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Generational Politics: Narratives of Power in Central Asia's Visual Culture

By

Anaita Khudonazar

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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of the  
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Committee in charge:

Professor Margaret Larkin  
Professor Sanjyot Mehendale  
Professor Victoria E. Bonnell

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Abstract

Generational Politics: Narratives of Power in Central Asia's Visual Culture

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Studies

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This dissertation focuses on the visual representation of generational politics as it changed during Imperial, Soviet and Post Soviet periods. It argues that the most important shift in visual representation of power relations between generations in Central Asia took place in the late 1920s when a group of cultural producers, which this dissertation introduces as Transsovieticus, entered the Soviet art and film industries. This dissertation demonstrates ways in which these artists and filmmakers used the visual technologies of the Soviet state to continue the artistic traditions of the pre-Soviet era, thereby creating their own niche in form and style. In this respect, this thesis rejects the assumption that Soviet non-Russian and non-Slavic art in the twentieth century is derivative of socialist realism. While theoretically, Soviet popular culture was to be produced in the tradition of socialist realism and was thus to be ideologically unambiguous, most of the analyzed popular works contain other semantic layers that complicate or/and contradict the Soviet narrative. By combining Soviet forms of visual culture with pre-Soviet perceptions of art as a complex system of symbols which change their meaning depending on the viewer's visual history, Transsovieticus cultural producers addressed and continue to address a variety of issues on modernity, technology, rural/urban division, and family structure in Central Asia and outside of it.

**Dedicated to my parents**

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Margaret Larkin whose understanding and encouragement turned my dissertation project into an exciting and adventurous experience. I want to express my deepest appreciation to Professor Sanjot Mehendale, who made sure I stayed on track and was both forgiving and patient with numerous errors in my text. My special appreciation goes to Victoria E. Bonnell, whose book “Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin” inspired me to write about Soviet visual culture. Professional as well as personal guidance of these three women has been a source of my continuous confidence and strength while at UC, Berkeley.

I would also like to thank my parents whose work as filmmakers during the late Soviet period in Tajikistan was part of my visual education and my academic family: Azadeh Yamini-Hamedani, Bobak Tamaddon, Jean Li, Zhanara Nauruzbayeva, Ariel Shannon, Regine Spector, and David Ilmar Beecher for their support and humor along this journey.

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## Introduction

“... our individual identities and ideals of personhood are constructs produced in much the way that works of art are produced.”<sup>1</sup>

David Novitz

The declaration of sovereignty by five Central Asian republics in the 1990s increased Western academic interest in this region. The first wave of scholars focused on questions of identity in the newfound Asia. During the past fifteen years, publications by this first academic wave revealed much about the region's history of colonialism, socialism, nationalism, and Islam. Since most of these scholars used historical<sup>2</sup> and/or political science<sup>3</sup> methodologies, these

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<sup>1</sup> David Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Place of Art in Everyday Life* (Christchurch: Cyberedictions Corporation, 2001), 113.

<sup>2</sup> Among the most recent publications are Kamp, Marianne. *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling Under Communism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006. Print.; *China and India in Central Asia: A New "Great Game?"* ed. By Marlene Laruelle. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.; Bergne, Paul. *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic*. London: I.B. Tauris. 2007. Print.; Keller, Shoshana. *To Moscow, not Mecca: the Soviet campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001. Print.; Paramonov, Vladimir. *Russia in Central Asia: Policy, Security and Economics*. Translated by Mervyn Brown. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009. Print.; Soucek, Stav. *A History of Inner Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Among the most recent publications are Lewis, David. *The Temptation of Tyranny in Central Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. Print.; Karagiannis, Emmanuel. *Political Islam in Central Asia: the challenges of Hizb ut-Tahrir*. London, New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.; *The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Enduring Legacies and Emerging Challenges*. Ed. By Amanda E. Wooden and Christoph H. Stefes. London; New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.; Esengul, Chinara. *Politics of Regionalism in Central Asia*. Bishkek: Institute of Integration of International Education Programs, 2009. Print.; Bichsel, Christine. *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia: Irrigation Disputes in the Ferghana Valley*. London; New York: Routledge, 2009. Print. ; Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010. Print.; Jonson, Lena. *Tajikistan in the New Central Asia: Geopolitics, Great Power Rivalry and Radical Islam*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris. 2006. Print.; Aitken, Jonathan. *Nazarbaev and the Making of Kazakhstan*. London:



studies were limited in terms of data they analyze. However, what could be designated as a second wave of studies on Central Asia involves analyses of cultural production in connection to national, religious, socialist, and post-Socialist narratives.<sup>4</sup> In this respect this dissertation, which stands at the crossroad of area studies, art history, and film studies, is part of this latter academic trend.

When studying Soviet art, post-Soviet scholars, as well as Baltic (Tartu), and Western schools of semiotics, focused primarily on Russian art. The assumption was that non-Russian and non-Slavic Soviet art is a derivative of socialist realism. This dissertation rejects this notion and brings evidence that demonstrates ways in which Central Asian cultural producers used the visual technologies of the Soviet state to continue the artistic traditions of the pre-Soviet era, thereby creating their own niche in form and style.

Drawing on works of art, posters, press photography, films, TV shows, and video games, this thesis is based on the assumption that the nature of popular visual culture, i.e. its dependence on commercial success, creates space for negotiation and ultimately collaboration between state ideologies, cultural producers and viewers. In this way the popularity of an image or a film that conveys a certain perspective reveals not only the urban cultural elite's standpoint, but also confirms recognition from a wider, and for the most part rural, Central Asian audience. This research shows that while theoretically, Soviet popular culture was to be produced in the tradition of socialist realism and thus be ideologically unambiguous, most of the analyzed popular works contain other semantic layers that at times contradict the Soviet narrative. By combining Soviet forms of visual culture with pre-Soviet perceptions of art as a complex system of symbols which change their meaning depending on the viewer's visual history, a group of Central Asian cultural producers addressed a variety of issues on modernity, technology, rural/urban division, and family structure. This group of indigenous producers, which has not yet been properly labeled nor thoroughly studied will here forth be referred to as the Transsovieticus.<sup>5</sup>

The preliminary fieldwork for this study showed that one of the discourse themes central to these indigenous producers was that of intergenerational

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Continuum, 2009. Print.; *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*. Ed. By Jo-Ann Gross. Durham; London: Duke University Press. 1992. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Nauruzbaeva, Zhanara. "Refurbishing Soviet Status: Visual Artists and Marketization in Postsocialist Kazakhstan." Diss. PhD Dissertation, Stanford U., 2011 (forthcoming). Print.; Drieu, Cloe. "Du muet au parlant: cinéma et société en Ouzbékistan (1919-1937)." Institut des Langues et des Civilisations Orientale, 2008. Print.

<sup>5</sup> The coinage of this term is based on the combination of the terms 'homo Sovieticus' and 'transnational'.

continuity and the relationship to the past, including the symbols and role of the 'past' religious/traditional practices. The theme of intergenerational continuity becomes especially visible and direct in narratives designed for/about children and youth, which this thesis focuses on. Analysis of the indigenous narratives that often run parallel to the Soviet narrative reveals how Transsovieticus cultural producers position themselves towards a wide range of topics varying from modern technologies to Islam.

## Literature

The literature on the visual culture of Russia and USSR varies in terms of methodological approaches and areas of study.<sup>6</sup> Victoria E. Bonnell's work on early Soviet propaganda, *The Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin*, which details the semiotics of Russian iconography, has been most inspirational in the writing of this dissertation. Western studies on visual culture of Central Asia, however, remain limited. Meanwhile, analogous studies in the region still use Soviet methodological tools.<sup>7</sup>

The dearth of in-depth analyses of Central Asian visual culture was and is partially determined by the epistemic foundation of art history. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century Central Asian art was viewed as either too complex or too simple to study. When Tsarist, and later Soviet, art historians and anthropologists attempted to analyze Central Asian art they were discouraged by the multiplicity of visual meanings. In his early twentieth century article *Les Tapis Anciens de l'Asie Centrale*, Baron A. Foelkersam called

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<sup>6</sup>*Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth Century Russia*. London: Indiana Univerisyt, 1995. Print.; Woosley, Jane. M. *Cold War in the Kitchen: the Cultural Politics of the Kitchen Dabate*. Diss. State U. of New York College at Oreonta, 2001. Print.; *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*. New York: Routledge, 2006.; Bendavil-Val, Leah., Rawls, Walton H. *Propaganda & Dream: Photographing the 1930s in the USSR and the US*. University of Michingan, 1999. Print.; Hixson, Walter. *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961*. New York: Palgrave Machlillan, 1997. Print.; Tupitsyn, Margarita. *Margins of Soviet Art: Socialist Realism to the Present*. Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1992. Print.; Tupitsyn, Margarita. *Margins of Soviet Art: Socialist Realism to the Present*. New York: Art Pub Inc., 1994. Print. Rosentfeld, Alla. *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945-1991*. New Jersey & London: Rutgers University Press, 2001. Print.

<sup>7</sup>Abdulkasymova, Khanjara. *Khudojestvennoe kino Uzbekistana I Ideologiya*. Tashkent: Fan, 2003. Print.; Akbarov, Hamidulla. *Kino-teledrataturiya: nazariya va amaliyot: kasb-hunar kollejlari uchun o'quv Qo'llanma*. Toshkent: ILM ZIYO, 2006. ; *Sovremennoe Iskusstvo Kazakhstana: Problemi I Poiski*. Ed. By Kabdieva, Sanii'a. Almaty: Fond Soros-Kazakhstan, 2002. Print.; Mikhailov, Vladimir. *Kirgiziia na Ekране 1920-1955*. Bishkek: Atyn Tanga, 1998. Print.

the ornament of Central Asian carpets “visual music” that he did not always understand, but appreciated (85-86). One of the first attempts to decode the etymology of Central Asian ornament was made by A. Bobrinskii in 1902. His work was followed by several publications by Veselovskii, and Felkerzam on the semantics of Central Asian ornament. In early Soviet period, Bernshtam’s book on Kyrgyz ornament argues that alone in Kyrgyz ornament there are at least 3500 symbols (10). Bernshtam believed that while some scholars underlined the complexity of Central Asian visual language, which incidentally European art historians were yet to study, conventional Soviet art history underlined the religious aspects and thus labeled it backward, harmful, or purely decorative. Pre- Soviet Central Asian art in Soviet museums served to highlight the ethno-national distinctiveness of different nationalities. When studying meaning and content, Soviet academia focused on photography, film and paintings created within the framework of socialist realism. Since Central Asian visual culture in the twentieth century was in their view only a derivative of Russian school of realism, the methodological tools they used to study different forms of art in this region were limited to Western semiotics.

## Zahir & Batin

This dissertation combines contemporary scholarship on semiotics as defined by Yuri and Michael Lotman and the Tartu schools of semiotics with the Sufi artistic and literary concept of *zahir* and *batin*. The use of the Sufi conceptual framework to examine Transsovieticus visual culture of the twentieth century is determined by the fact that since the eleventh century Sufi philosophy has been a big part of artistic and poetic evaluation of visual and literary cultures in the region (Kunanbaeva). The concept of *zahir* and *batin*, in particular, is developed in close connection with Islamic aesthetics, which recognizes visual complexity to be the most valuable virtue of art.<sup>8</sup> The technique of coating several *zahir* and *batin* semantic layers in one poetic or artistic piece enabled the reader/viewer to access the “universal truth” (*haqiqat*), which embraces the whole range of parallel perspectives.<sup>9</sup>

In Islamic poetry and art, the *zahir* (external, visible) layers represent the most obvious narrative accessible to the majority of the audience. The *batin* (internal, hidden) meaning on the other hand, is to be discovered only by those who possess special knowledge and may or may not contradict the *zahir* narrative. An example of this artistic approach may be observed in ‘hidden’

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<sup>8</sup> On the connection between visual complexity and aesthetics see for example Gonzalez, Valerie.

*Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture*. London and New York: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 2001.16-27. Print.

<sup>9</sup> Boymurodov, Boymurod. “Zahir va Botin dar Adabiet va Hunari Samarqadu Bukhoro dar Astri 19.” *Pomir* Nov.1991: 25-32. Print.

calligraphic inscriptions in abstract multidimensional patterns of arabesque, calligraphy and ornamentation. On the *zahir* level viewers may enjoy what appears to be a complex geometric design. At the same time on the *batin* level viewers observe the words of the *Qur'an*, which they may or may not recognize depending on their visual history.

Though none of the Transsovieticus cultural producers directly referred to Sufism, the *zahir/batin* theoretical framework contains all key elements of the Central Asian artistic process in the twentieth century. Applying this method, this study examines a variety of apparent (*zahir*) as well as more hidden (*batin*) narratives of Transsovieticus visual culture. While the *zahir* narratives addressed the wider Soviet audience, *batin* narratives spoke to the indigenous population.

## Organization

Chapter I offers a brief overview of colonial and early Soviet visual representation of inter-generational relationships in Central Asia. From the mid-nineteenth century art series *Barbarians* by Vasilii Verechshagin to Alexander Volkov's early twentieth century *Mourning* this chapter demonstrates the diversity of perspectives as well as the conceptual complexity of visual representation of Central Asian societies during the colonial period. Furthermore Chapter I discusses ways in which Bolsheviks re-identified their own position towards former Tsarist colonies of Central Asia, promoted major socio-political and ideological transformations, yet reinforced many elements of colonial power relations.

Chapter II examines the visual productions of 1940s and 1950s, when the first generation of Transsovieticus cultural producers came into the Soviet art and film industries. It shows how over the course of the 1940s and 1950s, the ideological formula of the national form gradually grew into representations of the imaginary past that mirrored nostalgic longing for different spaces and times not only in Central Asia but in Russia as well. Two films discussed in Chapter II *Tohir and Zuhro* and *The Old Khottabych*, explore Central Asia and Russia's ambiguous relationship to the past. While *Tohir and Zuhro* became a nostalgic cinematographic poem of the pre-Soviet Central Asian, *The Old Khottabych* captured Russia's contradictory sentiments of condescension towards, nostalgia for, and inseparability from, the Orient.

Chapter III discusses the post-Stalin era of 1960s and 1970s when Transsovieticus cultural producers went into different stylistic directions, yet continued to evaluate their subjects from a Central Asian inter-generational perspective. In their dialogue with the past and present they challenged the superficiality of the Soviet national form, by creating cinematic worlds that did not fit into the Soviet framework. Rustam Khamdamov created a semi-foreign pre-

Soviet world of idleness and poetic irony idealizing the pre-Soviet Russia. Elyor Ishmukhamedov's presented modern, multinational Uzbek youth that distanced itself not only from rural Central Asia but from Soviet ideology as well. The most prominent and influential representative of Transsovieticus visual culture of 1960s, Talamush Okeev, revealed the ambiguous role of urbanization and modern technologies and underlined the decline of Kyrgyz family structure. However the message of the Transsovieticus filmmakers appeared in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, all of them called for complexity of historical and contemporary representation of social and political issues within and outside of Central Asia.

As Transsovieticus cultural producers re-approached their histories in the last decade of Soviet power, they began to reinterpret early Soviet narratives making the Central Asian intergenerational perspective accessible to wider audiences. Chapter IV examines the transformation of one narrative from 1940 Pavel Luknitskiy's novel *Nisso* to its 1979 television version *The First Morning of Youth*. This chapter presents a detailed examination of ways in which Transsovieticus culture of late Soviet period became increasingly ambiguous in its representation of the pre Soviet generations.

Chapter V discusses the post-Soviet visual culture. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and due to the ensuing economic crisis the majority of film industries in Central Asian republics collapsed due to economic crisis. Yet at least one representative of the last generation of the Transsovieticus visual tradition Timur Bekmambetov offers his perspective on the post-Soviet society within the reemerging Russian film industry. His films *Night Watch* and *Day Watch* analyzed in the final chapter of this dissertation offer a Central Asian/Jewish outlook on the state of the post-Russian hero, not from the popular in the post-Soviet film ethnographic position but from the intergenerational and transnational perspective.

Chapter VI presents the latest film by Timur Bekmambetov *Six Degrees of Separation* (*Elki*, 2010), which depicts a Central Asian labor migrant as part of contemporary Russian society. This chapter argues that despite the overall lack of political correctness in contemporary visual culture towards non-Slavs, the idea of civil nationalism has a strong foundation in Russia's history of national self-presentation. The success of Timur Bekmambetov's film demonstrates that despite Russia's attempts to create a historical discontinuity with the Soviet past, the notion of civil brotherhood is making its way back into the visual discourse on nationalism.

## Sources

To demonstrate the multifaceted nature of Central Asian visual culture in the twentieth century this dissertation draws from a wide range of sources. Having been raised in a family of filmmakers in Tajikistan, I was exposed to three generations of artists, photographers and filmmakers from across Central Asia,

each of which developed their own visual language in order to bypass Soviet censorship. I was able to elaborate my interest in cultural production in Central Asia as an editor and writer for the *Nur* newsletter, published by the Association of Central Asian Students in Russia. From 1998 to 2001 I interviewed many artists and filmmakers about the Soviet period's creative process in Central Asian republics. During data collection for this dissertation I worked in a variety of state archives, museums, and libraries including the Museum of Film (Summer, 2005 Tashkent, Uzbekistan), Soviet Press Archive of the Russian State Library (Summer, 2006 and 2007, Moscow, Russia), *TajikFilm* Archive and Tajik State Archive (May 2006 Dushanbe, Tajiksitan), Kazakh State Archive, *Kazakhfilm* and Kazakh State Library (April-May, 2006 Almay, Kazakhstan). In the Tashkent Museum of Film I came across a unique, and, rarely shown since the 1930s collection of early Soviet films which the museum had just received from the Central Archive in Moscow. In the summer of 2006 and 2007 I was also fortunate to work in the Soviet Press Archive of the Russian State Library, which opened its Central Asian collection of posters for the first time since 1935.

## Chapter I

# Mirages of Central Asian Children in Russia's Late Imperial and Early Soviet Visual Cultures

### Historical Context: 1860s to 1930s

Russian colonization of Central Asian regions<sup>10</sup> gradually progressed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the end of 1860s the Tsarist army repeatedly defeated Khanate of Kokand and Emirate of Bukhara. The Governor-Generalship of Russian Turkestan was established in 1867 under General Konstantin Petrovich Von Kaufman. Ashkhabad, Merv and Pendjeh came under Russian control between 1881 and 1885. Russian expansion was halted in 1887 when Russia and Great Britain delineated the northern border of Afghanistan. Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva remained quasi-independent, but were essentially protectorates along the lines of the Princely States of British India.

Until the 1870s, Russian interference in local government structures was minimal. The local Muslims were not considered full Russian citizens. They did not have the full privileges of Russians, but nor did they have the same obligations, such as military service. The Tsarist administration left substantial elements of the culture (such as Muslim religious courts) intact, and local self-government at the village level was quite extensive. In the 1870s and 1880s Turkestan came to play a reasonably important economic role within the Russian Empire. Because of the American Civil War, cotton shot up in price in the 1860s, becoming an increasingly important commodity in the region.

When the Russian Revolution of 1917 occurred, a provisional Government of Jadid Reformers, also known as the Turkestan Muslim Council declared Turkestan's autonomy. The autonomy was short-lived as already in 1918 the Bolshevik Red Army proclaimed Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. While some Jadids joined the Communist party others continued to struggle against the Soviets as a part of the *basmachi* movement until late 1930s.

Under the Soviet control Soviet Central Asia experienced a flurry of administrative reorganization. In 1920 the Communist party established the borders of the Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, remained in 1925 into

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<sup>10</sup> Territories of contemporary Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan

the Kazakh Autonomous SSR. The Uzbek and Turkmen SSR became part of the Soviet Union in 1924. Tajik SSR became a separate republic in 1929 and finally the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast became an SSR in 1936.

As a part of Russification project the Arabic script was replaced with Cyrillic, which created an instant barrier between Central Asian states and their neighbors Turkey and Iran. Under the Soviets the southern border was almost completely closed and all travel and trade was directed north through Russia. While the establishment of Soviet republics opened the way for new local elites to emerge in 1920s many of them had been eliminated during Stalin's purges of 1930s convicted of nationalism, pan-Turkism, pan-Iranism, and/or Trotskism.

## Children and Asia in the Art of the Russian Empire

Despite rain on a certain morning in March 1874, the crowd in front of the entrance to the Saint-Petersburg Ministry of Internal Affairs grew noticeably. Carriages of wealthy Saint-Petersburg citizens had difficulty approaching the entrance due to long lines of people awaiting entry. Open to the public and free of charge, Vasilii Vereshchagin's show caused considerable stir and attracted people from all over the city. Under the title *Varvary* (Barbarians), nine gala halls of the Ministry exhibited over 120 of Vereshchagin's paintings. The main attraction of the exhibition was the Tsarist Empire's colonial war in Central Asia and the portrait of the enemy; its architecture, flora, and fauna serving as a vivid background to the war.

Unlike the artworks of other Russian artists, Vereshchagin's paintings revealed the war's brutality and gracelessness. They presented 'barbarian' warriors killing Russian soldiers, beheading them, pinning their heads on poles in front of mosques for public demonstrations, and finally presenting them as trophies to their rulers. The artist depicted Russian troops leaving behind their comrades' dead bodies in the steppe to be eaten by exotic wildlife and dried by the hot sun of the Central Asian desert. Vereshchagin's images of the 'uncivilized' Central Asia showing dirty dervishes and beggars, drug addicts, *burka* covered women, and enslaved children both frightened and fascinated Russian viewers with their brutality. The show was a colossal success. Thirty thousand copies of the exhibition's catalogue were sold to the public, an unheard number for this period. At the age of thirty-one Vereshchagin became a very well known artist, receiving a Georgian cross and the title of professor.

The reason for such great success partially lies in the position Vereshchagin took in the ongoing debate on the essence of Russianness in relation to Europe and Asia. The roots of this debate are closely linked to the process of Western European empire building, its profound self re-identification, the emergence of new geocultural identities, and the establishment of power relations between the



dominant imperial center and its colonial peripheries. In the emerging colonial narrative, the progress of Western civilization validated the dominant imperial role and called for the enlightenment of less advanced peoples around the world. Codification of new cultural relations involved unambiguous dichotomies of Europeans/non-Europeans, Occidental/Oriental, rational/irrational, civilized/primitive, and progressive/backward.

Until the eighteenth century, Russia was often described by Western Europe as “despotic” and “Oriental” (Stepun 307-327) which is why Europe’s distinctions of Occident and Orient had a special significance to Russia. To ‘elevate’ Russia to a status on par with Western countries like France or Spain, Peter the Great proclaimed himself an emperor and promoted fundamental Europeanization of the Russian internal social structures. Peter’s ambition to transform Russian society involved not only the establishment of new bureaucratic structures such as the State Senate (*Pravitelstvennii Senat*), abolition of patriarchy and reorganization of the Holy Synod (*Sviatishii Senod*), but also the creation of a navy and the reorganization of the Russian army along professional Western lines. The new emperor introduced to Russia the concept of “*civilitéé*.”

Having acquired popularity in Western Europe in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the concept *civilitéé* was closely linked to the rise of the centralized modern state and the growth of a more complex web of socio-political and economic interdependences. As Norbert Elias argues in *The Civilizing Process*, the creation of a monopoly of force and centralization of authority over an increasing number of territories promoted the emergence of a more complex society with a new set of normative behavioral regulations (14-22). The new code of manners, the rules of hygiene and dress, which developed in the course of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, gradually spread among the European population with the growing popularity of treatises such as Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium*.

While in Western Europe the concept of *civilitéé* emerged gradually, Russia’s state surveillance over the private life of each citizen, his or her external appearance, mode of life, and everyday routines at the very beginning of the eighteenth century, was neither gradual nor indigenous. The emperor’s abrupt attempt to transit Russia from medieval culture to modern European culture resulted in serious changes of the social structures of Russian society and a growing cultural gap between Russia’s Westernized urban elites and the rest of its rural population in the mid eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Westernized urban elites began to view rural Russia as less European, and therefore more Asiatic. The notion of the in-between East/West (*Vostok/Zapad*) duality in the formation of Russian identity and the question of Russian historical purpose in relation to that identity formation became a source of continuous intellectual agony for the Russian intellectuals. The cultural imperialism of Peter’s reforms created a complex

love/hate relationship of Russian elites to Western Europe, as well as to Russia's own cultural tradition, recognized as half-Asiatic.

Cultural mimicry was only part of Russian ambivalence towards the West. A simultaneous internal rejection of Western culture, a feeling of provinciality, and the desire to advance, to contribute to the treasures of European civilization, and to gain recognition as an equal Western power were also important components of Russia's complex dualism (Tlostanova 40-76). In an attempt to distinguish Russia from Europe, the so-called Slavophiles in the mid-nineteenth century and later their successors, the Pan-Slavs, claimed that there was something unique and non-western about Russia's national ethnos. In 1836, less than twenty years before colonization of Central Asia, Pyotr Chaadaev's famous "Philosophical Letter" (*Filosofskoe pismo*) appealed to the Russian public: "Between two great divisions of the world, the Orient and Occident, and leaning our one elbow on China and the other one on Germany, we should have combined two great foundations of spiritual nature, imagination and reason, to become a union of historical fates of the whole globe" (24-25).

Yet, as Mark Bassin argues, no matter how sincerely Russian intellectuals "insisted that Russia was detached from Europe and Asia alike, they clearly saw the gulf separating Russia from the Occident as considerably less deep than that separating it from the Orient" (13). In fact, many, such as Mikhail Pogodin (1800-1875), a prominent Moscow University professor, continued to claim:

*It is impossible to educate Africa and Asia, except by fitting out an army from all of Europe and sending it to a crusade against them. Let Europeans occupy the thrones of the Ashantis, the Burmese, the Chinese, the Japanese, and then establish there a European order of things. Then the fate of these countries will be decided. And why should this not be done? ...The happiness of mankind depends on it (qtd. by Riasanovsky 178).*

By the time the Russian empire colonized Central Asia in the 1860s, it was much easier for the Russian elite to define 'European' and 'Asian' against 'Russian'. The appearance of another Asian *Other* intensified the debate, causing Fedor Dostoevskii, a year before Vereshchagin's art exhibition, to write the following in *The Diary of a Writer (Dnevnik Pisatel'ia)* (1873):

*...in general all of our Russian Asia, including Siberia, for Russia still exists as some kind of an appendage, which our European Russia does not want to take any interest in. Russia is not in Europe only, but in Asia as well. Russian is not European only, but also Asian. Moreover, it is Asia that we should rest our*

*hopes upon more, than those we do in Europe. In the upcoming fates of ours, it is perhaps in Asia that lies our future. [nash glavonii iskhod](33).*

The role of the new Central Asian Other was strongly influenced by the internal battle Russians carried on with their own 'Asiaticness'. In this respect, Russian Orientalism was of a special kind, unlike European Orientalism; it was in continuous dialog with its own reflection. The virtual absence of the term 'race', as Jeff Sarego argues in "Epidemic and Empire: Ethnicity, Class and "Civilization" in the 1892 Tashkent Cholera Riot," was motivated by Russian settlers' uncertainty over their own position between Europe and Asia and their claim that perpetual contact with Eastern people made Russians ideal as an "universal civilizer" (117-139).

Thus the main reason for Vereshchagin's success was that the visual narrative of his artwork pacified an internal hesitation and uncertainty the audience had over its Asia/Europe identity. The artist's rendition of savage and exotic Central Asia reassured viewers of their European mission to bring civilization to Asia. At the same time, as intended by Turkestan's governor-general Konstantin Petrovich Von Kaufman, Vereschagin's paintings were an efficient and productive tool that provoked fear of the Other and drew the attention of potential sponsors of the colonial war in Central Asia.

## The "Herd of Animals"

Next to fear of the Asian Other, emblematic colonial narratives aspired to 'save' the oppressed barbarian groups from the savageness of themselves. Vereshchagin's vision portrayed this narrative in terms of the oppression of innocent children. Two of his famous paintings, *Purchase of a Child Slave (Prodaja rebenka-nevolnika, 1872)* and *Bacha and His Admirers (Bacha I Ego Poklonniki, 1868)*, set up an important generational opposition, which half a century later the Soviets continued to maintain in their apparatus of governance.

As a part of Vereshchagin's biography, Soviet art historians, such as Andrei Lebedev, included a number of pencil sketches of the *Purchase of a Child Slave* to demonstrate Vereshchagin's original work in progress. The earliest drawings involve adult slaves, which Vereshchagin later replaces with a single slave boy standing with his back towards the viewer. In the last few sketches the slave boy appears in the nude. It is arguable whether Vereschagin's long-term mentor Jean-Léon Gerome influenced his work, but the final version of the painting very much resembles the 1870 *The Snake Charmer* (Fig.1). Shortly before Vereshchagin went on his first trip to Central Asia in 1867, he spent several years in Gerome's art

studio learning not only how to paint, but also how 'look at' the Orient. Even if he never saw *The Snake Charmer* (which is unlikely), in Gerome's school he developed the important skill of what to notice and transfer to canvas.

Despite evident similarities, the social messages of these two paintings conveyed to their viewers are slightly different. Gerome's central theme is the exotic as well as erotic features of entertainment in the Near East. On one hand, the boy's naked body and the snake wrapped around his waist present the two as a part of the same animalistic, primordial setting, where the nudity of the boy stands for his vulnerability in the face of the predator. On the other hand, literary and artistic symbolism of the snake as a phallus may further suggest social acceptance of pedophilia and homosexuality in the Middle East. All additional features of the painting, such as the old musician, the viewers' colorful clothing, the kальяn and the ornamented wall on the background, add to the peculiarity of this exotic setting.

Vereshchagin's painting includes exotic characteristics of Central Asian society but focuses on its social vice, i.e. child slavery. The victim of his *Purchase* (Fig.2), a seven or eight year-old boy, stands still with his arms slightly spread in front of his potential owner. Vereshchagin accentuates the boy's naked body through the contrast of light and dark shadows. In the dark interior of the house the boy's glowing body echoes iconic angels. His nudity as well as his pose serves to demonstrate his vulnerability in the face of the cruel reality of Central Asian social injustice represented by the three adult males.

By concealing the child's face and revealing his body, Vereshchagin 'de-ethnosizes'<sup>11</sup> his features. In the highly exotic setting the boy's facelessness and nudity turns him into the universal child rather than a Central Asian child. In contrast, his surroundings, ornamented doors, colorful clothing of men, slightly exaggerated size of the turban on the client's head and a *tusbi* (beads) in his hands, stress not only the Oriental Asian but also Muslim characteristics of the whole setting. The way Vereshchagin plays with light and shadow becomes especially significant. It congealed the instant that the darkness/evilness of the Muslim world absorbed the light/innocence of the child.

Russian public reaction to the painting was quite intense. In his description of the piece, Vladimir Stasov, one of the most respected art critiques of his time, said, "Hidden in the depths of the painting indignation against thousands of revolting events in the past and present...one's spirit is protesting against the outrage and barbarianism, which swamps on every step of the way in the past and in the present life" (Lebedev and Solodovnikov, 48). *Turkestanskije Vedomosti*, (Turkestan news) dedicated a whole article to Vereshchagin's *Purchase*:

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<sup>11</sup> I use the word 'de-ethnosize' to stress techniques artists used to visually distant Central Asian children from the environment and society with which they share distinctive cultural traits.

*Through the door opened by the servant a strong stream of sunlight bursts into the dark room, which barely sees light coming through the oily paper of the lattice window. The door is opened so the master of the house, an obese, wealthy Sart<sup>12</sup> with a gray beard could take a closer look at the expensive commodity, a seven, eight years old boy, standing in front of him. The merchant took the child's shirt off and is whispering something entertaining and alluring to the customer, describing the most delicate, piquant details of the commodity. The customer is all ears and eyes. He placed his half weak hands on his lap and looks at the boy with a sweet, luscious gaze unable to take his eyes off him. Listening to the merchant he is feeling helpless, taken over by languor. "Tell me, tell me more..." is written on his face and watery eyes. As for the object of commodity itself, it stands calm and naïve in the middle of this group. Not knowing what awaits it, when in a status of his master's favorite, it will perform at parties not as a faceless object, but as a proud, shameless seducer, coarsely flirty bacha, who will bring a loud company of Sartian guest into quivering ecstasy (Lvovich 2).*

The most interesting aspect of this description is the way it interprets the painting by inferring the consequences of actions in the scene and by extrapolating the emotions the main characters go through in the process. From a frozen moment in time, the reviewer turns the painting into a whole story line with a projection into the future of the boy. The article goes beyond slavery to interpret the scene as a purchase of a future *bacha*, the literal meaning of which is 'child' or 'boy'. In nineteenth century Central Asia, the term *bacha* came to mean a prostitute boy, whose status and qualities were close to that of the Japanese geisha. A well-educated *bacha* was able to dance, recite classic poetry, sing, and engage in an interesting conversation. Usually sponsored by several wealthy men, *bacha* boys often became objects of mass admiration and jealousy, causing bankruptcy and even murder. True celebrities of their time, their dance performances attracted hundreds of people and caused considerable public excitement.

While the *Purchase* does not clearly indicate the connection between slavery and prostitution, Vereshchagin's other painting, "Bacha and His Admirers" (1868), directly addresses pedophilia and homosexuality (Fig.3). Despite the fact that the original painting did not survive, even its black and white copy reflects the intense social message the artist embedded in his painting. Again, Vereshchagin underlines the child's passiveness. In contrast with facial expressions and body language of men surrounding the boy, his face is marked with indifference and is almost doll-like. While nudity in the previously discussed piece signified the child's innocence, an oversized *joma* (robe) on the *bacha*, which covers his body completely, indicates the irrelevance of his age in this social environment. The tension

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<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth century Turkestan, *Sart* meant urban citizens of Samarqand, Bukhara.

Vereshchagin creates in his painting is best described by the comments of his contemporaries’:

*This is another typical scene from Central Asian life. Only here it is the replete and the wealthy who are having a good time not the poor ragamuffins. Here they are, squatted down and on their knees enjoying their special opium, but with their eyes wide open. And what expressions, what faces, what smiles, what animalistic eyes... A real herd of animals ready to seize an appetizing prey in their clutches (Stasov 302-303).*

In both paintings, the artist accentuates the social position of particular/certain children in Central Asia, which contravenes European cultural standards and thus invites civilized viewers to save and protect children from the “herd of animals.” In this context, colonial involvement became a rescue mission to save innocent children rather than a conquest. Reinforcing Gerome’s Orientalist vision of the ‘mysterious east’ with a strong socio-political statement, Vereshchagin’s paintings fed political ambition of his middle and upper class viewers in Moscow and Saint Petersburg and offered visual confirmation of Russia’s kinship with Europe rather than Asia.

## **Class Brothers**

The view from the imperial Slavic peripheries, which Westernized urban elites considered ‘half-Asiatic’, was significantly different from that of central Russia. Foreshadowing the Marxist ideology of the Soviet state, it highlighted class kinship of the Russian ‘half-Asiatic’ rural people and colonial Asians. The Central Asian steppe, as well as Siberian snow deserts inhabited by ‘savages’, were not only colonies of the Russian Empire but home for political dissidents, social outcasts, and criminals of the Empire. One of those political criminals, Pavel Shevchenko, the most prominent founder of modern Ukrainian literature, was born a serf. At the age of seventeen, his literary and artistic talents freed him from serfdom and introduced him to Russian intellectual circles. With financial help from his new acquaintances, he was able to graduate from the Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg and publish collections of his poetry and plays.

Already in 1847, however, Tsarist police arrested him for his anti-imperial poetry and membership in the Brotherhood of Cyril and Methodius. The goals of this secret society included the abolition of serfdom, access to public education, and transformation of the Tsarist Empire into a federation of free Slavic peoples with Russia being one of the equal rather than dominating nations. Shevchenko was banned from painting and writing and exiled as a private soldier to the Orenburg

garrison. Despite this prohibition, he continued to work and in the next ten years became the author of a series of paintings dedicated to the Kazakh steppe.

The most interesting aspect of Shevchenko's vision of Central Asia is his almost complete blindness to the 'exotic' features of the Kazakh steppe and its inhabitants. Fashionable among artists of that time, the Oriental style is barely readable or simply absent in his art. Neither was Shevchenko interested in the lifestyle of the Central Asian ruling elites. His focus, be it his native Ukraine or Central Asia, was on the everyday life (*byt*) of the lower classes –in the Central Asian case, Kazakh nomads.

Several of his paintings, the theme of which can be summarized as the universal innocence of childhood, feature different aspects of children's life in the Kazakh steppe. *A Kazakh Boy Lighting the Oven* (*Kazakhskii Khlopchik Razjigaet Pechku*, 1848-1849) features a child of approximately six or seven years old in a Kazakh yurt (Fig.4). Unlike Vereshchagin's images of children, Shevchenko's representation of the boy is in active interaction with the viewer as the only central figure of the composition. His pose and facial expression are animated with liveliness stressed by the light of the oven.

The use of nudity here, when compared with Vereshchagin, is especially interesting as the boy's half-naked body creates similar as well as opposing visual effects. Vereshchagin's intention was to de-ethnicize the image of the child, giving him angelic qualities in the environment of an exaggerated Oriental hell. Shevchenko also de-ethnicized his child, but does it to indicate his poverty, which universally unites him with poverty-stricken children all over the world. In fact, Shevchenko downplays in boy's facial features any suggestions of his Turkic origin. In the same manner, Shevchenko approaches the Kazakh yurt by displaying its simplicity, i.e. the poverty of the interior.

The child's underprivileged status does not undermine his relaxed pose and smiling face. Shevchenko's boy is in no need of a civilizing or rescue mission. The artist's interest lies in demonstrating similarities and the universality of children's habits. This is also the case in the next painting of the series, *Shevchenko and a Kazakh Boy Playing with a Cat* (*Shevchenko i Kazakhskii Klopchik, Igraiushiisia s Koshkoi*, 1856-1857) (Fig.5). There are no indications of the geographical location of the scene except for the title of the painting. With Shevchenko himself sitting in the background, the scene could have taken place anywhere, including the Russian or Ukrainian provinces. Much like Vereshchagin, Shevchenko uses light on the boy's upper body to stress the child's innocence. But in Shevchenko's case, the angelic quality of the boy's glowing skin reveals the hidden beauty of an ordinary scene. The artist's presence in the background of the painting may symbolize the weight of maturity versus the child's light-heartedness. Shevchenko's heavy, dark overcoat that covers his whole body like armor, contrasts with the boy's exposed upper body, light pants, and bare feet.

Despite his ten-year involuntary stay in the region, Schevchenko's depictions of Central Asia were not characterized by the Asia/Europe dichotomy. By highlighting the similarities of Central Asian children with children of the Slavic rural areas, Shevchenko focuses on class brotherhood rather than on ethnic, religious or cultural differences. The artist's background and political antagonism to the Tsarist autocracy endowed his artistic vision with universal humanistic qualities, which foreshadowed the expansion of Marxist ideas in Russia and its colonies.

## Central Asian Tahitians

Romantic primitivism, cherished by Russian intellectuals long before Central Asia became part of the Tsarist Empire, involved a combination of the contemptible and the admirable. "Artless scions of nature" (*prostodushnye chada prirordy*) who "do not think about wealth, honor, or glory, and do not care about what tomorrow may bring," (Slezkine 79) was how Russian-Siberian intellectuals characterized the Northern peoples of Siberia. In the Russian Romantic primitivism of the Caucasus, the savages were the freedom-loving, cruel, and fearless Caucasians. In the chart of savage *inorodtsy* (foreigners), Central Asians occupied the position of the cruel and dirty, yet mysterious and ancient, Other.

As Harsha Ram notes in his *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire*, "the Noble Savage held numerous attractions for the Russian gentry intellectual: as a primitive he was closer to nature, while his ferocious opposition to Russian rule elicited sympathy as a prism through which to contemplate the however limited creative resistance of the Russian poet to his own political system" (11). Romantic primitivism led intellectual and artistic outcasts of the empire to search for answers in the Russian Orient. By 1906, when Pavel Kuznetsov first came to Central Asia, colonial wars were for the most part in the past, and the peoples of the region were placed in an ideological framework of the other 'tamed' Asia. Recognized as the Russian Paul Gauguin (Baushinskii 13-21), Pavel Kuznetsov's intention was to find his own reflection in the mirror of, what he referred to in his diary as, a "wonderful, fantastic country" (Stupples 116). Occasional public recognition, alienation from artistic circles of St. Petersburg and Moscow, and finally financial difficulties turned Central Asia into a land of mysterious promises: "And these mysterious distant places drew me to find the meaning of the world of nature that could be discovered there, of the people that inhabit it, what distinctive way of life awaits me" (Stupples, 115). Kuznetsov's "penetration of the life of the East" is at times overwhelmingly exalted:

*I reach out to this gleaming, scorching sun, the red, stony cliffs,  
the precipices above rivers and valleys, the terraces and local  
villages. The curiosity of an unexpected happiness took  
possession of me – to realize my long-standing dream, to*



*penetrate the life of the East. On the flat roof of a tea-house I would listen to conversations about the mysteries of eastern wisdom; the green Indian tea refreshed, intoxicating grape honey put one to sleep, the massage baths gave one exceptional energy, good spirits and vitality; mutton pilaf satisfied the craving for food and the Bukhara mountain air, saturated with the scent of musk, together with the contemplation of colour-rich splendor and harmony, brought human existence to a state of paradisiacal felicity, and it seemed to me that I was beginning to penetrate into the secret of eastern consciousness...(Stupples, 139)*

In Kuznetsov's Asia of pure and unspoiled nature, there is no place for poverty, disharmony or pain. It is not the presence but the almost complete absence of men and children that is interesting about Kuznetsov's vision of Central Asia. In his colonial Eden, unspoiled by the sins of the civilized world, there is no place for children. Women are the main characters of Kuznetsov's art. Symbolizing the artist's Orient, they carry the "secrets of eastern consciousness" that he is so eager to penetrate.

In the *Shearing of Lambs (Strijka Barashkov, 1912)* (Fig.6), landscape and women share the same smoky blue palette, and the roundness of their headscarves echo the curves of the yurts and moon in the background, all signifying their inseparability from the exotic nature of their environment. The dimness and the pale moon leave the viewer uncertain of the time of the day. Here, time, an important concept in the Western/westernized world, is insignificant. His sense of frozen time in the Orient is stressed by the women's static poses as well as their impassive facial expressions. In fact, it is hard to say whether they are awake or sleepwalking in the shadows of Oriental timelessness.

Kuznetsov's only painting depicting a child, *Kirgiz Children (Kirgizskie Deti, 1908)* (Fig.7), adds nuance to the way colonial outsiders viewed Central Asian children. The largest figure of the composition, the boy, is centered at the forefront of the painting. The interior of a yurt with its colorful blankets, carpets, and the water jug placed next to the boy, accentuate the child's Central Asian background. The boy's dark skin, wide grin with small uneven teeth, and unstable pose forcing him to lean on his both hands, are almost animalistic and rather unexpected in the overall steadiness and aesthetic harmony of Kuznetsov's *Asia* series.

One possible interpretation of this depiction - atypical for Kuznetsov - may lie in the epistemic framework of Russian Orientalist primitivism. In a civilization ruled by instincts and emotions rather than reason and intellect, children are even further removed from civilization and closer to nature than adults, which is why some features of the boy (teeth, deformed body, unstable pose) are different from

Kuznetsov's depiction of women. The artist's *Asia* series demonstrates how in the political environment of the late nineteenth century there was no more need to maintain visual narratives of violence with an urgency of children's rescue mission; the metaphorical function of the colony had shifted from the land of 'barbarians' to the land of 'children of nature'.

## The View From Within: Central Asian Russian

Colonization of Central Asia in the 1860s and migration of Russian population to Central Asia produced a fourth vision of Central Asia in the early twentieth century. Standing on the periphery of colonial visual discourse, this artistic perspective is best seen in the works of Alexandr Volkov. Born in a family of first generation colonial immigrants in Central Asia in 1886, Aleksandr Volkov referred to Fergana as his homeland (Zemskaia 9). A well-known figure in both worlds of colonial Turkestan, the Russian and the native (*tuzemnyi*), Volkov's artistic gaze from within is unique as it reflects the duality of his own cultural identity as half Russian and half Central Asian.

Volkov's artistic maturity coincides with the October Revolution of 1917 followed by the change of power in the former colonies of the Tsarist Empire. The Bolsheviks promoted major modifications in all spheres of Central Asian societies such as modernization, industrialization, sedentarization, and the establishment of Western medical and educational systems. Introducing these changes, the new authorities needed artists and writers who could illustrate the benefits of these changes in an accessible visual language of the socialist realism. Volkov found his own niche teaching in a variety of art schools, including the Turkestan People's School of Art (1919), Tashkent Railroad College (1919), and the Pedagogy Faculty of the Turkestan State University (1921) (Zemskaia 46). His personal exhibitions took place in Tashkent and Moscow in 1920, 1921, and 1923. It is during this time that he created one of his most famous paintings, *Mourning (Oplakivanie, 1921)* (Fig.8). At the birth of a new socialist society, the idea of mourning and death went against the mainstream ideological promotion of eternal happiness in the glorious future. The religious connotation of the painting was also unpopular in light of the Soviet promotion of atheism. Volkov uses a Central Asian technique of incorporating a variety of semantic layers into one image, which reveal themselves depending on the epistemic tradition of the viewer. While a Christian viewer recognized the image as Jesus Christ, for a Central Asian audience it may as well have been a famous in Persian literature motif of mourning over prince *Siavash*, who sacrificed himself to stop the war between Iran and Turan in Hakim Abulqasim Firdusi's *Shahname*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Abulqasim Firdusi's (940-1020) *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kinds) is an epic consisting of some 60,000 verses that narrates the mythical and historical past of Persian speaking peoples from the creation of the world up until Islamic conquest of Persia in the seventh century.

A familiar Christian motif of mourning over the body of Jesus Christ gains an additional meaning in Volkov's interpretation. The circular movement of the four bodies in the painting intermingling with predominantly dark geometric forms creates the impression of a stain glass image. At the same time, it resembles techniques used by Central Asian carpenters, whose works Volkov studied and incorporated into his artistic vision, arguing that there was "more of Central Asia in fabrics than in photographs, as when one creates a fabric, he reproduces (envisions) the world in its essential characteristics" (Zemskaiia, 14). While Zemskaiia points out the portrait resemblance of Volkov with his Christ, it is also important to note his visibly Turkic features. In this respect, Volkov's Central Asian Jesus does not break the canons of traditional Russian iconography, as many of Christ's images after the Turko-Mongol conquest of Russia in thirteenth century have Turkic features. Yet Volkov does exaggerate these features by even a darker color of skin, darker hair and overarching eyebrows that are traditional in Central Asian miniature painting. In the same manner, he accentuates women's faces and bodies. By doing so, the artist enters Russia's East/West discourse by displaying the Asiatic element of the Russian culture and in this respect demonstrating Russian/Central Asian kinship.

The idea of death in Volkov's artistic vision may have been provoked by the 1920s confrontation between the Soviet Red army and the anti-communist, native *Basmachi*<sup>14</sup> revolt. In 1920, a year before Volkov created *Mourning*, the Bukharan emirate became the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic. The overthrow of the Emir was the impetus for the Basmachi Revolt and there was continuous bloodshed on both sides until the late 1930s. Thus Zemskaiia's hypothesis of the painting being a self-portrait gains a political dimension as Volkov viewed himself as a carrier of both traditions and therefore experienced the deaths on both sides as his own.

In his writings, Volkov often rejected the idea of death as an ending, claiming that it is only a stage in the circle of infinite rebirths (Zemskaiia 13). In this way, his vision is close to the idea of *arvaks* in the Central Asian religious tradition, which also states that the souls (*arvaks*) of ancestors come back with the newborn children named after them. In the semiotics of Central Asian nomadic ornamentation, the triangle, which Volkov places in the lower part of the painting, symbolizes continuous circulation of souls in the upper, middle, and the lower worlds. The central color of the painting, red, which in both Russian and Central Asian traditions stands for life,<sup>15</sup> also becomes part of Volkov's depiction of death. The idea of resurrection in the environment of Soviet promotion of atheism may have implied the return of Christian as well as Central Asian religious traditions in the future.

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<sup>14</sup> The *Basmachi* movement, which started in 1916 as an anti-Tsarist and anti-Russian revolt developed into a long-time revolt against the Soviets. The movement consisted of clergy, aristocracy and peasants, who viewed Tsarist and Soviet presence in Central Asia as colonial interference. According to Tursunov Soviets succeeded in eliminating the last Basmachi groups only in 1940s.

<sup>15</sup> See on the meaning of red Bonnell.

Five years later, Volkov revisited the idea of resurrection in his painting, *Mother (Mat', 1926)*. Featuring a Central Asian Madonna (Fig.9) with a child, Volkov uses a technique in which colors and shapes envelope the central objects. The warm earthy palette of colors the artist used for the child and his mother's skin are applied to the earth and the hills outside of the house, thereby creating a visual analogy of a 'Mother Earth'. The iconic exposure of the mother's breast is also at odds with the Soviet policy of asexual representations of women at the end of 1920s early 1930s (Dashkova). In 1926, when the idea of fostering a new generation of Soviet citizens away from the "polluted older generations" (Lunacharskii, 127) was becoming increasingly popular, the almost circular composition of Central Asian Madonna and feeding the child stresses the opposite.

In 1923, *Pravda* (Truth) gave Volkov an overall positive review, but also noted that there are two artistic paths he could pursue in the future. He had to:

*...either overcome cubism, useless in contemporary art, and follow the path of the much needed and understandable for everyone-- artistic realism (to show workers of Russia the daily living of Asia's working class is a marvelous goal for a USSR master)-- or put emphasis on purely decorative art and produce something meant for wall paintings or some sort of other decoration (some of the sketches of comrade Volkov may be quite usable for big decorations. In either case there are things to be expected from this artist)(Sidorov 2).*

With these two options, Volkov was expected to give up any attempts of bringing two aspects of his identity together and combining two visual languages in his artistic vision. The Soviet approach to arts was of a particular kind, and in this respect Volkov's aesthetic dual consciousness had to become either European/Russian (i.e. realistic) or "purely decorative" (i.e. folk) Central Asian art. In the following years of Soviet rule, ideas related to children and generational relations became increasingly important in the visual discourse of Soviet artists, photographers and filmmakers. Volkov remained an outsider to this visual discourse as much as he was an outsider to the colonial narrative.

## **2. Soviet Modernity vs. *Aziatshchina*: Visual Politics for Children**

When the Soviets took over the Tsarist administration in Central Asia in the early twentieth century, they expressed determination to break with colonial past and establish equality (*ravenstvo*) of proletariats of different ethno-nationalities of the Soviet Union. The early Bolshevik vision of Soviet society involved the creation of a modern state with complex web of social interdependence, a community in

which every person “joined ranks with others in a free collective” (Khakhordin 103). Visual propaganda of this period emphasized equality (*ravenstvo*) and solidarity of all republics marking an important shift in perception of ethno-racial relations between Russians and former Tsarist colonies. The poster *Vmeste, Druzhno na Vibori I Rabotu. V Sovety! (Together, Hand in Hand to Elections and Work. To the Union!)* from 1928, for example (Fig.10), demonstrates representatives of Russian and Uzbek peasants walking together towards political and economic changes of the Soviet state. Physical closeness of both central figures (hands on each other's shoulders, carrying the weight of the banner together, shadows on the sun merging into one), visual similarities (equal heights, closeness in age, similar body structure), as well as synchronized body movement (eye contact with the viewer, facial expression, pace of marching) are reinforced by the semiotics of the message on the red banner, which begins with words “together” (*vmeste*) and “hand in hand” (*druzhno*). Etimologically the word *druzhno*, originates from the Russian word *drug* – “friend”, which also reinforces successful partnership of two nationalities.

In introducing modernity, the Soviets reinforced not only its essential elements such as industrialization, urbanization, and technology. They also presented peripheral cultural norms such as western eating etiquette, European fashion, Russian/western classical music and art as modern. In this way while Bolsheviks strived to establish ethno-national equality of all republics on the one hand, on the other they reinforced colonial notion of Western/Russian cultural superiority.

This interesting ideological paradox can be observed in different forms of Soviet visual propaganda for women and children. Among the first signs of modernity that Soviets brought to Central Asia was western medicine. Thousands of professionals from Russia arrived to Asian republics to open medical centers, clinics, and hospitals. Part of these institutions' mission was to educate the population about hygiene as well as contagious diseases. The 1932 poster *Kolxozin oln dund.*, which introduces nomad populations of Kalmyks, Kazakhs, Turkmens and Kyrgyzs, to the Soviet *biopower*<sup>16</sup> critiques the absence of hygiene among nomads. Divided into two parallel dimensions, the image (Fig.11) on the left presents the central figure of the woman with a bandage over her face that hides deformation caused by disease. Eating from the same plate with healthy family members that include a little child she presents a potential source of contamination. In contrast, on the right side of the image, people wash their hands (figure in the back) and eat from separate plates. Rather than displaying an improved version of the image on the left, the artist replaces the nomadic environment (yurt, nomadic clothing fashion and hairstyles, eating etiquette) with western style interior and its symbols of time (the wall clock), power (the picture of Lenin) and western civilizing process (tables, tablecloths, chairs, and silverware). Left versus right as well as

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<sup>16</sup> This particular poster is in Kalmyk language, but the same image was used to address other nomads, including those of Central Asia.

dark versus light color pallets of opposing images intensify the ideological gap between two lifestyles. Leaving no option but to completely transform one's living conditions in favor of the Soviet modern standards of living, the image's underlying implication equates germs and diseases to the Central Asian nomadic lifestyle.

Atheism was an important component of Soviet modernity. In visual culture modernity opposed Islam visualized through elements of traditional culture. Schoolbooks introduced children to the ideological calendar and the heroic pantheon of the Soviet state; they provided children with a complex of facts that drew historical and geographical borders of what was to be considered 'ours' as opposed to what belonged to 'them' (See Mamedova 113).

A 1936 Kazakh primer schoolbook *Elifbo* (Fig.12) introduced children to antonyms of the words "old" [*eski*] and "new" [*jana*] i.e. religious versus modern (16). The vertical spatiality of the Soviet modernity as the higher power (top) addresses religious Muslim as well as Christian perception of the Soviet modernity as heaven and pre-Soviet traditional world as hell (bottom). In the absence of the sitting man's full front view in the bottom part of the image the visual accent falls on his clothing and pose. The headdress, indigenous style robe and the rug signify the teacher's Central Asian and Muslim background. Representation of physical punishment (the stick in the man's left hand) as a teaching tool presents the pre-Soviet education as a violent practice. In the visual binary of the modern/traditional the image of Soviet modernity (top part) is not as detailed. A Western style building may suggest the idea of the shelter provided by the collective.

Furthermore, Soviet ideologists viewed Russian language as the language of international communication between republics that would help raise the first generation of Soviet citizens within the linguistic norms of a larger multinational modern state. In visual culture, the knowledge of the Russian language was often a way to find shelter, better opportunities, and even a new family. Every issue of *Pioneer of Tajikistan* in 1938, for example, published a fragment from Nikolai Oganovskii's novel about a Tajik boy *Rahim*, whose father and brother were murdered by *basmachi* troops (2). Detailed descriptions of their bodies' decay as well as a leader of *basmachi* cutting off *Rahim*'s fingers occupy a significant part of the narrative.<sup>17</sup> When a Russian Stepnoi commander finds out that *Rahim* speaks excellent Russian he invites him into his army to fight the *basmachi*. The illustration (Fig.13) that compliments the narrative demonstrates the moment

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<sup>17</sup> The opposition of old versus young was due to political situation of the time. While *basmachi*, who consolidated aristocracy, religious elites and peasants, viewed the Soviet state as an extension of colonial domination (Holdworth 258-277) and continued to fight the Red Army up until the 1940s, during Stalin's purges of 1930s the Party arrested and executed great numbers of indigenous 'enemies of the people' (*vragi naroda*). These were people who joined the ranks of the Communist party, but were against some aspects of Soviet modernization. Even "reliable" Party members had the potential of contaminating others with a backward mindset (*otstaloie myshlenie*).

when the comader *Stepnoi* and *Rahim* meet for the first time. Reaching out towards wounded *Rahim* with his left hand, *Stepnoi* touches the boy's head with paternal care. In this way having lost his biological father, *Rahim* replaces him with a representative of the state, commander *Stepnoi*.

Very often acceptance into a new Soviet family leads young heroes in visual culture of the time towards a transformation. In the opening scene of *Friends Meet Again* [*Druzia vstrechaiutsia vnov*] by director Kamil Iarmatov: Scriptwriters Aleksei Speshnev and Alexander Filimonov (Stalinabadskaja kinostudiia, 1939) a 1920s group of Soviet army topographers mapping the Shahri-Chang desert. A band of *Basmachis* attacks them and in the middle of the battle an orphan girl *Rano* accidentally witnesses a scene which reveals one of Bolshevik soldiers *Daniyar* (Konstantin Mukhiddinov) as the head of the *basmachi Shir-Khan* (Fig.14). Having gone through the trauma of losing her parents, she does not reveal the truth to the Soviets. One of the Red Army Russian soldiers, *Kornienko* adopts and raises the girl (Fig.15). Years later *Rano* and her rescuers meet again during the celebration of harvest in a Soviet city, which replaced the desert, where *Rano* was found. When the young woman meets the traitor, she does not recognize him at once. In the meantime, the villain plans to blow up the city dam. At the crucial moment, *Rano's* memory comes back, she uncovers the truth, and the Red Army arrests the villain.

In one of the first scenes, a Russian soldier *Kornienko*, *Rano's* future foster father, hands her a watch. Listening to its ticktack, the girl stops crying and smiles. Typical for Soviet visual propaganda's symbol of modernity, the watch represents the beginning of the modern era. It is an object that the 'older' Soviet Russia presents as a gift to the young Central Asia and in the moment of this act historical time enters the scene. With 'modernity' in her hands *Rano* is no longer part of what Soviet characters of the film identify as "eternal sands of Asia" (*vechnie peski Azii*). As years go by, even the desert turns into a beautiful modern city while *Rano* transforms into a young Soviet woman and "becomes a person" (*chelovekom stala*) (film). Soviet modernity literally transformed an ethnically Tajik child<sup>18</sup> (Fig.16) into an adult (T.V. Nikitina) with less pronounced ethnic features (Fig.17). As intended by the state, *Rano* is 'national in form' and Socialist/Russified 'in content'.

*Rano's* new social status comes with the state's protection. She gradually regains her memories, which allow her to 'remember', i.e. to see events of the past in a new Soviet light. As a result, *Rano* identifies an apparent Bolshevik as a traitor. She 'recognizes' the enemy and turns him in. As a symbol of Central Asia's future, *Rano* fights her past and accepts the Soviet vision of history.

Soviet visual propaganda also identified those children who failed to accept Soviet modernity in its full. The Kazakh poster on advantages of active lifestyle for children and youth (Fig.18) for example, demonstrates the need for physical exercises. The image of children playing with sand and snow comes with the text:

<sup>18</sup> The name of the Tajik girl, who played *Rano* as a child does not appear in captions.

“When the summer sun shines, fresh air should touch a child, his body must be exposed [to sun] as much as possible. In the winter, child’s clothes should be warm but not limit his movements. Let it be light...” On the one hand the visual (children playing and running outdoors in winter and summer) as well as verbal message of the poster clearly identifies its theme. As Victoria Bonnell argues in her book *The Iconography of Power*, “The attributes of youth, agility, and fitness were directly linked to the labor function” and thus esthetics of young, well built and tanned exemplary Soviet citizens became part of the Soviet vision of Homo Sovieticus” (Bonnell 105).

On the other hand, the image also presents the ‘unhealthy’ alternative (children on the left top and bottom). The clothing that prevents children from being mobile is exclusively ‘ethnic’ (Kazakh traditional hats, dress, robes) as opposed to children on the right (Soviet/western style sweaters, pants, and headwear). Other features such as one of the male figures sitting on the ground (top left) in a traditionally Central Asian way as well as images of yurts in the back intensify the ethno-national background of children on the left. The image of the fallen girl (bottom left) also creates some gender tension. While Soviet boys are able to run in order to help the fallen girl, the boy next to her cannot move due to his heavy coat. Thus Soviet fashion also becomes a marker of a more mobile and capable male. The image creates the conditions of each lifestyle: passive Central Asian observers on one hand and active, healthy, happy Soviet children on the other.

Popular culture also showed ways in which the Soviet awarded children who accepted Soviet modernity and went through the transformation. The press of 1930s shows a wide range of new activities as well as objects that symbolized Soviet modernity. If in the course of the October revolution, material wealth symbolized disapproved bourgeois immoderations, by the 1930s, the policy had changed and objects came to emphasize *Homo Sovieticus*’ belonging to the people of the prosperous, technologically and culturally advanced Socialist future (Bonnell 302). Thus images of children surrounded with numerous objects such as gramophones, airplanes, chess, checkers, as well miniature planes, microscopes, binoculars, and introduced young readers to the world of professional opportunities the Soviet system was able to offer. Outside of professional scope, press also encouraged children to listen and play classic or modern Soviet music (Fig. 19 & 20), dance ballet (Fig. 21), and stay within the realm of Soviet realism in art and literature.

As a part of the cultural Russification, the press stressed the importance of excellent knowledge of the Russian language and culture. The imagery that repeatedly comes up in children’s press photographs of the 1930s, for example, is Soviet Central Asian children reading the books by the nineteenth century Russian author and the founder of modern Russian poetry Aleksandr Pushkin (Fig 22 & 23). The portrait of Pushkin above Central Asian schoolchildren established symbolic guardianship of the Russian literary tradition over all including Central Asian Soviet children.



Parent/child relationships within the Soviet family across Soviet Union changed in mid 1930s. The cult of comrade Stalin added a layer of veneration to symbolic parents of the Soviet children. The 1936 photo-collage in *Pioneri Tojikiston*, for example, features a (Fig.24) comrade Stalin with the Soviet state emblem behind his head above numerous Sovietized Central Asian children. While the image of Stalin is abnormally large compared to other figures, the size as well as the position of his figure adds a saintly quality to the state emblem behind his back as a nimbus. His smile and applause addressed beyond the camera celebrates millions of Tajik children involved in numerous activities such as ballet dancing and sports.

In the second half of 1930s however, the new 'parents' expectations grew and involved not only knowledge of the Russian language and excellence in school, but also labor. In 1936, a ten year old Tajik girl from a small village of Shomansur, Mamalakhat Nakhangoova became the most famous girl of Soviet Union, the first pioneer to receive order of Lenin, and meet comrade Stalin. She deserved this high honor by collecting up to 102 kg of cotton a day. The following drawing of Mamalakhat in the 1939 *Textbook for Russian language in Tajik schools* is one out of thousands of depictions of this meeting. Mamalakhat's commentary compliments the image of comrade Stalin stroking her head with one hand while handing the order of Lenin with another (Fig.25):

*I don't like to play dolls" – says Mamalakhat – "what is interesting to me is studying, working, collecting cotton is interesting. I was [still] too little and not allowed to work. And so I started collecting cotton myself after school. You have to collect it with two hands. Before I collected with one hand I would only collect fifty kilograms<sup>19</sup> a day. On the sixth day I began to collect with both of my hands and collected a hundred and two<sup>20</sup> kilograms (13).*

In her interview Mamalakhat says that it was her own initiative that brought her to collect cotton. Rather than encouraged or forced by the state, she herself decided to help out her country and was honored by meeting the father of the nation. The name 'Mamalakhat', which means 'country' in Tajik, adds another layer of semantic significance to the girl's heroism. She is not only a little girl, but the country itself, ready to dedicate her entire being to what she finds most interesting – collecting cotton.

What is significant about Mamalakhat's numerous depictions is the absence of the heroic act itself. The visual images reflect the outcome, the reward that came as

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<sup>19</sup> 110 pounds.

<sup>20</sup> 224.4 pounds.

a result of her work, i.e., meeting Stalin and receiving his gift – the order of Lenin (Fig. 26). Mamlakat's smiling face and body language on most of these images are informal. With her hands around Stalin's shoulders, Mamlakat acts like a daughter around her father. In the visual representation of Soviet children, a trip to the 'heart of our country' (*serdse nashie Rodini*), the city of Moscow, a chance to become comrade Stalin's little girl was a dream come true. Soviet visual propaganda encouraged thousands of other girls to prove themselves on the cotton fields despite minimum wages and exposure to harmful chemicals.

Bolshevik visual propaganda changed the power relations of the former colonial order, encouraged and strengthened ethno-nationalism in Central Asian republics. In this way, the notion of universal equality and solidarity went back to the art of the nineteenth century revolutionary artist Shevchenko. At the same time, Bolshevik propaganda reestablished cultural superiority of westernized Russian norms in areas of social life that were not essential to modernity, such as housing, fashion, music, art and literature. As Lenin stated on raising the first Soviet children, his generation was "forced to reconstruct human life while standing up to its waist in the filth of old fallacies and hideousness of life" (Lunacharskii 301). In doing so, Soviet press and film presented indigenous cultural norms, housing, and fashion as harmful, unclean, and unhealthy much like the Tsarist Orientalist artists such as Vereshchagin.

Rewritten or rather re-visualized through propaganda, histories of the region were significantly more realistic to children who had a vague or no memory at all of pre-Soviet Central Asia and was more flexible in adapting to the political and social changes of Soviet modernity.

In an environment of political and social changes that either eliminated or excluded large groups of adult and elders out of the Soviet state-building process, children and youth needed security and, therefore, guidance. In return for dedication to the Party and Soviet values, hard work and involvement in socio-political activities of the Soviet state, Central Asian children gained a sense of acceptance into a big happy Soviet family and faith in Stalin and Mother-Party's protection against internal and external harm. Continuous political instability, poverty and hunger made adjusting to Soviet lifestyle and turning in or away from those who didn't, for many seem like a small sacrifice.

Having demonstrated all the advantages of Soviet modernity and disadvantages of pre-Soviet traditional world, Bolshevik propaganda encouraged young Central Asians to accept cultural modernization and Russification. By the early 1940s the first generation of Soviet Central Asian children dressed, spoke and thought differently than their parents and grandparents, but whether they met the ideal criteria of Soviet citizens is the question this thesis attempts to answer in Chapter II.





Figure 1. Jean-Léon Gérôme. *The Snake Charmer*. 1870. Oil on canvas. Sterling and Francine Clark collection. *Sterling and Francine Clark Institute*. Web. 15 March 2009.





Figure 2. Vasilii Vereshchagin. *Purchase of a Child Slave*.1872. Oil on Canvas. The State Tretyakov Gallery. *The State Tretyakov Gallery*. Web. 23 Febr. 2007.



Fig.3. Vasilii Vereshchagin. *Bacha and His Admirers*.1868. Oil on Canvas. N.p.  
*Vasilliy Vereshchagin. Zhizn' I Tvorchestvo*. Moskva [Moscow]: Iskusstvo, 1958. 94.  
Print.





Figure 4. Tarash Shevchenko. *A Kazakh Boy Lighting the Oven*. 1848-1849. Stepovik, Dmitrii. *Taras Shevchenko: Zhivopis', Grafika*. Kiev: Mistetstvo, 1984. 47. Print.



Fig. 5. Taras Shevchenko. *Shevchenko I Kazakhskii Klopchik, Igraiushiisia s Koshkoi*. 1856-1857. Stepovik, Dmitrii. *Taras Shevchenko: Zhivopis', Grafika*. Kiev: Mistetstvo, 1984. 49. Print.





Fig. 6. Pavel Kuznetsov. *Strijka Barashkov*. 1912. Tretyakov State Gallery. Bakushinskii, Anatolii. "Pavel Kuznetsov." *Katalog vystavki Tre'tiakovskoi Galerei*. Moskva: n.p, 1929. 13. Print.





Fig. 7. Pavel Kuznetsov. *Kirgiz Children*.1908. Tretyakov State Gallery.  
Bakushinskii, Anatolii. "Pavel Kuznetsov." *Katalog vystavki Tre'tiakovskoi Galerei*.  
Mosvka: n.p, 1929. 22. Print.





Fig 8. Aleksandr Volkov. *Mourning*. 1921. Muzei Vostoka, Moscow. Zemskaja, Militsa. *Volkov Aleksandr: Master "Granatovoi Chaikhany"*. Moskva: Sovetskii Khudojnik, 1975. 84. Print.





Fig.9. Aleksandr Volkov. *Mother*.1926. Muzei Vostoka, Moscow. Zemskaia, Militsa. *Volkov Aleksandr: Master "Granatovoi Chaikhany"*. Moskva: Sovetskii Khudojnik, 1975. 88. Print.





Fig. 10. *Vmeste, Druzhno na Vibory I Rabotu v Soveti*. 1934. Collection of posters in State Russian Librabry [*Gosudarstvennaia Rossiyskaia Biblioteka*] Moscow. Print.



# Kolxozin oln dund xot uuln xalbmgin kədlmşinb boln bəəlhinb jasrulna.



Igz xot uxim biş.



Xot igz uximn.

1. Xotig salu savas edl; 2. Xot uusna ardnb savan  
xalun usar uha; 3. Xot uux bolnannb omno haran uha.

Fig. 11. N.a. Kolkhozin Oln Dund Xot...1927. Collection of posters in State Russian Library [Gosudarstvennaia Rossiyskaia Biblioteka] Moscow. Print.



№ 7.



Мънав саңа мектеп.



Мънав eski мектеп.

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Fig. 12. N.a. *Elifbo* Exersice 7. N.p.:1936.13. Print.





Fig. 13. Jahjolev, Z. "Pri Jok v Piandg." *Pioner Tadjikistana*, 23 July 1938. Print.



Fig. 14. The Basmachi traitor (Rakhim Pirmukhammedov) *Friends Meet Again*. [*Druzia Vstrechaiutsia Vnov*]. Stalinobod Film Studio. 1939. Film.





Fig. 15. *Rano meets Kornienko (Oleg Zhakhov) Friends Meet Again. [Druzia Vstrechaiutsia Vnov']*. Stalinobod Film Studio. 1939. Film.



Fig.16. *Rano as a Child N.N. Friends Meet Again. [Druzia Vstrechaiutsia Vnov']* Dir. Kamil Iarmatov. Stalinobod Film Studio. 1939. Film.



Fig17. *Rano* as a young Soviet woman. (Tat'iana Nikitina. Tatiana). *Friends Meet Again*. [*Druzia Vstrechaiutsia Vnov'*] Stalinobod Film Studio. 1939. Film.



Fig. 18. N.a.*Balan' Dur's Kijindirindler*.1932. Collection of posters in State Russian Library [*Gosudarstvennaia Rossiyskaia Biblioteka*] Moscow. Print.





Fig. 19. *Gramophone in the Music class. Pioneri Tojikiston. Sept.24. 1938. Library of History, Department of Press, Dushanbe. Print.*



Fig. 20. *Schoolchildrn of School #12. Pioner. 3 May. 1935. National Library of Republic of Kazakhstan. Department of Press. Alma-Ati. Print.*



Fig. 21. N.a. *Ballerinas*. *Pioner*. 11 May. 1936. National Library of Republic of Kazakhstan. Print.





Fig. 22. Reading Pushkin outside of school. *Pioneer*. 13 Feb. 1937. National Library of Kazakhstan. Department of Press. Print.



Fig. 23. Reading Pushkin in class. *Pioner*. 13 Feb.1937. National Library of Kazakhstan. Department of Press. Print.





Fig. 24. N.a. *Pioneri Tozhikiston*. 23 May 1932. Print.



Прочитайте статью и расскажите по вопросам.

## Орден Ленина.



Никогда ещё не было, чтобы такая маленькая девочка получила такую большую награду.

Проверку Мамлакат Нахонгову Советское правительство наградило за хорошую работу орденом Ленина.

Это было в конце 1935 г.

Вместе с лучшими ударниками Таджикистана Мамлакат приехала в Москву на совещание.

— Не люблю я играть в куклы, — говорит Мамлакат. — Мне учиться интересно, работать, хлопок собирать интересно. Я всё была маленькая, и меня не пускали на работу. Тогда я сама после школы стала собирать хлопок. Собирать его надо двумя руками. Раньше я собирала одной рукой только пятьдесят килограммов в день. На шестой день стала собирать двумя руками и собрала сто два килограмма.

Ответьте на вопросы письменно.

1. Кто была Мамлакат?
2. Где она была в 1935 г.?
3. За что её наградили?
4. Что Мамлакат рассказала о себе?

Fig. 25. Russian Language [Bogoliavlenskaii D. I. *Kniga dlia chteniia po russkomu iaziku v VI klasse Kazakhskoi Shkoli* [Reading Russian in VI grade of Kazakh Schools] Alma-Ata. 1938. 12. Print.



Fig. 26. *Comrade Stalin and pioneer Mamlakat Nakhangova. Pioneer. 7 Novem. 1936. National Library of Republic of Kazakhstan, Department of Press. Print.*

## Chapter II

### The Spell of Self-Exotification or What Happened to the *Natsional'naia Forma*

*A good film is as good as an army.*  
Josef Stalin

Stalin's definition of Soviet nations as not ordinary modern bourgeois nations in 1930 *Marxism and the National Question*, (54) drew the outlines of the country's ethno-nationalism as socialist in 'content' (*soderzhanie*). This did not contradict the fact that Soviet ideologists invested into reinforcing and at times building the national 'form' (Roy, Martin, Walker). Visual representation of the national form had specific features. Motivated and sponsored from Moscow and republican urban centers, the 'form' absorbed variety of stereotypes Bolshevik elites had of rural population. Traditional robes, sunlit cotton fields, women in colorful satin dresses, bazaars, teahouses, and *plov*<sup>21</sup> in Soviet visual culture for example, represented Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The steppe, horses, *yurt*, *kumis*<sup>22</sup>, nomadic clothing and jewelry became markers of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan.

At the same time rapid modernization of 1930s began to transform the way Soviet citizens perceived themselves in relation to their 'content' and 'form'. By mid 1940s after Stalinist purges and WWII the 'form' i.e. the image of the stylized rural lifestyle in Soviet visual culture began to resemble the pre-Soviet urban aristocracy. Lola Ismailova and her visual representation on the cover of the December 1949 special issue of *Ogonek*, one of the most popular statewide magazines of the Soviet Union, is a good example of that kind of discrepancy.

Like many Soviet youth of the 1940s Lola Ismailova (Fig. 27-29), lived in the capital city of Tajikistan - Dushanbe, studied biology at Tajik State University, spoke Russian and Tajik, preferred Mozart over folk Tajik music and dressed in European-style dresses. Yet when *Ogonek's* photojournalist Oleg Knorring picked her for a 'titular' (*titul'noe*) Tajik girl photo-portrait, he found it necessary to adjust her appearance to readers' expectations of the Tajik 'form'. After several hours of searching, he found the right outfit for the photo-shoot in the local Opera Theater. When the picture appeared on the cover of *Ogonek*, the woman in the photograph (Fig.30) had very little in common with the image of the young Soviet woman, which Lola Ismailova projected in real life.

The semi-Middle Eastern/ Central Asian dress on the photograph, designed specifically for theatrical performances and musicals as the 'rubab player' (*rubabistka*) costume, did not reflect any of the regional Tajik dress styles. The

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<sup>21</sup> Most popular in Central Asian region rice dish.

<sup>22</sup> Fermented horse milk

earrings and the crown while worn by wealthy Samarqandian and Bukharian women of the pre-Soviet era, did not fit into the political agenda of the proletarian aesthetics. A white bow on the back of Lola's head was another non-Tajik fashion component, which the photographer from Moscow included to make the overall look more dramatic and 'royal' (*tsarstvennii*) (Ismailova, 34). Despite the fact that both Lola and theater workers never saw a headscarf modeled in this way, neither protested or tried to explain to their *mehmon* (guest) his confusion about the Tajik national form. Reflection of reality, at this point, was no longer the main concern; in the face of a bigger notion of the 'national form', these inaccuracies had little significance. While Oleg Knorring was interested in the exotic aspect of a Tajik woman, theater workers were driven by national pride. State authorized *forma* gave different audiences an opportunity to have collective dreams about the past as a form of imaginary present.

In that issue of *Ogonek* there were many other photographs, which reflected what was supposed to be far more important, i.e. the socialist 'content' (*soderzhanie*) of the Tajik youth. Nevertheless, when the issue came out, it was Oleg Knorring's image of a young Tajik woman that provoked readers' interest. Hundreds of love letters from all over Soviet Union were forwarded to Lola Ismailova in Tajikistan. In the meantime, Oleg Knorring received a special prize for the best photo portrait of the year and subsequently, his image of the Tajik girl reappeared on the pages of *Ogonek* five more times (Kurbanova 2).

As Lola Ismailova's personal archive of correspondence demonstrates, the central attraction of the image for a non-Central Asian male audience was its non-proletarian, exotic aesthetics. Much like Kuznetsov's paintings in the nineteenth century, the image served as a window into a different, foreign world, which gave temporary distraction from the intellectual and emotional distresses of the time. Rather than cheerfully driving a tractor or working on a loom in a grey coverall, as most women in the visual propaganda of the time did, the woman in the photograph was dressed in an outfit that did not imply labor. It also lacked signs of unambiguous Soviet happiness. Unlike many representations of women of 1940s Lola looked as one letter described, "proud and pensive" (*gordaia i zadumchivaia*) (Ismailova 44).

In her discussion of fantasies, Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia in a way that best describes the relationship many citizens of the Soviet Union developed towards Soviet national 'forms' in 1940s. Boym describes it as not only a sentiment of loss and displacement, but also a romance with one's own fantasy:

*At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desire is to obliterate history and turn into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time those plagues the human condition (XV).*

Visual representations of Central Asia allowed many Soviet citizens outside Central Asia, who by the mid 1940s felt the “sentiment of loss and displacement,” a chance to have a romance with their own fantasies, when nostalgia for a different time translated into fantasies about a different space. Socio-political and economic transformations brought by collectivization, industrialization, not to mention the physiological pressure to transform into the *Homo Sovieticus* required a high level of adaptively (see Volkov). Nostalgia and fantasies about distant spaces and different times became a way of coping with the rapidity of changing realities. As a Arkhangelsk engineer, Nikolai Semennov, wrote in his letter to Lola - “...at the end of the day, all my worries step away at the sight of your Eastern features (*Vostochnye cherty*)” In his poem dedicated to Lola he identifies her as a “shelter from fate” (*ukritie ot sud'by*):

*The image of this girl from Tajikistan  
So pure and dear to me  
Calls to fight against all odds...  
May this beauty from the East  
Become my dream as well as a shelter from fate... (Ismailova, 31-32)*

Interestingly, among many poems sent to Lola, most of them use poetic vocabulary of the pre Soviet period with references to Alexander Pushkin's Tatiana from *Evgenii Onegin*. Some, like Gordinskii Albert from Armenia compared her to Pushkin's wife Natalia Goncharova:

*You are more beautiful than Natalia Goncharova. I would like to express my admiration for your beauty like Bellini in music. Everyone has gone crazy for your stunning beauty here in my city, Zakatali. I am sorry to be telling you all this. I am sending you the music I wrote in your honor... (Ismailova, 34)*

Linking Lola's image not only to the old-time Russian aristocracy through the reference to Natalia Goncharova, but also to distance in both time and space Vincenzo Bellini, Gordinskii positions Lola into a symbolic realm that is far removed from the realities of 1940s proletarian culture. Another of Lola's admirers, sculptor Mirgorodskii P., sent her a photograph of his statue of her in Crimea (Fig.31), the Soviet equivalent of Hawaii:

*...I am sending you the photograph of your statue, by the beach of the Black Sea in Gurzuf park. I gave it to the Central Army Resort so that thousands of tourists that come from all of the Soviet Union see you. (Ismailova, 35, 36)*

Non-proletarian aesthetics of Ismailova's image inspired Mirgorodskii to put his statue in the most desirable destination to all Soviet citizens that symbolized leisure and vacation.

In Tajikistan, where the image turned Lola Ismailova into an overnight sensation the photograph also represented a distant fantasy, but in an historical rather than a geographical dimension. The girl in the picture embodied the past Tajiks aspired to be proud of. Reprinted on the covers of local Tajik magazines and multiplied via covers of gramophone records of folk music, the image of Lola revived the pre-Soviet sense of elitist aesthetics and high culture. Families, especially in rural areas of Garm and Pamir, decorated their houses with the image as with a miniature painting (Ismailova, 67). For Tajiks the image opposed early Soviet visual propaganda, which depicted pre-Soviet women as abused and debased, and wealthy people as old and aesthetically unattractive. On the bigger ideological scale, the need for pride grew in response to the Soviet narrative of "culturally backward" (*kul'turno otstalie*) nations of Central Asia that needed to catch up with the rest of the civilized world.

As a well-known Tajik poet Mirsaid Mirshakar said in 1989: "Lola represented the home we had lost but remembered ... Besides, it was nice to see a woman in clothing that was not Russian, cheap, or male" (qtd. by Khudonazar, Dissert. 65). This comment reflects an overall dual sentiment towards Soviet civilizing process. While approving of Soviet modernity as a whole, many, like Mirshakar, were often irritated by the state imposition of Russified/Westernized cultural norms as modern and thus unambiguously positive.

The portrait's poetic and aesthetic processes demonstrate the 1940s public need for a fantasy world far removed in time and space. Visual representations idealized national forms not only in Central Asia but in many other places of the Soviet Union compensated for the rapid arrival of Soviet cultural unification and contributed to the growth of self-exotification in visual culture. In late 1940s as film became the most dominant form of entertainment filmmakers were able to reach out to wider audiences.

## 1. From Self-Exotification to Reinterpreting the Past

When the first, state-educated generation of indigenous filmmakers such as Yuldash Akzamov, Gani Akzamov, Djalil Akhmetov, Mamatkul Arabov, Akmal Akbarkhodjaev, Nariman Azimov, Khusan Abdullaev, Elubai Umurzakov, Shara Zhienkulova, Gafar Valamat-zade and many others came into the film industry in 1940s, most of the projects they received were based on the local literary heritage and were to be filmed in comedy or melodrama genres. The plots and the genres implied imagery of the eclectic national forms such as bazaars, teahouses, exotic architecture and clothing, gardens and dancing women in 'national' dress. *Glavgipertkom* (Head Repertoire Committee), the highest state institution of censorship, expected filmmakers to balance between ideological and commercial poles when they had to incorporate the formal 'pre-Soviet hell' didactics on one

hand, while entertaining and distracting the audience from the realities of WWII on the other.

It was still a time in the Soviet film industry when a word, a look, or a gesture could change one's life and the life of one's family. Production of a film was a long, exhausting and dangerous process due to a variety of state institutions of censorship. As Andrei Zhdanov, one of Stalin's loyal supporters and the main censor of the Soviet literary and art production, put it: "We suffer for every film, we worry, we discuss every motion picture, and fix what [seems to be] irreparable" (Mar'iamov 64). Joseph Stalin, who had a special appreciation for film, was closely involved in the production of many films, picking the cast and if needed, changing the storyline. If a film did not meet ideological criteria set by Stalin and Zhdanov, it had to be rewritten, re-filmed, put away on a 'shelf' (*polka*)<sup>23</sup>, or simply burned (Margolit 145). If in the early 1930s, scriptwriter Gromov A. was able to declare in press that "Our characters are all the same...They are not characters, but schemas... Hack-work replaced art," (Khokholova 129) by the end of 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s making a statement like that not only in the press but in the privacy on one's home could result in loss of a career, freedom and even life (Latishev 157-164). Many did not wait for an official arrest. Unable to take pressure of the high politicians' interference with the artistic process, the director of children's films, Margarita Barskaia, wrote shortly before committing suicide in 1939: "Of course one can work, but to put up with slapdash (*khaltura*) from the start? To work at "keeping the energy" like most of us do these days? ... In my life I am unable to express myself as an artist. [I can] only physically clench my teeth and put up a happy face" (Mamatova 201).

Nabi Ganiev came into the Soviet film industry around this time in the late 1930s. His debut, *Tohir va Zuhro* (Uzbekfilm, 1945) a cinematic adaptation of a famous love legend, passed Soviet censorship, became a blockbuster in its home Uzbekistan, and was even distributed outside of the Soviet Union. Despite the 'light' genre of the film the analysis of its visual language demonstrates its complex structure with multiple, at times contradictory, semantic dimensions. Integration of several parallel narratives, which become accessible depending on the socio-cultural background of the viewer, is the key characteristic of the film, which sets *Tohir and Zuhro* apart from other Central Asian films of that time.

Although the first Central Asian filmmakers including Nabi Ganiev never talked about the semiotics of indigenous art in any of his interviews, conceptualization of his films through the Sufi philosophy of *zahir* and *batin* corresponds to the region's philosophical framework which left a significant mark on the history of Central Asian literature and art. The most significant for this study feature of *zahir* and *batin's* theoretical basis is that it contains several semiotic layers with different seemingly contradictory narratives: *zahir* (external) interpretation (A) may or may not seem to be opposite to *batin* (internal) (B) interpretation. However, since in the *zahir/batin* theoretical framework both A and B are part of the larger concept of the truth (*haqiqat*) there is no contradiction

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<sup>23</sup> This meant that the film was put on hold for an uncertain period of time.

between them. By absorbing all conflicting stories into one in his visual narrative, Ganiev, addressed the Central Asian as well as more general Soviet audiences. Nattiez's formula of aesthetic and poetic processes becomes in this case more explicit in terms of poetic intention of the producer, whose semiotic system of signs in *Tohir and Zuhro* takes the form of a path with several stages of visibility/comprehension.

Meeting the state censorship requirements, Ganiev's most apparent semantic layer in *Tohir va Zuhro* is that of the 'pre-Soviet hell'. In accordance with the Soviet ideological framework, poet *Nazim's* (Razzak Khamraev) introduction of the story promises a rather dark narrative:

*The witness of the forgotten kingdom, a poet and a historian, I speak to you, oh fortunate generation of strong ones, listen to the following legend about youth and true love, about terrible sufferings of our ancestors, Tohir and Zuhro.*

Indeed, the story is a tragedy of two lovers, promised to each other at birth, but separated by the antagonism of their parents. On the day of his daughter's birth, king *Bobokhon* (Asad Ismatov) promises to take into his palace all children born on this day and raise them next to his daughter. One of *Bobokhon's* warriors *Baqir* brings his son *Tohir* (Guliam Aglaev) and *Bobokhon* promises not only to raise his daughter *Zuhro* (Iulduz Rizoeva) and *Tohir* together, but also to marry them when they grow up. *Tohir's* father, *Baqir*, becomes one of *Bobokhon's* viziers. When years later *Baqir* helps *Bobokhon's* class enemy *Sarkor* escape prison, *Bobokhon* decides to kill *Baqir* but keep his promise to marry his son and *Zuhro*. *Bobokhon* invites *Baqir* to go hunting where an unknown arrow kills *Tohir's* father. When *Tohir* turns eighteen, *Sarkor* reveals the truth to the young man. Heartbroken, *Tohir* refuses to hear *Bobokhon's* explanations and tries to convince *Zuhro* to elope. Despite *Bobokhon's* attempts to prevent young lovers from being together and to force *Zuhro* to marry someone else, the young couple stays true to each other. Enraged by his daughter's disobedience, king *Bobokhon* kills her. As soon as the news of her death reaches *Tohir*, he commits suicide. *Tohir's* political allies headed by *Sarkor* are too late to save the young couple and the narrator's last words "Together they came into this world, together they left" conclude the tragic tale.

Having fulfilled the official Soviet requirement for a 'pre-Soviet hell' narrative, which in Central Asian context represents the superficial *Zahir* layer, Ganiev addressed the Party's semi-official request for a romantic fantasyland, distant and exotic in its imagery. Despite the dark narrative, heroes easily overcome obstacles and smile even when they are about to die, like *Tohir* in the scene with Khorezmian king, whose daughter *Tohir* refused to marry (Fig.32). The film's parallel stories, such as the scene of seduction of *Tohir* by a Khorezmian princess or the scene of *Tohir* hiding in a box of gifts in order to sneak into the palace with singers, create a frivolous atmosphere that also contributes to the film's overall promotion as a 'light genre' (*legkii zhanr*). There is a lot of music, dancing



(Fig.33), as well as clever and humorous dialogs that embellish the seemingly dark narrative.

A film poster (Fig.34) advertising *Tohir and Zuhro* in late 1950s Yugoslavia demonstrates a visual shift from the aesthetic process of film evaluation to the creation of a new sign. The most interesting aspect of this poster is that in some ways it anticipates the public's expectations abroad. The artist's rendering brought colors into the black-and-white film, making *Zuhro* the central color attraction of the poster along with the title of the film. Her gold and orange top and pants demonstrate not only what was 'seen' but also what was 'imagined' as the pseudo-Middle Eastern belly dancer outfit reveals a lot more than the costumes of the Uzbek princess in the film (Fig.35), all of which cover not only her belly, but her arms as well.

Using the Soviet need for exotic fairytales, Nabi Ganiev creates a parallel *batin* story. His national form is not a random collection of oriental features, but a scrupulous ethnography of material culture, costumes, landscape, as well as social interactions. Using Soviet rhetoric on the importance of realistic representation, he argued that they had "to reflect a true panorama of reality" and demanded real, not circus horses, and more people for crowd scenes, which had to be "dynamic and polyphonic" (Jahlol). While incorporating the class antagonism story in the *zahir* narrative, Ganiev contradicts it on the *batin* level by creating a narrative about power struggle between different elites. Despite the revolutionary narrative, the film features all elements of high culture, such as palaces, gardens, harems, royal hunting scenes and sword fights. All central characters of the film clearly belong to an aristocratic elite and even those who do not either become part of it or seem as if they do. *Tohir's* father, *Baqir*, is a warrior only in the beginning. As soon as he meets *Bobokhon*, he becomes his vizier and his son *Tohir* grows up in the royal palace next to the princess *Zuhro*. Even the revolutionary *Sarkor* is dressed in a fur hat and an embroiled, rich overcoat of the pre-Soviet aristocracy as he speaks of social justice and equality (Fig.36).

Yet the core of the *batin* narrative is in Nabi Ganiev's presentation of the Uzbek aristocracy embodied by the character of the king. On the day of his daughter's birth, *Bobokhon* decides to raise her with the son of an ordinary warrior promising to marry them when they grow up (Fig.37). An unusually liberal attitude for someone of his royal status becomes even more evident when the king does not stop caring for *Tohir* despite the betrayal of the boy's father. Instead of killing the son of the traitor, *Bobokhon* raises him like his own son. Even after *Tohir's* insults, attempts to take *Zuhro* away and finally *Tohir's* collaboration with *Bobokhon's* rival *Sarkor*, the king treats *Tohir* as his family, begging him to let go of the past. It is in fact *Tohir's* inability to forgive and understand *Bobokhon's* position as a warrior that escalates the conflict.

On the *batin* level *Bobokhon* is also a fair and a noble warrior torn between his royal and paternal responsibilities. In reviving some of the elements of nomadic war etiquette, Ganiev equates him to his enemy *Sarkor*. What, in the Soviet context, had to become a scene that focuses on the revolutionary dichotomy of good

and evil, is in fact a meeting of two equally strong opponents, full of respect for each other. Having captured *Sarkor*, *Bobokhon* expresses admiration for his greatness and wishes they were not enemies.

*Bobokhon's* tragedy in the *batin* narrative is his fear of family degeneration. His wife's death, the treachery of *Baqir* whom *Bobokhon* made part of his family, disloyalty of *Tohir* that he raised as his own son, and finally betrayal of his own daughter *Zuhro*, destroyed the family the king aspired to have. When in the culminating scene *Zuhro* tells *Bobokhon* that she would rather forget his name than *Tohir's*, the king's murder of his own child becomes a metaphor of his suicide. In Central Asian tradition where family and kin affiliations remain the most important element of one's identity, children represent the metaphysical promise of eternity. Named after their parents and grandparents, they carry the name and therefore the spirit of their ancestor. Having said that she would forget her father's name, *Zuhro* breaks the foundation of intergenerational agreement between children and their parents to pass on the name to ancestors to next generations and in this way allow them to come back into the family in the next generation.<sup>24</sup>

Nabi Ganiev's vision of the father/child conflict contributes to Soviet discourse on intergenerational relationship in visual culture of 1930s. If early Soviet propaganda encouraged children to become modern and protest against the oppression of their traditional families, *Tohir and Zuhor* demonstrates what happens as a result of this kind of opposition. As a representative of the first generation of Central Asian Soviet citizens, Ganiev witnessed the 1930s Soviet struggle against aristocracy, clergy and eventually some of the indigenous Communist party members arrested for nationalism. By the 1940s, many representatives of the 'parent' generation were either killed or driven out of the country, leaving 'children' with a growing sense of nostalgia for parenthood and the pre-Soviet way of living, which they began to idealize in 1940s. Nabi Ganiev's *batin* evaluation of recent history and generational conflict underscores the impossibility of victory as the death of children or parents destroy the future of both.

What also remained unseen to most of the film's viewers was a complex pattern of images, some of which last only a few seconds, that create an organic visual narrative addressed primarily to the Central Asian audience of the film. In

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<sup>24</sup> The word *arvah*, a plural form of the Arabic *ruh*, (soul, spirit) came to define in Central Asian region spirits of diseased family, kin and tribe members who had a strong presence and influence of their social surroundings as living people. As 19th century Kazakh historian of Central Asian culture Chokan Valikhanov observes, an individual's lifetime deeds earned his or her right to be worshiped after death. "Great personalities become great *arvahs* while insignificant people, who could not love or hate with passion as living beings, become worthless spirits." (See Valikhanov) This belief may be the reason for the existence of two words that define the idea of death: 1) *olu*, meaning 'to die' which Kazakhs apply to all living creatures and 2) *qaitys bolu*, which means 'to leave', 'to return', 'to come' and can be used only in relation to human beings. At first glance, unrelated and diverse in terms of rituals and iconography, the key conceptual elements of the cult of *arvahs* are in fact analogous in all of Central Asia. Ethics behind this belief system define and reinforce the meaning of birth, adulthood, generation relations, and afterlife.

Nabi Ganiev's "panorama of reality," objects and nature add depth and poetic interpretation to the narrative. For example, in the scene when *Tohir* tells *Zuhro* that he was going to find out the name of his father's killer the next day, the lovers stand between a fish tank and an hour glass. In the semiotics of Central Asian poetry, fish symbolize ancestry while the hourglass stands for fickleness of life. In this way, the image gains depth by implying symbolically that the time of the two lovers was running out, lost in the tragic patterns of their family histories.

The Soviet attempt to control the emergence of parallel *interpretants* was only partially successful. In practice, the ideological formula of the national form gradually grew into representations of the imaginary past, mirroring nostalgic longing for different spaces and times. Central Asian popular culture embraced the new socialist reflection of the past in a way that did not negate the internal *batin* narrative. Filmmakers such as Nabi Ganiev, directed movies that offered a more complex picture of intergenerational relations projecting a strong sentiment of nostalgia for the pre-Soviet way of living.

## 2. Modernity and 'Oriental' Magic in 1950s

Following the loss of over thirty million of Soviet citizens in the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), and the death of Soviet Union's venerated as well as reviled dictator Josef Stalin in 1953, Khrushchev's 'thaw' allowed for a chance to reflect on the past 30 years of the Soviet rule. An analysis of popular representations of the literary and film character *Old Khottabych* in 1940s and 1950s demonstrates not only changes in representation of the Orient but Soviet modernity as well.

The character of a genie with limitless possibilities was born in Lazar Lagin's 1939 novel *Starik Khottabych*. The 1930s Great Terror, NKVD's <sup>25</sup> shadowing, the iron curtain and ubiquitous presence of Father Stalin and Mother Party in the daily lives of Soviet citizens, turned him into one of the most popular literary characters in children's literature of the 1940s and 1950s. In his article, Gregorii Alunin confirms the 1930s Soviet readers' longing for a character with no fear of the "man with the gun" by discussing similarities between Lagin's genie in *The Old Khottabych* and Bulgakov's devil in his *Master and Margarita*. Written around the same time, Bulgakov's dark phantasmagoric novel was published much later, in 1966 due to its scandalous anti-Soviet content. *Kottabych's* humorous tone and children's book genre allowed for its publication in 1938. Yet both novels introduce semi-human creatures with limitless sources of alternative to Soviet power, which they use to break mechanisms of the Soviet order in a playful humorous manner. Lagin's novel narrates a story of a Russian boy *Vol'ka* who

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<sup>25</sup> The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Narodniy Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del) was public and secret police during Stalin's rule.

discovers an ancient vessel with a genie *Khottabych*. The genie's introduction to Soviet modernity leads to unthinkable adventures of *Vol'ka* and his friend *Zhenia*.

In Lagin's novel innocent and fearless *Khottabych* creates chaos in the perfectly structured Soviet lifestyle by turning man into sheep, erasing peoples' memories, dropping hundreds of footballs on the playground in the middle of the football game, and forcing adults, mostly in positions of power, to do as he pleases. Artist Rotov's illustration of the first 1938 edition captures the literary character of *Khottabych*. At first glance (Fig.38), he appears as an average citizen (*grazhdanin*) of Soviet society. Wearing a suit and a hat he is dressed according to his social environment and is not represented differently from any other elderly person living in Moscow in the 1930s. Yet his pose, flowing in the air beard and stern facial expression with slightly slanting eyes create an abnormal and almost uncanny presence despite a seemingly average appearance. By turning men into sheep, which in the Slavic tradition stands an absence of will power, *Khottabych* exposes the true nature of Soviet society of 1930s. *Khottabych's* magic elevates him above the herd of sheep and the only other human being visibly terrified by the old man.

*Khottabych's* brother in Lagin's novel, *Omar Iusuf ibn Khattab*, goes even further by continuously mocking *Vol'ka* and *Zhenia* as well as everything else in the Soviet Union and even wanting to kill them. Lagin's 1938 description of *Omar* as an "unsightly old man with an angry face and a pair of eyes that burnt like coals" is completed with a book illustration. Surrounded by black smoke and elevated above the heads of his saviors, *Omar* is both a daring and dangerous source of uncontrollable power (Fig.39). Images of both, *Khottabych* and *Omar* show similarities in terms of commanding and uncanny body language, menacing facial expressions, elevated position, and a sense of fear they generate in characters surroundings them. While further in the story *Omar* is punished by his own ignorance, stuck in the atmosphere circulating around the earth, on meeting *Omar* for the first time both *Vol'ka* and his friend fall on their knees looking back in confusion and fear.

While the book was a great success among children and adults, the novel was reworked considerably several times in the following editions. In the 1940s, Lagin was asked to make the novel more relevant to the political situation and more educational for children. As a result of the political pressure put upon him, Lagin had a stroke. The 1956 production of the film was so stressful that when the film finally came out Lagin did not want his name to be mentioned in the caption (Alunin).

Yet, film director Gennadiy Kazanskiy's the fantasy film *The Old Khottabych* (*Starik Khottabych*, 1956) became one of the most popular movies of 1950s remaining among the top hundred best selling films of the Soviet era today. In an online forum dedicated to the film *The Old Khottabych* a 42 year-old Russian doctor from Moscow said that as a child she loved it because:

*...it was like bringing “The Arabian nights” and its magic into my daily life... Khottabych did things I could not have imagined. He possessed the kind of magical freedom I could not have imagined. I remember giggling hysterically when Vol’ka and Khottabych mocked the Militia man (Berkutov).*

A 36 year old Tajik businessman, who grew up in the former Tajik Republic and is now working in Moscow remembered the film in slightly different terms:

*As a child I remember craving the taste of the Eskimo ice-cream, which Vol’ka and Khottabych ate at the circus and which we back in Dushanbe did not have... and Moscow, it was so beautiful...made me so proud to be Soviet. At the same time things that Vol’ka and Khottabych did together were unthinkable and fun. It is silly but the first country I traveled to once I was able to afford a trip was India, and I think that was partially because I carried that magical feeling of Vol’ka and Khottabych flying there on their magic carpet (Berkutov).*

While the magical atmosphere of the film attracted Muscovite children, the capital and Soviet products inaccessible in many other parts of the Union such as Eskimo ice-cream became sources of envy for children from the Soviet periphery. The most important attraction of the film, however, was in the fact that *Khottabych* possessed the kind of “unthinkable” freedom that opened-up immense possibilities not only to children but their parents as well.

The 1956’s cinematic version of the novel left some important elements of the book, including *Khottabych*’s evil brother *Omar*, out of the narrative. *Khottabych*’s rebellious mischief turned in the film into hopeless attempts to compete with Soviet technology. The film character of *Khottabych* flies on a moth-eaten carpet, forgets his spells and is helpless when his magic beard is wet. The genie’s lack of knowledge about the modern world makes his skills useless (he creates a phone booth out of pure marble, which does not work) and potentially hazardous (disturbed by noise of the plane motor he turns it off and almost crashes the plane). Charming yet ignorant *Khottabych* tries to help his young master which makes *Vol’ka*’s life more difficult.<sup>26</sup> Such apparently ordinary objects as an alarm clock and a light bulb continuously amuse *Khottabych*. Upon this background, the accessibility and comfort of Soviet technology and science become the real magic of the story. While

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<sup>26</sup> In this respect, the Soviet genie resembles the prototype of the same character in the 1960s American television series *I dream of Jennie*, where the same situation constructed via gender rather than age difference of two central characters.

the literary narrative contained these details, the film accentuated them by toning down the uncanny atmosphere of Lagin's text. The Asia *Khottabych* embodied in the film was no longer uncontrollable or dangerous.

The evolution of *Khottabych*'s personality as he comes to understand Soviet ethics and lifestyle takes place as he learns that an average Soviet child does not dream of individual wealth, fame and power over other people. *Khottabych*'s savior and ideological opponent *Vol'ka* is not interested in owning palaces, slaves and caravans of cinnamon and pepper. "Money establishes most secure control over people!" *Khottabych* exclaims trying to convince him. "What do we need the control over people for?" *Vol'ka* and his friend *Zhenia* laugh back at *Khottabych* – "What are we....some kind of kings or capitalists? ...think about it...why would I need friends [bought with] money?"

While his body language in all the 1938 illustrations project strength and arrogance, the film presents an old man often taking the pose of a servant bending and bowing, his head shaking from old age. In close up shots (Fig.40) the camera takes an angle from above, creating a 'looking down' effect by elevating the point of the viewer above *Khottabych*'s head. In one of the last scenes, a sad *Khottabych* tells *Vol'ka* and *Zhenia* that no matter how much he tries to please them, he does not seem to succeed. It is interesting that, as *Khottabych* says it, *Vol'ka* and his friend *Zhenia* climb a bench, become visually taller than *Khottabych* (Fig.41) and ask him if they can talk to him 'man to man'. "You are of course a great magician, but in the modern life you are as helpless as a baby!" – *Vol'ka* tells *Khottabych*. *Vol'ka* suggests that when using magic *Khottabych* has to consult with 'people' (*liudi*), i.e. with the collective. *Khottabych* agrees to consult with *Vol'ka* and if he is not around with his best friend, *Zhenia*. In the classic Soviet reversal of parent and child's power relations, the film puts a young Soviet Russian boy above an old non-Soviet Oriental elder. Having finally asks his young savior *Vol'ka* to guide him through the unknown of modernity *Khottabych* begins to work in the Soviet circus.

At the same time, the film establishes much closer parent/child ties between the two central characters. While *Vol'ka*'s father is always on business trips it is *Khottabych* that from the offset of the film takes on the paternal role in the boy's life. In one of the first scenes of the film *Vol'ka* hands *Khottabych* a photograph of his grandfather asking him to change into something more modern (*sovremennoe*) i.e. literally transforming *Khottabych* into a family member. Having changed *Hassan Abdurahman ibn Khattab* into informal Russified *Khottabych*, *Vol'ka* treats his genie like his grandfather, calling him "soulful" (*dushevnyi*) and "dearest" (*milen'ki*).

*Khottabych*'s protectiveness of *Vol'ka* also goes far beyond his responsibilities as a genie. On his own initiative he sends *Zhenia* to India for being critical of *Vol'ka*'s behavior. He puts a spell on another boy, *Goga*, who mocked and laughed at *Vol'ka*. In what appears to *Khottabych* as a dangerous situation, he offers his life in

exchange for *Vol'ka's*. The child/grandfather affection is best shown in the scene of *Vol'ka's* late night studying. Worrying that *Vol'ka* would not get enough of sleep, *Khottabych* suggests that he go to bed. When *Vol'ka* refuses, *Khottabych* puts a spell on him and once *Vol'ka* gets sleepy *Khottabych* lifts him in his arms, and while swinging him in his arms sings a lullaby "My precious one..." (Fig.42).

In addition to the child/grandfather bond between the two characters, there are also several scenes that suggest a generational continuity and *Vol'ka's* mental dependence on *Khottabych*. In most cases it happens when *Vol'ka* is confronted with representatives of state power such as teachers, administrations, and militia. One scene, for example, features *Vol'ka* and *Khottabych* breaking the rules of the road by riding a camel on the driveway. When a militiaman stops the camel, charmed by *Khottabych*, *Vol'ka* begins to yell at the militiaman: "How dare you, despicable guard keep me in the precious hour of my ride. I am the most prominent lad of this city! ..." In the first edition of the novel, *Vol'ka* adds a threat: "I will tear you apart." (Lagin). A minute later the boy regains control over his speech and tries to explain his 'inner' voice: "Comrades, dearest, don't listen to me! It isn't me who says these things! He is the one who makes me say them!" In this way, for several minutes, when *Khottabych* takes over, an obedient Soviet child turns into the crazy old Orient with no fear and no respect for the state. *Vol'ka's* need for *Khottabych* is that of a child in need for paternal presence, yet he is the one that has the responsibility of a parent in their relationship, as it is *Khottabych* that teaches him how to be as fearless as a child. Despite all this *Khottabych's* voice in *Vol'ka* is a temporary and non-threatening occurrence. When he speaks through *Vol'ka*, children make fun of him while teachers and ordinary Soviet people consider him to be mentally ill or a professional clown. *Vol'ka* himself when asked about *Khottabych* tells people not to pay attention to the old man who is a little crazy (*nemnogo tavo*). Contextualizing the *Vol'ka/Khottabych* relationship into the bigger discourse on Russia's dual identity and its 'mysterious soul' (*zagadochnaia dusha*), it could be suggested that *Khottabych* presents the 'inner' rebellious voice of the suppressed in the orderly modern state, the non-Western half of the Russian identity that was considered by Bolsheviks of the 1920s as half-Asiatic.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Discussions among high rank Bolsheviks about Russian identity show that like their predecessors, Soviets equated Asianness with backwardness opposing it not only to Europeaness but modernity as well. The first Soviet People's Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii, reflected on the nature of Russianness in 1928 identifying rural Russian identity as non European but Asian. Drawing on the literary character of Ivan Goncharov's novel *Oblomov* (1859), Lunacharskii (279) links the nineteenth century term *oblomovshchina*, defining social apathy and immobility of the Russian society to *Aziatstvo* (Asianness), to a more derogatory term *Aziatshchina*, which he agrees to be a constituent of the Russian national character. His evaluation of *oblomovshina* underlines the westernized middle and upper classes of Moscow and Saint Petersburg's perception of the semantic closeness of "rural" and "Asian". Russia's perceived half-Asianness (*polu-Aziatstvo*) in Lunacharskii's view was not allowing Russian society to wake up from its "dopey bliss".

The irony of this transformation may partially originate in the changes provoked by the Soviet state in the 1920s during the urbanization of the Russian population. Having joined urban Russian elites of the 1940s and 1950s, many of those who grew up in rural Russia have shifted the discourse on Russianness away from westernized cultural norms towards nostalgia for “half-Aziatic” rural Russia complicating a more simplistic representation of antagonism between pre-Soviet and young Soviet generations in early Soviet propaganda.

Thus, over the course of the 1940s and 50s, the ideological formula of the national form gradually grew into representations of the imaginary past that mirrored nostalgic longing for different spaces and times. Chapter II explored the visual production of this period, tracing ways in which nostalgia for the past lead cultural producers to external and internal exotification of Central Asia. Both *Tohir and Zuhro* and *The Old Khottabych* explore Central Asia and Russia’s complex and ambiguous relationship to the past. While Nabi Ganiev’s film became a nostalgic cinematographic poem of the pre-Soviet Central Asian, *The Old Khottabych* captured Russia’s contradictory sentiments of condescension toward, nostalgia for, and inseparability with, the Orient.

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Figure 27. Lola Ismailova (right). Freshmen year in college. Lola-Nisso Ismailovna. *Tadzhikskii Universitet v Sud'be Pervoi Vipusknitsi*. Zevar Publishing: Dushanbe, 2009. 6.



Figure 28. Lola Ismailova (right). Tajik State University. Dushanbe, 1948. Lola-Nisso Ismailovna. *Tadzhikskii Universitet v Sud'be Pervoi Vpusknitsi*. Zevar Publishing: Dushanbe, 2009. 15. Print.





Figure 29. Lola Ismailova (right). 1947. Lola-Nisso Ismailovna. *Tadzhikskii Universitet v Sud'be Pervoi Vpusknitsi*. Zevar Publishing: Dushanbe, 2009. 47. Print.



Figure 30. Lola Ismailova. *Ogonek*. Cover. December 1949. Print.



Fig. 31. Mirgorodskii, Pavel next to his statue in Gurzuf park in Central Army Resort, Crimeria, USSR. Lola-Nisso Ismailovna. *Tadzhikskii Universitet v Sud'be Pervoi Vipusknitsi*. Zevar Publishing: Dushanbe, 2009. 36. Print.





Figure 32. Guliam Aglaev as *Tohir*. Film.



Figure 33. Dancing in the Khorezmian Palace. Film.



Figure 34. Poster for *Tahir i Zuhra*. Bulgaria, 1957. Ebay. 23 June 2002. Print





Figure 35. *Tohir and Zuhro* (Iulduz Rizoeva). Film.



Figure 36. *Sarkor*. Tohir and Zuhro. Film.



Fig. 37. Asad Ismatov (center) as the king Bobokhon. *Tohir and Zuhro*. Film.



Figure 38. Konstantin Rotov. Illustration to the first publication of “The Old Khottabych”. *Pioner*. 1938. Print.





Figure 39. Konstantin Rotov. The appearance of *Khottabych's* brother *Omar*. *The Old Khottabych*. Moscow: Detgiz, 1940. Print.



Figure 40. Nikolai Volkov as the Old *Khottabych*. *The Old Khottabych*. Film.



Fig. 41. From left to right: *Zhen'ka* (Gennadii Khudiakov) *Khottabych* (center) and *Vol'ka* (Aleksei Litvinov). *The Old Khottabych*. Film.



Fig. 42. Khottabych singing a lullaby. *The Old Khottabych*. Film.

## Chapter III

### Children of Soviet Modernity in the Age of Internal Censorship (1960-1970s)

#### Historical Context: 1950s and 1970s

Following Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, Nikita Khrushchev the next head of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, delivered a speech "On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences" at the closed session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress on February 25, 1956. In this speech, Khrushchev addressed the damages done by Stalin's personality cult and the Great Purges of 1930s. What came to be known as Khrushchev's *thaw* initiated a wave of rehabilitations that officially restored the reputations of many million victims of the Stalinist purges.

Furthermore, Khrushchev's *thaw* involved expansion of the international trade and educational and cultural contacts with countries outside of Soviet Union. Cultural changes of this period involved festivals, publications of books by foreign authors, access to foreign films, art shows, popular music, dances and new fashion trends, massive involvement in international sport competitions. Some previously banned writers and composers, such as Dmitriy Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, Anna Akhmatova, Mikhail Zoschenko, were brought back to public life. The younger generation of cultural producers such as Bella Akhmadulina, Robert Rozdhestvenskii, Evgenii Evtushenko, Viktor Astafev had less ideological restrictions as opposed to their predecessors. In 1962, Khrushchev personally approved the publication of Alexandr Solzhenitsin's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, which became the first uncensored publication about Stalin's Gulag labor camps in the Soviet Union.

Khrushchev's *thaw* did not last, as following the Hungarian revolution of 1956, the party leadership became concerned with the growth of westernization of Soviet intellectuals. Khrushchev's contemptuous comment about the avant-garde art works at Manezh Gallery on December 1, 1962 as "dog shit" drew the boundaries of the *thaw* that encouraged cultural producers to remain within the framework of socialist realism.

With full control over the film industry, *Goskino*, the successor of *Glavgipertkom*, funded as well as continued to reinforce and expand a complex system of layered censorship from casting to editing. A script for a feature film, for example, had to be approved by several republic-level as well as central Moscow commissions. If and when approved, it was edited and extensively reworked until it resembled any other Soviet film. Censored visual materials were not necessarily anti-Soviet or a-Soviet. Most of the times, films that ended on the 'shelf' (*polka*) were slightly ambiguous or reflected a slice of reality that failed to fit into the Party's ideological framework. It could be as simple as in the case of the character



stewardess *Natasha's* (Tatiiana Doronina), improper behavior when she had sex on the first date in the 1968 film *Once Again About Love* (*Eshche raz pro liubov*). While *Mosfilm* studio accepted the script, the *Goskino* commission recognized the film as amoral and unworthy of Soviet youth. It took director Georgiy Natanson a whole year of negotiations to get the script approved.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, Nikita Khrushchev's 'thaw' broadened ideological frameworks of the Soviet storytelling allowing for a more complex presentation of past and present. Ironically, more artistic freedom revealed an interesting phenomenon of internal censorship among cultural producers of 1960s. Majority of films continued to celebrate numerous victories of Soviet modernity in the unambiguous language of socialist realism and were for the most part ignored by the new, post WWII generation of viewers. What worked so well in collaboration with the mass fear of political repressions in the 1930s, was no longer effective in the 1960s. Russian Film critic Valeriy Fomenko distinguishes two types of cinematography that emerged during the 'thaw':

*There was a serious drama in our cinema and it is still present. It happened during 'the thaw', when cinematography began to develop and grow in different directions with incredible speed. It was during this happiest and most productive period that our cinema broke into complex, individual, problematic, serious on one side and plebeian film on the other (353).*

This chapter discusses the film of 1960s and 1970s, which Fomenko addresses as complex, individual, problematic and serious. It introduces Central Asian cinematographers who began to change their visual narratives, but not so much by taking them into different directions, but rather by challenging and complicating visual narratives of the early Soviet era in respect to Soviet modernity, indigenous cultural heritage, technology, and the growing gap between the rural and the urban population.

## 1. Internal Censorship of *Manqurtism*

In Chigiz Aitmatov novel *And the Day Lasts Longer Than a Century* ( *I Dol'she Veka Dlitsia Den'*, 1980), a young boy *Jolaman* is captured by an enemy tribe of *juanjuans*, who practice a type of torture on their prisoners that causes them memory loss. Turned into *manqurt* (slave without memory) *Jolaman* forgets his name, parents and relatives. Without memories of who he is or where he comes from, he becomes incapable of resistance. In one of the most dramatic scenes of the novel, Aitmatov describes *Jolaman's* mother *Naiman-Ana* who finally finds her son:

*It is easier to take a prisoner's head off or harm him in any other way*

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<sup>28</sup> When the film finally came out *Once Again About Love* became one of the most successful commercial projects of the year with Tatiiana Doronina recognized by the readers of *Sovetskiy Ekran* as the best actress of the 1968 "Sovetskiy Ekran" (Soviet Screen).

*than to suppress his spirit. It is much harder to take away his memory, destroy his mind, pull out the roots of something that should stay with the person until his last breath, something that [should be] inaccessible to others, should have left this world with him. From their dark history the nomadic juanjuans kept the most cruel form of barbarianism, encroached upon the very essence of a human being...That is why grieving and desperate Naiman-Ana cried for her son, who was turned into manqurt:*

*Jolaman! My son, Jolaman, where are you? – called Naiman-Ana.*

*No one answered (137).*

*Once Naiman-Ana realizes that her son is maqurt she begins to cry:*

*Men botaksy olgen boz maia,*

*Tulybyn kelip iskegen (Kyrgyz)*

*I am an orphan mother camel that came to breathe in the smell of my baby's skin, stuffed with straw (153).*

While notions of 'ethnicity' and 'nationality' became known with the arrival of Russians and later Soviets to Central Asia, the idea of homeland (*vatan*), tribal/kin origin (*avlod, zhurt, oila*) with all of the complex territorial and socio-cultural implications had been an important part of the indigenous histories of people living on this territory. Aitmatov's story demonstrates how in the environment of continuous geographic and climatic changes of the nomadic lifestyle, kin affiliations, family lineage and history, and finally the cult of *arvaks* were the central source of stability as well as the primary identity marker. Without his memories, *Jolaman* was nothing but a puppet 'stuffed with straw' who follows his master's orders and kills his own mother. It is the break with these multilayered identities (rural/urban/, nomadic/sedentary, Turkic/Persian) intertwined with the idea of ancestry that turned the Aitmatov's story of *manqurt* into the notion of *manquritsm* as a social phenomenon amongst Central Asian and Russia's Muslim elites. *Manquritsm* identified a symbolic departure from the territorial/cultural/ family origin and the loss of "the very essence of every human being." As a social phenomenon, *manqurtism* was labeled only in 1980s, but the discourse on cultural memory loss began to grow among cultural producers already in 1960s.

As a result of multiple compromises and negotiations with the censorship apparatus many cultural producers developed what film critic Naum Kleiman called "the atrophy of imagination" (Kleiman, 1999). In recalling this period he speaks of internal censorship:

*People would censor themselves on very early stages, when the idea was just about to be born. Knowing in advance that something would not 'go through' scriptwriters and directors did not even allow the idea to develop and grow. Censorship got under our skin (1999).*

The 'under the skin' censorship was only partially based on external pressure. As noted by director Rustam Khamdamov, Stalinism, i.e., the artistic, intellectual and political censorship people voluntarily imposed on themselves, was more terrifying than Stalin himself (Nur, 1998).

The self-imposed censorship among Central Asian filmmakers was analogous to that of cultural producers in other parts of the Soviet Union. *Tajikfilm*, *Kazakhfilm*, *Turkmenfilm*, *Uzbekfilm* and *Kyrgyzfilm* fought against parasitism, profiteering, and wracking (*tuneiatdstvo*, *spekuliatsiia*, *vreditel'stvo*) in the same way as, for example, *Dovzhenko* or *Odessa Film Studios*, but against the background of local tea houses, bazaars with mountains of melons and crowds of men and women in 'national' clothing. In their representation of the pre-Soviet period, the majority of Central Asian films involved foreign spies, *Basmachis*, abused women and children, and brave Soviet commissars who defeated enemies in the culminating scene, often framed as Hollywood style westerns such as in the case of *The Seventh Bullet* (*Sed'maia pulia*, 1972). This vision of Central Asia, which filmmaker Tolomush Okeev mockingly called "cute" (*krasiven'kiy*), created a version of cinematographic reality that presented the past and the present 'cleaned up' of any local complexities or imperfections (Khudonazarov, Nur 1998).

Self-censorship was only partially caused by Stalinism. The growing gap between urban and rural Central Asia resulted in cultural elites' overall lack of experience and/or knowledge about rural lifestyle. Unlike early Central Asian filmmakers, the cinematographic elite of the 1960s and 1970s only had the Soviet point of reference. If Nabi Ganiev based his Central Asia fairytale *Tohir and Zuhro* on the foundation of his personal memories of the pre Soviet Uzbek urban culture filmmakers of the 1960s had a very vague idea of pre-Soviet or even rural life.

For many intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s, carrying some signs of Asianness (*Aziatstvo*), whether it meant speaking one or more Central Asian languages, listening to and reading Central Asian music and classic literature, wearing clothing identified in the Soviet context as 'national' (*natsional'niy*) or as little as having a Central Asian name and being aware of one's ethnicity and race, became a source of pride, embarrassment or both. That may explain why most of the urbanized cultural producers trapped between internal censorship and their own lack of knowledge continued to reproduce Soviet Orientalist imagery.

Another group of filmmakers, which this thesis introduces as as Transsovieticus emerged on the margins of Soviet internationalism. Initiated and sponsored collaborations between the artistic elites of different ethno-republics were designed to bring different nationalities together via the Russian language as the language of international communication (*iazik mejnduarnodnogo obshchenia*). In places like Dushanbe, Tashkent, Ashkhabad, Frunze, and Alma-Ata, cross-cultural influences traversed and subsumed Soviet rationales with indigenous Central Asian rationales, leading to a new identity formation, Transsovieticus. Trained in Moscow as well as in the Central Asian capital cities of Tashkent, Dushanbe, Alma-Ata, Ashkhabad, and Frunze, the Transsovieticus generation of Central Asians

embraced elements of other national histories and created their own counter to the *manqurtism* subculture. They validated their own parallel internal influences by appropriating these technologies and the Russian language for their own end, yet still operated within the template of the Partyline. In visual culture, Transsovieticus producers followed in the artistic footsteps of Nabi Ganiev. Together, Rustam Khamdamov, Elyor Ishmukhamedov and Tolomush Okeev represent three polar dimensions of the Transsovieticus culture of the 1960s and 1970s.

## 2. Rustam Khamdamov and His Russian *Heart*

In 1967, Rustam Kamdamov, a third year student of the top Soviet film school, the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography, also known as VGIK (*Vsesoiuzniy Gosudarstvenniy Institut Kinematografii*),<sup>29</sup> had a closed showing of his thirty-one minute long film project, called *My Heart is in the Mountains* (*V Gorakh Moe Serdse*). Breaking boundaries of conventional Soviet cinema a twenty five year old student provoked a small film revolution among his peers and professors and became the author of an instant cult classic. In the words of Andron Konchalovskiy, who was graduating VGIK at the time, *My Heart in the Mountains* won all the unspoken student awards and influenced a whole generation of Russian filmmakers:

*...The film My Heart is in the Mountains had a tremendous effect on me. I was under its spell when I worked on The Nobility Nest (Dvorianskoe gnezdo). I watched the film several times and every time I had a hard time understanding why does it affect me in such a way, [why does it] agitate me...I am not afraid to say, disarrays me. What is so special about it?" (Sovetskii Ekran 42)*

Later, in 1999, Konchalovskiy speaks of the film again in his book *Ennobling Lies* (*Vozvishaiushiy Obman*):

*As strange as it seemed, the short movie of student Khamdamov would not leave my thoughts. I thought about it. It was so beautiful, although it had some sort of mannerism. ....Rustam is of course, an artisan, a person with exceptional talent, I was fond of him, even adored him...The Noble Nest was made under the influence of Fellini and Khamdamov: the greatest classic and a VGIK student (72-73).*

Filmmaker Kira Muatova, one of the key dissident filmmakers of the 1960s, recognized Khamdamov as one of the few people who influenced her work as well:

*I refuse to talk about anybody but Khamdamov... When I am*

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<sup>29</sup> Vserossiyskiy Gosudarstvenniy Institut Kinematografii (Russian State Institute of Cinematography) was established in 1919.



*asked: “Who influenced you? Who was your teacher? I say this: “Perhaps many people, but for sure Paradzhanov and Khamdamov (3).*

How did a twenty-five year-old Uzbek student from Tashkent become known as the “last representative of the Russian Silver century” (Stepanova) along with poets Alexander Blok and Anna Akhmatova? What was so special about the film that almost a half a century later, in 2003, he received a prestigious *National Heritage of Russia* prize?

Exceptionally detailed in depicting the urban landscape, clothing and interior design, *My Heart* is a stylized version of the black-and-white silent movies of the early twentieth century with, from the Soviet ideological standpoint, an unclear narrative. Even though it was noted in the caption that the script was based on William Saroyan’s <sup>30</sup> story, many, like Andron Konchalovskiy, believed the film was entirely Khamdamov’s creation:

*The name of Khamdamov was only once mentioned in the caption among other students, but everybody knew that he was the one and only author of the film: not only the director, but the author of the original script (covered by the reference of William Saroyan), [that he] came up with funny absurdist dialogs (Official site, 02/21/2010).*

Breaking all the canons of socialist realism, Khamdamov’s heroes live in a semi-foreign, semi-retro atmosphere that lacks any signs of Sovietness (Fig.43). Whether it is a woman bragging about her American lovers, an opera singer telling stories of going to Istanbul, bicyclists in white private school uniforms, or Khamdamov himself playing on the crossroad of train roads (Fig.44), the characters of *The Heart* lead the idle and happy lives. Despite their social background, gender, and age differences Khamdamov’s characters are engaged in conversations about mortality, essence of life, dreams and fantasies of far away places, poetry and art. Russian private school children in pre-Soviet uniform, African flower girls, an Uzbek pianist and English actors share a city with signs in different languages. Phrases like “My father is the greatest poet among unknown poets” and “You can’t earn money and embody greatness at the same time” from the film came to identify a whole generation of Soviet cultural producers who refused to make ‘plebeian films’.

The retro atmosphere of the film is partially based on the director’s memories of Uzbekistan’s capital and its mixed population in the 1950s. The Tashkent of Rustam Khamdamov’s childhood was a city with communities of Italian Jews, Russians, Armenians, Uzbeks, and Koreans. As a child he watched sisters Kuchlikovs<sup>31</sup> sing Shuman and Schubert and Galina Ulanova <sup>32</sup> come from

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<sup>30</sup> William Saroyan (1908-1980) was an American-Armenian author and dramatist. Many of his stories and plays are set in the center of Armenian life in California in Fresno.

<sup>31</sup> Sisters Kuchlikov were famous Uzbek opera singers.

Petrograd to order outfits and shoes for her performances from Tashkent designers of Jewish-Italian descent. Remembering the 1940s and 1950s he recalls:

*I lived in the Soviet Tashkent. It was a charming Russian city, absolutely Russian, there were more Jews than in Odessa, it was intelligencia. Our neighbors were these two French women. Komissarzhevskaja<sup>33</sup> once lived in the house that I grew up in...It was all amazing, natural, but it is all gone now... there was an earthquake, everything was demolished, then everybody immigrated, then everybody died...When I came to VGIK, I spoke Russian better than Russians. Even today I say “davecha”, “ninche”, “namedni”, “vecherom tret’ego dnia”. It is very embarrassing. I never say “Wow!” What can I do? I am Russian (Sinefantom).*

Not only does Khamdamov claim that Tashkent was a Russian city with an ethnically mixed population, he argues that it enclosed a Russianness of a special *intelligentsia* kind - the kind that is separated from Russia not only in space but also in time. The Russian noun *intelligent* (intellectual) in the Soviet context implied education, and often refined non-proletarian manners and way of thinking. In this particular context educated and refined in a pre-Soviet sense. As a part of this milieu Khamdamov is contemptuous of the recent adoption of American expressions such as ‘wow’, preferring archaic Russian word forms for ‘yesterday’, ‘today’ (*davecha*, *ninche*). In this way, what Khamdamov implies both in his film work as well as in his interviews, is that Tashkent preserved the kind of Russianness that has been lost in Russia itself. This claim for a certain type of elite Russianness preserved elsewhere partially explains the popularity of Khamdamov among Russian underground circles.

Khamdamov’s world does not have a particular geographic location, but does recreate the pre-Soviet lifestyle forgotten in the Soviet period. As in the case with the portrait of Lola Islamilova, Rustam Khamdamov used images of women to embody aristocratic aesthetics. In his films as well as in his art works, women were and still are capricious, sexual and mysterious creatures (Fig.45-48), the antipodes of the Soviet female archetype of athletic, unisex workers as shown on the poster from 1954 (Fig.49). A mirage-like depiction of pre-Soviet life brought a wave of nostalgia for a no-longer existing world that many, like Andron Konchalovskii, remembered and missed. “Nostalgia”- said Khamdamov-“ is a monstrous thing. It feeds art. As soon as you merge into the graveyards, everything you need emerges on its own. One trip to the cemetery and you are instantly reborn with a clear understanding of what to do” (*Radikalizm*). Khamdamov’s nostalgia took him so ‘deep’ in the graveyards of the past that it became ideologically threatening as he

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<sup>32</sup> Galina Ulanova (1910-1998) was a famous Russian ballerina.

<sup>33</sup> Famous Russian actress Vera Komissarzhevskaja (1864-1910).

not only created an imaginary past but also a past with undefined geographic borders.

Despite the fact that the film came out in the era of the so-called 'thaw', the Party's reaction to Khamdamov's film was radical. VGIK's Party Committee (*Partiiniy Komitet*) not only confiscated the film, it introduced new censorship policies to students and their work. Soon after the showing of *My Heart*, the school administration opened a new editorial position to monitor the ideological impact of students' final projects.

Intellectual and artistic intolerance to any kind of censorship influenced Khamdamov's later career. His film *Accidental Joys* (*Nechaniannie Radosti*), that was supposed to come out in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was banned immediately after the preliminary showing. Refusing to adjust his project to *Goskino's* expectations, Khamdamov left *Mosfilm* studio and in the following years was not able to make films despite his underground popularity and support from colleagues.<sup>34</sup> Yet, he passed on his nostalgia for the past to a whole generation of filmmakers who were inspired by *The Heart* and recreated the world of their grandparents in their art works, photographs, and films.

### 3. Elyor Ishmukhamedov's *Tenderness*

While Rustam Khamdamov was pushed out of the Soviet film industry, other Transsovietic filmmakers such as Elyor Ishmukhamedov survived in the industry by reinterpreting Soviet realities of 1960s and 1970s that did not involve politics. Ishmukhamedov's *Tenderness* consists of three novellas each exploring the complexities and pain of one's first love as experienced by young people living in Tashkent (Fig.50). In the first story, an Uzbek boy named *Sanjar* (Ravshan Agzamov) meets an older Russian girl called *Lena* (Maria Sternikova) (Fig.51). *Sanjar's* love for this girl transforms the Tashkent of his childhood with street fights and river games into a city of adult expectations and disappointments.

The second story goes into *Lena's* emotional ambivalence about *Andrei*. Like *Lena*, *Andrei* was a child when his family was evacuated from Russia to Tashkent during WWII. Years later, as a young man, he decided to go back to Russia leaving *Lena* behind. Memories of him stand between *Lena* and her ability to commit to anybody else, whether it is *Sanjar* or another young man *Timur* (Rodion Nakhapetov). The tension arises when she goes out of town to the countryside with her friends, where *Timur* proposes to her. Despite having feelings for him, *Lena* refuses to marry him.

In the third story, 14-year-old *Mamura* (Makhmudova), who lives with her parents in Uzbek countryside, meets her brother's friends, who come from Tashkent for a visit. Among them *Timur*, who tells *Mamura* about his life in the city. Sometime after the city guests leave, *Mamura* sees a newspaper ad for a carnival in

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<sup>34</sup> Another project film *Anna Karmazoff* starring Janna Moro in Cannes, which *Le Mond* called it "the treasure house of pharaohs with untouched fortune which will last for decades", was arrested by the film's producer and never released.

Tashkent and decides to go there. In the city she meets *Timur* and gives him back a handkerchief he forgot in her parents' house. On seeing the handkerchief *Timur* begins to cry as he recognizes *Lena's* gift for him. He tells *Mamura* that *Lena* died saving a little boy from an electric shock. While other people may have survived the shock she died as she had a heart condition she did not tell anybody about. *Mamura* goes to the carnival by herself. The film ends as she meets *Sanjar*.

In a celebration of Central Asian urban life, the city's internal harmony, the characters in *Tenderness* are in continuous motion jumping into the city river to float on car tires, getting into street fights with other groups of teenagers, going on night motorcycle rides, dancing in parks, hiking around archeological sites, and falling in love. In depicting Tashkent and his generation, Ishmukhamedov discloses the world of Soviet youth in Central Asian cities against the backdrop of a classic bard and Soviet-style multinational soundtrack. The bitter sweet sadness of first love the characters in the film search for and talk about, is spoken in the special Central Asian slang of the Russian language.

Although Ishmukhamedov's cinematic reality is of the Soviet kind, he is very careful to avoid any visual or linguistic markers of Sovietness. His youth is not concerned with the victory of socialism, hard work or party membership. Instead, his characters quote French authors and watch Bollywood movies. Women in *Tenderness* are dressed in little white dresses, covering their hair with white berets or European-style scarves. They shorten their names, which makes it impossible to identify their nationality. One Uzbek girl *Ulfat*, for example, is called *Ulfi* throughout the film while another, an Uzbek boy, has the nickname *Paganini*.

Shifting away from Soviet symbolism, Ishmukhamedov focuses on the urban/rural break between the citizens of Tashkent and the surrounding areas. When *Mamura's* brother *Morat* visits his family in the countryside, his grandmother does not recognize him as, in his own words, he "hadn't seen her for a whole epoch." *Morat* and his ethnically mixed westernized friends have more in common than he and his little sister *Mamura*, whom he initially does not recognize either. The disconnect from rural Uzbekness is visible in the ways the characters dress. While *Mamura* and her grandmother live in a traditional house and are dressed accordingly, *Morat*, *Lena* and *Timur* look like young people from any big city of the 1960s whether Moscow, Tehran or Paris. The transformation of *Mamura* takes place when she decides to visit the city and change her Soviet schoolgirl outfit into a white little dress (Fig.52-53). *Timur* and the lights of the city carnival that both allure her, merge together as she transforms herself to look more like *Lena*, an urban Russian girl, desired by *Timur*.

The ad for a city carnival *Mamura* finds in the local newspaper is an interesting reference to early Soviet propaganda, which promoted westernized Soviet style leisure time to children and youth. Ishmukhamedov takes a step forward to follow *Mamura* in her desire to become *Liber Sovieticus*. Despite the transformation *Mamura* goes through, *Timur's* love belongs to *Lena* and the city lights become the lights of *Mamura's* disappointment. Yet, as she walks through the carnival in tears, she meets *Sanjar*, who smiles at her. In some ways brought

together by *Lena*, two Russified and urbanized young Uzbeks begin something of their own in the midst of the carnival that embodies Soviet modernity. Romanticization of the city of Tashkent thus becomes a bittersweet promise of excitement yet loneliness.

While Ishmukhamedov does not follow Soviet clichés of representation, he exoticizes Uzbekistan in his own way. He modifies the 1920-1950s traditional representation of Central Asia as a distant and exotic place by fulfilling another important gap, created by the ‘iron curtain’. The weakening of Soviet propaganda in the 1960s and continuous isolation from the capitalist world developed an inclination towards the West, which had turned into the ‘forbidden fruit’ especially for young viewers. Anything Western, whether it was films, jeans, music or magazines became a form of counter culture, desirable and fashionable among Soviet urban youth of 1960s and 1970s (See Yurchak). Using this trend, Ishmukhamedov gives his Tashkent a Mediterranean/Middle Eastern foreign feel, accentuating Uzbekistan’s warm climate and presenting new types of ‘almost foreign’ Central Asian heroes. His characters dress in white, talk in metaphors, drive Soviet-style corvettes (Fig.54-55) and spend a lot of time not working.

The characters’ foreignness manifests itself in a variety of details that give the atmosphere of Ishmukhamedov’s narrative a slightly noticeable foreign tint. There are several important references to Italian cinematography of the 1950s. One of the most obvious ones is in the last scene of *Mamura* at the carnival. Recreating Federico Fellini’s *Cabiria*, an Italian prostitute, who smiles to people in the crowd despite her broken heart (*Le notti di Cabiria*, 1957), Ishmukhamedov creates a universal cinematic space where women like *Mamura* and *Kabiria* are equally alone and heartbroken. As in *The Nights*, *Mamura* begins to smile through tears confirming what *Timur* had told her earlier about city life: “You walk around the city in a crowd and smile even when you are sad.” Against the backdrop of Soviet ‘equality’, love remains unpredictable and immeasurable in Ishmukhamedov’s film that lacks the Soviet happy ending of the “girl ends up with the boy.” His visual dialogue is not in line with Soviet ideology, but with Federico Felini and Henri Barbusse,<sup>35</sup> whose short story *Tenderness* characters of the film quote in the course of the narrative.

At the same time this film reflected a different unofficial side of ethno-racial relations in Soviet urban settings. In many ways, Ishmukhamedov responds to the visual propaganda of the 1930s and 1940s, which celebrated the future merging of all nationalities into one socialist nation. Films of the early Soviet period that encouraged inter-ethnic marriages featured couples who struggle against ethnic tension as in the famous film of 1941 *Pig-tender and Sheperd* (*Svinarka I Pastukh*, 1941). The film features a young Russian girl *Glasha Novikova* and a shepherd *Musaib Gatuev* from Dagestan, whose love prevails over all social and geographic challenges.

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<sup>35</sup> Henry Barbusse (1878-1935) was a French novelist and a member of the French Communist party.



Ishmukhamedov's assessment of the politics of inter-ethnic merging is in the story of *Lena* and *Andrei*, a second generation of Russians in Central Asia. *Andrei*, who came to Uzbekistan during WWII and who is only present in the film as a young boy of *Lena's* memories, goes back to Russia. In the film he exists only in conversations between *Lena* and her friends. Despite her physical presence in Tashkent, *Lena* is clearly distant from the world that surrounds her. Living in the memories of her childhood, she is disconnected from the Uzbek *Sanjar* and *Timur* desiring her love in the present. Without the love of *Andrei* that she needs, *Lena* literally dies of a broken heart. A similar motif was replayed in the famous *The White Sun of the Desert* (*Beloe Solntse Pustini*, 1969), in which the central character, comrade *Sukhov*, had to fulfill his mission in Central Asia before he went back to Russia. In Central Asia he meets a white army officer *Pavel Vereshchagin*, whose existence in Central Asia was filled with nostalgia for Russia. As a white officer *Vereshchagin* could not go back home and thus in the final scene he sacrifices himself so that comrade *Sukhov*, could return to Russia. Similarly, *Lena* is caught between two worlds: Uzbekistan, where she grew up and lives, and Russia that calls her back. Despite *Sanjar* and *Timur's* love, *Lena* dies away from Russia and her first love *Andrei*. In this sense, Ishmukhamedov identifies the internal conflict of Central Asian Slavs, whose mission according to the Soviet state was to bring civilization and modernity to the region. In the process of Russification, Sovietization and urbanization, however, Slavic Soviet missionaries became Central Asianized themselves. Like *Lena*, many second generation Slavs, faced an identity crisis being both Russian and Central Asian, especially after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

While Ishmukhamedov offered his vision of ethno-national diversity of Central Asian society in stories of first love, the visual metaphors he used were universal and characteristic for European cinema of the time equally comprehensible to viewers in Central Asia, Russia and Europe. In this way *Tenderness*, like many other films of the 1960s such as *I Walk Around Moscow* (*Ja Shagaiu po Moskve*, 1963) and *The Cranes are Flying* (*Letiat Juravli*, 1958), created a space for self-expression within the 1960s Soviet ideological framework. Having changed ways in which Central Asia was exotic, Ishmukhamedov celebrates Tashkent as a modern style city with youth whose problems are identical to any other big city of the world.

#### 4. Tolomush Okeev's *Sky*

Presenting Central Asia from a new perspective, Ishmukhamedov focused on the present that glorified if not Soviet, but modernity. Filmmakers that approached the Soviet system critically, such as documentary director Iuz Gorshetein, soon discovered that the 'thaw' had a darker side. In Gorshetin's documentary *Look Around, Comrade* (*Oglianis' Tovarishch*, 1965), the director interviewed Soviet citizens from different social groups about 1920-30s Kyrgyzstan. Kolkhoz women, for example, told him how during the hunger years they were arrested and thrown

in jail for hiding a pile of wheat grain, which they had saved for their starving children. Interviews of that kind compromised not only the 1930s leadership but also the Soviet system all-together and, thus, *Look Around, Comrade* was banned, and soon after destroyed. The KGB questioned everyone involved in the project. A writer and an editor of one of major Frunze publishing houses, Ashim Zhakypbekov, who was interviewed in the film was fired soon after the film was banned. Gorshtein himself was fired and soon after left Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, his name was literally erased from the history of Kyrgyz filmmaking. His name does not appear in any of the film encyclopedias of the following years despite his role as one of the founders of the Kyrgyz documentary film. Even in late Soviet period, Oleg Artiukhov's encyclopedia of Kyrgyz film *Filmmakers of Soviet Kyrgyzstan (Kinematografisti Sovetskoi Kirgizii. 1981)* does not refer to him in any way.

Tolomush Okeev was among very few people, who despite the danger of being considered 'unreliable' (*nenadezhniy*), supported Gorshtein. At the time Okeev had just graduated from VGIK and was about to receive his first big film project. His sympathy towards Gorshtein almost caused him a chance to make his first feature film in 1967 (Diaduchenko, 55-56). Gorshtein's artistic fate taught Okeev an important lesson, which lead him, like Nabi Ganiev before him, towards developing his own visual language. Years later, in 1985, he compared the visual narratives of his films to a flat wall. One can look at the flat surface of the wall but is unable to clutch on it (*zatsepitsia*) (Surmanoz).

In developing his visible, yet censorship resistant cinematographic language, Okeev considered montage to be the most important part of the filmmaking process. In VGIK he found inspiration in the works of Sergei Eisenstein and Michelangelo Antonioni. His school notebooks were full of remarks that underlined their ability to deliver an idea without "explanations":

*...he [Antonioni] does not want to give explanations to what he does.*

*He refuses to judge his heroes, give explanations of their motives in the story. He maintains a very complex plot.*

*1. Without the story the idea still comes through with little actions, i.e. very difficult work.*

*2. Reveals the idea through a very precise and very detailed construction of composition, which by itself is a work of art (Diaduchenko, 41-42).*

Okeev's realization of the need for the 'wall' grew even stronger when he was criticized for his senior film project in VGIK, *There are Horses (Eto Loshadi, 1966)*. This short documentary traced the life of a horse from birth to death and in Okeev's vision was a visual metaphor for life as a continuous struggle (Diaduchenko, 63). While a majority of critical reviews praised the film, one article in *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* newspaper accused Tolomush Okeev of pretentiousness. The journalist A. Lippe found the film to be too confusing:

...the viewer is annoyed with the filmmakers' arbitrariness. Some time we received a letter. The author of the letter, a student from Kyrgyz State University, A. Abdykaduryv, watched the film *These are Horses* and decided to share his views: "From all the documentaries that I had seen in my life, this is the only one I did not understand. What did the authors want to say? ...Aren't horses just animals? Just like cows, sheep and goats... and those could get offended... Why aren't we in the movies?" I think complains of that sort are fair. I understand them. Will the director? I mean, we might as well make movies titled *There are Cows*, *There are Sheep* *It is time!* The irony is understandable. This is the price one pays for pretentiousness, far fetched plot, which this film is guilty of so good to horses and cruel to people (2).

In his personal notes, published after Okeev's death in 2001, Okeev went back to this article to reflect on what he wanted as a young director: "We wanted to make films new in every aspect! Our film experiments were very important for us and we refused to copy others." (qtd. by Diaduchenko, 53). Yet he also realized that if he did not meet the Soviet ideological norms he would be banned from filmmaking in the way Iuz Gorshtein or Rustam Khamdamov were. For his first feature film, *The Sky of Our Childhood* (*Nebo Nashego Detstva*, 1967) Tolomush Okeev drew every shoot himself (Fig.56), designing his 'wall' from pieces of imagery that had different semantic significance for different audiences.

When Okeev presented the final version of the film, *Goskino* agencies recognized the film *The Sky of Our Childhood* as ideologically clear and appropriate. In the story, a twelve-year-old boy, *Kalyk* (Nesret Dubashev) lives with his older siblings in the city. He comes back to the steppe to visit his elder parents for a summer break. Helped by a younger shepherd *Alym* (Sovetbek Dzhumadylov), *Kalyk's* father *Bakai* (Muratbek Ryskulov) and mother *Urum* (Aliman Zhangorozova) live a nomadic life of shepherds. Their son's arrival coincides with them finding out about the new road that was soon to be built near their pastures. The only young shepherd, *Alym*, decides to leave the steppe as the nomadic lifestyle was becoming more and more challenging. Without his help, *Bakay* and *Anai* cannot survive, so they decide that *Kalyk* should drop out of school and help them with the herds. Their decision meets *Kalyk's* protest, who wants to go back to the city. The conflict between *Bakay* and *Kalyk* culminates in *Bakay's* physical assault of *Urum*, whom *Kalyk* tries to defend. The final scene of the film features *Kalyk* going back to the city.

Whether or not censors were able to interpret and recognize the *Batin* layer of the film did not matter as none of them managed to "clutch to the surface of the wall." From the formal ideological standpoint, Okeev's film discussed a topic of current importance, i.e. the struggle between tradition and progress. It showed a little boy *Kalyk* striving to find his own path in life dramatically different from that of his parents. Choosing education over the life of a shepherd he protested against

his father's pressure to remain with the family. In the best traditions of visual propaganda of 1930s heroes who rebelled against their oppressive parents, the boy tells his father that one's "son is not a cattle to keep him on the leash." The scene of *Bakay's* assault of *Urum* is also typical for representations of indigenous men as abusive and despotic. *Kalyk's* solidarity with his mother, the symbol of the oppressed surrogate proletariat (Massell), goes along the lines with the Soviet narrative of Central Asian pre-Soviet society. As the boy returns to the city, the narrative reaches its logical happy ending with the victory of progress over tradition.

Despite all Soviet propaganda components of the narrative, the semi-dissident cinematographic elites of the 1960s found the film innovative and groundbreaking. Soviet intellectuals recognized Okeev as one of the first directors, who raised the fashionable theme of environmental catastrophe. In the following years, Okeev's film became inspirational to many other filmmakers such as Sergei Gerasimov's whose 1969 film *At the Lake (U Oзера)* also focused on technological expansion and ecology. On the other hand, Okeev's film also evoked romanticization of Central Asian nomadism. Concentrating on the unity of indigenous music and landscape, film critic Oleg Artiukhov, for example, idealizes Okeev's cinematographic reality. Calling Okeev a "poet in film" he argues that the landscape in his films turns into a symbol of the blooming world (Central Asia, 81). Another critic called *The Sky of Our Childhood* the "epic poem about eternal steppe and eternal mountains of the Kyrgyz people... [It is] About poetic, welcoming, loving antiquity, which the city appreciates."- writes another film critic (Central Asia, 6). Furthermore, calling Central Asia the land of "strange, exotic cliffs of *Altaï*" and "the world of hunters and cattle-breeders, stoic inhabitants of the mountains and settlers, who are connected to nature and dumb animals with their whole beings" (Central Asia, 7), some of the critics romanticized Central Asian nomadism as a space of blissful harmony invaded by technology.

Most reviews of that kind respond to the film's long panoramas of the steppe, horses, and the daily activities of *Kalyk's* family (54-58). Okeev focuses on elements of his characters' lives, such as setting up a yurt, taking care of the animals, and hunting that has not changed dramatically from the time Pavel Kuzentsov depicted his "innocent natives" in the nineteenth century.

Building on the Russian vision of the steppe as something "connected to nature" and nomads as its "stoic inhabitants," Okeev demonstrates ways in which this "welcoming, loving antiquity" is destroyed by Soviet modernity. One of the most dramatic scenes in the film, for example the Soviet road construction workers demolishing a mountain, comes after a long scene of the family's slow migration from one pasture to another accompanied with the background dialogue between the mother and her son, in which she he asks her questions about nomadic lifestyle (Mom, how long do camels live?...Why do some have one and other two?...When do we stop?). Imagery of the steppe, horses crossing river, the sky and voices of a mother and her child create an atmosphere of a close connection as well as a sense of inheritance between people and nature. A sudden scream of a

construction worker that interrupts the scene's internal harmony "Where do you think you're going? Go back!!!" drowns in the sound of explosion. Imagery of frightened horses, the river with hundreds of dead fish flowing in the water and *Bakai* standing by the river mourning, displays the damage Soviet technology wrought on the ecology of the steppe as well as the clash between nomadic lifestyle and Soviet modernity (Fig 59).

Considering Okeev's careful approach to visual narrative and his 'wall', it is unlikely that the theme of environment as well as a mild romanticization of nomadism was accidental. The film received the *Grand Award Mountain Crystal* Film Competition of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (Dushanbe, 1967), an honorary diploma at the festival Best Director Debut (Frankfurt, 1967), an honorary diploma of the *Iskusstvo Kino* magazine at the Film Festival in Leningrad (1968), and the *Golden Alp Rose* at the Film Festival in Trento (Italy, 1969).

In addition to these two semantic layers, much of the indigenous symbolism remained on the deeper *Batin* level and was accessible mostly to Central Asian audiences. When talking about his film in the press, Okeev said that it was about the "difficult life of steppe shepherds," emphasizing not *the Liber Sovieticus Kalyk*, but his parents *Bakai* and *Urum* (Diaduchenko, 66). Okeev's *Batin* narrative is embedded in the parts of the film that Soviet realism described as reflection of daily life (*bitopisatel'stvo*) and focus on the parents' relation to their children. From a Soviet perspective these scenes were to strengthen the overall pedagogical message of the film, i.e., the necessity of progress.

It is in these scenes of daily life that Okeev embedded his other story. The fundamentals of Central Asian social etiquette, as well as the knowledge of religious significance of some symbols used in the visual narrative, reveal the tragic disconnect between *Kalyk* and his parents. Beginning with the first scene, in which *Kalyk* arrives to the pasture, he hands his mother pictures of her children. Looking at the picture *Urum* criticizes his daughter in law's short haircut ([She] turned herself from a woman into a man. It is dishonoring!), make up and nail polish as shameless. Surprised at the fact that her grandchild speaks Russian only, she insists that children should be educated in the family. (Fig. 57) *Kalyk* answers that all women in the city paint their nails and all children at daycare speak Russian. "What kind of children are these? In other families at least the youngest child stays with them... Grew their wings and left the nest. They don't need their parents anymore." – she concludes. Traditionally, children inherited pastures and supported their parents, who helped them with upbringing of grandchildren. Each generation had its role as well as its responsibility towards other members of the family. With children moving away to the city, an important element of this social structure began to crumble and parents unable to experience the joys of raising grandchildren were left with the labor they were supposed to pass on to their children.

Given up on his older children *Bakay* is trying to hold on to his youngest child and pass on the knowledge he got from his father and grandfather against *Kalyk*'s will. *Bakay*'s failure to convince his son to stay not only shows opportunities urbanization gave to rural citizens, but also ways in which it disrupted the rural



family structure. The last scene of the film, in which *Bakay* leaves his son with other children flying back to the city, demonstrates that the break of the family structure was as painful to children as it was to parents. As *Bakay* rides away Kalyk begins to cry looking at his father's figure disappearing in the distance.

In Okeev's *batin* narrative, not only did the city take away *Bakay's* children, it reached to the steppe leaving *Bakay* and his wife homeless. Multiple visual binaries underline the shift from old to new, traditional to modern, but in a way that shows the new as a negative, destructive force. One such binary can be seen in the scene of *Bakay* welcoming two journalists from the city that come to tell him that he has to move to new pastures because of the road construction. One of them takes a picture of *Bakay's* blind eagle. Frightened by the flash of the camera, the eagle attacks the journalist (Fig.60). Okeev's visual binary of the blind bird versus photo camera the eagle is full of symbolic irony. In Central Asian nomadic tradition, eagles were essential to peoples' lives due to hunting. Symbolically they were connected to ancestors and often represented nomadic family/kin/tribe. A blind eagle is useless as it cannot hunt and thus is unable to survive much like *Bakay* who is too old to take care of his herds. As *Bakay* is pushed out by construction workers that represent Soviet modernity, so the mechanical 'eye' of the camera objectifies the blind eagle. What once was essential for survival has become an exotic feature, an archaic artifact of the disappearing world of nomadism.

A more elaborate example of Okeev's overall criticism of Soviet modernity from variety of angles is in the scene, which shows *Bakay* bringing *kumis*<sup>36</sup> to the construction site. From the Soviet censorship perspective this scene does not have much significance. *Bakay* simply fulfills someone else's shift and is in the position of service. When he comes to the site construction workers praise *kumis* and thank *Bakay* for it. As the workers ask him for more, he spills some *kumis* on the ground and everyone laughs and jokes with *Bakay* as it happens.

From the indigenous perspective, however, *Bakay* comes to the construction site not as a servant, but as his wife addresses him in the film 'master of the pasture' (*khoziain pasbishcha*) to greet his guests with the drink that symbolizes Kyrgyz hospitality and *barakat*, i.e., blessing and luck. On the same semantic level of interpretation newcomers are disrespectful towards their host. The use of the statue of *balbal* (Fig.61) in this scene is the key element that turns it from being non-significant from the Soviet perspective into the scene of symbolic violence in the eyes of the audience familiar with Kyrgyz symbolism. *Balbal* ('grandfather' or 'ancestor' in Kyrgyz) an anthropomorphic stone stele is one of the most important components of the socio-religious worldview of nomads across parts of Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia and Mongolia. Found around kurgans and kurgan cemeteries, Iron Age *balbals* are associated with Scythians while medieval examples with Turkic tribes. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the nomadic population of Central Asia considered these statues of bearded, armed men as icons of ancestral warriors often serving as places of Muslim prayer. Okeev acknowledges

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<sup>36</sup> Traditional to Central Asian nomads milkbased alcoholic drink.

*balbal's* social significance in one of his opening scenes that shows *Bakay* and his family praying by the statue as they move away to another pasture (Fig.62). On the construction site, workers use *balbal* and the stones around it to start a fire and boil some water in an aluminum Soviet-style bucket. With the Soviet music, laughter, and conversations in the back, this becomes the scene of symbolic vandalism of Soviet youth unfamiliar with Kyrgyz socio-cultural values.

The next shot takes the viewers back to the technology versus nature binary reinforced in the previous scene. *Bakay* looks up and sees a stuffed golden eagle with the lifting construction crane in the back. (Fig.63). The irony of a dead yet alive-looking animal next to the moving, 'living' machine highlights the demise of the pre-modern steppe. Once again Okeev underlines ways in which the Soviet system turned a traditional symbol into a museum artifact. Surrounded by construction workers who ask him for more *kumis*, *Bakay* looks away first at the *balbal* and then at the stuffed eagle. Not paying attention to what he is doing he spills some *kumis* on the ground. The construction workers begin to laugh and joke with him as it happens. Yet, in the nomadic tradition *kumis* represents *barakat*, i.e. blessing and luck. When spilled on the ground milk or *kumis* symbolizes a lost chance, misfortune and death.

Focusing on differences between generations Okeev discusses modernity unattached to discourses on ethnicity and race. Ethnically diverse construction workers represent Soviet style internationalism, yet all of them are significantly younger than *Bakay*. By doing this Okeev identifies the fundamental break between the older generations and young Soviet *manqurts*, whose understanding of what they are doing has gone with their memory and knowledge of what this land represents in the pre-Soviet Kyrgyz generation.

In the following scene of *tui*, a birthday celebration of *Alym's* little son, Okeev continues to add dramatic dimensions to his central *Batin* idea of declaining spirituality. Dates, spaces and symbols associated with birth and death in the Central Asian religious tradition often represent borderlines between the world of the living and the world of the dead. As borderlines they are also places where one may be harmed, which is why whether a family member is born or passed away family gathers to provide support in the space and time associated with danger. It is essential to be pure in thought and actions when gathering together and while some elements of *tui* remain the same (children run around trying to win the prize of *buzkashi*) others went through a transformation that diminished the symbolic significance of *tui*. *Bakay* who was honored by *Alym* to 'cut the thread' i.e. to help *Alym's* son make his first steps in life as a part of indigenous ceremony of initiation, is late to the celebration. When *Bakay* finally arrives, *Alym* who had been drinking and offering vodka to his guests, refuses to accept his gifts. Humiliated *Bakay* leaves the celebration without giving his blessing to *Alym's* child. In continuation to the previous scene at the construction site, Okeev shows *Bakay* who comes to the *tui* empty handed, having 'spilled' his *kumis*, i.e. his blessing at the construction site. *Alym* and others, end up substituting *kumis* with vodka, the Russian alcoholic beverage. Thus Okeev speaks not only of the young generation

that refuse to accept indigenous knowledge. He also speaks of the older generation, who has nothing to offer their children. In the genealogical continuity of Kyrgyz family traditions, *Bakay* and his son *Kalym* represent the broken link.

Responsibility of being that broken link is the weight that *Bakay* carries throughout the film, trying to hold on to his youngest son and prevent him from going back to the city. The tragic culmination in this *Batin* narrative is the scene of *Bakay* playing *komuz*, a traditional musical instrument of Central Asian nomads. In his memoirs Okeev notes that much of *Bakay's* character came from his own father:

My father never punished us physically, but was not exactly affectionate either. Yey, his words for us were like a given. Perhaps it was because people around...were very respectful of him. He was a very taciturn person. At the same time I never saw him just sit there without occupying himself with doing things. There was an old *komuz* hanging in our yurt. After an argument with somebody or in the moment of deep melancholy he would take this *komuz* and calmly play some old melody (qtd. in Diaduchenko 64).

Indigenous to Kyrgyzstan *komuz*, which Okeev's father played when he was sad and *Bakay* plays in the end of the film, was an essential component of nomadic knowledge production prior to Soviet-style education. Musicians were often also historians, poets and religious figures that taught children and adults ways of being with an accompaniment of *komuz*.<sup>37</sup> The gift of singing as well as the talent of playing music was traditionally associated with divine power and thus prophethood. The emphasis in learning was made more on the historical, literary or religious narrative becoming one's spiritual experience than on factual information. *Bakay*, who plays his *komuz* by himself, expresses his sadness at losing his youngest son. While critics repeatedly praised Okeev for realistic representation it is ironic that on the *Batin* level Okeev does the complete opposite by creating an effect of ancestral spiritual presence by means of the camera movement. With the music of *komuz* coming from a distance, the camera moves from a completely dark screen towards a distant circle of light. As the playing of *komuz* becomes more and more distinct, the camera moves towards the light that eventually turns into the circle of *tunduk* the ceiling window of the Kyrgyz yurt. The camera looks inside the yurt and gradually zooms in on *Bakay's* figure playing music. While non-indigenous viewers saw this cinematographic maneuver as a creative approach towards a scene of *Bakay's* distress, the indigenous *Batin* layer transcended a connection to *arvaks*.

Okeev's visual emphasis on the *tunduk* has a strong symbolic reference to Kyrgyz oral and religious history.<sup>38</sup> All of the architectural parts of the yurt can be

<sup>37</sup> There are other musical instruments in Central Asia, such as *dombra* and *rubab* that play similar role among other peoples of the region.

<sup>38</sup> Today, for example, a stylized version of *tunduk* embodies the central decorative element of the Kyrgyz national flag.

replaced except for *tunduk*, which represented the essence of one's family. As a transitional point between the world of *arvaks* and the world of the living, it represents one of the borders that separate the two worlds. When a family member is born he or she enters the family circle through *tunduk*, as it also represents birth and thus female reproductive organ. Yet, what is important in this setting is that the souls, which enter and exit the *yurt* are always part of the same kin moving between upper, middle and lower worlds, where they are surrounded with living and diseased family members. This is why children in Central Asia are named after their grandparents and often treated and called 'father' or 'mother'. Okeev's camera work brings a religious mystical element into the scene. In his sadness *Bakay's* music calls upon *arvaks* to share his grief over the break of internal harmony and spiritual continuity in the Kyrgyz worldview.

Although indigenous reviewers could not dissect the film structure in a way that revealed the symbolic significance of Okeev's *Batin* layer without putting Okeev's career on the spot, many of them spoke of *Kalyk* with regret rather than pride. A poet and a writer Sadzhan Djigitov, for example, claimed in his review of the film that *Bakay* "only looks old and simple-minded, but in reality he is wise, fearless and spiritually young and healthy" (qtd. in Diaduchenko 64). He speaks of *Kalyk* as of his own generation of Soviet born Kyrgyzs:

In the final part of *The Sky of Our Childhood* *Kalyk* is not the only one, who farewells his parents with pain overloading his whole being, but we too, the peers of the authors of the film, say good buy to our parents. A whole generation of people, who did not know peace and idle life, the taste of vodka and cigarettes, are crossing the border between existence and history. And we, their children, tangled in other circle of life ride towards new horizons without looking back...but gaining much goodness and greatness, leaving 'lead vileness' of the past behind, are we also giving up on all the goodness that was part of our parents' lifestyle? These are the questions that emerge after viewers see the film *The Sky of Our Childhood*. The imagery and emotional impact of the film is hard to express in words, but it is multilayered, chatoyant and truly deep" (86-87).

Djigitov uses a widely popularized Soviet quote from Maksim Gorkiy's 1914 autobiographical tale *Childhood* (*Detstvo*), which characterizes the pre-Soviet era as "lead vileness" (*svintsovie merzosti*), ironically speaking of the greatness of the Soviet present by identifying the absence of vodka and cigarettes in the past.

It is important to note that unlike some dissident filmmakers of 1960s, Okeev was not anti-Soviet. Most Transsovieticus cultural producers accepted, and were proud of being Soviet. As another Transsovieticus filmmaker and Okeev's colleague, Khodjali Narliev recalls:

The other day we set with Tolomush and talked about the possibility of Soviet power not being here, what if we never experienced cinema, which has become our life...[We decided that] our wonderful and clever Tolomush would have become a comedian in some village, physically not having a chance to even go anywhere (Central Asia, 14).

Yet, as 'children' of the Soviet system, Transsovieticus cultural producers did question the indisputable righteousness of the Soviet-style civilizing process. The totalitarian element of Soviet ideology allowed for only one static set of right answers.<sup>39</sup> Okeev and other filmmakers of his generation such as Khodakuli Narliev, Bulat Mansurov, Elyor Ishmukhamedov, Baqo Sadiqov and Davlat Khudonazarov however had their own 'truths', which they revealed through a semantic *zahir/batin* layering of their visual narratives.

Soviets were only partially successful in their attempt to control the emergence of other non-socialist interpretations. After the 20th Party Congress in February of 1956, the Soviet cultural producers began to gradually gain back some agency over their production in literature, film, photography and art. Forty years of Soviet rule brought confidence and a sense of social and political stability. These years also brought disappointments and losses, which is why so many filmmakers of the late 1950s and 1960s turned to the past to find answers about their present. Visual vocabulary of *Tohir and Zuhro* inspired the next generation of Central Asian filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s to continue developing a cinematographic language that whether breaking conventional rules of the socialist realism or not introduced new interpretations that complicated the 'rights' and 'wrongs' of the Soviet ideology.

In their dialogue with the past and present Transsovieticus generation of filmmakers challenged the superficiality of the national form, by creating cinematic worlds that did not fit into the Soviet framework. Rustam Khamdamov created a semi-foreign pre-Soviet world of idleness and poetic irony. Elyor Ishmukhamedov's interpretation of urban Central Asia lacked Soviet symbolism. His Tashkent love stories revealed the world that was modern, multinational, yet barely Soviet. The most prominent and influential representative of Transsovieticus visual culture of 1960s Talamush Okeev diversified Nabi Ganiev's *zahir/batin* language revealing the amalgam role of modernity in Kyrgyz society. However the message of the Transsovieticus filmmakers was in the post Stalinist Soviet Union, all of them called for complexity of historical and contemporary representation of social and

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<sup>39</sup> Even in late stages of Soviet ruling in 1970s students who refused to accept all elements of the Soviet lifestyle (*Sovetskiy obraz jizni*), were stopped from career advancement or were even publicly humiliated. In Tajik high schools of mid 1980s the capital city of Dushanbe, for example, girls that played basketball and insisted on wearing sweatpants instead of more revealing shorts, were allowed to regional and city competitions but not republican championships.<sup>39</sup> Anti-Islamic campaigns in 'national' i.e. non-Russian secondary schools during the month of Ramazan involved physical force, when teachers opened teenager's mouths to pour water to break their fasting.<sup>39</sup>



political issues within and outside of Central Asia. The need for complexity continued to grow into 1970s and 1980s anticipating Mikhail Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*' of mid 1980s.



Fig. 43. *My heart is in the Moutnains*. Film.

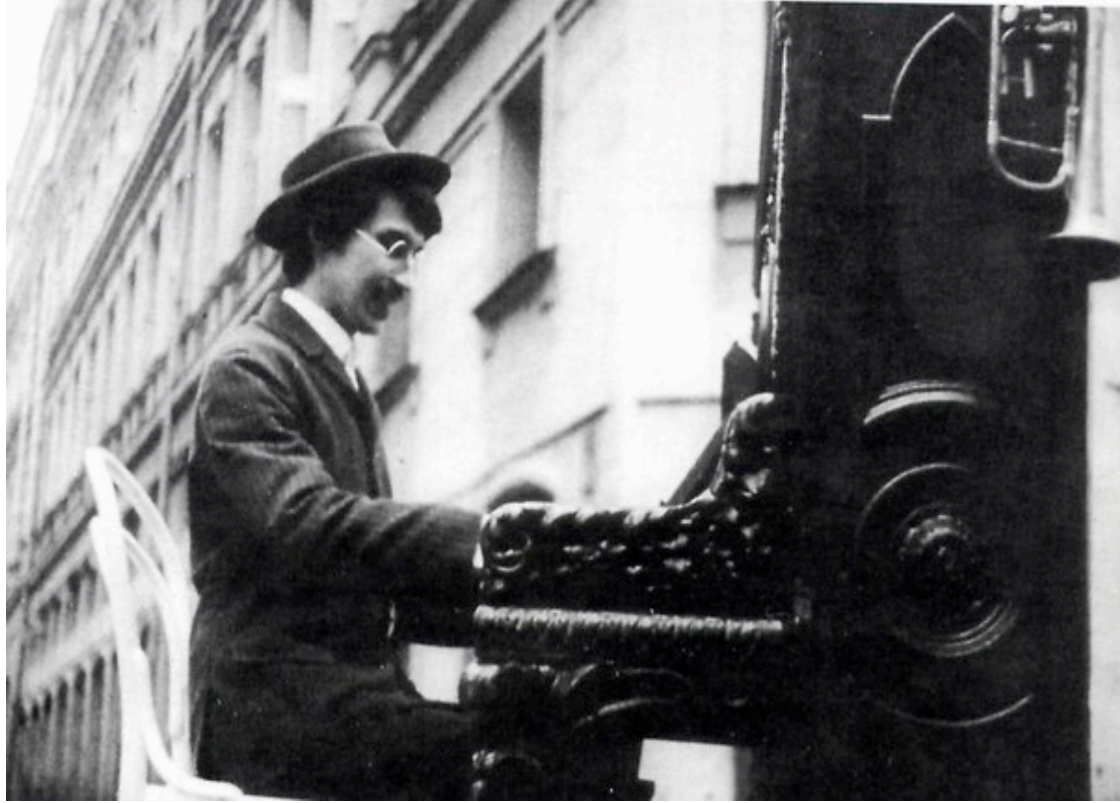


Fig. 44. Rustam Khamdamov as a pianist in *My Heart is in the Mountains*. Film.



Fig. 45. Rustam Khamdamov. N.t. 1972. Watercolor. The State Tretyakov Gallery.  
*Andron Konchalovskii's Official Site*. Web. 27 Febr. 2009.





Fig.46. Rustam Khamdamov. N.t. 1977. Watercolor. The State Tretiakov Gallery. *Andron Konchalovskii's Official Site*. Web. 27 Febr. 2009.





Fig. 47. Rustam Khamdamov. N.t. 1987. Gouache. The State Tretyakov Gallery.  
*Andron Konchalovskii's Official Site. Web. 27 Febr. 2009.*



**Мы выполнили норму**

Fig. 48. N.a. *Did you Fulfill the Norm?* 1956. Reprint. Moscow: Zvezda, 2007. Print.





Fig. 49. Rustam Khamdamov. Poster for *Tenderness*. From right to left Timur (Nakhapetov), Lena (Sternkova), Sanjar (Agzamov). 1966. Print.



Fig. 50. Sanjar and Lena. *Tenderness*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 51. Timur. *Tenderness*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 52. *Tenderness*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 53. *Urum* (Aliman Dzhangorozova) looks at the photograph of her children who live in the city. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.





Fig. 54. *Urum* crosses the river. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 55. The steppe. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.

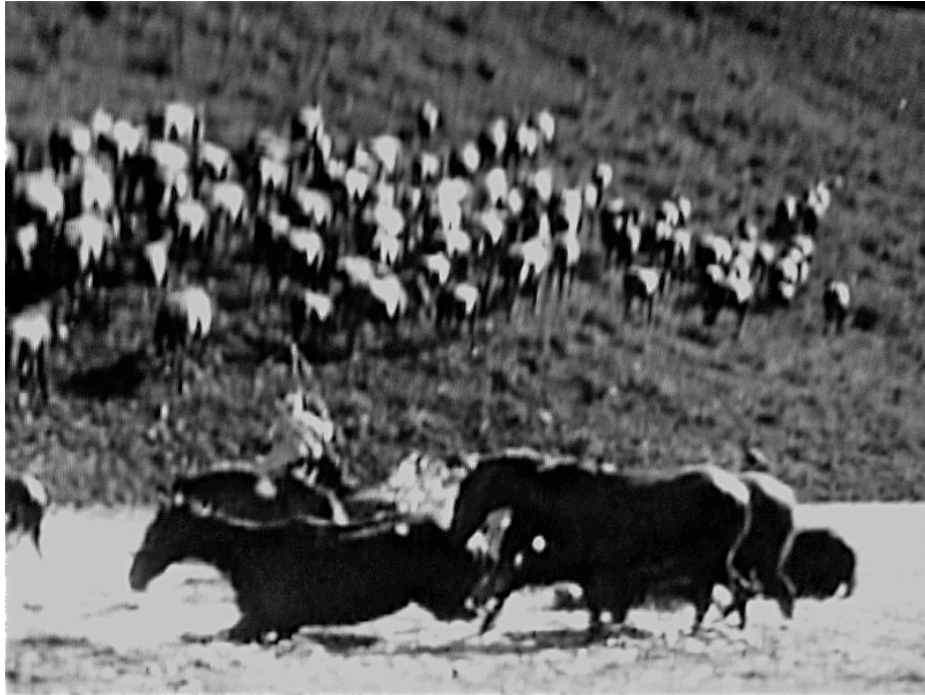


Fig. 56. Moving to the new pasture. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.

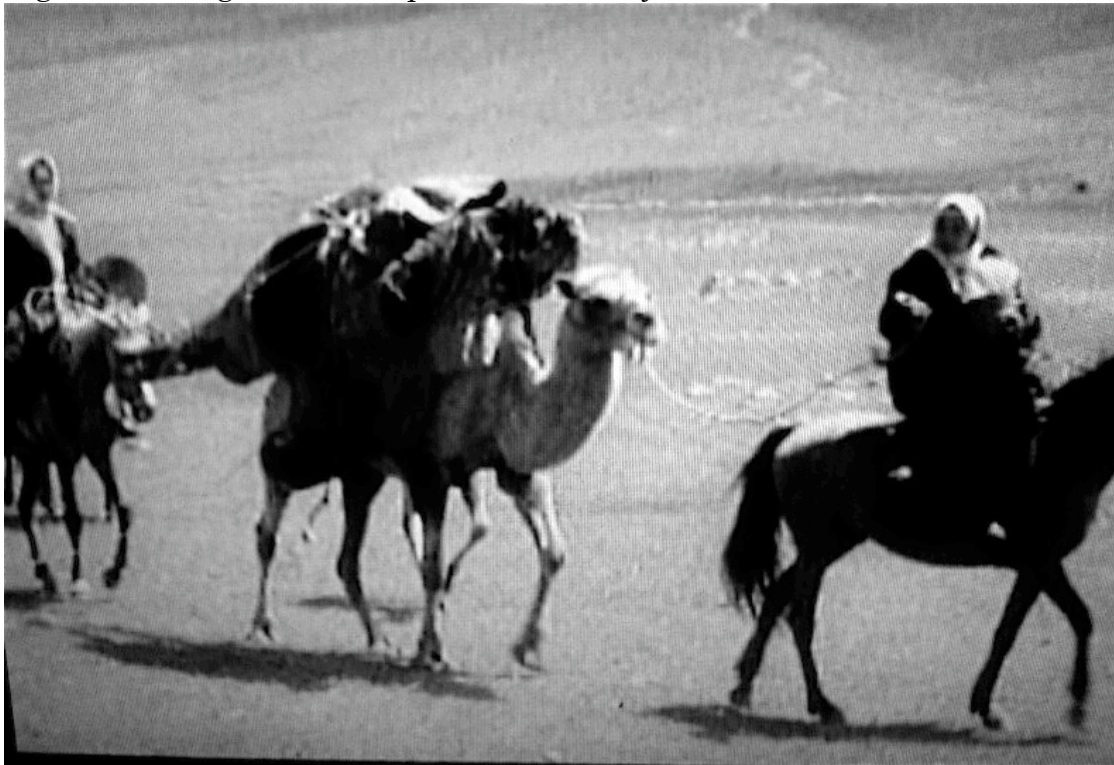


Fig. 57. Moving to the new pasture. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.





Fig. 58. Moving to the new pasture. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 59. The Explosion. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 60. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 61. Vandalizing the Balbal. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 62. Leaving pastures. Muratbek Riskulov as Bakai (right), Sovetbek Dzhumabilov as Alym. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.



Fig. 63. On the construction site. *The Sky of Our Childhood*. 1966. Film.





## Chapter IV

### Rewriting History: The Transformation of *Batin* into *Zatin* in the 1979's Television Feature *The First Morning of Youth*

The unspoken agreement between the Soviet state and its citizens during the Brezhnev's era required viewers if not to believe ideological slogans of the late *zastoi*<sup>40</sup> period then at least to appear believing them. In the meantime, the number of cultural producers challenging the boundaries of this ideology expanded throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. An attempt to reimagine the world of the pre-Soviet generations became a big part of Central Asian visual culture. As directors reproached their histories in the last decade of Soviet power, they also brought the *Batin* narrative to the *zahir* surface making the Central Asian narrative accessible to wider audiences. This chapter examines the transformation of one such narrative from 1930s to 1980s.

Davlat Khudonazarov had just turned eighteen years old when his first film project titled *Lullaby* (*Kolibel'naia*, 1960) landed on the 'shelf'. While it passed censorship in Moscow, in Khudonazarov's native Tajikistan the Central Committee of Communist Party banned it for being 'unpatriotic' (Khudonazar, 1998). The 'unpatriotic' fragment of the film featured a farmer from Pamir province working in his field with two bulls and a pre-Soviet style plow. Tajikistan's ideological apparatus saw this as an attempt to discredit the Communist party's progress in providing Tajik farmers with latest Soviet technology. In the recollection of this period, Khudonazarov remembered that he was far from making any political statements, but he did want to film something that was 'real' as opposed to the pervasive and staged 'pretty' Sovietness, :

*I remembered how when I was a kid, men were told to shave and dress up for May Day demonstrations. All these 'voluntary' activities were imposed and then staged. No one wanted to be part of this fake reality. No one cared, yet people were forced to perform, to play the role of the 'proletariat'. (Khudonazarov, Vesnik).*

The inclusion of the pre-Soviet style plow in the *Lullaby* would prevent Khudonazarov, who at the time did not fully understand what happened, from making his own films for the next thirteen years (1966 to 1979). During those

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<sup>40</sup> The term *zastoi* (Russian: a part of the river with no or little flow; a situation characterized by a lack of progress, standstill, stagnation, depression) came to represent the late Soviet period of Leonid Brezhnev's ruling (1969-1982).

years, Khudonazarov worked as a cameraman on several film projects at Tajikifilm. It was then that he developed a strong antipathy towards 'staged' realities and in his work was strongly influenced by the aesthetics of Georgian filmmaker Otar Iosseliani (*Fallen Leaves*, 1966), Satyajit Ray (*The Apu Trilogy*, 1950-1959) and, later, by Yilmaz Guney (*The Road*, 1982). He was also able to work with many filmmakers of Central Asia and soon became part of the 1960s Transsovieticus cinematographic circle:

I learned my lesson when my documentary [Lullaby] ...was banned. When all the copies were burned I began to understand what was happening not only in culture, but in politics as well. I felt as if I fell out of one reality and fell into another dimension, where I was able to read *samizdat*,<sup>41</sup> meet and be next to those, who were not afraid to be honest with themselves. I will never forget the Central Asian film festival in Dushanbe in 1967. Films *The Sky of Our Childhood* by Kyrgyz director Talamush Okeev and *The Bride* by the Turkmen director Khadzhakuli Narliev were shocking to me and everybody else. The director of the film studio risked his own career and organized a closed showing of my "dissident" documentary *Lullaby* for them [Okeev and Narliev]. During the final banquet of the festival, Tolomush, Khodzhakuli and filmmaker Bulat Mansurov called me their Tajik spiritual brother in the presence of local party bureaucrats. No other award had ever made me more proud than these words, this solidarity they showed me back then. Everything I did in film after that was like giving back to those who had faith in me...(Khudonazarov, Vesnik)

Acquaintance with the Transsovieticus filmmakers allowed Khudonazarov to study a variety of techniques, some known to filmmakers across the Soviet Union and some characteristic to Central Asian cultural producers only. One of those cinematic tricks, called *petushki* (roosters) in film jargon, for example, involved the insertion of two or three apparently ideologically questionable elements. Deliberately positioned, *roosters* decreased the film's chances of dramatic changes. Having enough material to 'cut out' distracted censors did not always notice less apparent fragments that may have been cut out otherwise. If, despite *roosters*, important scenes were censored, the Central Asian Transsovieticus readily agreed to make changes only to add something else later that would still complicate and transform the meaning of the scene back to what was intended in the original version.

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<sup>41</sup> The etymology of the word *samizdat* comes from *sam* (self) and *izdat* (publishing). Self-publishing were printed materials censored by the state yet produced by individuals in the former Soviet Union and passed from reader to reader.

Like many things in the late Soviet period, a chance to direct a film came to Davlat Khudonazarov through *znakomstva* (personal networks), a complex system of returned favors among cultural producers, studio management, *Goskino* authorities and other censorship institutions, that made seemingly unfeasible film projects of late 1970s possible. Despite restrictions and bans, there were people in high positions who had the means and the aspiration to turn things around in the system. One of these people, Irina Vlasova, curator editor of Central Television (*Tsentral'noe televidenie*) also known as *Perviy Kanal* (Channel One), suggested that Davlat Khudonazarov direct a Gosteleradio<sup>42</sup> television project under the working title *Nisso*. A television series about a Pamirian girl's struggle for her freedom in the 1920s was based on Pavel Luknitskiy's (1902-1973) novel *Nisso*, first published in 1941. The novel describes the sufferings of a young beauty *Nisso*, who runs away from her old Tajik husband to find love with a Soviet commissar *Medvedev*.

In accordance with Soviet ideological framework, the world *Nisso* lived in before she met *Medvedev* was abusive and hopeless. *Nisso's* father dies at the hands of a rich landlord Alim-Sho, who wants to marry *Nisso's* mother *Rozia Mo*. Having rejected him, *Rozia Mo* dies in an accident while being chased by his people. After *Rozia Mo's* death, *Nisso* moves in with her opium addicted aunt *Tura Mo*, who favors her own children over *Nisso*, abuses her physically and starves her. When *Nisso* grows older, turning into a beauty with features of a "Greek goddess" (Luknitskiy, 48, 102), *Tura Mo* exchanges her for opium to an old landowner *Aziz Khon*. *Aziz Khon* marries *Nisso* against her will yet on their wedding night she finds a way out by jumping into a river. Hungry and exhausted she reaches another village *Siatang* where she meets a Russian commissar and doctor *Alexander Medvedev* (*Shopir*). *Medvedev* finds a family to accommodate her and *Nisso's* life begins to change as she notes that people of *Siatang* enjoy a better life. With the arrival of Soviet power embodied by *Medvedev*, *Siatang* villagers became happier and wealthier. Yet even in the Soviet *Siatang* *Medvedev* and his friend *Bakhter* have to stand against the local religious authority *Bobo Kalon*, who stands against progress by preventing the building of a dam. *Nisso's* beauty draws many interested suitors including *Bakhtier*. *Nisso*, on the other hand, is drawn to the tall, blue-eyed Russian stranger, who tells her stories about a far away land. In the meantime, *Aziz Khon* finds out that *Nisso* is alive and leads troops of *basmachis* to *Siatang* to get his wife back. As a result of an armed conflict, *Medvedev* gets injured while many of the villagers die, including *Bakhtier* and a young girl named *Mariam*. Salvation comes in the form of the Red Army that defeats the *basmachis*, kills *Aziz Khon* and frees *Nisso* from captivity. Having witnessed *Mariam's* death, *Nisso* loses her sense of reality hallucinating and having visions of *Aziz Khon* chasing her. The one thing that keeps her linked to reality is taking care of the injured *Medvedev*. When he finally recovers *Nisso* decides to leave for Russia with him.

<sup>42</sup> *Gosteleradio* was a Soviet Union's radio broadcasting.

Luknitskiy's novel was translated into many languages of the Soviet Union, and turned into two different operas.<sup>43</sup> The first film version based on the novel came out in Tajikfilm studio in 1966 (director Marat Aripov, script by Pavel Luknitskiy).<sup>44</sup> The TV project was to make it known to every Soviet family.

When Davlat Khudonazarov read the script for the screen version of *Nisso* (written by Pavel Luknitskiy's wife Vera Luknitskaia and scriptwriter Alexander Mariamov for the first time), he refused to be part of the project. In his view, the novel had nothing in common with the Pamirian people Khudonazarov himself represented. Having grown in the small province (24,000 population) of Shughnan, (GBO, Tajikistan), Khudonazarov's family was close with Khonim *Nisso*, the woman whose life Luknitsiy had said he had documented. During the Tsarist period *Nisso* was an orphan who married a Russian engineer. Once the Soviets took over, the head of the GPU (later KGB) who was also Russian, fell in love with *Nisso* and threatened her husband with prison if he did not give up his wife. *Nisso* became the wife of the KGB officer and in the words of Khudonazarov's grandmother "used to visit her mother's grave, lie on it and cry about not having anyone to stand up for her" (Khudonazarov, 1998). Eventually when the KGB husband was executed during Stalin's purges of 1930s, Khonim *Nisso* left for Saints Petersburg, where she married Khudonazarov's distant relative Tashmukhamedov.

When Khudonazarov expressed his disappointment with the unrealistic representation of his people to Irina Vlasova, curator editor of Central Television (*Tsentrāl'noe televidenie*), she told him that the project was already approved by the Film Committee (*Kinokomitet*) of the USSR and was going to be produced with or without his participation. It was, Vlasova added, in his interest, to try and recreate the story making it more real. She reminded him that the film was to be shown on Channel I and thus millions of people would see it (Khudonazarov, 1998).

When almost three years later Channel I showed Khudonazarov's three part television series, captions indicated that it was based on the original novel. Yet, those who appreciated the original text, such as Vera Luknitskaia – the writer's wife and one of the scriptwriters for the television series, were deeply disappointed. "Luknitsaia said that we changed the story, but could not point out what was it that we changed." – said Khudonazarov later (Vesnik). Rather than dramatically changing the story, Khudonazarov added an additional *Batin* layer that included several semantic dimensions and complicated the narrative. In the course of reworking the story, scriptwriter Gavhar Surmanoz, whose name in the end was not even mentioned in the captions, extended the first part of the originally planned

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<sup>43</sup> First in 1954 by Sergei (Balasian *Bakhtior va Nisso*) and later, by a Bulgarian composer Dmitiry Ganev.

<sup>44</sup> Later, after Khudonazarov's version of the film came out in 1980, Luknitsiy's wife confirmed that the earlier version was the most accurate cinematographic representation of the novel.



two-part *The First Morning of Youth* (1979) to a three-part television series. Offering an indigenous perspective on the Soviet civilizing process Khudonazarov challenged Luknitskiy, whom he called the “Soviet prototype of Rudyard Kipling”<sup>45</sup> (Khudonazarov, *Vesnik*). Modifying the contrast between pre Soviet and Soviet worldview and shifting the viewer’s prism on sexuality and ethnicity from Soviet Tajik to culturally Tajik (including Soviet Tajik) when presenting the story of *Nisso’s* life Khudonazarov exposed an indigenous perspective of the history of the Soviet civilizing process.

## 1. Pre-Soviet versus Soviet

Luknitskiy’s dark description of the village of *Duob* and *Nisso’s* childhood was to create a contrast with the Soviet village Siotang where *Nisso* meets *Medvedev*. The author intensifies the atmosphere of the lifeless space with people indifferent to each other’s lives and deaths through semantic patterns of words such as ‘dead’, ‘buried’, ‘grief’, ‘black’, ‘empty’:

*The stone shacks of the village were black. Each one of them surrounded with an empty dead garden, was hidden behind a stone fence... (18)*

*Nothing changed in Duob. Several people died. They were buried quietly, as no one was really saddened. More children were born, but no one was happy about it. Everybody knew, that people in these lands were like rocks; the more you clean your field from these rocks the more would plunge down from the mountains. There will always be people in the village and they will always be hungry (30).*

Further descriptions and comparisons of indigenous population with animals degrades their living situation to non-human. The range of Luknitsiy’s comparisons ranges from comparisons of girls to little monkeys to pure fictional representation of *Nisso* eating fish as a cave woman:

*Five-year-old Zaibo in a piece of goat skin wrapped around her little body with a woolen thread looked like a little monkey...(18)*

*...Jumping over the fence, Nisso stumbled over a rock and fell. She was hurt but she did not care. She laid on the ground grabbing the bone with her both hands, and with greediness, animal like hurled her teeth*

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<sup>45</sup> Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) a British author and poet born in British India. Called by George Orwell a “prophet of British imperialism” Kipling is the author of *The Man who Would be King* (1888) and *Gunga Din* (1890).

*into the peace of meat and began to tear it apart and swallowing peaces without chewing them. (29)*

Such representation of pre-Soviet Pamir shows that Luknitskiy was either unaware or chose to ignore everything ranging from the complex system of social relations to the more obvious social markers such as restrictions in eating etiquette of the Pamir population in the late nineteenth early twentieth century. In terms of narrative these representations intensify the contrast between the pre-Soviet lifestyle and *Medvedev's* civilizing mission, which involved not only modern technologies, but also linguistic and cultural Russification. When later in the novel *Nisso* meets *Medvedev* he tells her to learn Russian, wear Russian (Western) type of clothing and sit at the Russian (Western) type of table:

*...Here Nisso- Sho-Pir lightly pushed her towards the table –this is called ‘skamia’ [bench]. It’s a Russian word, you don’t have it in your language. Enough of you sitting on your heels! From now on you will sit at the table like me. Pick a seat...*

*...Nisso gingerly sat at the corner but instantly bended her legs. Gulriz laughed:*

*-She doesn’t know how yet! The first time, when Shopir told me to sit [at the table] I too set this way. He laughed and I got angry. Let your feet down, completely let your feet down! (97)*

*Nisso's* admiration of both - *Medvedev's* physical aesthetics (blue eyes, big and strong) and the modern lifestyle he offers to her (clean, big, with much wood house) - are bound with Russianness:

*Russian- Nisso thought to herself – Never before did I see Russians. He must be rich. His house is clean, big, with much wood. Even the ground is wooden...Russian. That’s why he is so big, and [all] Russians must have blue eyes! He is strong...What is he going to do with me?... (123)*

Khudonazarov's film begins to change Luknitskiy's binaries of uncivilized/civilized, unhappy/happy, regressive/progressive by modifying the picture of the pre-Soviet Pamir. Keeping Lunkitskiy's description of people's poverty and difficult lifestyle in the cold mountainous climate, Khudonazarov poeticized it through landscape and music. Focusing on mountains, cameramen Valeriy Vilenskiy and Konstantin Orazaliev picked the most stunning landscapes of snowy mountains, which positioned *Nisso's* childhood in an extraordinary environment with its own severe natural beauty. (Fig. 64-67). Music selection for

the film included a variety of important ritual folk songs. Composers Daler Nazarov and Firuz Bahor wrote music for the film that involved folk instruments such as *nai* serving as a reference point to a long indigenous tradition. Folk music and aesthetically appealing landscapes countered the original 'dead' atmosphere of *Nisso's* place of birth. Small seemingly unimportant elements such as children's laughter, a funny episode of a dog playing in the snow, family preparation of seasonal celebrations against the backdrop of a mountain in water color palette created an atmosphere of a difficult, yet happy life. While working with actors, Khudonazarov noticed that when they spoke to each other in local languages when off set, their body language was dramatically different than when they 'acted' in Russian. The actors' body language noticeably changed when Khudonazarov asked them to read their lines in Shugni or Tajik and, although later the film was dubbed, the overall atmosphere of the film changed due to the less formal linguistic environment. Thus, through a variety of small changes, Khudonazarov created a different social setting in the film. The people living in Khudonazarov's *Duob* enjoy solidarity in the face of climatic instability, life and death. Social networks and variety of festive gatherings and celebrations that Surmanoz included into the script changed the vision of *Nisso's* childhood. Adding these details Khudonazarov and Surmanoz did not intend to make it apparent for Central Asian audience only. Rather, their goal was to bring the *batin* narrative to the *zahir* surface making indigenous narrative accessible to viewers whether they were from Tajikistan or not.

One of the scenes that underline a sense of a strong community features the spring celebration of *Navruz* (New Year) (Fig. 68 & 69). As the camera moves from young girls in white dresses running down the mountain paths to elders greeting each other and women carrying traditional *nan* on their heads, and finally to a mass gathering of people engaged in eating, playing music, watching *buzkashi* and theatrical dances, the visual symphony of social festiveness grows from one family, to the whole village. Despite her orphanage and poor life conditions, *Nisso* is part of a bigger community laughing as she swings with other girls on tree swings.

A sense of communal support, which identifies a moment of grief when *Nisso's* mother *Roziamo* dies, also counters Lunkitskiy's narrative of Pamirians as people who barely noticed the birth or deaths of their neighbors and relatives (Luknitsii, 30). Khudonazarov's film features a long procession of people with *Rosiamo's* body entering a traditional Pamirian house as *Turamo* and other women of the village perform the traditional mourning dance. Related in many ways to Sufi dervish whirling, the dance with circular movements is an active form of physical meditation aimed at joining family spirits to help the *ruh* (soul) of the diseased person to cross the transitional space of life and death. Honoring death, women tie their shawls crosswise against their chest as a symbol of continuous circulation of life and death. As such, as the women begin to whirl, they themselves become embodiments of the eternal flow of life and death. In the film, *Turamo* dances and sings in Shughni language: "My sister, my beautiful sister...why did you leave me?"

What am I going to do without you my love? My sister, my dearest sister...” As she cries, little *Nisso* runs towards the house. She stops unable to cross the threshold. Semiotic significance of this scene involves the symbolic role of a traditional Pamirian house in the mourning ceremony. Pamirian houses identical in terms of structure represent a symbiosis of a spiritual and living space. As a crossroad between the before and after life, the house is the central and the final point of departure for the *ruh* of *Nisso’s* mother. *Nisso’s* inability to enter the house is her inability to join her mother who had already crossed the threshold of life and death. While the symbolism of the scene on the *Batin* level was accessible primarily to Central Asian audience, the grief of a little girl who lost her mother as well as her happiness during Navruz celebration were situations that many viewers in Central Asia or abroad could relate to.

*Nisso’s* childhood described in the novel as a torturous existence in a family of an opium addict aunt, who abused and starved her niece, was modified in the film by transforming the girl’s life into a life of an ordinary orphan faced with difficulties. While in the film *Nisso* lives in poverty, works a lot and does not always have food, her life is not much different from the lives of her cousins or other peers in the village. The aunt’s opium addiction in the film is something that *Turamo* herself struggles with. In an argument with *Nisso* over the purchase of drugs, for example, *Nisso* convinces her aunt to return opium and buy flour instead. *Turamo*, as well as her neighbors are all aware and careful with *Nisso’s* as an orphan giving her extra attention and telling her stories about her mother. Before the Navruz celebration, for example, *Turamo* passes to *Nisso* *Roziama’s* necklace telling her that she would be the prettiest girl at the Navruz celebration. By creating a more familiar type of character with a complex yet loving family dynamics, daily challenges and a secret crush on a boy next door, Khudonazarov neutralized the animal like image of *Nisso’s* literary prototype.

## 2. Sexuality and Ethnicity

Luknitsiiy positions his savage beauty *Nisso* between two central men of her life: her indigenous husband *Aziz Khan* and the Russian doctor *Medvedev*. The writer’s description of *Aziz Khan* as a beastly old man with a dirty, wiry, like a camel hair beard (50), underlines the grotesqueness of his union with *Nisso*:

*Nothing in the world was more frightening and disgusting than Aziz-Khon [Aziz Khon], who was alive despite Nisso’s praying.... she could always hear his nasty, barking cough. His beard was dirty and wiry.*  
(73)

Having freed herself from her husband *Nisso* is far from picking another Pamirian men. It is only when *Nisso* meets *Medvedev* that she falls in love again:

*Big, wide in shoulders, different from indigenous to these mountains people, his clothing also differs... Neatly girded with a wide belt, slender, deft in his unhurried movements, he makes an impression of a well and clean dressed man even in his old military clothing. His sun kissed face with a slightly pug nose is confident and calm. (87-88)*

Describing *Medvedev's* "big," "wide in shoulders," Luknitskiy identifies him as different from indigenous men presenting him as more competitive as a male not only compared to an old *Aziz Khon* but to young Soviet Tajiks such as *Bakhtier* as well.

In creating a number of visual binaries such as big/small, tall/short, clean/dirty, well dressed/barely covered, confident/insecure, Luknitskiy's hardly ever addresses *Medvedev* as Soviet, but Russian. Similarly, he identifies objects of the Soviet civilizing project as Russian: 'Russian car', 'Russian gun', 'Russian city', 'Russian bench' and so on. This puts into question the extent to which not only non-Russian populations viewed Soviets as Russians, but Russians themselves viewed themselves as more Russian than Soviet.

In Khudonazarov's cinematographic version of the story, small modifications of the central story characters determined a drastic change in the power dynamics within this love triangle complicating the causes and the outcome of the conflict between *Aziz Khon*, *Nisso* and *Medvedev*. In Surmanoz's revised version of the script, *Aziz Khon* was the man who caused the death of *Nisso's* mother. His love for *Roziama* bordered with obsession when despite her refusal to marry him, *Aziz Khon* decided to pressure her against her will and eventually caused an accident that killed *Roziama*. Khudonazarov's *Nisso* is an average looking girl (Fig.70) She is so ordinary that when *Aziz Khon* brings her to his house, his mother tells him "What did you find in her? She has neither beauty nor female intuition. What do you need this dull sheep for?" What draws *Aziz Khon* to *Nisso* in the film is not her physical beauty, but her resemblance with her mother, the love of *Aziz Khon's* life. For *Aziz Khon* *Nisso* embodied the memories of his lost love, and a chance for forgiveness from someone he had turned into an orphan. Tormented by guilt and determination to make things right *Aziz Khon* confesses his sin to his mother:

*Aziz Khon:...I remember well. We hunted her [Roziama] back then... as if she was an animal during hunting. She was the air I breathed in...and I killed her. Nisso is not like her. Only sometimes...her voices, gesture, glance. I need Nisso. I need her to live.*

Ato Mukhamedzanov, who played the role of *Aziz Khon* in the film, was far from being old or physically unattractive. A man in his late forties Mukhamedzanov plays a mature, powerful, and wealthy man, who remains charismatic despite the evil he causes (Fig 71). By complicating the image of the central villain, Davlat Khudonazarov follows Nabi Ganiev's technique in *Tohir and Zukhro* when the motives of the central villain uncover his weaknesses and thus



make him more human and thus less vicious. *Nisso* herself begins to like *Aziz Khon* accepting his attention and gifts until she discovers that he was the cause of her mother's death. Realization of what he had done eliminates the romance that may have taken place otherwise. In the absence of sexual tension, what separates as well as unites these two characters is their love and longing for *Roziama*. While in the novel *Nisso* escapes *Aziz Khon* as a virgin, in the film he rapes her on their wedding night. Violated *Nisso* leaves the house in the middle of the night to cleanse herself in the river. When she hears voices calling her name, she steps into the water, i.e. recreating her mother's accident/suicide. By the time *Nisso* meets *Medvedev* she a victim of an assault.

Khudonazarov complicates the narrative even further by changing the character of *Medvedev*. While in the novel locals call him *Alexander Sho-Pir* (the king of pirs<sup>46</sup>), in the film he is simply *Sania*, short for *Alexander*. Far from being a big and strong as described by Lunkitsiyy, the cinematic version of *Sania* is tall, thin, and a round-shouldered young man (Fig.72). He is more of a passionate romantic than a superhero. To the indigenous population he appears as a strange and touchingly funny character. In the scene following *Nisso's* first morning in the Sovietized village, she wakes up hearing waltz music. When *Nisso* peaks in the window she sees *Sania* doing morning exercises next to the playing gramophone. Clumsy yet enthusiastic *Sania* keeps adjusting his glasses, while making sit ups. A group of local kids and *Nisso* watch him with curiosity and amusement. Some children begin to imitate some of his movements and giggle pointing at him and the gramophone. *Sania* and *Nisso* too start smiling.

In this seemingly passing scene Khudonazarov identifies two cliché components of the civilizing process in Soviet visual propaganda: the gramophone as a symbol of prosperity and technological advancement of the Soviet state and exercises, which image embodied the state health system. The scene shows that from an indigenous perspective many elements of the Soviet civilizing process seemed amusing, as they did not necessarily fit into the social setting of indigenous lifestyle. *Sania's* sit-ups do not have an obvious purpose, as he is not working like the rest of men in the village or dancing at a social gathering. Yet *Sania*, unlike his literary prototype, does not force *Nisso* or others to follow his lead. He practices his own way of being and smiles at children realizing that it may seem strange to them. In this respect *Sania* is lost in the Pamir's internal social complexities and perhaps that is what unites him with *Nisso*. While *Sania's* civilizing mission is not understood or wanted by many, *Nisso's* social position makes her an outcast. Finding herself in a socially awkward position of being a run away wife she is the least desirable woman (*Bakhtier* has a fiancée and treats *Nisso* like a sister) neither innocent nor free from her marital commitment. This social position isolates her

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<sup>46</sup> In the Shia Ismaili community The title *pir* is given to most knowledgeable representatives of the religious elite.

from the rest of society and her friendship with the stranger is determined by the distance they both feel towards others.

### 3. *Bobo Kalon* and *Bakhtier*: Tradition versus Modernity

Luknitskiy's novel presents the character of *Bobo Kalon* as that of a stubborn old man, holding on to old religious dogmas. His choices are based on the amount of control he has over the villages as well as his own profit. His struggle with *Bakhtier* and *Medvedev* represents the conflict between Soviet modernity and tradition.

As in the case of Okeev's *The Sky of Our Childhood*, Khudonazarov avoids the opposition of Russian versus Tajik to eliminate the power dynamics of the early Soviet propaganda, in which Tajiks were either rescued or victimized by the Russians. In Khudonazarov's film, *Bobo Kalon* and *Bakhtier* (Fig.73 & 74) carry the main responsibility for the future of the region. Scriptwriter Mariamov and Surmanoz turned Luknitskii's character of a backward religious figure *Bobo Kalon* into the symbol of tradition facing inevitable changes both destructive and creative. Disagreeing with the young and active *Bakhtier*, *Bobo Kalon* does not oppose him as both of them want the best for their village. One of the scenes that takes place in *Bobo Kalon's* house/school for children, features the old man surrounded by children. Reading verses from the twelfth century poem by Nizami Ganjavi *Iskandarnoma*,<sup>47</sup> *Bobo Kalon* interrupts the class when *Sania* (*Medvedev*) and *Bakhtier* want to speak to him. Their disagreement escalates as the young men insist on destroying *Bobo Kalon's* chapel to build a dam:

Bakhtier: People go all the way into the mountains for a piece of land. While it is right here. We could plant fruit trees. Would it be so bad?

Bobo Kalon: When people begin to care about the body more than about the soul, both, the body and the soul die.

Sania: Just think about these people, Bobo Kalon. You love them don't you? Many smoke opium and see a happy life only in dreams...food, clothing, and books will be brought here. Bakhtier will go with me to Petrograd. There will be doctors, teachers. Life will be different.

BK: And for this to happen you have to break my chapel? You believe in people. If your faith will make people happy maybe it is better. I will not try to stop you, but I will not help you either.

This scene identifies one of the core dissatisfactions of Transsovieticus cultural producers with the Soviet system as a whole and its civilizing system in particular.

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<sup>47</sup> Nizami Ganjavi's twelfth century poem *Iskandar Name* (The Book of Alexander) about Alexander the Great's political and spiritual growth has been widely known epic and part of oral literary canon of the Central Asian region.

While *Bakhtier* speaks of his dedication to improve people lives through material wealth (food, clothing, book) and education (doctors, teachers), *Bobo Kalon* questions spirituality and cultural values of the past need to be eliminated (breaking the chapel). *Bobo Kalon's* refusal to prevent or participate in the destruction of the chapel comes from his understanding of their actions as well as compassion for their efforts. On the day of the planned explosion *Bobo Kalon* prays in his chapel for the last time: " Creator. Don't be hard on people, possessed with apprehension. Do not be angry, they don't know their own doings. They intend to destroy the world." As in the case of Tolomoush Okeev's film, an explosion becomes the symbol of Soviet modernity that not only creates but also destroys. By calling Soviets "people possessed with apprehension" Khudonazarov for the first time in Central Asian cinematography offers a semi negative assessment of the Soviets by a character that is not a villain.

Creating complex characters of *Aziz Khon* and *Bobo Kalon*, Khudonazarov did not exclude the *zahir* Soviet interpretation but created a multifaceted picture that brought the *batin* layer on the *zahir* surface. *Bobo Kalon* rehabilitated not only mullas of Central Asia but all religious figures faced with Soviet modernity. In his assessment of the characters Khudonazarov said:

We did not want to create a character of yet another 'evil bai'. We were tired portrayals of predecessors as anti-Soviet... We wanted to see what was hidden behind these masks of 'bad' mullas, aristocrats and basmachis. It isn't that we were trying to prove that they were 'good', but we wanted to understand what drove them. Aziz Khon was driven by his obsessive love, Bobo Kalon by his faith...the character of Bobo Kalon was a symbiosis of two of my grandfathers. It was what I knew best and it was what I wanted to share. Visual generalization of Central Asian peoples were too tiring... they did not take into consideration cultural, psychological, and historical complexity of different areas of Central Asia. These were careless depictions of semi-Central Asian societies, than no one could relate to. I wanted my family and friends to recognize their Pamir (Khudonazarov, 1998).

*Bobo Kalon's* as well as *Bakhtier* both die at the end of the film. Trying to stop *basmachis* from entering the village *Bakhtier* sacrifices his life in the name of armed self-defense. *Bobo Kalon*, on the other hand, dies on his own, unable to survive in the society that no longer believes in non-violent resistance. Both of them represent two poles of the tradition versus modernity discourse. In this respect Khudonazarov's answer to Soviet modernity is similar to Okeev's assessment of history, i.e., there is no future in the absence of intergenerational continuity and mutual compromises. With two indigenous leaders dying, *Nisso* leaves with *Sania* in search for another future. In this respect, the happy ending of Lukntisiy's novel turns in Khudonazarov's interpretation into a national tragedy.

The Central Television reaction to the first screening of the working version of the film was to *roosters*, which Khudonazarov intentionally incorporated into his narrative. However, as the representations of *Aziz Khon* and *Bobo Kalon* were too ambiguous, both Moscow and Tajikistan found the film *The First Morning of Youth* ideologically weak. The Tajik ideological apparatus and the minister of Ideology of Tajikistan Gulzhahon Babasadikova personally underlined the absence of a class approach (*klassoviy podkhod*) as well as a “romanticization of class enemies” (Khudonazarov, Nur). As a result, Tajikistan demanded banning of the film from television broadcast. The official Moscow production company of the film considered screening the film after some minor modifications. One of the parts that Moscow demanded to be cut out was *Bobo Kalon*’s dialogue with *Bakhtier* about faith. In the original version, *Bobo Kalon* compares faith to life-giving water:

Faith is like life-giving water, which one receives from the day of one’s birth and till his last breath. What can offer instead? Faith in humanity, in freedom... but what will humanity and freedom become in people’s inexperienced hands?

Referring to faith (*vera*) *Bobo Kalon* touched upon an unspoken topic that satisfied the growing interest in religion among youth not only in Central Asia but all over the Soviet Union. State promoted atheism as opposed to religiosity did not last long as already by the 1960s and 1970s religion came back on the wave of growing disappointments with the Soviet system. Despite Moscow’s changing political atmosphere of the 1980s that eventually lead to Michael Gorbochev’s *perestroika*, answers that *Bobo Kalon*’s questions may have provoked in millions of Soviet viewers were risky enough for this part to be cut out of the film. Despite modification, the film was screened on Channel One and became one of the first films which made the Central Asian *Batin* narrative of Transsovieticus visual culture accessible to a wider audience.

In the course of the 1980s, the number of *batin* signs coming to the *zahir* surface continuously grew. Gorbochev’s *glasnost* brought many indigenous ‘truths’ to the surface. Baqo Sadiqov’s ten-minute documentary *Adonis XIV* is a great example of that kind. In his 1986 visual narrative Sadiqov shows a goat named *Adonis* that lives in a slaughterhouse. He stays alive leading others into the slaughtering room. This visual metaphor of men in power who sacrificed the lives of their people to stay in power spoke to audiences across Soviet Union. Other films exposing realities of late Soviet and post-Soviet periods that challenged the ‘truths’ of the socialist realism were Bakhter Khudonazarov’s *Kosh ba Kosh* (1993), Jamshed Usmanov’s *Flight of a Bee (Polet Pcheli.1998)* and many others.



Fig. 64. *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.



Fig.65. *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.





Fig.66. *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.



Fig. 67. *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.



Fig. 68. Navruz celebration. *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.



Fig. 69. Navruz Celebration. *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.





Fig. 70. Lola Taigunshoeva as *Nisso*. *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.



Fig. 71. *Aziz Khon* (Ato Mukhamedzhanov). *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.



Fig. 72. *Sania Medvedev*. (Vadim Iakovenko). *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.



F 73. *Bakhtier* (Shamsi Khaidarov). *The First Morning of Youth*. 1979. Film.



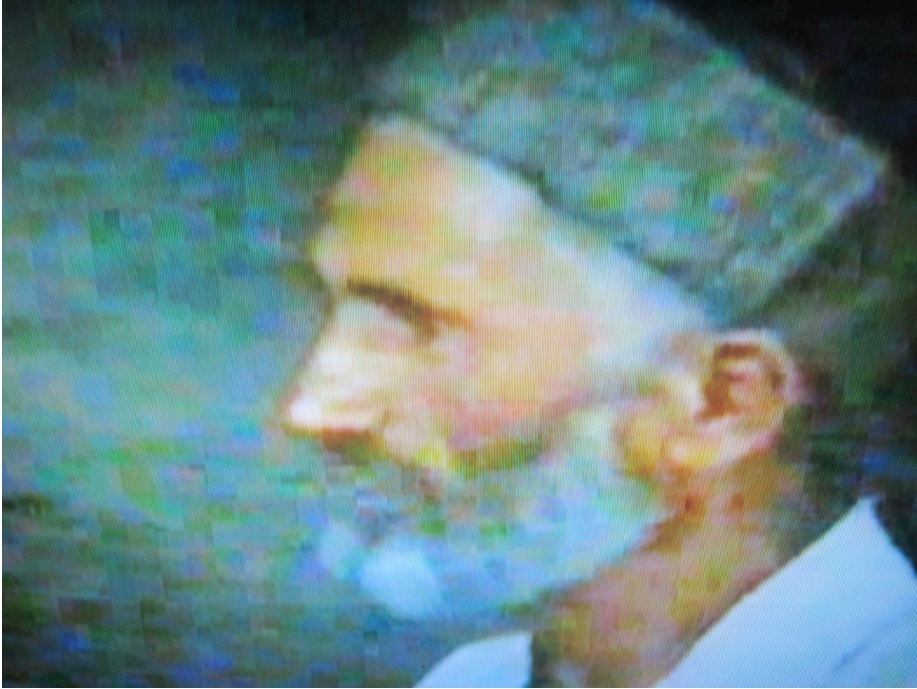


Fig.74. *Bobo Kalon. The First Morning of Youth. 1979. Film.*



## Chapter V

# In Search of Post-Soviet Identity: The Transsovieticus Perspective on the Sacrificial Hero in Russian Cinematography

*...Как вы яхту назовете, так она и поплывет.*<sup>48</sup>

Текс песни Е. Чеповецкого,  
«Приключения Капитана Внунгеля»,  
Киевнаучфильм, 1979

### Historical Context: 1986 to 2000s

In 1986 Mikhail Gorbachev initiated the process of increasing political liberalization (*glasnost/perestroika*), which led to the emergence of long-repressed nationalist movements and ethnic disputes within the diverse republics of the Soviet Union. The Revolutions of 1989 pressured the Communist Party to introduce greater democracy and autonomy for the Soviet Union's constituent republics. Gorbachev promoted direct elections, formed a new central legislature, and ended the ban on political parties. The legislatures of the Soviet republics began passing laws undermining the control of the central government and endorsing independence.

The increasing political unrest led the conservative establishment of the Soviet military and the Communist Party to attempt a coup d'état to oust Gorbachev and re-establish an authoritarian central power in August 1991. The coup d'état was unsuccessful and on December 22, 1991 the presidents of the Soviet republics of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus agreed to dissolve the Soviet Union, replacing it with the Commonwealth of Independent States. Gorbachev resigned from his office and the Soviet Union formally ended its existence on December 25, 1991. The disintegration of the federal political structures and central government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), resulting in the independence of all fifteen republics of the Soviet Union between March 11, 1990 and December 25, 1991. The dissolution of the world's largest socialist state also marked a formal end to the Cold War. After the fall of the Soviet Union each former Soviet republic

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<sup>48</sup> The way you name your yacht, that's the way it sails.

underwent major political, social, economic and cultural transformations.

## Visual Culture of Post-Perestroika

While it seems that each country's visual culture went its own way after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the establishment of new national identities, many Transsovieticus cultural producers remained part of internal national self-discourses within the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The case of Russia is especially interesting as it marks the emergence of the new sacrificial hero,<sup>49</sup> which this chapter analyzes in two popular Russian films of 2000s *War* by Balabanov and *9<sup>th</sup> Company* by Bondarchuk. Timur Bekmambetov, who represents the last Transsovieticus generation of filmmakers, offers a different, Central Asian/Jewish outlook on the Russian hero in his two-part film *Night Watch* and *Day Watch*.

Historical discoveries of the mid-1980s lead to both exciting and disillusioning realizations. Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union, as well as the major economic crisis caused significant trauma to many citizens of the former Soviet Union. The Soviet state's unfulfilled promises and so many of its 'truths' revealed as 'lies' in the second half of 1980s and early 1990s, lead to the loss of trust not only towards the state, but towards the 'Self' as well. In re-identifying the present, many cultural producers looked back into the recent Soviet past to picture the 'real' past. Knowing what is 'real', 'reality', 'true' as opposed to 'untrue', 'unreal', 'unrealistic' became increasingly important in the fall of Soviet ethics in the late 1990s and 2000s and the emergence of the new sacrificial hero.

Filmmakers of the Soviet period explored the stories of a simple man's (*prostoi chelovek*) struggle against the upper class Other in dramatic depictions of the pre-Soviet period. Despite their great capabilities, the heroes of a pre-Soviet times, i.e. the sacrificial heroes died, unable to defeat numerous class enemies across history (Tatar khans, feudal/capitalist elites, serfdom landlords, the Tsar) on their own, i.e. in isolation from the collective. Soviet film's heroes in capitalist countries also suffered and rarely survived their misfortunes unless they found refuge in the Soviet Union or countries of the Soviet block like the character of American actress Marion Dixon in the 1936 film *Circus (Tsirk)* who fled the USA escaping racial discrimination. From the ideological standpoint, misfortunes of these heroes highlighted the fortune of the USSR citizens, enjoying socio-political equality, collective unity and economic prosperity of the Soviet system. In films about the Soviet people, *Goskino*, (USSR State Committee for Cinematography) in

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<sup>49</sup> Among them Aleksandr Velebinskiy's "Jivoi", Andrei Zviagintsev's "Vozvrashhenie" and "Izgnanie"; Kirill Serebrennikov's «Izobrazhaia Jertvu», Balabanov's "Gruz 200", Khotinenko Vladimir's "72 metra"; Sergei Ovcharov's, "Skaz pro Fedota strelsa" and many others.

the organization responsible for not only ideological impact but also the commercial aspect of film production, secured the 'happy endings' (Kleiman). These cinematographic 'realities' featured heroes who always found support from the collective and the Communist Party.

Fedor Bondarchuk's film *The 9<sup>th</sup> Company* (*9-aiia Rota*, 2005) is an attempt to recreate the events of the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1988). A story of friendship and heroism of young Soviet recruits in the midst of a distant and remote war reaches its tragic point when commandership gives the 9<sup>th</sup> company a mission to fight for Hill 3234 during the large-scale Soviet military operation Magistral. Having lost contact with their commanders and with no reinforcement, the young men of the 9<sup>th</sup> company die one after another fighting against the Afghans. After the battle, when the only survivor of the 9<sup>th</sup> company reports to the Soviet commander that his company accomplished its mission, he finds out that while his friends were dying Soviet politicians decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. In the midst of major political changes, the 9<sup>th</sup> company was forgotten and thus the lives soldiers sacrificed in the battle became worthless. In the final scene the only survivor of the 9<sup>th</sup> company *Liutiy* (Ferocious) summarizes:

We were leaving Afghan. We...the 9<sup>th</sup> company won our war. Back then we didn't know many things. We didn't know that the country we fought for would disappear in two years and it would become unfashionable to wear the medals of the non-existent world power. We didn't know... that Belosnejka and her mother among other Russian families would disappear in the former army town on the border of Afghanistan...that we'd be cruelly thrown into different directions...some would become princes, while others would sink to the bottom. We didn't know all of these things back then. We didn't even know that in the turmoil of withdrawal of a giant army, we were forgotten on that far and away point. We were leaving the Afghan. 9<sup>th</sup> company. We won.

Repetition of the sentence structure beginning "We did not know..." reinforces the gap between what the Soviet state did and what it told its citizens. Bondarchuk connects the points of historical betrayals from leaving the 9<sup>th</sup> company to die in the deserts of Afghanistan, dishonoring the heroes of the Soviet-Afghan war after the break up of the Soviet Union (it became unfashionable to wear the medals of the non-existent world power) to throwing the ones that survived the war into different directions in the post-Soviet period. Passive voice in the monologue (cruelly thrown; were forgotten) directs attention towards the Soviet political and military leadership that betrayed its people. It also marks the changes people had gone through after the break up of the country (*some would become princes, while others would sink to the bottom*). Not only Bondarchuk's central heroes, including his own character of *Khokhol*, become victims of the state, but the Russian families

that stay in Afghanistan after the withdrawal also become forgotten and killed by the Muslim enemy. Among these forgotten families, the only female character of the film is a Russian prostitute *Belosnezhka* (Snow White), who disappears in Afghanistan (we did not know...Belosnejka and her mother among other Russian families would disappear in the former army town on the border of Afghanistan). The young men's inability to protect the only woman they have loved in Afghanistan emasculates them intensifying the humiliation of Soviet Russian soldiers leaving Afghanistan. In the framework of the parent/children relationship established by the Soviet ideology early in 1920s Bondarchuk, who plays one of his sacrificial heroes, mourns the loss of trust towards the father-state. Having revealed the 'truth' about the father-state, the film sacralizes its many victims.

Advertisements and television previews for the film underlined the sacrificial premise of the narrative, when each of the seven young men appeared on the screen introducing themselves: "I want to be with you forever. I love you and nothing will separate us" says *Vorobei*. Having left his fiancée on the rainy train station, he hopes to come back and marry her; "Mom, don't worry...it is my choice" says *Stas*; "I was thinking...after the army I'll get into a university" says *Liutiy*. As the young soldiers give their emotional one-liners, each disappears in black smoke, which turns into scenes of war, bodies covered in mud and blood. The background voice "They just wanted to be loved" and a caption "The film is based on true events" concludes the introduction. Predestined captivity and/or death of victim-heroes of *The 9<sup>th</sup> Company* project a profound sense of hopelessness yet glory. As heroes, the young soldiers are isolated in their suffering and have little to no agency over what happens to them in the future. In a sacralized narrative of their sufferings, victim-heroes become cinematographic saints of the contemporary Russian film industry forever young and innocent.

The most interesting aspect of online discussions of the film is the re-appropriation of the term 'real'. There were many who accused Bondarchuk to have reinterpreted the story of the 9<sup>th</sup> company without relying on historical facts:

...Why lie in the end of the film the "company was simply forgotten by the headquarters?" You [Bondarchuk] know better than anyone, that no one forgot about the company and supported it with artillery during the whole battle... And if this is the director's fantasy, why the hell talk on every corner that the "film is based on real events"? ... Overall, the movie is well filmed and is quite realistic. But this piece of shit smacked at the end ruined the whole movie. On the other hand, I understand why it was done. Once again [you] push that idea that there were pointless sacrifices, right? Why not throw a piece of shit at the country that you were born in, grew up in and got an education (a free one right?)...(9-iaia Rota, Voенно-patr. Forum.)

Necessity to be proud of the Soviet state still very present in contemporary Russia is verbalized in a way that shows Bondarchuk ungratefulness towards the father-

state, where he not only was born but also got a free education. Another viewer responding to the previous comment pointed out the importance of national image as compared to Hollywood. Historical 'truth' becomes secondary in the battle of visual narratives:

That's easy to judge. Those we were in Afghan know that people had been forgotten and sent back in tsinkovka<sup>50</sup>....Bondarchuk is great. He showed next door guys that fought and died for Smart asses like you, who talk about whether the director lied or not. If you want to tell your story, make a movie. It is too bad that Russians can't be proud of their own people, [they] can only judge them. What's the difference what happens in the movie at the end? Did anybody see the eyes of teenagers once they saw the film? There was no indifference, but respect and understanding. This film only partially opened Afghan to people, and you politic talkers look for a vicious intent [umisel] in Bondarchuk. Then why don't you watch Rambo and admire how Hollywood kills Russians? (9-aia rota, voenno-patri. forum)

This very different comment also reflects the necessity for national pride, but in a contemporary, comparative to the United States and Hollywood dimension. "It is too bad that Russians can't be proud of their own people" is part of the Russian self narrative as a nation unable to appreciate and recognize its own heroes, yet always chasing and admiring foreign ones. While distrusting the state, Bondarchuk created a narrative that celebrated brotherhood of simple soldiers. Another viewer shared her reaction to the film revealing the need for national pride within family type of relationship:

When in one of the last scenes Liutiy, all covered in blood, falls on the ground and howls I howled with him, unable to cry out the enormous grief of people, who died several years before I was born. When you watch the film, the guys from the 9<sup>th</sup> company become like family, you worry for every one of them, as if he is your son or a fiancée. Why look for faults when it comes to facts? There was Afghan in our history. Was the 9<sup>th</sup> company forgotten or not...is it really that important? We will not find out the truth. The most important thing about the film, in my opinion, is something else, the tears that stand like a lump in a throat, the sharp pain for every hero who dies and the sense of everyday shell breaking, opening [one's] heart, forcing to be compassionate.... Thank you [filmmakers] for forcing [us] to cry, feel with our souls and wipe the dust of the everyday selfishness. That means we are alive. (9-aia Rota. Voенно-patrioticheskii Forum)



The “everyday shell” and “selfishness” this viewer speaks of reflects the overall disappointment of the post-Soviet population experienced after the break up of the Soviet Union. While this comment expresses an overall need for national pride, it also projects compassion for the period in history when people experience life in a different way. Narratives of this time force contemporary viewers to experience compassion and grief (*opening [one’s] heart, forcing to be compassionate*) realize that they too are alive.

In the search for a lost sense of reality visual cultural producers such as Bondarchuk reintroduce not only historical and contemporary events, but also reestablish notions of ‘reality’, ‘real’, ‘true ‘truthful’ and finally ‘righteous’. What many viewers came to define as ‘real’, ‘realistic’, but also ‘truthful’ in a sense of ‘accurate’ (*pravil’niy*) is the political stand they agree with and emotionally respond to. Even in cases where viewers know that some elements of the narrative are not necessarily accurate from a historical standpoint (*Was the 9<sup>th</sup> company forgotten or not...is it really that important?*), the narrative becomes ‘real’ through emotional experiences of anger, frustration, compassion, and sorrow that lead to the higher ‘truth’ of feeling alive.

In narratives about contemporary Russia, the Other Muslim Chechen is part of the country’s internal rather than international (Afghans) problem, intensifying the grief and much closer proximity of the sacrificial hero to his killers. It also shows the extent of national humiliation, which Russia’s post-Soviet corrupt state did not prevent. In the film *Brother*, Aleksey Balabanov’s archetypal hero *Danilo Bagrov* (1997) redefined the rights and wrongs of post-Soviet Russia, proclaimed the death of Soviet internationalism, and became the symbol of the new Russia. Balabanov’s next hero *Ivan Ermakov* from the 2002 film *War (Voina)* goes even further, lacking what Tatiana Moskvina calls “warmish humanism” (*teplen’kiy gummanizm*).

Tied together by *Ivan*’s ‘interview’ from a prison cell, the visual language of *War* mimics documentary-like footage (Fig.75). Actor Aleksei Chadov, who plays the role of *Ivan*, tells the story of the Chechen war in the street slang of ‘the guy next door’ (*paren’ iz sosednego dvora*), with long pauses and incomplete sentences. Captured by Chechens *Ivan* and his commander *Medvedev* meets a British actor *John* and his fiancée *Margaret* also imprisoned in Chechnya. Chechen commander *Aslan* released *John* in exchange for money he is suppose to bring to get his fiancée back. *Ivan* who also gets out is hired by *John* to help him release *Margaret* and film a documentary about the war. *Ivan* agrees but not because he cares about *John*’s money. He wants to get his commander *Medvedev* out of Chechen captivity. When they return to Chechnya, *John* films the war while *Ivan* almost single handedly liquidates most of the Chechen guerrillas and saves his commander *Medvedev* and *Margaret*. *Margaret*, who becomes *Medvedev*’s lover in Chechen’s prison, decides to leave *John*. *John* goes back to Great Britain, makes a movie and writes a book *My life in Russia*, which becomes a best seller. *Ivan* on the other hand, ends up in

the Russian tribunal for killing civilian Chechens as described in *John's* book. In the final monologue of the film, *Ivan* is uncertain about his future:

I don't think I'll be jailed, but who the fuck knows. Our Tobolsk freaks keep looking at Moscow...like...what Putin is gonna say on TV...what kind of new reforms there are...like...in court and shit. The film... I haven't seen...it'd be cool to see it now.

*Ivan's* loneliness in the face of the Other non-Russian (*Aslan* and *John*), and distance from the Other Russian Elite in Tobolsk city and in Moscow (*Our Tobolsk freaks keep looking at Moscow...like...what Putin is gonna say on TV...what kind of new reforms there are...like...in court and shit.*), is the cause for continuous captivity whether first in Chechen's prison and later in the Russian one. With no help from Russia's corrupted leadership, *Ivan* is tortured and mocked by Chechens and betrayed by his apparent ally *John*.

While expressing solidarity with world powers that fight the "war on terror" against the uncivilized Muslim Other, (Vasileva) the image of the West embodied by British journalist *John*, lacks the masculinity of a 'real man'. Unable to defend his fiancée *Margaret*, *John* films the war, while *Ivan* fights it. Paying him for his actions *John* compromises *Ivan* later with his description of the violation of human rights in Chechnya. *Margaret*, who becomes the lover of commander *Medvedev* (Fig.76) and refuses to marry *John* once out of the Chechen captivity, confirms *John's* lack of masculinity. The film poster (Fig.77) features *Ivan* in the center of the image between two mountains looking back at the viewer as he holds his gun down. Looking past the viewer, *Ivan* is bareheaded and vulnerable to the helicopters above his head. In the lower right corner of the film poster *John* faces the viewer with the camera attached to his head while holding a weapon. Compared to *John*, *Ivan* is unprotected, and human than *John* whose whole body is covered with technological devices that protect him. At the same time *Ivan* is the sacrificial figure crossed by the word *war*, and as such he also becomes saintly positioned above *John* and in the center of the poster.

One of the most famous, as well as controversial, scenes in the film is the dialogue between *Ivan* and Chechen commander *Aslan Gugaev* (Georgii Gurguliy) (Fig.78) confirms the lack of paternal presence in the post-Soviet Russian society. As *Aslan's* warriors recite "Allah-u Akbar" in an evening prayer, he tells *Ivan*:

You Russians are weak and stupid and ruled by fools...Ukraine you gave away, Kazakhstan...half of the country [you] have given away...just like that...soon the Chinese will take away the Far East. You are fighting me for example...I on the other hand [own] a hotel, three restaurants, four companies...Saints-Petersburg, Moscow, Samara. I milk Russians like goats and they on top of that give me credit. Do you know why you don't fight well? [You] don't know. You don't fight for your country. You fight because you were brought in

here like sheep. I know seven generations of my family. I am the descendant of Urit, Khaji, Kazi...He slaughtered you [Russians] 150 years ago. I will clean it [land] from infidel dogs until there will be not a single Russian all the way to Volgograd. (Alexmartinegro, youtube)

This monologue confirms several important mixed sentiments of fear and bitterness over the loss of Russia's socio-political role in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the Soviet narrative was that of the union of socialist states, the post-Soviet popular regret is that of the fall of Russia as an Empire, which had to "give away for nothing" Ukraine and Kazakhstan. *Aslan's* speech confirms Russia's popular distrust towards Russian leadership (*You Russians are weak and stupid and ruled by fools...*) and the phobia of blacks (*chernie*)<sup>51</sup> taking over Russian cities (*I on the other hand [own] a hotel, three restaurants, four companies...Saints-Petersburg, Moscow, Samara. I milk Russians like goats and they on top of that give me credit*).

Aslan also points out Chechen close connection to their families (*I know seven generations of my family. I am the descendant of Urit, Khaji, Kazi...*) and thus dedication to win the war as opposed to Russians, who are "brought in here like sheep" i.e. have no family or country leadership. The film confirms Ivan's loneliness as the only person he cares for Medvedev. As in *The 9<sup>th</sup> Company*, brothers by misfortune (*bratia po neschast'iu*) – other soldiers replaced paternal figures of Party leaders in Soviet cinema.

In two public online forums of discussions on this film (Forum Dvijeniia Protiv Nelegalnoi immigratsii; VIP-Versiia; komendarii izvestnikh liudiei na aktual'nie temi) the *Aslan's* monologue was among the most debated and controversial topics. On *YouTube*, viewed 4206 times as of June 10, 2009, comments such as "Islamic Fascism. There comes a new war." by *Slavpro* and *FedorFedorovich's*: "Cheap show, but a great propaganda for Russian sheep" are among least intense. Excessive anti-Chechen sentiments are part of mainstream media discourse as well. In her article "About *Ivan* and *John*", Tatiana Moskvoina comments on the film's character *Aslan* on the *KinoArt* website:

This one [Aslan] doesn't know crap (ni khrena), yet brags to Ivan: you, Russians, you are weak and stupid, and I know seven generations of my family kin, and this is my land and I will fight, until there is not a single Russian all the way to Astrakhan. Pale, dirty, and beaten Ivan looks at the blabbing Chechen in silence and with a pensive gaze. A vicious feelings at this instance, hooks the soul of the viewer with its claws. What are you talking about, you, crook animal about your kin,

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<sup>51</sup> While there are many other terms such as *churka* (central Asians), *khachik* (Caucasians), the term *chernii* (black) and *chernozhepiy* (black-ass) are two general terms that include all others.

who is there [besides] bandits and shepherds? You sit there in bare mountains, your ancestors have given nothing in centuries, no religion, no science, no art, all you do is buy with [your] stolen money the products of civilization, which you parasite, don't even know how to use. We are not weak and stupid, we just got taken aback a bit...and as soon as we gather our strength, we'll iron press (razutiuzhim) your damned Caucasus, yes!

What is fascinating about this article is that it is unclear whether Moskovina speaks in the first person or reflects on public opinion. Her own voice in the context of this article becomes one with the voices of viewers across Russia. This type of merging allows her to express the pain of many Russian viewers ready to iron press the Caucasus. While she is clearly insulted by Russians called “weak and stupid” she does not disagree with a *Aslan's* “ruled by fools”. Neither does she claim that Russians like Chechens have strong family presence. Instead, she opposes Chechen's attachment to their kin to Russian civilization. She intensifies this binary by calling *Aslan* “crooked animal”, “parasite”, and his ancestors “bandits and shepads” and thieves (“...all you do is buy with [your] stolen money the products of civilization, which you parasite, don't even know how to use...”) as opposed to civilized Russians and their art and science. Thus, while seemingly disagreeing with *Aslan*, Moskovina admits to the absence of paternal presence in Russian society that is “taken aback”. In this respect, she also indirectly confirms Ivan's perception of the Russian political elite as of distant “freaks” who have no political agency of their own (Our Tobolsk freaks keep looking at Moscow...like...what Putin is gonna say on TV...what kind of new reforms there are...like...in court and shit).

What is striking about the critics' reviews as well as viewers' online forums is the dominating use of words “truthful,” “real,” “realistic,” “true” when it come to the film. Some, as in the following passage by Kodunkov, not only speak of the film as truthful as their own life, but of Aleksei Balabanov himself as a real hero. Film critique Aleksandr Kodunkov uses different variations of the word “truth” four times while giving the director of the film Balabanov soldier-like qualities:

Aleksei Balabanov's difficult cinematography is impossible to imagine without the physical sense of human drama, without the harsh rhythms of “Bi-2” and “Splin”<sup>52</sup> that provide War with the energy of reality. The realism of this kind is not a poster kind realism, and the main hero Ivan in his essence is just a more contemporary version of Danilo Bagrov...There is nothing of a folk hero in Ivan – he is an absolutely realistic person, whose only

mission and fate is feat of arms. This is how he [Ivan] is build and Aleksei Balabanov is build exactly the same way, with each of his film making shell-holes in the viewers' hearts...hating the war and taking the thrusts with the dignity of a real man. (Itogi)

As an “absolutely realistic person” *Ivan* and Balabanov, i.e. the fictional character and the director of the film, become equally ‘real’. Making “shell-holes in viewers’ “hearts” and “taking the trusts with the dignity of a real man” Balabanov is like *Ivan*, a soldier “built exactly the same way.” Yet, a majority of comments express a deep sense of bitterness as summarized in the article “Voina Brat!” ([It’s a] War Brother!): by journalist Vladislav Shurygin:

*...I was leaving the movie theater with a familiar bitter pain in my chest. It isn't that the film shocked me! How can truth shock someone, who had known it for a long time? It isn't that it became a revelation either. How can my own life become a revelation? It [film] mercilessly and crudely showed me everything that I have already known. (Zavtra)*

Balabanov’s representation of the ordinary man’s loneliness, forgotten by the state, manipulated by the West, and killed or hurt by internal Muslim enemies is confirmed by the Russian viewers as reflection of their lives. In both films *The 9<sup>th</sup> Company* as well as *War* Russian soldiers’ isolation from the Elite Other whether it is the Russian government or the Soviet commanders is predestined, final and leads to the heroes’ captivity or death. *Ivan* as well as Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan have no agency over what happens to them or how their fates are going to be handled by the Elite Other (*Ivan* is waiting for a sentence in prison while *Liutiy* does not know that two years later the state will fall apart). The Soviet narrative of an individual unable to make a change without the collective, in the post-Soviet cinematography, changes into a hero forgotten by the collective. Heroes and anti-heroes of these two popular films are of the ‘pure’ kind. Much like the Russian Orthodox hagiographies, they live and die young as true saints.

In this context, religious and ethno-racial antagonistic Otherness (be it Muslim, Jew, Black) continues to combine Russia’s own pre-Soviet image of the Other such as in the 1860s art works of Vasiliy Vereshchagin and contemporary Hollywood representations of terrorism (see for example, Rabina Ramji). Journalist Tatiana Moskovina elaborates on the idea of inter-ethnic relations in her laudatory review of the 1997 film *War*, which portrays Chechens as uneducated, uncivilized animals:



...To discover that we [Russians] “are not loved” not only in the world, but also in our own “peripheries,” caused Russians a profound physiological shock. It was lessened...when in fact, it turned out, that we don’t love anybody either.

The absence of love towards other former Soviet nationalities that Moskovina speaks of manifested itself in antagonism with many Others in the post-Soviet visual narratives. Demonstration of Russians as winners reinforced the national pride compensating for the drop in status of Russians among other nationalities after the break up of the Soviet Union.

In this respect the video game based on *The 9<sup>th</sup> Company* gives players a chance to change the history. While the film grieves over the deaths of Soviet children, the video game turns them into winners by allowing players to eliminate the enemy (Fig.79 & 80) and save their comrades. The video ogame cover with (Fig.81) tulip fields on the background of snowy mountains with blue skies represents peace rather than war. The young men caught in a moment of celebration are young, united, and joyful. To kill the Afghan/Muslim enemy becomes in this context equal to being alive and happy. This type of problem/solution narratives in popular culture is potentially problematic considering the ethnically diverse population of the Russian Federation. The Russian director Timur Bekmambetov presentation of the Soviet history contributes to Russia’s present search for self-narrative.

The impact of Timur Bekmambetov’s fantasy films *Night Watch (Nochnoi Dozor, 2004)* and *Day Watch: The Chalk of Fate (Dnevnoi Dozor. Mel Sud’by, 2005)* on Russia and other former Soviet states’ pop culture can be compared to the popularity of George Lucas’s 1977 hit series *Star Wars* in the United States.<sup>53</sup> While the popularity of Bekmambetov’s films borders on public obsession, the majority of film critics failed to categorize them in terms of their visual narrative and cinematographic language. Some got lost in attempts to understand and explain the film’s higher “truth” (*Dozor kak Simptom*). Others claimed *Night Watch* and *Day Watch* to be confusing, excessively violent and overloaded with computer-generated imagery. The most extreme reviews accused producers of an aggressive promotion campaign, which, in their view, explained the films’ popularity and expressed regret over the poor tastes of younger generation viewers, whose aesthetics took shape under the influence of Hollywood, video games and drugs. A well known film critic Kirill Razlogov in fact relentlessly critiques Bekmambetov in *Iskusstvo Kino* saying:

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<sup>53</sup> On Jan. 2006 1 "Day Watch," which was produced for about \$4.5 million, opened in Russia and obliterated every local box-office record when it made \$29.7 million in its first 29 days of release. (By comparison, "[The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe](#)" has brought in \$7.7 million in Russia since it was released, two weeks before "Day Watch." See Ross Johnson, "From Russia, With Blood and Shape-Shifters", New York Times, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

...unintelligible for many critics...in reality [the film] is perfectly compatible with the visual perception of teenagers high on glue. In their dazed condition all the imperfections of the film dissolve while the stream of sensations grows hundred times stronger.

Extreme reactions to Bekmambetov's narrative are explainable. *Night Watch* and *Day Watch* do not speak the ideological language of post-Soviet cinematography, but rather Transsovieticus. When asked whether he is a Kazakh or a Russian filmmaker in one of his interviews, Bekmambetov answered that he was born in the USSR and considers himself a descendant of both Kazakh and Russian cinematographies (Gulbanu Abenova). Having received his education in Tashkent and Moscow Bekmambetov represents the last Transsovieticus generation of Central Asian cultural producers. His films go against not only Russian (*War, 9<sup>th</sup> Company*) but ethno-nationalist popular narratives of other CIS states, which oppose the dynamics of 'us' against 'them'. Playing with the idea of reality, the director addresses a wide audience from post-Soviet spaces, speaking in several chronological (Soviet and Post-Soviet) and geographic (Central Asian and Russian) dimensions and poses questions universal to humanity rather than to particular nations or ethnic groups. Like his Soviet predecessors, Bekmambetov uses the Transsovieticus visual technology of *zahir* and *batin*, but in a very different way. 'Speaking' in varieties of visual languages accessible to him, Bekmambetov delivers his two central points to geographically and generation wise fragmented audiences of the CIS. In this way, for example, some segments of the film's narrative (excavation of the Amir Timur's tomb in 1941) are addressed more towards the Soviet generation Central Asian viewers, and some others more towards the post-Soviet urban youth of Russian cities (Anton's life in Moscow).

*Night Watch*, tells a story of a contemporary Russian man *Anton Gorodetskiy* who lives with regret for making a wrong choice in 1992. When his wife leaves him for another man, Anton asks a witch to help him win her back. The witch tells him that his wife carries a child of another man and promises him his wife back on one condition. He has to say that he "takes the sin" (*beret grekh*) for killing his wife's unborn child. Not believing the witch's power *Anton* "takes the sin" and the witch makes a spell that almost kills the child. She is interrupted by a group of people who call themselves *Night Watchers*. Responsible for the balance between the world of humans and Others, they arrest the witch. This experience also changes *Anton* who discovers an ability to see Others. Thinking that he caused the death of an innocent child joins the *Night Watch* in its struggle against Dark Others. Twelve years later, during one of his operations he meets *Egor*, the child that he once almost killed. Upon meeting him he finds out that the witch had lied to him and *Egor* was in fact his son. Upon receiving a second chance at fatherhood *Anton* tries to protect his newfound son from harm. Yet as soon as the boy *Egor* discovers that his father once wanted to kill him he joins *Anton's* rivals, the Dark Others. In the second film *Day Watch*, *Anton* tries to change the past by looking for a mystical Chalk of Fate that once belonged to fourteenth century conqueror of Central Asia

*Amir Timur*. In the meantime *Egor's* Dark powers emerge from his disappointment and bitterness over his father's alienation. With the help of a mystical Jewish-Central Asian figure *Zoar*, *Anton's* coworkers and friends, *Anton* succeeds at going back to 1992 and changing the course of history.

There are two major factors that set Bekmambetov's narrative apart from the mainstream Russian cinematography of the post-Soviet era: 1. *Night Watch* and *Day Watch* highlight the complexity of the Russian *Self* by demonstrating internal and external intellectual influences between Russian and non-Russians; and 2. In his films Bekmambetov underlines commonalities of the universal intergenerational conflict between parents and children.

In the presentation of the central conflict, Bekmambetov connects contemporary Russia with ancient Central Asia. Depicting the fate of *Amir Timur* Bekmambetov's visual narrative goes back to the fourteenth century city of Samarqand. The scene of conquest begins with *Amir Timur* studying the map of Samarqand, where he knows he could find the Chalk of Fate. As he points his finger at the map, the paper tears and in the writing of a text underneath the map he recognizes the word *arvah*. Screaming out the word *arvah*, *Timur* leads his army to Samarqand and gets wounded on the way. As soon as he finds the Chuck of Fate dying *Timur* wishes for *heyat* (life) (Fig.82). The Chalk takes him back to the moment of his defeat. *Timur* kills his enemy first and becomes one of the most powerful men in history (Fig.83). Despite his victory, as one of the characters of the film reveals later, *Timur's* enemies kill his only son. Despite *Timur's* seeming victory, he fails as the death of one's child is also the death of the parent's *ruh* (soul). *Timur* forgets one of central notions in the metaphysics of *arvah* to care for parents and children as part of caring for the *Self*. By being too concerned with his immediate need for power and not his *ruh*, he fails to stay "alive."

Centuries later *Anton* makes the same mistake in 1992. The year of 1992, when one ideology crumbled and the new one has not yet emerged, is important as it marks not only the former Soviet population's loss of trust in its national father figures, but also its disconnection from the post-Soviet generation. Wishing for his personal well being *Anton* almost kills his own son in 1992. Reading the book on *Timur's* life, he searches for the Chuck of Fate not to gain power or return a woman, but to reconnect with his son (Fig.84).

Bekmambetov underlines *Anton's* connection to *Timur* replaying the first scene in one of the culminating episodes of the film. Lost in the corridors of the "Cosmos" hotel, *Anton*, like *Timur*, finds a map to help him in his search for the Chalk of Fate. As he wonders around the building, the ceiling above his head turns into an arabesque of a Samarqand mosque and the door he opens turns into the door *Timur* opened in the fourteenth century (Fig. 84 &85). Multiple linguistic and visual metaphors in Bekmambetov's narrative, such as the name of the hotel "Cosmos" reinforce the universality of two men searching for answers.

Timur Bekmambetov not only connects Central Asia and Russia conceptually, but also offers a different image of the non-Russian Other as a changing and multifaceted entity that is in continuous dialogue with Russia. In contemporary Russia *Zoar* (Fig.86) serves dumplings, *manti* in a Moscow café, speaks in Kazakh and broken Russian with his clients, and lives a modest life of a work-migrant. In the course of the film, *Zoar* is the only character that does not strive for power, yet has all the answers to *Anton's* questions. When Anton stops by his café *Zoar* tries to stop him from drinking too much alcohol (*Don't drink anymore, Anton dear. Or you'll really run into trouble*). Anton does not listen and as a result almost causes the end of the world.

The same *Zoar* is a Communist Party member, who tries to prevent the opening of *Amir Timur's* tomb in 1941 Uzbekistan (Fig.87). Historically, many Central Asians perceived the opening of the tomb, which Soviet archeologists performed in 1941, as an act of symbolic violence. Indigenous population's answer to Soviet attempt to clash Soviet science with the cult of *arvaks* was the Central Asian urban story about three old Uzbek men, who approached Soviet scientists warning them about the consequences of their action. Disturbance of an ancestor's grave, the old men said would cause major historical misfortunes. Disregarding old Uzbeks, scientists opened the tomb. On the next day Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. Bekmambetov incorporates this urban myth into his visual narrative but replaced Uzbek men with *Zoar*, a representative of the Uzbek communist party elite, who tries to stop people from Moscow from making a fatal mistake. In the fourteenth century *Zoar* is the golden (radiant) man, the embodiment of Judaic mystic wisdom,<sup>54</sup> and the keeper of the Chalk of Fate (Fig.88). When *Zoar* becomes an immigrant in Moscow Anton tells him that he is a man of gold, making a reference to the fourteenth century *Zoar*. Whatever status *Zoar* has throughout the film, he is still one and his mission was/is not to cause but to prevent catastrophes.

By turning the non-Russian Other from a villain into the Kazakh/Uzbek/Jewish advisor, Bekmambetov negates the ethno-national and religious oppositions of Russia's mainstream popular visual narrative. He goes even further by addressing Russia's own internal East/West discourse by incorporating Turkic decorative elements (Fig.89). into the interior (*Valeriy Viktorov*) and clothing design (*Varvara Avdushko*) of his Light and Dark Others In the parallel love story of *Alisa* and *Kostia*, for example, the moment of falling in love is marked by *Kostia* wearing a Central Asian robe (Fig.90). In the post-Soviet context of narratives, which often promote ethno-racial delimitation, Transsovieticus director reminds the viewers of Russia's own complex Slavo-Turkic ancestry imbedded in the fabrics of Russians' daily lives.

Bekmambetov's also challenges the concept of the sacrificial hero in popular contemporary Russian film. *The 9<sup>th</sup> Company*, which was coming out parallel to

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<sup>54</sup> Bekmambetov makes a visual reference to the book of Zohar.

*Day Watch*, is depicted in the film in a form of a glass billboard, which *Anton* breaks, i.e., may be interpreted as the victory of Bekmambetov's hero over the heroes of The 9<sup>th</sup> Company (Fig.91).

Unlike the sacrificial hero, Bekmambetov's *Anton* is similar to the Russian folk character of *Ivanushka Durachok*, who may not be the smartest or the richest character, yet has a witty mind (*smekalka*) and a kind heart, which get him the ultimate prize: *Elena the Wonderful* (*Elena Prekrasnaia*) and half of the kingdom. At times naïve and disoriented, *Anton Gorodetskiy* has many flaws, yet his open-heartedness and readiness to lend a hand to strangers leads him to powerful friends, who help him in becoming a hero and reach a happy ending.

Similarly, *Anton Gorodetskiy* makes mistakes. Like so many other representatives of his generation he loses themselves in redefinitions of the Post-Soviet rights and wrongs. In the rise of the political and economic turbulence of the late 1990s individual choices dramatically changed lives and for some, as for *Anton*, brought regrets and disappointments. In this context, *Anton* is not a victim, but a sinner with a lost sense of reality. His struggle "to remain human" (*ostavatsia chelovekom*) despite the collapse of socio-political and economic structures of post-Soviet society and the dissolution of Soviet-style ethics, is above all, a struggle with himself. In his sense, like *Ivanushka* he succeeds when he returns to the past and changes above all himself. One viewer, Igor S. Nikishin in his article on the website *Vnezemel'e* titled "Essay of a Dilettante" talks about *Anton* in the light of the notion of "v otvete":

The reason for all the collusions seems simple – the rivalry between two Magicians, the Dark one and the Light one...Yet the main idea lies deeper: You carry the responsibility [v otvete] for it all. Perhaps this is what we get for our socialist past. And that is what kills me. The great, decisive role of an individual choice in history (even imaginary one!) and there is no way to get away from that.

The idea *v otvete* (literally 'in answer'), i.e. one's responsibility for one's sins, corresponds in many viewers' responses with the Christian and Muslim idea of Judgment Day, and in this way 'speaks' to a very wide range of viewers. The idea of one's responsibility for one's choices also gives *Anton* agency over his life and a chance to change it. Journalist Evgeniy Nefedorov expands on this idea in his review of *Day Watch*:

The co-called Chalk of Fate does not remain the prerogative of phenomenal individuals like Tamerlane...every person becomes the creator of his/her own fate – and in this respect carries responsibility for the fate of the whole Universe...It isn't by chance that *Anton Gorodetskii* is at the center of it all. Experienced, yet with very average abilities...Anton tries to solve his own personal, ordinary (yet complex)



human problems, expiating for the sin he made in the past, trying to establish contact with his son, who picked another path...

While Timur Bekmambetov clearly challenges the sacrificial hero, he does not negate, but incorporates him into his narrative. His sacrificial hero *Kostia*, played by Aleksey Chadov, an actor, whose characters go to jail or die in at least four film of the last ten years, including *The 9<sup>th</sup> Company*, and *War*, also dies, but only as a secondary character. In Bekmambetov's film, *Kostia* is a young vampire who struggles to stay human and killed by *Zavulon*, the head of the Dark Others.



Fig.75. Ivan in Prison. *War [Voina]*. Aleksei Balabanov. STV. 2002. Film.



Figure 76. From left to right: John (Ian Kelli) (left front), commander *Medvedev* (Bodrov Mladshii) (center front), Margaret (Ingeborda Dabkunaite) (right). *War [Voina]*. Aleksei Balabanov. STV. 2002. Film.



Fig.77. Official promotional film poster for *War [Voina]*. Aleksei Balabanov. STV. 2002. Print.



Fig. 78. Georgii Gurguliy as *Aslan Gugaev*. *War [Voina]*. Aleksei Balabanov. STV. 2002. Film.





Fig. 79. *9<sup>th</sup> Company*. Video Game cover. Lesta Stuido: Novii Disk. 30 April 2008. Disc.





Fig. 80. *9<sup>th</sup> Company*. Video Game cover. Lesta Studio: Novii Disk. 30 April 2008. Disc.



Fig.81. *9<sup>th</sup> Company*. Video Game cover. Lesta Studio: Novii Disk. 30 April 2008. Disc.





Fig 82. *Timur* attacking Samarqand. *Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor]*. Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.



Fig.83. *Timur* with the Chuck of Fate. *Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor]*. Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.



Fig. 84. *Anton in Cosmos hotel. Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor].* Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.



Fig. 85. *Anton in Cosmos hotel. Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor].* Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.





Fig.86. Zoar as a work migrant in Moscow. *Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor]*. Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.



Fig.87. Zoar in 1941. *Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor]*. Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.





Fig. 88. *Zoar* (Nurjuman Ikhtinbaev) as a Radiant Man. *Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor]*. Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.



Fig. 89. Official Promotional Poster for *Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor]*. Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Print.



Fig. 90. *Kostia* (Aleksei Chadov) and *Alisa* (Zhanna Friske). *Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor]*. Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.



Fig.91. *Anton* breaking the billboard of *The 9<sup>th</sup> Company*. *Day Watch [Nochnoi Dozor]*. Timur Bekmambetov. Gemini Film & Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006. Film.

## Chapter VI

### Timur Bekmambetov's *Six Degrees of Celebration*: From Ethno to Civil Brotherhood

*Вот они с нами теперь живут наравне, –  
– указал Старый Ванька на чужих людей -...  
Мы по-мертвому жили, а по-хорошему жить нам не  
трудно.*<sup>55</sup>

*Andrei Platonov, Dzhan (Knigosait)*

Timur Bekmambetov's last film *Six Degrees of Celebration* (*Elki*, 2010), which depicts a Central Asian labor migrant as part of contemporary Russian society has generated \$ 22, 772,019 (KinoPoisk) in Russia only, becoming one of the top ten blockbusters of 2010 outside North America. While the majority of scholarly works on Russian media focus on the rapid growth of xenophobia since 1992, little has been said about the nature of civil nationalism in Russian visual culture. This chapter argues that despite the overall lack of political correctness in contemporary visual culture towards non-Slavs, the idea of civil nationalism has a strong foundation in Russia's history of national self- presentation. The success of Timur Bekmambetov's film demonstrates that despite Russia's attempts to create a historical discontinuity with the Soviet past, the notion of civil brotherhood is making its way back into the visual discourse on nationalism.

On April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 the Russian migration service spokesman Konstantin Poltoranin expressed his concerns over the future of the "white race" in his interview with the Russian BBC Service. Criticizing the European Union's immigration policy for accepting migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, he said, "Relations must be build differently to ensure blood is mixed in the right regime". Russia, he argued, needs primarily "people of the Slavic group" as "what is now at stake is the survival of the white race" (BBC Russkaia Slujba). Poltoranin's view of being a Russian citizen (*Rossianin*) involves not only racial (white), but also ethnic (Slavic) element and while he was fired for his remarks on the BBC, his

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<sup>55</sup> - So now they live with us on equal terms, - the old Vanka pointed at the strangers -... We lived the dead way, its not too hard to live the good way.

perspective on the future of Russianness is shared by a large portion of ethnically Russian population. Today, Russia is home to half of the world's neo-Nazi membership, which is estimated at around 85000.

The latest neo-Nazi riots in Moscow against Caucasians and Central Asians in December of 2010 resulted in the arrests of over 800 people. In response to these riots, a writer and television producer Victor Shenderovich called for a demonstration titled "Moscow for everyone" (*Moskva dlia Vsekh*) in his blog on *RadioEkhoMosvki*:

We do exist in Russia – that is millions of separate individuals, normal people, who grew up with normal dads and moms, who gave us good books to read when we were kids. We, who believe xenophobia is indecent, and Nazism is criminal ...There are many of us out there. It's just that unlike the others, we avoid crowds. We like to be alone or in small groups, with our friends, girlfriends, computers, books, and cups of coffees. I understand. I am like that myself...but there are many of us...and sometimes we have to demonstrate it.

The "moms and dads" Shenderovich speaks of are essentially Soviet period parents, whose civil identity included Soviet multinationalism (often referred to as multi-culturalism in North American parlance). Over 3000 thousand people joined Shenderovich for December 26, 2010 demonstration including Russia's literary and film celebrities such as Valerii Todorovskii, Everniy Mironov, Aleksei Kortnev, Chuplan Khamatova, Dmitrii Bikov, Kama Ginkas, Genrietta Iankovskaia, Vladimir Mirzoev, Iosif Raikhelgauz and many others. Despite the fact that Shenderovich's demonstration created a lot of publicity, many, including participants of the meeting marked the average age of participants as 40 to 50 years old, as opposed to the neo-Nazi riots, where the average age of protesters was 14-35 years (Matyukhin).

In the same month (December 2010), a film by Timur Bekmambetov *Six Degrees of Celebration* (Elki), which presents a story of brotherhood based on one's civil rather than ethnic allegiances, reached the top of Russia's 2010 film blockbusters becoming the most popular film of the last three years. In his film Bekmambetov not only makes a Central Asian labor migrant - *Iusuf* - part of the film's circle of people from across Russia who are trying to help a Russian orphan, he goes even further by turning him into the key figure who makes a seemingly impossible outcome possible. How could it be then than in a country where according to latest surveys over 50% fully or partially agree with the phrase "Russia is for Russians" (Levada Tsentr), Timur Bekmambertov's film collected 209 million rubles (\$6.5 million) just in the first weekend of the film's release on December 16, 2010? Is the myth of the mysterious Russian soul (*zagadochnaia russkaia dusha*), which Russians themselves often refer to when faced with contradictions of their society, responsible for such a contradiction? To answer this question I will turn to

the history of Soviet multi-nationalism and its connection to Timur Bekmabetov's film.

### **The Birth and the Death of Soviet Multi-nationalism**

Representation of multinational civil brotherhood in Russia goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Early Bolshevik vision of Soviet society involved the creation of a modern state with complex web of social interdependence, a community in which every person "joined ranks with others in a free collective" (Khakhordin 103).

Visual propaganda of the Soviet period emphasized equality (*ravenstvo*) and solidarity of all ethnic groups of the Union marking an important shift in perception of ethno-racial relations between Russians and former Tsarist colonies. The poster *Vmeste, Druzhno na Vibori I Rabotu. V Sovety! (Together, Hand in Hand to Elections and Work. To the Union!)* from 1934, for example (Fig.92), demonstrates representatives of Russian and Uzbek peasants walking together towards political and economic changes of the Soviet state. Physical closeness of both central figures (hands on each other's shoulders, carrying the weight of the banner together, shadows on the sun merging into one), visual similarities (equal heights, closeness in age, similar body structure), as well as synchronized body movement (eye contact with the viewer, facial expression, pace of marching) are reinforced by the semiotics of the message on the red banner, which begins with words "together" (*vmeste*) and "hand in hand" (*druzhno*). Etymologically the word *druzhno*, originates from the Russian word *drug* – "friend", which also reinforces successful partnership of two nationalities. Contrasts in representation, such as differences in skin tone, are emphasised yet do not imply one's superiority over the other. This is by itself is a unique factor considering that racism was a socially accepted reality of most European and North American countries in the 1920s. Soviet film's heroes in capitalist countries suffered and rarely survived their misfortunes unless they found refuge in the Soviet Union or countries of the Soviet block like the character of American actress *Marion Dixon* in the 1936 film *Circus (Tsirk)* who fled the USA escaping racial discrimination. And while this approach changed later due to Stalin's introduction of Russians as "older" brothers, elements of the original vision of ethno-national friendship and unity remained part of the Soviet self-narrative even when other elements of Soviet ideology lost their credibility. By the end of the WWII ethno-national solidarity became strengthened by the outside enemy. In the late Soviet period filmmakers began to avoid elements of Soviet ideological narrative that they and many of their viewers no longer believed in. Yet the multinational element in Soviet visual culture remained strong in such popular films as the *The Old Khottabych (Starik Khottabych, 1956)*, *Kidnapping. Caucasian Style (Kavkazskaia Plennitsa, 1967)*, *Gentlemen of Fortune (Djental'meni Udachi, 1971)*, *Mimino (Mimino, 1977)*, and *The Most Charming and Attractive (Samaia Obaiatel'naia I Privlekatel'naia, 1983)*.



Filmmakers of the early post-Soviet period often defined freedom by the ability to voice ideas *Goskino*, (USSR State Committee for Cinematography) <sup>56</sup> silenced during the Soviet period. Critical assessment of the Soviet idea of national brotherhood (*natsional'noe bratstvo*) allowed them to break the conspiracy of silence about interethnic tensions and create a sense of historical discontinuity with the Soviet period. *Danilo Bagrov* (*Sergei Bodrov*), the main character of Aleksei Balabanov's film *Brother* (*Brat*, 1997) set the new boundaries of the post Soviet Russian *Self* by becoming the Soviet anti-hero. *Danilo* (Fig.93) was the first film character, who displayed dissatisfaction with the image of Russians, which Soviet visual culture had maintained for over seventy years, i.e. de-ethnicized carriers of Soviet modernity.

In one of the most popular scenes of the film, *Danilo* comes to help a Russian cable car ticket collector. <sup>57</sup> Confronted by two Caucasians who refuse to pay for the ride, and mock the ticket collector (*I don't have a ticket. Don't you understand? Do you even speak Russian?*) *Danilo* gently pushes the ticket collector aside and demands the fee with a gun in his hands. The two men beg *Danilo* not to shoot (*Please, don't kill, brother!*). *Danilo's* response "Who do you call a brother? You black-assed nit" became one of the most quoted film aphorisms of the decade. Identifying two Caucasians as parasites (*nit*) that will no longer be getting a "free ride", *Danilo* differentiates himself from the passive Soviet ticket collector. Balabanov's post Soviet Russian is a man with a gun, who is not weighed down by the necessity of 'brotherliness' towards other ethnic groups and is not to be taken advantage of.

Breaking Soviet taboos was a liberating experience. Russian film critic Tatiana Moskovina elaborates on the idea of inter-ethnic relations in her review of another film by Balabanov *War* (*Voina*, 1997) dedicated to the Chechen conflict. Commenting on the hostility between ethnic Russians and Chechens she speaks about national discoveries of 1990s:

...To discover that we [Russians] "are not loved" not only in the world, but also in our own "peripheries", caused Russians a profound physiological shock. It was

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<sup>56</sup> In films about the Soviet people, *Goskino* in the organization responsible for not only ideological impact but also the commercial aspect of film production, secured the 'happy endings' (Kleiman). These cinematographic 'realities' featured heroes who always found support from the collective and the Communist Party.

<sup>57</sup> As of april 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 the scene is shown in three clips and all together got over 100000 hits on *You Tube*. *Stsenas kavkaztsami*. Web. 17 May 2011.

lessened...when in fact, it turned out, that we don't love anybody either.

Acknowledgement of interethnic resentment, which Moskovina discusses, sets new trends and norms of visual representation of interethnic encounters. In the following years of the post-Soviet era the Chechen war and the growing numbers of migrant workers (*gastrobeiter*) from Central Asia and Caucasus diversified the range of themes about “black-assed nits” in Russian visual culture.

### **Discovering the Soviet Within with Timur Bekmambetov**

Timur Bekmambetov's *Six Degrees of Celebration*, which is an answer to Balabanov's *Brat* in terms of Russian self-presentation, marks a significant shift in the discourse on Russian nationalism. Bekmambetov begins by creating a sense of historical continuity. He does it indirectly, and in a way reminiscent of the ironic delicacy of Riazanov's late Soviet films, by putting his character into the “in between” times – the last day of the year. It was this anticipation for a magical fate driven change that had turned Eldar Riazanov's films such as “Carnival night” (*Karnaval'naia noch'* 1956) and “The Irony of Fate” (*Ironia sud'bi ili s legkim parom*, 1975) into all times favorite Soviet and post-Soviet films. Bekmambetov's attempts to connect his viewers to the “magical symbolic point in time and space, when one year ends and another begins....when we all hope that something will happen and change our lives forever” began several years earlier with “Irony of Fate 2” (*Ironia Sud'bi ili s Legkim Parom 2* 2007) and continued with *Six Degrees of Celebration*.

The story of the orphan girl *Varia* (*Alina Bulynko*) frames nine other stories of the film that take place within the last hours before the New Year. When other children at the orphanage find out that *Varia* fantasizes that her father is the president of Russia Dmitrii Medvedev, they threaten to boycott her for lying. To prove that *Varia* is in fact the president's daughter she promises that on the night of the New Year, Dmitrii Medvedev will use the phrase “Santa helps those who help themselves” (*Na deda morozu nadeisa, a sam ne ploshai*) in his national television greetings to the Russian public. *Varia*'s friend *Vova* (Sergei Pokhodaev) convinces her to try out the six-handshake theory, which is based on the assumption that anyone can reach any other person on the planet through six people. His phone call to *Iura* (Pavel Melenchuk), one of the graduates of the orphanage, sets the narrative of nine characters, each one of whom try to help *Varia* by making the next phone call. A Central Asian work migrant *Iusuf* (Baimurat Allaberiev) becomes the last link in the chain of phone calls. He calls the only person close to the president he knows - another work migrant, a Red Square street-cleaner *Ibrohim*. The writing “Santa helps those who help themselves” appears on the snow in front of the president's window and in the end of the film in Medvedev's television speech.

Having established the moment in time, Bekmambetov creates a sense of geographic unity. Computer generated imagery of phone signals traveling across the map of Russia from Moscow to Saint-Petersburg, Kaliningrad, Kazan, Perm, Ufa, Bavlakh, Yekaterinburg, Krasnoyarsk, Yakutsk, and Novosibirsk throughout the film broadened the boundaries of the Russian Self from Moscow and Saint Petersburg, to Russian provinces, rarely represented in visual culture. By making citizens of different cities part of his narrative about civic brotherhood Bekmambetov reaffirmed the socio-geographic oneness of Russia as a whole.

Another important plot thread that connects all of the characters is that despite their individual struggles, each one of them commits to a random act of kindness towards *Varia*. Part of their compassion towards the little girl derives from them recognizing themselves in her act of desperation as she searches for a paternal figure in her life. Adult characters of the film do not judge *Varia* for lying about Medvedev being her father; nor do they encourage her to tell the truth. Yet, as they make the next phone call *Varia's* story changes as each character projects his or her life dilemma on *Varia's* situation. A taxi driver *Pasha* (Nikita Presniakov) mocked for his love for a pop-star describes *Varia* as someone who is told that there are no miracles. A student Misha, who lies to his girlfriend, describes *Varia* as someone who got herself into trouble with lies (*zavralas*), and finally *Iusuf* says that if *Varia* is not to be helped, she would get lost, literally “vanish” (*propadet*).

Yet, unlike Soviet or most post-Soviet filmmakers Bekmambetov identifies one's individual responsibility for their actions. Questioning the essence of freedom, Bekmambetov defines it not by the characters' readiness to follow or their ability to break rules, but by their capacity to embrace the responsibility of one's choices while helping others. The key saying of the film - “Santa help those who help themselves”, which goes back to Russian folk tradition and the proverb “God helps those who help themselves” (*Na boga nadeisia, a sam ne ploshai*) reinforces this sentiment as each character's lives changes as they act against his or her habit, preconditioned by gender, social status, or ethnic background. A thief turns into a savior, a taxi driver becomes a knight, and a woman who lost hope to find love, meets a new man.

By adding the character of a work migrant *Iusuf*, (Fig.94 & 95) Bekmambetov enters the dimension of the post-Soviet discourse on nationalism that has generated heated discussions over the course of the last fifteen years. The number of work migrants (*gastrobaiter*) from Central Asia has been consistently growing despite low pay, poor living conditions (the majority live in barracks, slums, and apartment buildings planned for demolition), absence of workers' compensation and health insurance. Work migrants' conditions worsened in the last five years with exposure to hazards (construction sites covered with ice, chemicals), abuse by police, skinhead and Nazi organizations, and in some cases captivity on construction sites (Dzhuraeva). As of 2011 work migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, constitute 48 % of all work migrants from CIS (Kumo 6). Derogatory

representations of work migrants in mainstream visual culture involve comedy sitcoms, such as *Nasha Russia* (Our Russia), which has depicted Tajik work migrants *Djamshud* (Valerii Magdiash) and *Ravshan* (Mikhail Galustian) (Fig. 96) drinking from a toilet, talking obsessively about sex in broken Russian, and demonstrating total inability to fulfill the most simple chores given to them by their Russian boss (*Sergei Svetliakov*).

Baimurat Allaberdiev who plays the Turkmen work migrant *Iusuf* in Bekmambetov's film, is not a professional actor but a work migrant from Tajikistan. Until 2008 when he became famous with an amateur video on *Youtube* in which he performs a popular late Soviet period Bollywood song from "Disco Dancer" (1982), Allaberdiev worked as a loader in Kolomna, Russia.<sup>58</sup> In two of the film's scenes Bekmambetov first identifies the origins of tension between ethnic Russians and work migrants from former 'brotherly' states, and then reconnects Russians with their former 'brothers' via the idea of civil brotherhood. *Iusuf's* story in *Six Degrees of Celebration* begins with a scene at McDonald's. Having sent all of his annual earnings to his family in Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan, *Iusuf* keeps 299 rubles (about \$10) to himself so that he can celebrate the New Year with a single meal at McDonald's. In the restaurant, he mistakes his table for someone else's and claims 'his' territory by sitting across from the man in a suit, taking a big bite from his burger, and drinking his coke. The man in a suit, who turns out to be one of president Medvedev's assistants *Igor* (Viktor Verzhbitskii), leaves without a single word. As soon as *Iusuf* realizes his mistake, he tries to find *Igor* (*Brother, where are you? Where are you, brother?*), but with no success.

Confusion defines Bekmambetov's *Iusuf*. He talks to an ATM machine (*Hello there! Happy New Year! I would like to send some money home...Can I keep 299 rubles?*) and literally gets lost between identical tables at a McDonald's restaurant. When *Iusuf* hears about *Varia's* problem, he handles it with the typical naiveté of a man from a small rural village in Central Asia. Assuming that anyone can talk to anyone the way people can in a small Turkmen village where everyone knows everyone else, *Iusuf* tells *Ibrohim* on the phone: "Hello, Ibrohim? Its me, Iusuf. I need to help one little girl or else she is lost (*propadet*). You are on the Red Square, he [Medvedev] is on the Red Square". *Ibrohim* tries to explain the impossibility of him reaching out to the President (What are you talking about, Iusuf? Where am I and where is he? I am sorry Iusuf. The snow is falling. I have to work).

The majority of labor migrants come from rural areas of Central Asia, where the economic infrastructure collapsed after the fall of the Soviet Union. The challenges they face in Russia are not only linguistic and cultural but also urban. Not having found his "place" in Russia, *Iusuf* is eternally lost. Even the phone call, which changes *Varia's* life, *Iusuf* receives by mistake on *Igor's* cell phone. *Iusuf's*

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<sup>58</sup> Filmed on a cell phone camera the *Youtube* video shows Allaberiev drumming on variety of objects in the shoe shop while performing a well known in late Soviet period song *Jimmi* from a Bollywood movie "Disco Dancer" (1982).

attempts to fit into a world beyond his understanding both confirm as well as overwrite the post-Soviet stereotype about Central Asian labor migrants. Like Balabanov's Caucasian man on the tram, he calls *Igor* "Brother" (*Bratan*), yet not fearfully, but apologetically.

Communication between *Iusuf* and *Igor* may have potentially resolved the misunderstanding, but a total absence of communication is what marks the scene. *Iusuf* and *Igor* do not engage in a dialogue, but make instant assumptions about each other. *Igor*'s only comments about the incident as he gets into his car is the Russian word '*ponaekhali*', which comes from the word 'overrun' (*naekhat*) and used primarily by urban Russians commenting on rural and/or non-Russians overcrowding their cities. At the same time Bekmambetov suggests that the gap between a Central Asian work migrant at the bottom of the social ladder and a representative of the Russian government is not as big as it may appear. While neither *Igor* nor *Iusuf* understand the motivation behind each other's actions, both dine at a McDonald's restaurant, which for many people of the post-Soviet space represents the end of the Soviet lifestyle and the beginning of the new global post-Soviet Russia. *Iusuf*'s happiness over his fast-food meal is reminiscent of the economic poverty of thousands of Russian citizens in early 1990s, when a meal at McDonald's was a sign of economic prosperity. The scene also marks changes in contemporary Russia's family traditions and work ethics. While New Year's eve was considered a time of celebration with families gathering around tables across the Soviet Union, new times require both an assistant of the president and the labor migrant from Central Asia to be away from their families and replace salad *oliv'e* – essential element of traditional New Year table – with a McDonald's salad.

Having addressed the interethnic tension between former 'brothers', Bekmambetov goes further by demonstrating ways in which *Iusuf* identifies himself as a Russian citizen. In one of the opening scenes, he overhears *Varia* name Russian cities and adds Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, to her list. "That's not a Russian city!"- says *Varia*. While on a large political scale, each of the CIS countries proclaimed independence and began to develop national self-narratives - which often presented the former 'older' brothers as occupants - average people, still carry deep connections to the Soviet space. Many still consider Russia to be what Georgian actor Vakhtang Kikabidse called his "second home" (BBC *Russkaia Sluzhba*). What *Varia* may perceive as wrong, to *Iusuf* is still part of his cultural memory that is a product of a much longer history than that of the last fifteen years. Central Asian labor migrants continue to come to Russia almost as result of inertia. Born in the Soviet Union, *Iusuf* represents the last Soviet generation and is connected to Russia in ways the 10-year-old *Varia*, who was born after the break up of the Soviet Union, cannot imagine.

The relationship of space to the Soviet period is crucial in Bekmambetov's narrative marking ways in which one's abilities change depending on where he or she is. *Iusuf*'s story begins at a McDonald's restaurant, where he is lost and misunderstood. Yet, in the geographic context of the Red Square, the space of



collective memories of multinational unity, another labor migrant *Ibrohim* is able to do what appears to be the impossible: break class and ethnic barriers and become the link that connects a Russian president to a Russian orphan *Varia*. By turning *Iusuf* and *Ibrohim* into key links in the chain of phone calls, Bekmambetov includes them into what Russia represents today.

Bekmambetov, whose previous projects involved careful consideration of viewer's preferences, did not create the film entirely by himself. *Six Degrees of Celebration*, which the director intended as “people's comedy” (*narodnaia komediia*), is based on stories, which Timur Bekmambetov's company *Bazelevs* collected in a national competition for best inspiring New Year's Eve story. Over the course of one month (01/05/2009-02/05/2010) *Bazelevs* received more than six thousand emails from all over Russia. Nine of these stories became novellas for the film. Bekmambetov also invited other filmmakers (Alexander Voitinskii, Dmitrii Kiselev, Aleksandr Andriushchenko, Iaroslav Chevazhevskii, Ignas Ioninas) to direct other stories turning it into what film critic Olga Shervud called “soul to soul talk” (*razgovor po dusham*).

Other filmmakers, such as Dmitriy Meskhiev are already following Bekmambetov's steps in creating a historical continuity with the ideology of Soviet multinationalism. In one of the scenes from Dmitriy Meskhiev's *At the window* (*U okna*, 2010) *Aleksandr Dronov* (Iuriy Stoianov) gets into an argument with a militiaman, whom he bribes in order to get illegal Uzbek labor migrants out of jail. In response to the militiaman's remark about “black-asses” and *churki* – a derogative term which refers to peoples of Central Asia, he says:

Listen, mayor, maybe you don't know. When during the war [women] like your grandmother or my mother were evacuated in thousands to their [Uzbek] Tashkent, the so-called ‘churki’ slept on the ground themselves, and the only bed with the only coversheet gave away to Russian women and their children. [It was] with them, with those ‘churki’, that we first won the war and then reconstructed Russia. Do you understand?

Identifying the gap in his and the militiaman's age (... maybe you don't know ...), *Stoianov* implies the lack of epistemological continuity, when the post-Soviet generation rejected the body of historical knowledge developed during the Soviet period as ideological and therefore false. By referring to the evacuation of thousands of Russian families to Central Asia during WWII, *Stoianov* puts an emphasis on Uzbek hospitality and a sense of civil unity of the Soviet people. In this context, reference to WWII becomes especially viable considering that racism in contemporary Russia is directly linked to neo-Nazi organizations. Creating a historical continuity between Uzbeks of the mid twentieth century who helped Russians “rebuild Russia” after the war and Uzbeks of the beginning of the twenty first century, who are primarily working as construction workers, Meskhiev, like

Bekmambetov identifies Soviet multinationalism as a positive element of the forgotten past.

Eviatar Zerubavel notes that far from being a strictly spontaneous act, remembering is governed by unmistakably social norms of remembrance that tell us what we should remember and what we should essentially forget. (5) The sense of deception many former Soviet citizens experienced in the early 1990s led to mass rejection of everything remotely Soviet. In the development of post-Soviet norms of remembrance, the Soviet narrative of national brotherhood had turned into a story of interethnic deception. Yet, rejection of the past in Russia did not eliminate the need for symbolic belonging to a larger, meaningful project. Thus, if Balabanov's *Brother* broke the Soviet canon of representation of Russians as de-ethnized carriers of Soviet modernity, Bekmambetov's film broke the post-Soviet image of Russians established by Balabanov. The image of the rebellious Russian hated or feared by other ethnic groups no longer serves the purpose of the changing Russian self-presentation. *Six Degrees of Celebration* gave Russian viewers a sense of civil brotherhood depicting Russian people (*Rossiane*) as giving, united, supportive and forgiving regardless of their ethnic background. While providing Andrei Platonov's aphorism "Without me the folk is incomplete" <sup>59</sup> a much larger geographic and social scale, the film's success demonstrates that many Russian viewers long to see themselves as such. The return to the idea of civil brotherhood may be one of the first signs of Russia's recovery from the socio-political post-traumatic disorder which most post-Soviet states have been going through after the fall of the Soviet Union.



Fig. 92. *Vmeste, Druzhno na Vibory I Rabotu v Soveti*. 1934. Collection of posters in State Russian Librabry [Gosudarstvennaia Rossiyskaia Biblioteka] Moscow. Print.

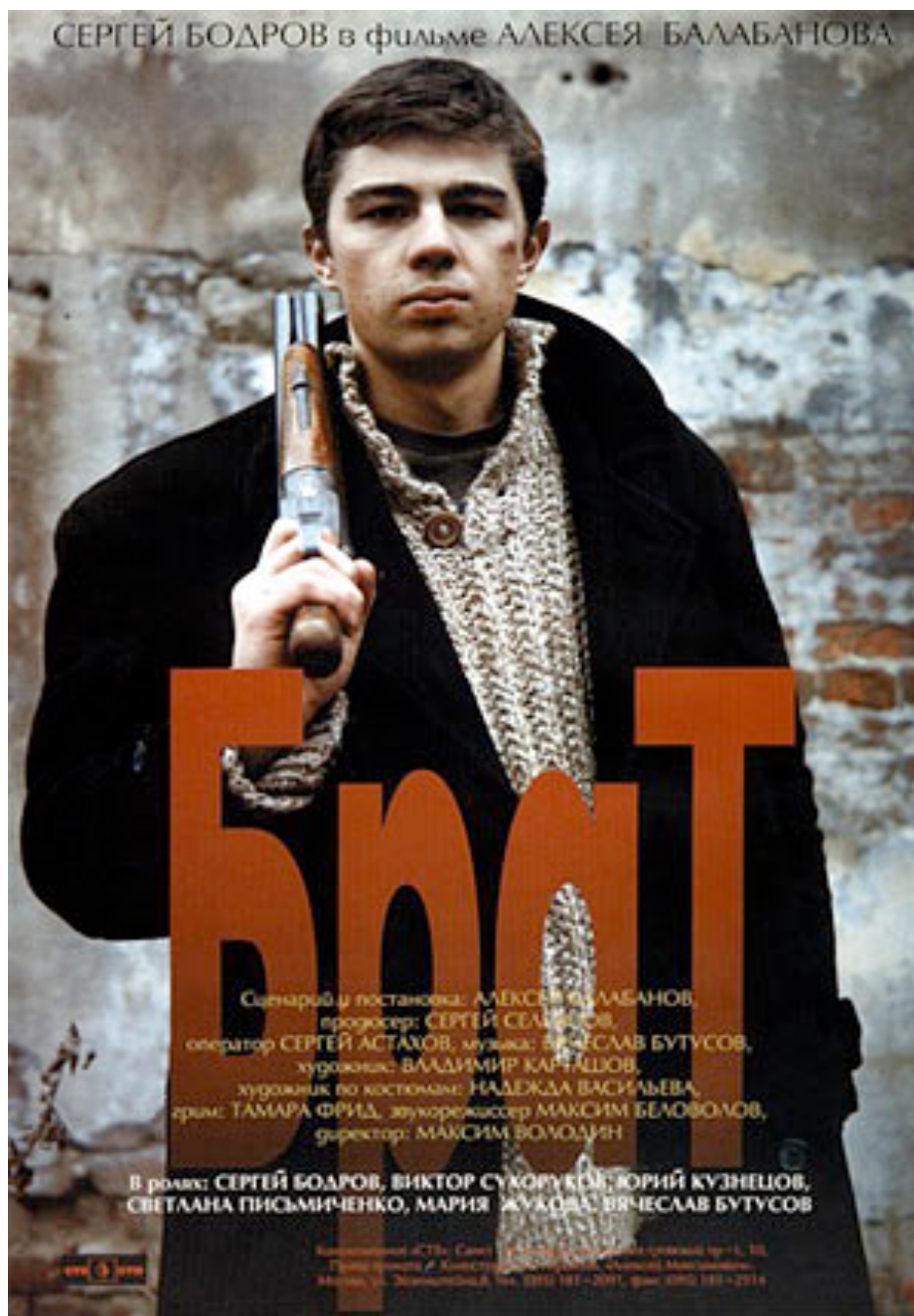


Fig. 93. Brat. Danilo Bagrov (Sergei Bodrov) Brother [Brat]. Aleksei Balabanov. STV. 1997. Poster.





Fig. 94. *Iusuf* (Baimurat Allaberiev) *Six Degrees of Celebration* [Elki], Bazelevs. 2010.

Fig. 95. Baimurat Allaberiev (right) and Timur Bekmambetov (left) shooting the scene in McDonald's.



Fig. 96. *Ravhsan* (Mikhail Galustian) (center) and *Djamshud* (Valerii Magdiash) (left). *Nasha Russia*. TNT. November 2006-to date.



## Conclusion

This dissertation exposed the origins of a Soviet experiment, its development, objects, subjects and consequences. Soviet visual propaganda, which aimed at creating a unified Soviet identity, both succeeded and failed in Central Asia. It succeeded because the majority of urban dwellers became modernized and Russified over the course of the first thirty years of Soviet rule. Already by 1940s the urban citizens of Frusne (Bishkek) and Dushanbe, for example, had more in common with one another than with the rural representatives of their own republics. Cultural producers discussed in this dissertation not only accepted the tools of Soviet modern art forms, but also consolidated them into a Transsovieticus subculture during the Soviet period. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union they continued to associate themselves with the Soviet Union and the Soviet worldview.

Nevertheless, Soviet efforts to discredit the pre-Soviet values in the eyes of the Soviet population failed. While rural areas of Soviet Central Asia continued to view family and kin affiliations as primary to one's identity<sup>60</sup> urban elites, and more specifically cultural elites developed a complex and ambiguous relationship towards the past and the pre-Soviet generations. Already by the 1940s, the growing children of Soviet modernity began to experience nostalgia for the world of their parents and grandparents that the Soviet system had rejected in the 1920s and 1930s.

In order to escape uniform clichés of Soviet visual production and speak to Central Asian viewers directly, the Transsovieticus cultural producers developed a multilayered visual language to address different audiences. They re-imagined the pre-Soviet world with its traditions and values in popular visual culture (*Tohir and Zuhro*, *The First Morning of Youth*) not only in Central Asia but in Russia as well (*My Heart is in the Mountains*). The representation of the present in their visual narratives was often intertwined with the urban/rural i.e., modern/backward and present/past discourses (*The Sky of our Childhood*). Popular visual culture became a space where cultural producers and their audiences were able to have a dialogue with the past they never had a chance to get to know or say farewell to. In the post-Soviet space with a whole new range of challenges, Transsovieticus cultural producers (*Night Watch*, *Day Watch*) continue to reinforce the importance of family affiliations, which become crucial in the absence of economic and political stability in the post-Soviet environment.

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<sup>60</sup> On the of family and clan system in Central Asia see Olimova, Saodat, Bose, Igor. *Labor Migration in Tajikistan*. Dushanbe: IOM, 2003. 49-50. Print.; Collins, Kathleen. *Clan Politics and Regime in Transition in Central Asia: The Impact of Regime Transformation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 1-23, 217-222. Print.



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