functions, themes, and technical aspects. An analysis of historical development revealed that war turned cinema into an ideological tool, using it to shape public sentiment, maintain morale, and mobilize the population. At the same time, the study's results confirmed that in modern conflicts, cinema moves beyond propaganda, becoming a powerful means of preserving historical memory and fostering humanitarian discourse.

Modern Ukrainian cinema reflects the complex psychological and social consequences of war. Emphasis is placed on themes such as post-traumatic stress disorder, the challenges of social adaptation for both military personnel and civilians, as well as the collective experience of society. Both feature and documentary films portray not only the protagonists' profound moral dilemmas and broader social challenges but also offer viewers an opportunity to understand traumatic events from multiple perspectives. The genre diversity of Ukrainian cinema has become one of the key aspects of its development in wartime conditions. War dramas, documentaries, psychological thrillers, and disaster films all comprehensively depict the realities of war. Documentaries play a particular role in capturing historical events and conveying emotional experiences, while feature films delve into the profound experiences of the characters and their moral conflicts. Ukrainian films have become an important tool for international dialogue, contributing to global support for the country during the war. Through their participation in world film festivals, such as Cannes and Venice, Ukrainian cinema highlights the scale of the conflict and demonstrates the national spirit's resilience. The cultural context of these films enables international audiences to gain a deeper understanding of Ukrainian reality and the challenges facing society.

The war stimulated the emergence of young directors and screenwriters who aim to reflect contemporary events through the prism of personal stories. The new priorities in film production, combined with support from the state and international funds, created conditions conducive to developing unique projects that have become a cultural phenomenon. It attests to the desire of Ukrainian cinema not only to document the realities of war but also to preserve national identity. The analysis also highlighted the prospects for the development of Ukrainian cinema after the war. It is anticipated that themes of reconstruction, veteran reintegration, and social transformation will take center stage in future films. The themes of cultural revival and rehabilitation will become essential, enabling cinema to serve as a social cohesion tool and preserve historical heritage.

Thus, the study's results confirmed that Ukrainian wartime cinema performs a multifaceted role, combining artistic, social, and cultural significance. The data analysis indicates that cinema not only documents the realities of the conflict but also creates a platform for national and international dialogue.

A limitation of this work is its focus on the analysis of predominantly Ukrainian cinema, which may limit the scope of a global comparison of the impact of war on the

film industry. Furthermore, the study mainly covers the contemporary period, without addressing the long-term consequences for the development of cinema after the conflict. Prospects for future research include an in-depth comparison of the experiences of Ukrainian cinema with other countries that have undergone conflict and examining the role of cinema in processes such as national reintegration, cultural revival, and the preservation of historical memory.

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