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Incommensurable Distance: Versions of National Identity in Georgian Soviet Cinema

Dušan Radunović

On the Concept of National Cinema

The aim of this chapter is to trace the variegating strategies of identity formation in Georgian cinema, and to interrogate the manifestations of minority identity in the markedly transnational context of Soviet cinema. The particularities of national cinematographies within Soviet cinema were rarely discussed during the Soviet period, and this attitude did not change fundamentally in the years following the collapse of the Soviet state, when the Soviet multi-ethnic model disappeared into thin air, along with the ideological platform on which it stood. Certainly, this is not to say that the issue of ethnic identities had not been recognized as such during Soviet years, or that it was not identified as a concern pertaining to national cinematographies:¹ as this essay will show, national cinemas were dealt with by the Soviet state with great care from the very outset and Georgian cinema is the major case in point. This chapter, however, does not aspire to ascertain the visibility of Georgian film industry in the Soviet transnational conglomerate.

Rather, I aim to examine the position of Georgian cinema as a national cinema *par excellence*, in a transcultural context *par excellence*.

¹ The fact that a conference on the cinemas of the Central Asian and Transcaucasian Republics was held in Tashkent as early as 1968 (Micciché 295) testifies to the enduring interest of Soviet officialdom in the cinemas of the region. In late Soviet years, the national peculiarities of Georgian cinema were most famously scrutinised by Yuri Bogomolov, who set an important, if controversial, blueprint for the reception of Georgian cinema as a cinema detached from reality (“Gruzinskoe kino: otnoshenie k deistvitel’nosti” 44). Having stirred much debate in the USSR, Bogomolov’s views were also subjected to scrutiny in the West. In her introduction to interviews with four major Georgian directors “Georgian Cinema: A Subtle Voice of Nationalism”, Julie Christiansen attempted to refute Bogomolov’s interpretation (Christiansen). From a production point of view the most valiant attempt to locate the position of Trans-Caucasian cinema vis-à-vis Soviet ethnic identities one will find in Micciché.

This positioning, which sees Georgian cinema as perennially entangled in a mediation between centre and periphery, necessitates more sophisticated conceptual frameworks than those that have been attempted in the past for our understanding of the mechanisms of nation building and identity formation. The substantial quality that this novel framework should introduce is a set of non-essentialist critical concepts pertaining to the relationship between cinema and national identity. Therefore this chapter will at the outset test the suitability of concepts, such as national cinema, transnational cinema and/or world cinema, for our grasp of the antithetical positioning of Georgian national cinema within the transnational system of Soviet cinema. Clearly, a correlation of these diverse methodological framework calls for a caveat. Although the transnational contexts of Soviet cinema and world cinema do appear as compatible conceptual frameworks, primarily due to the ongoing negotiation between national and transnational definitional frameworks that pertains to both, the two conceptual spheres also markedly differ insofar as they originate from radically different political *milieus*. Whereas the concept of “world cinema” emerges as a product of the post-ideological, neo-liberal era, in which distinct national identities are, at least seemingly, negotiated in the global (capitalist) cinematic market, the articulation of individual identities in the Soviet transnational space took place in a considerably more restricted social climate, that of an ideological superstate, in which identities were subjugated to, or instrumentalized by, an overarching ideological principle. I am by no means implying that the concept of world cinema is to be taken as something that is valuable *per se*: while endorsing the view that the world cinema framework enables individual identities (“national cinemas”), to “assert the importance of placing national within regional and global perspectives” (Chaudhuri 1), I am fully aware that the concept of world cinema is the inseparable part of a wider global cultural hierarchy/hegemony. As rightly put by Dennison and Lim, world

cinema operates as part of a “mediating apparatus” created by cultural elites not only in centres of cultural mediation (Paris, New York, etc.), but also on its peripheries (Tehran, Mumbai, or Bucharest), to serve the purpose of regulating the dynamic between those who have political power, and those who do not (“Situating World Cinema” 4-5).

For all these reasons, the task of defining Georgian cinema *qua* national cinema in a dynamic context of a transnational ideological state will have to seek for methodological correctives beyond the existing frameworks of transnational film studies. In order to take fully into account the specific positionality of Georgian cinema as a *minor* cinema in its continuous calibration against the definitional framework of Soviet culture, I will deliberately square the above methodological framework with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of “minor literature”. The latter is defined as a minority literature written in the major language, by virtue of which “deterritorialization” the minority culture gains symbolic access to the resources of the cultural majority (47). Indeed, although originally voiced/scripted in its native tongue (Qartuli), Georgian cinema was from the day of its inception produced with translated Russian intertitles/tableaux (in the pre-sound era) and it continued to be dubbed thereafter; it is dubbing that ensured Georgian cinema’s entry into “major” Russophonic culture-political space. This primary displacement then gave rise to a process of coerced cultural translation, in which a certain imago of Georgian culture was constructed in the interstices between the cultures of the Russophonic majority and the Georgian minority. This kind of “translation”/identification develops as an exemplary political practice: as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, there is no such thing as an individual or insignificant concern occurring in a minor culture. In the “cramped space” of minor literature every individual gesture has a collective value: each statement in a minor literature has the “role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation”,

whereby individual concerns are immediately connected to politics (48). Thus the framing of Georgian culture *qua* minor culture requires that each of its elements be perceived primarily as relational or distinctive values. Indeed, the expressivity of minor cinema must also be seen as a relational cultural act, a performative gesture signifying difference.

A product of the co-existence of national and transnational pathways of identity formation, this dual articulation of national identity introduces some key variables to our attempt to theorize the question of Georgian cultural identity under Russian and Soviet rule. Not only are our attempts to position vernacular Georgian culture and cinema in a transnational politico-cultural arena hindered by multiple unknowns, but our understanding of parameters constituting “vernacular” voices in *national* cinema also needs re-positioning. In other words, the question is not only one of what legitimizes the consideration of a certain film (or indeed a national cinema as a whole) as the expression of a certain cultural, ethnic, or geo-political identity, but also a matter of which instances of mediation could be seen as contributing to this process of identity formation. With regard to the first of the questions, one is entitled to raise the issue of whether one can speak of “vernacular” expression, in cinema, in a way that a socio-linguist talks about sociolects of different social groups. If we were to accept that there is a “characteristic cinematic expression” associated with a certain national culture, our speculation would not end, but only begin, as the set of new issues would unfold, from discipline-specific ones, to those of a political kind: what are the criteria by which the recognizably “national” cinematic expression is ascertained (aspects of production, i.e., the ethnicity, or perhaps, citizenship, of the director or producer; elements of cinematic style such as recurrent motifs and themes, plot-making patterns, aspects of mise-en-scène...)? And yet, even if we hypothetically agree on some unquestionable signs of a cinema’s national identity, we are presented with the core question of who is the

regulator, the law-giver, in this display of national uniqueness? Is it the one who makes a film who is also to act as a judge as to whether the film is a valid expression of a purported national/cultural identity? Or is it the recipients, cinematic audiences possessing varied degree of symbolic capital, who give the actual verdict on how verily the film conveys the *spirit* of a certain culture?²

It seems that studies of transnational cinema have been unable to agree even on this last cluster of issues. In other words, the circumstance that cinema operates as a complex social apparatus, which entails multiple levels of mediation (political, financial) challenges the Hegelian view of national culture (and national cinema, by extension) as an expression of *Volksgeist*, and reveals it as nothing more than a ritual of self-fashioning. The fact that the global articulation of particular identities happens in a system heavily laden with politico-economic dynamics further reminds us that the initial, naively intact and virginal, postulation of cultural exchange also needs considerable reframing. The discussion of cinematic reception, the key aspect of global cultural exchange, particularly calls for a revision. Transcultural encounters are, it appears, multiply coded processes, in which a national culture (or a film) is being shaped by the dominant system of ideological signs – film festivals, literary awards, global public opinion. Moreover, and here we are entering the territory in which the subsequent discussion will be charted, in order to obtain visibility, an individual culture has to relinquish the irreducible, incommensurable distance between its own mode of expression and the governing system of signification. This relinquishing of irreducibility in order to obtain legitimacy is the beginning of

² For a good summary and a nuanced reconsideration of traditional approaches to the question of national cinema see Higson, especially 36-7 and 42-5.

the tragic drama of identity politics. And it is this volatile territory between irreducibility and legitimacy in Georgian cinema that the present chapter charts.

The Birth of Soviet Georgian Cinema: Ethnographic Mode of Representation

From a purely historical point of view, the origins of Georgian cinema date back to late Imperial years, in which Georgia was part of the greater Russian empire. The first full-length film, a documentary entitled *The Journey of the Poet Akaki Tsereteli to Racha-Lechkhumi* (*K'artveli mgosnis akaki ceret'lis mogzauroba rača-leč'xumši*) was produced in 1912 by the Baku-born photographer-turned-cinematographer Vasil Amašukeli (1886–1977). Given that Amašukeli's pioneering effort was followed only by a few sporadic productions,³ it is plausible to assume that the national cinema of Georgia found its proper inception only in the early Soviet years.⁴

Moreover, this coming into being happened by a decree issued by the Federal Ministry of Education (Narkompros) in September 1921, only several months after the Soviet invasion of Georgia and the latter's unification with the USSR; the decree established the film section within the Narkompros branch in Tbilisi, and installed Hamo Bknazarian (Amo Bek-Nazarov) (1891–1965, an experienced actor of the pre-revolutionary Russian cinema) as its chair (Perestiani 310; Ratiani 37-8; Cereteli 11-12; also, Kepley Jr. 349-50). In anything but favourable social circumstances, with an extreme scarcity of film stock and minimal professional crew, Bknazarian assigned the first Soviet Georgian production, *Arsena Jorjiašvili*, to Ivane Perestiani (1870–1959), star of pre-revolutionary melodramas and Bknazarian's acquaintance from

³ By far the most significant cinematic effort in the interim years is certainly Aleksandr Cucunava's 1916 melodrama *K'ristine*, which, both in its style and in its content, conforms to the tradition of late Imperial melodrama.

⁴ For more on the very earliest Georgian cinema in the late Imperial eras see Cereteli 7-11; Perestiani 310-12.

Aleksandr Khanzhonkov's Moscow film studio. No doubt, Perestiani's appointment was a matter of convenience: having already moved to Tbilisi in late 1920 to assume the post of director in a Russian-language theatre in Tbilisi, the appointment befitted the role in extreme circumstances. The uncharacteristically rapid dealing with cinematic affairs, at a time when the Soviet state was on a brink of economic collapse, is only to be explained by the strategic efforts of central authorities in Moscow to institute political authority in the recently annexed cultural "peripheries". When in March 1921 Soviet troops occupied Georgia, by then the only remaining independent territory in the Trans-Caucasus, an urgent "Sovietization" of Georgian culture, and "indigenization" of Soviet power and ideology was needed. Not only was the first national cinema in the Soviet Union born out of this gesture of political pragmatism, but, equally importantly for my investigation here, the same gesture also inaugurated the formula for dealing with the national question.

Two subsequent productions by Perestiani, *The Suram Fortress* (*suramis c'ixe*, 1922) and *The Red Devils* (*cit'eli ešmakunebi*, 1923), were instrumental in establishing Georgian national cinema. It is the first of the two that bears vital import for our discussion. With its origins in the 14th-century folk legend of the miraculous defence of the Georgian town of Suram, the narrative achieved its final form at the hands of ethnographer and writer Daniel Čonkadze (1830-1860). Čonkadze first coupled the medieval myth of sacrificial immurement with a melodramatic plotline, incorporating popular folk songs from oral tradition (Gostieva 33), and then ameliorated it with instances of social criticism and strong national sentiments.⁵ In Perestiani's adaptation,

⁵ After Čonkadze, the ideas of social equality and, especially, Georgian patriotism, come to full fruition in the works of the national bard Ilia Čavčavadze. For more on Čavčavadze's nationalist manifesto "Letter of a Traveller" in the context of the late 19th-century Georgian nationalist movement, see Manning 2004.

⁶ As Paul Manning has pointed out, rural simplicity emerges as the dominant mode of Georgian nationalist self-fashioning in the late 19th century, when the young nationalist elite attempted to distance themselves from the

the central narrative retains the original motifs of betrayal, vengeance and sacrifice, but a strong emphasis is placed on social aspects by introducing into the narrative a parallel plotline, in which a young widow is brought to demise by the evil doings of her feudal lord and corrupt clergy. Thus, by merging the national myth with a contemporary social narrative, Chonkadze, and Perestiani after him, supplied the traditional motifs of love, betrayal, sacrifice and revenge with the critique of religious superstition and feudal exploitation.

Perestiani's film further inaugurated a catalogue of visual devices that went on to define both the thematic and visual dominants of future representations of Georgian identity. Like so many Russian observers before him, Perestiani is utterly absorbed by the discovery of the ancient world behind the Caucasus. His camera indulges in lengthy non-diegetic sequences, the sole purpose of which is to delve into ethnographical material (rural scenery, folk dance, etc.) and feed what Susan Layton termed the "nostalgia for the romantic Caucasus" (Layton 253-255).⁶ Alongside his cinematographer Boris Zavelev, Perestiani's acquaintance from the days of his collaboration with Evgenii Bauer, the director established what might be called the ethnographic mode of representing Georgian identity on the screen, a visual rhetoric and topicality that

Russian-influenced Georgian gentry ("Describing dialect and defining civilization" 27 *passim*). From a purely empirical point of view, the emphasis on the rural in representing Georgian identity was in fact in tune with the real ratio of urban to rural population in Georgia, which was, according to the first Soviet federal census in 1926, among the lowest in the whole of USSR (Jones and Parsons 294). Despite having the highest industrialization and urbanization rate in the whole of USSR, the urban population in Georgia by the 1970s reached no more than 51%, which was at this point 11% behind the federal average (Parsons 549).

⁶ As Paul Manning has pointed out, rural simplicity emerges as the dominant mode of Georgian nationalist self-fashioning in the late 19th century, when the young nationalist elite attempted to distance themselves from the Russian-influenced Georgian gentry ("Describing dialect and defining civilization" 27 *passim*). From a purely empirical point of view, the emphasis on the rural in representing Georgian identity was in fact in tune with the real ratio of urban to rural population in Georgia, which was, according to the first Soviet federal census in 1926, among the lowest in the whole of USSR (Jones and Parsons 294). Despite having the highest industrialization and urbanization rate in the whole of USSR, the urban population in Georgia by the 1970s reached no more than 51%, which was at this point 11% behind the federal average (Parsons 549).

conceived of the world behind the Caucasus, in the vein of Russian literature at the time of Imperial expansion, as at once primal and sublime.⁷

No doubt, the principles of Perestiani's ethnographic fashioning of Georgian identity on screen were profoundly informed by the political imagination of Imperial times. The old, Romanticist principles of representing otherness from the other side of the Caucasus continue to resonate strongly in the post-Revolutionary climate of emerging ethnic, cultural, and linguistic pluralism. As most scholars now agree, ethnic diversity was perceived in the early Soviet years as not only acceptable, but also a desirable phenomenon: its product, the cultural variety of the Soviet Union, was seen as a vehicle for communicating the newly established system of values throughout the vast frontiers of the state. Stalin's seemingly tautological formulation, according to which national cultures in socialism are "socialist by content and national by form"⁸ implements fully the cultural diversity of the new Soviet landscape, and therefore represents an advancement from his (and not only his, but Lenin's, too) earlier ontological model: "A nation", wrote Stalin in his very first scholarly effort, "is a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture" (Stalin 8).⁹

⁷ In the words of the 19th century Russian liberal Vissarion Belinskii, the orientalist vision of the Caucasus was painted by "the light touch of Pushkin's hand". According to Belinskii, it was after Pushkin's *Prisoner of the Caucasus* that the orientalist image emerged in which Caucasus then became the locus of "expansive freedom [...] inexhaustible poetry, [...] boiling life and bold dreams!" (quoted in Hokanson 336).

⁸ The formula "sotsialisticheskaia po svoemu soderzhaniiu i natsional'naia po forme" was inaugurated in Stalin's 1931 article "On the National Question and National Culture" ("O natsional'nom voprose i natsional'noi kul'ture"). For more on Stalin's early policy, see Saroyan 405-6.

⁹ Contrary to my view canvased above, this requirement of the official Soviet doctrine on nationalities—that the concept of *nationality* retains its traditional "form", that is, the old idea of ethnicity (*natsional'nost'*)—has led some modern-day critics to suggest that the Soviet approach to the nationality question did not effectively depart from the traditional "biological" (race-based) and "ontological" (race, language, territory) models (see, for example, Slezkine 414 *et passim*).

The early Soviet formula of identity receives a particularly interesting articulation in Mikheil Kalatozišvili's cinematic debut, part narrative feature and part edited documentary, *Salt for Svanetia* (*jim švante*, 1929).¹⁰ In his third screenwriting venture for the already well-established Georgian branch of the Federal Committee for Cinema, the Avant-garde writer and theoretician Sergei Tret'jakov (1892-1937) envisaged a modernisation narrative perfectly befitting the initial year of Stalin's industrialisation programme: the plotline juxtaposes the backwardness of life in remote Georgian highlands with an enlightening and life-saving modernisation. The austerity of life in the village of Ushkul, which is cut off from the low-lands during the long winter months, is attributed not only to natural, but also to social factors: it is not only the harshness of the climate and inaccessibility of the landscape that prevent the highlanders of Ushkul from getting hold of basic provisions during long winter months, but it is their old beliefs that prevented them from receiving the full benefits of modernisation. In theory at least, Kalatozišvili and Tret'jakov's project conforms to what has, by 1930, already become a well-established ideological model: the ethnographic material, which was signifying the world of the past, was meant to be subsumed under/absorbed into an overriding ideological narrative of modernisation, which indicated the present and charted the future. The cinematic language of *Salt for Svanetia* charts this narrative in its own vein: while emphatic long shots visually

¹⁰ It has long been assumed that Kalatozišvili had debuted on the Soviet screen a few months before *Salt for Svanetia* was made, with a mid-length feature *The Blind Girl* (*usinatlo* 1929) and that this material was, with the exception of few fragments, irretrievably lost. However, as the Russian film historian Aleksandr Deriabin has recently shown, Kalatozišvili's premiere feature came out from a collaboration one year earlier. By relating an unattributed documentary material entitled "A page from biography" ("Stranichka iz biografii") to Kalatozišvili's writings on cinema dated 1928, Deriabin drew a conclusion that the material found was the edited documentary, long believed to have been lost, entitled *Their Kingdom* (*mati samepo*), which was a collaboration of Kalatozišvili and his colleague Nutsa Gogoberidze (Kapterev 176). The nature of the documentary material, the juxtaposition of contemporary documentary material and "found footage" (from the time of Menshevik Georgia), as well as Kalatozišvili's writings of 1928 (especially his and Gogoberidze's programmatic text "Film-cinechronicle" ["Kartina-kinokhronika"], in which the authors explicate their poetics) clearly situate Kalatozišvili in the cinematic avant-garde of the 1920s.

construct the “romantic sublime”, its idiosyncratic use of close-ups, coupled with the manipulation of acted and documentary footage, further exoticize the human subject and construct the villagers of Ushkul as unenlightened savages.

However, despite the dramatic cinematic manipulation of the acted material, the original ethnographic footage makes striking punctuations on the ideological fabric of the film. While the film’s intertitles authoritatively remind the viewer that industrialization is building roads in Svanetia to connect remote villages with the rest of the Soviet world and provide much needed salt for the people of the region, what the images caught by the camera show in, at times, an abundantly clear way, is that the everyday lives of the villagers have remained untouched. Indeed, the visual narrative in *Salt for Svanetia* appears to contradict its own discursive elucidation: the everyday routine of the Svan tribesmen depicted in Kalatozišvili’s footage glaringly testifies to the endurance of old values.¹¹ Despite the authors’ efforts to utilize ethnographic material politically, the juxtapositions of documentary footage will hardly be seen as the negation of the old world.¹² For example, the sequence in which an old man energetically carves a cross, which will be used for someone’s (perhaps his own) tomb-stone, is indicative of his own, centuries old way of grappling with nature: his utilisation of nature and its elements, his eventual harmony with it and finally his submission to its ultimate laws. It is plausible to infer that the reasons for this incongruence between the intended political effects of the film, to

¹¹ It comes as no surprise that, after the film premiered in 1930, a group of local elders from the Svaneti region wrote a letter of protest at the representation of their villages, saying that the customs depicted in the film, and presented as relics of primitive old beliefs, actually never existed (Leyda 293-4). What the “real” villagers of Svaneti heights objected to was the “acted” material from *Salt for Svanetia*. While Kalatozišvili’s tendentious editing of ethnographic material invites comparison with the treatment of similar material in the so-called constructed documentary cinema of Robert Flaherty, his incorporation of acted parts into the documentary fabric, by which the latter was given a dramatically different spin (for example, during long winter months, the starving villagers are depicted as being hostile towards foreigners), far surpasses Flaherty’s manipulation of Canadian Eskimos in his 1922 *Nanook of the North*.

¹² For a short period of time Kalatozišvili studied under Esfir’ Shub (1894-1959), the inaugurator of the so-called found footage, or “compilation-style” documentary.

advertize the industrialisation project, and its actual impact on the viewer, lie in Kalatozišvili's ethnographic approach to documentary material. The footage from the village of Ushguli was, above all, a (quasi-)ethnographic record of the world beyond civilisation, that is, outside Moscow, and its metropolitan (Russophonic and Soviet) viewer.¹³



[CAPTION: Figure 3.1: **An old man is carving a cross in *Salt for Svanetia*** (*Salt for Svanetia*,

¹³ According to Jay Leyda, it was only at the incentive of Pera Atasheva (1900-1965), Sergei Eisenstein's wife and collaborator, that Kalatozišvili decided to edit and make use of the ethnographic footage from Svanetia. In a private screening of his debut feature film *usinatlo* (*The Blind Girl*), which left Atasheva and her friends indifferent, Kalatozov's documentary footage from Svanetia excited great interest amongst viewers and the young author received encouragement to pursue his project (Leyda 310-11).

dir. Mikheil Kalatozišvili, 1930). Screen capture. DVD *Salt for Svanetia*. Landmarks of Early Soviet Films. Disc 4. Flicker Alley, 2011. Private collection.]

As suggested before, the ease with which the patterns of ethnographic representation of the world behind Caucasus took shape in the formative decade of Georgian Soviet cinema can be explained by the long presence of the Russian Imperial imaginary and, in relation to it, the self-imagination of its Imperial subjects. Indeed, both the grammar (imagery and other visual, aural, etc. means of expression) and politics of representing Georgian identity on the Soviet screen in the 1920s draw abundantly on old Imperial strategies of representation. In what might be called an act of Imperial nostalgia, the early Soviet politics of representation was constructing a Georgia of its own, just like the 19th-century Imperial discourse, from Pushkin to Tolstoy, formulated its own vision of the world at the fringes of an expanded empire.¹⁴ In other words, the minority subject of Georgian cinema of the early Soviet years follows in the footsteps of his Romantic predecessor, and becomes everything that the metropolitan subject, the Soviet man in this case, failed to become: he is libidinal rather than cerebral, visceral, rather than class conscious; natural rather than ideological, familial and private, rather than public. Henceforth, following an established path, and through the workings of a complex mechanism of self-fashioning, the image of the Georgian man on the screen became Soviet cinema's internalized other.

Dramatic restructuring of the Soviet state during Stalin's rule and in the years of the Thaw had little bearing on the representation of Georgian and Caucasian subject on screen. The ethnographic mode of representation lingered well into 1950s and 1960s when it received its

¹⁴ In addition to Layton's classical volume, a work that deserves particular mention for its study of the emergence, formation and persistence of the Romantic mirage of Georgia in the Russian cultural imaginary is Harsha Ram's *The Imperial Sublime*.

paroxysmal completion in Shota Managadze's 1965 *Ballad of the Khevsurs* (*xevsuruli balada*). Set in the north-east region of Khevsuria [*xevsureti*], the very location of Managadze melodrama signified a lot to a Georgian or even Soviet viewer: remote and bound to conservative customs, Khevsuria was, in the words of anthropologist Paul Manning, traditionally assumed as "a paradigmatic locus for the Georgian ethnographic imagination" ("Love Khevsur Style" 25).¹⁵

Tailored to suit social and cinematic clichés alike, the film tells the story of an unattainable love between a local Khevsuri woman Mzek'ala and the village-born, but city-bred young artist Imeda. Managadze opens the film with a spectacular aerial establishing shot to communicate to his viewer the sheer extent of the remoteness of the location. The opening sequence is covered by a seemingly extra-diegetic voiceover (in Russian, of course), later revealed as the voice of the film's central protagonist, which reminds the viewer that the world he is entering radically differs from his own, thereby verbalising the visually communicated message of the establishing shot. Upon landing, we realize that the helicopter from which the introductory sequence was filmed is part of the diegesis, sent at an urgent request from the capital Tbilisi to provide medical help to remote lands. It is through the eyes and ears of the protagonist doctor, a stranger to the lives of the tribesmen, that the spectators' perceptions of the world of the film are formed: as he chats to the locals, the doctor emphatically repeats that "everything is so unusual here"; when he is shown his room, one of the locals tells him that "everyone just looks for the romantic side of Khevsuria". What is striking in this sequence is that from the very outset Managadze's Khevsurs are self-conscious about their own primordiality. In

¹⁵ As argued by Ram and Zaza Šatirišvili, the position of Caucasian North in the 19th-century Georgian national imaginary is peculiar. The authors show that, having become complicit with Russian Imperial rule in the Caucasus, the Georgian social elite alienated itself from other nations in the North Caucasus so much so that instead of the well-known "binary opposition of colonizer and colonized, one might speak of a 'trichotomy' involving Russia, Georgia, and the Northern Caucasus" (1).

Managadze's *Balad* the ethnographic mode of representation becomes internalized: what used to be an imposition of identity from above, turns into to an interiorized strategy of self-assignment.

This internalization of minority identities in the Soviet context, which was underway in post-war mainstream Georgian culture, begs for a fairly synchronous, but politically unforeseen comparison: namely, that with Frantz Fanon's analysis of post-colonial identities, in particular, with Fanon's interrogation of the inculcation of a "colonial inferiority complex". Drawing on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, Fanon identified the existence of what he termed *affective erethism*, a condition of heightened sensitivity inflicted upon an oppressed race by years of colonial rule; it is this affective erethism that causes the ego of the minority subject to "collapse" in its encounter with the colonising subject and attempt, in Fanon's words, to "acquire—by internalizing them—assets that were originally prohibited" (*Black Skins, White Masks* 42). The purpose of this strategy of self-figuration is, to return to one of our starting premises, to win admittance to a hitherto inaccessible world. The position that the minority subject assumes in Managadze's film thus signifies important changes that took place in the process of negotiation between minority identity and the supranational or majority definitional framework: the emergence of the self-reflexive minority subject who is conscious of his/her own cultural location is the most astonishing of them all.

In another scene, also indicative of this paradox, as Imeda approaches the remote village of his birth, the locus of otherness, he is intercepted by the group of young women who introduce themselves to him simply as "Khevsur girls;" or, similarly, throughout the film, Imeda will be told (by the woman he falls in love with, or by his local cousin) that he is "not one of us", whereby the construction of otherness is repeatedly performed along with the self-assignment of

identity *qua* minority identity. In other words, minority identity, in a form constructed by a law external to that minority, is now internalized by the minority subject to become a mask or signifier of identity. This manoeuvre, in which the identity imposed *ab extra* is internalized and transformed into identity politics *ab intra*, signals the final stage of the ethnographic mode of identity formation.

Variations and Alternatives

A far more original treatment of the Caucasus theme is enacted in Nikoloz Šengelaia's 1928 *Eliso*. The most popular and, perhaps, cinematically most accomplished feature film released by the Georgian film studio in the 1920s, *Eliso* was also the first Soviet Georgian film to attempt an alternative to the ethnographic mode of representation and its political pretexts, the early Soviet politics towards the ethnic question. Based on an 1882 story by the Georgian writer Aleksandre Qazbegi, *Eliso* was set in 1864, at the time when the Russian conquest of the Caucasus region reached its final and most brutal phase. In the period between 1858 and 1864, the Imperial Government launched a plan of permanent displacement of large swathes of Caucasus tribes with the purpose of populating the area with Russian Cossacks and thereby securing the southern borders of the Empire.¹⁶ Šengelaia and his screenwriter Sergei Tret'iakov infuse into this politically sensitive historical narrative a melodramatic plotline involving the Chechen woman Eliso and a Khevsur Georgian man Vazhia: as the two fall in love, an alliance against Russian Imperial authorities and corrupt tribal lords between two oppressed minorities, Chechens and Georgians, is established.

¹⁶ For a detailed account of the expulsion of up to 450,000 west Caucasus mountaineers from their homes by the Imperial army, in 1863 and 1864 alone, and their dispersion throughout the vast frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, see Jersild *passim*, especially 23-26.

In its refusal to resort to the existing mode of representation, by portraying the film's characters in a much wider palette and, more importantly perhaps, by coupling the members of two Caucasian tribes together on the account of their *political* allegiance, the film considerably deviates from the established norm. To be more precise, what initially joins together Eliso and Vazhia is their mutual affection, but their love is ameliorated by a newly awakened political consciousness, which is manifested in Vazhia's support to Eliso's fellow tribesmen in their resistance to Imperial oppression. Further to this, the cinematic language of *Eliso* is unadorned by orientalisng excesses: Tret'iakov – who, upon his arrival in Tbilisi, called the local film studio a “shop of oriental delights” – demanded that the ethnographic decoration be expunged from the film (Ratiani 102, 107). Interestingly, it was also upon Tret'iakov's request that the only “ethnographic” topos of the film, the absorbing scene of the traditional *lezginka* dance was included.¹⁷ But the function of the scene has little to do with self-indulgent nostalgia for the Caucasus: rather, the dance marks the tragic finale of the film, in which the collective tragedy of the Chechen tribe becomes individualized in the senseless death of a young woman, and, as a dramatic crescendo, inscribes the moral of the film. *Lezginka*, a dance shared by the various nations of the Caucasus, which traditionally represents a “forum for social mobilization and political dissent” (Zhemukhov and King 288), is there to testify to the unswaying spirit of the deportees and to the spiritual triumph of the oppressed over their oppressors.

In what way does the cinematic representation of minority identity in *Eliso* differ from the prevailing strategies of identity formation? Most important of all, the cinematic Caucasus in *Eliso* is no longer an Imperial fantasy, but a historically identifiable political space. Similarly, the

¹⁷ On Tret'iakov's critical attitude towards the tendency of Russian cultural elite to exoticise their Orient see Nikol'skaia, 478 *passim*.

man of the Caucasus is no longer tailored to suit the expectations of his colonial ruler: rather than being constructed, minority identities in *Eliso* emerge out of real historical and political circumstances. The minority subjects of *Eliso* reject cohabitation with majoritarian discourses of power, of which Deleuze and Guattari, for example, speak. They equally refuse either to inculcate a sense of “colonial inferiority”, or to be swayed by the Imperial super-ego, of which Franz Fanon warns; instead, Eliso and Vazhia resist Imperial oppression, thereby emerging as *political* subjects. The conclusion one can draw from this is that Šengelaia and Tret’iakov’s model challenges the representational strategies that persisted from the times of Imperial expansion to the early Soviet years.

At the time when *Eliso* was made, the Soviet Union was entering the age of Stalinism, during which Soviet society underwent “a revolution from above”. The so-called “nationality question” was by no means an exception: as early as in the 1930s, the politics of internationalism was relinquished in favour of the doctrine of “socialism in one country”, a move that instigated a major “patriotic revival” and, above all, a resurgence of pan-Russian nationalism in various ideological guises. Needless to say, this new dynamic disrupted a fragile inter-ethnic equilibrium, which the Soviet state had purported to retain. This complex social tectonics was to be followed by the country’s new global positioning in the post-Second World War redistribution of power: in the wake of this major political regrouping, whereby the Soviet state emerged as a global super-power, a further re-negotiation of existing approaches to the nationality question was inevitable. On this front, most scholars now agree that, although the postnationalist assimilation of peoples remained the only official doctrine of national relations until the USSR’s last Constitution in 1977, in practice the strategy of indigenization (*korenizatsiia*) prevailed. Indeed, the failure of the strategy of assimilation, and further

reification of particular ethnic identities in the post-Stalin era, announced not only the crisis of Soviet transnationalism, but the crisis of the Soviet Union itself (Suny 2001, 872; Brubaker, 25 *passim*).

It was precisely in Georgia that the political climate emerging in the wake of Stalin's death was first translated into national homogenization of both general populace and cultural elite. While the Tbilisi riots of 1956 acted as a catalyst for national unification in the most general sense,¹⁸ the mid-1960s definitely confirmed that the Soviet orthodoxy on the national question was no longer considered viable amongst the Tbilisi intelligentsia. In a paper entitled "The Stages of National Consolidation of the Georgian Nation", which appeared in the social science section of *Mac'ne*, the official journal of the Georgian Academy of Science, the major Georgian historian Yuri Kačarava openly challenged the scientific viability of the official Soviet conception of nation. Contrary to official doctrine, Kačarava argued that nations have nothing to do with the capitalist mode of production, but existed in feudalism as well. Kačarava's colleague Andria Apakidze went even further and challenged the official definition of the nation by using Stalin's pronouncements: the formation of nations was perfectly possible before capitalism emerged, as long as the "unity of language, territory, economic life and psychological character" existed (Parsons 559). Needless to say, the case in point for Apakidze was the medieval Georgia, which had attributes of a nation as early as the 12th Century. As rightly pointed out by J.W.R. Parsons, Kačarava and Apakidze were less concerned with engaging the doctrinal aspects of

¹⁸The Tbilisi riots have remained a controversial event in Georgian history. This massive popular uprising, which represented the first public act of political dissent in the post-war Soviet Union, had a rather retrograde, Stalinist agenda. The rebellion, led by the group of young nationalists was suppressed in blood (*The Making of the Georgian Nation* 303-316). On the fundamental change in the construction of Georgian identity after the death of Stalin, see Saroyan 409.

the nationality question, than by “providing a case for those nationalists seeking to stress the superiority and antiquity of Georgian culture” (559).

In more than one way, Georgian cinema of the 1960s was born out of this spirit of national renaissance. The generation of filmmakers announced by Rezo Č‘xeidze (b. 1926) and Tengiz Abuladze (1924-1994), and followed by Merab Kokoč‘aşvili (b. 1935), Eldar and Giorgi Šengelaia (b. 1933 and 1937, respectively), Otar Ioseliani (b. 1934), and Sergo Parajanov (1924-1990), among others, reintroduced to Georgian Soviet cinema a number of already existent thematic concerns, such as national history and mythology, but gave these themes a radically different articulation by using, among other cinematic styles, non-sequential, symbolic narratives, long takes, and tableau aesthetics. Whilst the amalgamation of folk culture, distant past, and mythology emerged as privileged territory for the articulation of the new social sensibility of the post-Stalinist era across ethno-cultural divides,¹⁹ the inclusion of “alternative ideologies” of this kind in Georgian cinema of the 1960s became a vehicle for another calibration of national identity.

Merab Kokoč‘aşvili’s 1967 *The Big Green Valley* (*didi mcvane veli*) could be a case in point here. By setting the film’s narrative in the rural Georgian countryside (still configured as the locus of traditional Georgian values), the idyllic purity of which is under threat from the onslaught of modernization, Kokoč‘aşvili seemingly draws on the old catalogue of

¹⁹ The tendency to delve into the past and to explore topics such as dreams, poetry, mythology, religion, etc., was a shared feature of the Soviet new wave(s) in general, by which the filmmakers of the 1960s attempted to transcend the narrow limits of socialist realism (Marshall 174 *passim*). As rightly pointed out by Karla Oeler, the emphatic presence of poetic, or “archaic” aesthetics in the non-Russian Soviet cinema of the 1960s accentuates “the cultural specificities of the republics in which they work” (140). The conclusion Oeler draws from the ethnographic pluralism of the Soviet screen, that the Soviet state “actively promoted” ethnic particularities of constituent nations, is, however, less secure: while the official ideology of the 1960s did indeed encourage ethnic particularities, the proliferation of historical, mythological and “archaic” tendencies, without (or even with) immediate reference to contemporary reality, was above all the symptom of the crisis of that reality – more precisely, of the ideological platform on which it stood.

representational strategies. The “traditional” identity is here embodied in the herdsman Sosana, the man who wilfully resists the pressure of local authorities to leave the land of his ancestors and move to a newly built, modern kolkhoz. The predictable modernization narrative is intertwined with what seems initially like a melodramatic plotline, the subject of which is Sosana’s battle of another kind, to persuade his wife that it is worthy to stay on the paternal soil. However, performing this twofold task proves to be an impossible venture: Sosana’s defence of paternal affiliation as a *retrospective* principle, which is grounded in historical recollection and patriarchally sanctioned memory, contradicts his rejection of the prospective and matriarchal principle of family and home, and collectively constructed future. Just like the former, socio-political level of the narrative, the latter, melodramatic one transforms into a metaphysical drama in which the principle of memory defies the strategy of anticipation, the purpose of which is to secure social relations and, by extension, the interests of the state.²⁰ Sosana’s paternal quest manifests itself in a paradoxical key insofar as his attachment to the land of his ancestors is at the same time a radically individualist gesture: by juxtaposing memory to the principle of law, Kokoč’ašvili’s protagonist outlines a formula of identity that is at once radically subjective and metaphysically communal.

The forces of law and officialdom that impinge on Sosana’s memory are rendered as an invisible, but inevitable force: epitomized only by a local apparatchik, the authority of the public sphere is relegated to the discursive realm, to letters and decrees (Sosana is told that he has to leave his land by letter). Conversely, the domains in which Sosana’s identity is articulated are

²⁰ From a somewhat different angle, the association of femininity, family and the state figures in one of the foundational works of Marxist ideology, Friedrich Engels’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. For Engels, the monogamous family, although being the expression of patriarchy, revolved around the principle of matriarchy (the issue of reproduction, for example); on the other hand, the emergence of the monogamous family for multiple reasons (property, for example) predicated the emergence of the state, insofar as an organized institution was needed to protect and socially legitimize private property (*The Origin of the Family* 141).

myth, dreams, and art. It is the past, imaginary and idiosyncratic, rather than the future offered by officialdom, that furnishes a niche for himself and his progeny, the protagonist believes.²¹ Sosana's truth remains veiled, even hidden in the depths of the Earth. In a characteristic scene, after a ritual bathe in a local river, Sosana takes his son to an underground cave where he ponders the meaning of various rock paintings of animals: "back then", he says to the boy, "the whole world was one great pasture". Sosana's identification is therefore not a simple historical projection, but rather, an act of excavation. In a follow-up to this scene, Sosana sets up a picture show for his fortune-teller lover, where he displays his woodcuts, carvings of his deceased father, his faithful shepherd Giorgi, animals, and the archetypal world of his dreams.

Just like in the scene of his entry into the cave, the Platonic truth of this sequence is that it is the inner world of imagination that holds the keys of happiness, rather than the pragmatic world of industrial development or any explanatory discourse of ideology. As a contemporary Georgian critic put it, this insistence on poetic narrative procedures was in opposition to "ideological and political, as well as social cinema" of the time (Ochiauri). We would extend this assessment and argue that, in Kokoč'ašvili's universe, Sosana's oneiric world consciously opposes the reality of official decrees. Although this denial of socially legitimized channels of identification happens at a cost (Sosana ends up alone in absolute terms, abandoned not only by his wife and son, but also by Giorgi, his faithful shepherd), his radical actions perform precisely the freeing of "individual consciousness [...] from the collective sub-conscious" (Ochiauri).

It is important to emphasize that the individualism that marks the Georgian cinema of the Stagnation era should be redefined as a new form of individualism; rather than existentialist

²¹ Sosana's attachment to his son, rather than to his wife, further testifies that for him family is seen as a vehicle for the continuation of the line of his forefathers (historical principle), rather than of preserving the societal order and securing future for himself, his son, or society in general.

solitude, we are witnessing a metaphysical form of individualism in which the subject indeed rejects collective identification, but only to embrace the vast domain of memory, the frontiers of which, real and imaginary ones alike, are virtually unbound. In Kokoč'ašvili's film, identity politics no longer follows the strategy of internalization of which Deleuze and Guattari speak in their theorization of the minority position; rather, the protagonist of *The Big Green Valley* wages an all-out war with the forces that detach him from the metaphysically conceived source of being.

Fittingly, perhaps, the key illustration of the evolving process of identification in the late Soviet years arrives in another cinematic inscription of the classical foundation myth. Indeed, Sergo Parajanov's 1984 revisiting of the Suram Fortress narrative, *The Legend of Suram Fortress* (*ambavi suramis c'ixisa*),²² is a vivid example of the transformation of the platform for national identification, taking place against the background of a crumbling empire. In comparison to Perestiani's 1922 version, with which our discussion began, Parajanov's intervention in Daniel Čonkadze's text marginalizes both the historical details and the social overtones, and foregrounds, instead, the elements of regionally-specific nation building mythology. In this polyvalent narrative template Parajanov introduces the quest for lost national identity as a further axis around which the already existing themes of love, betrayal, sacrifice and revenge now revolve. Through recurrent motifs and conscious anachronisms, the authors gradually depart from the real historical framework of the film, thereby detemporalizing (but never despatializing) the narrative,²³ Importantly, the tale of sacrifice has not been changed in this

²² Although the film was officially co-directed by Parajanov and Dodo Abašidze, it is widely assumed that the film was fully authored by Parajanov and that Abašidze's appointment was requested by the producer at Georgia Film ("Khronika zhizni i tvorchestva Sergeia Paradzhanova" 25).

²³ As Hamid Naficy reminds us, relativization of historical time, and the concomitant emphasis of spatiality, produces precisely what Bakhtin termed the idyllic chronotope (*Accented Cinema* 155). Rather appropriately for the

late-Soviet reconsideration: it is now connected to the narrative of homecoming, insofar as the young man who will be immured is the son of the unfaithful lover (and convert to Islam) Durmišxan, and the sacrifice he performs is configured as an act of paternal redemption. The confession of Osman-Agha, the wealthy merchant who provides refuge to Durmišxan, sums up the working of the homecoming motif: “I took on a different faith. I estranged myself from my homeland. [...] Yet, the past tormented me. I mourned my homeland. I couldn’t forgive myself for renouncing my faith”.



[CAPTION: Figure 3.2: **Inculcating the sense of belonging: Simon the Piper introduces the**

situation depicted in Parajanov’s *Legend*, Bakhtin describes the idyllic space as the “spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one’s children and their children live” (Bakhtin 1981: 225, quoted in Naficy, *ibid.*).

Georgian Pantheon to little Zurab (*Legend of Suram Fortress*, dir. Sergo Parajanov, 1984).

Screen capture. DVD Russian Cinema Council Edition, 2006. Private collection.]

Having revealed to Durmishkhan that he was born into a Georgian Christian family, but, having killed his feudal lord, converted to Islam in order to earn himself exemption from the law, Osman-Agha, or Simon the Piper, as his identity is now revealed, dedicates the rest of his life to a spiritual, but also national, repatriation. Now a reborn Georgian, Simon tutors Durmišxan's son Zurab, the future redeemer of the nation, about the glorious days of Georgian history. That history starts with Prometheus (or Amiran, in the local idiom), whose chaining to the cliffs of the Caucasus is taken as emblematic of the historical enchainment of Georgia. Simon preaches the well-known folk legend to the astounded boy, that Georgia will rise from the ashes only when Amiran is set free from his enslavement. Simon's historical excavation epitomizes the incipient nationalistic discourses of the late Soviet era in their seeking for new, immediate and exteriorized, strategies of identity.²⁴ Infused with national myth, the central narrative of the unfaithful lover Durmišxan and his vengeful fiancée Vardo now allegorically re-enacts the drama of lost national identity. From Durmišxan's betrayal of Vardo and his subsequent marriage of convenience to another woman, the emphasis is placed on his renunciation of the identity of his forefathers. Durmišxan's fate reiterates that of Simon, with one important difference: whereas Simon's excavation and eventual homecoming will be rewarded, Durmišxan's uprootedness will be redeemed at the highest cost: it will be his son, the avid disciple of Simon's national myth,

²⁴ Although in an entirely different poetic framework, attempt to reclaim national identity through historical excavation features in Irakli Kvirikadze's 1979 *The Swimmer* (*Mocurave*). On the utilisation of distant past, especially the myth of Argonauts, in Kvirikadze's film, see Graffy 306-301 *passim*.

whose wilful sacrifice will redeem not only his unrepentant father, but in a synecdoche, the entire Georgian nation.²⁵

Epilogue: Exilic Cinema and the Nation State

The 1990s saw the Republic of Georgia transformed into a paradoxical entity – a state that “no longer existed” (Jones and Parsons 305). Indeed, in the aftermath of the country’s political turmoil, civil war of 1994, and processes of disintegration in the minority regions of Abkhazia and Ajaria, this assessment should not be taken as hyperbole: having embarked on the path to national independence, the Georgian nation state proved incapable of exerting political sovereignty over large parts of its own territory. This period of dramatic political instability gave rise to a major paradox of the country’s recent political history, whereby the period of regained political independence brought about the suspension of the country’s sovereignty. The new circumstances profoundly transformed the identity politics in Georgian culture and society, which was for centuries being calibrated “in confrontation with the Russian Imperial policies” (Chikovani 72).²⁶ Worth recalling in this regard are the words of the dissident Soviet philosopher Merab Mamardašvili, who, prophesizing the collapse of the transnational Soviet state, exclaimed in 1989 that “the Georgian nation needs independence in order to see its true face” (Rusadze).

Mamardašvili’s missive, which was essentially a plea for an unmediated politics of national

²⁵ A paradoxical feature of Parajanov’s films, at once “deeply personal, and fiercely national”, was observed by Karla Oeler in relation to Parajanov’s *The Colour of Pomegranates* (*Nran Guyne*, 1967) (146-7). Ambiguities seem to have accompanied the local reception of Parajanov’s treatment of the national myth. While the Armenian anthropologist Levon Abrahamian critiques the author for compromising the universality of the mytheme of immurement by utilising it for nationalist purposes (78), the Tbilisi-based critic Giorgi Gvakharia reminds us of the largely negative home reception of *Legend of Suram Fortress* in the climate of growing Georgian chauvinism, where the official circles deemed the film disrespectful of Georgian history (94).

²⁶ As pointed out by Nino Chikovani, the fundamental reconsideration of official national discourse was triggered by the blurring of the centre-periphery dynamic (72-75).

identity, a call to Georgian culture to break free from the minority paradigm, resonated with irony in the decade to come.

The philosopher's dream of Georgian self-perception outside the minority paradigm was shattered in the bloody unfolding of the 1990s, and the collapse of the Georgian national political project. In the period of major political vacuum, a large portion of the Georgian cultural elite, amongst them several major filmmakers, found refuge outside their newly independent homeland. It was in this politically charged, but territorially uncharted space of exile that a new mode of cinematic representation emerged. Characteristic of Georgian expatriate filmmakers of the late Soviet and post-independence years, the new mode of representation could perhaps be best understood by what Hamid Naficy termed *exilic* or *accented* cinema. This transcultural and transnational mode comes from the author's own *displacement*: usually, although not necessarily, from his/her territorial displacement or physical exile, or from his/her experience of exclusion. Being radically individual, the expressive capacity of exilic cinema is virtually unbound and therefore escapes easy classifications: in Naficy's words, in exilic cinema "diegesis overtakes mimesis" ("Epistolarity and Textuality in Accented Films" 132-3), which means that this cinema of exclusion is more about communicating the individual experience of exile than about universalizing that experience.

In this vein, Georgian exilic filmmaking could be said to have made a leap from its minor positionality and the representational strategies that unfold from it: those involving the interiorization of majoritarian gaze, and those that openly clashed with majoritarian discourses. It is, however, possible to argue that, rather than disappearing all together, the "minority paradigm" was transformed in its exilic articulation to become the most fitting expression of the new, global

form of transnationalism. Deleuze and Guattari have commented on what they saw as Kafka's political strategy of grounding representations in "the principle of multiple entries" which "blocks the introduction of the enemy" – that is, "the attempts to interpret [translate into a dominant, majoritarian social code] a work that is actually only open to experimentation" (3). The paradoxical way in which accented films deal with this introduction (not to be confused with *intrusion*) of historical individuality into a cinematic text is precisely by undermining "cinematic realism" and signifying instead the "home and host societies and cultures as well as the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers" (Naficy, "Epistolarity and Textuality in Accented Films" 134). At least two things are of import here: the experience of exile renders the immediate politics of representation radically impossible; and perhaps more importantly, in place of a negotiation with majoritarian discourses, the state of exile assumes the state of perpetual, irretrievable exclusion. In other words, the exilic subject knows that his/her exclusion is beyond negotiation, so the only recourse s/he has is what Naficy would call the symbolic "displacement of desire" ("Epistolarity and Textuality in Accented Films" 134). In an attempt to explain the cinematic expressions of the state of exclusion, Naficy once used the term *epistolarity*, by which he had in mind the highlighted acts of "sending and receiving, losing and finding" (*An Accented Cinema* 101). In other words, epistolarity emphasizes various figures of communication, thereby embodying the symbolic displacement through which the subject of exclusion reaches out towards his loss.²⁷ This at once highly symbolic and profoundly personal form of representation captures, with far more exactness than Mamardašvili's anticipation, the recalibration of identity

²⁷ In Deleuze-Guattarian terms, this dynamic could also be assessed in the context of what the French thinkers call the twin action of "deterritorialisation" and "reterritorialisation", where the latter strategy signifies an act of symbolic reclaiming of the lost territory, object of desire, *Heimat*, etc. On the origins and varied articulations of reterritorialisation see Deleuze and Guattari 20 *passim*.

politics in Georgian cinema in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet years, when the former minority identity was no more, and the identity of a nation state was not yet.

The cinema of expatriate Georgian director Nana Jorjadze (b. 1950) assumes an interesting position precisely in this context. Along with Otar Ioseliani, Irakli Kvirikadze (b. 1939), Temur Babluani (b. 1948), and a few other Georgian filmmakers of various generations, Jorjadze found herself living and working outside her own country (in Germany, France and Russia) for over 30 years. Although her experience of exile predates the years of political turmoil, Jorjadze's work remains a paradigmatic example of the new, deterritorialized identity which a number of senior Georgian filmmakers, those that remained home as much as those who were living abroad, suddenly embraced. Indeed, Jorjadze's cinema is voicing not only her own experience of territorial exile, but is indicative of the state of exclusion that Georgian society has been facing in the wake of the collapse of Soviet transnationalism. Expressive of the unfulfilled prophecy of the nation state, the exilic cinema of Nana Jorjadze is dwelling precisely in the imaginary locus that, according to Naficy, signifies deterritorialisation or, in Deleuze and Guattari's understanding, signals an attempt at "reterritorializations" on new terms.

The first film by Jorjadze to rise to international prominence, the 1986 *Robinsoniad, or my English Grandfather* (*robizoniada, anu xemi ingliseli papa*), already establishes a dense network of references and signifiers of what might be termed a deterritorialized identity. Simultaneously local and global, as Naficy would have it, or, perhaps, neither local nor global, the film is a part-fictional and part-historical biopic of Christopher Hughes, an English engineer who was sent to Georgia at the turn of the nineteenth century to maintain the recently established telegraph line between London and Delhi. The second temporal plane of the film is set in

present-day Georgia, and follows the life of Hughes's fictional grandson, now an established composer. Not accidentally, the first of the plotlines of the film is set in the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), a short-lived independent state that emerged on the ruins of the falling Russian Empire and was soon to be swallowed by the Union of Soviet Federal Republics.²⁸ To emphasize the historical rootedness of the plot, Jorjadze intercuts the diegetic narrative with original newsreel footage showing the deployment of international troops in Georgia in 1921, a scene accompanied with the words "The Menshevist Georgia was welcoming its saviours, the army of the League of Nations".²⁹

Yet, despite, or rather because of the inflation of traditional markers of Georgian identity in the film, direct rootedness in history is not the platform on which Jorjadze posits her identity politics. On the contrary, she suspends the well-trodden paths of identity formation by infusing them with irony. The worn-out mirage of Georgia as the land of "sun, mountains, and grapes" is subverted through frequent repetitions or comic reversal in the historical plotline of the film, and the same could be said of the reality of the Georgian and all-Soviet 1970s. For example, one scene in which protagonists sing a well-known patriotic chant (a scene, which, in a more immediate strategy of representation, would be rendered without ironic suspension) is ended with a goof by the sound engineer who happens to turn the microphone in the wrong direction. Equally, if not more importantly for my unfolding argument, *My English Grandfather* is permeated with characteristic signifiers of deterritorialized identity: telegraph poles and cables, ships, trains, and other means of transport, all suggest that the ideological framework in which

²⁸ The Democratic Republic of Georgia, or, in the Soviet parlance, "Menshevist Georgia" was subdued to the Bolshevik authorities in the early months of 1921.

²⁹ The same footage of international military display was used by Kalatozišvili in his 1928 debut *Their Kingdom*, but here it is given a visibly different articulation: while in Kalatozišvili's effort the found footage was the signifier of the treacherous actions of Menshevik authorities, Jorjadze uses the footage precisely as an epistle in the context of Naficy's theory, as a signifier of an irretrievably lost time of peace and international cooperation.

Jorjadze builds her politics of identity is a transitory one, in which “Georgianness” is a protean entity that takes different shapes in its encounter with other cultures (English and European, Russian and Soviet). Tellingly in this regard, the arrival of Soviet rule, as presented in the historical line of the film, unquestionably disturbs the newly established balance: among the first measures introduced by the Soviet authorities is the abolition of signifiers of deterritorialized identity. Telegraph lines are cut, the English engineers are expelled, and under Soviet rule Georgia is no longer a go-between in the cultural-political exchange between East and West. The message Jorjadze is trying to send here is clear: contrary to its purported internationalism, the newly imposed political framework disturbs the geocultural equilibrium in which Georgia stood as a middle point between London and Calcutta, Europe and Asia, Occident and Orient.³⁰

With the arrival of the Bolsheviks, Hughes’s time in Georgia is up. He is expelled from his house and, prior to his final expulsion from the country, is allowed to reside in a restricted space, 3 meters in diameter around each telegraph pole, the area allegedly owned by the British Royal family, the principal investor in the London-Calcutta telegraph line.³¹ Ostracized and eventually outlawed, Hughes is forced to reinvent his cosmopolitanism and embrace a radically deterritorialized form of identity, which lies beyond any of the existing symbolic forms of identification offered in the film: his native Englishness, his adopted Georgianness, and the newly imposed Bolshevism. Hughes’s non-contemporaneity in the new circumstances is reinforced in Jorjadze’s staging of the film’s absurdly tragic ending: the once wealthy landowner Lavrentii, now a disenfranchised brigand, fires on Hughes by mistake and kills him. The political

³⁰ In actual fact, soon after securing their power in the Trans-Caucasus, the Soviet authorities restored the telegraph network (which was interrupted during war years) and the line was in operation until 1930 (Karbelashvili 280).

³¹ The Royal Family’s financial involvement was a legend. The London-based Indo-European Telegraph Company was a subsidiary of the Siemens Company.

message Jorjadze canvases is again very clear: the life Hughes was deprived of was a life beyond political programmes—those advocated by the Revolutionaries, as much as those propounded by the nationalist reactionaries. By abolishing the idea of trans-national mobility and, finally, by staging a tragic ending for the film's only messenger of non-essentialist politics of identity, Jorjadze allows reactionary and violent ideologies to triumph, thereby qualifying the politics of transnational exchange for Georgia as a noble, but utopian vision.

This chapter has assessed the modulations in representing nationality identity in Georgian cinema in the Soviet context, over the course of around 70 years. The essay aims at bringing to light the complexity of the problematic pertaining to the question of national identity in a multi-national superstate: to this end, the subject of Georgian Soviet cinema was viewed as inextricably linked to its dynamic socio-political context. Out of this dual articulation of Georgian Soviet cinema, the core methodological postulate of the chapter was recognized in its focus on the complex workings of the minority position. Therefore, the novelty of the chapter does not lie in identifying the presence of certain national identities within the Soviet context; rather, the chapter has focused on the ways in which these particular identities were shaped in the overarching transnational context. The methodological frameworks for this complex conundrum arrived from what we may term a “minority paradigm”, that is, a spectrum of theoretical approaches attempting to elucidate minority cultures in their entanglement with the majoritarian framework. The application of each of these critical tools, ranging from world cinema theory, Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on minor literature, Franz Fanon's remarks on the colonized subject, and Hamid Naficy's discussion of exilic/accented cinema, found fertile soil in this essay.

My discussion has led me to the conclusion that, in the aftermath of the demise of Soviet Union and the failure of national politics in early post-Soviet Georgia, Georgian cinema adopts the so-called exilic mode of representation, which, in many ways, breaks with the previous minority-majority dynamics. But this departure does not mean that Georgian cinema arrived at a viable, immediate politics of representing national identity. In the situation of exile and permanent exclusion, filmmakers relinquished their aspirations to create a national mode of representation, embracing rather a punctuated and, above all, symbolic mode of representation, whereby direct signifiers of national identity (national history and myth, for example) are suspended and reduced to figures and signs.

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