

ABSTRACT

“Our Lives are Fleeting Moments”: Role of Women in Brezhnev-Era Soviet Georgian Film

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From 1953 through *glasnost*, Georgia's film studio was second only to Moscow's in terms of resources and quality output. However, Soviet Georgian film tends to be underrepresented in Western academia. Georgian cinema's golden age during the silent film era would provide an ideal foundation for the region to take the lead of other periphery republics in cinematic achievements as censorship relaxed. This thesis will examine the use of the role of women specifically through a thematic analysis of films and filmmaking in celebrated and influential Brezhnev-era Soviet Georgia, specifically in Tengiz Abuladze's *The Plea* (*Vedreba*, 1967) and *The Wishing Tree* (*Drevo Zhelania*, 1977) and Lana Ghoghoberidze's *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* (*Ramdenime Interviu Pirad Sakitkhebze*, 1978). Throughout this analysis, I will compare the motif of memory as facilitated through female characters. In my conclusion, I emphasize this era's impact on the current resurgence of Georgian cinema, which is predominantly led by a cohort of female directors.

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“OUR LIVES ARE FLEETING MOMENTS”:
ROLE OF WOMEN IN BREZHNEV-ERA SOVIET GEORGIAN FILM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Figures	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Chapter One: An Introduction to Soviet and Georgian Cinema	1
Chapter Two: Lana Gogoberidze's Women in Georgia	12
Chapter Three: Tengiz Abuladze's Women as Georgia	27
Chapter Four: Georgia's Cinema Archives and Conclusion	52
References	59

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Librarian.....	18
Figure 2: The Worker Woman.....	21
Figure 3: Young Sofiko.....	24
Figure 4: Eka.....	24
Figure 5: The Khevsur traveler.....	34
Figure 6: Agaza Weeping.....	34
Figure 7: Deva's Wedding	36
Figure 8: Deva's Execution (1)	36
Figure 11: Deva's Execution (2)	37
Figure 10: Men Digging Graves	39
Figure 11: Deva's Execution (3).....	39
Figure 12: Death of Gedy's Horse.....	41
Figure 13: Covering the Scene in Red.....	41
Figure 14: Marita on the Donkey.....	46
Figure 15: Marita's Grandmother.....	48
Figure 16: Marita's Death.....	48
Figure 17: Nargiza Defends Marita.....	50
Figure 18: The Pomegranate Flowers.....	50

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

From 1953 through *glasnost*, Georgia's film studio was second only to Moscow's in terms of resources and quality output. Georgian cinema, established in 1912, experienced a unique foundation by virtue of its pre-revolutionary origins and Georgia's brief independence period between 1918 and 1921.¹ Georgian distinguished itself during this time and would continue to include literary and folkloric traditions distinguishing it from other Soviet cinema. Cinematic traditions would fluctuate in influence and importance throughout the century, usually mirroring that of the severity of state censorship at the time, and Soviet cinema as an academic field remains integral and well-established due to its socio-cultural, economic, and political implications. The films of the Brezhnev era (1964–1985), also referred to as the Era of "Stagnation," however, are often underrepresented in scholarship due to the return to strict censorship following Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw. Existing literature often focuses on the *auteur* films of the central republics, ignoring the domination of films from the peripheral republics which drew on their own cultures and stories, "[inspiring] the centre, if only by restoring the power of the poetic image of all-powerful Mother Nature."² Westerners similarly overlook the cinema of peripheral republics due to equating "Soviet" with "Russian." Soviet Georgian film,

¹ In 1912, Vasil Amashukeli filmed *Akaki's Journey to Racha-Lechkhum* (*ak'ak'i ts'eretlis mogzauroba rach'a-lechkhumshii*), the first full-length documentary film in Georgia. In 1916, Alexander Tsutsunava began shooting the first Georgian feature film, *Christine*.

² Beumers, Birgit. "The Stagnation (1967-82)." *A History of Russian Cinema*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, pp. 156.

with an already rich and productive history in cinema, exploded with the use of color, folk traditions, and allegory.

This combination of national expression through cinema with Soviet socio-economic politics creates an interesting lens through which we can view Soviet Georgia in the 1970s. This thesis will examine women's role in films through a thematic analysis of films and filmmaking in celebrated and influential Brezhnev-era Georgian film in Tengiz Abuladze's *The Plea* (*Vedreba*, 1967) and *The Wishing Tree* (*Drevo Zhelania*, 1977), and Lana Ghogoberidze's *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* (*Ramdenime Interviu Pirad Sakitkhebze*, 1978).³ Specifically, I will compare the discussion of memory in these films as facilitated through female characters. My analysis will contrast the two directors, however, in the ways they use women to comment on Brezhnev-era Georgia and Georgia's history in the Soviet Union.

In this first chapter, I provide historical context for film and filmmaking in a Soviet and Georgian context, as well as provide historical context for the situation and expectations of Soviet women at the time. In the second chapter, I discuss the popular film genres during the 1970s–1980s and begin my film analysis with Ghogoberidze's *Some Interviews on Personal Matters*. In the third chapter I analyze Abuladze's films, *The Plea* and *The Wishing Tree*, in the context of their secular folkloric symbols and historical and religious themes. In the final and fourth chapter, I directly compare Ghogoberidze and

³ I viewed these films with their original audio in the Georgian language with English subtitles provided by Klassiki, a UK-based video-on-demand platform which is dedicated exclusively to cinema from Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia. This is important to mention given the impossibility of finding some Soviet films with original audio in the original language if it was not Russian, such as the tendency of Russian distributors to dub Russian on top of other language soundtracks. While I had to rely on the English subtitles, this did improve comprehension, since I could hear the original actor and actresses' voices.

Abuladze and discuss the current film archival situation in regard to Georgian cinema. Firstly, in the following section, I provide brief context for the intersection of cinema's rising importance with women's emancipation politics in the Soviet Union from its creation to the death of Stalin and briefly into the Thaw period (1953-1964/66). This overview will lead into the second section, which discusses Soviet Georgian film and its larger influences and contributions.

An Introduction to Soviet Cinema and the "Woman Question"

Due to its social and technical importance, Western academics focus on Soviet films of the silent era and later Thaw era (1953-1964/66), as both important for artistic contributions and social and economic commentaries. This scholarship also often has the unfortunate problem of equating Soviet cinema with Russian cinema, forgetting that the 15 republics within the Soviet Union and its six satellite states retained much of their cultural autonomy throughout the 20th century. Periphery countries such as Georgia, Armenia, and Kazakhstan are the most common victims, despite Georgia's State Cinema Production coming in third in productivity and often rivaling the Russian and Ukrainian studios in quality throughout the 1920s and 30s—a creative peak in Soviet cinematography—and continuing to be one of the most abundant producers in the federation.⁴ Through the years, academic commentary on the representation and roles of women in these Georgian films is even less. This is notable given Georgian cinema emerged around the same time as the Bolshevik Revolution (1917), and the establishment of the Soviet Union provides a

⁴ Tsopurashvili, Salome. "Modifications of Women's Representations in 1920s Georgian Soviet Silent Films." Tbilisi State University, 2016, http://press.tsu.ge/data/image_db_innova/socialur_politikuri/salome_tsofurashvili.pdf, pp. 3

compelling intersection with women's emancipation. Women's rights was one of the primary goals of Bolshevism and would be constantly championed throughout the Soviet Union's history as a success of the system in the face of American capitalism. Thus, this thesis will examine the construction of female identity and its representative role through a traditional textual analysis as derived from the formal aesthetic properties (such as imagery and editing) and themes of the aforementioned films in Soviet Georgia, focusing on the Brezhnev era, and how these constructs persevere in modern Georgia and continue to influence its culture and society.

It is first necessary to establish familiarity and context for the women's emancipation movement in the Soviet Union, especially when writing and reading from a Western academic perspective. The "Woman Question" was often addressed by Lenin, as he connected it with the construction of Marxism-Leninism, and which would be an integral topic to early and later Soviet ideology.⁵ One of the tenets stressed by Karl Marx was that gender oppression was inherently a result of class oppression and inextricably intertwined with the existence of private property. However, this also meant Lenin and the Bolshevik Party did not view female emancipation as something to pursue but rather something that flowed naturally from the successful abolition of private property and economic liberation from the ruling classes. Effectively, the symptoms of female oppression and class oppression were seen as one and the same. Women would be free to liberate themselves once the Marxist-Leninist system was secured.

⁵ Lacking both political-economic equality and domestic emancipation, Lenin claimed women are "doubly oppressed" and argued they would liberate themselves via the Soviet System. Pollitt, Harry. *Women and Communism: Selections from the Writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin*. Lawrence and Wishart, 1950, pp. 9, 35-56.

Bolshevik rhetoric was supported by policy, as evidenced in Article 22 of the first Soviet Constitution of 1918, which affirmed the equality of all Soviet citizens regardless of sex, race, nationality—an affirmation which would not be made in the US until 46 years later. Article 64 also established the right of women to be elected officials, and these rights were reaffirmed in the 1936 Constitution. However, by not addressing the unique cultural and domestic causations of female inequality, and with the abandonment of social reform in the vein of state-sponsored, community-based living, such as state-sponsored day cares, cafeterias, *et cetera*, these policies did little on their own to contribute to achieving practical gender equality. Instead, the “New Soviet Woman” as enforced by Stalin, required the dual burden of women as both a diligent Soviet worker and as mothers to a growing nation, especially in a post-WWII context.⁶ This meant that women in film during the first three decades of Soviet rule until Stalin’s death often viewed aspects like love and finding companionship as philistine or low-priority. As paradoxical as it might seem today, women in film were occasionally stripped of their agency through the emphasis on the notion that true meaning and happiness came from work, service, and political commitment, as self-discovery came in the form of political discovery.⁷ This was more than an artistic or stylistic choice. Socialist Realism became a state-mandated method for creative work after the 1934 declaration made by the Congress of the Writers’ Union, which meant works should display

⁶ This emphasis on motherhood especially can be seen in the changing policies of the time. In 1920, Soviet Russia was the first modern country to legalize abortion, a privilege which was then revoked in 1936 during the Stalin era. Following World War II and the immense loss of life, this role would be pushed even more.

⁷ Beumers, pp. 75–111.

socialist ideology, national character, and loyalty to the Party, which was then applied to cinema in 1935.

Intersection of Women and Film

Film's representation of women's involvement in male-dominated environments was more or less accurate. During the war, women were integrated into the armed forces and assumed roles as pilots and snipers and on tank crews as well as other combat roles.⁸ The dichotomy between the ideal Soviet woman being a mother, while not inviting men into the domestic sphere, alongside this history of inviting women into male-dominated and masculine environments, is discussed in Larisa Shepitko's 1966 film *Wings*. Shepitko's heroine Nadezhda, was a Soviet fighter pilot during World War II, but now, in the 1960s, where she has been pigeonholed by her indebtedness to the state into working as a principal at a construction-oriented trade school, she struggles in her role as a mother and her inability to connect with her daughter's generation. The film ultimately ends with Nadezhda hijacking an airplane during a field trip to the aviation museum to the shock and awe of her on-looking daughter and students. Although the Axis did not reach Georgia, this film would have resonated with Georgians, especially with the 400,000 soldiers who returned from the Eastern Front and the comparatively large loss of life the republic suffered. This is the history which all Soviet cinema of the late 1950s, 60s, and 70s would be digesting and reframing, especially from female directors like Lana Ghoghoberidze,

⁸ Erickson, John. "Night Witches, Snipers and Laundresses. (roles of Soviet Women in World War II)." *History Today*, vol. 40, no. 7, History Today Ltd, 1990, pp. 29–35.

whose *Some Interviews on Personal Matters*, which will be discussed later, reads as a more subdued, 1970s version of *Wings*.

The freedom to genuinely portray women and their roles in Soviet society with the appropriate nuance it deserved was not possible until after Stalin's death in 1953, one of the first to inaugurate this trend was Georgian director Mikhail Kalatozov, director of *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957). The film was also only one of two Soviet film to win the *Palm d'Or* award, which was won at the 1958 Cannes Film Festival.⁹ The role of Soviet Georgian film in reclaiming women's rights to love and the previously disallowed individualism and agency this provided is critically under-researched in Western academic and has much to do with Georgian literary and social culture. Thus, this thesis aims to address whether the aforementioned films from influential Georgian directors of the time, Lana Ghoghoberidze and Tengiz Abuladze, reflect something that can be called 'Georgianness' in their portrayal of women and if so, whether this conforms or does not conform with the ideas on Soviet femininity at the time. My analysis will question the way these films do or do not reject the Soviet archetype of the worker woman.

Singularities of Soviet Georgian Cinema and Georgian Literary Traditions

Before launching into the discussion of Georgia's cinematic tradition, it is important to first establish familiarity with its literary and written traditions. With its own writing and alphabet originating in the 7th century BC, literature has played an indispensable and unique role in forming Georgia culture and identity throughout history. It is no surprise, therefore, that many Georgian films are based on pre-existing stories and

⁹ The top prize at Cannes was called the Grand Prix prior to the *Palm d'Or*. In 1946, the Soviet film *The Turning Point* (1945) shared the Grand Prix award along with 10 other films.

novels, especially films during the silent era. Aiming “to immortalize the motherland’s writers” and emerging long before the Bolsheviks invaded in 1921, Georgian director’s dedication to portraying a “Georgianness” makes later Soviet Georgian cinema particularly interesting in comparison with other Soviet Socialist Republics whose film culture did not necessarily exist to reflect or preserve its own culture and ‘nationhood.’¹⁰ These films did share in the general early Soviet metaphor for the female body, “woman as Madonna, or woman as whore,” depending on whether the woman was meant to represent the Soviet Union and the workers’ mindset, in the first case, or the frivolity of femininity and bourgeois inclinations, as in the latter.¹¹ This is especially true when considering Bolshevik revolutionaries who came from Georgia, such as Lavrentiy Beria and Josef Stalin himself. However, this initial view of cinema as a way to preserve and represent ‘Georgianness’ meant certain deviations occurred which were unique to Georgian film when its literature was adapted for the screen.

The Silent Era and Early Films

The silent film era was a golden age for Georgian cinema. As mentioned previously, legacy films like Ivan Perestiani’s *Red Imps* (1923), which became the first Soviet box-office hit, Mikhail Kalatozov’s *Salt for Svanetia* (1930) meant Georgia’s State Cinema Production was outperforming most other republics in quality as well as quantity. The role of women in these early films has been acknowledged but not studied with the comprehensive depth necessary. Nikoloz Shengelaia’s *Eliso* (1929) can be used as a brief

¹⁰ Makharadze, I. “Diadi munji: Qartuli munji kinos istoria” [“History of Georgian Silent Film”]. Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing House, 2014, pp. 75.

¹¹ Attwood, Lynne. *Red Women on the Silver Screen: Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Communist Era*. Pandora, 1993, pp. 36.

case study of the agency of women demonstrated through mastery over her love and affection as well as the historical importance of nation-state ideas to Georgia. The relevance of love and nationhood continues to be a theme in Georgian cinema, along with the use of stories focused on generational changes.¹² Alexandre Kazbegi's 19th century short story eponymous portrays the 1865 deportation of the Chechen population to modern-day Turkey by the Russian Empire. The relevance and influence of Georgian literature on filmmaking creates a space in which "Georgianness" can be analyzed in tandem with dissecting the role of the female body, as evidenced in *Eliso*. The main protagonist, Eliso, is a Chechen and has fallen in love with the Georgian, Vazhia. Vazhia tries various ways to allow Eliso and her father to remain in Russia, but the story ends with all three being killed. One way Shengelaia's film version differs from the written story is that Vazhia and Eliso's love story takes centerstage while the Chechen exile remains in the background. Their love story in conflict with the ethno-political drama occurring in the background culminates in a scene where Eliso protects Vazhia from the rallying Chechens and speaks against her village, acting autonomously out of love both for her people and for Vazhia. Eliso is not victimized and there is no particular political connection, although the film generally can still hold the same commentary on imperialist tsardom as the short story does. *Eliso* is one of the first films of its kind in terms of its portrayal of women as independent individuals, but Shengelaia concludes his film with Eliso choosing to leave Russia with her father and village in an act of allegiance to the "nation-state idea," even after standing up to her fellow

¹² Graffy, pp. 299.

Chechens in Vazhia's defense.¹³ The film presents a discussion of religion, represented as Chechen Muslims versus Georgian Christians, which is made subtler in Shengelaia's film, but religion and Christian allegory would continue to be extremely relevant in Georgian literary adaptations, especially. Religious allegory specifically will act as purposive sampling criteria for Tengiz Abuladze's films, which will be discussed more in the following section.

The analysis of women's roles and bodies in films from Soviet Georgia is noteworthy due to Georgia's history of female film directors and cultivation of 'women's cinema.' Nutsa Ghoghoberidze, an associate of Sergei Eisenstein and Alexander Dovzhenko, was the first female feature-length film director in the Soviet Union, and her daughter, Lana Ghoghoberidze, whose films I discuss in chapter two, will become the Soviet Union's first self-declared director of women's cinema.¹⁴ The focus would once again return to abstract protagonists, nationhood, individualism, and love, and would be a discussion facilitated more through the female body, in terms of Abuladze's films, and the dissociation of women's lived experiences, as in Ghoghoberidze's cinema.

My analysis will focus mostly on visual symbolism and allegory in addition to framing decisions and cinematography, as opposed to discourse analysis, since my lack of Georgian language skills prevents me from contextualizing the cultural and social semiotics of certain phrases and words. Whenever literary references are relevant, as in the

¹³ Tsopurashvili, pp. 126-127.

¹⁴ "Esfir Schub was shooting documentaries before Ghoghoberidze, but Ghoghoberidze made the first fiction film in the Soviet Union." Dzandzava, Nino and White, Jerry. "The Cinema of Georgia's First Independence Period: Between Republican and European." Indiana University Press, Film History, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2015, pp. 168.

case of Tengiz Abuladze's two films, it will be done with the intent of addressing and comparing narrative differences, as well as a tool to highlight Abuladze's films as uniquely Georgian while still recognizing the impact of Party ideology. Any kind of relational content analysis will be most relevant when discussing *Some Interviews on Personal Matters*, in which the representation and role women is less visually symbolized and occasionally more outrightly discussed. However, these analyses will be paired with analysis of camera work as a supporting argument.

CHAPTER TWO

Lana Ghoghoberidze – Women in Georgia

The “Era of Stagnation” as a descriptor, coined by Mikhail Gorbachev, is often criticized for its lack of nuance in reference to Brezhnev-era (1964–1985) Soviet Union. Taken in context, this epithet was meant to describe the political inactivity and lackluster economic state of the period between Khrushchev and Gorbachev, not necessarily as a sweeping generalization for the period. Georgia in the 1970s suffered this economic stagnation (*zastoi*) as did other Soviet republics, and cinema during the period alongside social changes, such as the form of Khrushchev-era social policies and the privatization of family life. As I will discuss in the following section, often simply portraying Soviet life faithfully on the screen was seen by critics and viewers as non-conformist and dissenting.

As mentioned briefly above, a resurgence of ‘national’ culture, language, and tradition occurred within periphery republics especially due to the loosening of restrictions under Khrushchev and the desire to address the Soviet dissonance. Notably, Tbilisi’s Georgian population became the majority in the 1970s for the first time in modern history.¹⁵ When, in 1977, the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR considered a revision to the constitution in which the Georgian language would no longer be the sole official language, riots followed in the early months of 1978. Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan had always enjoyed the privilege of having their own national languages cited as the sole official

¹⁵ Vsesoiuznaia perepis’ naseleniia 1939 goda, 71–72; Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda, 138–39; Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda, vol. 4, pp. 258.

language, as opposed to Russian, something not shared by any other republic.¹⁶ The resurgence in interest in national identity is evident in all three of the following films I will discuss here. In the first section, I will discuss the nature of *auteur* and films for the masses in order to contextualize Ghoghoberidze's and Abuladze's films within the larger Soviet cinematic sphere. In the second, I will dissect Ghoghoberidze's *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* (*Ramdenime Interviu Pirad Sakitkhebze*, 1978) and the intertwined role that women and memory serve in her narrative.

Poetics and the Ordinary – Soviet Film in the 1970s

The post-Thaw Stagnation period saw a return to Stalin-era censorship, although less strict than the Stalin period, and the emphasis on ideology. In 1972, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union addressed Goskino, the USSR's State Committee for Cinematography, and the USSR Union of Filmmakers, instructing them to return to an emphasis on ideological themes while also raising the bar for creativity and technical quality in "an answer to our ideological enemies."¹⁷ This censorship differed from the Stalin-era approach in that films created during this time and disapproved of by the state were shelved as opposed to their directors being executed or exiled. This resulted in two cinematic forms presiding over the late 1960s and into the 1970s—*auteur* films, in which the director is able to develop his/her own distinctive visual and narrative style, and films intended for mass consumption.

¹⁶ Olsen, James S., Pappas Lee B., Pappas Nicholas C. *An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires*. Greenwood Press, 1994, pp. 247–258.

¹⁷ Michaels, Paula A. "Navigating Treacherous Waters: Soviet Satire, National Identity, and Georgii Danelia's Films of the 1970s." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol. 29, No. 3, September 2009, pp. 346.

As the Soviet system moved into the late 1960s and 1970s, its citizens began reconciling the fact that the promises made under Khrushchev's administration were not being realized. Filmmakers and directors for the masses turned to the *bytovik*¹⁸ genre to illustrate their frustrations.¹⁹ The genre *bytovik* focused on representing everyday life and individuals, often assumed a naturalistic or banal visual style, and addressed social grievances through satire and comedy or dramatization. The *bytovik* style of filmmaking came into conflict with the stagnation era *auteur* films and directors, of which Andrei Tarkovsky is perhaps the most common name that comes to mind when discussing Soviet *auteur* cinema. *Auteur* directors stood out due to their use of poetic language and nonsequential visual styles and were therefore easy targets for the Brezhnev regime. However, *bytovik* and other films designed for the masses could use their depictions of everyday life for social commentary while still working within the state administration's framework.

Historian Paula Michaels comments on the dialogue between *bytovik* films and state administration in her analysis of films directed by the celebrated Georgian-born Georgii Daneliia, who is well-known for his Soviet satire films and dark comedy. Michaels notes Daneliia's relevance and importance not only as a master of his genre, but also as a filmmaker able to "work within the system while still creating meaningful films."²⁰ However, she also acknowledges that this ability lends itself to ambiguity, as working within the system was most often achieved through the use of indirect language and leaving

¹⁸ From Russian *byt*, meaning "every day life"

¹⁹ Michaels, pp. 345.

²⁰ Michaels, pp. 356

the film to be interpreted in different ways. The technique of commenting on the system without appearing to outright critique or contradict carries into all films of *bytovik*, as *bytovik* films presented as both conformist and non-conformist at the same time. One of the first films which could truly be called a Russian blockbuster, Vladimir Menshov's *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, demonstrates this duality of conformism vs nonconformism well. The film's accessibility and straightforward approach makes it by nature a conformist film. Following three women and their lives' trajectories in Moscow over several decades, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* affirms the Soviet system through its main protagonist, Katya, but also, albeit limitedly, reveals veins of non-conformity. Katya is a stereotypical model Soviet worker who is dedicated to her job and, when met with resistance or misfortune, works diligently to become director of a plant. The system repays her by providing Katya with a two-bedroom apartment, and her overall quality of life as a single mother is superb, comparatively speaking. Its non-conformity reveals itself in one of her friends' (ex)husband, who becomes an alcoholic. The portrayal of alcoholism in Soviet film in any capacity would have been troubling, and its depictions in a celebrated and state-supported film such as *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, demonstrates how nuanced "films for the masses" could be in their depictions of Soviet Brezhnev-era realities. Several characters discuss loneliness, which would have also been an example of non-conformity at the time. The creative decision to portray real life as it was in and of itself non-conformist for Soviet cinema at the time. *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* also demonstrates the necessity for the historical and social context provided in chapter one in order to properly analyze these films. Writing in a Western academic context, beliefs like Gosha's, that men should earn more money than women and should act as provider for the

household, might be perceived as conformist and the revelation that Katya did earn more would have been an innovative twist. This opinion in a Soviet context, however, would have been immediately considered non-conformist and not representative of the general population's opinion. In fact, it might have even been included as a laugh at the Western world's expense, as women's emancipation was considered a proud achievement by the Soviet system.

In the case of Ghoghoberidze's films, however, we have direct confirmation of her intentions through recorded interviews and statements in addition to the social and cultural context of the time, as she has stayed active in the film industry even in 2023. The *auteur* and 'films for the masses' approaches have their respective benefits and deficits when arguing which of the two best achieved socio-political and ideological discourse. In this thesis, I do not intend to make any comment on the effectiveness of either, as Ghoghoberidze could even be argued as an *auteur*, given her emphasis on her stylistic approach of 'women's cinema.' I only intend to analyze the respective use of women and the female body and point out the similarities in women's roles, particularly when it comes to memory and remembrance, between these two celebrated directors.

"The Owner was Kind but What About the Donkey?" and Some Interviews ...

Despite the Soviet Union championing the success of women's emancipation and equality in the public sphere, celebrated Soviet female directors and *auteurs* would not emerge until the 1960s. Pioneering female filmmakers Esfir Shub and Olga Preobrazhenskaya produced influential, yet under-researched, works throughout the 1920s. The 1950s saw the emancipation of traditional Soviet archetypes, but it was not until the following decade that women such as Kira Muratova and Larisa Shepitko would begin

leaving their marks, although neither one considered themselves ‘feminist’ filmmakers. The lack of women in cinematography had less to do with cultural stereotypes or policies barring women from joining and more with convention. Ghoghoberidze herself mentions that the idea of a gendered pay gap and economic inequality of the Western variety was almost non-existent, but that it was the point at which women became as involved in their careers as men did that became an un-equalizer.²¹ The Soviet Union had not yet created sufficient state-run and funded daycares, cafeterias, laundry mats, *etc*, which would finally and concretely free women to balance their home and work lives. This is the problem on which Ghoghoberidze centers her film. In *Some Interviews on Personal Matters*, taken as a *bytovik* film for the purposes of this thesis, Ghoghoberidze follows her protagonist’s, Sofiko’s, life and work as a journalist, mother, and wife while incorporating various interviews she has conducted with other women and clips from her past to comment on the dissonance between the Soviet system and ideology and reality. Like Abuladze, Ghoghoberidze uses Sofiko’s memory of interviews with several Georgian women to talk about women’s status in the Soviet Union, of course, but also to talk about Georgia’s condition as a whole. Memory is a key feature of *Some Interviews on Personal Matters*, but Ghoghoberidze ties it to family and loneliness as opposed to Abuladze’s association with death. *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* would have been a film many Georgian and Soviet women would have resonated with, as evidenced by its international acclaim and success.

²¹ Waddell, Justine. “Interview with Lana Gogoberidze.” Klassiki, <https://films.klassiki.online/some-interviews-on-personal-matters/videos/interview-with-lana-gogoberidze>.

Some Interviews on Personal Matters opens on an older-looking woman who is speaking directly into the camera. We discover she is a librarian and that she seems to have a lot of regrets about the way she let life pass by. The conversation flips as the Librarian begins interviewing the interviewer, and eventually Sofiko is revealed on the other side. The Librarian asks if Sofiko is married and if she has children. To Sofiko's answer in the affirmative, the Librarian comments that Sofiko must be happy. Then she asks if Sofiko loves her job, to which Sofiko answers enthusiastically.



Fig 1: The Librarian

Thus the viewers are introduced to the journalist protagonist, having learned more perhaps about the interviewer than the interviewee. The camera then introduces Sofiko's family as they wake up one morning—Sofiko's husband, Archil, and son and daughter, Eka. ABBA, who won Eurovision four years prior to the events in the film, plays in the background. Specifically, ABBA's *Money, Money, Money* plays amidst the chaos of the family waking up for work and school. Interestingly enough, the plot would not revolve around money themes at all. Instead, most of the conflict arises out of the lack of time and passing thereof, not the lack of financial means.

In Sofiko's office, the viewer is introduced to the nature of her journalism. She writes stories and features about people and their troubles, one of which is an elderly woman asking Sofiko for help in finding an old folks' home. This elderly woman holds the same slouched and defeated posture as the Librarian from the beginning of the film, emphasizing that she would rather die than continue to sit, alone, in her family's house while her family is away at work and school. This scene, combined with the opening scene, are the first introduction of the film's underlying themes of loneliness. Even with a family, which is supposed to keep the elderly woman satisfied and happy according to the Soviet system, she feels neglected. Having presumably spent her whole life working a job and domestic duties, and now being deprived of both, the elderly woman's life has lost all meaning.

The next woman Sofiko encounters is an overstimulated and nervous woman shopping for groceries. The camera provides an aerial view of the bazaar as the woman scurries around from the cheese line to the eggs and over to the meat. As the woman struggles with her bags, Sofiko asks whether she has anyone to help her, to which the woman replies, enthusiastically, "I've got a whole army, that's why I'm carrying so much!" She mentions that she has not even got a second to breathe when Sofiko asks to interview her briefly. This woman's nervous energy and implied large family will supplement another interview later in the movie, during which a woman laughs at the idea of having free time to pursue hobbies. The first narrative interruptions occur at Sofiko's aunts' house, one of which is a memory of an interview with a family and the other is a memory from Sofiko's past. The theme of memory and its facilitation through female characters continues with one of the aunts' comments: "Our lives are fleeting moments." The film ultimately is a

composition of many fleeting moments and comments and serves as the only point of insight into the protagonist's, Sofiko's, life and feelings. During the first memory, Sofiko recalls how one family used singing as a means of overcoming hardship and cementing their family unit. The singing motif continues throughout the film. The personal memory, brought on by her aunts' disappointment at Sofiko taking leave of them once again, brings us to an orphanage, where the viewer sees a very young Sofiko watching her aunts approach from the orphanage window. They collect her for yet unknown reasons, and the camera pans to the trees, which are barren in the snowy Georgian landscape. As later scenes will reaffirm, the barren trees indicate that this memory was a low point for Sofiko. In the context of the film, it was a moment in Sofiko's history at which she was her loneliest. Notably, the current timeline with Sofiko and her family takes place in autumn, and the viewer is often shown lingering shots of the changing, falling leaves.

Throughout the film, there are two conflicts occurring. Internally, Sofiko is conflicted over her familial obligations, mostly to her husband, and her love for her work as a journalist. The external conflict occurs when a village principal contacts Sofiko and asks her to write a story exposing a rich man who is building on the village school's property. This event becomes the primary stress point which results in Sofiko's marriage falling apart. It is during the first visit to the village that Irakli, Sofiko's photographer, tells a humorous story of a donkey and his "kind" owner. In this story, the owner offers to put a number of people he encounters who need help—old man, a child, and then a camel and its rider—all on the back of the donkey. Sofiko interrupts and asks, "The owner is kind but what about the donkey?" Irakli finally arrives at the punchline: the donkey then asks if he can be put on the donkey. The owner's answer is ambiguous and lost in Sofiko's dismissal

of the story. The donkey's question makes the story funny, but it also points out the donkey's needs and how they have been ignored in the process of picking up other travelers. This story, especially when considered in conjunction with the following interjected memory, encapsulates the primary essence of Ghoghoberidze's film. The kind owner in many ways represents the kind Soviet system, who made an effort to incorporate and invite women into the public sphere. However, in this kindness, the donkey, or the women, have to carry the domestic work for the home, caring for the children, and provide domestic services for their husbands, as well as just being there for them as a life partner, in addition to the responsibilities of an employee in the workplace. As Ghoghoberidze mentioned, the issue emerged when women began loving and caring for their work just as much as the men did. The interview memory which couples with this story is one with a woman who proudly discusses her factor work and how successful she has become, in addition to her ability to provide for her husband and children and her gratefulness for the government programs which helped with daycare, etc.



Fig 2: The Worker Woman

She represents the archetypical worker woman. When the donkey asks if he can ride on the donkey, the story's absurdism and the potential reaction of the audience, whether to laugh or scoff, is very similar to the Worker Woman's reaction when Sofiko asks if she has any time to herself, or if how she spends her free times. Through this memory, Ghoghoberidze highlights that women are pulled not in two directions, but three. When pulled between the private and public spheres, women have little to no time to be themselves. The Worker Woman does admit, later in the memory, that she loves to sneak over to the station and watch the trains, and that she misses her village. She quickly asks Sofiko not to mention this, as she had asked about her dreams, as if the woman does not see this as a productive use of her time and so could not be considered a dream or aspiration or taken with any sense of seriousness. Here Ghoghoberidze again has used memory as facilitated by women to discuss this lingering women's situation in Georgia.

What Women Remember

Ghoghoberidze facilitates this discussion through three generations of women. The Georgian tradition of using different generations to demonstrate social, political, or economic changes was especially integral to 1970s Soviet Georgian cinema, but generally this was facilitated through male members of the family.²² Conversely, Ghoghoberidze makes *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* somewhat autobiographical. Sofiko's mother, it is revealed, through temporal narrative interruptions, was a political exile. This reflects Ghoghoberidze's own experiences, and the experiences of many Georgian families. Her

²² Graffy, Julian. "History, memory, water: the reclamation of Georgian identity in Irakli Kvirikadze's *The Swimmer*." University College London, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2007, pp. 299.

mother, pioneering director Nutsa Ghoghoberidze, was exiled to Siberia for ten years and thus missed most of her daughter's Lana's formative years. The viewer is not told why Sofiko's mother was arrested, but based on Ghoghoberidze's experiences, who was exiled for her films, one can perhaps assume the arrest had connected her with political activities. The illustration of the panic and fear Sofiko felt when she learns her mother is coming back as facilitated through a flashback, ("She returns but I don't know her"), must have been cathartic not only for Ghoghoberidze but for every Georgian viewer, as well. The scene where Sofiko and her mother meet again is awkward and strained until when, from Sofiko's point of view, the viewer sees the dark and hazy silhouette turn into someone Sofiko recognizes as her mother. Despite being Georgian-born himself, Stalin did not spare his home country during the purges of the 1930s. Whereas Abuladze does not tackle Stalin and the purges, and the memory or lack thereof, of what happened head-on until *Repentance*, Ghoghoberidze's film makes social and political commentary on the purges and Georgia's memory of the past simply by focusing on the story of an individual and her life experiences realistically in Tbilisi.

Through generational introspection, Ghoghoberidze is able to comment on the cyclical nature of history. In a shot following the principal's comment that Sofiko's generation did not know fear, a young Sofiko stands, arms loosely at her side, alone in a dark room with only her body illuminated. This should look familiar to viewers. Much earlier in the film, when Sofiko and her husband host a dinner party, their daughter Eka, wakes up and similarly stands, illuminated against a dark surrounding room. Sofiko, who has limited one-on-one interactions with Eka and very rarely shows physical affection with most characters throughout the film, comforts Eka and walks her back to bed.



Fig 3: Young Sofiko



Fig 4: Eka

Thus, Ghoghoberidze characterizes the internal conflict within the next generation, as well. Just as Sofiko's memory of her mother has influenced her life choices, so will Eka's memory of Sofiko. Eka is the only one to notice her mother crying after the fight with Archil, and she dreamily listens to her grandmother discuss the aurora borealis. Eka notices the changing family dynamic while her brother always has his head down in a book. Ghoghoberidze uses the motif of memory to comment on women's situations in Georgia, and the unfronted pains of the past, not only through her primary female character but through all three generations of women. In this way, she also comments on the ambiguity of the future, of Eka's future, and the role women will or will not have in Georgia.

This ambiguity belongs to Sofiko, as well. Eventually, she discovers her husband is cheating on her, and she begins trying, futilely, to show an interest in him again, even changing her hair by wearing a wig. She relies on memories of when they were in love to promote his affection. This discussion occurs while they watch a tennis match, representing the dueling volleys Sofiko has to bounce back and forth between. She eventually realizes their marriage is dead. As mentioned, generational introspection provided an opportunity to comment on the cyclical nature of history and society where Abuladze used physical and

literal death, as will be addressed in the following chapter. However, Ghoghoberidze does also use death, although metaphorically, as in the death of Sofiko's old life with a similar intention. Ultimately, Sofiko and Archil decide to split, and their conversation takes place while their children look for their lost dog, who ran away upon the death of Sofiko's mother. The tired yet confident portrait of Sofiko is shown in contrast to Eka's sobs when they cannot find the dog. Ghoghoberidze concludes with Eka's brother's comforting words, that they will "search the world" for the dog, and the viewer cannot help but feel they are not talking about just the dog. Ghoghoberidze does not offer a solution to this problem in Soviet Georgia, but through the use of memory, she demonstrates that there is the potential to find one.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Ghoghoberidze's *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* is a commentary on women's roles in Soviet Georgia and the dissonance between expectations for these women as all-involved mothers, wives, and employees. Ghoghoberidze uses the motif of memory, as featured in narrative interruptions, to discuss the changing nature of Georgia and women's roles in it. Between the three generations, Ghoghoberidze is able to discuss the difficult period of the purges through Sofiko's mother and the way this impacted the following generation, as well as the current and potential future situation through Sofiko's daughter, Eka. The use of women to facilitate this discussion in conjunction with memory is especially poignant due to the unique facet of women as both full-time mothers, wives, and Soviet workers. There was no explicit expectation for men to fathers or husbands, as all of this was wrapped in with working to provide for the family. Through Sofiko's metaphorical death at the termination of her marriage, there is hope for renewal

and discovering happiness for herself again. Ghoghoberidze does not offer any particular answer, as the ending is ambiguous, and we may never know if Sofiko's split with her husband was the right decision, but she does seem to allude to the possibility of an answer hidden in Georgia's memory and what women remember.

CHAPTER THREE

Tengiz Abuladze – Women as Georgia

In this chapter I will analyze Abuladze's use of women and the female body as a metaphor for Georgian memory and Georgia's fate under the Soviet Union. Through nature, religious allegory, and death and treatment of the dead, Abuladze emphasizes the tragedy of Georgia's fate and yet the bittersweetness of the opportunity for rebirth. Both *The Plea* (*Vedreba*, 1967) and *The Wishing Tree* (*Drevo Zhelania*, 1977) end with the death of a primary female protagonist, who had come to either represent Georgia directly or the soul's goodness, or the Georgian soul, indicating the importance of women in Abuladze's films as a mechanism for approaching these themes. During the Brezhnev era, the Soviet leadership of periphery republics looked to resurrect aspects of national identity in an effort to unite and rebuild. As previously mentioned, Soviet Georgia during this time was attempting to rediscover its culture and traditions. This produced a mangled phenomenon of projects intended to increase interest in nationalization, but which were not quite separated from the Sovietization. As Claire P. Kaiser suggests in her chapter on "a Georgian Tbilisi" during the 1970s, "states and republics alike realized such nationalization projects only through Soviet/socialist population politics, urbanization, and responses to the postwar housing crisis." The emphasis on reconstruction meant deeming certain aspects of Georgian history as relics to remain in the past or rebranding other aspects.²³

²³ Kaiser, Claire P. "Chapter 5: A Georgian Tbilisi," *Georgian and Soviet*. Cornell University Press, 2022, pp. 161.

One of the best examples of this reconstruction is the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), which has a rich legacy in Georgia's history and traditions. The complex intertwined relationship between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Georgian people could not simply be renounced, as other traditions had, and reports at the time publicly noted certain aspects could be kept "provided that [the traditions] can be modernized to use it against its 'forefathers.'"²⁴ Instead, the leadership of Soviet Georgia transformed Orthodox holidays into state ones or simply replaced them all together. The holidays themselves would remain, but they were celebrated in honor of Georgian authors, for example, instead, such as days celebrating Shota Rustaveli, Ilia Chavchavadze, and Vazha-Pshavela. This maintained the integrity of local festivals and cultural traditions while also steering the essence of these events away from religion and toward the Soviet Georgian system. Orthodox and other religious holidays were targeted as having been hijacked by the church originally, so these holidays were emphasized as a return to Georgianness without the downsides of religion. Similarly, in wedding and funeral traditions, replacing instances and uses of crosses with the "national" flag and state seal were encouraged alongside the revival of traditional Georgian clothes and costumes.²⁵ These changes in attitude and tradition especially affected important life milestones such as weddings and funerals or methods of remembrance of the dead.

It is with this context in mind that I analyze Abuladze's use of the female body and how Abuladze uses women to facilitate a discussion of Georgia's changing traditions and identity, in his first and second installments of a loose trilogy on Georgian memory and

²⁴ Kaiser, pp. 155.

²⁵ Kaiser, pp. 156.

identity. The term “loose” is generally applied to Abuladze’s trilogy since the films are interconnected via their thematic exploration, not in terms of plot, setting, or characters. In the first two films, *The Plea* and *The Wishing Tree*, Abuladze uses visual metaphors and symbolism as it pertains his female characters to represent different facets of Georgia’s heritage and character, particularly when it comes to death and memory. Abuladze’s *The Plea*, based on two epic poems by Georgian literary figure Vazha-Pshavela, “Aluda Ketelauri” and “The Host and the Guest,” is at its heart a commentary on religious conflict and the fate of the human soul when confronted with injustice. The film demonstrates, from both sides of the conflict, that having the moral courage to face evil is not in-and-of-itself a deliverer of evil. Although these themes are predominantly explored through the film’s male characters, Abuladze uses femininity and the female body to emphasize and reiterate this commentary. In *The Wishing Tree*, three women stand out, each of which represents a dueling nature or cautionary tale on Georgianness. Abuladze intentionally intermingles secular Georgian tradition with churches, prayer, and religious symbolism in ways it would have been in Soviet Georgia reality. Traditionally, graves and events surrounding remembrance of the dead has been crucial to Georgia’s underlying sense of identity.²⁶ Ultimately, both *The Plea* and *The Wishing Tree* use the connection to death, which is facilitated and channeled predominantly through Abuladze’s female characters, as a sign of rebirth. Despite ending in scenes depicting physical death, both films end on a relatively hopeful note, especially compared to Abuladze’s third installment. This chance for revival

²⁶ Christensen, Julie. “Tengiz Abuladze’s Repentance and the Georgian Nationalist Cause.” Cambridge University Press, *Slavic Review*, 1991, Spring, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 166.

and resurrection of the Georgian nation, however, can only be facilitated through a return to the Georgian soul.

Femininity, Religion, and Death in The Plea

The Plea—alternatively translated as *The Prayer*—is the first installment of Tengiz Abuladze’s critically acclaimed and influential loose trilogy on the themes of memory and national character facilitated through Georgian narratives and culture. The second two, *The Wishing Tree* and *Repentance*, are typical *auteur* films but do not have the extent of temporal disjointedness or heavy poeticism which characterize *The Plea*. As mentioned before, at its core, *The Plea* is a film that deals with religious conflict and the nature of human suffering as inflicted by other humans, intertwining two storylines in pursuit of this aim. The verbal structure and dialogue are unique, too, as often the words being spoken will either belong to an often ambiguous narrator’s consciousness, one of the character’s internal dialogue, or it will be actual dialogue between characters. The two storylines deal with the consequences of interactions between the Muslim Kistins and the Christian Khevsurs. A pilgrim and, presumably, narrator, is a member of the latter. In the first episode, a Christian Khevsur’s empathy and respect for a Muslim Kistin is punished, and the lesson is swapped and made harsher in the second. While *The Wishing Tree* may be called an allegory for Georgia’s experience within the Soviet Union, or at least deals with the ways in which Georgia changed and has been changing under Soviet rule, *The Plea* is much more intimately in dialogue with the Georgia in conflict with itself.

Deva and Women as Pictures of Divinity

The film opens with an interaction between Aluda, who later becomes the wanderer or pilgrim, as he refers to himself, as well as a woman called Deva, and a villainous looking man. The dark silhouettes look dreamlike, with certain shots contouring the actors' faces as if they were charcoal skeletons, and it is unclear whether this is happening in reality or whether it is part of the mythic context Abuladze is trying to create. The narrator, who one can presume is Aluda, pleads with God not to just "let [him] just live and breed." Each character will have his or her own prayer or soliloquized plea throughout the film, which further contributes to the dreamlike feel of the film and its placement outside of time or any real place. Aluda further muses on the identity of God, at which point the viewer is shown a scene of Deva, clothed in white, backlit and walking in a field. The visual use of highlighting the elegance and grace of the female body directly associates Deva with divinity and goodness, or more specifically, Aluda's goodness and humanity, as he will later call her both a child from heaven as well as human. Due to the characters and historical context, this film is set in pre-revolutionary Georgia. However, the idea of the film existing outside of temporal constraints, since the viewers are never given a concrete answer, contributes to the timelessness of its message.

The divinity of Deva is revealed in her name, or rather, lack thereof. Deva, meaning "maiden" and "virgin" in Russian, may correlate directly with the Virgin Mary, particularly in an Orthodox context where Mary's perpetual virginity is a firmly held belief. At the beginning of the movie too, as the viewer interacts with the heavily mythicized scenes with the pilgrim, Deva, and the villainous-looking man, Aluda's visceral reaction to the villain, who acts as a personification of evil and the innateness of human suffering, attempts to touch Deva as she sleeps. The corruption of humanity's goodness will ultimately culminate

in the death of Deva; however, by lingering on a shot of the film's personification of evil and maliciousness groping the unconscious goodness, Abuladze stresses not only the destruction of the human soul and its potential for good but the extent of humanity's perversion. Aluda makes a move to protect the woman, and the villain returns to the shadows. The woman remarks, "As long as you're alive, I'm alive," presumably, to Aluda. The introduction to these three characters—Aluda, Deva, and the villainous man—presents "an allegorical frame of Man, the Devil, and Man's Soul (the Beloved)," as Julie Christensen writes in her analysis of Abuladze's *Repentance*.²⁷ Indeed, this preface sets the general tone of good versus evil which can be applied more specifically to Soviet Georgia's social and cultural situation.

After the interaction between Aluda, Deva, and the villainous man, the film enters reality, and the viewer does not see Deva return visually on the screen until later in the film. Instead, Abuladze begins a new storyline, during which Aluda kills a rival Kisitn named Mutsil in a skirmish. According to tradition, Aluda is supposed to cut off Mutsil's hand in an act of defilement and contempt, but out of respect for the bravery and strength with which Mutsil fought, Aluda decides to honor his corpse. In refraining from taking Mutsil's hand, Aluda acknowledges the innateness of human dignity, but when he attempts to sacrifice a steer for Mutsil's soul upon returning home, the villagers riot and run Aluda out of the region, burning his house and property in the process. As the pilgrim—again, who is presumably one in the same with the narrator and Aluda, although Abuladze uses a new actor for the second half of the film—reflects on Aluda's/ the pilgrim's own exile, Deva returns. While attending a funeral and watching the flames, the pilgrim reflects on how the

²⁷ Christensen, pp. 170.

people only stood and watched, except for Deva, who Aluda just refers to as “she.” He muses how it was a good thing the villagers did not see Deva’s attempts to save the house, as they probably would have reacted violently. Abuladze shows Deva interacting with the flames and busying herself, almost as if she were looking for something instead of trying to save it. The inability of the villagers to see or hear Deva also calls into question the reliability of the narrator. The last time Deva was involved in a scene, it was the opening ‘dreamtime’ sequence of events involving the villainous man. Did the villagers really not happen to see Deva, or was it that they could not see her? Aluda’s commentary on Deva as she flitted about the flames, as a “child from heaven,” suggests the latter and reaffirms her connection to divinity and God. Aluda also refers to Deva as “illusory,” “sublime,” and “forever human,” suggesting the nuance of this divinity. Deva represents goodness, but in a much more complex way she subverts the visual stereotypes of a beautiful woman in white robes playing the role of ‘Good.’ Since Abuladze’s intent is to illustrate the consequences of these internal consequences between good and evil with stark frankness, Deva’s interactions with the flames demonstrate the interrelation between goodness, empathy, and suffering. *The Plea* as a title refers to a singular plea, but most characters in the film have some sort of their own secret prayer. From characters like Aluda, and those in the following episode, musings and pleas come initially from an attempt to understand where the beauty and goodness in the world has disappeared to, and these pleas are answered with escalating forms of violence.

The Female Body as a Vessel of Grief

The second storyline escalates the lesson of the first, and Abuladze offers a new meaning for the visual role of women as a portrayal of mourning and grief. Deva does not

make an appearance; instead, this time, the viewer is introduced to a Muslim Kistin, Dzhokola, who invites a Christian Khevsur traveler, Zviadauri, into his home after meeting him out on the mountainside. Dzhokola's fellow villagers quickly recognize the enemy and move to bind Zviadauri and kill him, especially after finding out Zviadauri has killed two Kistins. Dzhokola declares his intent to protect the guest at all costs, asserting that their faith places hospitality and generosity above any allegiance to his people and especially above seeking revenge. While the men are arguing, the Khevsur traveler is framed such that the decorative plate on the wall creates a halo. The irony of framing this murderer with a disk or nimbus much in the way saints are painted and characterized with highlights that, although Dzhokola will be punished by man, God was ultimately on his side. Dzhokola is eventually overpowered, and both he and the traveler are killed.



Fig 5: The Khevsur traveler



Fig 6: Agaza Weeping

While the executions are taking place, the frame pans to a young crying woman, Agaza, who soliloquizes to herself how she wishes she could kill “those villains,” her fellow Kistins, and free their prisoner. She recognizes both the literal and figurative death which is occurring here as she thinks about the perversion which will occur of the memory of Zviadauri through the neglect of his body, and she agonizes over the fact that Kistin women have no power vis-à-vis the men. Zviadauri dies physically and in memory.

Abuladze allows the camera to linger in several instances, as if offering comforting caresses to the woman. After the village abandons Zviadauri to die, again, presumably—as nothing is confirmed definitively or denied throughout this film—alone in the snow, the young woman returns in the middle of the night to mourn and protect the body, which lies on the graves of Zviadauri’s victims. Even though Agaza had mourned her lack of agency and ability to do anything in response to Zviadauri’s execution, the act of mourning subverts the village’s intention to murder him in memory, too. The extent of Agaza’s devastation indicates that she is grieving for Zviadauri’s senseless death but also for the souls of her fellow Kistins. In this way, respect for the dead begins to tie in with respect for Georgia’s heritage and Georgians’ pursuit of creed—new associations and ideology—over faith—traditional Georgian identity. The conflict between creed and faith is all facilitated through the visual and character structure of Agaza. In a religious context, her mourning and guarding of the deceased is just as important as if she had prevented Zviadauri’s physical death, since now his soul has closure and retains some sanctity. There is healing in this grief, and Abuladze notably facilitates this healing visually through a woman. Even when Agaza is caught in the night, it is admitted that it “befits a woman” to mourn a hero.

At the conclusion of the two storylines discussed above, a visual tonal shift occurs and Abuladze shows the viewer a wedding. Deva, in her white gown, is marrying the villainous-looking man from the film’s opening scenes. Abuladze emphasizes this dichotomy in one shot where, as the couple sits side-by-side, Deva is sitting in the sun and looks almost as if she is glowing. In contrast, Deva’s groom is completely shadowed in darkness. Abuladze uses this visual to cement his earlier message, which is that goodness, purity, and divinity walk hand-in-hand with suffering and conflict. The innateness of

human dignity and empathy cannot exist without its opposite. In an additional moment of foreshadowing, the Abuladze allows the camera to linger on Deva's neck as she faces the men in attendance, revealing the men's faces over her shoulders. Later, as Deva is being hanged, the men watch Deva once again with almost an unchanged expression of contented awe or appreciation, as pictured in the figures below. The men's facial expressions are equally apathetic toward Deva's wedding as they are toward her death. It is as if the men are admiring her beauty without quite understanding the context in which they are admiring it.



Fig 7: Deva's Wedding



Fig 8: Deva's Execution (1)

The final moments of Deva's execution occur at the pilgrim's greatest point of despair. He climbs up a hill after watching a number of men digging graves, pleading to see "something else, good and joyous." Ironically, at the top of the hill, Aluda, the pilgrim, is met with Deva's execution, the framing of which emphasizes her divinity once again. A nearby fire cloaks Deva in black smoke, and in one tight shot, the camera focuses on the sky as if Deva's head encircled in a noose, featured in the left bottom corner, is an afterthought. Despite the execution of Deva equating to the death of goodness personified, Deva's body burns even brighter in death, blinding the onlookers. Just as the grieving woman exercised her agency most in a death scene, so does Deva exercise the height of

her autonomy in the face of death and destruction, Ultimately, Abuladze wishes to leave the audience with a feeling of hope.



Fig 9: Deva's Execution (2)

Due to its literary reference, Abuladze intends *The Plea* to resonate with fellow Georgians in particular, although the third 'act' follows another overarching archetypal story structure, which is that of a pilgrim descending into 'hell.' This archetype can be traced from ancient Sumerian traditions, such as in the poem *Bilgames and the Netherworld* from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, to Greek myth and Christian tradition, as well as belonging to other modern religions.²⁸ One such tradition is the Orthodox belief in the descent of the Theotokos into hell, which Abuladze appears to draw attention to through the death of *The Plea's* Mary figure occurring next to a fiery pit²⁹ The Orthodox tradition details Theotokos' descent with the Archangel Michael and her subsequent pleadings with God to have mercy

²⁸ Bremmer, Jan N. "Descents to the underworld from Gilgamesh to Christian late antiquity." *Studia Religiosa*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2017, pp. 293–309.

²⁹ Meaning "Mother of God," used in the Eastern Orthodox Church as a title of the Virgin Mary

on those being punished, even going so far as to ask to be punished in their place.³⁰ The story of Theotokos' descent reenforces the interpretation that Deva's execution is sacrificial and done as an action, ultimately, of hope. Deva's suffering in a "hell"-adjacent scene prompts a visual of Theotokos begging God to have mercy on sinners who are already doomed. Combined with the aforementioned associations between Deva and the folkloric and natural elements of Georgia, Abuladze addresses the thin line between hope for Georgia's future, and Georgia's maternal importance to Georgians, and the potential for Georgia's destruction.

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, the poem "The Wanderings of Our Lady through Hell" is mentioned as having "descriptions as bold as Dante's," which provides another interesting textual intersection.³¹ The visual of the men digging the holes in *The Plea*, shown below in Figure 10, might be reminiscent of the trenches in the eighth circle of Dante's inferno, and Dante's description of Beatrice is very similar to Deva's characterization. Aluda climbs out of 'hell' up to the heavens in pursuit of the woman's soul, as characterized by the closeup of the woman's face before being executed, just as Dante pursues Beatrice's soul. Both occur in a dreamlike state and comment on the identities of their respective 'nations.' The last act of *The Plea* is reminiscent of Dante's Inferno. Abuladze has a pilgrim who is being guided by a beautiful and idyllic woman who represents divine love and salvation. Deva also attempts to protect our characters, as in the case of the burning home, and seemingly commissions the pilgrim's journey, and so Deva

³⁰ Grigorieff, Dmitry. "The Theotokos in the Orthodox Tradition and Russian Thought." *The Way*, pp. 22-29, <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/s045Grigorieff.pdf>.

³¹ Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*, translation by C. Garnett. New York, 1950, pp. 293.

becomes a combination of Virgil and Beatrice. This would be an interesting avenue of research, whether comparing the film and/or the source material to Dante's *Inferno* or even Georgia's version of the 'descent into hell' story structure in Georgian author Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's *The Smile of Dionysus*. I unfortunately do not have the Georgian language skills or Georgian literary resources needed to make any meaningful commentary on this avenue of research.



Fig 10: Men Digging Graves



Fig 11: Deva's Execution (3)

Conclusion

An analysis of *The Plea* reveals Abuladze's use of the female body to represent the dichotomy of goodness and suffering, as well as strength in grief. Both Deva and Agaza, the young Kistin woman, appear to be deprived of their agency as evidenced by the apparent forced marriage of Deva to the villainous-looking man and the inability of the young woman to save her fellow Kistin. However, Abuladze empowers Deva and Agaza by subverting the situations and environments they have found themselves in. Agaza finds power and agency in her tears and grief, as she is able to act outside of the village conglomerate. Similarly, Deva burns brightest as she is being hung before a crowd of men, subverting their attempts to dim her. Abuladze even shows a shot of the villainous man

retreating back into the shadows, which is reminiscent of the introductory shot at the film's start but set in reverse. *The Plea* closes with a shot of a cliff side, which was also featured in the opening scenes. This time, however, the camera does not begin panning upward. Deva, which had been the film's personification of goodness and divinity, has already ascended. The solutions and healing is left on earth, with the people who have been left behind, and there is no more need to pan up the cliffside and frame a shot of the heavens.

"Selling the Sun-Faced Tamar" in The Wishing Tree

The Georgian poet and prose writer Giorgi Leonidze first published writings in 1911, and he produced the bulk of his work throughout the late 1920s and into the Stalin-era. A member of the Georgian Symbolist group Blue Horns, his stylistic choice to write in myths and folkloric metaphor, in addition to his later decision to write poetry and prose in support of Stalin and the Soviet system and of course combined with a bit of luck, resulted in his being the only member of the group to survive the 1930s purges. His early poetry and short stories, while writing with Blue Horns, were nationalistic in nature but decried the Realism literary movements of recent Georgian classics. He instead reflected a desire to remember Georgian tradition and the character of the Georgian nation as one of overcomers. Tengiz Abuladze's *The Wishing Tree* is based on themes taken from short stories published in Leonidze's *In The Shade of Forgotten Ancestors*.

The Wishing Tree has a number of subplots with a numerous of supporting characters which come together within the central plot, which occurs between two star-crossed lovers, Marita and Gedy. Set in pre-revolutionary Georgia, *The Wishing Tree* opens with a field of blood-red poppies, serving as the background against which a stark white horse is struggling and breathing heavily. The horse is dying, and a young boy goes

off to fetch its owner, Gedy. The village leader, Tsitsikore, insists to Geyda that the horse needs to be put out of its misery and kills the horse before it can suffer. Ironically, Tsitsikore would show more humanity in this scene to an animal than to a fellow human later in the film. Abuladze begins with this scene, however, to set the dark tone of *The Wishing Tree* and acts as foreshadowing.



Figure 12: Death of Gedy's Horse



Figure 13: Covering the Scene in Red

The red colors of the poppies, combined with a death scene, is reminiscent of blood and loss but remembrance, as well.³² Periphery cultures, especially those of Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Georgians in the Caucasus, were facing a resurgence, but in many ways these people groups needed to remember how to remember these older traditions and practices, as mentioned earlier through government rewritings of holidays and traditions. Abuladze recognized that some of Georgia's more archaic traditions needed to die in order for it to fulfill its potential in the long run, and *The Wishing Tree* illustrates the nuance of reclaiming national traditions and identity while also acknowledging legacies which may now be outdated. The combination of the poppies and a death scene inspire images of

³² Remembrance and memory would also serve as an important theme in Abuladze's *Repentance*, produced in 1984 but premiering in 1987, and which would be his tour de force.

rebirth and remembrance through death. In this way, *The Wishing Tree* beginning and ending with a death also demonstrates the repetition and perpetuity of nature.

Three women stand out in *The Wishing Tree*: Pupala, the once beautiful fortuneteller who mourns a love that was never hers; Nargiza, the town flirt; and, of course, one of the primary protagonists, Marita, Gedy's forbidden love. I will spend time analyzing each of these women in the context of each of their stories and in the context of the overarching love story in the following pages.

Marita is the granddaughter of one of the older women living in the village, and she has returned to the village with her father after her mother's death.³³ The whole village is enamored by Marita's youth and beauty, and while Marita's name hints at her religious allegory, Marita is even outright referred to as "the Virgin Mary" and "St Mary the Virgin" throughout the film.³⁴ Abuladze also assigns Marita a role as a literal force of nature. He consistently frames Marita in natural spaces, whether in the stream with her grandmother or walking outside with the other women in the village. As Marita falls in love with Gedy, the couple is featured together on Georgia's mountain sides and cliff edges. Through this setting, Abuladze represents the physical freedom Marita experiences while spending time with Gedy, but also the nearness to danger. It is unlikely Gedy would ever receive permission to marry Marita given his financial status in the village, as is mentioned by Tsitsikore to Marita's father when discussing Marita's hand. The cliffside setting reminds the viewer of the danger of falling physically and falling in love metaphorically, a depiction which will haunt viewers with Marita's fall and collapse into the mud at the conclusion of

³³ "Marita" being the diminutive of "Mary."

³⁴ *Дева Мария* in Russian, *Ghvtsmshobeli* (transliterated) in Georgian

the film. Abuladze places Marita in these settings to solidify the viewer's association with Marita and nature, or Georgia specifically. The tie between Georgians and the Georgian landscape would have made this association unmissable. This assertion can even be found in the source material, *In the Shade of Forgotten Ancestors*, itself. Leonidze writes, "Our ancestors, Georgians, saw the yoke of many conquerors... No one could conquer their spirit or their love for their land."³⁵ Marita mimics the independence and free-spirited nature of the elements around her, but also the thin line between freedom and catastrophe. When Marita plays in the stream, the viewers are also reminded that Marita is really still just a child, reflecting the innocence and optimistic naivety of pre-revolutionary Georgia.

The parallel between femininity and nature is further emphasized when Marita is married to Shete, a rich villager, against her will. When telling Gedyā of her marriage, Marita dissociates herself as much as possible by announcing the news in the third person. "They decided to give Marita to Shete," she tells him. Marita's devastation and unhappiness is immediately demonstrated in the seasonal change. In the timeless space Marita occupies, which further mythicizes the story, the snow and cold are brutal, and she pleads for spring to come. Notably, this is the first time the viewer sees Marita indoors. Earlier in the film, Marita had mentioned to Gedyā that "the dew on the grass is the earth's tears" and that "everything on earth has a soul." Marita speaks infrequently, but when she does, it is of significance. The reference to the earth's soul in particular cements the interchangeability of Marita's soul and mood with Georgia's soul.

³⁵ Quote in Christensen, pp. 167. (Georgii Leonidze, *V teni rodnykh derev'ev*, trans. Elisbar Ananiashvili (Tbilisi: Literatura da khelovnedba, 1965), 225-226.)

Abuladze's associations, such as the cliffside with Gedy and Marita and Georgia with Marita through references to nature, are poignant because they are visual. Marita's representation as Georgia is not discussed through her personality or behaviors but through Marita's physical body and character structure, and it is to the latter which Abuladze draws the most attention. In this way, Abuladze is able to address the duality of Georgia's identity rooted in Orthodoxy and also in its rich cultural traditions and history. The scenes which resonate with the intersection of Georgian Orthodox tradition and secular Georgian history most, from this specific analytical approach of the female body, are the wedding scene and the punishment Marita faces at the film's conclusion for admitting love for Gedy. The wedding scene, for example, is a very traditional one. The wedding is the only scene in which Marita is not called St Mary (or St Nino).³⁶ One of the village onlookers calls Marita the "sun-faced Tamar." More specifically, the villager accuses the village of "selling the sun-faced Tamar" as Marita parades in her wedding headdress and garb alongside Shete. Queen Tamar, a canonized saint, plays an immense role in Georgian culture and history. A queen which led Georgia into the height of its Golden Age and whose femininity has always been a point of focus and pride, Tamar's name would not only associate Marita with Georgia but with all of Georgia's cultural achievements, medieval military successes, and romanticized past.³⁷ As this is the only time Marita is called Tamar, at the height of Marita's visually traditional Georgian appearance, one might conclude that Abuladze is commenting on the nature of Georgia's relationship with the Soviet Union, or Georgia's changing nature

³⁶ St. Nino is credited by the Georgian Orthodox Church with the Christianization of Georgia via her witnessing to the King Mirian III of Iberia.

³⁷ Ayşe Beyza BÜYÜKÇINAR. "The Last Ruler of the Golden Age of Georgia in Georgian Sources: Queen Tamar." *Karen-Karadeniz Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2017, pp. 31–46.

in general, which should have been “appropriate soil,” as the village leader described Shete and Marita’s union, for Georgia to succeed within the Soviet Union, but the pairing instead resulted in bitterness and tragedy. Instead, the marriage between Shete and Marita, and the Soviet Union and Georgia, was “poisonous,” as the pairing leads to Marita’s death, much like the way the village elder had referred to the grass that killed the white horse in the opening scene. Similarly, Georgia was planted in poisonous soil throughout the 20th century and suffered a metaphorical death consequently.

Martyrdom of the Virgin Mary

The second relevant scene, Marita’s punishment, draws attention to religious allegory. Marita subverts the one-dimensionality of “women as Madonna, women as whore” which characterized most of the women portrayed in films of Georgia’s previous cinematic golden age—the Silent Era—by existing in elements of both.³⁸ Marita is the Madonna, by nature and virtue, but the crime which ultimately claims Marita’s life is love for another man, Gedy, despite being married to Shete. Marita committed no physical betrayal beyond a hug, but the emotional betrayal became the focus. The fixation on the abstract feeling of love might be another indicator that *The Wishing Tree* was pointing out the political corruption of the Soviet Georgian system and larger Soviet Union at the time.

³⁸ Attwood, pp. 36.



Figure 14: Marita on the Donkey

Marita is also a Christ figure, as her youth and naivety have been sacrificed for outdated and unjust traditions. Just as Christ rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, to the adoration of those who would later kill him, Marita's earlier arrival and adoration from the village is visually perverted as she is paraded around on a donkey, this time sitting backwards, as punishment for her unfaithfulness. Notably, her namesake, the Virgin Mary, also rode on a donkey when travelling to Bethlehem. Abuladze creates Marita as both a Christ figure and a visual perversion of the sanctity of Mary's purity and virginity. Not only is Marita riding the donkey backwards, but Marita is dressed in a thin white shift, which only serves to emphasize the stains from the mud the villagers threw at her. Marita's youth and virginity are perverted in the way the villagers display Marita, with little clothing and hair hanging loosely. Even Nargiza, the town flirt, keeps her head and hair covered, emphasizing that Marita's uncovered, loose hair is the ultimate violation of Marita's body and agency.

In Leonidze's original text, a storm accompanies Marita's death and a period of drought follows.³⁹ Abuladze continues the natural consequences even after Marita's death demonstrates, again, the perpetuity of death and importance of remembrance as facilitated through Marita. It does not just stop at Marita's last breath. During the film, the hurricane which Abuladze's town fool predicts, occurs instead as Marita is paraded about, representing nature's fury with the act as it happens. As Nargiza, who embraces her sexuality and body, angrily points out, there is no person or force coercing the townsfolk to carry out the tradition of parading a fallen woman around the village. The villagers act somber and above it all, but ultimately Marita's death is on their hands. Nature's turbulent and violent response corroborates the immorality of the villagers' actions. Leonidze describes the villagers' response to the storm as being reverent, as if they understood their mistake and honored Marita's memory for it. Abuladze again emphasizes the tragedy of Marita's martyrdom, as only her grandmother is shown, in shock and mourning. Marita dies alone, not knowing what happened to her lover, who was shot earlier.

³⁹ Christensen, pp. 167. (Georgii Leonidze, *V teni rodnykh derev'ev*, trans. Elisbar Ananiashvili (Tbilisi: Literatura da khelovnedba, 1965), 225-226.)



Figure 15: Marita's Grandmother



Figure 16: Marita's Death

The camera rests for a while on Marita's abandoned body in the mud, emphasizing Marita's body lying in the mud as a second death. Marita's grandmother does not wail or scream; she instead raises her hands and arms and looks confused, demonstrating how much change has truly occurred in Georgia. Just as highlighted in *The Plea*, Georgia has prioritized the new associations over traditional Georgian identity and memory. A pomegranate grows at the site of Marita's death, a symbol of remembrance and rebirth, much like the death scene of poppies at the beginning of the film. Abuladze again combines the image of the female body with nature to illustrate the great tragedy and martyrdom the nation has faced, and yet the great hope and potential which comes with the cleansing nature of death. Marita represents the bright and beautiful Georgia that was close to nature and a virgin mother to her people, which the viewers are reminded of by Gedya's mother pleading to St Mary earlier in the film, that "[she's] a mother, too." Marita's, and Georgia's, purity and agency was tarnished by Sovietization, and her death could not have been complete without her own peoples' culpability. The village leader, Tsitsikore, demonstrates this hypocrisy in his earlier condemnation of trains whose tracks will scar the Georgian mountain sides and poison the air, and yet he willfully ignores nature's angry response

when he leads in the scarring of Marita's body with mud and the poisoning of her reputation and purity.

Nargiza and Pupala

It is also worth pointing out that it is the village outcasts who come to Marita's defense. Most volatile is Nargiza, who even manages to assault Tsitsikore with a mud clod of her own. Nargiza has, up until this point, been portrayed as haughty and vain. She knows how beautiful she is and that no one in the village is truly worthy of her. If Marita is the Virgin Mary, Nargiza is at first recognized as Marita's foil. However, the visual metaphors and symbols which adorn Nargiza's body reveals more of the truth. Although the viewer never hears Nargiza speak about religion or God, the viewers see a glimpse of her necklace during a tight shot of her chest, which portrays St. George killing the dragon. One of the patron saints of Georgia, St. George's slaying of the dragon is the epitome of good triumphing over evil. Wearing his symbol would have, of course, been natural for someone living in Georgia, as it is a national symbol, and it associates Nargiza with the country, but it also marks her as an overcomer. The viewer soon realizes Nargiza's haughtiness is a manifestation of her sense of self-worth. Nargiza alludes to this when answering the village elder and asking whether any man in the village is worthy of her. Additionally, instead of crumbling in despair or being dragged away from the punishment scene, Nargiza fights the longest and the most viciously against the village's violation of Marita. In this way, Abuladze uses Nargiza's body and self-realized sexuality to illustrate her agency and autonomy, not her superficiality. Abuladze associates Nargiza with Marita and the death scenes even before the climax through the color red. The red field of poppies and the red

pomegranate flower which grows at the site of Marita's death, as well as the red head scarf Nargiza wears, become associated with one another in the interest of Georgian identity.



Figure 17: Nargiza Defends Marita



Figure 18: The Pomegranate Flowers

Not only does the color red allude to blood and conflict, but red also has a longstanding tradition of representing Georgia, whether on flags in the days of Queen Tamar or St. George's red cross on the modern one. Nargiza does not die, however, and, consequently, comes to embody Georgia's strength, resilience, and indignation.

Nargiza's true foil lies in Pupala, the fortuneteller past her prime. Pupala visually represents the Soviet system and its failures. Pupala is a fortuneteller, which might point to the false prophecies the Soviet Union made for socialist utopia. Similarly, Pupala has been lying. It is revealed that the man Pupala has been pining over was really never Pupala's lover, and she is afraid of dying alone. However, the use of makeup and outlandish and bright clothing also references Western trends. In many ways, the character of Pupala can be regarded as a cautionary tale against the lulling security and appeal of Western systems. Georgia has always been pulled between the East and West throughout history, being situated at the crossroads of empires and having an abundance of natural resources as it

does. Pupala embodies the chaotic way Georgia is pulled in these many directions, which is emphasized by her meltdown in the mud at Marita's procession. In the face of tragedy, she falls apart, which stands in stark contrast to Nargiza's strength and indignation.

Conclusion

Overall, an analysis of the second installment of Abuladze's loose trilogy, *The Wishing Tree*, reveals Abuladze's use of the female body to represent fluctuating facets of Georgia's heritage and character. Death and memory are key themes in this representation, which Abuladze includes in order to emphasize the loss of Georgian traditions and the nuanced changes occurring in Brezhnev-era Georgia. In Marita, Abuladze presents the dueling historical and folkloric symbols intermingled with that of Orthodox symbolism and allegory, all of which are left to die in the mud. Abuladze ultimately portrays Marita as a Christ figure, as Marita is vilified and perverted by the conclusion of the film, but Marita's beauty and memory live on in the form of a pomegranate flower. As mentioned in this section, Marita's death follows Georgia's history and relationship with the Soviet Union. Nargiza represents the strength and resilience of Georgia through her independent and flirtatious nature, which foils Pupala's self-deprecation and pathetic fall from grace. The false promises and ambiguity of Soviet Georgia, in addition to the false promises of the West, need to be buried in order to pursue rebirth. Ultimately, through the cyclical nature of the film, beginning with death and ending with death, as well the emphasis on the pomegranate flower and Marita's soul melded with Georgia's, Abuladze asserts the strength and resilience of the Georgian state and people. Abuladze uses the female body as a mechanism for this commentary.

CHAPTER FOUR

Georgia's Cinema Archives and Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analyzed the role of women in films of Abuladze and Ghoghoberidze, two celebrated Soviet Georgian directors of the Brezhnev-era. Abuladze's *The Plea* (*Vedreba*, 1967) and *The Wishing Tree* (*Natvris Khe*, 1977) and Lana Gogoberidze's *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* (*Ramdenime Interviu Pirad Sakitkhebze*, 1978) draw attention to the themes of memory as facilitated through their female characters. In comparison to Abuladze, Ghoghoberidze's film is less allegorical but no less symbolic. She uses memory as facilitated by women in her film to provide commentary on women's issues in Soviet Georgia. Ghoghoberidze explores her themes through the exploration of three generations of women and uses visual symbolism to associate memory with each woman. Sofiko's mother was exiled just as Ghoghoberidze's mother was exiled, and Sofiko had to confront the fear of having no memory at all when her mother returned. Although there are few moments of Eka and Sofiko interacting, one of the most poignant scenes is Sofiko comforting her daughter when she awakens at night. Eka's figure, illuminated when all else is dark, looks strikingly similar to the picture of young Sofiko after her mother was taken. Ghoghoberidze uses memory to discuss women's issues on a large scale, but she also addresses the hope for a better Georgia. Hopefully Eka will not have to face the same fear and loneliness Sofiko faced as a child, and hopefully Sofiko can find happiness again in her children and work.

Grief and memory are similarly represented in Abuladze's female characters in *The Plea*. Deva and Agaza share a close relationship with grief and death which enables Abuladze to discuss Georgia's "lost soul" and the changes in which Georgians prioritize or

ignore their traditions. The overall drivers of the plot in *The Plea* are men, but it is predominately through women that the themes of memory and identity are explored. Deva represents Aluda's goodness, otherwise characterized as his soul, and Deva can also come to represent humanity on a greater scale. Deva's marriage to the film's personification of evil, the villainous man, and Deva's execution represent the nuance of this goodness, as it reflects the "lessons" learned in the two storylines involving the Kistins and the Khevsurs. The film viewer might expect Deva's death to indicate the death of hope itself; however, Deva's body shines the brightest during her execution, associating death with the idea of rebirth. Through the Kistin Agaza, Abuladze is able to tackle the motif of graves and burial as a form of national remembrance and identity. due to the cultural relevance of graves and death traditions in Georgia. For Georgians, remembering the dead and remembering the past in many ways become one and the same. Abuladze explores both these films with greater attention in *Repentance*, which was not included here due to its classification and influence as a glasnost-era (1986–1991) film. However, I believe it would be interesting and most effective to investigate the role of women, especially because in *Repentance* (*Monanieba*, produced in 1984 but premiered in 1987), a woman is the primary vessel of vengeance and drives the plot in this third installation.

In Abuladze's second film, *The Wishing Tree*, his themes are primarily represented through three different women. Through Marita, Abuladze presents the historical and religious identities of Georgia. The name Marita references the Virgin Mary, and Marita's associations with the nature and landscape tie her to Georgia directly. Nargiza, through her strong sense of self and confidence in her sexuality, who wears the likeness of St. George on her necklace that features prominently on her chest, represents the resilience of the

nation. Pupala, the aged fortuneteller and fibber, wears heavy white makeup and maintains an aloof personality, an aloofness which crumbles to pieces during the film's climax. Abuladze uses Marita to comment on the traditions and social aspects that Georgia still clings to, in addition to the failed system of the Soviet Union and the false promises of the West. In a thematic overlap with *Some Interviews on Personal Matters*, Pupala is also the only character which discusses loneliness. Ultimately, *The Wishing Tree*, too, ends in death. Marita's death closes the circle which began with the death of the white horse in the opening scenes of the film. *The Wishing Tree* and *The Plea* both center around the weddings and deaths of their respective Mary, which serves less to make a religious comment and more to highlight the virginity of the motherland of Georgia's mountains, valleys, and other natural elements. Deva and Marita are both closely associated with natural imagery, and their subsequent inappropriate suitors result in both women's death. Abuladze represents the Soviet Union as the improper suitor which results in Georgia's desecration and potential death via industrialization. In *The Wishing Tree*, only Marita's grandmother was left to mourn her, similarly to Agaza's scene in *The Plea*, nature remembered and grew a pomegranate flower. Abuladze and Ghoghoberidze share the use of ambiguity as a tool for hope for the future, and both directors' main characters experience a physical or metaphorical death to achieve rebirth. The concluding visual of the pomegranate flower in *The Wishing Tree* encourages hope for a liberated Georgia.

Abuladze is well-known for his emphasis on memory and remembrance, and Ghoghoberidze shares these themes. Georgians are particularly proud of their historic ability to hold on to their traditions and love for their land in confrontation with any conqueror or oppressor. Therefore, it makes sense that Abuladze and Ghoghoberidze, both

highly influential directors, would use memory as a motif for their commentary. While Ghoghoberidze facilitates this dialogue through women, her intent is to portray women in Georgia, not woman “as” Georgia, which is the case in Abuladze’s films. Ghoghoberidze’s interruptions, in the form of memories from her childhood and memories of past interviews, narratively mirror *The Plea*’s disjointedness. In contrast, Ghoghoberidze’s internal conflict is not one of a national character but of a personal one. Where Abuladze highlights collective memory, Ghoghoberidze utilizes personal and individualize memory. Both can both be viewed as commentaries on the Soviet system, however. As in the story of the donkey in *Some Interviews on Personal Matters*, the “kind” master does not actually have the donkey’s interests in mind. Women were invited and forced into the public sphere without adequate domestic support, and Ghoghoberidze represents women’s double burden through the story of the donkey. The idea of a donkey riding itself results in the same absurd visual imagery as Pupala’s outfits and makeup. All three films end on rather ambiguous notes, as well. Deva’s death may have represented the death of Aluda’s humanity, but her body shone even brighter in death than it had in life. The pomegranate flower grows at site of Marita’s death, but who is narrating? Has the village repented? Similarly, Sofiko has decided to separate from her husband, but will she be finally satisfied? All of these questions beg for answers. None of the films offer solutions, but they do offer possibilities. Ultimately, all three films do, however, affirm the importance of memory and remembrance, as facilitated by the female protagonists, in finding those answers.

Georgia’s Cinema Archival Situation and the Importance of Material Heritage

As has hopefully been demonstrated, Soviet Georgian film has made unique contributions to the history of cinema and retains aspects which are uniquely Georgian,

whether due to folkloric and historic commentary or because they pull directly from Georgian literary traditions. Georgian cinema experienced two golden ages in the past century, the first being the silent film era, and the second running from the death of Stalin in 1953 through the 1980s. During the Soviet era, the release of a film required directors to send the film negatives to Moscow's Goskino, the USSR State Committee for Cinematography, which decided whether the film was premiered or shelved. During this process, most regional film studios would also be required to send their original negatives and materials to be stored at Gosfilmofond, the state film archive. The Georgian Film Studio, specifically, retained duplicates of these original negatives, stored throughout the Central Archive of Audiovisual Documents, part of the National Archives of Georgia, the Georgian Film Studio's archive, and Georgia's National Documentary Studio.⁴⁰ In 2005, however, a fire at the Georgian Film Studio destroyed a number of vaults, and political and economic tensions with Russia, especially post-2008, hindered access to any of the original negatives stored in Moscow. I was able to see the Georgia State Museum of Theatre, Music, and Cinematography's, also known as the Art Palace's, small collection of posters, costumes, film prints, and other materials. Internationally, the Pacific Film Archive (PFA), located in Berkeley, California, and Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, a silent film festival held in Italy, have attempted to collect and maintain Georgian film negatives.⁴¹ More recently, a fire in September 2023 damaged an unknown number of original cinematographic works, sparking criticism in Georgia about the continued neglected

⁴⁰ White, Jerry. "The Archival Situation of Georgian Cinema." University of Minnesota Press, *The Moving Image*, Volume 14, Number 1, Spring 2014, pp. 10-29.

⁴¹ White, pp. 16.

condition of the archives. The resulting dynamic is complicated. While Moscow still retains many of the original negatives of Georgian films and recognizing the importance of material heritage for countries traditionally suppressed by Russia in particular, especially in a post-invasion of Ukraine environment, Georgia has also yet to correct many of the issues related to its archives and preservation methods. Restoration of the film is a key necessity, as well, which would not be possible until the management and organization of Georgia's archives are reformed. In an interview with *Klassiki*, a video-on-demand platform which is dedicated exclusively to cinema from Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Ghogoberidze discusses the situation regarding cinema after 1991. For a while, she mentions, the filmmaking world rejoiced at the opportunity to make films in an open and censorship-free environment. Instead, the first two or three decades after Georgian independence had convinced Ghogoberidze that Georgian cinema was dead. The death of Georgian cinema is, of course, due very much in part to the challenges presented by infrastructure during the Brezhnev era (1964–1982) and *glasnost* (1986-1991) and subsequent civil war (1991-1993). Similarly, Georgian film students would have few resources to study their own nation's cinematic history and masters given this archival situation. Ghogoberidze mentioned that, within the past five years, Georgian film has seen a resurgence, predominantly led by female directors, one of which is Ghogoberidze's own daughter, Salome Aleksi. Just as the celebrated works of Ukrainian director Larisa Shepitko, Ghogoberidze's and others' "women's cinema" has become an epicenter for a new wave of cinematic excellence. Other trailblazing directors include Ana Urushadze, who directed *Scary Mother* (2017), which won best film at the Sarajevo Film Festival, and Dea Kulumbegashvili, who directed *Beginning* (2020), which was selected for the 2020

Cannes Film Festival Part of Georgia's cinema resurgence can be attributed to both Georgia's stabilizing infrastructure, a byproduct of its attempts to join the EU. It can also be credited to the Georgian government's recent success in retrieving cinematographic materials and the unprecedented access to information the modern-day internet provides.

Film and video in general as a medium have become a uniquely poised outlet for historical, social, and cultural preservation. Not only did Georgian cinema contribute to and influence cinema internationally, but 1970s *auteurs* such as Abuladze, Rezo Chkheidze, and Otar Iosseliani, Soviet Georgian film also celebrated and explored Georgian identity. While writing this thesis and visiting Tbilisi, I could not help but think of how relevant the remembrance of a country's material heritage is, especially in the context of Russia's tendency to wage both physical and cultural wars with its neighbors. Just as the conflict surrounding Ukrainian versus Russian literary traditions and authors has become integral to the geographical war itself, the discussion of these themes in film or other media can better assist the West in understanding the cultural implications and causation of related conflicts involving Russia when tensions flare in their neighborhood.

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