

REVIEW PAPER

US SOFT POWER THROUGH HOLLYWOOD DURING COLD WAR: ROCKY IV

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ABSTRACT

Power has always been a concept around which many have been pondering, in a sense of trying to achieve it. International relations have mostly been about power, according to realism, amongst other shifts in the international politics, so it is crucial to understand it. Since the world, after the World Wars, shifted from violence and wars, a new power reemerged, called soft power, which now relies more on the global influence, and not on hard means of power like. Soft power is best described as imposing influence on the other states, through different canals like movies, student exchanges, media, etc. USA, as a superpower, employed soft power as a mean of spreading their political and ideological influence, especially during the Cold War. One of the tools of soft power employed, was through pop culture of the 1980s, via Hollywood industry and creation of USA-themed big-grossing movies, with great actors and popular topics. US movie industry focused on creating plots of the movies which would indirectly exert influence on the wider masses, in Europe, USSR, and other countries. One of those movies is Rocky saga, which are the movies about a boxing US hero, who is unbeatable, and poses as a symbol of US power. This movie, with a focus on Rocky IV, is a great example of how USA employed soft power through Hollywood industry, and the acceptance of the movie in the 1980s by the global mass is a great example of how influential soft power can truly be.

Keywords: soft power, pop culture, Cold War, USA, USSR

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Introduction

The world has always revolved around the word “power” and its meaning. Power was, and still remains, the main driver, for many things. States fought for power, centered their politics on the power. Starting from tribes and tribal societies, and coming to city-states, only to reach the sovereign states, the ultimate goal was power. According to Russell (1938), the power is the production of intended effects, and each person strives for as much power as possible and does not have limits, which can be transferred to the states as well. The politics has been about power, which is supported by the theory of realism, which is the oldest theory of international relations, based on the power as the ultimate goal of the state (Russell, 1938).

However, the world is changing, and the power is transferred (Bećirović & Akbarov, 2015). After the World Wars, the political atmosphere was changed, and the global politics was revolving around Cold War and power competition. Nye (1990) introduced the term soft power, stating that it is the ability to obtain wanted outcomes rather by attraction than coercion. Nye (1990) described the environment as before the 1980s, the world was about coercion and payments, but occasionally others are influenced by ideas and attraction, which set the agenda for others or make them desire what you want (Nye, 1990), and that was the driving power of politics in 1980s. The example of such is pop culture which had made a massive influence on the world politics. What is popular, how it arises, and what shape it takes have all been influenced by changing historical settings. Pop culture has reflected social, economic, and political shifts in this area. However, it has also acted as a catalyst for change, changing views, breaking down barriers, aiding upward mobility, and provoking societal clashes.

Politics and entertainment became more linked in the 1980s, yet popular culture became a political punching bag. The significance of entertainment has never been stronger. As ads, talk programs, hundreds of cable television channels, music, and other forms of popular culture flooded American life, the deluge of sights and noises reached new heights (Ashby, 2006). By the 1980s, many Americans were yearning for those perfect phrases – nostalgic locations that provided an escape from the problems that had plagued the country for over two decades. This was portrayed in the media, and was something that everyone wanted. It promoted the US lifestyle, their values, making the people want to live by US rules and traditions.

The phenomenon of pop culture escalated with its importance to an extent and becoming so socially relevant that it is being reported and embraced across boundaries of the Cold War influencing people growing up in a different ideological setting of imposed values. Pop culture is, without a doubt, the most interesting and divisive tool of American soft power (Fraser, 2015).

The example of this is the movie Rocky IV (1985), which is the highest-grossing picture in Rocky saga, according to IMDB, with a worldwide total of \$300 million. The film was intended to be a not-so-subtle metaphor for the Cold War. The movie is also a fascinating portrayal of Cold War sports competition. The Soviets are shown as cold, soulless, and only intent on triumph in the film. Drago is represented as cold and mighty character, moving robotically and saying practically nothing. Balboa is enraged by the Soviet boxer's lack of emotion after killing Apollo Creed, a response that enrages him as much as the deed itself. Drago's backers and his wife, a Russian swimmer called Ludmilla, are all uncaring and just interested in winning. Western impressions of Soviet athletics, if not Soviet residents in general, are reflected in these caricatures. Rocky IV also blames the Soviets' sporting dominance on strict training regimens and rampant steroid usage. Rocky concludes the film with a short but conciliatory statement in which he says that the only locations where Americans and Soviets should fight are boxing rings and athletic venues.

Literature review

Soft power is a concept that is deeply rooted in the liberal tradition. Soft power emphasizes the prospect of collaboration over the possibility of war; military power over the power of ideas. The study of American soft power is typically conducted through a neoliberal lens, which emphasizes the role of non-state actors and also the relevance of ideas and values in defining foreign policy. Hollywood's propagation of American ideas and lifestyles meshes quite nicely with neoliberal paradigms (Fraser, 2015). People in a democracy have a say in how the nation is run and can impose peaceful aims (Bećirović, 2012). As a result, democracies are more likely to deploy soft power rather than strong force. Furthermore, Nye (2011) claims that a democratic state will retain its soft power even if it faces challenges. When a policy is criticized, it may generate some soft power because people in other nations may regard it as a sign of authenticity and freedom of speech. Economic interconnectedness is emphasized by liberalism. The fact that it forces nations to collaborate with one another looks to be

more of a kind of compulsion than of attraction, and so this approach is closer to hard power than soft power. As a result, a free trade economy will generate soft power by attracting others to its model. The success of a liberal economy may inspire other countries to follow suit. Globalization, as well as and neoliberalism in global market relations, and current currents of power have created a space where concepts like pop culture have value and create a space for political competition, which was the case in the Cold War (Nye, 2011).

Soft power appears as a counterbalance to the so-called. Hard power, which in a capitalist system comes from economic, political or military power and is very often based on GDP, which is at the heart of this concept. Namely, there are cases when only coercion can achieve the goals that the government, in the right or wrong manner, wants to pursue (which is hard power), but other goals may only be achieved through cultural, intellectual or spiritual influence, concluding that is soft power.

Nye (2003) defines soft power as the ability to convince others that you want what you want. A state can reach the wanted results in the global politics, as other states tend to follow it, admire its values, emulate its example, strive for its level of progress and openness (Nye, 2003). Soft power cannot be equated solely with influence, although it is one of the sources of influence, because influence can be achieved through both threats and rewards. Soft power is more than persuasion or moving people by the power of arguments. Soft power represents the power to attract, and attraction generally leads to imitation. If the state manages to make its power legitimate in the eyes of others, its desires will meet with less resistance. In short, the universality of a country's culture and its ability to create institutions that govern various areas on the international stage are key sources of power (Nye, 2002). Soft power, according to Nye (2002), stems largely from certain values expressed in the culture, the policies we pursue in our country, and the way we present ourselves on the international stage.

While explaining the term, Nye (2002), in addition to culture, political values and foreign policy, most often uses a number of intangible features of states, but the paradox of the whole story lies in the fact that state power as such has no absolute control over most of these features. within the market and within civil society and are in fact grounded in the identity of the state or people. The emergence of these characteristics is encouraged, among other things, by citizens, media, companies and NGOs, in contrast to military capabilities, which are the basis of the so-called hard power.

According to Nye (1990), the whole concept of soft power consists of two diametrically different abilities. The first is the ability to persuade (attract and seduce), and it works from the outside in. The second ability refers to the establishment of assumptions (the creation of "ideology"), and is directed outward. The author explains such a claim on the example of the USA. American films and television are one of the key factors in the first of the two abilities, while democracy is a key factor in the second (Nye, 2003). From all the above, it is quite clear that soft power is largely based on the image of the state.

Although there is a small number of countries in the world that are able to use and implement means of "hard power", it is still hard to find a country that is not rich in at least some form of intangible assets, because almost every country in the world has a wide range of cultural, historical, geographical, human and intellectual capital, but did not have enough conditions, abilities, motivations, or luck to turn them into economic wealth.

It is precisely for such countries that in recent years a space has opened up on the global stage to catch up with the rich. Namely, the concept based exclusively on economic, military and political power is slowly losing its primacy and opening up space for brands that behave according to different rules. They, for example, compete more on cultural excellence than on economic strength. The global economy is majorly driven by services, intellectual property as well as "virtual" products (Dautbašić & Bećirović, 2022). The human capital of countries is becoming a key factor in its economic growth (Bećirović & Polz, 2021; Bećirović & Akbarov, 2016) and the absence of conventionally marketable resources is less of an obstacle to development in economic sector, than it has been the case previously (Anholt, 2007).

Machiavelli (2003) said that it is best for a ruler to be loved, but also for his subjects to be intimidated by him, however, since the two rarely go together, it is usually safer for a ruler to choose fear, to choose to fear him more than to love him. But is that so today? The classic "hard power" is intimidating, but "soft power" seems seductive, it still achieves more. American soft power spreads and establishes common norms, values and beliefs, and that leads to a kind of "Americanization" of other countries. They say that Stalin believed more in "hard power", in the fact that people were afraid of him and that he intimidated his associates and opponents, than in the fact that he cared about loving him (Nye, 2011).

The Americans won the “cold war” not thanks to weapons, but thanks to the complete triumph in the fight for the hearts and minds of individuals. If you disorient and discourage your opponent, thus reducing his readiness to fight and oppose you to a minimum, then you have already done a lot of work (Adamović, 2008).

Hollywood and pop culture

Little has changed in Hollywoodland since the moment its name on California’s Mt. Lee kicked out the “land” and turned it into the capital of commercial film. With some technical or stylistic innovation, Hollywood film has remained true to its established and predictable scheme, flat characters and ideology it promotes for almost a century, making it just one wheel in the machinery of popular culture. Extremely wealthy and profitable wheel, that is. However, on the other side of the American film industry, motivated by the desire to reveal the true face behind the glamor of mainstream film, gathered directors who, with an extremely small budget and independent of any major studios, made their independent films with the idea of free authorial vision: thus, changing the film landscape and the way the audience watches the films (Danesi, 2008).

Popular culture has become the foundation of contemporary culture – its expressions have become dominant over forms of high culture. The Western media society uses a multitude of popular expressions (Yaman & Bećirović, 2016) on a daily basis – from popular language, movies, technology, food, fashion, sitcoms, to sports broadcasts – while creating new popular forms according to its own needs and interests. It is both a consumer and a cultural producer of popular culture, and in the consumption and creation of its forms and expressions it finds pleasure, *jouissance* or *plaisir* (Strinati, 2005).

Popular culture is impossible to define by a simple definition because there is still debate among theorists about what it really is, whether it is contemporary American culture, what its expressions are, when it began, whether it can be equated with mass and folk culture. Whether it is the culture created by the people or the culture of the dominant structures that are used by it to achieve their own ideological and material goals. That is why it is best to describe it with the help of its basic characteristics of spectacle, providing satisfaction, progressiveness and social change, contradictions, emotionality and breaking with traditional norms and values (Dumbar-Hall, 1991).

Why is it important to understand popular culture? Given that cultural expression cannot become popular if society does not accept it and does not find some satisfaction in it, it can be concluded that popular content is a mirror of aspirations, values and attitudes of the society in which they are popular, as well as a reflection of current social reality. Understanding the reasons for the popularity of a text can help us understand the social environment in which this or that text is created, giving us insight into the main trends of modern society and culture and possibly the possibility of future trends (Danesi, 2008; Rizvić & Bećirović, 2017).

Today’s world is globalized – as global capital and cultural goods circulate the world, state borders become less and less important, and time and space are compressed. This compression brings together images, meanings, ways of life, cultural practices, which would otherwise remain separated in time and space (Storey, 2003).

Rocky the “American hero”

The movie Rocky IV was premiered in 1985, during the late phase of the Cold War, and in the period when USSR underwent a political change, with Mikhail Gorbachev taking over power in the country. R. Reagan was the president of the United States at the time, and he was a tough negotiator with the Soviet Union. In February 1984, the then-leader of the Soviet Union, Y. Andropov, died of a terrible illness; he was a staunch admirer of the United States. Also, in 1984, Olympic Games were held in the USA, in Los Angeles, and USSR did not want to participate due to their relationship with the USA. We can say that amid those sports tensions and changes in the agency of the USSR, USA made a powerful move with releasing Rocky IV and spreading their soft power in the time when USSR felt most vulnerable and when Gorbachev came along and began to prepare the terrain for his new policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

As time goes on, some films from the list of American classics do not fade but gain a new dimension. Sylvester Stallone as Rocky Balboa in 1976 set the definition of the American dream. It reads that if you do your best, you will make all your dreams come true. As America loses its global confidence in the nation’s strength, rule of law and democracy in recent days, Rocky celebrates forty-five years and reminds us of the timeless story of an ordinary man who reaches the top in sweat, raising the American flag with bloody fists. The majestic success of the first film is evidenced not only by its sequels, but also by seven nominations and winning

an Oscar. "Rocky" has become a new American and world hero, and in his story, there are many modern "heroes" who claim that they have achieved everything in America through their own work and commitment. So, for example, the outgoing US president posted an interesting photomontage on Twitter and Facebook three years ago, where he positioned his head on Rocky's body, insinuating that there is more to the story of the road to the top. The top of the towers offers an impressive view of the panorama of New York (Carstensen, 2019).

However, Donald Trump is much closer to those people from the margins of society, precisely those about whom Martin Scorsese's film of the same year spoke, for which "Rocky" won the Oscar in the Best Picture category. In the 1970s, it was too early for a film like *Taxi Driver*, with Robert De Niro as a taxi driver with Vietnamese syndrome, to be rewarded by the conservative American Film Academy, which tends to pay attention to motivational stories with strong affirmative messages. "Taxi Driver" was by far the best film, not only that year, but time has shown that it is one of the best films of all time. What Trump wanted to say with his announcement has not been fully clarified, except that American popular culture dominates socio-political life, and the media picture is becoming such that there no longer exists clear line between show business and reality (Abdulaev and Shomron, 2020).

The film "Rocky", which does not have any flaws, symbolizes one big ring that America has become, and in which individuals fight for survival (and stay in power) to the last drop of blood and sweat, often low blows, below the belt. Violence is what dominates mainstream American film production, and "Rocky" is a timeless classic even after forty-five years that tells us that there is nothing wrong with a bit of belligerence, ambition and desire for some title (Uysal, 2021).

Methodology

The method chosen is the desk analysis, as the focus is the content analysis of the movie Rocky IV. The movie will be analyzed by the symbols used and how each one represents what it represents, and how those symbols were used as soft power tools, by the USA, and how one popular movie, like Rocky, managed to be used politically and had so much influence on the world. There are several limitations, for example, some symbols may not be addresses towards certain ideas and meanings, there can be a lot of other symbols which are not noticed, and there can be a lot of bias in the extent of influence of Rocky IV, according to the sources and references.

The path towards choosing the movie, through selection methodology, was easy. The list was made, of 10 movies, which are directed and aired in the 1980s in the USA, with a goal to promote USA in different subjects and movies of different genre and topics. On the list of 10 movies, Rocky IV (1985) was the one which portrays in the best way, how pop culture of the 1980s influenced politics and exerted power onto wider masses. According to several film reviews, and other academic pieces about the topic, Rocky IV was most prominent of the genre, and that was confirmed after the movie was watched carefully, and analyzed.

Analysis

Rocky IV is embodiment of the context that was transposed to wider public through soft power tool box, because it is burdened with symbols and symbolics which actually is soft power in the core.

The very beginning of the movie is the two boxing gloves: one with a pattern of the US flag and the other with USSR – red with a sickle and a hammer. This immediately implies something much deeper, the clash between the two superpowers and, through boxing, this serves as the allegory and comparison of the war. War is portrayed through boxing. The US flag is shown on numerous other occasions, for example, it was the pattern of Rocky's boxing shorts, as well as Apollo's, and Rocky waved the flag in Russia, after he had won the fight. The US flag in USSR is a sign of power, because flag represents a nation, as the ability to wave it in a foreign country, in front of foreigners, is a power symbol. Waving the US flag is a national symbol that promotes unwavering allegiance as well as a rejection of national criticism and disagreement (Schatz and Lavine, 2007).

The movie is focused on event of the boxing match between Rocky and his Soviet opponent Drago, who is a government project by the USSR, and a lot of money has been invested in him, in his training ground and equipment. He is a national pride and a symbol of Russian power, cold and unbeatable. Rocky, on the other hand is an immigrant who fought to the top and still stays humble, as he comes to Russia and trains in the wilderness, in the snow, running up the mountains, using wood and rocks as weights and chops trees as his workout. This is a contrast between two sides, and shows differences between the two sides, passionate and wild-spirited Americans and cold and robotic Soviets, and it promotes the stereotypes, spreading the image of brutal Soviets. While anti-Soviet propaganda played an important part in the Cold War, it is important to remember that the West's policy

was anti-Russian in many ways at all times, and any strengthening of Russia (economic, military, or geopolitical) was viewed as a danger to the Western world (Fedorov, 2015). In *Rocky IV*, USSR and Drago are shown as bad guys and the movie is a perfect example of anti-Soviet propaganda. Over 80 films on Russia were made in Hollywood in the 1980s. Almost all of them portrayed bad aspects of the Russian and Soviet systems, terrifying spectators with malignant Soviet enemy pictures that should be eradicated, as M. Strada and H. Troper (1997) said, all of these films started with the premise that Soviet communism was a bad thing. It was not new, but it meant that peaceful coexistence was impossible and that conversations with freedom's foes were futile (Strada & Troper, 1997). When the movie shows Soviets to be the bad guys in the movie, that creates a certain perception in the eye of the public. Drago was not the bad guy per se, but he was not the side everyone cheered for. Especially as the viewers did not follow his path like Rocky's. However, *Rocky IV* does not have a main aim to show USSR as a completely bad guys, but the goal is to show US supremacy and to try to make USSR want what they have and make Soviets willing to accept their values. That is why, in the end, the whole hall in Russia cheers for Rocky, and when the fight ends, Rocky receives standing ovations even from the whole politburo.

The appeal of American soft power in the pop culture realm is heavily influenced by the underlying value systems in the places where it is distributed and received. American films have traditionally been successful and popular in Western countries, where people share liberal and secular ideas associated with individuality and democracy, while others felt threatened by these ideas (Fraser, 2015). It is important to mention that *Rocky IV* achieved tremendous success, and it was a great tool for soft power, but there is another perspective to look at. The on-screen conflict between two state systems was uneven. As practically all Soviet anti-American films were "goods for domestic use," numerous American films connected to the Soviet-themed enjoyed extensive worldwide distribution and resonance over time. Furthermore, the Hollywood Cold War was sometimes more liberal and accepting of the Soviet Union than the Soviet "ideological cinematic struggle with USA" (War, 2010). It can be said, that in the end, Soviets accepted Rocky, both the public and the politburo, especially after his speech that we can all change.

Another important scene in the movie is the speech Rocky gives in the end of the fight, when he speaks politically, saying that the Soviet mass

cheered on him and accepted him, regardless of his nationality. That was a strong symbol of resistance to the system, and an act which could have influenced a lot of people, especially since USSR started to go through reforms of the system and introduction of more freedom. The timing of the movie and a powerful speech made a lot of influence, as Rocky said "If I can change, and you can change, everybody can change" (Rocky, 1985). Even though before 1950s, Kremlin forbid Hollywood production in USSR, in the end of a decade, there was a limited number of US movies which were allowed to be premiered as they were popular and watched in USSR (Fraser, 2015). The fact that USSR allowed even a slightest glimpse of US trace in their society, opened a path and a way in which USA was able to exert influence through Hollywood and direct it towards Soviet society.

The use of music is also very influential as well. The American music industry was employed as a tool of US foreign policy during the Cold War, with pop rock being exploited by the US Information Agency to musically globalize American principles (Mirrlees, 2006). First of all, the movie starts with the song "Eye of the Tiger" by the Survivor, which is very popular song and is a worldwide hit even today, let alone in the 1980s. However, there is another song by Survivor "Burning Heart", which is about the Cold War, which is seen in the lyrics "East VS West; Can any Nation stand alone?" (Papp, 1919). So, not only the plot and the symbols were about Cold War, but also the music which followed the scenes.

Conclusion

Soft power became a very important political tool in the Cold War, which is explicitly seen in the Hollywood and cinematography. The example of such is the movie *Rocky IV* (1985), which portrays US nationalism and US superiority over USSR, and the fact that it was one of the most popular movies of the time, indicate its power and acceptance of the public. It is difficult to say to what extent did *Rocky IV* influence the people around the world, as we cannot quantify the influence of the pop culture, as the effects produces cannot be measured (Fraser, 2015), but the responses to the movie were vocal and seen, which is a success itself. Hollywood was just one of the ways in which USA promotes US values and lifestyle, makes everyone want to live their American Dream and just employs soft power in the true meaning of the word. This was a great tool during the Cold War, and still remains as so, from *Rocky IV*, to other US movies which hold the position of the best movies in the world, undoubtedly.

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