

# Modifications of Women's Representations in 1920s Georgian Soviet Silent Films

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**Orientalisation, Agency, Class**

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## Abstract

In my PhD thesis I investigate women's representation in Georgian Soviet silent feature films of the 1920s decade. More concretely I analyze the passive, subordinate women's representations in the beginning and assess shifts in the image of women by the end of the decade, following Soviet women's emancipator politics. In Soviet context film industry was supposed to carry out official ideological tasks, which Georgian Cinema Section did not always fulfill successfully as in the first part of the decade it employed mostly directors with pre revolutionary cinematic experience. But the situation changed with the appearance of Georgian Lef members in the industry. Using semio-psychoanalysis and discourse analysis as a theoretical framework, I intend to provide an answer what was symbolic meaning of women's images modification throughout the decade in the given ideological set. Studying women's cinematic representations considering the tensed historical and artistic context throws a light on how a woman, as a sign functioned in Georgia's cinema production's narrative in terms of class struggle, in terms of representing "exotic" motherland, and the last but not the least what was a desired-"correct" female type for ideology in the 1920s. Analyzing this aspect provides a crucial link for understanding how traditional female role was modified and a new kind of "femininity" was shaped through political and social changes, and how the very same femininity was carried out throughout Soviet discourse in following decades (which is a question of further researches).

## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### Statement of the problem and the limitations

The silent era of the Soviet cinema has been an important locus of interest for post soviet as well as for Western scholars. But in Western scholarship has been mostly focused on Russian cinema, and Georgian films and filmmakers of this period are only briefly mentioned, regardless the fact that Sakhkinmretsvi-Georgia's State Cinema Production (Gozkinprom Gruzii in Russian) was one of the most abundant producers. Even if much has written on Georgian Soviet silent films in Georgia the existing literature misses however to focus on women's representations. This issue is particularly interesting because one of the foremost goals on Bolshevik power's agenda was "woman's question" that is women's emancipation in 1920s. The film industry was perceived as a powerful means right from the beginning for justification of the revolution, spreading soviet ideology and creating new ideals. The Western literature includes only one book on this subject so far, Judith Mayne's *Kino and the Woman Question*, which examines merely Russian silent films and an edited volume *Red women and Silver Screen* by Lynne Attwood- a collection of articles examining women's cinematic representations from the beginning to the end of Communist era, mostly focusing on Russian cinema, although there is one chapter dedicated to the Kazakh cinema as well. By examining ten Georgian feature silent films, all of which were very popular in 1920s and hence provide an important prism to observe the existing tendencies, I will try to explore how "Woman Question" was reflected in cinematic medium in above mentioned terms.

The most important problem standing in front of me as a researcher is the fact that not all the films selected for the research are presented in their original form, as they premiered on the screen in the 1920s. Eventually there were many cases when censors and bureaucrats were cutting and editing some parts of the film with or without content of the directors, thus some

films were having their premier already in a changed and deformed form and/or content. But these films were reedited again and changed in the 1970s and 1980s when the procedure of restoring old silent films took place. Some of the films were conserved their original intertitles (*The Prison Cell 79*, *The Suram Fortress*, *Giuli* (?)), some films' intertitles were changed (*Eliso*), but what was most have to mention here that Georgian silent films were restored in the 60s, and those in charge removed original intertitles and over voiced them considering it a more “modern” and “technologically advanced way” (*Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze*, *Natela*). This factor obviously limits the analysis, although at the same time opens a way to the future investigation of the “reconstruction of the past” through the cultural artifacts in the later Soviet regime. In order to compensate this default, while analyzing over voiced versions of those films, I have accentuated and focused on their visual side, and also introduced in the analysis those original intertitles quoted in the secondary literature by various film historians, the scenes mentioned in the primary sources (that is in the press reviews). I hope it will balance at least to some considerable extent.

The selected films were digitalized and issued on DVDs in the frame of “Georgian Film collection”- a joint project of *Georgian Film Studio* and journal *Tskheli Shokoladi*, except for Kote Mikaberidze's *My Grandmother* and Ivane Perestiani's *The Suram Fortress*. *My Grandmother* is issued by NTSC All Regions on DVD, and *The Suram Fortress* was taken from Classics of Soviet Cinema's official channel on YouTube.

### Historical Context

Cinema, “the tenth muse”, was introduced in Georgia in 1896 through Lumieres' short films. Vasil Amashukeli and Alexandre Dighmelov (Dighmelashvili) were so hypnotized by “moving pictures,” that they dedicated themselves to the study of the magic lantern and becoming first Georgian cameramen produced their first short documentary films in 1908 and 1910 respectively. Alexandre Dighmelov later became a prominent cameraman in Georgian Soviet cinema industry. It was in 1912 when the first full-length documentary *The traveling of Akaki Tsereteli in Racha-Lechkhumi* was filmed by Vasil Amashukeli, which depicted travel of famous

poet in the region and locals' warm hearted greeting and festival. First full length feature film *Kristine* was started to film in 1916 by theater director Alexandre Tsutsunava and finished in 1917, or 1919, according various sources; already under Menshevik government, which existed in 1918-1921. The Mensheviks did not nationalize the cinema industry. The representative of French Film Company "Filma", P. M. Pirone benefited from this fact and opened a Filma's Baku division's branch in Tbilisi and appointed Vladimir Barski as its head. According Barski's letter sent to the Ministry of Education they intended to film pictures on Georgian themes, which included screen adaptations of some Georgian literary texts and Knut Hamsun's *The King Tamar*. But this plan was not accomplished; instead they produced commercial films which had nothing to do with Georgian thematic. In 1920 Pirone decided to return to Belgium and sold his property to Menshevik Government (according Kora Tsereteli (Tsereteli 1971) and Irakli Makharadze (Makharadze 2014). Although Giorgi Kharatishvili (Kharatishvili, 1975) states that he was arrested in Baku for financial machinations) As Giorgi Kharatishvili notes the Menshevik government was forced due to insistent demands of Georgian public figures (Kharatishvili, 1975). It is dubious to what extent this opinion corresponds to reality, as Kharatishvili's book depicts Menshevik government in a bad light intentionally. Ivane Perestiani's memory, quoted by Akaki Bakradze (1989) contradicts to the government's unwillingness as presented in Kharatishvili's book. But regardless how actual events took place, it's a fact that now the atelier with its staff belonged to the Ministry of Education and was known as Kinoseksia-Cinemasection, before becoming Georgia's State Cinema Production in 1923. According Perestiani's memory the government of independent Georgia decided to generate national cinema. They wanted to create a cinema epopee depicting revolutionary movements in Caucasus, starting from 1905 revolution till the end of Monarchy (Bakradze, 1989). They addressed to Ivane Perestiani for collaboration, which had escaped October revolution and was living in Tbilisi. Perestiani eagerly accepted this offer and started to film *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, which was supposed to be the first film of the epopee. But before filming was finished, Bolsheviks took over Tbilisi in 1921. The filming process did not suffer however from this fact and was finished in the same year, but the grand epopee was never realized. Instead the cinema section oriented towards screen adaptations of literary texts. Georgian Cinema section declared that its goal was "to immortalize motherland's writers," (Makharadze, 2014, p.75). It was through cinema that "peasants are introduced with history, cinema persuades workers in the



preference of work, cinema liberates ignorant from superstitions,” (Bor-i, 1924, p.20) and literary works that depicted historical being of peasants and unmasked hypocrisy eventually came first. Considering that cinema section was receiving financing from gained money, screen adaptations of known works was probably a solid guarantee of box-office winnings. These adaptations were directed by pre revolutionary filmmakers, who had been working in Russia: Ivane Perestiani, Vladimer Barski, Amo Bek-Nazarov. These directors did not have a knowledge and understanding of Georgian ethnography and culture. Often they only had an idea of the literary texts screen adaptation of which they were producing, from a Russian edition of Georgian literature reader (edited by Khakhanashvili) (Amirejibi, 1990).

In fact, as we can judge from the materials concerning three years existence of Menshevik government, collected and reworked by various researchers, the politics of filmmaking were hardly changed under Bolshevik rule: quoting Perestiani “you should not be surprised by this [the Menshevik’s intention to create a film epopee glorifying revolution in Caucasus] then too, it was written on newspapers “Proletarians of the world unite” just like today, Marx portrait was also hanged on every wall. They were dreaming about world proletarian revolution like during subsequent 20s”(Bakradze, 1989 p. 70). Even if the revolutionary epopee was not realized in series, as Menshevik government intended to, a question of producing screen adaptations of literary texts was also actively discussed throughout 10s. Moreover, a letter sent to the Ministry of Education by industrialist Pavle Tumanishvili titled “Program for Scientific-Educational Cinematography in Georgia” (dated 1918 June 29) states that contemporary movies have commercial intentions and has a bad influence on viewers, and proposes to the Ministry to create an “educative” film series, which will illustrate work of new techniques, and teach audience about geography, ethnography, techniques etc. (Kharatishvili, 1975). It is not difficult to recognize in these descriptions the scheme and purpose of agitfilms and culturfilms widely produced and spread in Soviet Union. It is also to keep in mind that one of the ardent supporter of literary texts screen adaptation, Shalva Dadiani, at the same time scenarist of *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, was a director of cinema section under Bolsheviks, and one of the realization very early Georgian Soviet screen adaptations *The Confessor* (filmed in 1922) was in the cinema section’s working plan before sovietisation to be realized in 1921 (Kharatishvili, 1975). Hence

considering these circumstances, we cannot assume that cinema politics line was changed under Bolsheviks.

The literary texts screen adaptations, produced in the beginning and mid twenties in most part were harshly criticized both by Georgian and Russian critics, as they reflected Georgian life-being and characters in deformed, not realistic, and very much orientalized and eroticized ways. In Soviet society cinema had other function, than producing mere entertainment melodramas, at least according to the ideological claims, even if audience was clearly prioritizing western or soviet commercial films over ideological ones, at which Georgia's State Cinema Production often failed to achieve, even if it was on the third place in terms of productivity after Russia and Ukraine (Youngblood, 1992). Beginning from the early 1920s, Kino, the cinema, was the main branch of art, according to Lenin, as it was supposed to legitimize the revolution and the new Soviet system and life. For this reason "to win the hearts and minds" of the wider rural population, the press was unable to fulfill its function due to target group's illiteracy. And here was cinema, a new medium, which could deliver a message regardless cultural and literacy backgrounds (Taylor, 1979). Together with agitfilms, feature films also had an important educative function, which, besides ideological enlightenment- that is delivering correct soviet messages and explaining history and reasons of revolution, included instructions of daily basic behaviors as well according Oksana Bulgakowa (Hochmuth & Bulgakowa, 2008). During 1920s there was a harsh debate between different film makers, theoreticians and critics, what kind of a real Soviet film had to be like. During this acclaimed Golden age of Soviet cinema, even if it was far from being independent from state control (Lenin nationalized cinema industry in 1919) there was a considerable freedom for the filmmakers. It was by the late 1920s cinema production came under very strict control of the Party and state in Georgia. According to contemporary Georgian movie critics, censorship was nearly absent from movies produced in the first part of the decade, a finding that some might see as surprising; most likely the Party was just too busy after the revolution (Gvakharia, 2011). Richard Taylor explains this late appearance of censorship by a claim that for the party the NEP period was a time to accumulate material base for transition to socialism, and with its end, (meaning it was already achieved) now came time for ideological issues (Taylor, 1979), whereas according Marc Ferro the cinema was not just seriously taken by Bolshevik elite, which belonged to bourgeois class and who favored more theater than cinema,

regardless the fact that they contributed to its embodying of revolution themselves. Ferro notes that Bolsheviks realized the power of cinema and understood that the film making process had to be under strict control, only after *Battleship Potemkin's* enormous success in Berlin (Ferro, 1988). It is important to note that the expansion of censorship coincided with Stalin's rise to power.

In order to preserve autonomy of Georgianess, theater directors Alexandre Tsutsunava and Kote Marjanishvili were invited to work in cinema. But as critics claim, even if Kote Marjanishvili revived and recreated a whole new dimension of being in theater, it was not the case in cinema (Makharadze, 2014). It was Marjanishvili who discovered and introduced to the cinema one of the most important Georgian silent era directors, Nikoloz Shengelaia. Nikoloz Shengelaia was a member of a Georgian Futurist group, members of which were against "Fathers' films" –as Georgian leftists were referring to the filmmakers of the older generation (Amirejibi, 1990). Besides Shengelaia another important cinematic innovator, Mikheil Kalatozishvili (Kalatozov) was also member of this group. In the twenties he was working on culturfilms and documentary chronicles, one of them in the collaboration with the first Georgian female director Nutsa Ghoghoberidze<sup>1</sup>.

In general many members of futurist group found themselves in the cinema industry in the late twenties, as directors or screen writers. The new generation bought innovative techniques and methods in Georgian cinema production, but with the establishment of Social Realism as the only aesthetic credo, that did not have any alternative, once young futurists' works did not have anything in common with their ardent youthful claims. As Lela Ochiauri remarks in her article *The Issues of Cinematography in Georgian Futurist Periodic*, (Ochiauri, 2010) there is no study dedicated to understanding the interrelations of cinema and groups of various literary movements, including and especially the interrelation of Futurism with cinema. Although Futurism came a bit late to Georgia as compared to its arrival and spread in Europe, Georgian futurists immediately attributed the most important role to the cinema in the field of arts, and

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<sup>1</sup> Nutsa Ghoghoberidze (1902-1966) was first Georgian female director. She produced a documentary *Theirs* in collaboration of Mikheil Kalatozishvili, and a culturfilm of her own *Buba*. She directed her first feature and last film *Grumpy* (the film is today in Moscow) in the thirties, which premiered after many obstacles in 1934. During the repressions she was exiled for 10 years. When returned, she never tried to return to the cinema.

were writing “cinematic apologetics” when Georgian cinema was at its very beginning. At that time, the Georgian press paid very little attention to cinematography; instead the press offered sensational gossip and news about upcoming films.

Georgian futurists began exploring the depth and potential of the cinema (largely influenced by Russian Futurists and Russian directors as well). They were against usage of the term “silent movie”. They stated that although there are no words in cinema, it does not mean that cinema is passive: “The power of cinema is embodied in its nature of art... Cinema is an expression without words, whereas silence is passivity” (Alkhazishvili, 1924, p.45). According to the Futurists the only way of survival for other forms of art was their cinefication. As Ochiauri remarks such odious attitude towards theater was due to the urge to deny everything inherited from the past and was mostly a form of revolt, as that time young group members confessed later. But whereas neutralization of such radicalism is natural in general and characteristic to various artistic youthful groups more or less, the fate of Georgian futurists was singular, in sense that the vast majority of them were absorbed and absorbed themselves the Soviet conjuncture established from the 1930s (Ochiauri 2000). According Giorgi Gvakharia, the only avant-gardist in cinema from Georgian group, who remained avant-gardist and always faithful to his own aesthetics throughout his career, was Mikheil Kalatozov (Gvakharia, 2014). Otherwise in the works of other directors the innovative approaches vanished, film frames became static. The overwhelming and sometimes vulgar erotization of female body present in the beginning and mid 20s disappeared, but on the other hand this it caused certain Puritanism and “sterility” in depicting sensual scenes and left a certain “hole” in Georgian cinematographic tradition. The absence of this tradition is still present in contemporary Georgian films.

### Literature Review

There is a big amount of scholarship about Georgian silent cinema, written both during Soviet and post-Soviet period. This literature includes volumes, monographs, articles in edited volumes and journals etc. Thematically they vary from historical monographs that depict-how the cinema industry was founded and developed, what films were produced, how these films served to represent communist ideological messages and provide biographies of key directors and actors to

the analyzes of the important films and influences of different avant-garde movements. They vary in depth also: some of these literatures are very factual, they do not provide any deep analysis of the film content and only in some rare cases is there any indication of avant-garde influences on movies (and even that is very superficial), and some are remarkable monographs which examine the context of films production and their content in more detail, together with its aesthetics. There are various books combining important and interesting articles which are mostly concerned with the influences of different avant-garde movements in particular Georgian films of the 1920s.

In general this literature (both soviet and post-soviet) is very rich with historical accounts and offer interesting information and facts. Nevertheless, these are mostly Soviet period literatures that focus on historical aspect in terms of trend, and most importantly, one should keep in mind that these books are tendentious,( and older the Soviet period books are, higher is the quality of tendentiousness) and some facts concerning pre Bolshevik cinema are either omitted from the narrative, or deformed. For example Karlo Gogodze's monograph issued in 1950 completely ignores the establishment of Cinema Section under Menshevik government, stating that although Pirone sold them his atelier before returning to his country and the "cultural statesmen" (quotation marks are original) never bothered to establish cinematography; whereas a monography of Giorgi Kharatishvili, published in 1975 although states the fact of Cinema Section's establishment, but describes it as their constrained step and adds it solely to the insistence of public figures, as already mentioned above. Nevertheless he also mentions the elaborated work plan approved on December 20, 1920 (it is followed by stating how Mensheviks never realize anything, and they only intend to lie masses; here is to note that Bolsheviks invaded Tbilisi just three months later in February 1921). Kora Tsereteli's monograph, issued in 1971 is quite neutral and not tendentious: it states that the establishment of National Cinema Production was pompously celebrated, but they had trouble in producing feature films and filmed only several chronicles. All the three monographs are silent about the fact that filming of the first Georgian soviet film, *Arsena Jorjiashvili* had already started under their rule and with their direction. The post soviet literature with historical aspect tries to correct the deformed soviet narrative, uncovering and exploring shadowed and neglected facts and to create a whole picture.

It is with the work of Natia Amirejibi, in late Soviet period that begins to examine and analyze films in depth, and considers avant-garde movements' influences. In the scope of the post soviet literature, it is mostly avant-garde movements' influences that are situated (again, if we are talking in terms of general trend). But however in these analyses films are discussed in terms of specific director's work progresses, or discuss a particular aspect, but again in terms of a specific director's work or discuss the avant-garde movements influence on cinematic trends in Soviet context. There is a lack of the works analyzing specific social issues in specific social context; they are always limited with the work of a certain filmmaker; and in case of analysis of a specific film, unless it is concerned with aesthetic question (montage, or presence of avant-garde movement) in general. Even if in the films of this period women's representation is crucial and has various symbolic functions, it is often neglected. The only exception is Oliko Jghenti's *National and Social Issues in Georgian Cinema in 10s, 20s*, focusing on, as title tells it on national and social aspects, but however, I find most of her point of views somewhat tendentious and sometimes poorly argued (I will focus on and discuss them during analysis). Below I will try to provide key monographs and articles that are most relevant to my thesis field. I will present them in chronological order.

- Karlo Gogodze's *Researches from the History of Georgian Cinematography* is a first body of work, published in 1950, (Tbilisi: Khelovneba) which tries (as the author states himself in the introduction) to provide a history of Georgian cinematography. The work overviews the pre soviatisation period (very tendentiously), and discusses development of Georgian cinema in the period of its "conception and development (1921-1931), the period of its "rise" (1932-1941) during "Great Patriotic War" (1941-1945) and "in the forth Stalianian 5 years" (1945-1950) (the period naming are original). As I already remarked the book is quite tendentious, but it is very interesting in terms of historical curiosity.
- Karlo Gogodze's *40 years of Georgian Soviet Cinematography*, published in 1961 provides the same kind of data as the previous work, only it is more shortened and updated with the new films produced in the 50s decade. Gogidze provides a historical and chronological list of Georgian Soviet films, and emphasizes the righteousness of communist ideological representation in these movies.

- Kora Tsereteli's *Georgian Soviet Cinema*, published in 1971, (Tbilisi: Khelovneba) describes how the Georgian Film Section was formed, how it elaborated and approved the plan of screen adaptation of Georgian classical literature with the aim to popularize it. The work provides with the list of Georgian movies and briefly mentions Russian directors' influences on Georgian cinema.
- Olga Tabukashvili's *Nikoloz Shengelaia*, published in 1974 (Tbilisi: Khelovneba) is a monography focusing on life and work of the filmmaker.
- Giorgi Kharatishvili's *Birth of Georgian Cinema* published in 1975 represents a historical account of Georgian cinema's development before sovietization and Georgian actors' career in Russian cinema.
- Irine Ratiani's *Georgian Silent Cinema* published a year later, (Tbilisi: Khelovneba) in 1976, is very much similar to the previous works mentioned: it also describes how the Georgian Film Section was formed officially on 11 April of 1921 under the Commissariat of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Its first contributors were artists who came from the fields of literature, fine arts and theater and also newly arrived directors from Russia. This work enumerates the list of the first Georgian movies, which, in the beginning, were mostly screen adaptations of mainly Georgian and sometimes foreign writers' novels and short stories and exposes many interesting details. In terms of analysis, its main emphasis is the extent to which and how rigorously and appropriately communist ideology was represented.
- Giorgi Dolidze *Georgian Cinema: Yesterday and Today: Cinematographic Studies* is yet another comparably recent work published in 1985. What it adds to the works listed above is the role and contribution of Lunacharskii, the first Soviet Commissar of Education, in the development of Georgian cinema and writer Shalva Dadiani's role who was also a prominent scenarist in the early stages of Georgian Cinema. The work also recounts the content of selected Georgian films and directors' lives. Although it is full of interesting facts, the work lacks deep analysis.

- Natia Amirejibi's article *Expressionism in Cinema*, which was published in the journal *Kino* in 1985 (1, pp. 65-81) is an important one to mention, because Amirejibi not only addresses expressionism's influence, but discusses a Georgian silent film, *My Grandmother*, shot in 1929, which was banned from screens for 40 years. Amirejibi refers to this film as expressionist cinema.
- *Cinema, Theater* a collection of Georgian art critic and publicist, Akaki Bakradze's letters and memoirs offer very interesting insights of different matters and films, published and written in different times, collected and published in 1989. These memories include first person narration of Ivane Perestiani, Mikheil Chiaureli and other. The collection includes Bakradze's critical letter on Nikoloz Shengelaia's *Eliso*, titled as "Two "Elisos", where he argues that Shengelaia's film cannot be considered as its literary source's screen adaptation and represents an independent text. According Bakradze, the altered ending of Shengelaia's *Eliso*, where Vazhia survives, represents the Chechen's tragedy isolated, contrary to the literary source, where he is killed with Eliso and her father, signifying that the sword against Chechens will also kill a Georgian, thus emphasizing the unity of Caucasian people.
- Natia Amirejibi's *Screen of Times*, published in 1990, which discusses Georgian silent films and the voiced films in the beginning of 1930s. This monograph includes very detailed and deep analysis of such important films as Nikoloz Shengelaia's *Eliso* and *26 Commissaries*, Mikheil Kalatozishvili's *Salt to Svanetia* (1930), Kote Mikaberidze's *My Grandmother* (1929), Aleksandre Tsutsunava's *Who is to blame?*, Mikheil Chiaureli's *Khabarda* and others. The monograph includes analysis of some films on which I focus in my dissertation: *Eliso* and *My Grandmother* and *Khanuma*. Amirejibi accentuates social inequality in *Khanuma*, artistic functionality of details and composition in *Giuli*, expression of national energy in *Eliso* and scenario's validity compare to its original source, formal aspects of *Saba*, and criticism of bureaucracy and influence of expressionism in *My Grandmother*. Other films, *The Suram Fortress* and *Arsena Jorjashvil*, are also mentioned, but very briefly.



- Natia Amirejib's another monography; *From Cinematography to Cinematic Art*, published in 1990, includes two parts. First part discusses Cinematography's invention, its further development and discuss works of its great contributors: Georges Melies, David Warrick Griffith, Sergei Eisenstein, Charlie Chaplin, Neorealism in Italy and Expressionism cinemas, and Federico Felliini, d the second part is dedicated to the birth of Georgian film and its development in 20s, Georgian cinema's revival in the 50s and some important questions in the films of the following decades.
- An edited volume *Georgian Cinematographers*, published in 2007 is a collection of articles on different film directors, also includes analyzes of their important films by various researchers. The monograph together with more contemporary filmmakers, includes articles on Alexandre Tsutsunava (by Oliko Jghenti, who focuses national motives in his works) Nikoloz Shengelaia (by Maia Levaidze, focusing on his use of montage forms in the films) and Mikheil Chiaureli (by Eter Okujava focusing on the complex aspects of the director's life and work).
- Oliko Jgenti's book *National and Social Issues in Georgian Cinema in 1910s and 1920s* published in 2007, appears to be the only work, that pays attention to women's roles. As the title suggests, the book mainly focuses on the expression of nationalist sentiments and issues of social equality/inequality as depicted in the films of that period. This author explicitly discusses and interprets the symbolic role that women characters play in following films: *Kristine*, (1918) *Elisso* (1928), *Ghiuli* (1927), *The Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze*. (1925)
- The recently published volume (Tbilisi: 2012) *Art Processes- 1900-1930* includes various articles on the modern movement across different art fields: theater, painting, cinematography and architecture. The section on cinema contains several articles relevant to the topic of my research: Lika Kalandrishvili's "Frozen Time'– the Result of Overall Hypertext", "Soviet Myth and Soviet Film History" by Lela Ochiauri and Teo Khatiashvili's "Influences of Modern Movements in Georgian Films of 20's". Below, I will try to provide a short description of main arguments made in these articles.

- Lika Kalandrishvili “ ‘Frozen Time’– the Result of Overall Hypertext”- In this article the author discusses the artistic climate of early 1920s Tbilisi, Futurism, Surrealism, and Dada’s influences on Georgian artists. The main focus is Futurism, because these were members of futurist literary groups who came later to cinematography as directors. She notes that Georgian filmmakers not only contradicted everything “old” and “outdated” (as it was in Futurist spirit) but they also maintained critical attitudes to the attainments of the avant-garde, whose ideas they shared. She argues that this is the reason why any radical appearance of the avant-garde was generally neutralized and softened in Georgian films. For example in Georgian films one cannot find the presence of a nonexistent, inexplicable fantastic phenomenon, something mysterious that has a crucial importance for expressionist or surrealist art. The stylization of these movements was adapted for realism and combined with understandable functional narration. The author also notes that in contrast with Western avant-garde art, where women were generally represented erotically while depicting progress and street industry, (she mentions Umberto Boccioni’s *The Street Enters the House* as an example) it is not the case in Georgia: in Georgian films the street is deprived of eroticization<sup>2</sup>.
- Maya Levanidze “German Expressionism, The Symphony of Horror and Kote Mikaberidze’s *My Grandmother*”- is another important article in this volume. The author discusses German Expressionism, its essence and its influence on cinema generally. She also writes about the context in which different avant-garde movements developed and influenced Georgia. She argues against Natia Amirejibi’s claim that *My Grandmother* is an example of expressionist cinema and states that it is rather a product of futurism.
- Lela Ochiauri “Soviet Mythology and Soviet Film History”-In this article the author provides an overview of Soviet film making: how artists were obliged to change the language of expression and establish new ideals

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<sup>2</sup> I find this argument somewhat incomplete: the author makes parallels between (an Italian) painting and (Georgian) cinema.

while denying the old, how artists participated in creating a mythology of the Soviet republic, (“in other words social realism” ); and how at a later point, artists used on hieroglyphic language in order to express what they had in mind and still survive. She does not mention any concrete directors or films.

- Teo Khatiashvili, “Influences of Modernist Movements in 20s Georgian Films”– In this article the author discusses how different modernist movements were entering Georgia and through which ways: they came either via the artists who were living and studying that time either in Germany and in France and then returned to Tbilisi, -(that is to say via their reflection and experience), or through Russia. The author claims that modernism entered Georgia in a fragmented, unsystematic way, but it is exactly due to this “unsystematic character” –that all those various “isms” entered in Georgia not as a copy, but in an adaptive, eclectic way, that combined with national cultural characteristics. She discusses the influence of western ‘isms’ on Georgian cinema, as well as the even more influential Russian montage film, especially those of Eisenstein.
- Another recent publication is *The 12 best Georgian films of all time*, published in 2012. It is a collection of articles written on these twelve best films selected by film critics. This publication is significant to my project in so far as it includes three movies from 1920s: *Elisso* by Nikoloz Shengelaia (1928), *Salt for Svanetia* by Mikheil Kalatozishvili (1930) and *My Grandmother* by Kote Mikaberidze (1929). In discussing these movies, the film critics in this collection cover a wide swath of topics: Russia’s colonizing politics, replacement of individual tragedy with the tragedy of the masses, the film’s rhythm and montage technique (in the case of *Elisso* and *Salt for Svanetia*), the influence of German expressionism, the historical context of the Soviet bureaucracy, the film’s history (in the case of *My Grandmother*), but none of the articles even slightly mentions the gender aspect and women’s representation, even though gender codes are central to these three films.

- Irakli Makharadze's *History of Georgian Silent Film*, is a factually rich monograph, which narrates the history of the establishment of cinema in Georgia, silent actors and directors, providing important biographical facts.
- *Nikoloz Shengelaia, 1901-1943*, edited by Marina Kereselidze, is a volume that explores the director's life, with a collection of memories of different people, letters, the extracts of protocol records of soviet cinematographer's sessions, his poems and filmography, most of which were unable for wider access.

In terms of Western scholarship, there are numerous works on Soviet Cinema, but this literature (except for Denise J. Youngblood's review of Kote Mikaberidze's *My Grandmother* published in, *The Moving Image*, Spring 2010, vol.10, #1, and Beach Gray's paper *Nikoloz Shengelaia' Eliso and Construction of Caucasus past*, presented at St. Antonio ASEES 2014 conference, mainly concerns Russian Soviet Cinema. This literature is indeed very helpful and relevant, in the sense that Russian cinema and directors had an important influence on Georgian cinema and directors. Below I will provide the list of the literature that I have used for my research in chronological order:

- Jay Leyda-, *Kino: a History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, -first published in 1960, represents a brilliant account of Russian and Soviet film developing, providing with many historical facts, memories and stories connected to communist party officials. Although it is mainly focused on Russian cinema, in this book there are interesting facts about the Georgian film section and Georgian directors and their movies as well (e.g. Jay Leyda discusses the works of Nikoloz Shengelia [*Elisso, 26 Commissars,*] and Mikheil Kalatozishvili/Kalatozov [*Salt for Svanetia, Nail in the Boot*]).
- John David Rimberg *The Motion Picture in the Soviet Union: 1918-1952, A Sociological Analysis*, published in 1973 is one of the dissertation on films, which overviews the political context of the mentioned period and explores the cinema's multiple functions in Soviet society.
- Richard Taylor's *Film Propaganda: Soviet Union and Nazi Germany* published in 1979 explores how cinema's mass propagandist potential was used by each government for their political goals.

- Richard Taylor's another monography *The Politics of Soviet Cinema 1917-1929* published the same year, explores in detail the Bolshevik's politics and measures taken regarding filmmaking process in the mentioned period.
- *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era 1918-1935* by Denise J. Youngblood (first published in 1985) provides a deep insight of the political and artistic tensions that was taking place throughout the period. It explores dynamics of debates in the creation of film industry and cinema criticism responses and the tasks that Soviet cinema was envisioning and trying to fulfill in the existing social, economic and educational contexts.
- *Cinema and History* by Marc Ferro published in 1988 offers a contemporary approach to the feature films analysis. He argues that a film is an "agent and source" of the history, and illustrates this by broad analysis of films produced in different countries, and different time periods. He argues that films provide certain "lapses" which tells the audience more than the filmmaker might have intended at all. Among other films he also analyzes Lev Kuleshov's *By the Law*, and Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*.
- *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* –edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (Rutledge, 1994, first published in 1988). This volume represents a collection of articles and essays by different Soviet artists', writers', directors' and politicians' articles and essays about cinema in the designated period, including Vladimir Mayakovsky, Lev Kuleshov, Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, Vladimir Lenin, Lev Trotsky, Anatoly Lunacharsky and others.
- *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film*, - (1989) by Judith Mayne analyzes different aspects of women's representation and portrayal in the following significant Russian Soviet silent films: *Strike* (directed by Sergei Eisenstein in 1925), *Mother* ( directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin in 1926), *Bed and Sofa* (directed by Abram Room in 1927), *Fragment of an Empire* (directed by Fridkrikh Elmer in 1930) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (directed by Dziga Vertov in 1929). The author's approach, as she remarks in the in the introduction of the book, is not concerned with the pressures in the interrelation between art

and politics of the period, but rather with the gender and sexual politics; that is exploring women's place and position in the frame of socialist culture.

- Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: From Revolution to the Death of Stalin* – In this work, first published in 1992, the author emphasizes accentuates the view of the cinema as a powerful propaganda medium to speak to and educate masses. As Kenez states in the beginning of the book, the goal of this work is not only to examine the propaganda role of films, but also to contribute to our understanding of the interaction of culture and politics. The book discusses various directors who have played a crucial role in the development of Russian and Soviet cinema. It also pays attention how Bolsheviks were bringing these films to masses, and explores the workings of the censorship apparatus in this particular historical context.
- *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in 1920s* another publication by Denise J. Youngblood (1992) which examines the Soviet taste in cinema from below: rather than examining the official “taste”, that is the films which were ideologically “right” and “great” the book focuses on commercial directors, box-office hit films and audience's responses, showing that great soviet “right” films (*Battleship Potemkin* and Eisenstein's other or Vertov's films) did not have much success and popularity among masses compare to commercial Soviet and Western films.
- *Inside Soviet Film Satire: Laughter with a Lash* edited by Andrew Horton (1993) is a collection of articles written by different scholars across the world which discuss the soviet satire and comedy in Soviet Union in 1920s NEP period, in 1930s and during Glasnost period.
- Jamie Miller's *Soviet Cinema: Politics and Persuasion under Stalin* (published in 2010) examines the processes of censorship, thematic planning and purges, in the film industry as well as state film education and training after the Stalin's rise to the power and the beginning of Great Patriotic War.

## The Aim of the Project

The literature that I have researched so far, looks at the films from following perspectives: authors either focus on the cinema as a means of propaganda and manipulation; emphasize the historical-chronological context of film production, and (mostly in articles) focus on the influences and reflections of the different modernist movements in films. It is true that while discussing films' contents, authors also mention women heroines, but only very superficially, (like for example stating that Eliso's character is a strong woman). The aim of my project is to focus on women's representation, and explore what are their symbolic functions in the given context. More concretely what I intend to do in my analysis, is to combine the historical-political context with the semiotic meanings that these films re/produce using the genealogical approach, with women's representation in the spotlight. I hope to contribute with this thesis to inspection of the gender roles that were promoted, and the narrative context in which they were displayed and situated there, and exploring what was female body's symbolic function in different terms?

The twenties decade was characterized by women's emancipator discourse, which was the most ardent comparing to any other decade of Soviet Union's existence. Here I cannot help not to mention that a feminist movement existed in Georgia before sovietisation, the mere fact, that Menshevik government included three women deputies, was the consequence of feminist struggle. But then the official history "erased" this fact and attributed women's emancipation solely to Soviet ideology. The journals and magazines were calling women to become more involved and active into the building socialist state, and Lenin's quote "every cook has to learn how to govern the state" was one of the most frequently cited in the press. The Party was taking measures to accelerate and support emancipation, although this process was not unanimous and smooth, and many goals of these reforms and decrees (for example concerning women's labor and child's rearing) failed to function and to have a desired positive effect ( more vastly on this issue please see Wendy Z. Goldman' S *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* and *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* also *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* by

Elizabeth A. Wood). My interest is also to analyze the extent to which Georgian Soviet silent films were reproducing a traditional understanding of gender roles, and to examine to what degree, if any, were gender roles modified according to the new social and political ideals? Moreover to what extent were women's images emancipated during the decade and what was the functional meaning of this emancipation in the given context?

The Soviet ideology was constructing a new way of life style, the New Soviet man and the New Soviet woman, creating meanwhile a homogenous soviet "nation" out of different and various republics. Being a citizen of Proletarian State of Peasants and Workers was a new identity to be embraced by different culturally varied nations. It was notion of class that altered the notion of nation, thus the mechanism of creating a sense of unity among vast population. Susan Hayward outlines that "the nation pretends to be gender-neutral (in that it purports to dissolve difference)" (Hayward, 2000 p.97). The Proletarian State of Peasants and Workers functioned the same way: it claimed that whatever it was done was done equally for everyone: for working men and working women alike. And just as Hayward remarks, arguing that regardless this gender-neutrality (blindness) "yet the woman's body is closely aligned/identified with nationalist discourses" outlining the symbolic equation organized by it where violated woman stands for violated motherland, and rape of a woman for the invasion by the enemy and rape of motherland (Hayward, 2000 p.98), in the state united by class mark, a peasant/worker woman's body attributed the same meaning, where it was invaded/raped not by national, but rather a class enemy, that is by bourgeoisie/aristocracy. Considering the fact that most of the films produced in the 1920s were screen adaptations of Georgian writers' literary texts, filmed through the colonial gaze of mostly non Georgian filmmakers, my aim is also to examine how these films redefined Georgianness as nationality, and how and to which extent the ideas on femininity and new ideals of "New Soviet Woman" were inscribed in the period's films, and if they were, then how Georgian nationality, was combined with these new ideals.

Hence, to summarize, with this research I aim to provide answers to following questions:



- To what extent Georgian soviet silent films were reproducing a traditional understanding of gender roles, and to examine to what degree, if any, were gender roles modified according to the new social and political ideals?
- To what extent were women’s images emancipated during the decade and what was the functional meaning of this emancipation in the given context?
- How these films redefined Georgianness as nationality, and how and to which extent the ideas on femininity and new ideals of “New Soviet Woman” were inscribed in the period’s films, and if they were, then how Georgian nationality, was combined with these new ideals?

### Methodological Framework

The methodology that I am going to use to conduct the above described analysis will be a combination of discourse analysis and psychoanalysis and semiotics. Whereas the discourse analysis is a vast term, combining various methods, I will explain here what I mean, and what sources I will exactly use and how in my analysis.

First of all by “discourse analysis” I mean considering the current official discourse -that is the contemporary articles and reviews about selected films, and/or what was expected to be done by Georgia’s State Cinema Production and how it was fulfilling the requirement of the critics, who were standing on the side of the Party’s ideology. It is impossible not to refer to the political ideology and the Party’s influence while analyzing a work of the period, as at that time the interrelation of politics and arts and their dependence on each other was explicitly stated and required both by Party officials and sometimes by artists themselves. The second what I mean in the discourse analysis is introduction of the films’ literary sources when needed. Many films produced in this period were screen adaptations of literary texts, but the scenarios (for example in the case of *Eliso*, where the plot was so changed that this alteration even stimulated later a consideration in Georgian criticism about “two Elisos”) (Bakhradze, 1989) do not always

follow the original source text. Thus I will also have to engage in the literary analysis of these texts, and observe what aspects of the stories were accentuated or on the other hand, eliminated from the scenarios. This is also a key for understanding the resultant visual text. And how the environment/atmosphere depicted in the literary sources was transmitted on the screen. Thirdly, as the authors discussed in the literature review section have stated, the influence of Russian filmmakers on Georgian ones was immense. Therefore in some cases I will have to include Russian films in the analysis as well, particularly taking into the consideration that these movies were made in the similar political climate.

In order to complete my project aim, I will combine the discourse analysis with a “second semiology” (Stam, 2000), that is a semiology which shifted from linguistics to psychoanalysis. This semio-psychoanalysis emerged in the beginning of 1970s when psychoanalytical concepts such as scopophilia, voyeurism (pleasure in looking) fetishism, and particularly Lacanian notions of mirror stage, imaginary and symbolic order entered in the semioticians’ theoretical discussions. Mirror stage designates a period in infant’s development, when the baby starts conceiving its own reflection in mirror, and conceives this reflection as more full, strong self contrary to the helpless and fragmented self experience of its own body. Consequently the image of an ideal ego starts shaping. Imaginary corresponds to mirror stage, and as this bond implies it is primarily narcissistic and functions as a space for subject’s fantasies and desires. The symbolic designates subject’s entry into language, and its acceptance of norms and laws dictated by the society- Law of the Symbolic Father. Lacan’s theory combined psychoanalysis with the philosophical tradition and explored subject from various aspects: psychological, philosophical, linguistic and logical. Key concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis among others are ‘other’ and ‘desire’. Desire, contrary to Freudian drive, which is biological, is a “phantasmatic movement toward an obscure ‘object’ exercising spiritual or sexual attraction” (Stam, 2000 p.160). The desire is always unsatisfied, since it is directed not towards an achievable object but towards “the desire of the other”. ‘Other’ is a symbolic place where the subject was constituted in relation to his or her desire. The desire emerges from the lack, object of which “objet petit a”, functions as its apparent cause, as an illusion of symbolically castrated subject’s fulfillment. Subject thinks “objet petit a”

can satisfy his/her desire caused by lack, but nevertheless the “objet petit a” is unable to fulfill it. The shift from linguistics towards psychoanalysis was also conditioned by the fact that Lacan connected these two disciplines, by stating that unconscious is structured like language; he reads Freud’s biologicistic tale of castration and Oedipus complex (where a child desires mother, but represses this desire because of threat of castration from biological father) linguistically: here biological father is substituted by Symbolic Father, who does not only forbids the actual desire of incest, but is an embodiment of social norms, rules and taboos, which are crucial for society’s functionality as society.

Psychoanalytic theorists link mirror stage to the spectator’s experience of watching films: in the narrative the spectator picks out a character, corresponding to his/her ideal ego image and identifies with him/her, and at the same time the spectator enjoys process of peeping, spying on others that activates scopophilic and voyeuristic drives. Feminist film theorists entered into the discussion making focus on the gendered characteristics of the vision and gaze offered by the narrative cinema. Laura Mulvey, in her classical essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* showed on the example of Strenberg’s and Hitchcock’s films that narrative cinema structures a ‘male gaze’ in the viewer: the camera wholly attribute’s male character’s vision, and follows narrative development from his perspective: the spectator sees what the male character sees and a passive, fetishized female is in the scope of this view (Mulvey, 1975/2009). E. Ann Kaplan remarks that Mulvey does not distinguish here ‘look’ from ‘gaze’, which as she argues connotes different processes. For Kaplan the gaze is active: “the subject bearing the gaze is not interested in the object per se, but consumed with his own anxieties, which are inevitably intermixed with desire,” which “...connotes an active subject versus a passive object” (Kaplan, 1997, p. xvii). ‘Look’ on the contrary signifies a process, a relation for her, in my understanding a reciprocal act, whereas gaze is a “one way subjective vision” (Kaplan, 1997, p. xvii). I completely share Kaplan’s observation and later in the analysis I will use these concepts following Kaplan: ‘gaze’ for one way subjective, and ‘look’ for interactive, responsive looking relation. To gaze and to look, is equivalent of having power according Michel Foucault (cited in Kaplan, 1997). Consequently one cannot have an agency (that is ability of taking one’s own decisions and fulfil them) without possessing power/gaze. Interestingly E. Ann Kaplan detects that when a woman becomes

a beholder of the gaze, “she nearly always loses her traditionally feminine characteristics in so doing, not her attractiveness but rather of kindness, humaneness, motherliness. She is now often cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose position she has usurped” (Kaplan, 2000, p.129). Some feminist film theorists have argued that the classical Hollywood filmic narratives functions very similarly to Claude Levi-Strauss kinship structures, where women function as exchange signs among male members of the communities through which male members establish relationships (kinship) with each other. In filmic narratives too, women function as sign, through which men’s relationship with each other is articulated (Cook & Johnston, 1990). And frequently this sign is empty: “The male protagonist’s castration fears, his search for self-knowledge all converge on woman” it is in her that he finally faced with the recognition of his “lack”. Woman is therefore the locus of emptiness: she is a sign which is defined negatively: something that is missing which must be located so that the narcissistic aim of the male protagonist can be achieved” (Cook, Johnston, 1974/1990, p. 20). Elizabeth Cowie argues that women function as exchange signs not only among male characters within the narrative, but between filmic system and the spectator, and this sign, constituted in the image of woman, functions not only within film, but in relationship to other signifying systems and discourses shared by the spectator (Cowie, 1978/2000).

I will explore and discuss women’s representation in Georgian Soviet silent cinema, as formulated in the aim of the research section above. As I already mentioned above my aim is to investigate gender representations and analyze how these representations modified and changed throughout the decade by focusing what were the signs women represented in the current discursive socio-political context. I will use the feminist semio-psychoanalysis to explore the following: 1. how did women characters function in the filmic system as signs and what were they signifying? 2. To what extent did women characters have an opportunity to acquire *objet petit a* of their desire? 3. When and in what circumstances did women characters manage to gain gaze (power) and to what cost? 4. In case when women protagonists have gaze/agency/power, for which purposes are they using it?

## Outline of Chapters/Thesis Plan

As I mentioned above my aim is to use psychoanalytical/semiotic methodology to explore the meaning of the films to be discussed as cultural signs, and- to situate these meanings in the discursive socio-political context. My interest is to define how women's representations were functioning in the contexts which were crucially important and domineering the production's themes: which are contexts of class, "east", revolutionary activities (in the cinematic productions of various republics in Soviet Union, the 1905 revolution theme was one of the most frequently recurring topic), and what kind of image of a New Soviet Woman was offered officially through screen. In the final chapter I will look at gender representations in Kote Mikaberidze's banned film, which describes modern bourgeois femininity and is so striking and extraordinary, that it does not fit in any of the major lines. The outline of thesis is as follows:

- Class and female body's symbolic meaning ( *Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze* (1925) directed by Ivane Perestiani, *Bela* (1927) directed by Vladimir Barski, *Khanuma* (1926) directed by Alexandre Tsutsunava)
- Representing East: orientalism, story's sadism and agents of narration (*The Suram Fortress* (1922) directed by Ivane Perestiani, *Natela* (1926) directed by Amo Bek-Nazarov, *Giuli* (1927) directed by Nikoloz Shengelaia and Lev Push, *Eliso* (1928) directed by Nikoloz Shengelaia)
- Mother figure's emancipation in the revolutionary Set (*Arsena Jorjashvili* (1921) directed by Ivane Perestiani, *Prison Cell 79* (1929) directed by Zakaria Berishvili)
- Meet the New Soviet Woman: incompatibility of femininity and Agency in Mikheil Chiaureli's *Saba* (1929)
- Invisible queerness of Georgian silent cinema: monstrous femininity in Kote Mikaberidze's *My Grandmother* (1929)
- Conclusion

## Chapter II

### **Class and Female Bodies' Symbolic Meaning: *The Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze (1925), Bela (1927), Khanuma (1926)***

As I remarked in the introduction in the Proletarian State of Peasants and Workers the category of the nation was substituted by the category of class, the sense of unity of among the vast and various populations of the Soviet Union was created by the sense of belonging not to the same nation, but to the same class. Therefore in my analysis at the first place I will focus on how women's representations were shaped in Georgian soviet silent films in terms of class aspect. In order to illustrate it I chose following films for the analysis: Ivane Perestiani's *Tariel Mklavadze*, which drastically illustrates the relationship between high and low classes, and Alexandre Tsutsunava's *Khanuma*, where the representations of aristocracy is as if presented more "softly." In between I will also include Vladimer Barski's *Bela*. Situated in Caucasus Mountains, this latter is a good example of how a category of nation can be substituted by the category of class and vice versa. I will discuss orientalisation in the following chapter, but I decided to focus on *Bela* here, because the film diegesis introduces high class woman, absent in its literary source, only with the aim to connote class characteristics, as I will argue later.

#### **Overview of the context**

Mid twenties Georgian cinema production was characterized by a distinct bias in representations, regarding both class and gender. Contemporary critics considered that Georgian films depiction of characters in the exaggerated and ultimately contrasting way was not quite useful for the audiences; arguing it was not an appropriate way to present and articulate the ideology through the cinematic narration. This fact was often mentioned by contemporary (competent or not) reviewers and critics. For example in "Kinomretsvelobis amotsanebi chvenshi" [Challenges of

our cinema production] published in *Komunisti* [The Communist] 1925 December 6, the author of the article<sup>3</sup> (righteously) claims that Georgian cinema production “sometimes makes big mistakes”. It argued that most of Georgian films were characterized by two moments: “1. the ignorance of our mode of lives, history and ethnography, and 2. Extreme biased propaganda nature that is proposed in such a way, that it cannot become acceptable for wide masses” (“Kinomretsvelobis amotsanebi chvenshi”, 1925, p. 6) Even more interesting point comes after this: the author claims that “we observe cinema production in various countries, and we have to say that there is not so much frightening, boxing and turmoil, rape and forced sex, as in Georgian films” (“Kinomretsvelobis amotsanebi chvenshi”, 1925, p.6). According the article this cannot be justified by the argument that “we do not hide the dark sides of bourgeoisie and aristocracy and we are trying to stay conscious about it. Bourgeoisie is doing its business elegantly and artistically. You cannot find apology of Bourgeoisie in any film of any country, but they create such a psychology in the audience, that is useful for bourgeois world. In this case we still have to learn a lot from bourgeoisie.” (“Kinomretsvelobis amotsanebi chvenshi,”1925, p.6).

The author of the article definitely had a valid point complaining about explicit depiction of overwhelming violence and a surfeit of sex in Georgian films of the period. The meanings of this depiction was going further obviously in terms of symbolic meanings that were attributed to human bodies that function as the signifiers of certain codes and values of social classes and gender identities (although the author was only concerned about class issue): whereas male figures functioned as both signifiers (of their class characteristics) and active agents, women’s role was only limited to be a mere signifier. I already noted above that in the Proletarian State of Peasants and Workers the category of the nation was substituted by the category of class, the sense of unity of among the vast and various populations of the Soviet Union was created by the sense of belonging not to the same nation, but to the same class. The nation-state paradigm of aligning with woman’s body and making it a scope of nationalist discourses (Hayward, 2000), remained the same. If in the nationalist symbolic equations violated woman usually stand for violated motherland and rape of a woman for the invasion by the enemy and rape of motherland (Hayward, 2000); in the state united by class mark, a peasant/worker woman’s body attributed the same meaning, where it was invaded/raped not by national, but rather a class enemy, that is

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<sup>3</sup> The article is signed with initials, that are not readable due to the document’s condition

by bourgeoisie/aristocracy. Moreover it is a female body that becomes the site of ideological and moral fights, thus the bearer of class virtues mark: if she is a representative of “low” class she is pure and an object of conflict between “high” and “low” class males; and if she is a representative of “high” class, she only serves to signify the defect of her class (manifested through her lust); whereas men of both social strata are active agents (more or less) of the story: they operate- by battling and/or bargaining with each other, although low class male characters always lose and their desires is not fulfilled in the end.

I will try to illustrate this argument by analyzing three silent films produced by Georgian Cinema Production in mid twenties: *The Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze*- directed by Ivane Perestiani in 1925, *Bela* directed by Vladimir Barski in 1927 and *Khanuma*, directed by Alexandre Tsutsunava in 1926.

### ***Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze***

*Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze*, is a screen adaptation of Egnate Ninoshvili’s short story, titled *A Knight of Our Country*, invoking obvious allusions with Mikhail Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time* through explicit title quotation. Egnate Ninoshvili was a late 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian writer, from newly “liberated” peasantry. During the short life (that was ended by tuberculosis when he was 35) he was actively involved in revolutionary activities. Later he was transformed into the symbol of revolutionary Georgia. According certain scholars he was idealized by Social Democrats because his work war suitable for revolutionary interests (Jghenti, 2007). It goes without saying that his status as the greatest Georgian writer was preserved during Bolshevik regime. Whereas Ninoshvili’s writings’ artistic value as such, might be a question of dispute and further examination, at the same time it is undeniable that he was writing about very important social issues connected with class oppression that obviously made him an ultimately important author not only for his contemporary period but throughout communist regime.

*A Knight of Our Country* was one of Ninoshvili’s very last works, written during his last days. It was adapted to screen titled as *Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze* (probably with the wish to avoid audience’s allusions, or maybe even confusion with Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time*,



considering that one of the stories included in Lermontov's work, *The Princess Mary*, was filmed the same year by Vladimir Barski) with the direction of Ivane Perestiani, the most productive feature filmmaker in the 20s (Youngblood, 1992). Perestiani was working on another film at the same time – *The Three Lives*, also a screen adaptation of a novel of Georgian writer Giorgi Tsereteli (*The First Step*, 1890). *The Three Lives* was filmed in 1924 but it premiered in the theaters in January 1925, *Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze* premiered on March 7 of the same year. The both films (as well as their literary sources) tell a similar narrative, moreover they were issued on screens almost simultaneously. I will discuss the interrelation of these two films later, as provided by reviewers and critics.

*Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze* opens with a trial scene of the (Tariel Mklavadze's) murderer, Spiridon Mtsirishvili, at Kutaisi Gubernia Court. The action takes place in 1889, under tsarist rule. The story is retold by the witnesses of the court, ("a western mode of opening fibula" that was not particularly appropriate in this case, as noted by one of the contemporary critics of *Khelovneba*, [Art] (Tariel Mklavadze, 1925, p. 9). First to give the testimonies are Tariel's father Erekle Mklavadze and Tariel's friend. In the 1982 restored version of the film (where instead of titles the plot is narrated by over voice) they speak about Tariel, as a wonderful boy in childhood, and later as a heart and soul of a joyful company. This narration is contrasted with the frames telling quite the opposite: showing Tariel as an ill-willed child and as a loafer young man, oppressing others, either constantly flirting with women of aristocracy and having consensual sex with them, or kidnapping and raping peasant girls and women. (It must be noted here that one of contemporary reviews stated that it would be impossible to give such a testimony in the court, suggesting that the original titles describing these speeches might have been quite straight lined.)

The meeting of Tariel Mklavadze with Spiridon Mtsirishvili and his wife, Despina, takes place at a railway station (retold in Spiridon's testimony, as we learn after this sequence is finished). While Tariel and his friends are flirting with a high class lady, who eagerly responds them (her interest in them is very clear and explicit through her body language and facial mimics,) the village teacher and his modest, timid wife arrive on the train station and take a sit on the bench. At this moment the newly arrived couple catches the company's eye. One of the young men tries to flirt with her, while Spiridon is away to find out news about the train schedule, but he is

unsuccessful: Despine rejects him. It must be noted that Despine appears far more timid and helpless in the film version, than she actually is portrayed in Ninoshvili's short story (this aspect will be discussed further later). The train is late till the next morning due to snow-slip, so Spiridon and Despine are obliged to stay in the same tavern as Tariel and his friends for the night. During the night the company decides to abduct Despine: one of Tariel's friends creeps into the couple's room. Despine sleeps and is having nightmare of eagle-Tariel (Fig.1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3). Tariel's friend is about to take her away, when she wakes up and starts screaming. Spiridon wakes up eventually and starts fighting with the abductor, while Despine breaks the window glass and cries out for help. The friend hardly escapes but leaves his sword in the room, later recognized both by Spiridon and the tavern owner. Spiridon is trying to comfort the wife, telling her that it was not a big deal, just an intrusion of some drunken people. Meanwhile Tariel's company is going to go back with the aim to return the sword, and to fulfill Tariel's wish. When they go back and ask to be invited, they are refused (due to Despine's refusal in most part, both in the story and film). The next day, after having learned that Tariel spreads rumors as if Spiridon insulted him and his friends verbally, Spiridon writes an excusing letter, where he asks for pardoning for not being able to receive the guests the other night, and claims that he had no intention to use bad language towards the company, as they are stating. A little bit later Spiridon accidentally runs across Tariel, who starts fighting with him, faultily accusing him again. Despine wants to intervene in the fight but is held back by Tariel's friend. Finally beaten-up Spiridon and Despine leave. Once they are in their tavern room, stressed Despine has a dreadful nervous break-down, manifested in having horrifying hallucinations awake. At this moment the frame shows crying Spiridon in the courtroom, and the viewer sees that this episode was his testimony given at trial.

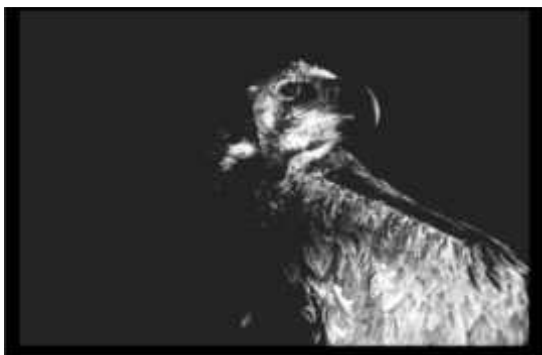


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Then a witness from Spiridon's side takes the oath and tells the court Spiridon's biography, about his poor childhood: how eager he was to study and how he learned reading and writing from a poor man, how he was trying to get through his youth, how he became village teacher. Spiridon rented a room in Despina's family, and was giving her Russian lessons. They eventually fell in love with each other and got married. Both, the story and the film describe Spiridon as helping peasants to achieve social justice.

Despina's mother reports to the court that after the meeting with Tariel Despina got sick. She was suffering from nightmares and hallucinations; the horrifying image of Tariel trying to abduct her was chasing her all the time until her eventual death.

Then we see Tariel walking on the same train station in the company of his friends and flirting with girls, as usual. Spiridon is there too by chance, talking to his acquaintance when he suddenly sees him and takes a gun out of his pocket (prepared for the incident in advance) and shoots him. He is arrested.

The court condemned Spiridon to exile in Siberia and work in the mines. But we learn that he died before he reached the exile destination.

After premiering the film received mixed reviews. On its examinational screening, that took place in cinema Apollo on February 17 in 1925 the opinions and evaluations were divided into "pro" and "contra" ("Akhali kino surati: *Tariel Mklavadze*" [New Film picture: *Tariel Mklavadze*], 1925). The next day anonymous reviewer in *Komunisti* was arguing that the validity of a film, "for us" (that is for Georgian soviets) must be judged according its "usefulness". The ultimate criteria for evaluating this usefulness is to examine whether a certain

film helps “consciousness consolidation” of workers and peasants, and teaches them what is right and what is wrong. In case if it does not, then is not acceptable or valid. Thus the validity of *Tariel Mklavadze* can be argued, in a sense that it shows a perfect portrayal of yesterday’s “hero” and “knight” that was entitled as “noble” and “brilliant”. And today, sons and grandsons of Tariels can see clearly all those abominations that were so frequent and happening daily just yesterday. Another kind of “validity” that the reviewer attributes to the film, is that it illustrates the “the cruel days of the past” for the new generation, that has not witnessed it, and they have to see it in the full length of its malice in order to cultivate the disguise of those days and habit-rules in their hearts from their youth days. From the review it is clear that the “contra” group was not satisfied with the thematic, arguing that those times were left behind and would not come back again and there was no need for a reminder.

G. Tsagareli, reviewer of *Khelovneba*, first praises Perestiani’s directorial skills, and also notes that the fact of issuing *Tariel Mklavadze* right after *The Three Lives*, does not benefit the director: “This big painter dedicated all his creative richness and diversity to *The Three lives*, this capital work was successfully finished. *Tariel Mklavadze*, shot at the same time, only vaguely repeats Perestiani’s style that was incredible in *The Three Lives*” (Tsagareli, 1925, p. 7). Adding that central intrigue of *Tariel Mklavadze* and main characters will ultimately remind us *The Three Lives* and this circumstance will complicate for the viewer independent assessment of the precedent picture.

Tsagareli claims that the human tragedy is the biggest motivation of that sympathy and empathy that causes a film in the viewer; “but when the victim of the tragedy appears to be extremely weak, that humiliates the victim’s personality, it causes not sympathy but indignation. This indignation sometimes is even directed towards the tragedy’s victim. The humiliation of S. Mtsirishvili reaches the bottom line- here the face of human being is lost, what is left is only live-stock, a crushed-down worm... The ideology of the picture is very obvious: on the one side swindlers and villains, and on the other side saints. Two camps: evil and kind by blood. It repeats the same “blood theory” (meaning nobility) that the film tries to mock at. We are afraid that the viewer will not believe neither in evil nor saints.” (Tsagareli, 1925, pp. 9-10).

Another review in the next issue of the same journal was even harsher, (probably that is why it was not signed). It criticized not only certain scenes (for example the reviewer does not see any

point in showing the delivery pains of Tariel's mother when she is giving birth. Here is a direct quotation: "I cannot understand what artistic or social value this 'practice in physiology' has? How can this moment be justified?" ("*Tariel Mklavadze*" 1925, p.10). It is worthy to note that this scene was taken out and cut during the restoration of the film). The review claims that the film offers a distorting mirror of Georgian life style and criticizes the accentuated hyperbolizing. For example when Tariel's father tells to the court his childhood, he mentions a story, when Tariel sealed up the beard of his mentor priest on the table while he was sleeping, and it was only considered as a childish trick by his father, arguing that it would have been unbelievable that time.

It is worthy to note here that this episode with priest is a scenario addition: in Ninoshvili's story it is not mentioned at all. I assume it was needed to illustrate the laziness and worthlessness of church representatives (the priest is sleeping when he is supposed to teach Tariel) in the light of harsh anti-church campaign going on at the moment in Soviet Union. It is here where the film takes a different direction than its literary source: the short story actually portrays Tariel as a good willed child, flawed later by upbringing style and wrong treatment from his parents and relatives: it is when he grows up, that becomes spoiled of too much compliments from his environment. Whereas the story criticizes the demoralized way of bourgeois and aristocracy's way of bringing up children, (thus blaming the mode of high class in spoiling Tariel) the film depicts Tariel as evil-willed ever since he was born, suggesting he got his characteristics from blood and class genetics is to blame and not the class as social structure (This is where Tsagareli's remark about reinforcement of "blood theory" comes to mind).

According the same critic, the reviewer also questions the accuracy of the trial itself: when Tariel's friend gives a testimony, he tells all the stories of abducting and raping peasant women. The reviewer claims that if such a testimony had ever been given in the court; even the witness would have been arrested by the court itself and condemned, not to mention that Spiridon would have been discharged for committing the crime. It is exactly this part of the review that gives a solid ground to suggest that the original titles depicting the witness's speech were quite literal. This background of Tariel is given in the story by the narrator. Giving the omniscient narrator's voice to the various court witnesses in order to compose the whole picture does not exactly fit in this sense indeed. In the over-voiced version, this "problem" is solved, as far as the narration of

what a viewer hears, states quite the opposite of what is going on the screen, but again, judging from this particular review it is clear that in the original titled version, the contrasting juxtaposition of titles and visual images did not take a place.

The reviewer also criticizes the overwhelmingly negative representation of “high” society, claiming that the villains driven to such extremes are losing their credibility. Portrayal of life style, as illustrated in the film is also severely disapproved: the scene that shows how Spiridon reads a book at the same time as he is cutting the firewood is senseless and unbelievable, as well as the “European” interior of Tariel’s father’s house. The class-social aspects as it is shown in the film are also badly judged by the reviewer. According the statement all the energy is spent on depicting how Tariel rapes women, “that happens so frequently; that it leaves the viewer surprised of his energy and potency and reveals the explicit tendentiousness of the picture” (*“Tariel Mklavadze”* 1925, p.10). The representation of peasants is not well assessed either: first “they have such savage faces”, and second, not even a slight protest is shown from their side assuming that peasants were silently suffering from rape and insult of their families. The representatives of intelligentsia circle, Mtsirishvili and his wife are neurotics and frightened people; they make extreme concessions and etc. In the end the reviewer concludes that bourgeoisie is not stupid when in none of their pictures capitalism is praised, but is all the time is elaborating such a psychology, that is necessary for preserving capitalist culture. “And we have to learn this trick from bourgeoisie; otherwise extreme bias will reinforce tremendous conservatism and apathy” (*“Tariel Mklavadze”*, 1925, p.11). Indeed the only male character of “low” class, who embodies some agency, is Spiridon, in the sense that he commits a murder of Tariel, eradicating his “type”, but he does not survive either. The rest of male peasant characters are passive, silent, oppressed, and unable to stand up against insult, in one word they are feminized.

Another review in the same journal assesses the film as failure. And remarks that the fault of ‘our directors’ is that almost in every picture, they characterize Georgia’s life with parties, dancing, boxing and women’s rape. This extreme bias is very noticeable and striking and neither author nor director is able to achieve the aim, as agitation requires thoroughly carefulness. It also remarks that unfortunately *Tariel Mklavadze* does not justify the authority it gained. This phrase indicates that it was very popular among the audience (D.A., 1925, p.9).

As mentioned in Tsagareli's review, Perestiani's another film, *The Three Lives*, was filmed and issued on cinema hall screens almost at the same time as *Tariel Mklavadze*, and the latter represented only a poorer reflection of the precedent's glory. Tsagareli indicates to the similarity between the plots of these two films. As I already noted above, both films represent adaptations of literary texts, which also carry similarities with each other. Giorgi Tsereteli's novel *The First Step* that served as a source for *The Three lives*, also deals with a similar love triangle: low class couple versus degraded aristocrat, who has turned into a brigand and is driven by lust. It must be mentioned that these characters also have distinctive features requiring to take into consideration: in Tsereteli's Novel, instead of timid poor *uchitel* (school teacher) we see a successful self-made man, Bakhva Pulava, originally from peasantry, but who got so rich that actually buys a land of a bankrupted prince, where he settles after getting married with his love Esma, (a dress maker, daughter of an ex prostitute and Russian soldier, transformed into a hat maker in the film (Youngblood, 1992)). Yeremia Tsarba, a degraded aristocrat who now lives as a brigand, has a wild desire of Esma, and does not reconcile with the fact that he has been rejected (for several times). With the help of his friends he decides to abduct her, and with the fear of getting caught by Bakhva, kills her and escapes to Tbilisi, where he finds a shelter with his cousin, Valide. In the novel, it takes a long time before trial reaches him, meanwhile Bakhva becomes morally and emotionally degraded himself, killed with pain, anger, and injustice (this degradation is also illustrated in a fact that he becomes cruel towards those who owe him money, hence he does not care about justice or fairness any more). Obviously he loses much of his fortune. When the justice finally reaches Tsarba, even a speech of a successful advocate is unable to resist Bakhva's emotional narration, so he is condemned with 11 years of working in Siberia. But Valide saves her cousin, manipulating the judge, who has been in love with her for a long time. Rescued Tsarba leads a happy life of a bachelor, when Bakhva eventually decides to take justice in his hands and strangles him the way Tsarba has strangled Esma. It must be noted that characters of Esma and Despina also share some similarities intertwined with the development of the plot (both characters are played by the same soviet silent period star- Nato Vachnadze): Despina is having a nightmare before the traumatic incident; Esma on the other hand, has repeating nightmares before the fatal night. The close connection of woman with prophetic dreams, an irrational dimension is very frequent and emphasized by both works equally. Tsereteli's *The First Step* was written in 1890, three years earlier than Ninoshvili's story, and I doubt I am the

first one to assume that Ninoshvili in a way rewrote Tsereteli's novel, making his characters more "acceptable" for his beliefs: a poor, devoted to social justice village teacher and his wife, rather than self-made man and his wife, who was going to run a tailor business with her French Madame, before getting married.

It seems *The Three Lives* did not have such a sharp dichotomist view unlike *Tariel Mklavadze*. Denise J. Youngblood states that its viewers "were treated to an elaborate melodrama which was not at all tendentious" (Youngblood, 1992, p. 87). It seems Perestiani took work on two similar scenarios, and experimented by making one tendentious, and the other not, (although the title describing Valide as "tsarevna of dangerous thoughts" (Youngblood, 1992, p. 87)) gives a possibility to assume that her character was presented as more spoiled and evil willed, than her literary double; so a woman from high society was necessary to be driven by lust and intrigues; in the novel Valide herself is a victim of the cruel husband and hypocrite aristocratic social norms). Indeed, when Georgian reviewers complain about excessive violence present in Georgian films, it is *Tariel Mklavadze* that becomes an umbrella term for such production (e.g. the author of 'Challenges of Our Cinema Production', mentioned above, states: "Let's not be such Kino Mklavadzes, to provide the audience with pictures like *Tariel Mklavadze*" ("Challenges of our Cinema Production", 1925, p. 6)) and not *The Three Lives*, although the latter one also contained "a surfeit of sex, violence, murder, and coincidence" (Youngblood, 1992, p. 88).

After having provided a contextual background of *Tariel Mklavadze's* realization, I will move on to discussing women images as they appear in the film. First I will discuss the "secondary" women characters and after that I will move on discussing Despina's representation.

These secondary women characters only function is to illustrate Tariel's life style, and features of his personality (the only exception is Despina's mother). They can be divided into two groups: "high" class-that is aristocrat women from his social circle, "gimnazistkas"- students of the girl school, assuming they are also part of high society: either aristocrats or daughters of bourgeois; and "low" class- women from peasantry. The only thing that drives Tariel's attitude towards them is lust, which is no surprise. What is interesting in this binary representation is women's attitude towards him. We know from the story, and respectively we see in the film, that Tariel is ultimately handsome man with beautifully structured body (to what extent a contemporary



viewer might find him appealing is different thing, and first and foremost a question of taste, but anyhow, he is very charming according the mainstream “male beauty” standard of his time). It must be noted that the name “Tariel Mklavadze” is not accidentally chosen by the writer. The name Tariel intertextually refers to Georgian mediaeval epic poem *A Knight in the Tiger’s Skin*. Its protagonist Tariel has become a symbol of perfect masculinity including chivalry, strength, friendship, devoted love and knighthood in Georgian culture. In the story Spiridon compares actual Tariel with the epic hero when he and Despina see him first time. The last name- Mklavadze- literally means a “son of arm”-and functions as a sign designing Tariel’s strength and his passion for fight and physical assaults. Thus the story’s character by his actions and features deconstructs the notion of noble knighthood symbolized in his name.

So at first glance there is no big surprise that all the women from his social circle are going crazy about him (a party scene describes him having affair first with one, and later with another participant of the party). He is very popular with gimnazistka’s as well (Fig. 4 shows amazed schoolgirls waving at him on the street and sending airy kisses), whereas he is unanimously considered disgusting and undesirable by peasant women.



Fig. 4

In the numerous scenes of Tariel’s sexual adventure, there is no single incident showing a peasant woman who would be as eager to have an affair with him, as aristocrat women (as well as even one aristocrat from his circle who would not find him that “wildly” attractive), that somehow makes a case of “the prince charming” a little bit unbelievable, considering his

physical features as described above. Thus we see that a female lust is something that only characterizes women of high class. Low class is somehow deprived from it. From this I am elaborating my argument to claim that female lust and female sexuality is just a signifier of a wider “vice” and moral “corruption” “inherent” to high society, whole social class. High class women have extremely seductive characteristics: flirting sultry glances directed at Tariel and expansive bodily gestures: (Fig.5, Fig. 6, Fig. 7, Fig. 8)



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

If we observe looking relations, we will notice that all high society women (unlike “low” class women) have an active gaze: they master it, and give it a direction. It goes without saying that these gazes are directed only towards Tariel. These women not only actively respond to male gaze directed as them (Fig. 5), but in most cases first it is their gaze that chooses an object invitingly (Fig. 6, Fig. 7, Fig. 8). According Michel Foucault “looking is power” (as cited in Kaplan, 1997, p.4), thus considering the power of gaze politics, we can say that in this sense

these women have an agency, although their agency is only limited in lust. Moreover it must be noted that their gaze does not objectify men in terms that we do not usually see how they see men. In other words even if we see that they objectify men as sexual objects with their gazes, the camera does not adopt women's point of view and show us objectified men; we just see these women's sultry gazes and seductive smiles which "objectify", but actually they are objectified themselves for the viewers. Unlike high class women, peasant women do not have the gaze, they do not see Tariel, do not look at him first, and when see, are not attracted. Their encounter with him happens always in the middle of the nature, emphasizing these women's closeness with "natural" origin and pureness (Fig. 6, Fig. 7) that is subsequently violated by Tariel's intrusion. (It is worthy to mention that these scenes are not depicted in the short story, thus they represent uniquely director's and scenarist's perception). Whereas meeting with "high" class women happens in the "civilization" (culture) realm: on the railway stations, in the city streets. This ultimately brings Sherry B. Ortner's essay "Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture?" in mind, where she argues that the culture is not only distinct from nature, but is superior to it, in terms that it transforms: "culturazies" and "socializes" the latter (Ortner, 1974), implying dominant/subordinated dichotomy. She argues that whereas men are unambiguously associated with culture, women are seen to be "closer" to nature, which, depending on the interpretation could be seen as "a middle position on a scale from culture down to nature" in which case nature is seen as "lower than culture and thus accounts for the pan-cultural assumption that woman is lower than man in the order of things", a mediating element between culture and nature, in which case cultural tends "not merely to devalue woman but to circumscribe and restrict her functions, since culture must maintain control over its (pragmatic and symbolic mechanisms for the conversion of nature to culture", and the third and the last is an ambiguous status, in which case in particular cultural ideologies and symbolizations "woman can occasionally be aligned with culture and in any event is often assigned, polarized and contradictory meanings within a single symbolic system" (Ortner, 1974, p. 87). If we look from this perspective at the distribution of locations in *Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze*, it is clear which class occupies dominant, transforming/controlling, thus male position, and which-subservient female one, as articulated through public spaces and through gaze relations. Even though meeting with Despina is a kind of exception, Tariel also sees her on railway station, but Despina and her husband are not simple "peasants", they are intelligentsia from peasantry. Consequently they represent a transnational

ring between power deprived and powerful social classes. And justifying their ideological beliefs, they are the representatives of those, who aim to bring power to powerless class. The railway station, represents (both, metaphorically and directly) an urban location where different flows and different types intersect with each other. It is also here, where rural and city spaces connect with each other and depart. Despina also possesses a gaze: it is she who first sees Spiridon when they meet for the first time. But her gaze is always pure and childish.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

To go back to the analysis of low class women's situating in "nature" landscapes, I will discuss two scenes that occur in the film.

First Tariel finds his victim in the woods, by the river, balancing in a simply made swing (Fig. 10). Here the girl's closeness to the nature and her "wildness" is further emphasized in the scene, where, after noticing Tariel she jumps off the swing, and hides behind a tree, like a frightened animal, and tries to repulse the hunter Tariel with its branches (Fig. 11) and flees away. Although it does not stop Tariel: with the help of his friend, he kidnaps her from the house. They carry her (most probably unconscious) to the river, where she is left, laying on the rock, with her legs in the water, but still unconscious. The camera stops and grasps the moment of her unconsciousness state for quite a long time (10 seconds), leaving impression that she is not only raped, but even murdered (Fig. 12).



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Then Tariel sees a peasant woman digging ground under a blossoming tree (Fig. 9) Driven by lust he catches her, shaking the tree and its flowers during the fight with her. Spoiling the blossoming flowers -a strong psychoanalytic symbol of defloration (Holtzman, 2003) - metaphorically illustrates her literal rape absent from the frame (Fig. 13). This implication is reinforced when camera first introduces the woman by showing her close-up, portraying the shadows of the flowers on her face in Fig. 9.



Fig. 13

I already mentioned several times that filmic version of Despine is far more timid and helpless than its literary double. Whereas in the end of the day her fragile psyche and soul is destroyed by the crucial incident, she appears more standing for herself in the story, than in its filmic

illustration. When Tariel’s friend approaches her, she angrily and harshly throws him back, quite independently, contrasting to Vachnadze’s helpless, frightened and despaired Despina (Fig.14) finding shelter in her husband’s arms (Fig. 15). In the short story Despina is quite self-willed, actively and enthusiastically arguing and disagreeing with her husband on various opinions, (including her treatment to Tariel’s friend- Spiridon thinks she was a little bit rude to him and she actively disagrees. Later Spiridon does not hide his amazement as he sees Tariel as a unique example of our country’s genes’ whereas Despina is telling him that he is going against his own beliefs, reinforcing now “beautiful soul in beautiful body” statement). This characteristic feature of hers is completely erased from the screen adaptation, making Despina even more vulnerable and dependent than she appears in the story.

Despina is the one among Tariel’s victims, that he cannot touch, who escapes the rape, at least physically. Although the incident- manifestation of Tariel’s and his company’s physical violence (attempt of kidnapping her, and the other day beating up her husband in front of her eyes) traumatizes her to the extent that she loses her mind and eventually dies. Thus even not physically “deflorated”, she is still raped mentally and emotionally. Tariel forgets her instantly, and in the end he does not quite recognize Spiridon. This is a feature which differentiates Tariel Mklavadze from *The Three Lives*: Tsarba becomes obsessed with Esma, and chases her around for months. And once it becomes clear that he cannot have her even by force, eradicates her physically, whereas Tariel kills Despina “indirectly” from the distance. Thus female body, in both stories becomes a site of battleground, between two males, representatives of different “low” and “high” classes.



Fig. 14

Fig. 15

*The First Step* was written before the marriage of bourgeoisie and aristocracy, described in *Khanuma* (to be discussed later in the chapter) took place.

Although Despina's rape does not happen in the film, I would argue that it is still there, not only emotional and moral one, but physical, that is observed and admired by the viewer. It is not Tariel, but the camera that rapes Despina (Georgian soviet film beloved star Nato Vachnadze) for the audience's visual pleasure, and not through Tariel's, but rather Spiridon's look (technically only, as Spiridon's character and his look almost disappears in order to provide room for spectator's fantasies). According to Laura Mulvey eroticization of women on screen is a result of how cinematic looks are organized around her. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" she differentiates three looks of gazes: first, this is a look of camera during filming process, look of the audience as it watches the film, and the third is the look of characters as they look at each other in the film (Mulvey, 1975/2009). All of these looks are objectifying women, because they are structured by male gaze in narrative cinema. As Mulvey notes "the conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. Without these two absences (the material existence of the recording process, the critical reading of the spectator), fictional drama cannot achieve reality, obviousness and truth" (Mulvey, 1975/2009, p. 68). Interestingly enough, in *Tariel Mklavadze* we face quite an opposite: it is not that the audience's gaze disappears while imitating and adopting character's look, but on the other hand, the character's gaze disappears as the camera allows the spectator to see what he ("he" in terms of bearing the male gaze is obviously implied) desires: showing what is not actually happening for the character's look. I will briefly mention one scene and then I will elaborate this argument: while providing the film plot above, I mentioned an episode, where Despina rushes to run between Tariel and Spiridon and Tariel's friend catches her. The length of the scene depicting how Despina tries to escape him and run to the fighters, lasts for 31 seconds in sum, whereas the fight between Tariel and Spiridon, as if the main scene, takes only 14 seconds. The scene between Despina and Tariel's friend is filmed scrupulously documenting



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

the excitement of Tariel's friend, and Despina's despair, invoking association of forced intercourse (Fig. 16, Fig. 17, Fig. 18, Fig. 19).

Now I will move to illustrate my above mentioned argument: the same implication of the camera's work is even more explicit in a scene, where after this fight Despina has a nervous breakdown in the tavern room. In the concrete scene (meaning what actually is happening) Spiridon is trying to bring her some comfort by holding and kissing her hands. But with many close ups on Vachnadze's terrified face, who pushes her husband away with her convulsions (the length of filmic sequence is 30 seconds in total) what the viewer actually sees is Despina's rape, played by Vachnadze, that would ultimately be a huge seduction for (not only) male fantasy (Figs. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27). We sometimes see Spiridon in the frame with Despina, but



mostly the scene is constructed by Vachnadze's close ups. As Christian Metz characterizes a camera's similar work: "It can happen... that a character looks at another who is momentarily out-of-frame, or else is looked at by him. If we have gone one notch further, this is because everything out-of-frame *brings us closer to the spectator*, since it is the peculiarity of the latter to be out-of-frame (the out-of-frame character thus has a point in common with him: he is looking at the screen). In certain cases the out-of-frame character's look is 'reinforced' by recourse to another variant of subjective image, generally christened the 'character's point of view': the framing of the scene corresponds precisely to the angle from which the out-of-frame character looks at the screen. (The two figures are dissociable moreover: we often know that the scene is being looked at by someone other than ourselves, by a character, but it is the logic of the plot, or an element of the dialogue, or a previous image that tells us so, not the position of the camera, which may be far from the presumed emplacement of the out-of-frame onlooker.)" (Metz, 1977/1984, p. 55).

As everything out-of-frame brings us close to the spectator, in this scene (Figs. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27) with its intensiveness of Vachnadze's expressive close ups and almost complete absence of Spiridon from it, eradicates the character's (Spiridon's) look and replaces it with that of spectator's only and works for his violent visual pleasure.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27

I already implied that in the binary structure of class representations in Taniel Mklavadze the female body occupies a central place. It is not only an objectified exchange currency, that has to be taken (by violence), female body also embodies all the features characteristic to her social class: if she is of “high” society (aristocracy or rich bourgeoisie, equally despised and demonized by soviet ideology), her body becomes a synecdoche of all the evilness and wickedness characteristic to her class, that is manifested through active female sexuality. If she is of “low” and hence “pure” class, there is no presence of it: this pureness is equally manifested by lust’s total absence. Not to say anything about peasant women’s unanimous rejection of “prince charming”, sexual tension is absent even from Despina’s and Spiridon’s relationship: in the time of their flirtation, the most intimate moments shown in the film are the physical proximity of their hands while writing (Fig. 28) and while reading a book, when Spiridon accidentally gets too close to her, which is followed by Despina’s quick reaction of stepping back, causing a moment of “shame” (Fig. 29, Fig. 30 and Fig. 31).



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31

Even their marriage life is empty from all sexuality: their affection and physical closeness in manifested by happy looks at each other and paternalizing embrace and kiss on Despine's forehead by Spiridon. I think all said above allows concluding that cinematographic choice of female sexuality transformed it into a metaphor: if it's absent, then we are dealing with a signifier that designates virtues, healthiness and moral purity, and respectively its presence turns it into a signifier of all kind of wickedness, moral corruption and evilness embodied in social classes.

### *Bela*

In mid 20s Sakhkinmretsvi financed realization of Mikheil Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*. The director was Vladimir Barski. He realized three stories: *Maksim Maksimich*, *Bela* and *The Princess Mary*. In the analysis I will focus on *Bela*, because according critics this film was considered as the best adaptation in the series (S.R. 1925). Later it became a metonym designating the overwhelming melodramatic direction that Georgia's State Cinema Production had and the extreme exotics that the films dealing with "Eastern" theme exposed (see a caricature published in *Sovetskii ekran (Soviet screen)* (1928, September 18, p. 12) describing the tendencies of Gozkinprom Gruzii's production trends in the 20s Fig. 32)

The film begins showing Pechorin arriving to post in the fort where he is supposed to serve while on his military duty in Caucasus. On the way he is greeted by the paymaster of the fort and his wife who is eager to flirt either with Pechorin and other officer as well. These characters do not appear in Lermontov's original text, and are introduced by scenarists. They do not emerge, act or take any roles afterwards. I will argue in the end that introduction of these characters, functions as a critic of the tsarist "high class". In *Bela* as well, as in *Tariel Mklavadze*, middle or upper class women are sexually open and flirting. Sexual openness becomes something of a mark, of the general class corruption and amorality that is embodied in women's bodies.



Fig. 32

*Bela* tells a story of an alpine princess, who becomes an exchange target between her brother Azamat, who has a morbid desire to possess Kazbich's horse (who himself is in love with Bela, and is a mountainous rider and inhabitant of the village) and Pechorin, who is bored in high mountains by the life, and also desires Bela. After several unsuccessful attempts of stealing the horse, driven by almost unhealthy desire of possessing it, Azamat kidnaps his own sister by himself and brings her to Pechorin. On the other day, when Kazbich visits Maksim Maksimich, Azamat kidnaps his horse while they are talking in Maksim Maksimich's room. When Kazbich learns that the horse was kidnapped by Azamat, he decides to revenge and in revenge kills Bela's father, and gets his horse. Bela first resists to Pechorin, but with time eventually she gets seduced, considering that she actually liked him before. As time goes, Pechorin gets bored with Bela. Now he is more likely to spend time alone wandering in the woods, while leaving her suffering in loneliness. Maksim Maksimich tries to entertain her and brings her out for a walk on the edge of the fortress, where Kazbich notices her and recognizes. The next day he kidnaps her as she is walking alone, while Maksim Maksimich and Pechorin are gone for hunting. Eventually they notice Kazbich and while they are chasing him, Bela resists to him, Kazbich's horse is killed; he wounds Bela with a stiletto and runs away. Maksim Maksimich and Pechorin bring wounded Bela home, where she dies in agony. In the end we see Maksim Maksimich standing at her grave. Pechorin observes him from a phaeton: after Bela's death he is leaving for good.

*Bela* premiered in three major cinema halls in Tbilisi (in Arfasto, Apollo, and Soleil) on February 14. According announcements the tickets had been sold out of notice for three days after its release, and due to audience's request its showing was continued for another week. The announcement of February 25 in *Komunisti* says that due to particular interest *Bela* will be shown for next two days.

In the beginning it received a positive review from *Komunisti* and from *Sabchota khelovneba* [Soviet art]. Both reviews praised its good approach to the story itself (*Sabchota khelovneba*'s critic claimed it was probably the best picture from Lermontov series (S.R. 1927)) and actors' performances, but as a conclusion *Sabchota khelovneba*'s critic was stating that "One thing should be noted: *Bela* cannot say anything new to the viewer. Too much fascination with Lermontov must be considered as a negative trend. Georgia's State Cinema Production should pay attention to this circumstance"(S.R. 1927, p. 6). Russian critics did not welcome it: Soviet Cinema wrote that one of the most interesting stories of Lermontov was "emasculated, amplified, and pale in the film" ("Sovetskaya filma: *Bela*," 1929 p. 31). In 1929 *Sovetskii ekran* assessed modeling "Caucasian life" on Lermontovian theme as Goskinprom Gruzii's "involuntary mistake" (T. 1929, p. 5). Later the film became a symbol of satiated melodrama and orientalizing of Caucasus; both in Georgian and Russian press (see also Fig. 32).

In *Bela* we do not have "low" class per se: there are no women from peasantry so to say, and *Bela* herself is a daughter of the local prince. But I would argue that regardless her origin she is a representative of a lower class, as her noblesse is erased by the fact that she is Caucasian other. In this case it is her, as well as other Caucasian characters' exotic otherness that constructs the class mark, compare to upper class Russian officers. Regardless her nobility, she is just a peasant girl, locked in strict patriarchal relations between males, and other Caucasians are considered as people having not enough agency or authority: they can be humiliated and abducted without feeling any responsibility or guilt by Russians, just like peasants and low class men by Taniel and his friends in *Taniel Mklavadze* (here I discuss how class can be substituted by nationality, but I will discuss orientalism in detail in the following chapter). Claude Levi-Strauss notoriously illustrated how women function as exchangeable signs in the kinship exchange system through which a "social contract" is established between men (Levi-Strauss, 1949/1969). *Bela*'s status quo of an exchangeable object between men in the patriarchal system is manifested through a

visual metaphor in the river scene, where she is equaled with a horse: when Bela and her friends are swimming naked, they are observed by Kazbich from the bushes. At the same time Azamat is observing Kazbich's horse, for which he has almost unhealthy desire to possess. The camera play between swimming naked Bela and the horse (Fig. 33 Fig.34) and between Kazbich's and Azamat's gazes (Fig. 35 Fig. 36) fixed on them respectively, emphasizes this identification.



Fig. 33



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

Azamat first proposes to Kazbich to exchange Bela for the horse (on his older sister's wedding), the offer that Kazbich refuses regardless his fascination with Bela. But bored Pechorin, who meets Bela at the same wedding, and is charmed by her, is away from the Jigit morals, and besides the only thing he desires is some bubbling with life in the bored lonely mountains. The loss of the horse, is a tragedy for Kazbich, for a prominent Jigit of the mountains, it equals loss of his masculinity: castration. He does not know yet that he has also lost Bela-the object of his desire- forever, although his mourning after the horse thief as if expresses it both (and also the

film in earlier offered a horse as Bela’s metonym quite explicitly): after unsuccessful attempts to shoot the thief, he breaks his gun on the rock (that ultimately represents a phallic symbol) and then he raises his hands to heaven, lays on the ground (Fig.37, Fig.38) and as the title lets us know, spends whole night like this (the scenario follows the story). It is only the next day when he asks a guardian who stole his horse, and when he learns it was Azamat, threatens that the whole family will be responsible for it. In fact, in *Bela* among all characters (Bela, Pechorin, Maxim Maximich, Astamir, and Kazbich) only Pechorin and Azamat obtain the Lacanian *objet petit a* of their desires interchangeably: Pechorin gets Bela and Azamat gets Karagyozy. Bela loses the object of her desire (Pechorin) in the end, and when deprived from life, she is doubly castrated. The same applies to Kazbich (the simultaneous loss of Bela and his much beloved horse), whereas Azamat, even if he gets the horse, cannot be placed on a secured wish fulfillment position, as far as he is obliged to flee from the village and his further fate is uncertain and accompanied by the castration threat (there is a high probability of losing Karagyozy as well as his life). Maxim Maximich stands aside: his desire is not manifested, he is just a patronizing observer, whose gaze structures the filmic narrative. It is only Pechorin whose desires are fulfilled and does not have to pay for it: he moves on in search of a new *objet petit a*.



Fig. 37



Fig. 38

The construction of Bela as other- something wild that needs to be tamed- is demonstrated by Pechorin’s treatment of her: when she wakes up and sees him she is frightened, runs into the corner of the room and threatens to kill herself with her long heavy braid (this is also an interesting metaphor considering hair is a symbol of passion and sexual power (Berger, 1977)): in the end of the day Bela is murdered for her lust after all). When she is offered a meal by Pechorin, she refuses to eat, although the next time, when his servant offers her, she eats, first



with spoon, and after several pieces, she throws the spoon away and continues eating by hand. Then she is offered by jewelry, and beautiful clothes, and a perfume. These are the things that she first rejects in front of Pechorin, but approaches and tries them on once he leaves the room. Thus she becomes seduced by presents symbolizing “civilization”, the world of white Russians. Although Pechorin only wins her by theatrical gesture, claiming he is going to woods to roar alone for the rest of his days and leaves all his fortune to her, and she is free to do as she will, either stay there or go back to her father.

As I already noted the depiction of these scenes portrays Bela in an extremely exotic way, and close to something animalistic and wild, that needs to be tamed (her closeness to nature, just like of peasant women in *Tariel Mklavadze* is thus emphasized). Although it must be noted, that the director stays close to the original source of the scenario in this sense: in Lermontov’s story equally portrays Bela, as well as other Caucasians, (Circassians, Ossetians, Georgians) in orientalist and objectifying way: after kidnapping Bela, Pechorin describes her to Maxim Maximich in following terms: “She sits there in a corner all huddled up in her shawl and will neither speak nor look at you; she’s as timid as a gazelle. I hired the innkeeper’s wife, who speaks Tatar, to look after her and get her accustomed to the idea that she is mine-for she will never belong to anyone but myself”(Lermontov,1840/2009, p. 21). Maksim Maksimich himself, when telling this story to the narrator, at the latter’s question whether Bela was mourning to go back to her village replies: “Now why should she have longed for her native village? She could see the very same mountains from the fort as she had seen from the village, and that’s all these barbarians want” (Lermontov, 1840/2009, p. 22), actually stating Bela to be less than a human, unable to have proper (for humans, read Russians) feelings and attachments to her family, relatives and friends, and placing her on the same level as wild animal, who just needs familiar surroundings. This is a perfect illustration of Edward Said’s statement that for white middle class Westerners (in this case Russians) Orientals (“by definition ‘it’”) were not quite as human as they were/are (Said, 1979 p. 108). Earlier this is how Maksim Maksimovich characterizes Ossetians: “A dull-witted people... Believe me, they can’t do anything, nor can they learn anything either. Our Kabardians or Chechens rogues and vagabonds though they be, are at least good fighters, whereas these take no interest even in arms: you won’t find a decent dagger on a single one of them. But what can you expect from Ossetians!” (Lermontov, 1840/2009, p. 10). And the other time: “These Circassians are notorious thieves. Their fingers itch for anything that

lies unguarded; whether they need it or not, they steal-they just can't help themselves!" (Lermontov, 1840/2009, p. 36). Considering that this latter assessment is given when Maxim Maximich explains why Kazbich kidnapped Bela, besides indicating the evil theft inclined nature of Circassians, it also completely objectifies Bela by all means, as something in possession and left unattended and unguarded by Pechorin, that also demonstrates once again not only the dynamics of Pechorin's possessive and egoist attitude towards her, but also the fact that Maxim Maksimich himself sees Bela as "it", something less than a human. Moreover, although the identification of Bela with Kazbich's horse might be nicely visualized by camera, this also takes source from the original text: it is Maxim Maximich who draws this parallel, comparing Bela's eyes to those of Kazbich's horse (Karagyozy) (Lermontov, 1840/2009).

In the film a storyteller, to whom in the original Lermontov's text Maxim Maximich is narrating the story, is absent. The film opens with Pechorin's arrival on the post. When providing the film plot I noted that in the beginning film introduces two characters, absent from the original story: the paymaster of the fort and his wife. The wife is arguing and constantly dissatisfied with her husband, whereas she flirts, glancing sultry either with Pechorin, or other officers. These characters have no other function in the whole film, as they just do not appear any more during the film sequence, once right after introduction wife promises Pechorin that he will get the best room possible. These characters have no other function, rather than illustrating the vice of the high class: (and here, in this context, it is the Russians regardless their position, who represents high class. Consequently the nationality is less an issue, as it stands as a metaphor of class) the wickedness and ephemeral lust of Pechorin on its own is not enough to demonstrate the corruption of high society: Pechorin, after all is constructed as 'other' who stands beyond his entourage and transcends with his eternal boredom made fashionable by English (Lermontov, 1840/2009, p. 33), translated into the sickness of the generation. For its illustration is needed a woman character, a female body that becomes a mark designation of all the vices characterizing Russian high society, hence tsarist power and its representatives. And a signifier, through which this process of signification is achieved in cinematography, in case of this film, is female lust (Fig. 39, Fig. 40).



Fig. 39



Fig. 40

### *Khanuma*

*Khanuma* initially was a Georgian dramaturge Avksenti Tsagareli's comedic play, written in the end 19<sup>th</sup> century- 1882. Some of Avksenti Tsagareli's plays are included in Georgian Dramaturgy Golden Foundation. In his comedies he addresses acute social problems that are always happily solved. *Khanuma* had enormous popularity throughout the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century in different forms: first it has been successfully staged in Tbilisi theaters as in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and also in 60s; then in 1919 it was used as a libretto for Viktor Dolidze Opera *Keto and Kote*, and in 1926 Alexandre Tsutsunava (initially a theater director, who in 1920s was filming as well, but was obliged to return to the theater in the 30s) made a film *Khanuma*. But this was not the end: in 1947, in post WWII era it was filmed again titled as *Keto and Kote*, by Vakhtang Tabliashvili and Shalva Gedevanishvili that became one of the most beloved Georgian film classics. In 2008 director Merab Kokochashvili filmed a documentary *House of Happiness* (for the title is taken a name of the theme song in *Keto and Kote* 1947 production) describing the century long story of the narrative: its histories as a play and of its film versions.

As mentioned above, in 1926, the play was filmed by Alexandre Tsutsunava, who was successfully directing it on the theater stage. It was extremely warmly received and popular among masses according to *Komunisti*. The film was running in the three major cinema halls

(Apollo, Arfasto and Solliel) simultaneously, and according the figures, it was seen by 20.686 persons in five days. Several days later *Komunisti* reported that due to viewer's requirement its screening was continuing for the second week and it went with absolute sold out notices. Because of special success it was running for the third week as well. In 1928 Shalva Alkhazishvili assessed *Khanuma* as a theatrical performance shot by movie camera, and not a cinematographic fact, because cinematic comedy has to be based either on formal "triuks" or scenarial situations, and none of them was to find there. According him, what was making *Khanuma* a comedy on a stage, its relevant comedic verbal material, was completely lost in cinematographic, screen adaptation (Alkhazishvili, 1929).

The comedy portrays usual city situation: a bankrupted prince is looking for a rich wife, and one of the match-maker, working for him, chooses Keto, daughter of the local Armenian millionaire merchant, who is eager to get access to high society and a title for his descendants. The thing is that the prince's nephew Kote and Keto are in love with each other. When Kote learns that his uncle is going to marry with her, the couple has only one choice: to address to the rejected match-maker *Khanuma*, to help them. With her help and Keto's cousins' support, they manage to trick the old prince, showing dressed *Khanuma* who pretends to be Keto, while the merchant is away on business, and eventually he rejects the offer. When the truth is found out by Keto's father and the old prince, the couple is already married, and the uncle eagerly congratulates his nephew.

The politics of class representations are not that straight forwardly tendentious as in previously discussed films. It has to be noted that here we deal with representation of aristocracy and bourgeoisie, and we only see the peasants who obey the prince momentarily. The whole story is actually a tale of the marriage of these two social strata (and considering the Georgian aristocracy and Armenian bourgeoisie, one could also speak about unification of two nationalities, although the nationality issue is not problematical even a bit in the original play whereas it was advanced in its latest production). This marriage embodied in the actual wedding of their representatives, but not by the matching scheme (that is based on benefit and planned, but that is actually failed) but by resistance to the authorities (father and uncle: older generation) and by true love. Female characters here do not necessarily have provocative sultry glances and manners, like in the films depicted above, although the viewer is aware of the presence of lust

and sexual vice, which in this case is represented in bohemian colors and charming way. Here we see princesses, daughters of rich merchants or citizens studying in the college, and Ortachala Beauties, that was the name of that time's courtesans, that were to find in princes' company in Ortachala gardens: a heart of that time's aristocracy's entertainment place.

Oliko Jgenti argues that *Khanuma* contrasts with Perestiani's and Barski's films in terms of class reconciliation and national solidarity conception and instead of evil aristocracy, here we deal with caricaturized aristocracy that still represents inflexible stratum towards current social circumstances (Jghenti, 2007). According her the films of Bek-Nazarov and Barski canonized a "feeble, thoughtless and morally degraded type of Georgian aristocracy- a class enemy, who mercilessly oppresses its own people", whereas *Khanuma* takes a different turn: Tsutsunava shows love and sympathy for aristocracy (Jghenti, 2007). Oliko Jghenti provides the directors origin as an explanation: as Perestiani and Barski were not ethnic Georgians, unlike Tsutsunava, they were more inclined to aggravate the social struggle through drastic representations, whereas Georgian Tsutsunava is sympathetic towards fading Georgian aristocracy, intending to erase the social difference and put forward the national unity. She supports her argument with director's introduction of a new character Tebrone, Keto's father's ugly, loafer, useless servant girl, who invokes a reminiscence of *Is He Human, This Man?!*, a grotesque and harsh social satire, directed towards aristocracy (Jghenti, 2007), written by Ilia Chavchavadze who was a major thinker, writer and journalist in 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgia and was advocating the idea of nationality (an unfavorable figure both for Social-Democrats and Bolsheviks, killed in 1907). Oliko Jghenti does not mention the fact that in the play, Sona (transformed into Keto first in the Opera libretto in the film) and his father are Armenians. Although Sona's name is GeorGINIZED in the film, something that Chavchavadze (half Armenian himself) would have ever approved. Although names of Sona's father and cousins still indicate to their Armenian origins that actually somewhat undermines her argument. But whereas the erasing the nationality of the play's original characters is a subject of different and very complicated discussion on tension between Armenians and Georgians, still regardless this artificial extinction it is still there: it is a well known fact that in 19<sup>th</sup> century Tbilisi all the "millionaire" merchants were Armenians: they consisted Tiflis bourgeoisie. I find this interpretation somewhat arguable from another perspective as well: Tsutsunava maybe does not portray aristocracy as evil in the film but nevertheless both in the film and play it is feeble, thoughtless and morally degraded aristocracy

that we are facing here. If we take away the laughter (from the play) and beautiful bohemian spirit (reigning in the film) what we see is an old partying prince, wastes all his money on entertainment, engages into fighting on every step, flirts with women, and finally he is searching for a beautiful and rich young girl to get married in order to solidify his income. The bourgeoisie is no better either: the rich merchant is ready to give his crying and refusing daughter away, just to raise his social status. It is not shown in the film, but the play makes it explicit that he has refused Kote before arranging business with his uncle, because he is just an “uchitel” (teacher) with a low income, and does not have a land -this is exactly a feature that makes the old prince Pantiashvili a desirable candidate for Makar, Keto’s father and somehow brings Kote close to working class in a way. Later the uncle happily gives the land to Kote, once the young couple’s marriage is declared. Hence his social status economically is secured and he is not “removed” in working class in the end. The evilness attributed to aristocracy in Bek-Nazarov’s, Barski’s and Perestiani’s films is erased, as much as in *Khanuma* we do not see class oppression per se, but there are reminding symptoms, which are cured in the happy end. Natia Amirejibi contrary to Oliko Jghenti does not see it as “class reconciliation” or “national unity”. Quite the opposite, she argues that it harshly ridicules both aristocracy and bourgeoisie, first for their aimless and vain existence, the other for its materiality and corruption (Amirejibi, 1990) and I completely share her point of view on this regard. It is just done in different manner than in Perestiani’s, Barski’s and Bek-Nazarov’s films; comedic genre of the audience’s much beloved play itself would not permit to introduce tormenting variations characteristic to these directors’ works. Here we have to keep in mind that the play was written in 1882, eight years earlier than Giorgi Tsereteli’s *The First Step* discussed above that actually illustrates how vulnerable a bourgeois (even a millionaire!) could be against aristocratic network, once he was “on his own”- meaning having no blood or social ties closely connected with them. And if the film/play describes the reconciliation of classes, these are aristocracy and bourgeois classes that was a harsh social problem indeed in the end of nineteenth and in the beginning of twentieth century’s. It was the Bolshevik rule that equalized both of them by considering as a one stratum to be eradicated.

As for the topic of the interest, it is what kind of representation this film allows to see: whereas the overall story (both the play and its filmic narrative) exhibit the accepted dependency of a woman to her male patrons and demonstrates she functions as an exchange currency between males for one or another type of social benefit. The main plot makes it quite explicit and clear

and I do not think that there is much left to argue about it. So I will leave aside the discussion of main unambiguous plot, and instead I would like to concentrate on minor scenes, that are only part of the visual text, and not of its literary source. I argue that these scenes say more in between the lines than the main plot, as they were added in order to visualize the life of the prince Pantiashvili in Tbilisi, in order to give us some background on him and his life-style. In the play this background is provided otherwise of course.

With this idea on my mind, I would like first to discuss the Prince Pantiashvili's party scenes. These party scenes are important in terms that this is here, when we see the female and male figures, who do not take part in the development of the story. The camera pays credit to all the characters both men and women, main and secondary: Keto, the two matchmakers: Qabatu and Khanuma, Pantiashvili's sister, the governess of the Gimnazium, Keto's friends, (women) Kote, Prince Pantiashvili, Makar, Siko and Saqo (Keto's cousins), the officer etc. Therefore I will concentrate how camera is distributed on the characters that do not participate in the story, but appear in the film with the aim to create atmosphere and "picturesque old Tiflisi".

These shots are important because they contain something of that "Old Tbilisi" life, that is suggested in between lines in the play and well known for the contemporary audience, and absent from the officially articulated discursive memory. The phenomenon of silent film, erases its (and the play's) ultimate charm: diverse voices of different representatives of various social and economic classes, with differing educative background, that constituted the authentic multiplicity of Old Tbilisi; but on the other hand, the film introduces an important aspect: this is the visualization of the life-style, that was still vivid and alive that time (if not in actual reality, in a collective memory at least) that lets us know more about the period than the textuality of the play. As Marc Ferro argues we should consider images not only as "illustration, confirmation or contradiction of another knowledge- that of written tradition" but rather as manifestations of "using other forms of knowledge" (1988, p. 29). One of this kind of genealogical "slip", or "lapses" (as Ferro calls them) for example shows that it was casual (more or less at least) for women from high society, who were leading a bohemian life-style, to get dressed publicly in men's suits in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup>(Fig.41).



Fig. 41

The character of the young bohemian girl dressed in men's Georgian national suit, is interesting not only because of this appearance. Later she is introduced again in the film shortly: she travels in a phaeton with her husband, when the phaeton is stopped by the Prince Pantiashvili during one of his never ending drunk adventures. Pantiashvili is eager to cause some trouble, but after recognizing her, he salutes and lets the phaeton go on its way. In my opinion this short introduction deserves quite an attention, as far as it represents film's implicit sub narrative demonstrating the alternative ending of Keto and Kote's story, and this is why:

At the moment of the second introduction into the story, the beautiful tomboy is totally trained and disciplined according the social norms: she is dressed as a woman of high society with all its feminine attributes. Her facial impression is lifeless and sad, compare to the image, that comes to Prince Pantiashvili's mind describing the way she used to be: joyful and happy (Fig. 42 and Fig. 43)



Fig. 42



Fig. 43



Her social status is now changed: she is a married woman to an old bureaucrat, and stuck into a boring an unhappy marriage as we can guess contrasting her previous and current ‘selves’ that we see during this short scene, that actually says more: this is exactly why it serves as a subnarrative introduced in the filmic text; it shows what would have happened to Keto, in case of the alternative ending: that is getting married to Prince Pantiashvili, instead of his nephew (that’s how the story would have ended without Khanuma’s help and her “magic” tricks).

The second party scene that shows the Prince Pantiashvili in the company of “low class”: now we do not have here the representatives of bohemian aristocracy (in the first party, Pantiashvili’s sister, Kote, and state officials were present). This time he is partying with Kharachogels, Kintos (the subculture groups of city handicraftsmen and petty-traders and borrow boys, inherent part of old Tbilisi essence) and Ortachala Beauties, who illustrate different social stratum- essential component of the authenticity of Old Tbilisi’s life. What is striking in this scene is the camera economy in terms of portrayal and giving spaces to men and women. Judith Mayne emphasizes that when it comes to screen representations in Soviet films, in this sense examination of the theory and practice of montage is in order: “In its narrowest definition, montage refers to film editing, but for Soviet filmmakers montage meant much more than the arrangement of individual pieces of film to form meaningful wholes” (Mayne, 1989, p. 30). Whereas in *Khanuma* one cannot find Eisensteinian or Vertovian montage, like creating unexpected juxtapositions of images, requiring from a viewer to make sense and conclusion from the associations, this point is necessary to keep in mind, as in this particular scene of the film it is exactly the distribution of camera gaze that portrays the characters as “wholes” (important) and “partials”(secondary) and thus constructs their meaning. Pantiashvili’s second party is described scrupulously (it is far more in length, than the previous one): with Kharachogel’s drinking and saying toasts, and dancing in the company of courtesans, the camera focuses on male characters solemnly: they are shown alone, or if with women, the camera focuses on them, ignoring the images of courtesans. The women on are shown only in general sight view shots, or as serving as a background company, whereas the camera undoubtedly gives priority to the male characters. (Fig. 44, Fig. 45, Fig. 46, Fig. 47, Fig. 48, Fig. 49)



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46



Fig. 47

Camera's prioritization of male characters above females, when it comes to create an atmosphere, the soul of the party, the spirit of "Georgianess" is what *Khanuma* has in common with *Murder of Tariel Mklavadze*. In a scene, where Tariel and his friends are having a party, and when the camera portrays



Fig. 48



Fig. 49

it, all the women with seductive gazes, that give them “agency” disappear and become only a background. They are indeed shown in the common sight, but mostly even the high society women in *Tariel Mklavadze* serve as a second plan for the males shown in the camera’s central focus when it comes to describing authentic “Georgian spirit” (Fig. 50, Fig. 51, Fig. 52). The camera politics and preferences gives a possibility to claim that women are not considered “whole enough” to express; these are male figures, with whatever they do (dancing, toasting, fighting) where the authentic agency is embodied redefining women, this time in terms of visual representation, as lack.



Fig. 50



Fig. 51



Fig. 52

## Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed representations of women characters from class perspective in mid twenties three films: *Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze*– which depicts tension between feudal aristocracy and working class, (Ivane Perestiani 1925) *Bela* –which moves forward the attitude of Russians to Caucasians, that considering the power relations allow to read this difference as class difference, as far as the paradigm of treatment remains the same (Vladimir Barski 1927) and *Khanuma* which describes the city lives of aristocracy and bourgeoisie (Alexandre Tsutsunava 1926). I showed in the analysis that women (both main and secondary characters) symbolize the traits ideologically attributed to their classes: if they represent corrupted high society, then their sexuality becomes a signifier of amorality and cruelty “inherent” to the social stratum. Thus female sexuality is extremely demonized and on its own term functions as a synecdoche of general malice. If a woman is from “low” class, then she is empty from any sexual desires, consequently signifying purity and sainthood likeness of working class and peasantry. The analysis also revealed the double function of female sexuality: it allows women to be transformed into agents to some extent, but this agency is limited in lust and passion only, thus low class women are deprived from any manifestation of any kind of agency. Similarly to these women, low class men do not have any agency either, they are passive and feminized. So if

we make a gendering of class representation as whole, the high class is in a “male”-dominant position, whereas low class is in passive, subservient “female” position. Nevertheless as the camera work confirms, unlike men, women, even if they are representatives of high class and manifest the ability of independent individual action at some points, they still do not have enough agencies, authenticity, “wholeness” to express either the spirit of the company, or create atmosphere to characterize national being. If we consider the camera work as a reflection of current social situation, we can draw a conclusion that nevertheless the emancipator politics, symbolic order still defined women as lack and unrepresentative. As Elizabeth Cowie remarked the the struggle of women’s definition is placed not in the film system, but outside of it; film becomes just a site of the struggle for representing these definitions (Cowie, 1978). Observing from this point of view it is quite obvious which definition of woman was winning battle in filmic texts in mid 20s.

## Chapter III

### Representing “East”: Orientalism, Story’s Sadism and Agents of Narration *The Suram Fortress (1922), NaTela (1926), Giuli (1927), Eliso (1928)*

In this chapter I am going to analyze how “east” and “eastern women” were represented in Georgian soviet silent films; how they were portrayed, objectified and sexualized and what was the connotation of this objectification/victimization. I am going to observe, how in the end women’s images emancipated in the context of the same “eastern” theme. I am also going to analyze further aspects in which women’s victimization were used as metaphors and for what (*The Suram Forgress, Natela, Giuli,*) and in which terms and for what purposes their agency and subjectivity was asserted (*Eliso*).

#### Overview of the context

The leading thematic of film scripts in Georgian cinema production were literary texts, mostly national and sometimes even foreign, and description of revolts against ruling class and lives of actual outlaws, obliged to lead a brigand life because of oppressive tsarist and feudal regime, and turned into national social heroes (*The brigand Arsena, Revolt in Guria,* etc). It was something that was not characteristic solely to Georgian production only. There was a question of overwhelming occupation of regional cinema sections in general with historical thematic as well: Y. Rist, a critic of *Sovetskii ekran* remarked in 1925 that cinema production line in the Union was defined in the following way: Moscow was reproducing pictures depicting contemporary life, and provinces (Ukraine, Georgia, Leningrad) were “boiling in the juice of various kinds historical and pseudo-historical productions” (Rist, 1925, p. 2). The question of representing East and its past by regional cinema sections was a topic of criticism as in Georgian, and (in a harsher way) in Russian press. *Khelovnebis drosha* was writing that “our pictures” often do not represent appropriately the live-being, “in terms of clothes, nature, and other”, stating that reason of this misrepresentation was to find in “the fact that cinema production is guided by those persons, who are far away from understanding our lives” (Don-Ani, 1924, p. 22). When in 1925 *Sovetskii*

*ekran* asked the “prominent orientalist,” comrade Veltman to express his opinion about the authenticity of the east, as depicted in these numerous productions, he stated the same point of view, expressed by *Khelovnebis drosha* critic: “these “eastern scripts” are written in major cases not by eastern people, but by those persons, who often even in the case of solid introduction with the east, are still away from its life and in the end the audience gets the representation not of the authentic, but of a ‘sugary’ east” (Veltman, 1926, p. 4). Russian press harshly criticized the domination of historical thematic in regional cinema productions: in 1926 N. Yakovlev was writing that “in political terms the first challenge of the soviet kino, is not the agitation against old regime, but to raise the will to fight against our nowadays poverty and striving towards construction in millions of cinema goers” (Yakovlev, 1926, p. 3).

Many film reviewers were stating that the eastern films followed the same schema: brigands, who were turned into outlaws because of cruel tsarist and feudal regime, and partisans, who were turned into national heroes (U. 1926, p. 13). The eastern themes pictures, before the end of 20s, were evocative for Moscow. They were making stake on exotics and beauty of the “east”. As I. Urazov claimed: “If we believe to these films, it turns out that all the peripheral nations of the Union live like cowboys: they ride horses, shoot and kidnap women. And women are dancing in harems and are also riding horses. Besides, all these nations are similar to each other” (Urazov, 1928, p. 13). The reason of this was the fact again that “these pictures were staged and produced by those people, who were not familiar with the life and being of those nations, the lives of which they were staging, and local forces and society were almost never included in the process. This is the reason why the majority of the productions, except very few exceptions, could not resist any critics,” (Gabidulin, 1928, pp. 4-5). This overwhelming amount of Eastern films, so frequently disfavored by critics for vast exoticism, were not without objectifying and victimizing women characters eventually. Aleksei Speshnev, a critic of *Sovetskii ekran*, remarked that “passive, orientalist role of women-is one of the main defects of eastern pictures. A woman serves in them (films) for creating “flavor”, for participating in adventurous abductions, for tossing in between hateful embraces villain- deflower and darling icon of a young man with “vigorous” face” (Speshnev, 1929, p. 5).

Laura Mulvey in her classical essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* argues that we see characters in the film according the way the camera gaze is organized. And discussing classical

Hollywood narrative films she argues that this gaze is always male, depicts woman character excessively glamorized and fetishized, who at the same time always threatens to evoke anxiety of castration (the fear that a woman represents for man according Freudian psychoanalytical model). In order eradicate this menace, she, 'a guilty subject'- is either punished, (by male characters) or as a fetishized beauty object- saved (again, by male characters). The punishment involves sadism obviously. As Mulvey states: "Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end" (Mulvey, 1975/2009, p. 65). Although, as E. Ann Kaplan observes, Mulvey does not distinguish here 'look' from 'gaze', which as she argues connotes different processes (Kaplan, 1997). For Kaplan the gaze is active: "the subject bearing the gaze is not interested in the object per se, but consumed with his own anxieties, which are inevitably intermixed with desire," which "...connotes an active subject versus a passive object"( Kaplan, 1997, p. xvii). 'Look' on the contrary signifies a process, a relation for her, in my understanding a reciprocal act, whereas gaze is a "one way subjective vision" (Kaplan, 1997, p. xvii). So I will use these concepts following Kaplan: 'gaze' for one way, subjective, and 'look' for interactive, responsive looking relation.

Surprisingly or not, women characters in the Georgian film scenarios produced until the very end of the twenties were all punished: they were (mostly) portrayed as innocent, beautiful fetishized objects, who instead of being saved, were severely punished and frequently physically eradicated, by men characters, who on their turn represented patriarchal evil system (*Bela*) and if these women had next to them "good" men, they were incapable to save women, because they were also castrated and deprived power to commit their "mission" : thus feminized (*The Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze*). This was a consequence of the fact that in the films produced during the Soviet regime, all the characters, men and women were just signifiers of not their sexes, but of their classes. Even if these films share many common plot characteristics and similarities, and following the example of Vladimir Propp we could dig a certain "archi-script" (paraphrasing Peter Wollen, 1969) laying in the basis of every film produced during this period, it would not be just enough to understand their essence and functionality. As Levis-Strauss was remarking, such kind of analysis (that is just noting and mapping differences) reduces all texts and scripts to "one, abstract and impoverished" (Wollen, 1969, p. 93). We have to apply synthesis and analysis to the texts if we want to use a structuralist method, and not a formalist one. To quote Peter Wollen,



who addresses this subject, while discussing Hollywood films, “structuralist criticism cannot rest at the perception of resemblances or repetitions (redundancies, in fact), but must also comprehend a system of differences and oppositions. In this way, texts can be studied not only in their universality (what they all have in common) but also in their singularity (what differentiates them from each other). This means of course that the text of a structural analysis lies not in the orthodox canon of a director’s work, where resemblances are clustered, but in films which at first sight may seem eccentricities.”(Wollen, 1969, p. 93).

The analysis of previous chapters show that before the very end of the decade, women’s images in the films produced by Georgia’s State Cinema Production were mostly passive and deprived from agency or subjectivity. If they were embodying an agency in some terms, it was extremely limited and enclosed in the realm of active sexuality, which in its own term was functioning as a demoralization of the high class (*Bela, The Murder Case of Tariel Mklavaze*). Prominent Soviet diva of the time, Nato Vachnadze, who most frequently impersonated these women characters, was not herself satisfied with the given circumstances: in her memoirs she was writing- “I am always playing a passive Georgian woman, it is sad that these roles are so homogenous” (Tatarashvili, 2014, para. 6). She was not alone in this dissatisfaction. The representation of women in films, which (to say slightly) did not exactly correspond to the Soviet emancipatory politics of the time, was a big deal for contemporary critics as well and this problem was not characteristic to Georgian production only. In 1924 one of the critics of *Kino-Nedelya*, [Cinema-Week] Tamara Ignatova, in a letter “Zhenshina v Sovetskoi Kinematografii” [Woman in Soviet Cinematography] was arguing that in soviet cinema industry “woman does not play a role appropriate for her... in the mirror of our cinematography contemporary Russian woman instead of right reflection, receives a false disfigured image of her real image” (Ignatova, 1924, p. 5), criticizing further the images of Natalia in Yakov Protzanov’s *Aelita* and general binary stereotypical representations of women either as “a batalnaya heroine”, or as an innocent peasant girl (Ignatova, 1924, p.5). Although the context of the criticism and dissatisfaction is quite different (Georgian film production this time had not even produced a film depicting “contemporary” life), but the problem of women’s representation in cinema from different aspects was already articulated. In the same year one of the critics of *Khelovnebis drosha* was writing: “Women’s problems are locked under seventh seal with us. There has not been any attempt to reopen it, and I think neither intention. And there are loads of materials in this sense”

(Z, 1924, p. 17). The author recalls for paying more attention to original scripts that will show the face of contemporary life, stating that in Russia this issue was adequately paid attention, although the critics quoted above proves that not everyone was satisfied with offered women's representations. In 1928 journal of Georgian Futurists *Memartskheneoba*, [Leftism] published a letter of Russian constructivist writer Sergei Tretyakov (who was working on *Eliso's* script with Nikoloz Shengelaia) that was addressed to the Georgian Cinema Production's leftist kino-workers: "Mtrebs nu davekhmarebit" [Let's don't help our enemies]. The letter was provoking the workers to give up reproducing the images of "useless woman of boudoir" and give space and screen to the woman who is "a comrade, a worker and an activist", concluding the article that the slogan of *Memartskheneoba* is "to fight against cinema-eroticism that bases film on spectator's drunkenness and sexuality"(Tretyakov, 1928, p. 56).

In the end of the 20s the same critics were remarking and celebrating in a way a new phase in Georgia's State Cinema Production's work that was marked by issuing films directed by young directors: *Youth Wins*, (Mikheil Gelovani) *Eliso* (Nikoloz Shengelaia), *First Cornet Streshnev*, *Saba* (Mikheil Chiaureli). Some of these films either dealt with contemporary live-being issues (*Saba*, *Youth Wins*), and some (*Eliso*), although thematically based in historical Caucasus, offered a completely different representation of the multiple times orientalized east. In this chapter I am going to analyze the depiction of East and eastern women in following films and how it changed on the example of *The Suram Fortress*, directed by Ivane Perestiani in 1922, *Natela*, directed by Amo Bek-Nazarov in 1926, and *Giuli* and *Eliso* directed by Nikoloz Shegelaia in collaboration with Lev Push in 1927 and Sergei Tretyakov in 1929 respectively. All the films except *Natela*, are screen adaptations of Georgian literary texts. *Natela* is loosely based on real events.

### *The Suram Fortress*

*The Suram Fortress* was directed by Ivane Perestiani in 1922. After shooting *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, the first Georgian soviet silent film, Educational Commissariat's Cinema Section declared that it was striving to immortalize the writers of the motherland region, and with this aim they were

going to adapt to screen their works. “In the first place are those writers, whose works are oriented on social issues. Among such writers Daniel Chonkadze is the first” (quoted in Gogodze, 1957, p. 25). Daniel Chonkadze was a XIX century Georgian writer, one of the most prominent representatives of critical realism. He died in 1860 at the age of thirty from tuberculosis, having written only one novel *The Suram Fortress*. He was the first writer who depicted and demonstrated the cruelty of feudalism and was invoking peasantry for liberation. The novel also depicts the origin of commercial bourgeois class. *The Suram Fortress* is the only finished his work that survived. His other handwritings were burned by his relatives after his death.

*The Suram Fortress* is based on a legend connected to the medieval fortress in the middle of Georgia. The fortress build in town Suram was an important and difficultly accessible strategic item throughout history. According the legend the reason of this invincibility lays in a cruel sacrifice: a young man, parents’ only child was bricked up alive in the fortress wall to ensure its strength. The film shows the villainy of serfdom as described in the novel and illustrates the backwardness, wickedness and fatal consequences of superstitions (and religion, as the film makes connection between these two).

The film introduces two protagonists of the film in parallel narratives right from the beginning: Osman Agha and Durmishkhan. First the spectator witnesses a death of ‘just another peasant man’ (as intertitle tells us) while fulfilling his duty for his lord, leaving behind a wife (Maria) and two kids: a son (later to become Osman Agha) and a daughter. While the desperate woman shouts: “there is not justice, not on the earth nor in heaven” a priest comforts her, telling she will get reimbursed for her sorrows in heaven. Although a month later it is exactly this priest, who buys Maria’s children from her lord. Maria escapes with her kids to Tbilisi, and they start leaving there disguised (in the novel they disguise themselves as Armenians).

Meanwhile somewhere in Western Georgia a young woman, who was seduced by a young prince Tsereteli, is abused and reproached by her family, while holding the result of her “misbehavior”- an infant in her arms (Fig. 1). The old prince also reprimands his son for having affair again with another peasant girl, and meanwhile asks his servant to steal the baby from the girl and take him to Tbilisi, to his sister, princess Mukhranishvili.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

The servant gives a false message to the woman, that the young prince will meet her midnight, and kidnaps the infant, while she is waiting for her lover by the river. When the young woman discovers the loss of the baby, she drowns herself in the river. First we see her going by the river, then her desperate face and finally her body floating in the flow (Figs. 2, 3, 4).

Back in Tbilisi, years go by, and one spring, when church bells are calling for “praying and redemption”, Maria goes for confession and reveals her secret to the priest. The camera shows her relieved and happy face after the confession and then shows her crossing the road from shadow to light, suggesting that her confessed secret will be soon exposed (Fig. 5. Fig. 6). In fact, she is followed by the priest and his servant, to find out where she lives (Fig. 7).



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

After discovering her dwelling, the priest informs Maria's lord, who arrives and takes the runaway serfs back by force. In order to amuse his guest, the lord yokes the mother and makes her plough (Fig. 8). The guest is disgusted and leaves, while the lord laughs. The mother dies (eventually). During the disturbance, caused by her death, one of the peasant cuts off the cords on the son's hand gives him a sword and tells him to kill the lord. The tormented son follows his advice, kills the lord and flees away to Ottoman Empire, where he disguises himself as Osman Agha, and becomes a merchant.



Fig. 7



Fig.8

Yet again after “many years” (as the intertitle lets us know) we are introduced with the main protagonists of the story: beautiful Vardua- a servant girl of Princess Mukhranishvili and

Durmishkhan-a now grown up son of poor peasant girl Anna and the young prince Tsereteli. The princess Mukhranishvili, is a joyful, warm and a motherly figure, clearly favorably inclined towards them. When she learns that Vardua loves Durishkhan with all her heart, the princess says she will marry them, but before that will help to gain some fortune. She promises Durmishkhan to give some money and a horse to become a merchant (that's what Durmishkhan strives to achieve according intertitle).

The next day lovers say goodbye and Durmishkhan leaves. On the way he meets Osman Agha, and starts working with him. Later Durmishkhan marries Osman Agha's goddaughter in Suram, settles down there and becomes a successful merchant. Meantime Vardua is waiting for him; she goes to a fortune-teller witch, from whom she learns that Durmishkhan betrayed her. Later this news is confirmed by Durmishkhan's apologizing letter sent to the princess Mukhranishvili. Desperate and broken Vardua goes back to the witch and asks her to teach all she knows, so that one day she could have a horrible revenge through witchcraft.

Ten years later Durmishkhan is a successful merchant and a happy father of the only son in Suram, whereas Vardua has become a well known fortune teller. The king is expecting invasions of Turks, so he reconstructs all the important fortresses for the upcoming battle. The Suram fortress is one of those, but whenever only last bricks have to be laid, it collapses down. It happens already for the third time. The king is advised ask to fortune-teller Vardua, she has answer on everything, and follow her advice. Vardua tells the king's vizier, sent for an advice that the fortress will not be built up, until they will not brick up merchant Durmishkhan's only son alive. Durmishkhan is away for his business, when king's soldiers tear Zurab (son) from his mother and lead him to brick him up alive. The bricking up process is accompanied and blessed by praying priests. Durmishkhan returns to find his wife mad with sorrow and son killed. When he learns that it happened because of certain fortune-teller's advice, he rushes to Tbilisi to find out why she did it. Meanwhile his wife commits a suicide: she throws herself from a cliff in the river (just like his mother).

Durmishkhan heads to Avlabar, Vardua's residence in Tbilisi, and tries to suffocate her, asking why did she did it to his young innocent boy. Vardua gets a dagger secretly and reveals her identity. She approaches shocked Durmishkhan and asks to hold her, hiding the dagger behind. They start a fight and eventually kill each other. Vardua's servant girl hides her face in terror

when she discovers the dead bodies. The final intertitle tells us that “the almighty time unmercifully destroys the past. Only ruins remind us about the gloomy past of the beautiful exciting country”, followed by the shots of Suram fortress remains.

*The Suram Fortress* premiered on December 1, 1922 according *Komunisti* and was running for a week. As Zviad Dolizde notes it was so widely required that the film was printed in 14 copies and distributed in movie theaters (Dolidze, 2004). We do not know what the critics were thinking about the film after its premier, as *Komunisti* was not concerned yet about film reviews, and *Khelovnebis drosha* and *Khelovneba* were not yet established. However one critic of *Teatri da Tskhovreba* [Theater and Life] in 1926 in an article titled “Qartuli kinostvis” [For Georgian Cinema] claims that “*The Suram Fortress* will always be remembered as a pity, where there is a severe deformation of Georgian life: motion, speed and composition. Colorize is not understood at all. And the scenario is not even worthy to mention” (Peli, 1926, p. 10). As Karlo Gogodze stated later the popularity of the story, good directorial work and acting, and energetic and assiduous work of art directors and cameraman assured the place of *The Suram Fortress* among the best films of the time (Gogodze, 1957).

As it is already implied in the *Teatri da Tskhovreba* critic’s short notice, the scenario of the film differs from its literary source in various ways. The remarkable change is that Zurab, Durmishkhan’s son in the text is a grown up young man, and not a ten year old child as in the film. Vardua does not go to the fortune teller to learn about Durmishkhan, she addresses her only after princess Mukhranishvili reads her Durmishkhan’s letter. There are changes in Osman Agha’s story as well: his mother dies as it is depicted in the film, but he does not kill the lord at that time: he becomes terribly sick, and after recovery he is the lord’s servant for three years. He falls in love with one of the princess’s maid, and asks for permission for marriage. He is eventually refused. The lord lays an eye on his sweetheart, and rapes her. After what she commits a suicide by drowning herself in the river. After learning this Osman Agha kills the lord, his wife and his little son, and later he suffers from the remorse because of murdering an innocent soul. Durmishkhan is really illegitimate son of the prince, but he is given as a present to prince Mukhraishvili, when he is nine years old. He refuses to marry Vardua, reminding her his fate, saying he does not want a similar thing to happen to their future children, and asks her to ask on her turn to the princess, (who dearly loves her) to give him freedom. Then tells her there

is no chance of happiness from them until they will not have their own fortune,-because if they still work for the lords, they will not be really independent, and leaves with the promise to come back and marry her. Whereas Durmishkhan is absolutely right in such judgment, the literary text reveals that he actually manipulated with Vardua's feelings ("I rightly pretended to love her" thinks he afterwards). In the film Osman Agha's goddaughter flirts with him and seduce, whereas in the text he is eager to marry her, in order to strengthen his ties with Osman Agha, and she and her family are actually against it, but they are powerless against godfather' will. The film does not tell the story of Osman Agha and Durmishkhan completely: after marriage Osman Agha gave half of his fortune to Durmishkhan, and the other to monastery, and turned back to Christianity, for which he was severely tortured and murdered. Durmishkhan did not even bother to bury his body. He is rather cold to his wife, and actually only loves his son, whom he sees as a possibility to get on higher social scale, whereas in the film he is a loving husband and father, Osman Agha's fate is not mentioned after the marriage. Thus Durmishkhan is a way more positive character in the film, than in the novel. As Natia Amirejibi remarks "the film painters were greedy to share dark colors for the liberated serf", and thereby deprived the film from "progressive social tone"-critical approach to bourgeoisie, characteristic to its literary source even in the era of serfdom (Amirejibi, 1990, p. 31). After outlining the plot differences, now I will move to more detailed analysis.

*The Suram Fortress* is a tale of a horrible revenge by a femme fatale. The film warns about it right in the beginning: first we see an asleep writer in front of the picture of a muse (an archaic bearded oldman with a harp, Fig. 14), superimpositions of Osman Agha and Durmishkhan on Suram fotress (Fig. 15, Fig. 16) followed by shots of Christ crucifixion like representations of Gaiane and Zurab- an indexical sign connoting the sacrifice and motherly sorrow (Fig. 17) and Vardua's close up- eyes wide open, breathing deeply and hands on the chest, suggesting the anxiety, suffering and passion (Fig.18). The muse gives an order while playing the harp, and awaken writer who had this images in a dream starts writing.





Fig.9



Fig.10



Fig. 11



Fig.12



Fig. 13

Thus right in the beginning we are given four images from the story: first of male protagonists superimpositions on the fortress- representing their characters-for the superimposition are used the shots of the characters, that are taken from filmic narrative; and then follow frames of two female protagonists, which differ from the males in terms that their shots are, so to say independently staged and do not appear part of filmic narratives. Their representation is very much archetypal: Zurab, put in the cross shape box, and Gaiane, crying while holding his legs, represents the compositional quotation of the Christ's crucifixion scene-hence we see Gaiane as Virgin Mary, and revengeful drastic femme fatale. Gaiane's figure does not stand here only for herself, or the archetype; she represents actually all the other women characters, mourning over their lost children in the film. Actually every woman in the film shares this destiny, except princess Mukhranishvili. The film denies the possibility of motherliness, considered the only way of realization of womanhood in patriarchal consciousness, to every female character. According Freudian psychoanalysis, the only way for an initially castrated woman, to acquire penis, hence self realization, and to become "full" is to have a (male) baby, which becomes the penis she has been longing for her whole life (Freud, 1933). All the mothers in the film lose their babies(penises) and they either commit suicide after the loss/castration (Gaiane, Anna) or are punished by death if they try to save them (Maria). This connotes the impossibility of motherhood during the time of feudalism which on its own terms stands as a signifier of production, life, activity. Vardua, a femme fatale represents the threat of castration: first she is introduced in the filmic narrative as a fetishized, beautiful object: camera shows close up of her profile, which slowly turns to the viewer, but in a way that she does not look into the spectator's eyes, strengthening voyeuristic 'peeping' effect in the spectator, and then returns to the primary position, (Fig. 9)



Fig. 14



Fig 15

The ambiguity of her character is already present in cinematic language: when the princess Mukhranishvili promises that he can leave the very next day, Vardua's face, expressing fear and pain is divided in two between sunlight and shadow (Fig. 15). This visual metaphor-the use of such lighting -can be interpreted in various way: either as her pain caused by separation with the loved one, her presentiment, or indicating that the given moment when Vardua stands in the crossroad of lightened happy past and dark sorrowful future, as well as illustrating the struggle of "light" and "dark" forces/instincts in her. Vardua herself is also castrated, not only by being a woman, (thus not possessing a penis) but because she loses the one she desires, her objet petit a in Lacanian terms- Durmishkhan. This castration/loss is signified by a loss of her long scarf: while she is standing on the hill, looking at leaving lover, the wind takes the phallic form scarf away and she falls down (Fig. 16, Fig. 17, Fig.18, Fig. 19). Intertitle describing the scene says that "her heart had a bad presentiment", making connection between women and irrational, intuitive realm. In a way, Vardua, is already "a little bit witch" before she officially becomes one. It is also remarkable that she is also beholder of the gaze in this scene, and as E. Ann Kaplan observes when a woman becomes a beholder of the gaze, "she nearly always loses her traditionally feminine characteristics in so doing, not her attractiveness but rather of kindness, humaneness, motherliness. She is now often cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose position she has usurped," (Kaplan, 2000, p. 129) which is more than true in Vardua's case.



Fig.16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

The colors of Vardua's clothes are also symbolic. She always wears white dresses, whereas the fortune teller which is dressed in black. Before this visit, Vardua is framed night in her room, where she cannot sleep after learning Durmishkhan's betrayal. She is not only dressed in white, but the frame is all white itself (Fig. 20), contrasted by "black" and dark environment of the fortune teller's residence (Fig. 21). This is the only time when she is dressed in gray (Fig. 22) – a transitive color between black and white. After sorted with magic, thus losing her spiritual innocence she is always dressed in black too.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

Once Vardua is denied the possibility of womanhood, through her castration, she, taking the masculine, that is powerful and manipulative, position, eventually succeeds in castrating others, before get “punished” in the end. By depriving Gaiane and Durmishkhan with their son, Zurab, she castrates them, and takes their lives consequently, Gaiane’s indirectly, and Durmishkhan directly. Nevertheless she is also punished by depriving life by Durmishkhan. But in my view to perceive her murder as punishment, is artificial, faked, in terms that this punishment is a testimony, an immediate consequence of fulfilling her life goal: castrating Durmishkhan.

Besides being a revengeful femme fatale, Vardua also stands as a signifier of the superstition and backwardness-this is exactly through which means she succeeds in her revenge. Although contrary to the literary source, the film is somewhat ambivalent in this regard: I mean the scene where the fortune teller actually tells Vardua about Durmishkhan’s betrayal which is confirmed later. The introduction of this scene in the film is really strange I suppose the film played on audience’s interest and excitement related to witchcraft on the expense of actually proving what it is oriented to deny and unmask. But on the other hand this scene strengthens Vardua’s character as a beholder of a gaze: she activates her vision (with the help of charms) and sees what she is not supposed to see.

I already mentioned above that the religion is identified with popular superstition. Besides that actual film narrative presents priests in a bad light (one priest enslaves Maria’s children, another does not fulfill his duties and sells the secret of confession for material reward), the religious institution itself is identified with the similar fallacy as Vardua’s fortune-telling: the bricking up Zurab is not only witnessed by priests who do not do anything to prevent the cruel sacrifice, but

they actually support it, by being there and blessing (Fig. 14). The intertitles describe the sequence as: “darkness, ignorance, superstition”.

The representation of medieval Georgia is very much exotic. The exotics work through female body (bodies) eventually. Gaiane, a Georgian peasant girl, who does not want to get married in the text, is represented through an image of a lustful oriental woman with her dressing and accessories (by saying “oriental” I mean the image associated with the East’s harems, Fig. 24, Fig. 25), which is not the case anymore after the wedding sequence (Fig. 21). Durmishkhan’s and Gaiane’s wedding is a quite long sequence, illustrating “Georgia” with its traditional dances, traditional wrestling (variety of sport, traditionally played on similar events) and extremely drunk man, who amuses other guests by not being able to handle himself on the horse.



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

Earlier in the film, when we are told that Maria fled to Tbilisi, on Maidan, (square of old Tbilisi) we see two “oriental” women flirting from a tower window with a young man, throwing him grapes, as an inherent characterization of Tbilisi life, very much invoking *Thousand and One Nights* illustrations (Fig. 26).



Fig. 26

The overall analysis of *The Suram Fortress* shows that female body does not stand for one particular signified. It has multiple functionalities: on the one hand it symbolizes the tormented peasantry that is illustrated in the film by various women deaths and suicides, implying the impossibility of motherhood, thus continuity of life. Interestingly enough male victims of feudalism, Osman Agha and Durmishkhan escape it in the film, and become another class-bourgeoisie, although this still does not turn them invulnerable yet. On the other hand female body functions as an instrument for manifesting Georgia's "easterness" and exotic, and in the end it symbolizes the general backwardness, according intertitle, "darkness, ignorance, superstition."

### *Natela*

In February 5, 1925 *Komunisti* announced that Bek-Nazarov a filmmaker of Goskprom Gruzii's would start working on new film *The Smith Mikava (Natela)*. The film was issued in 1926 – it premiered on April 3 1926, this time carrying *Natela*, as the main title and *The Smith Mikava* indicated in the brackets. The smith Utu Mikava was an actual historical leader and hero of the peasants' rebellion that took place in western Georgia's region-Samegrelo in 1857. The film was intended to show the historical context of peasantry's oppression by ruling feudal that eventually climaxed in peasants' uprising. Although Mikava remained the main protagonist, the historical context still serves only as a background for the plot developing around Utu Mikava's fictional sister Natela (Makharadze, 2014).

First the intertitles introduce us to the historical context: after the Crimea war the country was devastated, and the ruling classes decided to reimburse their losses by increasing obligation taxes, that turned the feudal exploration already intolerable. In addition to this a new rule was introduced: if earlier a peasant on corvee work was fed by his lord, now peasants were supposed to feed themselves on their own, and moreover, the lords were treating peasants worse than live-stock: they were terribly beating them up and imprisoning, and they were selling their children to Turks. In the moment of the film's beginning the corvee work included working on building Ekaterine Dadiani's (queen and governor of Samegrelo) palace. After witnessing the worker's miserable condition and arrogant supervisors, we are introduced with Utu and his assistant Jondo and apprentice Khiti, and Utu's sister Natela, who eagerly rushes to visit her brother Utu and her sweetheart Jondo. The supervisor at the queen's palace construction notices that Jondo is not work, Utu did not let him go, so he sends supervisor to drag Jondo to the construction. When another peasant dies again during the work, Jondo steps against the supervisors, and he is imprisoned. When Utu and Natela learn about his imprisonment, Natela mourns, but yet another disaster is coming ahead: the construction required more costs, and peasant's taxes were even more increased: after depriving them with live-stock, they also deprived beautiful girls in order to sell them to Turks. Natela becomes one of them and beaten up Utu is not able to protect her, so she is dragged by force to the way of East Market together with other fellow girls. Although she tries to run away with several of her friends with a help of an African slave boy, but their attempt failed. Natela is sold from a seller to a seller and finally she finds herself to be one of the Omar Pasha's favorite wives. Meanwhile Jondo escapes from the prison and reunites with Utu and Khiti.

The queen's palace is getting ready for a feast: they are celebrating queen's niece's engagement. The peasants rise against ruling classes, and select Utu as their leader. The rebels require auditioning with the queen, and Ekaterine agrees to meet with them, although she just sends Utu and Jondo back to prison again. While there is a celebration in the queen's palace, Omar Pasha is heading to Samegrelo with his numerous army. When the queen and her guests learn about the invasion, they leave the region instantly, leaving lord Chichua alone. Meanwhile Utu and Khiti are escaping from the prison. Utu is injured, and he collapses in front of petty nobleman Kordzaia's household. The nobleman shelters Utu fulfilling his daughter, Sidu's request. Lord



Chichua decides to collaborate with Omar Pasha, and promises to bring him Kordzaia's daughter as a present. Meanwhile a romance develops between Utu and Sidu.

Utu and Khiti reunite with the rebels. Their number increases day after day. As they need horses, Utu sends Jondo to steal horses from Omar Pasha's army. Jondo is arrested by guards and is interrogated by Omar Pasha when he meets Natela's eye, who is peeping from harem with the help of the same African slave boy (featured in the above mentioned episode). Jondo is sent to prison (again) but this time to be rescued by Natela and the little African boy.

In order to fulfill his promise, Chichua kidnaps Sidu, and takes her to the Martvili Monastery, and is about to rape her himself, when Utu, (who has already learned about it) comes to church to save his lover. During the battle, Sidu calls for Utu from the window, to him know where she is locked, when Chichua shoots her. He is defeated, in the end, but Sidu dies.

Meanwhile, Natela decides to rescue Jondo with the help of the little black boy, and they all flee together to join Utu and other rebels. Utu warmly welcomes his long lost sister and her little assistant. The rebels set a trial for Chichua and other his accomplices: it was the majority of people who had to decide his destiny, and not Utu alone. Rebels decide to let them go only if they would leave their land. One of the rebels Blonde Mikho, who was always jealous of Utu, and trying to push him aside, uses Utu's moaning of Sidu, declaring him as a not appropriate leader for the rebels. But he was not supported by people, instead of depriving Utu from leadership; he is declared as traitor and chosen away by people. Mikho decides to take revenge: he goes to Chichua and reveals where is rebels' camp, so consequently Chichua's men attack the rebels out of the blue and are able to defeat them. Blonde Mikho shoots Utu from the back, while Utu is battling, but Natela revenges and shoots him in the back respectively. Then she goes on the already ended battlefield, full of dead bodies, searching for her loved ones. She finds dead Jondo, while Khiti brings heavily wounded Utu to her also, who eventually dies on her lap. The final shot shows us crying Natela over dead Utu and Jondo with their heads resting on her knees.

As mentioned above *Natela* was based on historical peasant's rebel in Samegrelo in 1857, and although it features its actual leader, as one of the main heroes, the film hardly depicts the events accurately. To begin with peasants rebel did not start before Omar Pasha's invasion: when his army invaded Samegrelo, Utu Mikava was actually leading partisan groups against Turks,

whereas the queen Ekaterine, was battling herself against the Turks (no matter how inadequate she was in her internal politics with later rebelled peasants, truth must be told). During this war, her palace was burned, and that's when the revolt started, when peasants were forced to work on the reconstruction. Moreover, when the rebel started Queen was not in Samegrelo: she was invited to Petersburg by the tsar, and the last but not these least, Utu Mikava was not killed: he was arrested, sent to exile in Russia, and when the serfdom was abolished, we actually returned to Samegrelo and continued to be smith again, and even was elected as a village elder (Makharadze, 2014).

Although the film was aimed to demonstrate the rebel and feudal cruelty, what it actually does is exposing “east” with all its components: slave traders, camels, dancers, mosques, sultans, pashas, black servants, harem... It was really popular among the audiences, *Natela* premiered on April 3, and according *Komunisti* on April 6 already 25.387 persons had seen it (*Komunisti*, 1926, p. 4)

*Natela* is probably the most erotic film of the period that constantly sexualizes women's bodies, concentrating on the diva -Nato Vachnadze- who was playing the leading role, a guarantee of its commercial success. As I just mentioned above the film did not premier before April 3, 1926, but photographs from the film, depicting harem scenes, dancer with a snake and Nata Vachnadze were appearing in the *Sovetskii ekran* and several times even on its cover, during whole year (Fig. 27 Fig. 28, Fig. 29, Fig 30, Fig. 31. One of them, (Fig.27) actually misspelling its name stating “The smith Rogava”, instead of “The smith Mikava”).



Fig. 27



Fig. 29

Fig. 28



Fig. 30



Fig. 31

The excess of these male fantasy flattering images accompanying to *Natela's* campaign was mentioned in 1927 by *Sovetskii ekran*, in an article on their titular page: “ ‘the estimated public’ learned about *Natela* via a poster with naked women dancers, that had nothing to do with the actual plot of the film, but which obviously delighted the gaze of our cinema goers and those, for whom they work.” (“Dvigatel’ targovli” [Motor of Trade], 1927, p.3) (visual similarity of *Natela's* poster in Fig. 30 depicting Vachnadze’s character enclosed in harem with Gaiane’s representation in Fig. 24 makes very clear once again the Georgia’s orientalisation in *The Suram Fortress*). As Amo Bek-Nazarov remarked himself later “such plot was giving a possibility to create a “box-office” hit film and I decided to stage explicitly exotic, orientalist picture without much intellectual work and less expanses. .. The businessman won over the artist in me. And it must be mentioned that *Natela's* income exaggerated every expectation”(Ratiani, 1976, p.49).

In the film we are introduced with *Natela's* character with a different cinematic device: in an extreme wide angle shot, she rushes towards the camera in among the blossoming trees from back plan, then camera shows us her laughing close up for several seconds and she runs away

(Fig. 32, Fig. 33). The frames have a circular frame inside the image, emphasizing that Natela is a mere spectacle: a framed image in the frame/image.



Fig. 32



Fig. 33

Way big attention is paid to the scene where Natela and Jondo are running among the same blossoming trees (camera concentrates on Vachnadze for the most part obviously, and we do not really see Jondo often in this sequence at all). When Natela learns that Jondo was taken to the palace construction work, she goes to these trees alone, the camera showing again her long close up, how she eats sadly the blossoming flowers (Fig. 34). It is worthy to note that this simple scene (with medium shots and close up together) lasts for 10 seconds! When she learns about Jondo's arrest, she goes again to the trees and mourns there (Fig. 35)



Fig. 34



Fig. 35

In the second sequence of “Natela in trees” the uninterrupted close up on her face lasts for 10 seconds, in sum (including medium shot) 20 seconds.

The blossoming tree functions here as an indexical sign of Natela’s sexuality, youth, passion, but we do not see them only in Natela’s context: Fig. 36 shows a rural scene, and Fig. 37



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

depicts Jondo’s return to Utu when he escaped the prison. Thus they function as symbol also of healthiness and purity characteristic to peasantry, of which the noble class was deprived (obviously). Most probably it draws upon Fritz Lang’s *The Nibelungs*, as a source of image; the purchase of *The Nibelungs* was announced in the same issue as that news that soon Bek Nazarov would start filming a new movie. In *The Nibelungs* a blossoming tree also signifies Siegfried’s and Krimhilde’s love, happiness and life (Fig. 38, Fig. 39, Fig. 40). It was running in Tbilisi cinema halls during the whole year and was extremely popular.



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 40

Fig. 41

In white western male fantasy harem represented a locus for lesbian love (Shoshat, 1991/2000). *Natela* plays on this “Europe’s collective daydream of the Orient” (Said, 1979, p. 52), providing a whole range of shots as a testimony. The hint on lesbian sexuality is not expressed only through depicting harem scenes; actually it is present and felt before girls arrive to their final destination (that is they are located in Pasha’s harem by merchants): many cheek to cheek close ups of the kidnapped women almost the same frame shot from different angles, perfectly play on invoking this association: depressed, helpless, victimized in each other’s embrace ... but sometimes the “poor girls” are posed in a way, that brings in mind sexual connotation: for example, Nato Vachnadze in figures 51. And 52 is not even victimized and poor, but enjoyment the comfort and the company of her female partner. The women’s bodies are objectified not only camera, but by characters: the merchants are examining them, assessing, and giving direction to women’s looks, in one word totally gaining control over them. (Figs. 53, 54, 55)



Fig. 42



Fig. 43



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46

Fig. 47



Fig. 48

Fig. 49



Fig. 50



Fig. 51



Fig. 52



Fig. 53



Fig. 54



Fig. 55

This process continues in the harem as well – providing the pleasure for the male viewer's gaze is the reason why harem frames are so overwhelming, although nothing that spectacular in the



terms of plot developing happened there. But the attitude towards the camera-protagonist (Omar Pasha)-viewer's gaze now changes: if Vachnadze was resisting it, now she is agreeable and accepting and enjoying. Her total submission to Omar-Pasha is cinematically emphasized by high angle shot: her body and smiling face exposed as an offering gift (Fig.60). But the real address of her look and smile, and her submissive act, is not the Pasha but the male viewer of course, but even not Georgian male viewer; considering that *Natela* is exactly one of those numerous films made with Moscow audience in mind (and, as the extracts of the reviews prove, Russian audience was also aware and conscious about it) the this is a flattering image for a Russian imperial gaze actually, which reads Vachnadze's exposed and offered body as an exotic lustful other, which, in colonial perception stands for a signifier of her motherland. The way her and other eastern women's bodies are objectified and looked at, define the organization of the savor, the "civilizing/europeaniser" Russian, and this time Bolshevik Russian gaze. The dialectic of Russia "savior" Georgia "saved", present in the political discourse since Peter the Great, now might have implied that such enslavement and exploration from aristocracy was stopped by Bolshevik rule. As Amo Bek-Nazarov stated in *Sovetskii ekran* these outrageous facts (abducting peasant girls by noblemen) were happening even in the 60s of 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bek-Nazarov, 1926).



Fig. 56



Fig. 57



Fig. 58



Fig. 59



Fig. 60



Fig. 61



Fig. 62



Fig. 63

After all It is worthy to pay attention that in several cases, while portraying Vachnadze among the blossoming trees, and in the harem, (and harem scenes include some other actresses as well) the use of circle shot emphasizes her reduction to the mere image (Figs. 59, 61, 63). When such technique is employed in harem scenes, it transforms viewer into a peeping Tom literally, looking into the harem through a key hole, emphasizing and strengthening the voyeuristic impulses, and emphasizing that the women are framed images within the frame/image.

The film shortly introduces aristocratic women: Ekaterine Dadiani and her niece. They both are despotic and cold. Their class privilege is expressed by lightening: in the dark room the light shines on them, whereas leaving maids in the shadow (Fig. 64, Fig. 65,) although the film also shows maid's upset medium close up, after princess harsh treatment (Fig.66), but in the wide shots, when they are shown together, the light emphasizes their superiority.



Fig. 64



Fig. 65



Fig. 66

In *Natela* lust does not appear to be characteristic to high class women (a party scene does not expose sultry glances) but nevertheless it still secures its place as a high class characteristic in case of Chichua.

It is important to mention that although Natela's character is overly sexualized and objectified in the film, this objectification/sexualization of her body instantly stops once she is reunited with her brother. In their reunion scene first Natela has a guilty expression, as if she fears to be accused for her sexual activity in a wrong place and with a wrong man, but the welcoming gesture of Utu invokes in her happy smile. It is true that the forest is no place for luxury and sensuality, but camera's sudden interruption has another implication for it: now it focuses on the distribution of story's masculine forces, after overwhelming portrayal of feminine sexiness.

The content of the film plot might leave an impression that Natela's character is not such helpless after all: regardless of overwhelming objectification and fetishization, she manages to take control over her body in the end, and makes her own decisions: she decides to save her sweetheart and run away with him in the woods, and finally she takes a revenge for Utu's death and kills Blonde Mikho. But the way the film's narration goes, it does not provide her character with full subjectivity. The plot/camera is very much occupied by flattering the male gaze with her objectification (in most part) and her action is more likely just a formal requirement of an exotic tale, rather than the character's inner development and empowerment. Moreover, after killing Mikho, the camera leaves her helpless and lost in complete despair mourning and crying over her brother's and lover's dead bodies. The film leaves us with an ambiguous future of Natela, with a little hope of her subjectivity/agency's further development.

### *Giuli*

*Giuli* was Nikoloz Shengelaia's directorial debut in collaboration with Leo Push. He made his first steps in the cinema in 1924. Shengelaia was a member of the Georgian Futurist group, H2SO4, and was invited to the cinema, when Kote Marjanishvili, an innovative theater director, who also directed some films, saw him reading poems out loud from the tree on Chavchavadze prospect and invited him to be assistant director for the film *Before the Storm*.

Nikoloz Shengelaia met Nato Vachnadze, his future wife, when he was working with Kote Marjanishvili (Nato Vachnadze starred in Marjanishvili's several films: *Amok* – a screen adaptation of Stefan Zweig's novel and Ethel Lillian Voynich's *The Gadfly*). The Georgian futurist group, to which Shengelaia belonged, refused the melodramatic flavor of the dominating film production. The aesthetic revolt of Georgian futurists was directed against old fashioned and outmoded artistic trends that included symbolism, decadentism and banal cinematic melodramas. Apologetics of industry and new techniques, futurists, according Geronti Qiqodze claimed that it was time “to demolish some moral characteristics, kindness, tenderness, love of family, and their place had to be taken by inspiration and by metal sensitivity. It is ridicule to dream on moonlight in the era of electronics. It is senseless to talk about sexual love in the industrial epoch” (as quoted in Jghenti, 2007, p. 152). When he met with Nato Vachnadze for the first time, they had a harsh argument, and Shengelaia told her that if he ever directed his own film, he would never give her a role (Makharadze, 2014, Tatarashvili, 2014).

Nevertheless when Shengelaia had a chance to direct the very first film of his own he invited the diva for the leading role. His friend, Mikheil Kalatozishvili (Kalatozov, later to become the prominent representative of Georgian and Soviet cinematic avant-garde), also a member of the leftist futurist group, who wanted to realize in practice their leftist aesthetic credo and write “leftist” scenarios on free topics, was surprised by Shengelaia's decision to shoot a traditional melodramatic narrative film asking him: “but this will be the same melodrama that our fathers have been making?” but he agreed to be the cameraman anyways after Shengelaia's response that he had fallen in love with Nato Vachnadze and wanted to cast her (Kereselidze, 2014).

*Giuli* is a screen adaptation of Shio Aragvispireli (Dedabrishvili)'s short novel of the same title. The story depicts a life of the Muslim shepherds in Borchalo region, a province in southern Georgia, largely populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis. A Muslim girl Giuli and a Christian hired-man, Mitro, fall in love with each other. A rich and old neighbor, Ali, wants to “buy Giuli as a wife”. Giuli's sever stepmother, Tevris-Khanum, supports him, but her loving father, Kuchuki, refuses the offer. But when one day Kuchuki is returning from the city, where he sold sheep, he is attacked on the way back by thieves and killed. Mitro, who happens to be nearby with his patron Ovaness, tries to save him, but is severely wounded himself. Now Giuli is left alone, and her stepmother successfully sells her to Ali, who already has several wives and many children.

Young and beautiful Giuli is not loved in Ali's family, only Phari, Ali's little daughter is her friend. When Mitro recovers and returns to the village, he finds out that Ali had bought Giuli from Kerbalai, Ali's eldest son. Giuli and Mitro eventually decide to run away. Even if nobody loved Giuli that much and was not approving Ali's marriage with a young girl, when Ali's sons learn that Giuli is abducted, it becomes a question of honor and humiliation of the house, so they decide to revenge Mitro, who is the only suspect. Kerbalai, who had witnessed Mitro's and Giuli's embrace by the river, offers his help to young lovers. He tells Mitro that he will be killed if he goes to the place where Giuli is hiding, advises him to go to the city, and Kerbalai would bring Giuli to him himself. Mitro reveals Giuli's shelter to Kerbalai. Ali is in total despair. He asks crying to Kerbalai to find him Giuli. Kerbalai leaves, leaving him in despair, he is both disgusted and feeling sorry for his father. Angry Ali grabs a gun and follows him. Meanwhile, Mitro, who escaped chasing avengers, is in the town, waiting for Kerbalai and Giuli. When Kerbalai goes to the abandoned monastery chambers, where Giuli is hiding, Giuli mistakenly thinks he's Mitro and passionately kisses him. Kerbalai calms her down tells that they will go to Mitro. Ali meanwhile witnesses their mistaken embrace, and blames Kerbalai for betraying father and Allah, and when aiming the gun at him, shoots and kills Giuli instead, when she steps ahead to cover him. Ovaness sadly listens to his stopped watch; Ali looks down at Giuli's dead body in the house, whereas Kerbalai is turning his face away from the camera.

The film significantly differs from its literary source. The novel opens by Mitro's and Kerbalai's encounter, and Mitro, who has been away for a year, learns about Ali's and Giuli's marriage from him. Although he and Giuli did not really had love affair before, but Mitro had always been in love. In the short story we learn that Giuli was a tomboy in way, garding sheep better than his brothers, but her parents do not figure, and it does not give a slight hint on how and why she was sold (although very expansively) to the oldman Ali. (This missing context of the story is added, developed and elaborated in detail in the film, as we saw). Giuli and Mitro reunite and confess to love with each other at the river, as in film, but the story tell us that Giuli sees in Mitro someone who can be loved for the first time now- the question of religious difference, thus making them 'other' for each other is accentuated. But the drastic change in the plot development is in the end: Kerbalai is indeed going to help the young lovers, but when Giuli kisses him (mistakenly thinking he is Mitro) Kerbalai is overwhelmed by passion and offers her to run away with him. Giuli eventually refuses and while trying to run away from him falls from the cliff and dies.

Desperate Kerbalai, is torn between various types of remorse, between mother who reproaches him that he also betrayed him like his father, and then sees Mitro and Ali approaching him. The next chapter depicts confused Mitro who had not received any news, he goes to Giuli's shelter and discovers Giuli's and Kerbalai's dead bodies. Kerbalai has a dagger in the chest. Apparently he committed suicide.

The film did not receive much attention in Russian press (somewhere it was mentioned just another stereotypical eastern story), but Georgian critics praised it and congratulated Shengelaia with his debut. It premiered on April 11 in 1927. *Komunisti's* reviewer mentioned showing sheep-breeding as the main background for developing the film's intrigue, which is the main occupation of Borchalo population, as its main merit. "It is not the eastern exotic, abundantly dressed with sexual spices, the superficial façade of shashliks, draggers, Legzhinka, and multicolor eastern draperies. Insight in reality is more basic and right here" (Shkhepi, 1927, p. 3). The journal *Memartskheneoba* highly praised the film, claiming that young directors managed to transform "the ethnographic stencil of Georgian pictures" (Ch. 1927, p. 85). The review claims that all the shabby manners of photography are demolished here. There is a search for new dimension of photography and it is really successful in it. A remarkable example of it was bringing a different life to the objects- Ovaness's watch and a carriage wheel. (It was a first time when an object – a wheel was shot on its own, in action (the carriage wheel breaks and runs on its own way in the river). Circle was a prominent aesthetic form in early XX century different avant-garde movements, and Shegenalaia and Kalatozishvili, representatives of Georgian Lef, introduced this aesthetic in their film. The use of this aesthetic form was further developed in Shengelaia's second film, *Eliso* (see below)).

*Sabchota khelovneba's* [Soviet art] reviewer, Varam Gageli, provided with somewhat a ambiguous feedback: the film was good for the debut, but not too good. Nato Vachnadze helped the picture a lot of deal, but we all know that she cannot act, Sesilia Tsutsunava (the actress who played Giuli's stepmother) is very good, but before she was incomparable (Gageli, 1927). Nevertheless both, *Memartskheneoba* and *Sabchota khelovneba's* reviews were mentioning the discomfort caused by script's deriving from original text. Shengelaia himself was assessing *Giuli* as "apprentice experiment" (Ratiani, 1976, p. 42).

Regardless the whole melodramatic scenario and plot development that became even more sugary in the screen adaptation, *Giuli* definitely does something, which had not done before in Georgian films. The reviewer of *Komunisti* was absolutely right when talking about the lack of exotics in the film: the lives of shepherds, with their dressing etc. are very much truth likely depicted. Here the viewer does not see anymore that overwhelming orientalized eastern exotic. People are just the way they were: women are not dressed in semi naked multicolor dresses, and do not wear shining jewelry, or hide their faces behind the veil. On the other hand, their clothes are very much casual, ordinary, and simple. They do not cover faces under veils and throw seductive glances and/or smiles through them. Even if the whole story is based on a beautiful, sexual young girl, who again functions as an exchange currency between males, or just authorities, (as *Giuli*'s stepmother after *Kuchuki*'s death), the camera does not objectify her (at least to the extent as women are objectified in above discussed films) even if the script places her in an objectified position. *Ali* does not only ask to purchase her, but when he witnesses *Giuli*'s and *Mitro*'s night date, he tells *Kuchuki* (as intertitle lets us know) “you are not taking a good care of your sheep flock”, referring to *Giuli* and literally representing her equal to goods and live-stock.

The practice of exchanging women for live-stock and buying them was a very frequent practice throughout the country in different, and not necessarily only Muslim communities. The original story was written in 1899, but this question had much actuality in the beginning of Soviet regime as well. *Nina Gaglovi*, a certain working Ossetian woman was writing to working women's journal *Mshromeli qali* [The Working Woman] in 1926 that their community learned about the significance of March 8 by accident: “No one came to us and explained the meaning of this grandiose day. Our women are treated as badly as before. Our woman does everything: we are helping men like men in tillage, reaping and on the threshing-floor; and we do extra work in the family, we are washing... But our labor and work is not appreciated. The old rules dominate in our community. Men are exchanging women for live-stock. They call this habit “*urad*”. Our woman bears lots of suffer because of it. We want to awake ourselves and engage into common work during Soviet rule. Let the one, who is responsible, take care of us!” (*Gaglovi*, 1926, p. 28)

As already mentioned above, it is very much worthy to note that the camera does no objectify *Vachnadze*, and does not represent her in a fetishized way to the extent that we witnessed in



previous films: the camera does not propose her as an image to look at (like Vardua was introduced in the beginning of *The Suram Fortress* for example or Natela's introduction to the viewer, followed by numerous framing of Vachnadze's close ups creating sort of an image frame within an image). As already stated, here we have real, authentic image of the region, and not the mixture of oriental fantasies, but still Giuli is not free from stereotyped representation: we are introduced with her in a very much pastoral ambiance. The intertitle tells us: "Giuli with her friends", and then we see her, in the nature, playing with dog and then with little children (Fig 67), one of them, Phari, is her only friend (intertitle). Thus Giuli is very much portrayed as a very much pure soul, friends with animals and small children.



Fig. 67

The relationship with animals is a sign that groups characters in the film: Giuli is a very much animal lover (other scenes in the film also show how she is playing and caressing with sheep), whereas her antagonists in the plot, Ali and Tevris-Khanum, her stepmother, are negatively marked in this terms: Tevris Khanum treats a sheep rudely, and Ali kicks harshly a small puppy that caresses his leg.

In the film it is mostly Ali who is a bearer of the gaze, especially in the first part. We see what he sees, he furtively observes (and together with him the spectator) the development of the plot. We often see Giuli through his stare, fixed at her (Figs. 68, 69, 70, 71, 72).



Fig. 68



Fig. 69



Fig. 70



Fig. 71



Fig. 72

Although when the presence of his gaze is relieved, Giuli is not passively subjected it, she reacts to it negatively. Although Ali's gaze has control over hers: it is true that every time she faces it, she responds by rejecting, but Ali's gaze makes Giuli to cover her face, (which is not a necessary obligation for the community (Fig.72)) and makes her look disappear. Ali is "owning" Giuli when she is on her night date with Mitro, (Giuli feels the gaze, sees him and then too, she

covers her face and runs away (Figs.73, 74, 75, 76 ), and when she is in despair because of her father's death, when her ultimate sadness is exposed for Ali's eyesight without her knowing it.(Figs. 77, 78, 79 80,).



Fig. 73



Fig. 74



Fig. 75



Fig. 76



Fig. 77



Fig. 78



Fig. 79



Fig. 80

The looking relation between Giuli and Mitro is different: while it is true that Mitro also owns a gaze, (that is a subjective vision in which desire is intermixed, as he desires Giuli) still his one is not a ‘gaze’ per se, it is more ‘look’ than a gaze, following E. Ann Kaplan’s distinction between these two terms: he sees Giuli, but does not objectify her, on the other hand, he strives to engage into a communication with her, that is to receive a responsive look from her. Whenever Giuli receives his gaze/look, she eagerly responds towards. Regardless the fact that throughout the story Giuli is structurally in a powerless position, she is unable to be the master her own fate, and is an actual object of exchange and purchase between domineering “authorities” (her father, who is kind and refuses, but then her stepmother and Ali) and in the end she is physically eradicated and is the only victimized body of the story’s sadism, she still embodies characteristics of strength and power to stand for herself: when Mitro secretly approaches her from behind and teases her, unaware who is standing behind Giuli prepares for self defense grasping the shepherd’s crook instead of running away (fig.) but after encountering Mitro’s look, she responds with an affectionate smile ( Figs. 81, 82, 83)



Fig. 81



Fig. 82



Fig. 83

When Giuli is taking care of sheep with his father and stepmother, she becomes an object of the triple gaze: of Ali, Ovaness and Mitro, who are looking at her over the fence (Ali is showing Ovaness Giuli, after confessing he wants to marry a new wife Fig. 84) Her face frowns and smiles when she sees Ali and Mitro respectively. Mitro leaves, denying participating in the objectifying process. He acts like this because of jealousy, but this scene also opens a way to interpret him as an actor who strives for equal power relations.



Fig. 84

When it comes to camera's objectifying , it must be mentioned that the technical device of framing an image into the frame, is also frequently employed here, but contrary to its use in *Natela*, here it functions not for objectification and creating an image within an image, but to emphasize the process of peeping, that someone is watched without knowing it, and not only watching, but also listening without one's awareness (for example when Ali listens behind the door to Kuchuk's and Teveris Khanum's argument about his marriage with Giuli. Fig. 85). This technique is used for Ali's and Giuli's gaze's visual description (this technique of visualizing the gaze and process of peeping was employed in *Doctor Mabuse* of Fritz Lang in 1922).



Fig. 85

The conflict between Giuli and Ali in terms of looking relations (and not only), reaches its culmination on their wedding night. Before wedding, Giuli actually is outside of the existing symbolic order, or she has not made a total entry in it: she is by herself, also in paternal subjugation, but she has her freedom, she dates Christian Mitro that she, as a Muslim girl is not supposed to do. When Ali tells Kuchuki that he is not taking care of his sheep, that Giuli is dating Mitro, Kuchuki opposes, claiming that it is impossible, because they belong to different religions (compare to the novel, exactly this part is missing: the novel states that Giuli would not have thought about Mitro before, as her love interest (*objet petit a* of her desire) because of religious difference). The wedding articulates Giuli's entry into the existing symbolic order, exposing its traumatic effect: when married, Giuli is accompanied by Ali's numerous wives who lead her to the room where Ali is waiting for his bride. They have to cross several rooms before reaching the final destination, Giuli resists, and she takes in her arms the main pillar of the house and calls for her father (Figs. 86, 87, 88). But she is separated from the pillar by Ali's wives and introduced to Ali's room.



Fig. 86



Fig.87



Fig. 88

That is when and where conflict and rejection, reaches its culmination. Giuli denies Ali's passionate gaze, she tries to run away, but the wives have locked the door. Then she faces again Ali's gaze and covers her eyes and face, making this rejection a final condemnation. (figs. 89, 90, 91, 92, 93 ) Giuli actually disarms Ali with it. Ali also closes his eyes and hangs his head down, Giuli looks at him, and then she also hides her face crying. But this is a crucial moment, in the perspective as after this moment Ali does not possess the gaze over Giuli anymore, even if he now officially owns her, he is disempowered.



Fig. 89



Fig. 90



Fig.91



Fig. 92

Fig. 93

From now on it is Giuli who becomes a beholder of the gaze, and sees Ali, and others when they do not see her. One evening, when Ovaness and Mitro are Ali's guests and Giuli is called out from her room by Ali, all the men, who are sitting around the hearth and eating, become objects of her gaze. She observes Ali eating and Mitro, and her look and facial expression show all her disdain towards her husband.



Fig. 94

Fig. 95



Fig. 96

Fig. 97

Contrary to Ali, who does not notice Giuli's gaze and is totally objectified to it, Mitro is not in such a powerless position; he receives it, and returns back his look. But they are not the only gaze holders, Ali's wives gaze at Mitro and Giuli looking each other. Angry and offended



because of Ali's choice of a new, young wife, they voluntarily play a trick on him (Ali), and send Giuli and Phari to bring water, after Mitro has left the room on the ground to take bullies to the water. This is where Giuli and Mitro meet each other alone and reunite. Although, as it turns out in the end, they are still gazed, this time turned into an object of Kerbalai's look, who accidentally witnesses the scene. Hence even if Ali's controlling gaze is overturned, and now Giuli (and Mitro, considering that they are in the same group of the characters) possesses the gaze, she does not completely master it and is its only owner. She manipulates with Ali, offering him her embrace, in order to ensure his deep sleep and escape with Mitro afterwards (here again in mind comes E. Ann Kaplan's observation, that whenever women become bearer of the gaze, they become manipulative, quoted in the beginning of the chapter). When Giuli leaves she gazes at Ali, who is in extremely vulnerable and powerless position: he is asleep and unaware that he is just losing his hardly acquired object of desire. Losing her castrates him: after Giuli's escape Ali is all in miserable condition, exposed to Kerbalai's disgusted and at the same time sympathizing gaze, he is shown with a high angle shot multiple times, to emphasize his vulnerability. But still he is not deprived of all power, and takes revenge.



Fig. 98



Fig. 99



Fig. 100

Giuli, regardless her “empowerment” in terms of looking relations, and her attempt to break the oppressive symbolic order and to take control over her body and life (which she cannot do without helping auxiliaries (Kerbalai)) she is unsuccessful, she fails and is punished for it. Although the end still presents Ali in a rejected and castrated position: he sadly looks either on Giuli's dead body, or to Kerbalai, who refuses him a responsive look (Figs. 101, 102, 103). Nevertheless the last frame in the sequence leaves us with Giuli's dead body, whose deprivation

of the look, (sight, life, and agency) is emphasized by shadowing her face in such a way, that eyes are not seen, she is both literally and metaphorically blinded.



Fig. 101



Fig.102



Fig.103

In the end I would like to draw attention at one detail: Ovaness's watch. Ovaness, as already mentioned above, is a cheese merchant, who moves in between Borchalo and Tbilisi, the province and the urban city. I argue that in the film he functions as a connecting agent between progress (that is a new symbolic order, in which women are not exchanged on live stocks, are independent agents, the religion does not matter etc) and backwardness, a space where old customs rule and dominate. The filmic narrative introduces us with Ovaness in a very interesting way: first we see his boot on a bullock cart (Fig. 104) and then the title tells us: "As you see, this man is not in a hurry". The following shot shows us his stopped watch and the intertitle continues: "and his watch is following him step by step" (Fig. 105). Throughout the film Ovaness shakes his watch all the time and listens whether it works or has stopped again. These scenes metaphorically indicate to the slowed down tempo of overthrowing outdated customs and traditions in the rural areas. In the end, after Giuli's tragic death, we see Ovaness sitting on the chair in his room, sadly shaking the watch again



Fig. 104



Fig. 105

and listening to whether it works or not. The close up of the watch shows that time stands still, giving the sequence a metaphorical dimension. (Fig.106 Fig. 107)



Fig. 106



Fig.107



Fig. 108

By putting emphasis on the watch detail, and turning it into a speaking object, authors make this sequence say more, than the actual moral didactics expressed in concluding titles that was a major trend in the films of the period.

### *Eliso*

In the end of the 20s decade the production of Goskinprom Gruzii was marked with drastic changes. After premiering of several Georgian films, directed by young filmmakers, M. Chiaureli's *First Kornet Streshnev*, Mikeil Gelovani's *Youth Wins* and N. Shengelaia's *Eliso*, the critic of journal *Kino* posed a somewhat rhetorical question: "Can we now assume that Goskinprom fundamentally released its traditional "habits" of exposing "marmalade" eastern exotics?" ("In the Society of Soviet Cinema's Friends: *Eliso*", 1928, p.5). The critic was expressing suspicions not regarding the young directors, but to the heads of Goskinprom, asking gain if Goskinprom had engaged young directors seriously in its work/production. This suspicion was followed by the statement that these young directors were very promising and talented and were able to replace old "master" directors successfully.

But before the realization of *Eliso*, the film considered as the most breakthroughs in Goskinprom's production (it was the most successful among the above mentioned films), and its realization progress was not very much welcomed by the Goskinprom's officials.

In 1927 December the Goskinprom Gruzii and literary section received the conclusion of certain comrade Vasadze about the script: "I understand perfectly the author's desire. To hush up romantics on the expense of aggravating political side, to put on the first place all those injustice and abomination that Tsar's officials were committing. But no matter what they try, the film must expose the romantics of Caucasia by all means. Otherwise the picture will not provoke any interest"(Tabukashvili, 1974, pp. 56-57). The author of the conclusion was not satisfied by woman's representation in the film, stating that a Muslim woman is not supposed to behave so freely. The literary consultant of Goskinprom of the time, VI. Machavariani replied to the conclusion immediately that in his opinion nothing should be changed in *Eliso*: "The film is interesting exactly by the fact that it deals with romanticism and heroism in an innovative way. I will fight categorically to preserve the main version of the scenario. If the scenario is changed according to Vasadze's taste, then it will be better not to shoot the film at all" (Tabukashvili, 1974, p. 57).

*Eliso's* scenario, written by Sergei Tretyakov and Nikoloz Shengelaia, is based on Alexandre Kazbegi's short story of the same title. In the story Chechens are on their way to exile to Turkey, Istanbul from their native village- aul. One of Shamil's naib, Anzor, finds his daughter sitting alone, in deep sadness. He suspects that Eliso's sadness is not only caused by exile, but that she is secretly in love with Georgian Vazhia. After an honest talk Eliso confesses it, but calms down her father, promising that she will never leave him alone. When father and daughter are having conversation, Vazhia comes to them and learns that Chechens are going to exile, and asks Eliso to marry him. Eliso denies, saying she is going to stay with her father. After melodramatic conflict between loving father and sweetheart, the three of them agrees that Vazhia will go to Dzaug (where Tsar's officials are residing) and ask to the state official for permission for Anzor and Eliso to stay with him. Vazhia leaves, but the state official does not even talk to him and send his soldiers to chase him away. Although having heard that some of the Chechens are willing to stay, he gives an order to shout everyone, who disobeys and tries to run away claiming, that Chechens requested to be exiled by themselves, and they were permitted. The

night Vazhia creeps into the Chechens camp and runs away with Anzor and Eliso. But they cannot escape. Cossacks kill all of three.

Before releasing *Eliso*, Nikoloz Shengelaia published in *Memartskheneoba* a short notice titled as “Ramdenime tsinastsari shenishvna surat Elisos shesakheb” [some premeditated remarks about picture *Eliso*], in which he stated that their (his and Tretyakov’s) aim was not to produce a screen illustration of A. Kazbegi’s *Eliso*. They were interested in the main idea, theme that was given in *Eliso*, which was “bringing to light the aggressive (colonial) politics of the old regime and its results” (Shengelaia, 1928, p. 57). Shengelaia states that when they started preparing the scenario and studying the locality of Chechnya, it turned out that Kazbegi had “disfigured the historical truth of colonial politics for the sake of belletristic, or to say otherwise, he was not able to explore it as necessary” (Shengelaia, 1928, p. 57). Shengelaia claims that they studied the historical documents and the secret archive of Tergi region governor, that was accessible and exposed only after revolution. The dramatic collision of *Eliso* was inspired by the conducted research: “We introduced the action of the masses into the script and passed its condition... Thus obviously the picture does not represent the illustration of *Eliso*, and there was no need for it. We filmed the picture in a non exotic approach to Caucasus and demolishing aesthetic of nature, as far as possible”(Shengelaia, 1928, p. 57).

In the film scenario naib Anzor is transformed into the head of the village Astamir. The film opens with a scene where Eliso is waiting for Vazhia, who is negotiating with Chechens to give Khevi population permission to use their pastures for sheep. Even if Chechens always used to agree, this time they refuse, claiming that the general does not give them permission to do it so. Vazhia decides to go to the general and find out himself. After the meeting Vazhia and Eliso promise each other that even if Astamir refuses Vazhia to marry Eliso, they will still be together. The Russian cossacks want to exile Chechens, and attribute their land. With the help of one of them, who is jealous of Astamir, they make Chechens sign a document, which says they want a permission to leave the aul Verdi. Vazhia, who learns about this aim, makes the general sign the document, but he is too late, Chechens are already on their way to Turkey. Astamir regrets that they leave the village untouched. Eliso sneaks, goes to the aul and burns it. The next day, when Vazhia reaches the exiled people, he asks Astamir to follow them, but Astamir refuses, saying “You will always be stranger among us”. Eliso refuses to keep the promise, preferring to stay

with her father and people. Vazhia leaves and takes a child of a dead woman to Mozdok, as Eliso asks him to do so.

The film *Eliso* was transformed into a tragedy of masses from an individual one, that its literary source represented (this effect was reached by rhythmic montage of three scenes: aul population building the house for a poor widow, protest against Cossacks, and in the scene of mourning of one of their villager woman's death and collective dance. I will discuss these scenes below). In Akaki Bakradze's opinion the differences between literary and filmic texts generated two "Eliso": two different artistic works. This is caused by alterations of following accents: 1. The main plot line (in the literary text it is Eliso's and Vazhia's love and Chechen's exile serves only as a background, whereas in the film it is vice versa: the couple's love is only a fragment consisting of this human tragedy. 2. The literary source describes the Chechen's exile as a fact, whereas the film tells the history of this fact. 3. The film shows explicitly that Chechens tragedy was prepared by inner treason as well. 4. The characters in the story and in the film have differed from each other (Bakradze, 1989). But the main difference is that the story's ending connotes to the unanimity of Georgians and Chechens, where Eliso's and Vazhia's death supposes that "a sword directed towards Chechen will also kill Georgian," (Bakradze, 1989, p. 146) and all the Caucasian people. Whereas the film does not make connection between Chechen's tragedy and fate to any other Caucasian people, thus deals with this question (Tsarist colonizing politics) locally (Bakradze, 1989).

Although, according film critics Paata Iakashvili and Natia Amirejibi alteration of accents does not mean that we are dealing with a text other than Kazbegi, as this alteration did not change its semantic aim: according Iakashvili the creators of the film had an opportunity to talk about tsarist colonialism openly, whereas the particularities of the time did not give this permission to Kazbegi (*Eliso* was written in mid 1880s). And Amirejibi states that the alteration in the film was appropriate for its production time, when defending people's interest gained a particular importance, and moreover the main topic and plot pattern remains the same (Amirejibi, 1990). Paata Iakashvili does not share Shengelaia's opinion that Kazbegi represented the historical reality disfigured "for the sake of belletristic", but "he still said the truth, but in a different formulation, and both, the film and the short story are the continuation of each other considering the depiction of historical truth and artistic realization"(Iakashvili, 2012, p.10). It must be

mentioned that Alexandre Kazbegi was always illustrating the hard lives of Georgian mountaineers under Tsarist regime, and exposed the unbearably harsh treatment and conduct of Kazaks and Tsarist officials. In 1884 Kazbegi's story of the similar thematic, *Elguja* that had bought him popularity was published as a separate book, but the whole edition was burned by censor's order. Thus I completely agree with Paata Iakashvili regarding the representation of disfigured historical reality in *Eliso*, especially considering that the official's statement to Chechen people: "You requested exile yourself" does not quite fit into the depiction of Chechen's sadness and desperate situation and pain because of leaving the homeland, extensively described in the story, ultimately suggesting the untold facts standing behind it.

*Eliso* premiered on 18 September 1928 in Tbilisi cinema halls. No exotisation of Caucasus, any love triangles, any melodramatic marmalade, and introducing masses instead of individual heroes: no wonder *Eliso* had an enormous success: a poster published in *Komunisti* referred to it as "the best picture of the season" (*Komunisti*, 1928, September 18, p. 4). On September 23 it claimed that *Eliso* had a huge success and already 37.110 persons had seen it in 5 days. It was running for the second week in three grand cinema halls of Tbilisi: Soleil, Mignon and Apollo. But it must be mentioned that soon after its premier, the governmental politics towards North Caucasian people changed and Stalin's regime was established, it was not shown anymore as "anti-Russian" film (Kereselidze, 2014). In the review published on September 27, the reviewer Sh. D. was announcing that after those numerous fails that Georgian state cinema production had seen, it had entered into the era of development with *Eliso*, calling the film "the victory of director Shengelaia, cameraman Kereselidze, our State Cinema Production" (Sh.D. 1928, p.5). The October 9 issue of the *Sovetskii ekran* praised *Eliso* together with Mikheil Chiaureli's directorial debut- *First Cornet Streshnev*, although remarking that first works of the Georgian young directors are not dealing with contemporary life, but are interested still in its past, "but it is obvious that both these films are produced by the people who are fighting for our present in the cinematography. Both pictures differ from previous productions with cultural mastery and huge conscientiousness... Both films are willing to speak about historical past in a language of revolution" (Khris. Kh. 1928, pp. 6-7). Viktor Shklovsky also praised *Eliso* in an article regarding "K voprosu izuchenii zritelya" [Issue of audience studies] calling it a contribution provided by Goskinprom in cinema production (Shklovsky, 1928). The gazette *Kino*, dedicated a rubric "V obshestve druzei sovetsoi kinematografii" [In the Society of Soviet



Cinematography’s Friends] to Nikoloz Shengelaia’s *Eliso* (Vaks, 1928). Before the discussion Shengelaia introduced the origins of *Eliso*, his and Tretyakov’s aims, and asked to the Soviet Cinematography’s Friends for indications, stating that: “Caucasus has been compromised enough in cinema. Working with different devices, I tried to expose Caucasus in a more realistic and truthful light in my picture. The Society of Soviet Cinematography’s Friends, as the only organization concentrating the public attention on advancing cinema youth, must indicate me whether I have worked correctly, if my montage devices has reached the audience, what kind of defect does the picture have? I will consider every indication in my next work”(Vaks, 1928, p. 5). The Society of Soviet Cinematography’s Friends stated that *Eliso* “will bring huge good” (comrade Levintov, [factory Dinamo]), that it was “a big victory” (comrade Boltianskii), The main defect, of the picture, according comrade Russo, representative of Tea-Kino-Pechat, was introduction of the religious difference, and the ending that bear romantic shade. Although remarked that the picture was very impressive in general. “In the picture everything is motivated” (Comrade Stepanov, CO of the Society), “the picture teaches a lot” (comrade Jhabko [factory 22]). The resolution was that *Eliso* was a “huge achievement”, and emphasized that *Eliso* was the first picture among others of Goskinprom Gruzii and other organizations that was depicting not a “sugary” east, but authentic Caucasus it was stainless in terms of sharpness and transferring lyrical moments, and photography of a young cameraman Kereselidze, who debuted in feature film production. The main defect was unrealistically caricatured fight of Vazhia with tsarist Kazaks. In the end the Society highly recommended to Georgian State Cinema Production to support and strengthen work of the youth in their production.

A reviewer of the same journal remarked that in *Eliso* form was coincided with the content. The reviewer was surprised that the author of the historical script, was Sergei Tretyakov, a member of the *Lef*, “who has come into the cinema to make new things, and does the old things”. Although it remarked that the script was really good. In short the review expressed dissatisfaction with the thematic choice of the film, but claimed the “Director Shengelaia is talented, and not an average one”. And he “learns from the real masters” remarking *Eliso*’s parallels with Pudovkin, Kruze [I could not identify this author] and in the end stating that: “we have to admit, that Shegelaia did not watch Eisenstein’s *October* superficially” (M.Sh-R. 1928, p. 5).

Although there were some who were not satisfied because of the plot absence and blamed Shgelaiia that he was preoccupied too much with the form and missed the hero. He was also blamed for imitating American westerns ( N. Stor’s article “Goskinprom or Goskinpromockh” [promokh-failure in Russian] as cited in Tabukashvili, 1974). As Denise Youngblood remarks the irony of turning Vazhia’s swordfight with Russian Kazaks “into a hilarious parody of a Fairbanks swashbuckler” was missed by some critics, although it was “a sense of humor rare in Soviet melodrama” (Youngblood, 1985, p. 182). It is remarkable that N. Stor blamed Shengelaia for hero’s absence. It is true that Shgelaiia made masse as a protagonist, and did not focus on individual drama, but ignoring Eliso’s character, who nevertheless is a protagonist that drastically contrasts with all the other heroines of the eastern thematic films, showing a strong, self-willed woman, who was not anybody’s victim and was making decisions about her life herself, is not fair in my opinion. Olgha Tabukashvili also finds it strange, remarking that even if the mass is the main hero of the film, the certain figures characters are also worked on in great details (Tabukashvili, 1974). Interestingly enough neither Paata Iakashvili, who explores in depth the national energy expressed in *Eliso*, discuss Eliso’s character. Beach Gray in his paper *Nikoloz Shengelaia’s Eliso and Construction of Soviet Past* rightly remarks that “although Shengelaia and Tretyiakov spoke about the emphasis on the narrative of a people, rather than an individual, *Eliso* is the key figure in the film, the film’s protagonist” (Gray, 2014). Oliko Jghenti sees Eliso’s character as denying and breaking Nato Vachnadze’s star image (Jghenti, 2007). Olgha Tabukasvhili remarks that Eliso was the first character in Georgian film, which is “so strong, and full of dignity and selflessness. She puts public interests above private, submits an individual interest to common challenges” (Tabukashvili, 1974) .

For Eliso’s role was cast Nato Vachnadze’s sister, Kira Andronikashvili who was a non professional actress. Oliko Jghenti explains Shgelaiia’s choice to cast Kira, as a wish to destroy the cinema stereotype of Georgian woman- the heroine of Eliso radically dissociates the screen images created by Nato Vachndze, who are powerless, surrendered to fate, victims of violence and revenge (Jghenti, 2007), in one word, that of story’s sadism. After casting in Eliso she continued work in Vostokfilm, as an actress and director’s assistant. She was studying in Moscow Cinematography Institute in order to become a director. Sergei Eisenstein mentions her tragic fate in his autobiography: “Kira Andronikova, wife of the famous writer Boris Pilnyak (who had been imprisoned already)...was sent to prison together with her six-year-old child”

(Eisenstein, 1983, p.xxi). Although Kira's son did not go with her in prison, Vachnadze was raising him. In the beginning of the 40s Nato Vachnadze met Stalin on the days of Georgian Literature and Art in Moscow, and asked him in person to release her sister. Her request was fulfilled, and she was even cast in several films afterwards (Shatikashvili, 2011).

But before moving onto discussion of Eliso's character and her role and meaning in the film, first I want to discuss the role of masse, as film's protagonist. I already mentioned above that this moment, that the film is about people, not about individuals, is manifested in following scenes: house building sequence, protest sequence, and mourning/celebration sequence I will discuss them respectively.

First we see Chechens building a house of a poor widow. First women are building, and men are dancing, and then, obeying Astamir's order, they switch the roles: men are building women are dancing. This dancing scene is filmed in a very interesting and innovative (at least for Goskprom's productions) montage techniques, applying rhythmic montage. The unanimity and energy of Chechen people is expressed through rhythmic montage of a quick alteration of repeating frames of dancing legs, smiling faces, clapping hands, shots of feet that mash the ground, showing how someone's hand applies coat of mud over the pillar in circular movement, men passing bricks to each other. The sequence lasts for 2 minutes, but is dizzying and energizing in its intensity. The unanimity is strengthened by the fact that there is no labor division: both, men and women equally participate one after another in the process and fulfill the same duties and responsibilities. This works in two ways: on the one hand it depicts the mountaineer life-style<sup>4</sup> and on the other hand it depicts both sexes' involvement into building and constructing process, something that was so into the spirit of Soviet gender politics.

The second sequence showing the unanimity is when Russian Cossacks go to the Chechens and declare as if they have requested permission to depart themselves. Population unanimously declines this false fact eventually. When Cossacks decide to run the horses on them they simultaneously sit cross-legged and deny to move. The horses stop. Cossacks now try to make Chechens move by lashing them, but unsuccessfully. The unanimity is abolished when Astamir's

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<sup>4</sup> Letters of women delegates from mountainous regions published in *Chveni Gza* (later to become *Proletarian Woman*) testimony that women in mountains were fulfilling the same duties as men. Actually the letter authors complain that whole labor is on women's shoulders, whereas men only drink with neighbors.

rival proposes to write a letter to general, with a statement that they have not requested to be exiled. Astamir refuses this idea, but people agree. Russian soldiers write in the text that Chechens request to be exiled, and now the paper exists, with signatures of the whole population.

As I have noted above, the third scene occurs when Chechens are on their way to Istanbul to exile. They are mourning and depressed, and one of them, a woman dies, asking Eliso to send her child to Mozdok on her deathbed. The whole village falls in a deep grief, they start crying extremely emotionally. The death of a woman, a mother, who looks for a shelter for her child, functions as a synecdoche of Chechens deprived motherland, whose children are now obliged to find another home. And it is no accident that the dead woman is the widow, whose house the village was building in the beginning. The parallel montage shows the dead woman and the burning aul simultaneously, emphasizing this metaphor. The overwhelming, hysterical mourning, as Iakashvili remarks, is not a mourning of the passed away person, but moaning their selves and fate (Iakashvili, 2012). It is only Astamir who is not involved in the collective sorrow: he gives an order to the musicians to play and starts dancing: shocked people still grieving are looking at him, he makes Eliso and others dance too, and collective hysterical sorrow transforms into collective ecstatic joy/jouissance. As Gray righteously observes, the traditional dance, an inevitable part of Caucasian exotics, is filmed in a way that the camera gaze does not orientalize or exoticise it at all: “The camera-work focuses on the dance, rather than the costuming, to which the spectator at this point has become inured. The depiction fiercely denies a potential reading at this being merely exotica, since it serves a key function in the narrative. In the context with the final scene, the dancing scene shifts the focus to collective collaboration and coping, rather than just the romantic line of two individuals.” (Gray, 2014, p. 7). The montage is a key factor here: as Chechens dance the camera accelerates in a way that people are in incredibly fast motion: “Shots of people’s feet as they dance, frames of people in the crowd clapping and stills of the dying widow are intercut in a way that suggests that the only way to deal with tragedy and overcome it is through collective joy and an expression of solidarity” (Gray, 2014, p. 7). Olgha Tabukashvili claims that with this dancing scene Nikoloz Shengeialai managed to achieve what Sergei Eisenstein called “the effect of transition into a qualitatively new state” (Tabukashvili, 1974, p.67). Eisenstein himself claimed that Caucasian dance is well filmed only in two soviet pictures, and in Eliso it is better, than in October (Layeda, 1960/1983). According Iakashvili this dance

sequence became a classical example of manifesting repressed national energy in cinema (Iakasvhvili, 2012).

Teo Khatiashvili observes that these scenes illustrate the semantic of circle and montage structure (Khatiasvhvili, 2012). The circle, wheel, was an important imagery for early XX century avant-garde. And Shengelaia, who belonged to the Futurist group, uses modernist aesthetic in his film: he does not only represents this shape in his film as an aesthetic-formalist sign (the negotiation scene opens with Vazhia's shield's turning, the moving and compositional arrangement of people in these sequences repeat the form of the circle etc) but actually attributes it meaning of ideological concept and transforms it into a sign of dialectical relation of life and death in the last dancing scene (Khatiasvhvili, 2012).

The character of Eliso herself was a very much unfamiliar type of heroine for Georgian films. She is a way emancipated successor of Giuli, who tried to take her destiny in her own hands. Eliso is determined, independent, active: she is willing to master her body, her affection and fate by herself: she has made her choice on Vazhia, a candidate might not be approved by her father, but she gives him a vow, that Astamir's refusal will not influence her.

When Chechens are leaving and Eliso receives from a village boy Vazhia's sent document signed by general, Astamir says that now it's too late, and regrets that they left aul untouched for Russian Cossacks. Eliso sneaks away from the carriage, returns to the aul Verdi and burns it. By this action, she does not only expresses her autonomy and agency, which is taking decisions what she is going to do on her own, but also masculinates herself in a way: she transforms and acts, like Astamir would have done, if he had been younger, or his successor, son would have done, if Astamir had one. With this act, she preserves dignity to her people, and Astamir, the leader of this people.

Eliso has power not only on her life, but on people as well: when Chechens are in ecstatic condition and dance, Vazhia reaches them. Chechens blame him for their exile. It is Eliso who intervenes in between raising crowd of people and Vazhia, takes off her scarf and throws it down (a custom in mountains: when a woman was taking off her scarf and throwing in between the fighters, the fighters had to stop battle, no matter the reason), and with a powerful gesture stops them shouting: "It's not his fault, you signed the document yourself". (Fig.109 Fig. 110 Fig.111)



Fig. 109



Fig. 110



Fig.111

Eliso contrasts with all the other heroines, not only because she has full agency in the terms of the plot development: she is independent, acting on her own decisions, is not victimized and does not need to be saved from a “good, right” man (who mostly, as they are in powerless “feminine” position in the depicted social structure, fail to do so), but actually she is the one, who saves a man (Vazhia). Beach Gray remarks that when Eliso gives Vazhia a child and asks to take him to Mozdok, Vazhia gets gendered as female. But in my opinion Vazhia’s gendering as female is taking place in the moment when Eliso protects him from the people’s angst. Even if taking off the scarf was a usual custom shared by mountaineer peoples, the expression and action of Eliso is so powerful, that Gray compares her to biblical Moses figure “a new patriarch of the Chechen community” (Gray, 2014, p. 8).

Beach Gray interprets the film’s altered ending, the impossibility of Eliso’s and Vazhia’s union and Astamir’s refusal in terms of religious difference: “the film’s position is the following: differences in religion, not culture, are the root source of the problem and the reason that Vazhia and Eliso cannot be together. Vazhia is Christian and Eliso Muslim. If the indictment of religion in Tretyakov’s first collaborative script is subtle, then in *Salt for Svanetiia* it becomes much more clear (by showing the local priests in a negative light), and *Khabarda* is even more extreme in its depiction of the destruction of a church. Culture, however, and especially the *lezginka* dance, are to be preserved, as though religion is a definable aspect of culture than can be removed as if it were a part that did not contribute to the functioning of the whole.” (Gray, 2014, p. 7). Natia Amirejibi confronts such interpretation (frequently expressed also in Soviet film criticism) stating that Eliso stays with Chechens because of civil solidarity (Amirejibi, 1990). I would go further and argue that the reason of impossibility of Eliso’s and Vazhia’s being together, is more political. Beach’s argument might also be supported by comparison *Eliso*

to *Giuli*, Shengelaia's first film, where the union of a Christian and a Muslim is not even a question for a girl's father once hinted about it, because of the religious difference (according to the intertitle he says: "Mitro is a Christian and Giuli is a Muslim, I don't believe you Ali"). I already noted when discussing *Giuli* that its literary source also emphasized religious difference). But in my opinion, whatever the scenarists position was, the film offers a different reading, implying that the union of Eliso and Vazhia is impossible, not by religious, but political difference, especially when put in the dialogue with its literary source. In the film, when Chechen people are on their way to exile, in the morning, before the widow dies, Eliso is cleaning a casserole. During the process, drawn in sad thoughts, she draws an ornament (a cross- although a Christian attribute but a widely spread and used adornment in Georgian mountainous traditional clothing as well) of Vazhia's traditional clothe, on the casserole. This frame, in relation to a scene in the beginning of the film, where Eliso and Vazhia make a vow to each other (comp. Fig 112. and Fig. 113), becomes a syntagmatic sign and signify Eliso's longing for her sweetheart. Astamir approaches her from behind, and when he sees that Eliso is drawing crosses on the casserole he gets the meaning, interrupts her harshly, looks in her eyes and tells her "Giaurs have ruined us". Ashamed, Eliso turns back to him and starts erasing the crosses. The problem is not religion, neither cultural difference (Chechens and Mokheves and other Georgian mountainous people had many things in common, and Kazbegi's stories always reveal big sympathy and friendship between these people), and not the mere fact of Eliso's national civil solidarity, as argues Amirejibi, but Georgians' politics- that they have decided to fight against Chechens together with Russians. And even if one and many other Mokheves are not fighting against Chechens, it still does not change the fact that Georgians are. This is what Astamir means when he refuses Vazhia saying "You will be a stranger among us" -stranger not because of culture (they are neighbors and the religion did not matter that much: he is not even questioning whether Vazhia is ready to give up Christianity for Eliso), but the thing is that he is other, belonging to the nation that decided to fight against Chechens together with Russians.



Fig. 112



Fig. 113

The literary text states it explicitly (and Natia Amirejibi also quotes it to support her argument against assumption of religious conflict (Amirejibi, 1990)): when Anzor is wondering why Eliso is so sad, the worst scenario of her sadness is if she is in love with Vazhia. And Eliso does not dare to express her feelings to anyone, because “if such thing had happened before and a Muslim had fallen in love with ‘mountaineer’ Christian, according the customs of those times the religion would not be a brake reason for their union. But now, when Georgians, that is Christians, were guiding ‘giaurs’, that is Russians and were showing them ways, when they were fighting with giaurs against related neighbors-now it was all different. It was with the help of ‘Christians’ that ‘coward giaurs’ had subordinated them and after that what kind of union could have been!” (Khazbegi, 1882/1987, p. 374)

Georgia’s political collaboration with Russia makes Vazhia an “other”-“giaur”, although this term was solely used to designate Russians and never Georgians in Khazbegi’s works. Even if Vazhia is fighting for Chechens (he brings them live-stock, makes the general to sign a paper, which gives Chechens permission to stay, so he is very much acting as their protector), and even if Chechens signed the paper themselves, even if they were tricked, they were motivated when Cossacks showed them Vazhia’s sword, by which he wounded the general. So, even if Eliso is right, and actually stops people telling it’s their fault in the end, the cause to blame is still Vazhia. This blame becomes a signifier of a larger and bigger guilt of the nation, representative of which Vazhia is, as Chechens were to find in the condition they were because of Georgians collaboration with Russians. This is a reason why Vazhia will remain a stranger among



Chechens, and why Astamir is so decisive and radical in his refusal; by saying these words, he actually forbids Vazhia to join and move away with Chechens. Moreover, this is also the reason why Eliso does not will to keep her promise anymore. The tragedy of the small village Verdi, its population's exile, and Eliso's own participation in the protest (burning the village) raises, the sense of belonging to her own roots and nation. In the film restored by directors Eldar Shengelaia (Nikoloz Shengelaia's son) and Leila Mikeladze in 1987, Eliso says to Vazhia: "No, I cannot leave father and my people". But Olgha Tabukashvili quotes the following intertitle for the same sequence: "I was living happily with my people. Let me be unhappy with my people as well" (Tabukashvili, 1974, pp. 54-55)- which sounds way harsher and definitive than in the restored version. What wins over Vazhia, (that is personal) is the people (that is public and social demands), containing the idea of nation-state. This resurrected the archetypal image of a (although by no means exclusively) Georgian woman, who sacrifices her happiness (children, husband) to the state.

So, in the end of the 1920s a Georgia's State Cinema Production section issued a picture, which was offering everything that was missing from women's cinematic representations before in its production: an independent individual, able to take decisions by herself, a free actor, master of her life and body. But this independence, plays privileging nation-state public interests, and somehow excludes the combination with private happiness. It is remarkable that even in the case of having such an emancipated heroine; a woman's body is not free from victimization: a female must be sacrificed so that the community could achieve catharsis, a female body that becomes a marker of motherland. I mentioned above that it is the poor widow, whose house the village was building who dies, and remarked that this coincidence is not accidental. The building process of her house, depicted above, is an influential sequence, which expresses the unanimity of the community, ultimate solidarity for the poor and powerless and their life rhythm, in which both men and women equally participate. Thus this house also functions as a metaphor of the community's efforts to build their "home" (country).

## Conclusion

As we could see the orientalizing of Caucasus, of the east was a prominent thematic in the works of Georgia State Cinema Production throughout the twenties. Consciously directed for the gaze of the Other, the directors were trying their best to turn the region “other” on its own right through its orientalizing. Even if audiences were content and satisfied by such imagery, both in Georgia and Russia (and according to the numbers we can confidently assume that they were), it was not the case of the critics, who were harshly condemning the overwhelming, unrealistic orientalizing, excessiveness of not actual themes, and the last but not the least, women’s representation, who in the end of the day had only one function: to be an exchange currency / battle ground between “good” and “bad” guys. In the sign system, female body had multiple functions: it was definitely the source of visual aesthetic pleasure rendered through objectification/sexualization (*The Suram Fortress, Natela*) sometimes a signifier of popular backwardness, revenge and cruelty (*The Suram Fortress, Natela*) and always a signifier of tortured people/class/region (*The Suram Fortress, Eliso*). It is true that in the end of the twenties the Caucasus, and historical Caucasus (I think that it was managed showing its historical context is even more remarkable in this sense) is freed from the exoticization, and its women are no longer represented as merely sexual beings. Nevertheless it is striking to observe, that if women are trying to acquire agency to dominate their own lives, in order to master their own body and sexuality, they fail and are punished by death (*Giuli*). And those who have it, are using it to refuse private life/ sexuality for the sake of public “interests”, that is the nation-state idea (*Eliso*), implying that female sexuality is supposed to be repressed and disciplined in favor of nation-state’s interests.

## Chapter IV

### **Modification of Mother Figure and the Revolutionary Set: *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, (1921) *Mother* (1926) and *Prison Cell 79* (1929)**

The French writer Dominique Fernandez, in the psychobiography of Sergei Eisenstein posits that the Oedipal conflict is crucial for any avant-garde and any revolution (Fernandez, 1975), as both are said to suppose revolt against the father, and they both yearn towards shaking and refusing the “old”: social order, traditions, cultural beliefs, and modes of expression by replacing it with the “new”. There is a certain correlation when the temporal coincidence of both kinds of revolts happens, and in the Soviet revolution’s context the rebellion against the political and artistic Symbolic Father was not indeed accidental.

In the Soviet context, an avant-garde movement and revolution occurred at the same time, suggesting rebellion against both the political and artistic symbolic fathers. In the light of this social-psychological framework, this chapter aims to explore and analyze the shift in representations of the mother figure during the 1920s decade of Georgian films, which can be considered as early Soviet avant-garde. The selected films: *Arsena Jorjiashvili* (1921) and *Prison Cell 79* (1929) depict a revolutionary context where family relations are stressed in this set and offer an oedipal reading. Considering that young Georgian filmmakers belonging to revolutionary group Lef mentioned the pre revolutionary directors who pursued filming melodramas in traditional style, against which they wanted to rebel as “fathers” (Amirejibi, 1990), only supports this argument. In this chapter I offer a comparative analysis of three films to explore how women’s involvement in revolution and their agency were depicted and transferred through the medium of the cinema in the course of the decade of the 1920s.

Although my aim is to study women’s representation in Georgian Soviet silent films, here I will also incorporate Russian filmmaker Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Mother*, filmed in 1926 in the analysis, which was very popular in the Soviet Union and among Georgian audiences as well. I would argue that this latter appears to be a transitional point in terms of mother figure representations between those two Georgian films that I selected to investigate produced in 1921 and 1929. These selected films are directed by Ivane Perestiani—one of those referred as “father” by young

filmmakers (*Arsena Jorjiashvili*,) and by Zakaria Berishvili (*Prison Cell 79*). This decision was made for certain of their similarities and their differences. These two films share some common traits with each other: they both have the same topical focus on workers' clandestine revolutionary activities around 1905, and both are based on real events, as well as Pudovkin's *Mother*. They differ when they were produced: *Arsena Jorjiashvili* was the first Georgian film issued in 1921 right after Georgia's sovietization, *Prison Cell 79* was shot in 1929 and issued in movie theaters in 1930, one of the last films of the decade, whereas *Mother* was produced in between (1926 as already mentioned above) and had a big influence on Berishvili's film, as I will show later. *Prison Cell 79* was one of the first "ideologically correct" films in Georgian Cinema production after long years of its failures in this sense. The reviewers praised it for its refusal to introduce exotic vision of Georgia and Caucasus in general again and offering truth like representations. I argue that both factors, the main theme and time shift are the appropriate criteria for choosing these films for exploring the question of how women's images, were modified and emancipated during the decade in these visual texts, which describe the same historical context. I will also argue that this shift in women's representation does not represent a concrete director's different point of view, but is a result of always- present- in the press - criticism of Georgian Cinema Section's representations and the demand for strong women's roles on the screen. Supporting my thesis with above mentioned Fernandez's claim, I will argue that given that both films deal with the revolutionary activities, they allow observation and analysis of the oedipal conflict as played out in particular scenes in each film. The role of the mother is also figured in each of these films, though there are important differences in the mother-image. At the center of my analysis is the question of how the image of the woman (the mother figure in this case) changed during the decade. In *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, she appears as a mere decoration. In *Mother* she gains political awareness being an subject to an oedipal reading with its stress on father-son opposition and mother-child bond in the context of revolution, hence offering a reading of the family drama as a story of the revolution itself. And the end of the decade- in *Prison Cell 79* mother turns into an embodiment of the great revolution itself, as the film plot describes the successful resolution of the complex and the revenge of the rejected mother.

## Overview of the context

Historically women have been very actively involved in the revolutionary activities and Russian Revolution was no exception. Alexandra Artilakhva's book *Georgia's Proletarian Women in the Fight for Soviet Authority*, and Neli Burdzenidze's *Political and Massive Work among Georgian Women in 1921-1929* testimony to both, - the involvement of women in clandestine movements and Bolshevik efforts to emancipate women. The aim of the comparative analysis of these two films is to explore, how women's involvement in revolution and their agency was described and transferred through cinematic medium in the very beginning and in the very end of the 20s decade. The conducted analysis will put a special emphasis on the mother figure: as I already noted above, whereas in *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, mother figure has a mere decorative function, *Prison Cell 79* centers on a woman, a revolutionary, and a mother, where revolutionary values and motherhood, - a woman's sacred duty and evocation, emphasized and worshiped in all patriarchal cultures and overly characteristic to Georgian culture, are in conflict. Besides the overall generalization that oedipal conflict has crucial importance for avant-garde and revolution, as revolution (political or avant-gardist) is sons' revolt against fathers, the selected film scenarios also insist strongly on psychoanalytical reading, as the plots themselves accentuate oedipal triangles.

## *Arsena Jorjiashvili*

*Arsena Jorjiashvili*, or *The Murder of General Griazanov* (as it was named for circulation in the Soviet Union) by Ivane Perestiani, is the first Georgian Soviet silent film. It premiered in the movie theater Arfasto on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1922. It depicts the clandestine revolutionary activity of workers and the strike they organized, and the plot is centered on the main hero, Arsena Jorjiashvili, played by Mikheil Chiaureli later to be Stalin's favorite director.

The film's story line is based on real life events from 1905: Arsena Jorjiashvili, a worker from the depot killed General Griazanov, the prominent enemy of the revolutionary movement,

fulfilling the decision of the proletariats who were on strike. A year after the terrorist act, Jorjiashvili was captured and killed in Metekhi prison. He greeted the resolution of the court with dignity. The film is dedicated to this hero of the pre-revolutionary era.

The filmmakers began shooting during the Menshevik government (Arsena Jorjiashvili was Menshevik) and finished under Bolsheviks without any impediment (Makharadze, 2014). Ironically it became very important film for the Bolshevik government. Originally it was supposed to be the first film of Mensheviks' project- the cinema epopee which would describe the revolutionary activities and movements in Caucasus, starting from 1905 revolution till the end of Monarchy (Bakradze, 1989). The change of the power did not disturb the filming process, although the film epopee was never realized. The director Perestiani and the cinematographer Alexander Dighmelov (Dighmelashvili) produced the film "literary on pennies, without technical equipment (without atelier, laboratory, etc.)" ("Goskinprom Gruzii", 1925, p.7). Even so it had success. In 1925 the journal *Sovetskii ekran* wrote ("Goskinprom Gruzii", 1925) that although many people watched and were watching at that time *The Murder of General Griaznov*, very few knew what efforts and energy were spent on these 1.350 meters. But, according to the reviewer, the success of the film justified all the time and effort that went into creating it.

In the film certain biographical and historical facts were altered. For example the historical fact is that Jorjiashvili was hanged, not shot as it is represented in the film. In his memories, the Social-Democrat Grigol Uratadze mentions these distortions and notes that after the annexation of Georgia, Bolsheviks at first misappropriated this famous murder, and later even claimed that Jorjiashvili was also a Bolshevik (Makharadze, 2014).

From the time of its release, the film was enormously successful. It recouped its total cost two weeks after the release in movie theaters. According the official figures given in *Komunisti* (April 7, 1922), *Arsena Jorjiashvili* became a record-holder among all the films shown in the then existing cinemas: in Tbilisi it was shown 140 times, in Batumi 30 times, in Kutaisi 15 times, and in Poti and Samtredia 3 and 1 times respectively. Soon after its Georgian release, the film was sent to Russia as well, and it had a great success there too. Russian workers even sent a red flag to Ivane Perestiani to express their appreciation.

The film opens with the scene showing worker's conspiracy at the factory: Arsena is introduced with a member of "Russian People's Union" (Narodnik) and workers agree on a clandestine meeting. Arsena visits his family-mother and sister, and later goes to the clandestine meeting. The situation in the depot gets more and more tense. The strike reaches its culmination and while the officials are discussing the situation, General Griaznov opts for taking drastic measures. The revolutionary leaders are arrested. Since the workers are on strike, and Arsena's mother complains that they have nothing to eat, to which Arsena explains that all this is happening for the sake of a better future. But he cannot wait for the better future: the drastic circumstances and growing tensions with officials lead the workers to plan the murder of General Griaznov, and Arsena is selected by sortition to commit the act. In the film scenario Arsena is arrested immediately after the murder, and is shot in the backyard of the Metekhi prison. The concluding title tells the viewer that "the memory of the hero, who sacrificed his life for freedom and well being of the people, is immortal. The Soviet workers, who have got rid of exploitation a long time ago, will never forget the name of those who died for the freedom of his people."

By the time that *Arsena Jorjiashvili* was filmed, the social discourse on women's emancipation was present, largely advocated by first wave Georgian feminists before the revolution, and by the new Bolshevik government itself. It is an historical fact that in this period women were actively taking part in clandestine activities. In the film, women revolutionaries appear, though their roles and function are limited and they appear as a mere decoration: they do not act, do not participate in anything, do not have agency. They just *appear* on the screen next to male characters. There are two groups of women: Arsena's family (which includes his mother and sister, and a neighbor girl) and women who we actually see on the screen during one of the clandestine meetings, including Arsena's sweetheart. We also see high class women in the general Griaznov's party scene, which is juxtaposed in parallel montage with arrests conducted by soldiers, but here too with their flirting and sultry gazes women only function to connote lust and therefore moral degradation of their class, like I already showed in the previous chapter<sup>5</sup> (Fig.1 Fig.2 Fig.3). It is also true that during arrest a revolutionary woman daringly insults an officer, (Fig. 4) after which she is harshly beaten. Although her expression captured in the frame is all bold and brave, but nevertheless I do not think that this scene illustrates her agency: first, it is just a very short

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter on "Class and Female body's symbolic meaning."

momentary episode, her character does not have any development, and second, this short scene only serves to emphasize the bestiality of tsar’s soldiers, rather than depicting her agency, as when shown with male comrades, she and other women just appear and lack any initiative or boldness. In what follows I will provide a close, detailed analysis of Arsena’s domestic environment and clandestine meeting scenes to illustrate and prove my argument.



Fig. 1



Fig.2



Fig. 3



Fig.4

Arsena’s mother and sister are introduced to the viewer in a domestic environment: the mother is sitting and knitting, while her daughter is cleaning cups. A neighbor runs in and tells them that Arsena is coming home. They meet him with great affection, embrace and kiss. His sister leads him to the table holding his hand, as if he were a child. While his mother embraces him, the neighbor girl brings dinner; both girls stand next to Arsena and look down on him as he eats, in a very protective and caring manner (Fig. 5) The intertitle that follows this scene says: “Their only love”. After the dinner Arsena reads extracts form Karl Marx’s work to his sister and the



neighbor girl. The girls have very bored and absent expressions on their faces. The neighbor's gaze is directed towards Arsena, but appearing tired and exhausted, her face conveys disinterest in what Arsena reads, or understands what he is reading. The sister is not looking at her brother; instead her gaze is directed elsewhere. It is pretty clear that she is in an absent minded condition, which contrasts with Arsena's intensely very theatrical and emotional performance reading text (Fig. 6). There is a very sharp contrast between their almost exaggerated excitements while serving dinner to the beloved brother, and their disengagement while listening to him read Marx. The message is very clear: these women are not interested in politics and ideology. They are alienated from Arsena's aims and interests. When Arsena leaves home, the girls see him off. When he leaves they embrace each other affectionately and happily, feeling proud of him (Fig.7). These women embody attributes that the larger culture traditionally associates with their gender: they are caretakers, and offer affectionate love to the male member of the family- a son and a brother. It is traditional Georgian cultural attitude to prioritize a male child over a female one. The movie depicts Arsena as the mother's, sister's and the neighbor girl's "only love" which somehow precludes the love between the mother and daughter, and/or between daughter and the neighbor girl or any other external love (sexual) interest. Even so, it is significant that the scene concludes with Arsena's sister and the neighbor girl embracing as the frame fades (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8), suggesting an emotional bond between them, (that might look alike homoerotic lesbian spectacle, at least for contemporary viewer) but meanwhile their gaze is fixed on leaving Arsena, who has already gone from the frame, suggesting he is the point where their emotions and affections intersect.

As I already mentioned above, women occur to appear during the clandestine meeting, and thus the historical reality of given a tribute: In the conspiracy apartment there is a secrete gathering. On the second plan we see several workers, actively engaged into conversation. On the first plan there are three women sitting, silently with absent / bored / sorrowful faces (reading of their facial expressions is a question of interpretation). They are not taking part into the discussion, no one from the men's group address to any of them or seem interested in their opinion and try to engage them into conversation. On the contrary, men's heads and expressions/gestures are directed towards each other, creating a closed circle, from which absent faced women are compositionally excluded (Fig. 9).



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Women remain in the same position, until Arsena walks to them and engages in a conversation with them. We learn that one these women is Arsena's sweetheart.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

In the film we encounter women's images in each other's company, together with men, or alone. Nevertheless these representations lack authenticity. When they are shown in each other's company- it is in a domestic space (Arsena's mother and sister) and a short sequence also shows them outside- in a garden (where Arsena's sweetheart is talking with her friends). There is a certain contrast within these spaces, the private, domestic space is attributed to women, who do not work or study, and hence they are occupied with household, and the public- the yard of a school, by those who study, and are engaged in clandestine revolutionary movements as well- "emancipated" women, (Arsena's sweetheart). But their representations when they appear together with men are so isolated and compositionally excluded from men that women still appear without actual agency and have merely decorative function. Even when they are shown alone, they still are shown in relation to absent men: Arsena's sweetheart and mother both have a bad presentiment,(as intertitle lets us know) hence they are still enclosed in one of the characteristics belonging to the realm of "eternal feminine".

Thus, even if we see the involvement of women in clandestine activities, they either are not really interested in it or do not have voice/agency. Arsena's sisters, regardless their total affection and respect towards him, find it hard to follow when he reads and shares with them Marx's ideas, they are bored, looking the space or at him with visibly bored and uninterested faces. Even when we see women at the clandestine meeting (including Arsena's sweetheart) they are also separated: during the discussion there are two groups: the group in the front plan including three women, and the group of the second plan- a closed circle of men who are actively talking with each other. Women are sitting silently; they do not talk or interact, neither with the male closed circle, nor with each other, whereas the men are affectionately discussing something (political). The message of the scene is very clear: women are not interested in politics/they have nothing to say. Even in the scene of revolutionary activities, they serve as a decoration, just to make a statement that they are also there, but they neither participate nor have any agency. Women's role is embodied in taking care of the main hero, show affection for him, respect, admire and love him (mother, sister, and neighbor girl, Arsena's sweetheart). The figure of the mother is all passive: except for loving and caring for her son, she embodies also the feminine intuition, which her character share with her son's beloved: they both have foreboding before Arsena goes to kill the general (mother wakes up in the middle of the night). The film demonstrates the oedipal scenario: conflict with father (system/general Griaznov) / son

(rebel/revolution/Arsena), mother (women) is left outside of the conflict; she does not take part in it. She is castrated, lacks any interest, is inactive and she cares only for the love of her son, whereas the oedipal conflict takes a different turn in *Prison Cell 79*.

### *Mother*

As I already noted I intend to incorporate Vsevolod Pudovkin's classic film, *Mother* in the analysis for following reasons: firstly among the soviet films produced on the theme of 1905 revolution it also deals with its theme through familial relationship, and secondly this film was enormously popular among Georgian audiences and by no doubt it had an immense influence of Zakaria Berishvili's film *Prison Cell 79*. The last but not the least, as I already noted *Mother* was produced in 1926, that is in between the selected for the analysis Georgian films, and I argue that it marks a transitional step in the shift of mother figures representation in revolutionary set and in Oedipal conflict as well. Among the Russian soviet silent films produced on this theme, it is *Mother* which focuses strictly on familial relationships.

Pudovkin's film, based on Maxim Gorky's novel of the same title, focuses on mother-son relationship in the revolutionary setting. Gorky's novel on its own turn was also based on real events that took place at the Krasnoe Sormovo plant in Nizhny Novgorod in which had participated Pavel Zalomov, a leader of a May Day demonstration (Seargant, 2000). The scenarist Natan Zarkhi also used Pravda's reports about cavalry troops that were sent against strikers in Tver in 1905 (Sargeant, 2000). As Pudovkin notes himself, in the interview with *Sovetskii ekran* there was a very little left from the novel itself, stating that 'theme-is almost always the maximum of what can be taken from a literary work while transforming it into scenario' (Pudovkin, 1926, p. 6). From the novel remain two main protagonists: mother and son. And father, only mentioned in the novel- transformed into a whole character, playing a crucial role (Sargeant, 2000). This 'resurrection' of father figure, sharpens more the oedipal conflict. As Amy Sargeant remarks the father's role in the film is "expanded to serve for a number of purposes, both dramatic and ideological" (Sargeant, 2000, p. 64). In the film, Pavel, the protagonist, is involved in revolutionary activities. His mother is an oppressed housewife, without any civil or/and revolutionary consciousness. Pavel rebels against father, both biological

and symbolical. His father is an alcoholic; he beats the mother, allies with counter revolutionary forces (Black Hundred) for a glass of vodka (again according to Amy Sargeant the father character and this scene is used to endorse the official campaign against alcoholism notably articulated by Leon Trotsky, and to promote an idea of new soviet citizen who rejects alcohol) and dies while having a battle with Pavel's comrade revolutionary. In order to save her son from the gendarmes, mother gives the arms that Pavel is keeping secretly in the house to the officers, who promise that Pavel will not be punished for this. But Pavel is arrested, judged and imprisoned. Mother is once again let down and oppressed by Father's symbolic order. Contrary to the all passive and weeping revolutionary Arsena's mother, she becomes an ally of Pavel's comrades, engages in clandestine activities, and in the end, when her son is shot during the May 1 demonstration, it is her, who picks up the red flag and dies holding with it, when the gendarmes, embodiment of the symbolic order, kill her. In one word she becomes an agent and a subject who makes her own choices. In Pudovkin's film, there is a usual oedipal conflict between father and son, between old, oppressive father's symbolic order and the new, better symbolic order offered by the son. Hence here we have mother-son symbiosis against father. In Pudovkin's film mother becomes politicized, social agent through her devoted love for her son, who stands for a new symbolic order, which is to come and substitute, in Judith Mayne's words- "the corrupt and outmode order of the father" (Mayne, 1989, p. 104). It is mother-child bond that works for socialist public sphere. Judith Mayne righteously remarks that in Pudovkin's film motherhood is women's access to revolutionary consciousness, and this fact consequently suggests that "revolutionary bonds are as natural as the link between mother and son" (Mayne, 1989, p. 106). As we will see later in the case of Berishvili's film, it is revolutionary ideals that stand above all, and their value is so high, that even motherhood feelings cannot stand against them, if they are in conflict.

There is a 'gaze tension' between mother and the symbolic father in Pudovkin's *Mother*, an artistic device more elaborated and stressed in Berishvili's *Prison Cell 79* as we will see later. In the Gubernia Court, before Pavel's trial starts, mother is shown in the courtroom, sitting alone, with closed eyes, all vulnerable and isolated (Fig. 10). When she opens the eyes she encounters the gaze of symbolic father: first Tsarist emblem, and then gaze of Nikolas II's statue (Fig. 11).



Fig. 10



Fig.11

As Judith Mayne observes some of the dimension of the oedipal conflict have been adapted to socialist ends- the son, from the very beginning of the film, when he stands against his father to defend mother, represents a new order with new rules, first in a narrow, family circle, and later on a global dimension of symbolic order. Whereas the actual father stands for the old, patriarchal, outmoded order, that oppresses women, and later, as he joins the battle against new generation, revolutionaries, that is against his son, he becomes an active agent of the Father's (Nikolozi II) corrupted oppressive Symbolic order. As Amy Sargeant remarks Pudovkin's scenarist, "Zarkhi crucially brings together father and son on either side of the factory owners and workers" (Sargeant, 2000, p. 65) - this opposition just intensifies the already existing oedipal conflict between father and son on a wider scale. Obviously the actual father cannot win and dies, indicating to the ultimate death of the symbolic father-he will be replaced by the son, who represents a new symbolic order, where the "mother –child bond serves the socialist public sphere"(Mayne, 1989, p. 104). To quote Judith Mayne again "However much the film distinguishes between the power of the father and the power of the son, thereby suggesting that the patriarchal order which oppresses the mother would disappear under the socialist regime, it is nonetheless male power which reigns supreme. To be sure, the film creates a utopian vision of male and female unity. But that utopian vision is undone by the fact that such unity can only be a function of such a profoundly oedipal vision of the world, where the possible equality between men and women is circumscribed by the bond between mother and son. Indeed, women are only significant in *Mother* to the extent that they embody nurturing roles."(Mayne, 1989, p. 105). She claims that even other not important female figures, such as a female revolutionary comrade or a

lorgnetted woman in the court (who just enjoys the spectacle), do not have their own agency, but only serve as observant mirrors, whereas it is men who are active agents: revolutionaries or reactionaries. Although the mother is the central figure, all her emancipation and revolutionary consciousness growth happens not because she is an independent agent of her own, but because she is a mother, linked to her son. And even after that, as Judith Mayne states “she remains above and beyond all else a mother” (Mayne, 1989, p. 105). In the end, it is her who holds the red flag, facing with terror to the galloping Kazaks, with a firm and terrified gaze (Fig. 12) but still in Pudovkin’s film the “mother is not an independent worker and citizen at the same time that she is a mother. Rather she is a social being only because she is a mother” (Mayne, 1989, p.105). Thus to conclude in the mid 20s oedipal scenario even if we face to a mother, who acts and engages in revolutionary events, fighting on her son’s side against symbolic father, she still does not possess an agency of her own, or rather her agency does not surpass that of motherhood.



Fig. 12

### *Prison Cell 79*

*Prison Cell 79* was filmed in 1929 and issued on screens in March 1930. The premier was accompanied by public discussion in Rosa Luxemburg cinema hall as the premier announcement claims in *Komunisti*, (March 20, 1930) on March 20 and from March 31 was distributed in three cinema halls: Soleil, Apollo and Mignon. Due to its success its circulation was prolonged for another week in Apollo and Mignon.

Usually *Komunisti* columnists dedicated short reviews to the films (Georgian or of foreign production) which were successful and popular in the theaters. But for the *Prison Cell 79* it was

not the case, because in this period the articles about cultural life were diminished on the expanse of political propaganda growth. But a reviewer of *Akhalgazrda Komunisti*, certain P. Chkh-dze dedicated a small article to it. The reviewer praises the plot, but in sum it states that “*Prison Cell 79* is one of the ordinary, satisfactory quality kino-film, which obviously cannot be considered as a certain achievement of Sakhkinmretsv (Georgian Cinema Production/Gozkinprom) but it will only bring a serious profit with its historical importance and revolutionary and ideologically right content to young revolutionary generations, who study the history of revolutionary movement through archive materials” (P. Chkh-dze, 1930, p .4). Unlike the Georgian reviewer, Lev Shatov in Russian journal *Kino* was of a better opinion of the film, stating that it was “one of the transitional among Gozkinprom’s production” (Shatov, 1930, p. 7). These transitional films included *Eliso*, and partly *Youth Wins* whereas transition meant the concentration on revolutionary thematic, and refusal from “exotics”. Thus the review praises the thematic of the film, - an episode from a revolutionary clandestine movement, and particularly the finding of the scenarist and director to combine melodramatics with main ideological sense of the film in sum, and real-like conflict between revolutionary mother and tsarist son.

This film, in my opinion a very important accomplishment of Georgian cinematography in many ways, and successful in its own times later was unfairly forgotten (Trapaidze, 2012, Makharadze, 2014). The cameraman of the film was one of the first Georgian cinematographers, Alexandre Dighmelov. Dighmelov was the cinematographer of *Arsena Jorjiashvili* as well. Comparison of these films also testimonies on his progress too as a cameraman.

The scenario, as in the case of *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, was based on real events. In 1907 September 26 almost forty prisoners escaped from Kutaisi prison through a tunnel which was dug from the house standing in front of the prison building. The house was masked as a shop of tights lead by a famous revolutionary, Maro Bochoridze, who was a member of Stalin’s “Boevaia Drujina” (Makharadze, 2014). In the film the name of the protagonist woman is Maro Bochorishvili.

*Prison Cell 79* tells a story of a revolutionary woman from working class. Her husband is killed in a factory due to accident, and instead of helping the shocked woman, who had just bought lunch for him, the supervisor slaps her. Maro, in the fit of passion kills him. Consequently she is arrested and sent to exile in Siberia. Her orphaned son is adopted by the childless factory owner. Maro is unaware of this fact. When she returns from the exile years later she gets involved in



revolutionary activities, this time the mission of the revolutionaries is to dig a tunnel to the prison cell 79, where leaders of workers strike are imprisoned and will be sentenced to death. Maro accidentally finds out that her son has become a prosecutor and will have a debut on worker's process. She goes to him and asks him to postpone the trial for a day, so that the revolutionaries had enough time to reach the cell 79. The son at first agrees, but later he changes his mind. Maro kills her own son with a gunshot in the middle of the trial. She is arrested, but the next day prisoners are escaped from the cell 79.

*Prison Cell 79* offers a representation of a strong woman and I would say even a representation of unrealistically strong woman, embodied in the figure of Maro, probably inspired by the appeals in the press to create an image of a strong woman and depict a fight for women's liberation (For example V. Russo in an article : "Kino Natsional'nastyam" [Kino to the Nationalities] published in the 20<sup>th</sup> issue of *Sovetskii ekran*, 1928, claims that the cinemas main challenges depicting lives of different nationalities are the following: liberation from religiousness, process of industrialization, fight for a free woman etc.) I would argue that Maro's liberation is not represented only by her clandestine fight against the tsarist regime, but her liberation is also manifested with her murdering her own son- in a sense she is "liberated" from motherhood for the sake of the revolution's success. In *Prison Cell 79* there is a different scenario of oedipal conflict: here the son has inscribed himself in the same corrupt and outmode order of the father, he works for this symbolic, and even more: with his social position he is an active agent of the system unlike minor docile bodies-the soldiers, who visibly express their relief when the flee of prisoners is discovered. He has become the system and the symbolic order himself, which is very artistically emphasized visually with his shadow's play on the portrait of Nikolas II. The act of Maro's shooting her own long missed son can be translated into the revenge of the rejected (phallic) mother. Even if the motherhood had remained its special place in the soviet order ideologically, *Prison Cell 79* challenges its primary place if it is in conflict with revolution. It seems like a certain introduction to Pavlik Morozov narrative to me, where a little boy denounced his father to the authorities for the sake of the Party's Collectivization Plan. As Marc Ferro argues fiction films also constitute part of history, in so much as they affect the imaginary of people and even if one considers them as "dreams", they are not cut away from reality, as much as dreams are themselves part of reality (1988). Consequently this pure fiction embedded in a feature film (dream), testimonies a psycho-socio readiness for creating a

“historical” myth in reality several years later (1932), which legitimized and praised cutting off and sacrificing a family member, for the sake of a greater good.

Returning to *Prison Cell 79*, there are other female characters as well, the factory owner’s wife, who is childless (this could be read as an indication of the sterile condition of high classes and bourgeoisie, implying they will not have heir and thus indicating that their political existence cannot last), Maro’s neighbor, from who she learns years later about the fate of her son Akaki, and Akaki’s wife. From these women only Maro’s character embodies agency. According the development of the narrative, she becomes a symbolization of more than a woman – she becomes the active force and movement symbolizing the revolution. When she returns from the exile, it is she who gathers the revolutionaries in her apartment. Although later, the tunnel diggers are discussing the possible ways, how to make the newly assigned prosecutor (Akaki) postpone the trial, so that they could have enough time to finish digging, the compositional distribution excludes Maro from the group. Like a clandestine meeting scene in *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, men are forming a closed circle, and Maro is standing outside it. But nevertheless, this exclusion is not stressed as men’s circle is shown in one frame, and the next shows Maro listening to their conversation in a head and shoulder shot. That is to say that Maro’s distancing from the group conversation is not accentuated by frames (Fig. 13 Fig. 14). Again unlike the scene from *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, where women activists remain isolated, (and visibly uninterested and/or unable to contribute, judging from their facial expressions and total passivity) Maro intervenes into the conversation, claiming that she will deal with the procurer and the revolutionaries make a place for her among them, hence she breaks the closed (men’s) circle and positions herself in the middle of it (Fig. 15, Fig. 16). Besides the visual composition of the shots, intertitle voicing her speech says: “Don’t you trust in me? I have spent all my life on this pursuit” proving once again that Maro is not an accidental participant of revolutionary activities. At these words one revolutionary stands up, holds her and introduces her in the circle while another stands up and makes a place of her. This is not patronization, but rather an acknowledgment that she has deserved her place in the middle of the circle.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

The narrative of the film carries on a strong oedipal scenario. As known, a successful resolution of oedipal complex implies to refuse mother, on the expense of the father's authority. Thus child just forgets about mother. This scenario is especially strongly articulated in the meeting scene of Maro and Akaki. When Maro goes to her son's house and meets him, Akaki is sitting at his working table, looking down at papers, and asks her several times what she wants without looking at her. Only when he finally raises his head and sees her grave expression (Fig. 18) his facial expression changes as well, but Maro tells him: "I want you to recognize me" and then tells him who she (and he) actually is. First Akaki denies and stand up, but he soon is captivated by Maro's psychic power and obeys her and sits down. Margo reminds him the night she was arrested, how he cried and tells him about her feelings. Akaki asks her: 'So you are my mother?'- This is a moment of recognition of the abjected (m)Other and self at the same time. In the sequence Maro approaches Akaki, and tells him that she has never humiliated herself in front of anyone, and she is on the knees in front of her son to beg him to postpone the process for one day. Akaki turns his head with condolence to her and agrees. Before leaving Maro asks him for a pass so she could attend the process.



Fig. 18



Fig.19

This dramatic scene (the dramatic effect is accentuated by high contrast between dominant blacks and striking whites) represents allegorically the return of the abjected (m)other, (abjected other here becomes mother) banished by the Law of the Father outside of the symbolic order, to

the unconsciousness, which at the same time brings back recognition of the self. The dramatic effect is also stressed by use of parallel montage of Akaki's wife's hands playing the piano and their daughter playing in the room, which reoccurs all the time while Maro is telling her story to Akaki. This frequent interplay of the shots emphasizes Akaki's split between newly discovered mother, his real social class, and his acquired bourgeois life, high position in the society and values. This process of self/abjected other recognition is shadowed by the Law of the Father, embodied first in the statue and later in the portrait of Nikolas II (Fig. 19, Fig. 20, Fig. 21). While using the tsar's visual representations in the dramatic moments is an explicit quotation from Pudovkin's *Mother* court scene, in Berishvili's film this tension of gaze oppositions is far more intensified and loaded with symbolic meaning. This is exactly the tsar, who appears as Akaki's father figure and not the actual factory owner who adopted him, because Nikolas II represents everything that Akaki got due to this adoption in the symbolic order: his social class, his values, his wealth, and his family. The unmarked cuts of the statue and the portrait express this surveillance when spectators see Akaki sitting alone in the chair after Maro's gone.

The tension between Law of the Father and abjected phallic mother continues even to higher degree in the court trial. Akaki did not keep his promise and did not postpone the trial. Symbolic Father has won in Akaki. Obviously he is present there: in the hall (Nikolas II statue is standing there) and in the court hall as well (his immense portrait is hanging on the wall upon the judge's seat). Bourgeois are coming in and taking a seat. For them it is a mere amusing spectacle. The factory owner and his wife are also there, and while wife smiles looking with lorgnette at other people and greets them (a reference to lorgnetted woman in Pudovkin's *Mother*), her husband gives her a remark to stop and behave properly, to which she obeys (this small gesture shows the established gender hierarchy in bourgeois family).



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

When a gendarme announces “The court (Justice) is coming”, the next shot, following this title shows Maro dressed in black walking in a white street. It is evident that the “court” mentioned in the title (gendarme’s statement) refers to her, because she is the court and justice. This shot is followed by a medium shot of Nikolas II portrait- indicating to the final struggle between symbolic father and forgotten mother is to come.

When the prosecutor rises after the reading of the case is finished, his shadow falls on the immense portrait of Nikolas II in a way that the king’s head is replaced by Akaki’s head: this is a very explicit visual metaphor expressing the Father-Son union (Fig. 22). Akaki is now intertwined with symbolic father. This shot (unification of Akaki and Tsar by exposing Akaki’s shadow on the portrait) reoccurs several times while he gives accusatory speech. Everyone in the hall listen him with great satisfaction. Akaki’s shadow on Nikolas II portrait is contrasted with Maro’s shadow on the white pillars in court hall and later on the wall (Fig. 23) as she enters in and is going ahead towards him. Meeting of their eyes is visualized through shadows: Maro’s shadow on the wall stops and then camera moves on Akaki’s shadow on the Tsar’s portrait. Akaki’s shadow’s hand stops moving, as he gesticulates during his talk, giving an understanding that he saw the mother. Next shot shows his face, which is stupefied. He silences. As Maro approaches him the camera attributes Akaki’s gaze and reveals his psychological perception: Maro is advancing towards him, the court hall and audience split in two, people’s visualization gets blurred. Only Maro’s figure remains sharp as she comes in the middle, represented as the

embodiment of the Justice itself (Fig. 24). Akaki turns around not to see Maro, and continues to talk. The court members are confused, they do not understand what's wrong with Akaki, but Akaki meanwhile continues his speech and states that he demands the execution of prisoners. Again, the frame shows his shadow on Nikolas II portrait, which falls down, people jump up terrified. A gun falls down at Maro's feet, she has shot her son. The prisoners are taken out; Maro stands steadily, a close up shows the pierced front of Nikolas II -the bullet that killed Akaki, passed through the tsar's head as well (Fig. 25). Thus Maro committed double murder: one on actual, and the other on symbolical level: actual killing of the son equates the symbolic killing of the father. As people are rushing to exit door in panic, Maro remains steadily and watches the dead body of her son. Policemen rush and point guns at her, but she does not move. The frame fades.



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

The semblance with Pudovkin's film is undeniable: *The Prison Cell 79* draws upon *Mother* as a source of images (not only in the court, but in the prison scenes as well, although transmitting messages by Morse alphabet might have been a pretty common practice for the prisoners (compare Fig. 26 and Fig 27 from *Mother* and *Prison Cell 79* respectively). Nevertheless unlike Pudovkin's *Mother*, which explores how a woman enclosed in an oppressive patriarchal system transforms into politicized agent through motherhood (Mayne, 1989), in *Prison Cell 79* Maro is a political subject right from the beginning, as she kills the factory supervisor who slaps her. She is sent to a prison in exile, thus again right from the beginning she is already abjected and situated outside of the symbolic order, which is a precondition of her politicization (later testified as she tells to the revolutionaries that she has spent all her life on this pursuit). If *Mother* "takes the relationship between women and revolutionary change as its central subject", (Mayne, 1989, p. 93), *Prison Cell 79* explores the conflict between motherhood and ultimate necessity of revolutionary change, situating the latter and its ideals above the mother-child bond.





Fig. 26



Fig. 27

The *Prison Cell 79* closing sequence opens with prisoners in the cell, who are again in waiting. The head of prison talks to the representatives of the court and announces the emperor's decision to execute arrested workers by hanging. The graves are being dig for them in the prison yard. The gendarmes are going to take out the prisoners from the cell 79 but they come out confused. The young gendarmes are smiling at each other (probably hinting on the sympathy towards workers.) again the hanging is pulled out and graves are dug. The head of the prison runs into cell and looks around, it's all empty. Again hangings, and digging graves, followed the portrait of Nikolas II with a bullet pierce in his head indicating that the grave is dug for his system. The head of the prison steps forward and jumps into the hole, from which the prisoners have escaped. We see the irons left by prisoners while escaping. The recurring and repeating scenes of hangings and graves, repeats again the same visual statement that they are dug and built not for prisoners, not for workers, not for Bolsheviks, but for the police and representatives of the symbolic order, and for the whole symbolic order as well.

## Conclusion

Thus in the above chapter on the analysis of mother figure's emancipation in the revolutionary set I have discussed three films where the narrative concentrated in family circle. This includes two Georgian- Ivane Perestiani's *Arsena Jorjiashvili* and *Prison Cell 79* and one Russian film- Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Mother*. These films at first glance concentrate and depict a family drama

(more or less: less in case of *Arsena Jorjiashvili* and more in *Mother* and *Prison Cell 79*) in the context of 1905 revolution, but I argue that on the other hand, it is the 1905 revolution that is described in terms of family drama. The progression of the oedipal triangle mother-son-father in the revolutionary setting during 1920s on the example of these three films demonstrates the following: in the beginning it is all about father-son conflict, conflict between old symbolic order and new symbolic order (in case of *Arsena Jorjiashvili* 1921) where Mother figure stands outside of it, she (mother herself and other female characters) functions as a mere decoration- does not act, does not take charge of anything: it's all about Father and Son. Pudovkin's *Mother*, (1926) concentrates on mother figure, and describes her consciousness emancipation. Here she is actively involved in the conflict: she takes her rebellious son's side against the father, and in the end it's even her who appears to be an embodiment of her son's new symbolic order, while holding a red flag next to Pavel's dead body and waiting for the ultimate death. But all this is because she is a mother above all, and whatever she is doing, she is doing because of love to her son, as noted above in the analysis. Whereas in the end of the decade, (that is in *Prison Cell 79*, 1929) the whole scenario of oedipal conflict is changed: it's not about father-son conflict anymore and the revolution and acting force is no more embodied in the male figure (son). Now, it is the mother who is the embodiment of revolution, and the oppressed, rejected working class. In this case there is no son's new symbolic order that will substitute the Father's old one. Mother punishes and castrates the son because he did not rebel against the Father, resolved the oedipal conflict and rejected her. Thus instead of son's new symbolic order that used to replace that of a father, now the father's symbolic is substituted by phallic mother's pre-oedipal phase (and her revenge). In my opinion this drastic change in representation can be considered as an ultimate mark of woman's emancipation.

## Chapter V

### **Meet the New Soviet Woman: Incompatibility of Femininity and Agency in Mikheil Chiaureli's *Saba***

In this chapter I will examine the representation of a modern New Soviet woman as provided in Mikheil Chiaureli's *Saba*, which was one of the first pictures depicting the new, contemporary society. It is the only film giving an insight of a city worker's family life and being and representing modern women produced in 1920s. *Saba* was filmed in 1929 and was premiered on 17 March 1930. It was one of the anti-alcoholic films that were produced during this time in the Soviet Union. The film centers on a city tramway driver Saba, who is addicted to alcohol and depicts his rehabilitation, or- to put it in Oksana Bulgakowa's words (when she talks about the trends in films produced during this time) – represents the cure of damaged “raw human material, necessary to create a New man” (Hochmuth & Bulgakowa, 2008, 1: 04:17). This cure also includes restoration of the damaged cell in the Soviet society's organism- a worker's family, and exposes meanwhile the tension between public and private realms. Positioning the public and private realms is interesting to explore in many ways, but this time I will only focus on a female role model, who personifies the public realm on a symbolic level. Even if the narrative focuses on male protagonist, *Saba* is important for my research question as it is one of the first films of the period set in contemporary times, and as I already noted, the only film produced in 1920s which together with New Soviet men, shows New Soviet women citizens of the working class- these “two totemic figures,” obsession with which, to put it in Lynne Attwood's and Catriona Kelly's words, was “one the most characteristic features of the Soviet society in the 1920s and 1930s” (Attwood & Kelly, 1998, p. 256).

## Overview of the context

*Saba* was filmed in the context of the Cultural Revolution, taking place in the course of Stalin's five year plan in 1928-1932. The Cultural Revolution, a Bolshevik version of Enlightenment, aimed to transform the Soviet Union population and to construct a New Soviet man and a New Soviet woman respectively. The concept of "Cultural Revolution" was first voiced by V. I. Lenin. In Peter Kenez's words what Lenin meant when he spoke of the need of Cultural Revolution, was a "desperate need to catch up with the industrial and advanced West, and to overcome the dreadful weight of Russian backwardness," stating immediately that Lenin's successors had something "very different" in mind while using this term: "In this period [late twenties] cultural revolution represented a resurgence of utopian notions about the culture and politics and a demand for complete break with the past" (Kenez, 2001, p. 92). This implied the rejection of cultural pluralism existing during early twenties as well as modifying and eradicating some types of daily behaviors and rituals that were inevitable in the epoch of rapid industrialization and forced collectivization. The Union needed a different pulse and life rhythm. Excessive alcohol consumption, very much characteristic of the working class (and the ex middle class in masculinity crisis) was one of these rituals, that the Bolsheviks saw as "one of the most troublesome and intractable aspects of...prerevolutionary working-class culture" (Transchel, 2006, p. 6). The slogans "Alcohol is our class enemy" and "enemy of the cultural revolution" were widely cited in the press.

In Soviet society cinema had multiple functions, which alongside such a major mission, as the propaganda of the Bolshevik system and consciousness, also combined other "minor" tasks as well, which had "economic, educational, artistic and social aspects" (Rimberg, 1973, p. 39). The films were teaching and educating masses not only about political ideals, ideology and history but included everything that had to do with very much elementary activities, like how to eat, how to take care of hygiene: how to wash, how to take a shower, how to brush teeth, how to exercise, how to cross the street etc. (Bulgakowa, 2008). John David Rimberg notes that the films were expected to function as a weapon of Soviet society's transformation and compete and eventually replace two long-established life style components in Russia- that is the church and the tavern (Rimberg, 1973). It was Lev Trotsky who started to speak about the application of cinema in this respect in 1923: in an article published in *Pravda*, titled "Vodka, The Church and Cinema,"

he declared that cinema could successfully fight against alcoholism, persistent in Russian society, as well as against the church influence. As he was stating “why should not the government of the workers establish a net of State cinemas? This apparatus of amusement and education could more and more be made to become an integral of national life. Using it to combat alcoholism, it could, at the same time be made into revenue-yielding concern. Is it practicable? Why not? It is of course not easy. It would be, at any rate, more natural, and more in keeping with the organizing energies and abilities of a worker’s State, then, let us say, the attempt to restore the vodka monopoly” (Trotsky, 1923/1994, p. 96). In Trotsky’s view cinema could have been used against church as well, as the church never had managed to reach in to the soul of masses: peasants were practicing its rituals because of the inertial and monotonous life, and contrary to the church, which offered “only one drama... always one and the same, year in, year out”, the cinema, “the most powerful... most democratic instrument of the theater” would offer “the Easters of heathen, Jew and Christian, in their historic sequence, with their similarity of the ritual.” In the conclusion he stated that cinema was “an instrument which we must secure at all costs” and that would be a great competitor for the public houses and churches equally. Stalin also echoed this idea in his Political Report in December 1927, stating that “it shall be possible to begin the elimination of vodka, by replacing it with such sources of income as the radio and the film” (Rimberg, 1973, p. 43). Lenin too was quoted to have said that it was only art that could substitute religion (Rimberg, 1973). And here it is to remember often cited quote that Lenin considered cinema as the most important and powerful of all arts, as mentioned by A. Lunacharsky. In this context we can assume obvious that if the art could substitute the religion, then from all the arts it was the cinema that had the highest potential to complete this task.

The above mentioned slogans became very often cited, echoed and repeated in the Soviet press. One caricature in *Kino* was even depicting the soviet cinematography as the Saint George, holding a movie camera instead of a sword and a flag with inscription “Soviet Cinematography” as a lance; killing the dragon-alcohol (Fig. 1. The featured headline represents Stalin’s above mentioned quote). In 1929 Trotsky could not be quoted anymore for the well known reasons, but the very same argument made by him six years earlier on cinema’s powerful potential in the fight against alcohol and church was echoed in *Kino*: a section titled “Cinema instead of Religion and Vodka”, contained two articles, one by Oleshuk and the other by Y. Larin, a head of OBSA

(Society for the Struggle with Alcoholism). Oleshuk quoted Lenin’s words that Kino could be used against church, without mentioning Trotsky (Oleshuk, 1929), and Larin was explaining how useful cinema could be in the fight against alcoholism, stating that although the showing the alcohol’s harmful effects was not obligatory in order to draw away people from drinking, although the cinema’s work that focused on this topic had a huge importance, and mentioned that the scientific or feature films with this theme was quite useful (Larin, 1929). Larin even mentioned that in Moscow, there were cases, when after screening such films, confirmed “hooligans” from the workers, gave a vow at the place to give up drinking and that it has been several months since they had been keeping their word.



Fig. 1

“Cinema instead of Alcohol” was one of the most frequently repeated slogans in the Soviet press. In order to eliminate alcoholism the party was using various methods that besides the press propaganda included other means such as: delivering lectures, staging plays, arranging mock trials, agitational films, writing short stories and poems; a number of anti-alcoholic films were also released by collaboration of Narkomzdrav and Sovkino (Rimberg, 1973). It must be mentioned that alcoholism was not such an inherent problem for Georgian population (more extensively on this issue see below) as it was in Russia. But nevertheless, in the mid-late twenties the Georgian journals and newspapers (*Komunisti*, *Mshromeli qali*) were also actively carrying an anti-alcoholic campaign. Mikheil Chiaureli’s *Saba*, a release of Georgia’s State Cinema

Production aimed to expose the dark sides of alcohol consumption and inspire the working class to give it up. Chiaureli grasped the “hot” thematic in various perspectives: following the All-Union Party Conference on Cinema, held on 15-21 March 1928, the Georgia’s State Cinema Production elaborated the thematic plan that would allow the authors to take a proper pace in order to avoid the waste of the author’s energy on “not appropriate” themes. These themes, among exposing lives of modern intelligentsia, modern mountaineers’ life and the lives of Young Communist League members, included also the depiction of a modern city worker’s life being (Amirghanov, 1928). Thus besides the popular anti-alcoholism theme Mikheil Chiaureli’s *Saba* fit in one more requirements and gave an insight of city worker’s life and provided representations of modern citizens. Even if the plot centers on a rehabilitation of ‘damaged raw material’, the creation of a New Soviet man out of it and a tension between public and private realms in this process, *Saba* is also a really important film for analysis of the women’s cinematic images produced in the 1920s because it is one of those few number (and the only accessible) film of the period which shows contemporary emancipated woman and women’s interrelationship as already mentioned above. Hence, the question that I will try to answer in this chapter is: what kind of female role model was this propaganda feature film (as it is the only one featuring contemporary city based females) providing with the audiences? What type of the New Soviet woman was offered to Georgian audiences?

The New Woman was a controversial issue in the Soviet Union. „The woman question” was a widely and intensively discussed and women’s body was “a site for considerable contestations” (Grant, 2013, p. 72). The image of woman and the ideology of women’s equality were used and modified by the soviet authorities in order to assure homologation for economic and demographic policy changes (Attwood & Kelly, 1998). Nikolai Korolev, a “respected doctor, with some influence”, in 1924 “discussed the ‘complete and unconditional emancipation’ of women following the revolution and now they were viewed as being on an equal playing-field as men. The New woman, like her male counterpart, was strong, healthy and cultured” (Grant, 2013, p.74). But to what extent should a woman had been emancipated, be it on physical or social level? There was no unanimous answer to this question. Korolev had even designed three categories of female bodies: prerevolutionary ideal who was “poorly developed, with a long neck, narrow, sloping shoulders, a short torso, narrow pelvis and skinny legs” whose primary physical function was to be attractive to men, a “Tsarist times peasant housewife” with short

neck, over developed-waist, prominent pelvis, long torso and short legs, and the third, ideal of the New Soviet woman, who was in between these two. But it must be mentioned that Korolev still situated the emancipated Soviet woman in a domestic realm, and stressed their reproductive function (Grant, 2013). As Susan Grant remarks “while the state espoused female emancipation and equality between sexes, women’s liberation was in fact ostensibly undermined and inhibited by the alleged physical, emotional and psychological disposition of women themselves” (Grant, 2013, p.76). On the example of *Saba*, I will examine what kind of New woman model was offered to Georgian audiences, and will try to situate this representation in a wider discourse.

### *Saba*

*Saba* has been always characterized as an “anti-alcoholism” film, but I would argue that actually it is more an “anti-domestic violence” film. Even if alcoholism was not an issue in Georgia (contemporary Georgian critics often remark that the fight against alcoholism, was not inherently Georgian and it was more a “Russian” problem;<sup>6</sup> also it was not vodka, but rather consuming wine that was authentic and widespread ritual in Georgian citizens’ lives) this was not a case of domestic violence. The numerous letters and special agit/propaganda short stories published in *Mshromeli qali*, testimony to it. In the script plot the domestic violence is obviously connected with excessive drinking: it exposes a city worker’s domestic scene, and society’s (party’s) effort to eliminate the protagonist’s alcoholism eliminates the domestic violence as well. Consequently the film does not give the domestic violence a name in terms that it is not represented as a separate problem. Such coupling implies that a domestic violence cannot exist in a worker’s family on its own right, if the worker is not corrupted by “enemy of socialism”- which is alcohol in this case. The intervention of public realm’s representatives into private household obviously creates a tension between these two spaces which is dramatically exposed in the film. Whereas it is tempting to discuss *Saba* in these terms, as these are exactly the major lines composing the filmic narrative, my interest here is to examine and explore what kind of representation a New Soviet woman is provided in the film, and how she functions in the film’s textual system rather

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<sup>6</sup> This view is widely shared by Georgian critics: eg. Irakli Makharadze (2014), Nino Chkheidze (2013) in an interview enclosed to *Saba* DVD, issued in the frame of the conjoined project of journal *Tskheli Shokoladi* and Georgian Film , Natia Amirejibi, (1990).



than investigating the tension between public and private realms in the late twenties soviet society. Although exposing such sensitive theme, as domestic violence is, I have to emphasize once again that the film does not center on female characters, but rather on a man whose moral salvation is in the focus of its development.

In short whether Chiaureli had to fulfill the “Moscow directives” (Irakli Makharadze) or he volunteered by picking up this theme (Nino Chkheidze), *Saba* became one of the very first films that dealt with modern life and modern problematic issues. The original scenario for *Saba* was written by Shalva Alkhazishvili and A. Aravski.<sup>7</sup> As already noted above, it depicts a story of a Tbilisi tramway driver Saba, who is addicted to alcohol and cannot help but waste all his monthly salary on drinks with his friends; even if in the beginning of the film he tries to resist his friends/coworkers who insistently follow him and in fact drag him to the tavern practically by force. When drunk he becomes violent and beats his young son, Vakhtang (a Pioneer gifted with engineering skills) and wife Veriko. Due to frequent scandals at home and drinking, he is fired from work. With the encouragement of the Young Pioneers leader Olgha, (the first representative of the public realm, who intervenes into private space, after having seen the beaten up Vakhtang in school, and later witnessing domestic violence in Saba’s family herself) Veriko divorces Saba. This latter becomes more desperate, and once, after being refused to reconciliation with Veriko, he steals the tramway key from his former coworker in the tavern, captivates the tram and rides it like crazy, before accidentally hitting Vakhtang, who at the meantime has been looking for him from tavern to tavern and tries to stop the tram. This tragic incident is followed by Saba’s public trial. The court hall is decorated with anti-alcoholic posters and placards, one of them, hanged in the center reads: “Alcohol is enemy of Cultural Revolution”. On the trial the whole domestic life of Saba is discussed (all the violence shown in the film), Olgha also gives a testimony. Saba’s case is brought to the discussion of the workers, and when the representatives of factory committee, claim that “today we must try not only Saba, but the whole old world, alcohol is our class enemy, which ruins millions of people” (as voiced by the narrator) the case is generalized and it is clear that the alcohol stands as a signifier of all the old time evils. The lawyer defends him, but also whole community takes Saba’s side: his coworkers, who state that not only Saba has to be tried, but the whole collective, Veriko and head-bandaged Vakhtang (they appear

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<sup>7</sup> The names of the scenarists, as well as of characters are listed as given in a restored and over voiced version by Giorgi Dolidze in 1983.

unexpectedly during the trial). When, after giving a speech in front of judges Veriko rushes to Saba and gives him Vakhtang to hug, the whole people arrange among them, and it is not only Saba who hugs Vakhtang and Veriko, but the whole community.

The film ends with the Pioneers' demonstration against alcohol. The demonstration is very much theatrical: pioneers are carrying a coffin, where a bottle of wine is placed, and also alcohol damning messages posters and placards. Olgha is giving a fierce speech, as well as other young pioneers including Vakhtang, who demonstratively shakes his banded injured arm. Saba is gladly looking at the demonstration from the tram, and sees Vakhtang who holds a postcard "Father, do not drink". The gazes of future (that is Vakhtang) and of once corrupted by past present (Saba) meet each other: the human damaged material is rehabilitated, cured and functional.

A Soviet critic, Kh. Khersonsky observed that even if *Saba* consisted of the simplest and commonly-known observations and conclusions, it was watched without boredom (the reason of this is a work of cameraman Anton Polikevich, as well as the contribution of Lado Gudiashvili and David Kakabadze, two very important Georgian avant-garde artists, who were set painters of the film). Khersonsky stated that the tension between public and private- the fact of a worker's familial drama becoming a drama of the collective, and emphasizing that the whole society needs to be cured from alcoholism, as if a tramway driver Saba, will not be healthy (with the wide meaning of the word) the collective will not be healthy either, "sets the film towards the politically right direction." (Khersonsky, 1929, p.3). To quote Khersonsky the film authors were using various weapons to achieve their goal: drama, satirical comedy and lectures, but "less the lectures and mostly drama", assessing the film as a feature culture film, rising in the audience will to fight against alcoholism (Khersonsky, 1929, p.3).

Khersonsky also noted the worker's family was depicted naturally, "humanely" without clichés. Even if wife cannot easily leave her husband despite all the troubles, the hardest times come when she finally does and leaves alone. And even if Vakhtang wants his father back and runs to look after him in the taverns, this is not a family that lives with bourgeois coziness anyways: "the life is not focused on cricket songs on stove and tea-kettle, warming the soul. These people have already different motives and different music in them...- this family is warmed not by a dream about a tea-kettle, but rather perhaps about Vakhtang becoming a proletarian engineer one day" (Khersonsky, 1929, p. 3). The critic also praised the dramaturgical part, claiming that it was

made by “inventive language”, although remarking that “here Chiaureli was to be found under influence of German Expressionism”, which obviously was not a compliment already. This statement was followed immediately by a remark that worker Saba, his wife and son “are not completely real. They fulfill well the director’s task, but they are as if painted by in a conventional manner”, which meant that “they are monotonous, dry and not resembling the family of a Georgian worker. They have traits from both intelligentsia and abroad” (Khersonsky, 1929, p.3). Probably Khersonsky meant here the image of Veriko Anjafaridze, casted as Saba’s wife of the same name and frequent appearance of her aesthetically shot close-ups with half-opened eyes, and expressive pain, a little bit like pre-revolutionary and “bourgeois” heroines. Interestingly he does not mention the evident visual resemblance of *Saba* with Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera*, released the same year it premiered in Tbilisi cinema halls on 11 October, although it was running only for three days (*Komunisti*, 1929, October 11,) (like *Man with a Movie Camera* there are many diagonal frames in *Saba* as well). In the end Khersonsky was giving a firm recommendation to Chiaureli to try his talent in satirical comedies, for which he undoubtedly had a great potential (according him): “in this domain he showed several magnificent episodes, equal of which it is hard to find” (Khersonsky, 1929, p. 3).



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

*Saba* is usually characterized as an anti alcoholic film, and that was its primary function, but simultaneously it deals and reveals something more complicated than the mere fact of the restoration of the alcohol damaged human material and a creation of a New Man per se. What is more interesting, in my opinion is not the fact of having achieved a result (a new Soviet man) but the processes: how and through deployment of which devices it is achieved. Further, hand in hand with alcoholism, the film reveals and exposes the household scene that is also damaged by domestic violence which (according the plot) does not exist in its own terms, but is caused by alcohol and drunkenness. Via this direct link between alcohol and domestic violence, the film shows the domestic violence, and how it is dealt with persons involved and by society that witness it, although without naming it as a problem: Saba is always blamed for drinking. The witnessing audience is something to keep in the consideration during *Saba*'s analysis, which is especially interesting in terms of positioning the public and private realms. Alexandra Kollontai was arguing for the liberation from private closed familial system, that was considered as bourgeois and for creation of an open communal space, where there would be no division between "mine" and "yours", and everyone would pay attention with conscious awareness that these children belong to the community first of all to the Bolshevik society and consequently all the members were equally responsible for them (Kollontai, 1921/1972). Although the Party did not agree and share enthusiastically Kollontai's all ideas (the very fact that she was kept away from the Union in diplomatic "exile" proves that she might have been influential enough to make authorities fearful of her) but it did worried not only about workers public activities, that is ensuring them with jobs and ideological education, but also "with its all effort was looking after the improvement of workers private and familial conditions" as well (Burdzenidze, 1972, p. 93), which logically meant imposing a certain surveillance on their private realms in order to ensure that their social and private behaviors were appropriate for "a truly Soviet working class" (Transchel, 2006, p. 100). Of course the domestic violence was inappropriate. Actually in workers families it was also an issue to be eliminated. Friedrich Elmer's *Fragment of an Empire*, produced the same year was also addressing it among other problems (including working class drinking) present in the soviet society (Youngblood, 1992). *Mshromeli qali*, which was a

working women's journal published in Georgia combining various fields: politics, science, literature, in literary section was publishing thematic short stories, subject of which varied year after year according to present-day problems: emancipation of the oppressed pre revolutionary woman, taking of the veil, hypocrisy of men activists who were advocating for cultural revolution and women's emancipation etc. In 1926 the whole range of the stories were dedicated to the description of how a woman delegate or otherwise party activist with high Bolshevik consciousness liberates an oppressed woman from the domestic violence and helps her to get alimony from a verbally and/or physically abusive, unfaithful husband. The correspondents letters, sent from various regions, were mentioning the productive work of women delegates, stating that now husbands are afraid to oppress their wives like previous times, because they know that wives conditions are monitored by them. The journal also offered juridical advices/information. Intrusion of party activists into workers and peasants family lives and into their private space obviously brings the notion of public/private dichotomy and the tension existing between them into discussion.

Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* distinguishes two types of the 'public', which are interconnected but nevertheless differ from each other. The first is everything that is visible and hearable for everyone- things and facts on public display which create our reality. The second signifies the "world" itself", a place where we all belong and in which we all occupy our places, from which we see things differently, with our own perspective: a common world. As Arendt illustrates metaphorically, "To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 52). This 'common world' is constituted by various pluralisms, eradication of which equally disrupts it as well. As Arendt argues the distinction of public and private realms equals the distinction between what should be hidden and what should be shown. It is just the same as the distinction between political and household realms, which in between have an amorphous social (since the modern ages), which is neither public nor private "strictly speaking" (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 28). Even if in a family circle everyone occupied different places and the perception of certain events is also seen from different and multiplied perspectives of its members, still it can never be equal to the perception from those different perspectives that emerge in the public realm. But the common world, (the public realm) ends when in mass

societies or during mass hysteria “all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor”; when pluralisms are eradicated and facts and things are seen “only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 58). According Arendt such confusion is the end of both: public and private realms.

Public and private spheres in Soviet society, which intended to create one “super-human family” (to use Arendt’s concept for what we call society (Arendt, 1958/1998 pp. 28-29), political organization of which in Soviet case would constitute not a nation but a unification of different nations (an extended super-human family in a sense) were crucial and important factors. Walter Benjamin, who visited Moscow from late 1926 to early 1927, upon his return to Berlin wrote an essay “Moscow” where he stated that “Bolshevism has abolished private life” (Bershtein, 2006, p. 220). One of the basic factors in the process of putting private (household) space on public played the housing shortages, a characteristic problem of the Soviet Union and the communal livings. It turned impossible to distinct private from public and practically obliged everyone to witness and participate in each other’s private lives. I noted above (and I will discuss it in details below) that public realm is personified in Olgha. But the public realm appears/manifests itself at two instances: firstly, when neighbors are witnessing the domestic violence in Saba’s family, the balconies are overcrowded: they are looking at it on a display (Fig. 5, Fig. 6) and judging Saba: the private life of a family is on a public sightseeing and nolens volens insists on its intervention. Regarding housing shortage I also want to stress an episode, which some might argue that serves for creating tensed dramatic aura, but nevertheless is rooted in actual reality. After this fight, Veriko and Vakhtang spent the night sleeping on the stairs even if neighbors know they could not go home or elsewhere. Aware of living conditions in early Soviet Union, the viewer is not surprised and does not wonder why no one offered a sleeping corner to the mother and child. Maybe a will of dramatization has its share, but the audience knows that neighbors physically could not provide them with a free sleeping space. Here the housing shortage is present, although not articulated as problem in the film.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Secondly, Saba's trial is a culmination which shows that there is no distinction between these two realms. The idea of super human family is very vividly expressed in the final court scene, when Veriko and Vakhtang reunite not only with Saba, but with the whole audience, as they also approach and hug them, and create a close circle around them: it is not a reunion of a private concrete family, but the reunion and celebration of Saba's return to the public, state family (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7

In the film there are two main female characters: Saba's wife, Veriko, who experiences physical violence whenever he is drunk, an actor situated in a private realm, and a Young Pioneer Leader Olgha, who is an agent of the public realm and intervenes into her pioneer's family when she sees Vakhtang beaten and finds out the reason. But as already known from the plot synopsis above, this intervention does not bring result immediately, on the other hand: it takes a range of public realm's interventions into private one and at different stances to achieve the desired result: that is the cure of the damaged human raw material. But it is Olgha, who personifies the public realm, as she is the only public agent that we see acting throughout the plot (until the culminating collective standing by to Saba, where a scene transforms not in to a private family reunion but a

collective super-human family reunion), emphasizing women's active social role in the society. When Olga goes to talk to Saba, Veriko welcomes her: she is really eager and supportive of the public agent's intervention in her private domestic scene, as Veriko is unable to handle it all alone, and definitely needs help. It is especially interesting to observe contrast of these two women: contrary to the female characters discussed in previous chapters, they are no longer differentiated by social hierarchy- both of them are modern worker class women. The modernity is expressed here in such a simple marker as haircut: they both have the same short hairstyle. But this is the only trait besides the class belonging that they have in common. If in earlier films women, who belonged to the same class, shared the similarities such as cruel/vulnerable, lustful/desexualized, powerful/powerless depending on which class they belonged to, this is not the case anymore. In *Saba* we see two female figures who belong to the same class, but regardless this factor they stand on different poles of power position/agency: whereas Veriko is weak and vulnerable, Olga is strong. This weakness/strength also finds an expression in their looks: Olga has physical masculine features- her physical construction is more robust and rough, corresponding to the emancipated woman's bodily shape designed by Korolev, while Veriko is tender and slim, fitting in the prerevolutionary beauty standards so to say. The camera position and body language also reveal their power full/less position in the filmic narrative: during the conversation Olga is shown from low angle medium shot, using phallic (as described by Oksana Bulgakowa while analyzing variations of body language in Soviet films (Bulgakowa, 2008)) gestures emphasizing her powerfulness and authority, which belong to masculine, in masculine-feminine binary system (Fig. 8). On the other hand Veriko is shown from high angle close up, which indicates to her powerless and oppressed condition and exposes feminine passivity (Fig. 9). When waiting for Saba, two women are shown within the same frame in multiple shots followed one by another: Olga is in the foreground, with strengthened back, reading something, whereas Veriko is on the background, shriveled with her head hanging (Fig. 10). The waiting for Saba scene lasts for fifteen seconds, but nothing changes much (Fig. 11, Fig. 12): Olga remains in the foreground, rigid and concentrated on the newspaper, that is public life and social activity, and Veriko remains in the same powerless oppressed position, either with her head hanging, or desperately staring in the space. But this time the intervention of the public agent into private sphere is fruitless: upon Saba's revival the news that he has been fired from work, does not leave the space for further discussion.





Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Another day Veriko is broken by the fact that Saba stole a client's shirt to exchange for alcohol. Olgha and Vakthang return home from school together. When Olgha learns what happened, she encourages Veriko for a divorce. Saba hears her talking and another sequence of violence erupts, which this time includes Olgha as a target as well. Consequently everything ends up by presenting the case at the trial, and with a divorce.

Even though the film shows how the collective, public realm saves Saba, it is not only Saba, who needs to be saved in the film. First of all it is Veriko, a "damsel in distress." Her "damsel in distress"-vulnerable and powerless position is depicted in a cinematic language: the camera

mostly shows her from high angle when she is alone in the frame, or covered face (for example in the tavern scene, after the domestic violence publicly has taken place. Fig. 13, Fig. 14, Fig. 15) and in the court, when she defends Saba, indicating that she needs judge's and community's



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

assistance for help, holding her hand towards the court as if she asks for savior from drowning (Fig.16). Veriko, before final reunion of the collective family, is saved not by some “knightly” man, but by Olga: with her assistance, encouragement and support: after first visit, Olga frequently comes to Vakhtang and Veriko, and during the divorce trial she is sitting next to her, representing her interests, creating an example of women’s solidarity and backing. Olga is an androgynous agent of the public realm, besides her apparent masculine features and powerful gestures, she also manifests caring-a feature of motherliness: it is with her intervention (although not only, but to a quite considerable extent) that the problem is eradicated from the domestic scene and she does it because she cares for Vakhtang. In the ideological climate where motherhood was very stressed and present, and was often represented as a way of liberation in the films, as Lynne Attwood argues, (in particular on the example of Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Mother*, discussed in detail in a previous chapter, and Abram Room’s *Bed and Sofa* (Attwood,

1993) where the female protagonist refuses to have an abortion and leaves her two men to search a new life with her baby instead), and woman's stressed economical and individual independence was very frequently juxtaposed with maternity (in Fridrikh Ermler's *Katka the Apple-seller* for example) I guess we cannot dismiss Olgha's figure as embodying motherliness of the super-human family (although to what extent portrayed naturally/schematically is a question to discuss of course). Although it must be noted that it was only motherhood: giving birth to a child that was stressed, but not the preservation of nuclear family. In the above mentioned Russian films, heroines do not need biological fathers, or even men. It is supposed that the state is standing next to them and will take care of their babies (Attwood, 1993), meaning they are part of a bigger family: the Soviet Union. In *Saba* contrary to these films the family is preserved, but as I already mentioned it is very much obvious that the final scene is much more that a reunion of a private concrete family, but Saba's reunion and restoration in the public, state family.

The disposition of Olgha and Veriko on opposing of powerful/masculine and powerless/feminine poles is also manifested in their life occupations: Olgha, a leader of Young Communist League, is a social activist, public realm's agent as noted above, whereas Veriko earns her life doing laundry- a traditional domestic female labor-for others- it is a signifier marking her passive, oppressing and domesticating feminine position. In *Saba* an image of a modern Soviet woman embodying full agency and independence is produced embodied in Olgha's character. Nevertheless it does not give a possibility to assume that femininity has acquired "positive" terms: taking into the consideration the androgyny of Olgha, contrasted to suffering feminine Veriko, it becomes evident that still regardless the persuasive representation of a strong woman, feminine is still encoded as weak and passive, whereas the strength and agency is defined as masculine.

The process of turning women into more active agents, the goal that was on party's agenda even before the revolution (as they represented half of the population and consequently their support for the new order was crucial) was reflected in women's look as well, that would give a picture of a new woman dressed in more masculine fashion. In Russia it was common to the extent that it was a stereotype. The "metteur en scene" Foregger and dramatist Vladimir Mass, created theater masks for "types," the leather-jacketed woman, "who spoke only in slogans and militated, in imitation of Kollontai, for 'the theory of free love'," was one of these models representing

“generalized expression of real-life people” (Yutkevich, 1973, pp. 25-26). Although, this type of women was not approved by everyone even among the revolutionaries: as Lynne Attwood observed, Eisenstein was against such a militant female type in general: quoting *Novy Lef* critic in *October* Eisenstein, who was an ardent supporter of Bolshevik revolution did not only made a satire of women soldiers defending the Provisional Government, but women in military in general. It is obvious compare to the Bolshevik women in the same film, who are not fighting with arms, but fulfill administrative duties (Attwood, 1993). We can assume that such a “militant” type might have been quite common in Georgia as well, appealing to a letter giving advice to the women delegates how to work with peasant women and also pointing to the dressing style among other things, published in *Mshromeli qali* in 1924 (that time called *Chveni gza* [Our way]). The author (certain S. Afaneli) stated that “it is true that there are workers and peasants in our party, but it is not enough to only have a peasant surname. Rather it is necessary to have such a method of approach and appearance that a working woman is pleased when she sees you. And if you cut your hair shortly, dress in tuzhurka [military type leather jacket] and put on a zhoke [a masculine type hat] and moreover, stick a cigarette in your mouth, and go to a peasant woman like this, she will not look at you at all, and she will not believe you, even if you talk thousands of pearl words. Working among city women is another matter. These women are more developed, but self-restraint is still necessary, as you will also meet here old-fashioned women” (Afaneli, 1924, p.34). Elizabeth A. Wood, as a result of analyzing early twenties Russian journals, argues that “destroying all ‘femininity’ in herself, failing to be an ‘object of pleasure’ for her husband” (1997, p. 204) was a common charge made against New Soviet woman. The New Woman was not quite popular among communist men either: according to Elizabeth A. Wood, the communists as husbands were “no better and sometimes were worse than ordinary workers and peasants” - they did not let their wives to attend meetings or be politically active and they did not want a New Soviet woman as a wife, but were rather going for non party women; quoting one of them as saying that “he really didn’t see a kommunistka as a woman; she was more a comrade at work” (Wood, 1997, p. 205). The situation was very much similar in Georgia. *Mshromeli qali*’s correspondents were also complaining multiple times that the communists did not encourage their wives’ party activities but rather “pickled them at home” as one of them sarcastically remarked (Khutsishvili, 1924). Thus the outlines of a New Woman in 1920s are the following: militant masculine looking activist, vigorously involved in public realm,

although this image was not much appealing for communist men themselves. Olga- the only representation of the New Soviet Woman provided in Georgian silent films of 1920s- perfectly fits in the provided descriptions: she is militant like Foregger' s and Mass's leather jacketed woman, (or an activist woman as described by Afaneli), she ardently preaches and uses phallic gestures. When we see her, there is no slightest hint that she is a woman, in terms of femininity. We only see her as an ardent activist and comrade.

I have already noted above that *Mshromeli qali* was informing women workers and peasant women about the local and international politics, the party's activities, simultaneously providing them with educational information of different types: for example, starting from geography and ending with how to take care of various maladies, live-stock, etc. It is also very interesting to follow the journal's line of thought in terms of observing the kind of woman it was promoting: during mid-twenties it was calling and encouraging women to become actively engaged in the party work and the building of communist state, to provide the journals with letters from provinces, be actively involved in elections, in women's circles, etc. However, starting from the late 20s, the journal's temper changes: the issues became strikingly feminized in terms of offered themes: the politics is still in focus but now the journal gives advices not to women activists but rather to housewives; a new section, displaying models of clothes for women and children is introduced with an accompanying instruction how to sew them (initially it appears in the September-October issue of 1928, Fig. 17), and the journal dedicates a long section to recipes, as well as how to take care of clothes and gardening. According to Elizabeth A. Wood, in the beginning of twenties there was an active debate on the modes life, which among such essential issues as bribe-taking, drinking, religiosity, anti-Semitism as a reasons of excluding from the party, also included such topics as the line between "freedom" and decadence" in sexual matters, spouse responsibilities towards each other and their children, and whether young Komsomol men should wear ties, while women rouge and lipstick (Wood, 1997). It is obvious that the issue of the New Woman was a question of debate and Olga's type was not unanimously approved. In fact the discourse around New Woman was quite hybrid. In *Mshromeli qali* there are invocations to be involved in the military service and learn how to shoot, but the photograph of the "best women shooters" predominantly displays not the leather-jacket masculine type women activists, like Olga, but rather feminine, elegantly dressed women (Fig. 18). Even if "equality" of the 1920s assumed that "women should be exactly the same as men" (Turovskaya, 1993, p. 144) by

the beginning of thirties it became clear that women had to preserve their femininity, no matter how masculine their job was. *Rabotnitsa* guaranteed its readers that “female workers on the Motrostroi exchanged their overalls for fashionable dresses at the end of the working day: ‘if you were to meet one of our female metro-builders at the theater or a party, you would not be able to guess that she works underground’” (Attwood & Kelly, 1998, p. 274). The change of mood of *The Proletarian Woman* reveals an existing internal contradiction in the discourse of femininity as advocated by the party and shows signs of drastic changes in the construction of the new woman’s femininity in Stalin’s time to come: according to Lynne Attwood, the 1930s were marked with a new attitude towards dress and appearance, which encouraged women to dress in a more feminine but simultaneously practical style (Grant, 2013).



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

## Conclusion

As illustrated, the New Soviet woman was subject to many controversies. Even if it was unanimously clear on the party agenda that women had to emancipate and take the same position in the soviet state as men, they had to become comrades and women citizens, it was not quite clear what this camaraderie meant. The equality assumed that women should be the same as men, hence they should perform the same traditionally masculine tasks, be the same ardent activists, etc. Besides ideological transformation, it implied changes in look as well. Femininity

and agency were incompatible in the New Woman. But this kind of “the same as man” image of women was not greeted even by Bolshevik men, when it came to choosing a partner. They did not find a “comrade” appealing a bit as Elizabeth A. Wood shows (1997). This internal antimony within the discourse caused the modification and manipulation with the official image of the Soviet woman. In order to explore what a Soviet woman’s role model was in the Georgian context in 1920s, I have examined women’s representations in Mikheil Chiaureli’s *Saba*, which is the only film of the decade offering the images of modern women juxtaposed with the representations/line of women workers journal. In *Saba* women are no longer distinguished and marked by class difference, and consequently are not opposed in the frame of class binary system anymore, that was widely characteristic to Georgian films in the beginning and mid-20s. Here all of them are working class representatives but the class is no more something that makes distinguishing features. The women in the film: Veriko and Olgha are modern women from the working class. This modernity and belonging to the class of industrial epoch is manifested in such a simple thing as their similar haircut. It is the camera and their positioning in the frames that define their different social positions: Veriko is mostly shown from the high angle shot, which emphasizes her vulnerable position, whereas Olgha, on the contrary, is framed from the low angle shot. Besides the shot angles, Olgha’s powerful position is manifested by the frequent use of phallic gestures while talking. Contrary to Veriko, who is in the need of help, passive and slim, Olgha is robust and has a masculine appearance. It is not only Saba, who is saved; most importantly, it is Veriko, saved not by a protective man but by a female actor Olgha through her assistance, encouragement and support: after the first visit, Olgha frequently comes to Vakhtang and Veriko, and on the divorce trial she is sitting next to her, representing her interests, creating an example of women’s solidarity and assistance. Olgha is an androgynous agent of the public realm. Besides her apparent masculine features and powerful gestures, she also manifests caring—a feature of motherliness (I read it as a motherliness and not as a male protectiveness, considering that she nurtures young pioneers and appears something like a social mother): owing to her intervention the problem is eradicated from the domestic scene. An emancipated image of a New Soviet woman embodying full agency and independence is produced. Although as the examination of *Mshromeli qali* (and other Russian journals) showed, this image was not unanimously agreed on and the New Soviet woman was subject to controversies. Nevertheless, Olgha’s character does not give chance to assume that femininity in the film and in the

ideological discourse generally–has acquired “positive” terms: taking into consideration the androgyny of Olgha, contrasted to suffering feminine Veriko, including their life-earning occupations (Olgha’s outdoor, social activity and engagement in an open space and Veriko’s job of doing laundry in her household, a traditional feminine, passive employment) it becomes evident that regardless the persuasive representation of a strong, active woman, feminine/femininity is still encoded as weak and passive, whereas the strength and agency is defined as masculine.



## Chapter VI

### Invisible Queerness of Georgian Silent Cinema: Monstrous Femininity in Kote Mikaberidze's *My Grandmother* (1929)

First of all I have to make a clarification concerning the title that I chose for this chapter. I mean the presence of the word “queer” in relation to Kote Mikaberidze's *My Grandmother*. The film does not deal with gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transsexuals, for which, self-aware and openly sexualized films produced since earlier mid-nineties the term “queer” is used. I am neither arguing that it implies presence of non normative sexualities, for which aim other scholars use this term when they analyze films produced in earlier decades. I am using the term “queer” with its broadest understanding, which includes everything that is not normative and out-of-fitting from the mainstream. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason, editors of the volume on *Queer Studies: A lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender anthology*, published in 1996, note in the introduction that their choice of the term queer is not only because it characterizes best their own beliefs on applying this term in regards to non hegemonic sexualities, but because “the same sex sexual identities and behaviors is seen as out of the ordinary, unusual, odd, eccentric, “Queer” thus describes our position in regards to the mainstream: we do not quite fit in, no matter what labels or terminology we use” (Beemyn & Eliason, 1996, pp. 5-6). Alice A. Kuzniar in *The Queer German Cinema* explains the term queer, as a concept marking “an eccentricity common to gays, lesbians, bi-and transsexuals, a common protest against the hegemony and legitimacy of the normal” (2000, p. 6). I chose the word “queer” in reference to *My Grandmother* to mark its eccentricity, and subversive character towards the “hegemony” and “normality” of the films, mainstream both in form and in content that Georgia's State Cinema Production was generating. All bizarre and uncanny, *My Grandmother* does not have a like in Sakhkinmretsvi's productions; as Natia Amirejibi notes this film differs with its stylist form (1990) and decorative portrayal (1990) from Georgian cinema comedies produced before and after it; and considering a combination of various movements influences provided in it this film does not quite fit in any of them, representing at the same time a marvelous eclectic illustration of all these styles. More than that, *My Grandmother* was kept in a “closet”: it was not screened and immediately banned, to be premiered only 40 years later. In the 13 February issue of 1968 *Akhalgazrda Komunisti* the

reviewer says that the audience “warmly embraced this forgotten movie” (“Premier... 40 years later”, 1968, p. 3). In order to put more light on the circumstances that shaped the film’s destiny, I will explore the context in which it was made in more details.

### Overview of the context

*My Grandmother* was filmed in 1929, period, when Stalin’s Cultural Revolution had already begun, which had determined two focus areas: social and artistic realms. Cultural Revolution was intending to get rid all the cords that were connected with the bourgeois past, and it included a campaign against anti-communist elements and campaign against bureaucracy, in the social, and getting rid of the formalism, which was now seen as a degenerate form of bourgeois middle class art. As Peter Kenez notes it is difficult to determine the date when the Cultural Revolution exactly begun in cinema, as the cinema was never free from party’s interventions (Kenez, 1992). But nevertheless, the end of the twenties, there was no room left for the artistic (or otherwise) pluralism that had created the Golden Age. The NEP, new economic system was to be replaced by Stalin’s Five Year Plan, aiming to reshape the whole Soviet system and achieving industrial, financial and military self-sufficiency. Party leadership imposed tight controls on cultural affairs, including artistic expression (Kepley, 1996). If in the early 20s there was visible cultural diversity in different fields of art, it changed dramatically after First Five Year Plan. It also affected the film production eventually. Whereas art had been considered as an ideological ambassador directed to the wider masses with the mission to spread and convince them in the legitimacy of the Revolution and its subsequent politics, during this time it was clear that regardless the angst and enthusiasm, accompanied by “correct” messages, wider masses remained alienated from prominent avant-garde filmmakers’ experimental works (Kenez, 1992). The newly picked up slogan was “movies accessible for millions”. Formalism became a hot issue: whereas in literary critics formalist approach stressed the autonomy of literature, in cinema, when one or another film was described as „formalist“ according Denise J. Youngblood it functioned as “a code word meaning that they failed to conform to the state’s preference for a simple style accessible to the millions” (Youngblood, 2013, p. 85). This inaccessibility included

“any concern with the specifically aesthetic aspect of filmmaking, any deviation from a simple narrative line, and any artistic innovation” (Kenez, 1992, p.103).

During the First Five Year Plan, 1928-1932 16 % of newly produced films were banned by the Repertoire Committee (Keplye, 1996). Studio managers had to discuss with selected Party cells both future production plans and the nature of works-in-progress, and cell members routinely viewed and approved finished films before their release. Thus, the practice of internal review of a film’s performance, a condition that became common in many industries during the First Five Year Plan, entered studio practice by 1929 (Keplye, 1996). The cultural politics of the time was expressed explicitly by different party officials and its main goal was propaganda, propaganda and once again propaganda of the new Soviet man, the new Soviet system and the new Soviet life. Platon Kerzhentsev, a party figure in his report “Some Aspects of Literary Politics” (which evidently does not apply only to the literature genre, but to the art politics in general) states that literature, and art in broad-spectrum should be full of the spirit of proletariat’s class struggle: “We, always and everywhere are fighting that art and literature had a definite character in terms of class..We should fight that Party could actively influence on literary movements and on every movement in the sphere of arts... we should fight successfully against bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology, and against every temptation of depicting the Party’s line in a deformed way in arts” (Kherzhentsev, 1930). In this context eventually artists came to depend more and more on the decisions of various incompetent party officials as far as subject and style were concerned and these decisions changed as rapidly as did the moods of the party bureaucrats. Kaplana Sahni remarks that in literature, the depiction of red tapism, malfunctioning and bureaucracy was considered taboo. Satire as a literary form disappeared from the scene. Those who kept up with the times were the only people considered to be praiseworthy by the authorities. Although this period saw the emergence of some good literary works and films, the rapidity of the production of culture as a whole slowed down (Sahni, 1980). Of course the cinema was an important, multifunctional weapon in the fight directed towards bourgeois elements. As Jamie Miller states in *Soviet Cinema 1929-1941, The Development of Industry and Infrastructure* , first of all cinema could play its role in the struggle to eliminate illiteracy in the masses, which would be done within the frame of reference and ideas of communist ideology (Miller, 2006).

As already mentioned above 1928 was a year which was marked by the beginning of Stalin's complete grasp of power and his First Five Year Plan, by 1929 there is full enthusiasm for industrial development, transformation of agriculture and general reconstruction of production and provocation of the struggle against bureaucratization in such outlets as the daily issues of the magazine *Komunisti*. In Georgia daily issue of the magazine *Komunisti* depicts the slogans and messages addressed against "kulaks, Nepmen, and bourgeois intelligentsia, who are settled in the state apparatus and during the ongoing class struggle are trying to use the state machine for their own private purposes" (Yakovlev, 1929, p. 1). Another number showed an information about "Tbilisi workers' campaign against bureaucracy," stating that the campaign revealed "a whole range of astonishing disorderliness, that have to be stamped with red-hot-iron" from the establishments (Chkheidze, Eremani & Vishinskaya, 1929, p. 2). These "astonishing disorderliness" besides brutal treatment of citizens, also included the late appearance at work; the personnel wasted major working hours on private business and talking: "often it takes days to be just received. It is a big difficulty to see the leading workers of the enterprises at some places. In the establishments there are elements settled down- we have to heathen the soviet apparatus with active help from the masses" (Chkheidze et al., 1929, p. 2). In November of the same year Stalin evaluated the period as "the year of great transition" and stated that the spreading of working enthusiasm of masses' creative initiative was articulated in three ways: struggle against bureaucracy via self criticism, struggle against those who miss work and undermine working discipline of the proletariat via socialist competitions, and struggle against routine and immobility in industry via permanent productive weeks (Stalin, 1929). This campaign would find support in the film. Kote Mikaberidze's *My Grandmother* was supposed to be one of such films.

Kote Mikaberidze was a prominent silent film actor himself, a frequent screen partner of Nato Vachnadze in many films. *My Grandmother* was his directorial debut, which in a way turned out to be his last. After it was banned he did not have chance to work seriously in this direction any more. Although he shot couple more films in the 1930s, but they were very different from the first one, (after the ban of *My Grandmother*, they just had to be). *My Grandmother* gave a dramatic turn to Kote Mikaberidze's career: from that point on he was cast as a second rate actor and later in 60s he was voicing animations. In later years he was living in very poor financial conditions and died on the cinema committee meeting, to be found only after everyone left the hall (Kokochashvili, 2011). During the Soviet period he was remembered as one of early silent

film pioneer actors. One of the series of short brochures titled *Masters of Soviet Cinema* issued in 1954 is dedicated to Kote Mikaberidze. The brochure praises him as one of the talented actors of early film period and reviews of his acting career, mentions all the movies in which he acted. On the last page it is briefly mentioned that he had also tried directing two experimental films. *My Grandmother* was “an attempt of creating a satiric movie” (Moniava, 1954, p. 14). Jamie Miller mentions it as “a brilliant satire on the Soviet bureaucratic machine” (Miller, 2010, p. 54) and “one of the best Soviet films of the late 1920s” (Miller, 2007, p. 478).

### *My Grandmother*

Satire and comedy was the trickiest genre for the directors to try in their careers, as together with melodrama, it was difficult to sovietize (Youngblood, 1993). Soviet critics were writing how they needed a real soviet comedy; nevertheless they were always dissatisfied with what directors were producing in this aspect, as a comedy, in case to be a real soviet production, needed to have a real soviet ideological message as well, which was a narrow bridge to go through. Denise J. Youngblood observes that regardless constant declining of the comedy films, soviet critics also were understanding that it was not an easy task for filmmakers: “One (pseudonymous) critic noted, for example that it was much more difficult to make a comedy “ideological” than it was to insert some ideology into a drama” (Youngblood, 1993, p. 41). As Osip Brik famously noted: “we don’t know what to laugh at”, whereas according Ippolit Sokolov in comedy “at whom and how to laugh is the main thing” (Youngblood, 1993, p. 41). Regardless the ardent appeals in press how important and truly Bolshevik phenomenon self criticism was, as Denise Youngblood notes it still was unallowable to satirize soviet life, “because it could be misunderstood abroad, or even more seriously, at home”(Youngblood, 1993, p.42). *My Grandmother*, a modern satire with an extraordinary form (on the film’s formal aspects, see below) that largely influenced and abstracted /generalized the content, by no means could meet the standards of the highly pretentious “at whom and how to laugh” non-existing guideline, because it was laughing at everything and everyone.

The filming of *My Grandmother* started in April of 1929. The October issue of the Russian weekly magazine *Kino* announces that “a new modern satire” is finished and will be released in

January 1930. The November 26 issue of *Komunisti* was announcing the same, but the film never appears in the announcements of ongoing movies in the movie theaters neither in *Kino* nor in *Komunisti*.

The narration in *My Grandmother* is split in two parts: the first part depicts a general bureaucratic situation in a certain bureau establishment-trust, where everyone is sleeping, flirting or playing and no one has time to discuss the document of the worker -the situation is very much similar one to one as depicted in *Komunisti*'s above mentioned notice. No personage has a proper name. On the symbolic doors (presented by the backs of chairs) bear only the position titles. The only one person, who comes on time and starts work immediately, is an employer of the lowest level, enthusiastically reading "Manual for Proletariat", while others are enjoying their time in their symbolic offices. This wasting time is depicted in harsh hyperbolic grotesque exaggeration: for example the director of the establishment is playing with a car, not letting to his assistant also playing with it, the latter in the result burst into tears like a child. Another clerk is playing "loves me, loves me not" by spitting on a crawling cockroaches. This scene symbolizes the primitivism and degraded emotional feelings (Amirejibi, 1990). He throws a bouquet of flowers to the woman outside, who takes it, "tastes it" and throws it away and walks over it. Another employee, regardless the slogan hung on the wall "Do not waste paper" sends lots of paper airplanes on which he writes live messages to the secretary, which fail to reach her. We see the young woman, sitting totally immobile with a cold expression on her face. Once one of airplane reaches her, she gets irritated, destroys it, and remains immobile again. The desperate rejected clerk commits suicide. The girl still remains immobile and cold, but her eyes show the great satisfaction while observing. Meanwhile the suicide's colleagues start to fight over his chair, but a newly arrived "man with a briefcase", (intertitle) with loads of protection letters, a phallic shot from a low angle perspective (Fig. 1) wins them all.



Fig. 1

A new Soviet man, representative of proletariat comes in when all employees are sleeping. He is in absolute contrast with all the other characters. He is sweaty, seemingly having just stopped hard work. The way he is shot (use of camera angles and lightening) distinguishes him from the lazy-bones staff, and his posture repeats the one embodied in Soviet posters and sculptures (compare Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 from pages of 1929 *Komunisti* issues with Fig. 4 and Fig. 5 from *My Grandmother*). His gestures, pose, appearance in the scene is so much exaggeratedly pompous that it turns into the grotesque, and his character is transformed into the caricature together with other workers. With the whole absurdity and erasure of any concreteness in which the set of the movie is embodied created not a satire on particular paper pushers, on particular negative bureaucrat character, but it appears to be the universal satire on the whole soviet system.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

The other part is dedicated to a specific paper pusher's story, who gets fired because of being a bureaucrat, and exposed by "Msubuqi Kavaleria" [Flying Cavalry/Light Horses]. After being let go, he is shown home alone, reading the newspaper where his caricature is published, when his wife and daughter return from shopping on the black market, where they bought things unavailable for general population, they do not even notice him hung on the ceiling. But once the wife finds out that he is fired, she literally beats him up, throws from the window and demands divorce, shouting "no job, no marriage". The fired bureaucrat gets up, and while he is running away from the angered wife, he encounters a co-worker, seemingly on a high position, (a man with a brief-case from the first part) and asks him for an advice how to find a job. The co-worker tells him that he needs "a grandmother" to give him a recommendation letter (current slang for a protector), and in order to get a recommendation he needs to annoy and nag as much as possible. The bureaucrat literally takes his advice, and after going through troubles finally gets in to the cabinet of the "grandmother", annoys him to death, and finally in order to get rid of him, the grandmother gives him a letter, with the recommendation to never ever be employed again, as he is the most annoying person in the world. Apparently the bureaucrat is unaware of the content of the recommendation letter and rushes to the office of the "job giver", still chased by his wife, who once she sees he got the recommendation begs him to take her back. When they get into the office the bureaucrat is unable to pass the recommendation letter because the directors are changed so quickly that he cannot even find time. Finally he, with all the other people who were waiting in the line, grasps one of the rapidly changing directors, (who eventually is suggested to be the last one) and once he sees him all the people in the room get terrified, because it is the same worker who appeared in the beginning of the movie. The worker throws the bureaucrat's



letter away and turns everyone out of the office. Clerks are running and clashing against the wall and only their shadows remain as the trace of their presence. These running scenes alternate with the juxtaposition of tense, insistent, Orwellian “Big Brother is watching”-ish gaze of the worker. Above the remaining shadows it is written “death to all the bureaucrats”.

As Denise J. Youngblood notes, on the level of the plot description, it sounds like what the party had ordered: “a black and –white diatribe against the hated administrators and fat cats, in favor of the proletariat” (Youngblood, 2010, p. 156). But nevertheless “it is anything but” because of the films eccentric, avant-garde and I would say queer style. In my opinion *My Grandmother’s* queerness manifests itself on two levels: first, it depicts a queer, (read not mainstream, at least in terms of filmic representation) domestic scene: here the wife controls everything, and when unsatisfied, she commits literal physical violence over her husband, depicted hyperbolically in the film. And the second, the film is queer in every use of the filmic feature (as an example just mentioned hyperbola is just one of numerous examples). There is a debate among Georgian film critics whether we could attribute *My Grandmother* to German Expressionism or to Futurist and Constructivism movement. Among the film Georgian film critics it is established Natia Amirejibi’s view that *My Grandmother* is (the only) example of German expressionism in Georgian cinema (Amirejibi, 1985). The film is related with this latter in terms of its artistic conditionality (Amirejibi, 1990). German expressionism was born out of the desperate post WWI condition, when “Mysticism and magic, the dark forces to which Germans have always been more than willing to commit themselves, had flourished in the face of death on the battlefields” (Eisner, 1973, p. 9). For the artists of Expressionist movement, who in a way were on a hangover after bloody war drunkenness, in the focus of interest was to describe and illustrate their subjective traumatized vision, rather than objective world. The interior or exterior represented not themselves, but rather functioned as a depiction of a character’s inner state. The main principles of German expressionism are subjective interpretation of reality, strong emotionality, striving for irrationality and excessiveness of fantastic elements. Hallucinations, dreams and nightmares occupy a considerable place. The depicted world is deformed. In expressionist cinematography lighting, shadows and optical effects are crucial and they serve to transfer the character’s emotions (Iakashvili, 2012). We do find deformed, conditional, abstractive reality in *My Grandmother*, which is dreamy and hallucinogenic, but all this does not serve to transfer the character’s inner condition/state, but rather depicts the objective reality. Maya Levanidze, in an

article “German Expressionism, The Symphony of Horror and Kote Mikaberidze’s *My Grandmother*”, argues that actually *My Grandmother* does not represent an example of German expressionism in Georgian cinema, as in the first place, in *My Grandmother* there is no element of mystical, inexplicable fantastic phenomenon, so characteristic to German Expressionism. And second the contrasting lighting, so characteristic to German Expressionism is not applied in *My Grandmother*’s case as medium for subjective feelings, they are more decorative (Levanidze, 2012). Moreover, she highlights the Futurist aesthetics that is present in the beginning of the film (Oliko Jghenti also makes the similar claim in her article “Regarding the interrelation of Futurism and Cinematography” (Jghenti, 1991)) and the film’s art director, Irakli Gamrekeli, was more directed to Futurism, which is very noticeable how the scene is shot, how important geometry and lines are in the frames (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). Here the reality itself becomes fantastically inexplicable and surreal. And on the top of all that, the thematic-genre aspect of *My Grandmother* is more corresponding to Soviet film aesthetics and main pathos, where expressionism was not developed at all (Levanidze, 2012). The frames are often vague, that was characteristic to 20s soviet cinema and in contrast to expressionism, where the sharp contrast of black-and white and light-shadow has a symbolic meaning, in case of *My Grandmother*, light-shadow does not create meta semantic layer. Montage is also more similar to Russian poetic montage tradition or French avant-garde rather than with expressionism, nevertheless Levanidze claims it is possible to talk about existing resemblances, but *My Grandmother* in sum is more a product of Futurism and Constructivism (Levanidze, 2012). Irakli Makharadze and Oliko Jghenti attribute *My Grandmother* to the American films influences. Oliko Jghenti calls *My Grandmother* a manifesto of “strong expansion of American culture” in the NEP period (Jghenti, 2011). However what these scholars are missing is that the Russian Soviet Cinema was under strong influence of American films of the same time as well. As Denise J. Youngblood remarks *My Grandmother* has a strong influence of Eisenstein, Dvorzhenko, and especially of the Workshop of the Eccentric Actors (FESK) (Youngblood, 2010), who actually in their manifesto on Eccentrism in 1923 daringly were claiming: “Either Americanization or the undertaker” (Kozintsev, Trauberg, Yutkevich, & Kryzhintski, 1922/1994, p. 58). And when talking about the paper pusher’s resemblance to Harold Lloyd (Makharadze, 2014), one should not forget that Harold Lloyd had already been used as a prototype for creating Mr. West’s character by Lev Kuleshov (*Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of Bolsheviks*, 1924). In my

opinion this not-quite-fitting in any artistic movement, whereas assembling their important characteristics, is also an additional reason to label *My Grandmother* as “queer” besides its difference and being out-of-style of the mainstream Georgia’s State Cinema Production and unusual representation of familial power relations in domestic space. Queer in its wide meaning perfectly fits to Judy Bloch’s description of *My Grandmother*: “something like Franz Kafka meets Charlie Chaplin... a riotous, scathingly anti-bureaucratic satire, a genuine piece of grotesquerie descended from Gogol and the Soviet Eccentric cinema” (Bloch, 1985, para. 1).

Whereas it is very tempting and exciting to look at *My Grandmother*’s stylistic features and analyze its influences in the context of its contemporary films, I will stop on this short overview and just note that generally the absence of fantastic, supernatural phenomenon from Georgian cinema is also emphasized in Lika Kalandrishvili’s article “ ‘Frozen Time’– the Result of Overall Hypertext”: “In Georgian cinematography, the display of any kind of radical avant-gardism is softened and neutralized: even such peculiarities, such as deformation of objects or reality, here represents only a technical means of creating a comic-grotesque effect and satirical style in general.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

For example in our films you cannot find inexistent, inexplicable fantastic phenomenon, something mystic and horrifying that has a principal importance for expressionist or surrealist art” (Kalandrishvili, 2012, p. 136). Both, Lika Kalandrishvili and Maia Levanidze remark that in cinema, the manifesting of the author’s position clearly is a trend. Levanidze notes regarding *My Grandmother* that Mikaberidze’s position is clearly readable which is the confrontation of old, bourgeois, corrupted times with that of new, strong and healthy one (Levanidze, 2012), (although, had Mikaberidze’s position towards new times identified as straightforwardly “healthy,” the film would not have been banned I suppose). Kalandrishvili says that in general

for the artists the film, was supposed to serve for the “manifestation of the author’s point of view. For them film was not a mere spectacle any more, but an active action, fight, to build a new, better future and determination of its sense; the main aim of the avant-garde artists’ work is participation in the process of twentieth century accelerated life and showing the right way to the masses” (Kalandrishvili, 2012, p.136). *My Grandmother* was supposed to show “the right way to the masses” and explore the bureaucracy and bourgeois elements intertwined into state system. So, where did it all go wrong?

The screenplay was written by Kote Mikaberidze himself in collaboration with dramaturge Giorgi Mdivani. As later Mdivani recalls, he wanted to write a script on so called “Flying Cavalerie”- a komsomol activists, who were fulfilling mission of people’s control but “somehow the film turned out like this”: changes in form caused changes of the content itself (Iakashvili, 2012, p. 31). Jamie Miller states The Artistic Political Council rightly considered “the film to be anti-Soviet and likely to engender a negative attitude towards Soviet Bureaucracy and power in general” (Miller, 2010, p. 54). The criticism of soviet society and system can be read in other films produced in this era (ex. Fridrikh Ermler’s *Fragment of an Empire*, *Katka the Apple-seller* (Youngblood, 1992) and Eisenstein’s *The Old and the New*). Even if according Denise J. Youngblood film’s formal proprieties accentuate “its message about the sorry state of Soviet Society” and “criticism of bureaucrat’s was allowable... Mikaberidze got carried away with his enthusiasm” (Youngblood, 2013, p. 158) having forgotten and/or ignored the need of providing a positive hero, a role model for the audience, which are present in the above mentioned directors’ films. The only “positive” character in *My Grandmother*, a worker, is so grotesque, and totalitarian (some might see here the forthcoming and approaching Stalinist terror) that it hardly fulfils his function as a role model. An anonymous critic, masked as Msubuqi kavaleriis jgufi [Light Horse Group/Flying Cavalry], harshly blamed Mikaberidze for producing a reactionary film that was “a friendly, or maybe even a hostile jest, and not a satire-jest from the reality of our lives... an agitational film directed against “grandmother/godmothers” (Msubuqi kavaleriis jgufi, 1930, p.2). The anonymous author was addressing a question towards Mikaberidze: “Who is your grandmother, who permitted you to stage *My Grandmother*?” and stated that the film was “a tickling story of a tired brain, diverting in the “small” friends circle” (Msubuqi kavaleriis jgufi, 1930, p.2). It is interesting that in the climate against any sign of formalism, the reviewer appreciates Mikaberidze’s filmic form: “it is worthy to mention that the picture is well made

artistically, directorial methods are new, but this cannot save the reactionary abundance of the content” (Msubuqi kavaleriis jgufi, 1930, p. 2).

I noted above that situating *My Grandmother* in stylistic dialogue with the other films of the same period, would take us too far, but nevertheless I would like to discuss its similarities with depiction of the bureaucracy in Sergei Eisenstein’s *The Old and the New (The General Line)* in so much as they deal with the same topic and have explicit similarities. I will quote a sequence from *The Old and the New* to make a comparison: the protagonist-peasant woman- Marfa Lapkina addresses to the city bureaucrats for help for establishing collectivization in the farms and to get a tractor. A title sarcastically tells: “They were not hurried” while showing the effort of typing a text and a time to peel a pencil, the one side of which is already peeled- this way Eisenstein emphasizes the useless bureaucratic work of the enterprises. When Marfa arrives to the city, in order to address personally to them, she meets a worker, who is eagerly helping her. When they enter, the bureaucrats are engaged into the private conversation, laughing and talking, playing with things, and it is not until the worker pushes a fist, that they are paid attention. Others are relaxingly smoking, and not taking care of the people in need. The head of the enterprise, is a complete narcissist, he reads *Pravda* under a portrait that depicts him reading *Pravda*. His secretary is sitting and does not have anything to do. It is under the worker’s ardent proclamation “lead the general line” that the head of the enterprise writes down an order in an accelerate tempos and employers start to move up and down doing their business, edited also with accelerated tempo.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

In the end, when Marfa gets confirmation on her appeal, she enthusiastically thanks to her helper and the title appears: “Thanks to the Working class,” -implying/emphasizing the urge of the unity of peasants and city workers. All of these are played in *My Grandmother* as well, in a more radical, formalist, and grotesque way, and even if the similarity in depicting the general bureaucratic atmosphere is huge (one frame even almost repeats the scene from *The Old and the New*. Compare Fig. 11 and Fig. 12) Mikaberidze’s *My Grandmother* represents an independent, autonomous cinematic text. Also, contrary to *My Grandmother*, *The Old and the New* besides not employing radical stylistic features, what is crucially important provides the audience with positive role model/models, who are not grotesque and abstract themselves, like a worker in *My Grandmother*’s case.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

But my interest here is to observe and analyze gender relations and women’s representation the way they are depicted in the film. I would argue that in *My Grandmother*, we are dealing with monstrous, fatal, consuming femininity, which could also be regarded as “queer” in terms of both film’s form and content. I will try to provide illustration while analyzing female characters. During the whole plot appear only three women; two of them have episodic roles: we see them briefly in the first part of the film, as the romantic love interests of the two clerks, and the third is

the fired bureaucrat's wife. Firstly we are introduced with a woman in the street, a beloved of a certain clerk (the one who splits on cockroach). Apparently she is not a representative of working class: it can be said by the way she is dressed: in a vulgar bourgeois manner, holding an umbrella in her hand, to hide from the sun. Moreover she is walking in the street during working time. At first the woman smiles to the clerk while he's waving to her from the window and throws a flower bouquet to her. Once she receives the bouquet, she examines it and finding it unsatisfactory, throws them away and leaves him heartbroken. The bouquet here functions as a signifier of those material goods that the clerk can offer to her, but as we see, after assessing and examining it (the woman turns the small bouquet with interest, smells it with unsatisfactory expression and then throws it away and tramples down. Evidently it was not enough for her bourgeois requirements. (Fig. 13, Fig. 14)



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

The second woman, a typist, sitting immobile at her type-machine, just looking in the space with cold eyes, appears to be the love object of a certain high position worker, who regardless of the precaution on the wall : 'no paper to waste' sends her lots of paper planes with love messages written on the wings. They all fail to reach her, but once one of them does; she just gets annoyed, tears it into pieces and regains her immobile posture. The desperate rejected worker commits suicide, the girl remains immobile, but she has a content facial expression and a great evil pleasure in her cold, Medusa like castrating gaze. (Fig. 15, Fig. 16)



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

The third female character that we see in the film, which already has a leading role in the film plot, is the paper pusher's wife. The wife does not have a name either like her husband and rest of the characters, which transforms her into a generalized abstract figure-type, (like the whole film set in general). Although a modern woman, with her haircut and looks, she is by no means an emancipated new Soviet woman (actually none of the women depicted in the movie are, maybe only the typist, just in terms that she is a (white-collar) worker and apparently self-sufficient). The first time the viewer is introduced with her via a family photo. When the camera introduces us into the apartment of the fired paper pusher, the first thing we see is a family photo (apparently that of marriage) in which the paper pusher is sitting on a chair with a big flower bouquet in one of his hand, and the other gently posed on his knee, and his wife is standing next to him, in a masculine posture, with her legs aside characteristic to men's standing rather than women's body language, holding her hand on his shoulder. The body languages of the couple as depicted on the photograph functions as a signifier of their relations: it is quite clear that the wife occupies a powerful, possessive position towards the paper pusher, who in the photograph is depicted as effeminate and weak (Fig. 17). While the camera moves around the apartment, it shows that it is messy, everything is put out: socks, clothes, brushes etc. It is evident that the house does not have a good mistress, and is not taken care of, thus the paper pusher's wife, who lives on her husband's expanse, is not a good housewife at all. The paper pusher is home alone, sitting in a child's bed, with the blanket on, reading the newspaper which has published his caricature and news about his shameful firing. (Fig. 18) On the end of the bed a toy-man is hanged, connoting bureaucrat's inner state (Fig. 19), he is desperate, powerless and positioned as immature





Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

in the family hierarchy, the viewer, even without seeing the wife actually, already knows now “who’s the ‘man’ in the house”. While the paper pusher “cannot find a place”, (as the intertitle tells us and the idiomatic expression is brilliantly illustrated literally: he is either sitting on the flower vase on the table, or on the top of the wardrobe), the toys revive and ridicule and/or sympathize with him. Finally he finds his place: hangs himself on the luster. While animated toys are staring at him in shock, this is when the wife enters the room with their small daughter. She is all agitated and dancing Charleston like dance and is all happy, because she just “bought everything she ever dreamed at the black market” as the intertitles tell us. She does not notice that her husband is hung on the ceiling at the moment (he is not dead, this is just a satirical visual metaphor for his desperate inner condition, Fig. 20); she throws everything away and is dancing with her daughter screaming “who has a husband like me”. It is the kid who notices the paper pusher and asks him what he is doing up there and grabs the newspaper, that the paper pusher is vainly trying to take away from her, as now the ecstatic wife is dancing with him and he cannot manage to get rid of her. When he finally manages, the pushes her aside, but she does not even seems to notice it, she continues her mad dance with her reflection in the mirror, in total

agitation, in a certain kind of orgasm, which connotes her narcissism and consumerism (Fig. 21) while the fired bureaucrat is chasing after their kid to take away the newspaper. When she reads the newspaper, the paper pusher is hiding behind the curtain, peeping at her with fear time after time. Although when the little girl finally brings her the newspaper, the wife totally changes: her happy, excited face transforms into an angry, reproaching gaze fixed at her husband, who is standing like an accused (Fig. 22, Fig. 23) and then hides behind a curtain. While she is reading the newspaper, even the bureaucrat's caricature runs from the newspaper and escapes teasing her meanwhile. While chasing it the wife catches it by standing on it with her leg, in the very same newspaper, and finally gets the idea what the article is about.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

Once she finds out about the firing of her husband, she starts a violent quarrel: she bangs on the table and accuses her husband for not introducing her with the Rabkom Gaika (the author of the article) because he was always jealous (Fig. 24, Fig. 25) this intertitle reveals the bureaucrat's

possessiveness as well. “Fired: it means no car, no limit, no free tickets”-shouts she violently, while the paper pusher is trembling wrapped up in the curtain, counting all the benefits that the useless bureaucrats were receiving for doing nothing at their jobs. Then she brutally beats up her husband, who is passively and immobile standing in front of her (Fig. 26, Fig. 27, Fig. 28).



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28

Afterwards she literally throws him out the window, screaming: “divorce, divorce or job”. While the paper pusher is getting up and regaining the consciousness after the fall, she is descending on the stairs, and continues to chase him wherever he goes. When a “Grandmother’s” watchman makes fun of her husband’s long nose and glasses, she beats him up as well and knocks him down. After violent intrusion into grandmother’s office, she observes the scene like an ambushed animal, and when her husband notices her, she jumps on the table like a cat family representative, and while sitting there fixes a prey like gaze at him and waits before jumping and continuing chasing him. The way this scene is photographed draws explicit parallel between her and beast of prey. (Fig. 29, Fig. 30. Fig.31).



Fig.29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31

While running the paper pusher drops the recommendation letter, which she picks up and excitedly kisses it. The paper pusher now runs towards registration, for a divorce, when the wife approaches him, gives him a letter and begs him to stay with her on her knees, while the paper pusher, from a childlike weak accused is already transformed into an arrogant person declining her (Fig. 32). She cries with black tears, which could be read as a sign of her insincerity (it is quite evident that she does not care as much for her husband, as for his job and benefits she

receives as a bureaucrat's wife), her consumerism and her bourgeois style (like the excessive use of mascara), and/or parodying the melodramatic film genre (Fig. 33).



Fig. 32



Fig. 33

The now-confident husband changes his body language attitude towards her now it is he who acts violently by dragging her around by the hair and asks her about the divorce that she was asking for. She crying declines her words and he leaves to find a new job with his letter and the crying wife starts writing a new shopping list on a paper hiding in her breast. Instead of heart, she has shopping list.

But she is not giving up. She continues following her husband who now is at the door of the trust director. Again, she is the one who powerfully manages to enter the door, through which others are vainly trying to step. When the bureaucrat finally catches the ever changing new director, who as noted is the worker from the first part of the film, she is standing next to him, caringly looking at him, with the aim to win him back, even after he pushes her away, she stands next to him from the other side (Fig. 34) It is obvious that she does not give up easily what she wants to get. With her ever present gaze she constantly controls her husband: when this latter nervously cleans his glasses with a tie and puts on the glasses with his tie still on it, her kind expression changes into a rebuking one (and back) as soon as he takes it out (Fig. 35). When the worker shouts out “bureaucrat” after reading the “grandmother’s” letter, the paper pusher faints and loses his mind, and it is she, who drags him away grabbed in her arms (Fig. 36).



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

It goes without saying that she is a strong, controlling woman, who could have had an agency in terms that she is by no means passive, unable to make her own decisions, but rather she is very much controlling and violent, “phallic woman”, but she just is not willing to use her powerfulness in other matter rather ruling her husband. Her strength does not necessarily connote her emancipation. On the contrary, she is a Soviet nouveau-riche, with no desire to work and be self-sufficient, but rather is willing to benefit from her husband’s job privileges and being supported by him. The bureaucrat’s wife is an embodiment of the bourgeois moral and values; feelings are alien for her, and she is so oriented towards purchases and consumerism that has a shopping list instead of heart.

## Conclusion

Considering *My Grandmother's* style and genre, it would be even ridiculous to expect finding positive aspects of women's representation in an "agitfilm", where the only character supposed to be "positive" – the worker is depicted in such a grotesque way that he turns into a caricature of himself and a new soviet man in general that he symbolizes. No wonder that the film was accused for Trotskyist reactionary ideology (Makharadze, 2014) and eventually became 'forgotten' for 40 years. *My Grandmother* ridicules the whole system resided by new soviet bourgeoisie-NEPmen, bureaucrats, together with their embodied values: family relations, love, which is desacrilized first by altering daisies with a cockroach in a clerk man's "loves me, loves me not" play, and later through the bureaucrat's wife's black tears and her shopping list, which she keeps next to her heart, and actually functions as a metonym for her heart as already noted during the analysis. She is also associated with a beast of prey, most likely from a cat family, as it is shown in the "grandmother's" office. Besides her we briefly encounter with two other female characters, one of which, a lady in the street is greedy and a wealthy husband hunter, who only needs to get married/find partner to establish financial support for herself; and the other, a typist girl who is an emancipated modern woman in terms that she is self-sufficient is turned into an emotionless monstrous creature who is pleasantly devouring her victim as she enjoys his suffering with a castrating medusa like cold gaze. But she is a white-collar worker, part of Soviet petty-bourgeoisie like the bureaucrat's wife and a woman on the street. Here, we are faced with mocking representations of petty bourgeois femininity.

*My Grandmother*, positioned on the opposite location than the mainstream soviet films of the period, which provided a desired (more or less) reflection of the soviet society, represents the other side of this looking-glass, where viewer travels like Alice and encounters the soviet state establishments and its workers reflected in such a queer way that made the film unacceptable for forty years. The femininity, which resides through this looking-glass, is nothing but greedy creature, which consumes and financially devours men, but in case if it does not need men financially, then devours literally. In short the (bourgeois) femininity is represented like best of prey and monstrous.

## Chapter VII

### Conclusion

Thus in my Ph.D. thesis I have researched the Georgian silent films of the 1920s decade and I have analyzed what kind of women's representation it was offering, and what meanings these representations had in different contexts and aspects, and how they changed over the decade. The silent era of the Soviet cinema has been a subject of numerous studies, as for post soviet, as well as for Western scholars. But in Western literature the focus is mainly made on Russian films, and productions of other republics are largely ignored, with the exception of Ukraine. It has been much written about Georgian silent films in Georgia, but even so, the question of women's representation, and how these representations operated in the existing ideological context in various aspects, remained unexplored so far, if we do not take into consideration the brief and superficial examination of female characters in some analyses. With my dissertation I intended to fulfill exactly this gap. Analyzing women's representation is crucial in this sense as woman's question-that is questions and issues related to women's emancipation was one of the crucial concerns of early Soviet rule; and as far as the cinema was functioning as a reflector of Soviet ideologies, women's cinematic representations were actively debated in the press, as the discussed primary sources show. My dissertation intends to fulfill this gap in the context of early Georgian Soviet cinema. The questions I intended to answer by examining female body's symbolic function in different aspects in this research, as outlined in the introduction, were the following:

- To what extent Georgian soviet silent films were reproducing a traditional understanding of gender roles, and to examine to what degree, if any, were gender roles modified according to the new social and political ideals?
- To what extent were women's images emancipated during the decade and what was the functional meaning of this emancipation in the given context?
- How these films redefined Georgianness as nationality, and how and to which extent the ideas on femininity and new ideals of "New Soviet Woman" were



inscribed in the period's films, and if they were, then how Georgian nationality, was combined with these new ideals?

In the final chapter I will provide answers to these questions depending on what the analysis showed; first I will explain the data selection process and the challenges that accompanied to this process, then I will overview the results of the analysis. Afterwards I will outline the indications of these results, and finally I will suggest areas for further research.

### Relevance of selected data:

This research is based on the analysis of selected eleven Georgian feature films. As I already outlined in the introduction there was a certain difficulty while choosing specific data for my research; but on the other hand all the films to which I had access to use in my analysis were popular and widely screened at their time except for *My Grandmother*, which was banned. These films are not equally valuable in artistic terms and not all of them were appreciated by critics. On the contrary, as it is clear from the articles and reviews in the 1920s press, some of them were harshly criticized, and one of them (*My Grandmother*) even banned and not screened, but nevertheless I think these films are crucial for exploring the tension between official discourse and expectations of masses, as they definitely hit the box-office and enjoyed such a wide popularity that even became umbrella terms for unfavorable trends characterizing Georgia's State Cinema Production (for example *Murder Case of Tariel Mklavadze* and *Bela*). Moreover, as Marc Ferro claims, each film, be it fictional or documentary, has a value of a historical document; even if one sees feature films as merely “dreams”, this “dream status” does not minimize its historical importance a bit, claiming that films affect history as much as dreams affect actual reality: “ Fictional films-‘cinema’-are seen in relation to the imaginary and not to knowledge; they are not seen as an expression of reality...as if dreams were not part of reality, or as if imagination were not one of the motives of human activity” (1988, pp. 81-82).

## Analysis

My interest was to observe how women's representations functioned in different aspects and were used in the present ideologies and social-political contexts in 1920s. As in Soviet Union the first unifying characteristic of different and various republics was a class issue I looked and women's representations in terms of class binary system at the first place. The analysis of women's representation through class lenses showed that a woman's sexuality was a determining feature, a synecdochic signifier determining class virtues or turpitudes. Demonized and frowned on, active sexuality was feature of only high and/or bourgeois women, who were very often initiating and often responding positively to the villain's desire. Whereas peasant women, never showed a sign of sexuality and were always victims of villain's desire. In wider context, such feature can be found in Russian Soviet films as well, which testimonies to the fact that female active sexuality is dispraised in patriarchal cultures everywhere.

Secondly I analyzed women's representations in terms of nationality, which was intertwined with the representation of east and orientalisation. Examination of representing historical Georgia, "East", which was the most recurring theme throughout the decade revealed the evolution of women characters form male/high class/story's sadism to the agents of narration. In the sign system, female body had multiple functions: in "eastern" pictures it was definitely the source of visual aesthetic pleasure rendered through objectification/sexualization, it always functioned as a signifier of distressed community/class/motherland; and sometimes had negative connotations functioning as a signifier of popular backwardness, revenge and cruelty. Women's objectification and sexualization was a major trend throughout the decade, which changed in the end with the appearance of Nikoloz Shengelaia. It is in *Eliso* (1928), where woman's body is freed from exotisation and she is no more represented as merely sexual being, but is turned into an active agent. Female characters in *Giuli* and *Elisso* are eager to be the masters of their life and body. Nevertheless it is striking to observe, that if women are trying to acquire agency to dominate their own lives, in order to master their own body and sexuality, they fail and are punished by death (*Giuli*). And those who have it, are using it to refuse private life/ sexuality for the sake of public "interests", that is the nation-state idea (*Eliso*), implying that female sexuality is supposed to be repressed and disciplined in favor of nation-state's interests.

The third chapter I dedicated to the films set in the context of 1905 revolution. Even if it was not as frequently reoccurring subject as “eastern” theme, it represents the unifying circle of the films shot during the 1920s: the very first and the very last film of the decade are both concerned with this subject. Perhaps exactly due to this background this is here that we see the most drastic modification and contrast in terms of women’s representation: the almost invisible, completely passive mother figure in the beginning of the decade (*Arsena Jorjiashvili*) becomes the symbolization of the revolution itself in the end (*Prison Cell 79*). Here I also integrated into analyses Russian avant-garde classic, Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Mother*, which, as I argued occupies an intermediary position between these two films. Firstly because it was widely screened and popular in Georgia and subsequent *Prison Cell 79* definitely shows some influences, and secondly in difference to other revolutionary thematic films, it has a family in the focus of the plot. Secondly it occupies a transitional location in terms of mother figure’s development: contrary to *Arsena*’s all passive, nonfunctional mother, Pavel’s mother from a peasant housewife transforms into a politically active subject, but again contrary to *Maro* she is not an agent on her own, but acquires it through motherhood, whereas *Maro* sacrifices her motherhood to her own political consciousness. I argue that such a powerful representation was a reflection of the women’s emancipator politics on the one hand, and on the other on the ardent insistence of depicting strong women on screens.

In the following chapter I focused on the representation of New Soviet Woman in Georgian film, Mikheil Chiaureli’s *Saba*, which is the only one of the decade (judging from the annotations of the other unseen films) offering the image. According this image New Soviet Woman, was fully emancipated and ideologically conscious, she is a masculine, androgynous comrade. Although I do not argue that this was a universal role model at that time: as the analysis showed there was an internal contradiction within the official discourse, but nevertheless such representation allows to conclude that femininity was not redefined in positive terms, it still stood for weakness and vulnerability, whereas strength and agency was defined as masculine.

In the end, I dedicated the last chapter to Kote Mikaberidze’s *My Grandmother* where I analyzed petty bourgeois “monstrous” femininity. This chapter is the last because the film itself does not inscribe into Sakhkinmretsvi’s general production line, it is unique in every sense: be it plot, filmic features, style etc. Moreover it was banned, and there was no mention of it in the press,

(based on the research of the journals and magazines, selected for the research) except one, although very criticizing anonymous pamphlet. So it was kept in the Georgian State Cinema Production's closet for about four decades, and that is why I employed queer theory for its analysis.

### Main findings

The films released in the end of the decade (*Eliso*, *Prison Cell 79*, *Saba*) offer strong, active women's representations, who are present in full subjectivity (more or less) and have agency contrary to the passive, victimized and objectified women's representations abundant in the Cinema Section's and Georgia's State Cinema Production's works in the beginning and mid 20s. Even if Georgian State cinema Production's films offer very limited amount of films situated in modern era, nevertheless it is obvious that the women characters situated in historical past (*Prison Cell 79*, *Eliso*) are New soviet women: emancipated and having agency. They function as role models in terms that they behave exactly like a contemporary Soviet woman with her consciousness would have behaved in the given situation. Oksana Bulgakowa makes the similar observation regarding Russian film heroines discussing Russian films of the 1920s: "Although many of these films were set in the past, they were still modern; they were concerned with the process of the re-education of the masses, and this did not end when the Bolsheviks came to power, it was only just beginning. That is why the 'growth and liberation of consciousness' was so vital, and formed the link between cinema and real life. The purpose of the heroine and that of the plot were identical." (Bulgakowa, 1993, p. 154). In my analysis I mentioned several times Ann Kaplan's observation, how women lose their traditional feminine characteristic when acquiring gaze, which I take as a synonym of agency and power. Among the films produced in the end of the decade which offer female role models, we have three strong, emancipated women, with agency, but strikingly they acquire agency on the expense of denying the very traditional feminine characteristics: love/sexual life (in case of *Eliso*) motherhood (in case of *Maro*) and finally, the feminine attractiveness (in case of *Olgha*). Their agency and subjectivity is gained on the expense of refusing one of attributed traditionally considered as indivisible from feminine realm.

Hence I outlined the modification that characterized Georgian State Cinema Production's films in the beginning and mid twenties in terms of women's representations. This outline provides with answers first two of my research questions: the representations in the end of the decade challenged the traditional understanding of gender roles and reflected the social and political ideals of an emancipated woman, who would sacrifice everything for the good of revolution and (nation-) state and who would be an active actor concerned with the society's well being. The directors and scenarists of the late films were young people belonging or closely associating with Georgian Lef group. They reflected leftist ideology contrary to "bourgeois" directors (meaning those with pre revolutionary cinematic experience actively producing films in the early and mid twenties), whom they referred as "fathers" and against which they intended to rebel (Amirejibi, 1990). Considering these factors I share Oksana Bulgakowa's observation and argue that even if not every film is situated in the modern contemporary being, nevertheless they still represent ideas about New Soviet woman, who is a strong, self willed, acting agent. These films show her as a mother (*Prison Cell 79*) a lover (*Eliso*) and a comrade citizen (*Saba*). Contrary to their precedents these women characters are neither victimized nor objectified by camera work. However, it is striking that all these characters achieve full agency on the expense of rejecting one of the traditional feminine features: maternity, affectionate love/sexuality, and traditional feminine look and appearance respectively. In other words they are becoming active agents on the expense of denying femininity. And the denial is always made in the interests of nation-state, revolution, in short for the public needs and good. To put it another way, in spite the fact that representations of strong women are produced in films, it does not mean that femininity, culturally considered as "fragile" and socially oppressed position, is redefined as something positive and powerful; rather women only acquire agency by immasculating themselves one way or another.

But here is the last research question regarding the compatibility of Georgianness with the ideal of New Soviet Woman, to which I have not answered yet. A woman sacrificing her personal well-being for the good of public is characteristic to Georgian national imagery (in this sense the representation of *Eliso* fits well). Especially recurring is an image of a mother, who does not worry about death of her sons because they died in the battle for the nation: she worthily bears the title of the immolator because she gave her most precious for the wider good. *Prison Cell 79* challenges the motherhood -the most essential part of traditional femininity and highly estimated

in every patriarchal culture- by the fact that mother kills her own son. I argued during the analysis that this plot might be considered as a certain introduction to Pavlik Morozov narrative, literally invoking to overcome personal and familial relationships for the sake of wider (in this case Party's) good. Nevertheless I would still argue that *Prison Cell 79*'s Maro plays in the paradigm of the Georgian notion of an all-sacrificing mother, as here too, the mother commits this act for the wider good, that of revolution, but in a perverted, deformed manner. Lastly Olgha's figure in *Saba*, can be considered as a totally new actor, representing the new rule and new world order in my opinion.

Therefore, answers on research questions can be summarized as following: firstly the Georgia's State Cinema production films were re/producing traditional gender roles, depicting women as passive, docile objects, who fall victim of male aggression. At the beginning they either do not take decisions of their own, or fail to fulfill them, therefore they do not possess agency. The trend of objectifying and sexualizing female body is ultimately strong. The association of female body with motherland in national discourses was translated into class aspect; in the "eastern theme" films it remained the same. A woman character functioned as a synechocal signifier of her class characteristics (virtue or turpitude).

Nevertheless in the end of 1920s we see the evolution of this passive woman character according to current discourses and ideological requirements: female protagonist is strong, becomes an active agent and acquires agency. She uses her agency in favor of nation-state/revolution/public interests. She becomes a beholder of gaze, a synonym of power. But this happens only on the expense of denying certain component of traditional feminine characteristics. This recurring fact draws the conclusion that regardless women's emancipator discourse and strong women's cinematic representations, the positive redefinition of femininity itself- traditionally socially oppressed position- did not take a place. The strong women protagonists are embodiment of New Soviet Woman, who is strong and possess agency on the expense of denying femininity.

## Areas for Further Research

As I already mentioned above the films on which the presented analysis is based, although represent the major trend characteristic to Georgia's State Cinema Production's works, but nevertheless, of course close watching of the rest of the films would provide an additional light to the discussed subject, and/or would open another aspect for the analysis. My research filed is focused only on 1920s decade, when as the analysis showed the "final" image of the New Soviet woman in modern set was not created yet. Studying the films of the beginning of 1930s would develop and reinforce knowledge about this ideal and observing women's cinematic representation thorough the subsequent decade would throw a light on how the emancipator representation was altered with the traditional femininity later and how the notion of femininity was carried out throuought soviet discourse in following decades. The comparison of the original and reconstructed versions of these films at the same time would open a way to the future investigation of the "reconstruction of the past" through the cultural artifacts in the later soviet regime.

Despite the challenges that I encountered while selecting the data (outlined in the limitation section), this research has explored a realm in the field of Georgian silent film studies that had been largely neglected so far, and opens a way for considering what role cinema had played in the construction of gender roles during the soviet past.

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<sup>8</sup> Due to document's condition, there is a chance that the title is not precisely read.