

THE KAZAKH NEW WAVE:
OVERCOMING SOCIALIST REALISM IN THE AGE OF NEW WAVES

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Introduction

In 1988, Murat Auezov, the editor-in-chief at Kazakhfilm national film studio proposed its structural reformation.¹ From now on, the studio was to be divided into two creative associations, *Miras* (“heritage”) and *Alem* (“world”, “universe”), that in the next few years would become home to a number of key films of the decade, later collectively known as the Kazakh New Wave.² The former division devoted its attention to the questions of Kazakh national culture through historical, ethnographic, and folkloric films, while the latter demonstrated strong commitment to their official motto of “knowledge of the world in its motion” and encouraged production of films of modern, cosmopolitan, and all-round character.³ Even though the *Alem* and *Miras* associations had gradually disappeared, the emergence of these divisions at Kazakhfilm in the second half of the 1980s reveals a lasting dilemma about priorities in the Kazakh cinema industry.⁴ What themes should the Kazakh filmmakers tackle – national or universal ones? The Kazakh New Wave films that were made at those two studios were neither entirely national nor completely cosmopolitan.

Murat Auezov understood the impossibility of resolving this dilemma by the emerging directors of the Kazakh New Wave. He believed that the most essential prerequisite for the success of contemporary local filmmaking was a combination of both national and transnational factors. In particular, according to Auezov, any substantial development in Kazakh cinema required a nationally motivated feature of “historical self-consciousness” or “sense of historicism”, while the global, or transnational, prerequisite for cinematic progress was the ability on the part of filmmakers to enter into dialogue with culture of other world regions.⁵ The Kazakh New Wave made a substantial and lasting impact on the state of Kazakh national cinema, and if we follow Auezov’s way of thinking, this progressive artistic phenomenon had to

¹ Gulnara Abikeyeva, *Natsiostroitelstvo v Kazakhstane i drugikh stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii* (Almaty: OF “Tsentralno-Aziatskoi Kinematografii”, 2006), 151.

² Ibid.

³ Gulnara Abikeyeva, *Novoie Kazakhskoie Kino. Katalog* (Almaty, International Film Festival “Eurasia”: 1998), 5.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Abikeyeva, “Kino – eto iskusstvo tekhniki, komu prinadlezhit mir”. Interview with Murat Auezov”, in *Natsiostroitelstvo*, 106-107.

be caused by both its national “historical self-consciousness” and proliferation of transnational links.⁶ Two questions, rephrased under the influence of the rise of global studies, are therefore central for this essay: What were the main local and global premises for the emergence of the Kazakh New Wave filmmakers? How did these premises play out in their films?⁷

In this essay, I will argue that as much as the Kazakh New Wave was an active participant in global cinematographic experiences, such as that of *new waves*, it is also a representation of the inherently local and contradictory process of overcoming Socialist Realism. The Kazakh New Wave was a part of the global phenomenon of *new waves* evident particularly in the educational background of its directors, the sociopolitical context in which it emerged, and, most importantly, in its films. At the same time, the Kazakh New Wave played a significant role in the history of local cinema, as its directors took on a mission to overcome Socialist Realism, an official aesthetic-political project permeating the sphere of arts in the Soviet Union and in Soviet Kazakhstan from the early 1930s. The mission, which aimed at breaking away from the Socialist Realist legacy in conventional Kazakh cinema of the past, is traced in this paper not only through the Kazakh New Wave filmmakers’ expressed self-identity, but also in the themes, literary elements, and style of their films. The outcomes of this mission in their film practice point at a dialectical character of the interaction between the Kazakh New Wave and Socialist Realism, as they include both a rejection of Socialist Realist cinematic features in those three aspects and a preservation of some of the doctrine’s ideals and approaches, such as their films’ highly social aspect and their capacity of staging realism.

There is a significant limitation on the part of the existing literature on the Kazakh New Wave, taking into account the rising trend in more radical global approaches to studying cinema. To address that limitation, this essay seeks to situate the phenomenon of the Kazakh New Wave in the context of global

⁶ Birgit Beumers, “Waves, Old and New, in Kazakh Cinema,” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 4, no. 2 (2010): 203, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2010/27-beumers.shtml>.

⁷ On the relatively recent rise of global studies see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “What is Global Studies?,” *Globalizations* 10, no. 4 (2013): 499-514.

cinema, in general, and global *new ways*, in particular, pointing out the explicit ways in which these Kazakh filmmakers and their films are a manifestation of a global *new wave*. Another gap that this essay aims to fill is the absence in the Kazakh New Wave scholarship of the topic of Socialist Realism, which is central to any discussion on Soviet and post-Soviet art. Using the rather universal prism of Socialist Realism and its legacy in cinema to analyze the Kazakh New Wave's premises and cinematic elements will drive the discussions of the New Wave's local influences further by challenging the largely nationalist character of the existing interpretations of the topic.

The next first subparts will cover a review of literature and a brief background on the topic. Part I of my paper will cover the first pillar of my argument, that is, - the Kazakh New Wave's participation in global processes through the educational and larger sociopolitical background, in which its directors emerged. Part II will discuss the conventional Soviet and Kazakh Socialist Realist cinemas and demonstrate the Kazakh New Wave filmmakers' desire to rebel against it – the second pillar of my main argument. Part III will add to both of the previous points by providing an analysis of the Kazakh New Wave films and their use of thematic, literary, and stylistic elements in comparison to those of Socialist Realism and their counterparts in global *new waves*. Most histories on the topic prioritize and focus on Rashid Nugmanov's *The Needle* (1988) and Ardak Amirkulov's *The Fall of Otrar* (1991). This essay, in contrast, will look at other films that have not been paid the same amount of attention in recent Soviet film scholarship, but which, in my view, equally represent the essence of the Kazakh New Wave filmography. Those films will include Abai Karpykov's *A Little Fish in Love* (1989), Serik Aprymov's *The Last Stop* (1989), Amir Karakulov's *Homewrecker* (1991), Darezhan Omirbayev's *Kairat* (1991), as well as some other short and feature films more briefly.

Literature Review

A review of literature on the topic of the Kazakh New Wave reveals an increasing amount of interest towards this subject on the part of historians and experts from other academic and non-academic disciplines. A substantial number of material focusing on this Kazakh film current, has appeared in the last decade and

included articles, published interviews, film reviews, talk shows, and a documentary. Nonetheless, the existing narratives on the Kazakh New Wave remain limited to national and regional settings. For example, in his book, Rico Isaacs analyzes how different representations of Kazakh identity have been constructed throughout the history of Kazakh cinema from the very beginning up until today.⁸ The Kazakh New Wave is discussed by Isaacs primarily in the context of historical changes in local cinema and national identity construction. Michael Rouland's introductory chapter for *Cinema in Central Asia: Rewriting Cultural Histories* can be seen as a successful attempt at writing the Kazakh New Wave into regional histories of cinema, as it combines filmmaking from all Central Asian regions in a single and united narrative.⁹ There are also studies of all-Union level Soviet cinema that include the Kazakh New Wave. Instead of focusing exclusively on Rashid Nugmanov's *The Needle* (1988) as most of the Soviet film scholars have done, Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky's 1992 book explored in depth most of the Kazakh New Wave's films in the context of Soviet *perestroika* cinema.¹⁰

One of the limitations of the national and regional narratives of the Soviet film history is that they omit the topic of Socialist Realism, which is central to studies of Soviet art being the ultimate political-aesthetic project of the Soviet state. Rico Isaacs' grasp of Socialist Realism is reduced to a couple of notes on *Chapaev* (1934) and *Amangeldy* (1933), as examples of Socialist Realist traditions employed in what he calls "conventional" cinema of the USSR and Soviet Kazakhstan.¹¹ Other works that discuss Soviet national cinemas in the context of geographically larger areas fail to include any substantial discussion of Socialist Realism. This is despite the fact that studies in Soviet art history have for long emphasized the immediate

⁸ Rico Isaacs, *Film and Identity in Kazakhstan: Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture in Central Asia*, (London, New York: I.B. Taurus, 2018).

⁹ Michael Rouland, "An Historical Introduction," in *Cinema in Central Asia: Rewriting Cultural Histories*, ed. Michael Rouland, Gulnara Abikeyeva, and Birgit Beumers (London: L.B. Tauris, 2013), 1-30.

¹⁰ Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky, *The Zero Hour: Glasnost and Soviet Cinema in Transition* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992). The following book editions seem to focus only on Rashid Nugmanov's *The Needle: The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. by Birgit Beumers (London: Wallflower Press, 2007) and *Cinema in Central Asia: Rewriting Cultural Histories*, ed. by Michael Rouland, Gulnara Abikeyeva, and Birgit Beumers (London: L.B. Tauris, 2013).

¹¹ Isaacs, 72-73.

usefulness of applying the perspective of Socialist Realism in the study of all arts produced in the USSR.¹² There arises an increased relevance to the attempts to centralize Socialist Realism in future discussions over Soviet national cinemas. In order to bring the topic out of the margins of current historiography on Soviet filmmaking, I intend to place Socialist Realism at the center of the study of the New Wave of Kazakh cinema and its local origins.

Another limitation of currently existing literature on the Kazakh New Wave is the absence of more fundamental studies on this New Wave's global connections to other strands of filmmaking from around the world. The works that discuss the Kazakh New Wave's global features are well known. Since the year of 1989, when the term *new wave* had been first applied or rather self-applied to the works of young Kazakh filmmakers, mostly for the purposes of advertising themselves at festivals, local and foreign film experts from different disciplines rushed to meditate on whether "the old yet catchy epithet" is justified.¹³ In 1992, Andrei Plakhov's article named "French Lessons"/*Uroki Frantsuzskogo* appeared in the journal *Iskusstvo Kino* and replied to the question of suitability of that label for recent Kazakh film productions.¹⁴ Here, Plakhov analyzed in detail how two films by Kazakh directors, which he simply called a *new wave*, can be compared to the works of the French New Wave and other European cinemas. He eventually called the young Kazakh director Amir Karakulov a "Kazakh Truffaut" and named another director Abay Karpykov's film *Vozdushnyi Potselui*/"Air Kiss" "a kiss from [Roger] Vadim".¹⁵ He concluded that the "French lessons" of this *new wave* had been successfully learnt particularly in themes, character development and psychology, as well as in cinematic style with the exception of a few drawbacks.¹⁶ Thus, a verdict on the newly emerged Kazakh films' pertinence to their *new wave* references and foreign film movements had

¹² This is based on a general consensus between art historians that Socialist Realism is indicative of the Soviet art and the Soviet past in general. See the works of James, Lahusen, Dobrenko from Bibliography.

¹³ Ludmila Zebrina Pruner, "The New Wave in Kazakh Cinema," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 4 (1992): 791.

¹⁴ Andrei Plakhov, "Uroki Frantsuzskogo," *Iskusstvo Kino*, 3, 1992, 154-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* This is despite the fact that the French New Wave allegedly denied "psychology" in their films.

emerged and done so quickly without actually giving an opportunity for more radical considerations of the Kazakh New Wave's connections to global filmmaking.

Since the discussion of the success of “French lessons”, the attempts to situate the Kazakh New Wave in a more global context have failed despite the transnational character of the phenomenon of cinematic *new waves* that have for long been established as global. As later studies on the Kazakh film productions from the Soviet period of *perestroika* started to take the *new wave* label and its international roots for granted, it resulted in highly abstract and metaphorical references to the Kazakh New Wave's global influences. This trend can be seen from the following summary of a Russian film expert, Andrei Shemyakin:

Назвав молодых казахских режиссеров «новой волной», московская критика сразу же определила их место в мировой, а отчасти и отечественной традиции. Имелось в виду, во-первых, пусть и относительное, но единство формальностилистических поисков, а также общность культуры, времени и поколения. Плюс почти у всех был общий учитель – Сергей Соловьев. Во-вторых, подразумевался некий пафос обновления, связанный с европейским кино, с 1960-ми годами, то есть опять-таки со временем «новых волн»... Можно множить аллюзии (Апрымов – Антониони, Нугманов – Годар и т. д.), но они мало что объясняют вне контекста.¹⁷

Indeed, the existing references to the Kazakh New Wave's role in world cinema traditions are not very useful due to their allusiveness and abstractness, having no solid basis except for Andrei Plakhov's detailed analysis of “French Lessons” discussed earlier, which too remains rather dubious at points. Therefore, the attempts at putting the Kazakh New Wave within a larger, transnational context have failed, as film scholars and experts continue to refuse to draw more explicit connections between this Kazakh cinematic phenomenon and the larger developments in global cinema. With the rise in recent years of literature on global cinema, including that of global *new waves* as opposed to strictly national or Eurocentric considerations of the phenomenon, there is a need for a fundamental reconsideration of the Kazakh New Wave's role in global cinematic processes.¹⁸ To address this need and bridge the gap between the Kazakh

¹⁷ Andrei Shemyakin, quoted by Gulnara Abikeyeva in “Kazakhskoie Kino Epokhi Nezavisimosti”, *Kultura*, 12, December 2016, 172.

¹⁸ See James Tweedie, *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014). Also see *1968 and Global Cinema*, ed. Christina Gerhardt and Sara Saljoughi (Wayne State University Press, 2018).

New Wave studies and the recent trend of global cinema studies, this essay will seek to situate the phenomenon of the Kazakh New Wave in its global context by drawing more explicitly on its transnational character and connections.

Background on the Formation of the Kazakh New Wave

For over twenty years starting from the 1960s, Soviet Kazakhstan experienced significant problems with its cinema industry. According to Ludmila Pruner, in contrast to its neighboring counterparts in Central Asia, during this period Kazakh national production was consistently underperforming: not once had it been able to meet a six feature annual quota.¹⁹ In the mid-1980s, the crisis in Kazakhstani cinema had reached its peak.²⁰ Meanwhile, just before being offered an opportunity to organize a filmmaking course for young Kazakh students, Sergei Soloviov, a well-known Russian film director, travelled in Kazakhstan to gather material for his next feature.²¹ When he arrived to Almaty in 1984, he had a chance to be introduced to Olzhas Suleimenov. The famous Kazakh poet and writer, and at the time the Minister of Cinematography of the Kazakh SSR, Suleimenov showed Soloviov around Kazakhfilm national studio, which left a striking impression on the Russian director up to this date.²² During this excursion, the filmmaker noticed many of the studio's technical objects being sealed and Suleimenov explained to him, "Unfortunately, we have a very serious personnel problem".²³ Another problem that Kazakh film industry had had in the period before *perestroika* was the difficulty for willing individuals from across the Soviet Union to receive film education in the center due to low entrance quota for national minorities and the unfair, non-merit based selection process.²⁴

¹⁹ Pruner, 792. Also, I will use the term "Kazakh" meaning related to Kazakhstan in general; not in an ethnic, but in a civic sense of the word.

²⁰ Abikeyeva, *Natsiostroitelstvo*, 105-106.

²¹ Sergei Soloviov, interview by Yevgeniia Smirre, "Rezhisser Solovyev – o kazakhskom kinematografe, "Anne Kareninoi" i o krizise obschestva," last modified September 19, 2014, <https://www.caravan.kz/art/rezhisser-solovev-o-kazakhskom-kinematografe-anne-kareninojj-i-o-krizise-obshhestva-19365/>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 1. Ibid. 2. Serik Aprymov, *Souvenirs de Vague [Memories of the Wave]*, directed by Eugenie Zvonkine (2016; France: Badlands, 2016), Vimeo.com, 32:45; Ardak Amirkulov, Ibid., 06:14.

Olzhas Suleimenov and Murat Auezov were the foundational figures behind the formation of the Kazakh New Wave. According to a film critic Gulnara Abikeyeva, then a member at the Kazakhfilm's scriptwriting division under Auezov's supervision, Auezov pursued a "conscious policy of supporting young filmmakers".²⁵ Soloviov described the details of how himself and Auezov's boss, Olzhas Suleimenov had been devising the project of what would be later called the Kazakh New Wave:

And we began to think what to do. He was interested not only in the national quota, but in a mentally new generation of Kazakhs who could do something that past generations did not do. And I offered him, and he quickly picked up this idea - to make a Kazakh-targeted workshop at VGIK, focused on expanding this film studio. Then Olzhas called our Soviet Minister, Chairman of the State Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers for Cinematography, Filip Timofeevich Yermash – he agreed (...) ²⁶

That at first glance spontaneous meeting of the two artists had decided the fate of the next generation of Kazakh filmmakers. Contrary to the way individuals had usually been selected for highly prestigious educational institutions in the USSR, as was VGIK, the future directors of the Kazakh New Wave were chosen openly, on the basis of merit and talent. Soloviov sought to ensure that no *napravlenets* could sneak into the pool of chosen students, so he himself went to Almaty for recruitment, personally sending out advertisements to newspapers and radio stations.²⁷ The format of some of the tasks in the application process was to write a short story or to make a short movie.²⁸ Not only were those interested in direction selected, but scriptwriters and painters as well.²⁹ The selection was competitive, with many youngsters interested in a film direction career showing up. Among them were Rashid Nugmanov, Ardak Amirkulov, Darezhan Omirbayev, Amir Karakulov, Abay Karpykov, Serik Aprymov – the future faces of the Kazakh New Wave.³⁰

²⁵ Abikeyeva, *Natsiostroitelstvo*, 105.

²⁶ Soloviov, see note 1 above.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ 1. Amir Karakulov, interview by Alyona Miroshnichenko, "Amir Karakulov: Ya hochu snyat' indiiskoye kino," last modified January 17, 2017, <https://www.voxpopuli.kz/interview/amir-karakulov-ya-hochu-snyat-indiyskoe-kino-13397.html>. 2. Abai Karpykov, "Abai Karpykov, Prishlo novoe pokolenie ...", interview by Alla Gerber, *Iskusstvo Kino*, no.9, 1990, 79.

²⁹ Amir Karakulov, interview by Sabina Kuzenbayeva, "Tok-shou Na Kryshe," Tengri.tv, video, 5:06, July 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOQZXSSI294>.

³⁰ Soloviov, see note 1 above.

The feasibility of such a project, in the Soviet Union, even if being mainly orchestrated by intellectual elite figures in authority, indicates very vividly the kind of change that the country's cultural and political realms were experiencing around the start of the period of *perestroika*. This time is associated with the rise of a new political leader of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, who from 1985 onward began advocating for *perestroika*, or “restructuring”. This encompassed significant economic reforms giving state enterprises greater latitude in determining output levels, as well as a campaign of *glasnost*, meaning openness or transparency in political, economic, and social matters. For the Soviet Union in general, these measures certainly resulted in new types of interaction between the state, the Party, and the citizens.³¹ For artists and filmmakers working in the Soviet Union, the policies of *glasnost*’ provided “more security and less fear from persecution and detention”.³² As Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky wrote in their book on *glasnost*’ and Soviet cinema, “since 1985 filmmakers have been using the new freedoms to push the aesthetic and ideological boundaries of Soviet cinema further than ever before, to the degree that “Soviet” is, in a number of cases, an inadequate term for the emerging forms of filmmaking.”³³ Thus, since the mid-1980s there emerged in the Soviet Union an unprecedented level of artistic freedom and filmmakers from across the country rushed in various ways to exercise that freedom.

Part I: The Kazakh New Wave as a Global *New Wave*

Arriving from the periphery of Soviet empire, the Kazakh New Wave possessed a particularly global character. First, the main global links that the Kazakh students of Sergei Soloviov possessed had been forged during their time at VGIK. This time was important because these global links influenced their later film practices (as we will see in the film analysis of Part III) and their emergence as the Kazakh *new wave*, as they were introduced to professional prerequisites of cinematic global *new waves*. The Kazakh New

³¹ 1. Vladislav Zubok, “(Chapter 10) Gorbachev and the End of Soviet Power, 1988-1991,” in *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 313. 2. Mikhail Gorbachev, “Key Sections of Gorbachev Speech Given to Party Conference,” trans. Tass, *New York Times*, June 29, 1988, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/06/29/world/key-sections-of-gorbachev-speech-given-to-party-conference.html>.

³²Horton and Brashinsky, 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35

Wave is a part of global cinema also because its context fitted another prerequisite for the emergence of a global *new wave*: as foreign *new waves* emerged in the environments of significant sociopolitical transition, so did the Kazakh New Wave. Thus, transnational links and events both in and outside of cinematic context had profound influence in precipitating the appearance of the Kazakh New Wave in its global physiognomy after 1989.

Lessons in Global Cinema

The future stars of many international film festivals, Sergei Soloviov's Kazakh students proliferated global links essential for their emergence as a *new wave* early on during their studies at VGIK. These links included professional preparation based on the experiences of other *new waves*, such as those from Italy and France. For example, the French New Wave film critics and filmmakers were organized around one central teacher figure in the face of Andre Bazin, the head and co-founder of *Cahiers du Cinema* magazine, for whom they worked and to whom figures, such as Francois Truffaut, owed their achievements in the film sphere.³⁴ Similarly, the Kazakh New Wave and their achievements were also united around one master figure that was Sergei Soloviov. More importantly, as the Routledge Companion to Film History claims, *new wave* or *new cinema* labels "are applied when a body of films appears which somehow distinguish themselves – by their modernist effects, the pronounced style of their auteur directors, their similar subject matter and cultural influences – from the more conventional and commerce-driven filmmaking that preceded them and continues to surround them".³⁵ The terms are also "defined and given coherence by the professional collaboration between the filmmakers who constitute them".³⁶ In the Kazakh New Wave, many of these qualities of *new waves* were taught and developed during their studies at VGIK.

In his workshop, Sergei Soloviov gave his Kazakh students lessons that covered the professional experiences and highly cinematic language of other *new waves* (as opposed to literary language), while

³⁴ David Thorburn, "21. Truffaut, the Nouvelle Vague, The 400 Blows", MIT OpenCourseWare, March 16, 2016, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flAwb1TmOkQ>.

³⁵ "Critical Dictionary", *The Routledge Companion to Film History*, ed. by William Guynn (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 215.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

allowing his students to develop their own perceptions of reality that would be projected on screen. These lessons included developing an *auteur* style, appreciation for the pioneers of global cinematic *new waves*, the techniques of a documentary approach, and considerations of *mise-en-scene* that helped to achieve realism. From the first days of the special courses the Russian director ensured that his students were aware that he was there only as guidance, who aimed to uncover the unique talents of each of the students that were yet to be expressed.³⁷ In doing so, he rejected the idea of a unifying collective.³⁸ This can be seen as Soloviev's intention to develop the students' own *auteur* styles that would express their own understanding and views of the world on the screen – a particular example of the French New Wave's influence.³⁹ As Serik Aprymov remembered, Soloviev said in the first months of the workshop,

У меня такое ощущение, что вы все для меня как чистый лист бумаги, и я по этому листу бумаги не хочу ничего писать. Я хочу как [будто] утюгом горячим прогладить и весь ваш опыт, ваш менталитет, ваши чувства, все это просто проявится – вот это моя задача.⁴⁰

According to Rashid Nugmanov, however, Soloviev was quite tough on aesthetics, meaning that in his teaching he followed one clear framework that was based predominantly on the language of film, as a medium and not a literary adaptation, - a cinematic language that is closely associated with global *new waves*.⁴¹ He screened exclusively films of the famous art cinema of the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism and avoided the “talking heads” of “mass conveyer productions”.⁴² This granted his students the prerequisites both for creating their own *auteur* styles that would demonstrate their own perspectives of reality on the screen and for demonstrating an appreciation of the *new wave* cinematic language in their later work as film professionals.

³⁷ Rashid Nugmanov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 30:42.

³⁸ Serik Aprymov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 33:20.

³⁹ Inspiring cinemas around the world including the French New Wave and its *auteur* theory, Neorealist films celebrated creative freedom of the filmmaker to discuss any subject against dramatic, generic, and stylistic traditions of studio-based mainstream filmmaking. See Prakash Younger, *The Routledge Companion to Film History*, 34.

⁴⁰ Serik Aprymov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 31:49.

⁴¹ Rashid Nugmanov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 19:41.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 20:12.

Other lessons from global *new waves*, such as the modernist techniques for everyday documentary effect, *mise-en-scene*, or staging of realism, and rejection of literary elements were also taught by Sergei Soloviov.⁴³ The style that Sergei Soloviev taught, according to Rashid Nugmanov, was based on an “approximation to reality”.⁴⁴ Serik Aprymov added on the lessons taken from the French New Wave during the workshop, “The movie should look so realistic even the look of a person should not lie”.⁴⁵ At the workshop, the Kazakh students were very often given a task to stage theatrical etudes (short plays), where they would use non-professional actors and themselves play at each other’s plays.⁴⁶ They were thus introduced to the tradition of staging realism and using non-professional actors, associated with Italian Neorealism, that the Kazakh New Wave would later employ in their own films to achieve a documentary style.⁴⁷ Such concepts as “creating an environment” and staging of the set, or *mise-en-scène*, the defining philosophy of the French New Wave were also covered.⁴⁸ That is when Rashid Nugmanov understood that to give a scene ‘life’ meant to stage and decorate the scene to 360 degrees in order to create a sense of complete environment, even if only 180 degrees would be shot by camera.⁴⁹ Another example given by Soloviov to explain the style of the French New Wave was Truffaut’s consideration of ceilings height to make the character’s gaze at the ceiling and the space, where the film took place, seem more realistic.⁵⁰ That lesson gave the Kazakh students an understanding of how to stage realism in their films.

⁴³ 1. Neorealist films of immediate post-war era represented “a dramatic break with the conventions of the the classical narrative cinemas that had dominated mainstream film production since Griffith”. See Younger, 34. 2. It was the stylistic innovations of the French New Wave – “often deemed to be self-reflexive, calling attention to the very medium itself through its penchant for long takes and tracking shots, as well as its use of jump cuts and break with the 180-degree rule or organization of space” – that influenced future film movements worldwide. See Gerhardt and Saljoughi, 11.

⁴⁴ Rashid Nugmanov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 20:27.

⁴⁵ Serik Aprymov, *Ibid.*, 23:12.

⁴⁶ Rashid Nugmanov, *Ibid.*, 20:45.

⁴⁷ On the emergence of Italian Neorealists’ tradition of the use of non-professional actors see Thorburn.

⁴⁸ 1. Rashid Nugmanov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 24:38. 2. The French New Wave helped future filmmakers “describe how a director’s precise and coordinated use of *mise-en-scène* (i.e. details of the script, set design, cinematography, editing, direction of actors, etc.) resulted in a unique and personal expression of his or her response to the subject matter of a film (considered to be the mark of an *auteur* or film author), even when the subject matter was itself determined by the commercial constructions of mainstream studio-based filmmaking (e.g. the use of stars, genre conventions, etc.)”. See Younger, 34.

⁴⁹ Rashid Nugmanov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 23:55.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

The move to a rejection of highly literary language in film, a rejection that is associated with *new waves*, which the Kazakh New Wave later manifested in their films, also happened in the classroom.⁵¹ For example, parables, in the style of literature, were said to be strictly avoided.⁵² For this cinematic language taught by Solovyov the camera was now the basis or the “feather” of any work, as opposed to a theatrical play script or a literary work.⁵³ In all the mentioned examples there is an evident influence of the *new wave* pioneers, who developed those theories and practices, passed on to young Kazakh students in Sergei Soloviov’s workshop. We can detect the many echoes of these “French lessons” in the Kazakh New Wave productions themselves, which will be analyzed in the film analysis section of this paper.

Some other global *new wave* influences that would be seen in the films of the Kazakh New Wave analyzed in Part III are also essential to point out here. These are the commitment in film to an exploration of social conflicts, cinematic self-reflexiveness, and several other documentary and non-documentary style modernist effects. As David Thorburn claims, one of the most important legacy of Italian Realism was a strong social commentary.⁵⁴ Self-reflexiveness also played a major role for the *auteur* directors of the French New Wave, as they often reminded the viewer that the film is no more than a set of moving images through different techniques including making films about the process of filmmaking itself.⁵⁵ Moreover, the increasing importance of film (and art in general) in people’s life was a frequent theme and another mark of self-reflexiveness in these films.⁵⁶ Following that line of self-reflexiveness, the French New Wave directors, such as Francois Truffaut, had an autobiographical tradition (e.g. *Les Aventures d'Antoine Doinel* (1959-1979)).⁵⁷ All these types of self-reflexiveness are an important feature of *new waves*.

⁵¹ On the Italian Neorealist and French New Wave’s treatment of literary elements, such as improvisation in dialogue, script, and plot, see Thorburn.

⁵² Rashid Nugmanov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 25:29.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Thorburn, see note 27 above.

⁵⁵ Thorburn, see note 27 above.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Moreover, *new wave* pioneers emphasized a “more immediate, documentary approach to the representation of the contemporary world”.⁵⁸ The stylistic techniques of long take aesthetics and jump cuts were created to help achieve this approach.⁵⁹ Along with the use of non-professional actors, Italian Neorealist filmmakers started a tradition of location shooting.⁶⁰ The French New Wave’s use of “freeze” frames, used to emphasize either a cinematic self-reflexiveness or a film’s open-endedness, was also an important invention in the history of global cinema.⁶¹ Thus, with these techniques, the global *new wave* pioneers marked an end to the triumph of the highly literary language of early cinema. The traditions established by them, such as social commentary, self-reflexiveness, and modernist effects of a predominantly documentary approach would highly affect the themes, literary elements, and style of the Kazakh New Wave’s film productions. This is studied in Part III of this essay.

The Context of Global Sociopolitical Transition

Another reason the Kazakh New Wave is a part of global phenomenon of *new waves* is the sociopolitical context in which its filmmakers were formed. The context of socioeconomic transition is an important characteristic of all global *new waves*, as similar socioeconomic transformations happening around the world after World War II led to the emergence of parallel artistic movements. For example, the pioneers of *new waves*, the French New Wave, had been formed in the context of changing environments of post-war Europe. Their intellectual concern with the ambivalence of concepts of modernity arose in the middle of two worlds: the old “world” of material, depicting the still ruminating ruins of the World War II, on the one side and the new “world” of image, demonstrating society’s obsession with rebuilding in the forms of massive modernization and urbanization, on the other.⁶² The world of the French New Wave and other *new wave* films in the middle of transition, according to James Tweedie, was based on the substitution of the role of objects with the role of images:

⁵⁸ Younger, 34.

⁵⁹ Thorburn, see note 27 above.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Tweedie, 19, 30.

The films of the French and other new waves capture a glimpse of a future on the threshold of its arrival; they inhabit a landscape constructed in one social and economic system and experience a moment of transition; they reveal, in other words, the present when the walls from the past are being dismantled and the new façades are about to be unfurled.⁶³

Such kind of context of socioeconomic transformation was also found by Tweedie in the *new wave* cinemas of Taiwan, China, and Germany.⁶⁴ Thus, the transition from the world of objects to the world of image that happened in the world after World War II fostering emergence of *new waves* in transnational contexts appears to be an important prerequisite to developing a cinematic *new wave*.

The Kazakh New Wave, forming in the USSR in the mid-1980s, also went through a similar type of sociopolitical or socioeconomic transition. This change could be called, in the words of Ales Erjavec, a transition “out of post-socialism toward capitalism”.⁶⁵ In Gorbachev’s plan of economic reformation and modernization in the Soviet Union, market forces and economic institutions started to play a major role.⁶⁶ In the pre-Perestroika USSR under Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev, modernity meant “new factories, new construction, a larger labor force, and increased production of basic resources and products”.⁶⁷ Thus, the Soviet leaders of the past were obsessed by “the cult of technology characteristic of the Soviet ruling circles throughout Soviet history focused primarily on its material aspects”.⁶⁸ The propagators of *perestroika*, Gorbachev and his circle, in contrast, centered “the process of modernization (...) not on *things* but on people, their attitudes and skills, and the conditions necessary for their creativity and their commitment”.⁶⁹ Thus, during the formative and professional years of the Kazakh New Wave under the Soviet Union, a sociopolitical transformation happened. This was a transformation not yet so vividly toward the world of “images” of the West, but surely out of the “world” of material. Thus, the Kazakh New Wave is a global

⁶³ Ibid., 31

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ales Erjavec, “Introduction”, in *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. by Ales Erjavec, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), 29.

⁶⁶ Seweryn Bialer, “Gorbachev's Program of Change: Sources, Significance, Prospects,” *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 3 (1988): 404-07, accessed March 28, 2020, doi:10.2307/2150758.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 433.

⁶⁸ Bialer, 434.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

phenomenon, since its arrival as a *new wave* was generated by the uniform transnational context of sociopolitical transition taking place around the globe after the end of World War II.

Part II: The Kazakh New Wave and Socialist Realism

The emergence of the Kazakh New Wave, situated in the global context of socioeconomic transformations and cinematic *new waves*, had also been driven by significant local factors that come under the term of Socialist Realism. In other words, the young Kazakh directors from the VGIK workshop led by Sergei Soloviov appeared not only due to their global *new wave* lessons or adherence to global socioeconomic transitions, but also due to the sensed need to overcome the local problem of Socialist Realism. Similar to other artistic movements across the socialist states of late socialist period, the Kazakh New Wave understood themselves predominantly in terms of an opposition to that, in the words of Rico Isaacs, *conventional* cinema in the country, the epitome of which were the Socialist Realist aesthetical practices.⁷⁰

The motivation to challenge and reject the Socialist Realist legacy came from the fact that the official Socialist Realism of the 1930s and 1940s continued to dominate Kazakh national cinema industry long after it started declining in the center. The Socialist Realist practices ranged across various cinematic aspects from theme to literary elements, from style to cinematic realism – the aspects that, as we will see in Part III, would come under target in the Kazakh New Wave’s later work as film professionals. A consideration of the Kazakh New Wave’s relation to Socialist Realism points at profound local origins behind the emergence of the Kazakh New Wave.

Socialist Realist Influences on Kazakh Cinema

Socialist Realism remained in the national cinema of Soviet Kazakhstan up until the start of *perestroika*, especially in the aspects of themes, literary elements, and style. Made into an official aesthetic dogma in 1934, Socialist Realism claimed to represent “the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in

⁷⁰ Isaacs, “Between Two Worlds”, 62-90.

its revolutionary development”.⁷¹ From that point onwards, artistic works in the Soviet Union aimed to depict the socialist idea (*ideinost'*), national character (*narodnost'*) and Party loyalty (*partiinnost'*).⁷² Socialist Realist doctrine had created its own cinematic language, apparent in themes, literary elements, and style. The aspect of theme remained imperative to all Socialist Realist films. The Hollywood style genre system had become slowly disregarded in Socialist Realism with the new term of *templany* (“thematic planning”) coming to its replacement from the 1930s.⁷³ Every year a thematic plan devised in the center would set both a specific number of films to be produced and set of themes to that had to be embraced in these films.⁷⁴

The importance of realm of theme for this aesthetic doctrine imposed by the Soviet state can be seen through many of the topics explored in Socialist Realist films. Themes of the classic Socialist Realist cinema included the “Great Family” myth, optimistic portrayal of ideal and productive Soviet citizens, as well as the ideal Soviet public spaces.⁷⁵ While Socialist Realism significantly influenced the arts and cinema in the periphery, national considerations of the Soviet state, in turn, altered to some degree the original appearance of Socialist Realism, as it was devised in the center. The slogan for Socialist Realist art in the Soviet republics now was “national in form, socialist in content”.⁷⁶ Along with the dominating involvement of Russian film-makers, two cinematic trends had been developed in conventional cinema of Central Asia and remained throughout the Soviet period: “one that celebrated local exoticism for the Soviet viewer” and “another that served to educate and inculcate socialist values”.⁷⁷ These trends influenced the topics that

⁷¹ Lilya Kaganovksy, “Stalinist Cinema 1928-1953”, in *Russian Cinema Reader. Volume One: 1908 to the Stalin Era*, ed. by Rimgaila Salys (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013,) 216.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 231.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ The “Great Family” myth included a usually naïve and spontaneous young male; his highly conscious father figure that was a Soviet official, had a family and all the qualities of the New Soviet man; and the female Motherland. For details on these themes of Socialist Realism see 1. Hans Gunther, “Wise Father Stalin”, in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 178-188. 2. Katerina Clark, “Socialist Realism with Shores”, in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 29-30. 3. Kaganovksy, 217. 4. Isaacs, 63, 72-73. 5. Svetlana Boym, “Paradoxes of Unified Culture: From Stalin’s Fairy Tale to Molotov’s Lacquer Box,” in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 125. 6. Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), xvi-xvii.

⁷⁶ Stephen J. Lee, *European Dictatorships, 1918-1945* (Psychology Press, 2000), 67.

⁷⁷ Rouland, “An Historical Introduction”, 5.

were pursued by filmmakers in the region. The topics that were specifically characteristic of Socialist Realist cinema of Kazakhstan (and other Central Asian republics) covered “the friendship of the peoples”, as well as strong female heroes, defenders of the Motherland.⁷⁸ Thus were the themes that proliferated the Socialist Realist cinema of the Soviet Union and persisted especially in Soviet Kazakhstan up until perestroika.

In Socialist Realist tradition, literary and stylistic elements of film opposed each other. The former was of particular importance, while considerations for the latter were almost always avoided. Socialist Realist cinema certainly prioritized word over image and script over visual development of a film. This was seen most vividly in the cases involving screenplays. As Oksana Bulgakova pointed out, “all incidences of censorship are linked with the literary editing of the screenplay, directed at monitoring the dialogue and checking the text being transmitted.”⁷⁹ Bulgakova mentions an incident, when one of such screenplays did not pass censorship, and “Stalin was asked what should be done with the directors (...) Stalin, carelessly turning his fingers in the air to show how film revolves in a camera, observed, ‘And who are they? They only turned the reels on what he [the author of the screenplay] wrote for them’”.⁸⁰ Thus, in Socialist Realist cinema, the work of a filmmaker had a lesser role than that of a writer. This decreased the significance of complex stylistic and technical considerations. On the official agenda of Socialist Realist authors was a proposition that “Socialist Realist art must combat formalism (any complex or modernist style), the decadent art of the bourgeoisie of the West, and the bourgeois notion of artistic freedom”.⁸¹ Form was feared and stylization was neutralized.⁸² The concept of montage from the 1920s avant-garde modernists

⁷⁸ 1. Isaacs, 86-87. 2. Rouland, “An Historical Introduction”, 19.

⁷⁹ Evgeny Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (the United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 5.

⁸⁰ Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema*, 5.

⁸¹ Guynn, “Critical Dictionary”, 242.

⁸² 1. Mikhail Lampolski, “Censorship as the Triumph of Life”, in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, 176. 2. Evgeny Dobrenko, “The Disaster of Middlebrow Taste, or, Who “Invented” Socialist Realism?”, in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 160.

was seen as a threat to conventional narrative and running risk of making a film “plotless”, thus “unideological” and “powerless to express any significant ideas”.⁸³

Furthermore, staging of realism was an important part of Socialist Realist style (or the lack of thereof). As Evgeny Dobrenko reminds us, “the illusion of ‘reflection’ remained the most important aim of Stalinist [and thus Socialist Realist] art”.⁸⁴ Nothing speaks more vividly of this aim in Socialist Realism than its classic definition of “the truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development”.⁸⁵ In this process, Socialist Realism showed only a desired and ideal reality, or “not life as it is, but as it should and will be”.⁸⁶ According to Dobrenko, Socialist Realism eventually created socialism, a kind of Soviet reality-artifact.⁸⁷ Thus, it also succeeded in its aim of granting its viewer the pursued illusion of reflection.⁸⁸

In the cinema of Soviet Kazakhstan, stylistic realism was seen particularly in the ethnographic style that was popular there throughout the Soviet period up until *perestroika*. The ethnographic style that claimed to represent everyday life in Soviet Kazakhstan was seen in most films of mid-to-late Soviet cinema in the country in two ways. One was framed through Soviet orientalism based on “ethnic dress, song and dance” and another – through “the representation of Kazakh identity [that] served the larger purpose of depicting the revolutionary struggle”.⁸⁹ Even the cinematic “thaw” in the Soviet Union allowed for preservation of the binary of Socialist Realist cinema in Soviet Kazakhstan, where the ethnic complemented the Soviet in way that made the representations of the latter plausible. For example, Abdulla Karsakbayev’s *My Name is Kozha* (1956), which according to Rico Isaacs conforms to the idea of a ‘thaw’ in Soviet cinema, portrays both

⁸³ Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema*, 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁵ Kaganovsky, 216.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Dobrenko, “Preface”, *Political Economy*, xi.

⁸⁸ Thomas Lahusen, “Socialist Realism in Search of its Shores”, in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 5.

⁸⁹ Isaacs, “Between Two Worlds”, 76.

(...) the Soviet world of institutional order, commitment to the revolutionary struggle, friendship of peoples – a Soviet identity – and (...) an ethnic ascription of identity rooted in the traditions of rural life and religious practices.⁹⁰

Such were the influences of Socialist Realism on the conventional Kazakh cinema of the Soviet period before the mid-1980s.

Despite the relative decline of Socialist Realism since the Thaw at all-Union level, these influences continued to proliferate the national cinema of Kazakhstan up until *perestroika*. Three reasons are responsible for this. This situation was due to three reasons. First, generally speaking positive or innovative developments came to the Central Asian region usually five to ten years after it had come to the center. While minor relaxations of Socialist Realism initiated from above, started in the Thaw era, it reached Kazakhstan only by the end of the 60s with the emergence of films, such as *Kyz-Zhibek*.⁹¹ Moreover, once the cinematic “thaw” reached Kazakhstan, Brezhnev’s stagnation was on the rise and any attempts to make a different cinema had been shut down by the newly appointed KGB leader, Yuri Andropov, who reintroduced political oppression of Soviet artists through the creation of the Fifth Main Administration for Ideological Subversion (1967).⁹² Second, in the Soviet Union, Central Asian cinema in general and Kazakh cinema in particular were characterized by the dominance of Moscow-establishment both in filmmaking and film education spheres.⁹³ Such less than desirable situation for local-born filmmakers was reinforced further by the fact that the three central film studios of the USSR relocated to Almaty during World War II.⁹⁴ This had little positive impact on the local-born individuals’ potential directly in filmmaking. As Michael Rouland contends, “while the war was an opportunity for Central Asian film-makers and technical assistants to work with the most talented Soviet directors, it also ended their opportunities to make films”.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Ibid., 80-81.

⁹¹ 1. See more on cinema of the Thaw in Alexander Prokhorov, “Cinema of the Thaw 1953-1967”, in *The Russian Cinema Reader. Volume Two: The Thaw to the Present*, ed. by Rimgaila Salys (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 14-31. 2. See more on Central Asian cinema of the Thaw in Abikeyeva, *Natsiostroitelstvo*, 50-97. 3. See more on Central Asian cinema in general in Rouland, “An Historical Introduction”, 1-30. 4. See more on Kazakh cinema from the 1920s to 1980s in Isaacs, “Between Two Worlds”, 62-90. 5. See more on *Kyz-Zhibek* (1969) in Isaacs, 86.

⁹² Prokhorov, 15.

⁹³ Rouland, 2.

⁹⁴ Isaacs, 72.

⁹⁵ Rouland, 11.

Moreover, most of the local cohort of filmmakers were educated during the 1930s and 1940s, the apex years of Socialist Realism in the sphere of arts.⁹⁶ A combination of these factors gave little opportunity to local-born filmmakers to exercise their own artistic aspirations outside of Socialist Realist aesthetics. Third, before *perestroika*, Soviet Kazakhstan produced a relatively small cohort of local-born filmmakers.⁹⁷ This further complicated the situation in the national film industry and ensured the continued influence of Socialist Realism in the republic up until the start of *perestroika*.

The Filmmakers Self-identity as an Opposition to Socialist Realism

A continued proliferation of Socialist Realism in the cinema of Soviet Kazakhstan throughout the major part of the Soviet period was the main local premise behind the emergence of the Kazakh New Wave. This cinematic movement emerged primarily in opposition to the conventional cinema of Kazakhstan that existed before *perestroika* and was distinguished by the persistence of Socialist Realism. As Andrei Shemyakin noticed, “the Kazakh cinema [of the New Wave] is concerned primarily with the destruction of an illusion of the identity of art and “life”.⁹⁸ Such an illusion, as we have seen above, is the direct legacy of Socialist Realism. Shemyakin saw the Kazakh New Wave’s cinematic achievements as a part of Soviet artists’ common “breakthrough into the realm of freedom”.⁹⁹ Similarly, the Kazakh New Wave filmmakers themselves perceived the role of their professional work primarily in terms of rebelling against and overcoming the legacy of Socialist Realism in Kazakh national cinema. They understood themselves in these terms because Socialist Realist continuing legacy in Kazakh national cinema was seen as detrimental to that cinema’s progress. Proposed as a solution to this problem, their work in filmmaking was aimed at undoing the perceived harmful effects of Socialist Realism.

⁹⁶ Isaacs, 89. Also see Peter Rollberg, “FOUNDING FATHER. Shaken Aimanov: The Man at the Core of Kazakh Cinema,” *Voices on Central Asia*, accessed on March 7, 2020, <https://voicesoncentralasia.org/founding-father-shaken-aimanov-the-man-at-the-core-of-kazakh-cinema/>.

⁹⁷ See Rouland, “An Historical Introduction”, 1-30, for a comparison of how many prominent directors were there from Kazakhstan and other Central Asian Soviet republics.

⁹⁸ Andrey Shemyakin, as quoted by Gulnara Abikeyeva in “Kazakhskoie Kino Epokhi Nezavisimosti”, *Kultura*, 12, December 2016, 172.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Kazakh filmmakers from Sergei Soloviov's workshop at VGIK were a direct opposition to the conventional Kazakh filmmaking that came before them. According to Rico Isaacs, the Kazakh New Wave filmmaking represent "an era in Kazakh cinema, which shook up the staid, old and creaking Soviet system, utilized cinema as a site of dissent against the Soviet authorities".¹⁰⁰ In a 1992 interview with Alla Gerber, Abay Karpykov, one of the Kazakh New Wave directors, expressed a certain artistic self-identity of the Kazakh New Wave that was based primarily on their dissatisfaction with the conventional Kazakh cinema of the previous decades:

Я думаю, что пришло новое поколение - не в смысле возраста, а в смысле иного мировоззрения, иной культуры. До этого были картины (да и сейчас их достаточно), которые смотришь и кажется, что сняты они сорок лет назад, да еще в самом плохом советском варианте. Восточная сентиментальность и одновременно склонность к псевдофилософии, рыхлость формы: то ли драма, то ли философская притча, то ли авторская исповедь, а в итоге - ни то, ни другое, ни третье. В кино пришли ребята, отвергающие такие фильмы. Да и вся ситуация в Казахстане способствовала тому, чтобы пришли именно эти ребята.¹⁰¹

Serik Aprymov, another New Wave director, shared his memories about how he decided to make films that are different from the "serious" cinema of his predecessors:

Я помню, как-то мы шли с Рашидом по «Мосфильму», это было, кажется, на третьем курсе, болтали о том, о сем, и Рашид меня спросил: «Что ты собираешься делать?» Я ответил: «Хочу придумать что-то новое». На что он сказал: «Ерунда. Все уже придумано. И ты ничего нового придумать не сможешь. Ищи лучше какие-то новые связи». И заявил: «Я буду снимать фильм ни о чем - как бы в противовес серьезному кино».¹⁰²

Thus, the Kazakh New Wave filmmakers appeared and viewed themselves as being primarily in resistance to the conventional Kazakh cinema that came before them.

The problem that they came to solve in the context of national cinema was the lasting persistence of Socialist Realist aesthetics. For example, Rico Isaacs, who carried out interviews with contemporary Kazakh directors, including those of the Kazakh New Wave, concludes that none of them "spoke with any

¹⁰⁰ Isaacs, "Between Two Worlds", 90.

¹⁰¹ Abai Karpykov, "Abai Karpykov, Prishlo novoe pokolenie ...", interview by Alla Gerber, *Iskusstvo Kino*, no.9 (1990): 79.

¹⁰² Serik Aprymov, "Naperekor Mifu", interview by Gulnara Abikeyeva, *Iskusstvo Kino*, no.9 (1990): 70-72.

great reverence for the Kazakh cinema of the Soviet period [of the period before *perestroika*].¹⁰³ Isaacs added, identifying the issue that the Kazakh New Wave filmmakers had with that cinema:

if anything, for young directors emerging in the late 1980s the films of the Soviet period represented a conservative force to react against (...) They do not see any ‘truth’ in these films and they understand these cinematic works as being ‘national in form, and socialist in content’, and thus failing to offer a genuine Kazakh cinematic language.¹⁰⁴

Thus, the main issue of the Kazakh conventional cinema, for these filmmakers, is its Socialist Realism, which was expressed in “national form” and “socialist content”.¹⁰⁵ Rashid Nugmanov’s explanation behind the emergence of the underground culture within the Soviet Union, a culture that took a prominent role in his films *Yya-Khkha* (1986) and *The Needle* (1988), spoke to the same self-identity of opposition that was articulated mainly against the Socialist Realism of conventional cinema. There, Nugmanov deemed necessary to provide the context of the traditional Soviet rules for art, which were the rules of Socialist Realism:

Under the Soviet system, they [sub-cultures] took the form of an opposition to the communist ideology. (...) Stalin’s definition of Socialist Realism dictated that art had to be national by form and socialist by content, which meant that a film from Kazakhstan was Kazakh only on the surface, in an ethnographic fashion, but Soviet by nature. The subculture, on the other hand, had no national form. It was international if anything, being influenced by trends such as rock ‘n’ roll and pop art. The content was anti-communist.¹⁰⁶

Such statements of the Kazakh New Wave directors that were given a few years after these films were produced might suggest that their decision to rebel against Socialist Realism was a poorly-understood impulse that was only given meaning later. However, these directors, such as Rashid Nugmanov participating in the rock scene of Leningrad and Moscow, understood well at the time of the film production that Socialist Realism had already been dismantled in the center. The nonconformism that they represented was aimed at exactly the situation with Socialist Realism in Kazakh cinema at the time. Thus, the antagonism between the Kazakh New Wave and the national cinema of earlier decades was expressed by

¹⁰³ Isaacs, “Between Two Worlds”, 88.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 88- 89

¹⁰⁵ See note 67 from above.

¹⁰⁶ Gönül Dönmez-Colin, “Kazakhstan: Rachid Nugmanov: the Wild East, Rockers, Bikers and a New Life (1994)”, in *Cinemas of the Other: A Personal Journey with Film-makers from Central Asia. 2nd edition* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2006), 174-175.

these filmmakers in terms of a break from persistence of Socialist Realist aesthetics and was done so consciously when their films were being produced.

Socialist Realism was seen as harmful not only because it was aesthetically destructive and economically unproductive, but also because it downgraded the importance of cinema for society. One of the most fundamental figures in the emergence of the Kazakh New Wave, Murat Auezov, described the situation at Kazakhfilm studios before the coming of the Kazakh New Wave as “catastrophical” and “low” in terms of artistic value and production quantity.¹⁰⁷ This was an “acute crisis” that “for about twenty years aggravated the progressive development of the cultural situation [in Kazakh ASSR] as a whole.”¹⁰⁸ The Kazakh New Wave was thus seen as a logical resolution for the consequent development of Kazakh cinema in artistic, “cultural”, and economic terms, spoiled by the effects of the previous era. The situation in Kazakh national cinema industry in terms of its value to local society before the advent of the Kazakh New Wave can be pictured through an anecdote that was told by Rashid Nugmanov. The dialogue that was supposedly common among the average film audiences in Kazakhstan went, “- Let’s go to the movies. – What are they screening? – Kazakhfilm. – Ah, Kazakhfilm... (waving his hand off in the sign of distaste)”.¹⁰⁹ He continued, “[Such situation at] Kazakhfilm represented popular view that one should not go to and watch cinema”.¹¹⁰ This was perhaps a logical development, since, according to Donmez-Colin, “propaganda films of the past years [before the Kazakh New Wave], historical dramas stressing Communist views, or love stories with predictable endings, created a cinema with little human interest”.¹¹¹ Such problems as low artistic and economic outputs, as well societal rejection and indifference to the kinds of conventional cinema that existed in Kazakhstan up until the mid-1980s, signaled the need for the future Kazakh New Wave

¹⁰⁷ 1. Abikeyeva, 105-106. 2. Rashid Nugmanov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 11:35.

¹⁰⁸ See note 96 (1) from above.

¹⁰⁹ Rashid Nugmanov, *Souvenirs de Vague*, 29:00.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29:20.

¹¹¹ Gönül Dönmez-Colin, “Kazakh ‘new wave’: Post-perestroika, post-Soviet Union,” *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 1 (1997): 115.

filmmakers to attempt to overcome Socialist Realism with its detrimental effects on the development of Kazakh cinema.

In the context of artistic developments across the Socialist bloc, the Kazakh New Wave filmmakers were not alone in attempting to overcome Socialist Realism. In his introduction on “post-socialist condition” in art, Ales Erjavec argued that the first and most important feature of art movements in late socialist states was “a pivotal *artistic* break with their Socialist Realist past”.¹¹² Contemporary Russian art, for example, could be one of such art movements. As Thomas Lahusen aims to demonstrate, citing Boris Groys, the post-utopian art in Russia was “overcoming the Stalin period by remythologizing and aestheticizing it” making “the defeat of Stalinist culture seem “obvious and final”.¹¹³ Groys, in his article on post-Soviet Russian postmodernism in dialogue with Socialist Realism, calls post-Sovietism of art in Russia “the undoing of the Soviet/non-Soviet opposition”, which was indicative of Socialist Realism and its “style and a half”.¹¹⁴ For Evgeny Dobrenko, in his analysis of Stalinist production of history through film, such reactions to Socialist Realism in late socialist states and the *perestroika* era Soviet Union are not unexpected. He writes,

perestroika and the end of communism which followed brought with them not only economic “shock therapy”; but also a painful shock in mass consciousness; a situation was created in which society, suffering the painful experience of an identity crisis, was forced once more to consume the past, open and full of traumas, without historicizing anaesthetic.¹¹⁵

Thus, similar to the various art forms in late socialist states across Socialist bloc, the Kazakh New Wave emerged as an attempt to rethink and reconstruct the past that was “full of traumas”. As part of this trend taking place in late socialist period, the cinema of *perestroika* Kazakhstan under the term the Kazakh New Wave emerged as counteraction to the tradition that had become synonymous with Soviet art of preceding decades: Socialist Realism.

¹¹² Erjavec, “Introduction,” 2.

¹¹³ Lahusen, “Socialist Realism in Search of its Shores”, 23.

¹¹⁴ Boris Groys, “Style and a Half”, in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, ed. by Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 80, 89.

¹¹⁵ Evgeny Dobrenko, “Introduction: History Degree Zero”, in *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (the United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 2.

Part III: Film Analysis

The Kazakh New Wave's objective of overcoming Socialist Realism is not only evident in its directors' understanding of the role of their professional work in achieving this objective. Their films, being true manifestations of their authors' motivations, demonstrate even more distinctly the desire of the Kazakh New Wave to deal with the problem of the Socialist Realist legacy in Kazakh cinema. The films also demonstrate that the global *new wave* links forged during the VGIK workshop, as established in the first part of the essay, were particularly helpful to Sergei Soloviov's Kazakh students in satisfying this opposition to Socialist Realism, since these links helped the future directors to experiment with a number of cinematic aspects in their practice. Thus, with much help coming from the Kazakh New Wave's global links and lessons from their formative years, the antagonism, a paradoxical one indeed, between their films and the Socialist Realist legacy that they were overcoming took place in the following aspects of their productions: theme, literary elements, and style. The Kazakh New Wave films, analyzed in these aspects, reveal profound connections with global *new waves*, as well as dramatic deviations from Socialist Realist legacy of Kazakh cinema. However, while the Kazakh New Wave films represent a profound rejection of Socialist Realist cinematic practices, there is also a continuation of some of the original Socialist Realist ideals, both of which are indicative of the dialectical character of the relationship between the Kazakh New Wave and Socialist Realism. Coming to their logical conclusion in this film analysis, the existence of both strong global and local links in the Kazakh New Wave established in the first two parts of this essay is thus being reinforced further.

Themes

For the Kazakh New Wave, the process of overcoming Socialist Realism started with dramatic changes in themes. There are no traces of the topics discussed under Socialist Realism left barring brief sarcastic remarks. There are no parents, no traditional family structure, no motherland to defend, and no positive father figure in position of authority to look after the naïve and spontaneous youth. After being demobilized, the main character from Serik Aprymov's *The Last Stop* (1989), Yerkin returns to his native village of

Aksuat in the hopes of finding something useful to do. Eventually, after a number of unpleasant situations he decides to leave and the last thing he does before his departure is asking an elder to read the Quran for his departed parents. Yerkin has no family to turn to nor the desire of creating one, as his brother is too busy with the problems of a rural official and his love interest has been married off to someone else while he was in the army.

Similarly, the central figure of Abai Karpykov's *A Little Fish in Love* (1989), Zhaken, is outside of the traditional family structure. He lives alone in a village near Almaty spending most of his time with domestic activities: cleaning the floor, feeding the poultry, and looking after his only cow. During one of the episodes of his journey to the city, Zhaken goes to a burial site to visit his parents' graves and read the Quran. Zhaken is an orphan and his only family is an elder brother, who is a musician and lives in the city with his colleague-friend. The hope of finding a girl, who he accidentally met and says he would definitely marry, again founders and Zhaken returns to his home in the village. While the religious symbols are used in both cases to establish Kazakh identity outside of Soviet nation-building policies, Socialist Realism retreats as its "Great Family" myth disappears from the view.¹¹⁶

If these films ever touch on the old Socialist Realist themes, they do so with a degree of irony. The grand narrative of "friendship of the peoples" in Socialist Realist films of Soviet Kazakhstan, for example, is explored in *A Little Fish in Love*, but is at the same time juxtaposed with the disappearance of Soviet symbols that usually went hand in hand with that narrative.¹¹⁷ Wandering around the city in a tram, Zhaken joins a group of German women, who are joyfully singing and dancing to the sound of the accordion as they enter the transport. His brother's friend and a roommate is musician from Africa called Assan. Zhaken and his brother seem to adore the music of a distant culture that Assan willingly shares with them. At the

¹¹⁶ For more on the "Great Family" myth, see note 66 from above or 1. Hans Gunther, "Wise Father Stalin", in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 178-188. 2. Katherine Clark, "Socialist Realism with Shores", in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 29-30.

¹¹⁷ See note 67 from above. Also, on Soviet symbols in Socialist Realist films see 1. Kaganovsky, 217. 2. Isaacs, 63, 72-73. 3. Svetlana Boym, "Paradoxes of Unified Culture: From Stalin's Fairy Tale to Molotov's Lacquer Box," in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 125. 4. Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), xvi-xvii.

same time, Assan is not an outsider, he is familiar with the local culture and rules of social behavior. One particular episode involving Assan, Zhaken, and his brother on the road is memorable: Assan, seated driving seat, gets into a traffic conflict on the road and, using jargon and harsh vocabulary in Russian, argues with the driver of a near-standing truck. On the background, there is an extensive view of a tall white building made in traditional European style. Thus, the film establishes the city as cosmopolitan and multiethnic, but it is no longer evidently Soviet due to the absence of obvious Soviet symbols. The Soviet “friendship of the peoples” theme loses its original meaning and, in this Kazakh New Wave film, it only remains in order for the director to make an ironical point about Socialist Realist cinema of the past, in which that theme was continuously encouraged.

On the one hand, the Kazakh New Wave cinema targeted the most important element of Socialist Realist films, their themes, by replacing them with a discussion of highly sensitive social topics previously unknown to conventional Soviet Kazakh cinema. Following in the footsteps of the *new wave* pioneers, such as the Italian Neorealist and the French New Wave cinemas, the Kazakh New Wave brings some of the gravest social conflicts of their time to the front of their movies.¹¹⁸ Among them were the conflict of the village and the city, severe social and economic problems of the Kazakh aul, as well as the social position of women.

The heated confrontation between the city and the village is a central topic in Darezhan Omirbayev’s *Kairat* (1991). Kairat, the main character of the film, travels from the periphery to the center, Almaty, to take university entrance examinations. From the very start of his urban journey, the city refuses to accept him: Kairat is too green and naïve for it. He fails the exams not because he is not fit or prepared education-wise, but because he is gullible and unsuspecting. A couple of applicants sitting beside Kairat in the examination room use him to exchange cheat sheets and, in the process, the examiners only catch him. Similar lines of urban-rural contradiction would be explored in Omirbayev’s later features, such as *Cardiogram* (1995). It is a story about a boy from a remote village who leaves for a sanatorium near Almaty

¹¹⁸ See note 44 from above.

to treat his heart problems and there he confronted the urban youth. In this film, Omirbayev adds another aspect of the conflict between the city and the aul – the problem of language; Russian dominates in the city and Kazakh - in the village, running a clear divide in Kazakhstani society.

The Last Stop emerged as an ultimate form of social critique among the films in the Kazakh New Wave. While narrating about everyday life in a typical Kazakh aul, Serik Aprymov's film touches on a number of social problems surging on the periphery of Soviet empire: alcoholism, violence, unemployment, poverty, and the subordinate position of women. On several occasions, the main character Yerkin has to deal with friends who have serious problems with alcohol. Quarrels and fights in public are normal for Aksuat, but more severe types of violence happen on the background. For example, upon his secret night trip to the rural post office with his friend, Yerkin finds photo materials from a crime scene set in the village: a woman buried her newborn child just after having birth – she already has five children and could not afford to have one more. Her husband, as we see throughout the film, has an unstable job due to some financial constraints in the aul's administration. To earn at least some money, at one point, this married couple is forced to rent one of the rooms in their house to couples interested in one-night sexual relationships. In the course of the same night, a local police officer drives Yerkin's friend to commit suicide. In these ways, *The Last Stop* raises heavy social problems, such as drunkenness, daily violence, crime, and harsh economic conditions.

The difficult social position of females in this society is explored in *The Last Stop* as well. Women in the film are involved with hard physical labor, all the domestic chores, and taking care of children. This is in contrast to some of their husbands, who wander around with nothing to do all day, skip work and show up drunken late at night. However, despite possessing such a substantial role in the society of Aksuat, females in the film rarely have a say in their own actions and lives. When Yerkin and his friends go to an old classmate's house to catch up, they find a mysterious girl sitting on the bed in the room with them. The guess is that she must be the host's girlfriend, but another young man appears to take her and the males start quarreling without no apparent reason. The girl nonetheless remains silent and cold throughout, indifferent to the outcomes of the quarrel between those men as she continues acting only at their requests.

A similar take on a troublesome female position in Kazakh society can be seen in *Homewrecker* (1991). The film's prologue features a conversation between protagonists, two brothers Adil and Rustem, while they are driving to go hunting for steppe partridges. The conversation sheds light on the female role in society, as the elder brother asks, "Who do you think God loved the most – Adam or Eve?" The younger brother answers: "Probably Eve". "Why?" "Because she had a harder life than Adam." The conversation ends on a sound of the gunshot. However, the difficult position of women is explored here from a context different from that in *The Last Stop*. The film is set in the house where the two brothers live. As Gulnara Abikeyeva argued in her review of the movie, the issue of brotherly love, imperative to Kazakh or what she calls "Eastern" culture that puts family bonds before any other moral considerations, becomes central to this movie.¹¹⁹ Adil and Rustem seem to be very close and they used to spend much time together before Rustem brought a girlfriend, Elya, to the house. Eventually, Adil also falls in love with her. That dilemma is resolved at the end without no conflict, no discussion, no pondering: one of the brothers kills the young woman that stood between their brotherly bond.

The question that is being resolved here is not who she chooses to be with of the two brothers, it is rather whether any of the brothers would choose her over each other. The impossibility of compromising the relationship between two siblings with a happy ending in romantic affairs for both of them results in Elya's death. As Gulnara Abikeyeva claimed, "the film compels its viewers to compare the gender behavioral models and the value systems in the West and the East".¹²⁰ Abikeyeva spotted an important difference between *Homewrecker* and Francois Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* in that the death of a female character in the latter is brought about by her own decision and in the former – by another person, notably the male protagonist.¹²¹ Even though the female figure in this movie seems to be an active agent that stands above tradition in comparison to the passive women bound by custom in *The Last Stop* and, perhaps, she appears in this film more as a symbol of *perestroika* than Kazakh society, this film provides another layer

¹¹⁹ Abikeyeva, "'Razluchnitsa': Dva Adama I Odnaya Yeva", *Natsiostroitelstvo*, 121-123.

¹²⁰ Gulnara Abikeyeva, "Film Reviews: Two Adams and One Eve", *The Heart of the World: Films from Central Asia* (Almaty: COMPLEX print house, 2003), 96.

¹²¹ Abikeyeva, *Ibid.*, 96.

in the explorations of the topic of women by accentuating, in particular, their secondary role in this society. In these ways, *Homewrecker* adds to the Kazakh New Wave's investment in social commentary.

Some less obvious topics challenging the conventions of Socialist Realism are also included in the Kazakh New Wave films. One of such topics are the individuals with disabilities. It is featured in *A Little Fish in Love* and can be seen as a rebellious act considering the Soviet continuous exclusion of the topic of disabilities from any sort of public discussion in the goal of portraying an ideal and economically productive Soviet society.¹²² Even when people with disabilities were present on the Soviet screen before, they were mainly shown as heroic survivors of the war; it is precisely the fact of setting this is a social problem that the Kazakh New Wave cinema distinguishes itself from the previous cinematographic tradition. There are several occasions on which this issue is depicted by Abai Karpykov. One includes a scene with an elderly man without a leg walking on the street, holding a stick, while the audience follows another character's action. However, including this man with a physical disability was not accidental, as the old man is shown quarrelling with a relative, who shouts from the window to ask him to be careful on the road. The man replies, "You think that would scare me? It can't get any more worse." The other references to physical disabilities are displayed in the dialogues between Zhaken's brother and Assan, the African musician, who complains about having pain in his legs as he takes off a prosthetic. He dreams that one day his future child would unfasten the prosthetic leg for him. Thus, in such a non-intrusive form, the films of the Kazakh New Wave challenged the persistence of Socialist Realism by exploring the taboo topics of acute social problems that were long forgotten in conventional Kazakh cinema.

On the other hand, in this regard, the Kazakh New Wave is paradoxically also a continuation of the Socialist Realist project and its ideals as they were initially conceived by its founders. Socialist Realism aimed to uncover the underlying social problems existing in Soviet society. Not without reason, an early propagator of "cinema for the millions" that would later triumph under the name of Socialist Realist cinema,

¹²² 1. There was a degree of denial about the mere existence of people with disabilities in the Soviet Union. For more see Sarah D. Phillips, "'There Are No Invalids in the USSR!': A Missing Soviet Chapter in the New Disability History", *Disabilities Studies Quarterly* 29, no.3 (2009): 1. 2. Moreover, Socialist Realist cinema aimed at depicting only economically productive members of Soviet society. See Dobrenko, *Political Economy*, xvi-xvii.

Leningrad director Pavel Petrov-Bytov said in 1929 about the necessity to address the workers' and peasants' problems in cinema:

We must talk about the cow that is sick with tuberculosis, about the dirty cowshed that must be transformed into a clean and bright, about the child that is stirring in the peasant woman's womb, about creches for the child, about rural hooligans, the kolkhoz, and so on.¹²³

However, eventually, the Socialist Realist cinema approached social problems through a prism of desired and ideal reality that did not exist outside of screen. As Evgeny Dobrenko claims, Socialist Realist art “reflects the catastrophic zero Soviet time – time that does not exist”.¹²⁴ By taking this prism off their cameras, the Kazakh New Wave managed in some way to achieve the initial ideals of Socialist Realist art of exploring the immediate conflicts of society. After all, the social problems discussed in the Kazakh New Wave films, such as alcoholism, the conflict of the village and the city, language issues, and others, came from what these directors had seen swelling at home in Soviet Kazakhstan. In fact, as Serik Aprimov, the director of *Last Stop*, claimed: “people [of the village] were not upset [after watching *The Last Stop* that depicted their environment], and now they tell me life is much worse than what I showed in my film (...) Nobody has work and because of that crime is very high.”¹²⁵

Apart from its commitment to social critique, the Kazakh New Wave demonstrates its negation of Socialist Realism through their engagement with the topics that are unique to *new waves*. The pioneers of the global phenomenon of *new waves* set in Europe were the products of “the decadent art of the bourgeoisie of the West” that all Socialist Realist authors were officially decreed to avoid.¹²⁶ Thus, the Kazakh New Wave films directly rebelled against Socialist Realist aesthetics in cinema by engaging with their “bourgeois Western” taboo elements. One of the topics that the Kazakh New Wave borrowed from *new waves* of other countries in order to overcome Socialist Realism was an artistic, cinematic, and personal self-reflexiveness.¹²⁷

¹²³ Kaganovsky, 215.

¹²⁴ Dobrenko, *Political Economy*, 183.

¹²⁵ Dönmez-Colin, “Kazakhstan: Serik Aprimov: The Last Stop is Aksuat”, in *Cinemas of the Other*, 163.

¹²⁶ See note 72 from above.

¹²⁷ On self-reflexiveness of other *new waves* see note 45 from above.

First, employing a signature move of *new wave* films, the Kazakh New Wave is self-reflexive in meditating on the topic of the increasing role of film and art in social life.¹²⁸ Darezhan Omirbayev manifested this theme both in his short *Shilde* (1988) and feature *Kairat*. The plot of *Shilde*, set in a summertime aul, is centered around individual experiences of fascination with movie theatres. Two young boys, the protagonists of the film, would like to go to the evening session at a movie theatre, but they have no money. The desire to go is so strong they decide to steal melons from the local plantation and sell them. The place of movie theatre also plays a significant role in Omirbayev's *Kairat*, it is where Kairat usually goes in his free time and where Kairat meets his future love interest. Other non-entertainment roles of film is depicted in the movie. When Kairat fails his university entrance exams, he goes to study as a train driver. An episode of his first class at one of the city's driving schools demonstrates a large screen on the wall with a virtual simulation of the road on it and Kairat is in the driving seat of a virtual car on this road. Thus, the importance of film as a medium of social and practical activities both in and outside of entertainment is stressed here. The Kazakh New Wave films are also self-reflexive in terms of other forms of art in general. For example, photography is a central theme in *Homewrecker* and *A Little Fish in Love*, as protagonists of these films spend substantial amounts of their time in photo labs and photo booths.

Second, following in the footsteps of *new wave* pioneers, particularly Francois Truffaut, the Kazakh New Wave films are self-reflexive in that they are highly autobiographical.¹²⁹ For example, when Serik Aprymov was explaining the reasons why he decided to make *The Last Stop*, he shared details of his personal life connected to Aksuat, the village described in the film:

When I returned to my native village [of Aksuat] after my military service, I realized that something had gone wrong. Among the three kids I used to play with when I was ten, one committed suicide, one was in jail and the other became an alcoholic.¹³⁰

These events from Aprymov's personal life are strikingly similar to those taking place in the film, such as the main character's return to aul after demobilization, as well as suicide and alcoholism of his childhood

¹²⁸ On this self-reflexiveness of other *new waves* see note 46 from above.

¹²⁹ On this self-reflexiveness of other *new waves* see note 47 from above.

¹³⁰ Dönmez-Colin, see note 111 from above.

friends. A similar semi-autobiographical element is seen in Darezhan Omirbayev's *Shilde, Kairat*, and some of his later productions, such as *Cardiogram*. Omirbayev explained this in an interview with Rico Issacs:

I wanted to show a person that appears in an alien atmosphere. It is a sort of autobiographical story. I was born and raised in a rural Kazakh-speaking area of Southern Kazakhstan. My Russian is poor. I was sent to a sanatorium in Taraz when I had problems with my health after having angina and I was 'in' a Russian-speaking sphere. (...) I found it interesting that a person gets into a new sphere and he experiences more sharply.¹³¹

There is a self-reflexiveness in the meditations on the importance of art and film, as well as in the autobiographical aspect of the Kazakh New Wave films, a tradition that was borrowed by the Kazakh filmmakers from the experiences of other *new waves*. This juxtaposes the Kazakh New Wave and Socialist Realism as the latter negated these traditions as products of the "bourgeois Western" art. To sum up, the significant changes of theme in these films show the ways in which the Kazakh New Wave directors chose to repel Socialist Realism and how sometimes in doing so they ended up achieving the opposite.

Literary Elements

Another aspect, on which the Kazakh New Wave worked in order to defeat Socialist Realism, was in their use of literary elements in their films. Script and dialogues became much less important than it was in Socialist Realist films. As we have seen in the previous part of this essay, along with themes, the word had paramount importance in Socialist Realism.¹³² In contrast, the Kazakh New Wave, following again after the traditions of global *new waves*, disregarded the relevance of script and dialogues in their films in favor of visuals.¹³³ As Gulnara Abikeyeva's review of the film suggests, Amir Karakulov's *Homewrecker* lacks narrative structure and expresses ideas strictly in the language of visual images.¹³⁴ The reviewer cites an episode with the three main characters of the film at the city's observation wheel that depicts this highly visual language, as the three remain silent as actions unfold.¹³⁵ Without a word, they decide who will go on

¹³¹ Isaacs, "The Disruption of Time", 119.

¹³² See notes 70-71 from above.

¹³³ See note 41 from above.

¹³⁴ Gulnara Abikeyeva, "Review: *Homewrecker*," Review of *Homewrecker* (1991), dir. Amir Karakulov, in *Natsiostroitelstvo*, 121-123.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

the wheel and who will stay down. Also, when the girl drops her white scarf down, she says nothing as one of the brothers silently runs after it.¹³⁶

Similarly, *The Last Stop* and *A Little Fish in Love* appear to negate the role of word in helping the viewer understand the film. In her review, Ludmila Pruner described this quality of narrative in the Kazakh New Wave films as *pofigism*, as she noticed, for example, a limited amount of attention on the part of the director in *The Last Stop* paid to descriptive details.¹³⁷ (As a derivative from a Russian slang expression *po figu*, *pofigizm* means complete indifference.) The director, Serik Aprymov, himself admitted that while people, houses, and interiors are real in *The Last Stop*, all situations and conversations are absolutely “absurdist”.¹³⁸ Abai Karpykov also chose to reject significant aspects of literary elements in his films. For example, he uses a silent film format in the prologue and the epilogue of his *A Little Fish in Love*. Ilya Alekseyev, in an interview with Karpykov, raised a question of the lack of conversations in his another film, *Air Kiss* (1991) mentioning that it is a sign of deviation from Soviet cinematic traditions towards Western cinema.¹³⁹ As Alekseyev noted, the conventional Soviet cinema is among the most “literary” and non-material in the world.¹⁴⁰ Karpykov agreed with Alekseyev, when he called his film object-based, meaning the importance of visual interactions of characters with objects over their verbal expressions and interactions with each other.¹⁴¹ Thus, Socialist Realism had been combatted by the Kazakh New Wave through their rejection of literary elements that were important in conventional Soviet cinema of the past.

Style

In the hopes of overcoming the Socialist Realist past of Kazakh cinema, the Kazakh New Wave developed a unique *auteur* style with its modernist effects, following in the footsteps of earlier *new waves*. This style included “the more immediate, documentary approach to the representation of the contemporary world”, which was emphasized in the French and Italian lessons that the Kazakh New Wave readily picked up

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Pruner, 796.

¹³⁸ Aprymov, “Naperekor Mifu”, 70.

¹³⁹ Abai Karpykov, “Interior dlia geroia”, interview by Ilya Alekseyev, *Iskusstvo Kino*, 12 (1992): 49.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

during their studies at VGIK.¹⁴² Indeed, these Kazakh directors did not fail to provide different representations of reality from their predecessors, as we have seen before in the discussion of themes. Furthermore, on the one hand, stylistically speaking, the filmmakers of the Kazakh new wave used innovative modernist effects that in some ways reinforced the documentary style that they had pursued. As with other *new waves*, this was not necessarily out of desire to do so but rather out of necessity, as the budgets of these young Kazakh directors were extremely low in comparison with those of the mainstream commercial productions.¹⁴³ On the other hand, the documentary approach that the Kazakh New Wave was able to achieve with those effects also produced an illusion of realism, the one stylistic quality that these Kazakh directors shared in common with Socialist Realist artists of the Soviet period, which points to the dialectic terms of their relationship.

The effects that were involved in elaborating the new style of these Kazakh directors had been definitely borrowed from earlier *new waves* and included the use of non-professional actors, location shooting, and hand-held cameras. As Jane Knox-Voina notes in her discussion on the Kazakh New Wave, “all one needs, it seems, is a camera, a group of friends, and the city itself whose busy streets and real-world interiors (apartments, cafes or bars) set the scene.”¹⁴⁴ The Kazakh New Wave filmmakers hired exclusively non-professional or previously unknown actors. For example, Zhaken, the protagonist from Abay Karpykov’s *A Little Fish in Love* was played by an architect and director’s friend, Bopesh Zhandayev; the protagonist’s brother – by the director’s brother, Ablay Karpykov; and the character of Assan – by a director’s classmate, Assan Kuyate.¹⁴⁵ In *The Last Stop* of Serik Aprymov, with an exception of one professional actor, the people that acted in the film were friends and relatives of the director, as well as

¹⁴² See note 48 from above.

¹⁴³ 1. Global new waves are known for their limited economic resources (and hence their difference from Hollywood aesthetics). See Tweedie, 6, 19-21. 2. The feature of limited economic resources used for the production of film, as the basic feature of a *new wave*, is definitely indicative of the Kazakh New Wave. Their films have always been referred to as low-budget by film experts and the filmmakers themselves. See Angelina Karpovich, “(In)Action Film: Genre and Identity in Rashid Nugmanov’s *The Needle*,” in *Genre in Asian Film and Television*, ed. Chan, Karpovich, Zhang (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 165.

¹⁴⁴ Jane Knox-Voina, “The Kazakh ‘New “New” Wave’”, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 4, no. 2 (2010): 195.

¹⁴⁵ Abikeyeva, “Ten Years Under the Winds of Different Ideologies: The cinema of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tadzhikistan”, *Natsiostroitelstvo*, 31-32.

other common villagers of Aksuat.¹⁴⁶ The main character, for example, was played by Sabit Kurmanbekov, who is not an actor, but a set designer and cartoonist. Moreover, the actors' actual names were used for their characters. Serik Aprymov, the filmmaker behind *The Last Stop*, admitted that no budget had to be spent on decorations, since it was shot on location, in his real native village of Aksuat.¹⁴⁷ Commenting on the film in her interview with the director, Gulnara Abikeyeva claims that the illusion of documentalism in this film is given to the audience right at the start, when against the background of the portraits of the four protagonists, the sound of a typewriter comes in, indicating the following on the screen: surname, middle name, nationality, year and place of birth.¹⁴⁸ The shaky camera, noticed in one film review, gave it a documentary style as well.¹⁴⁹ Such features combined or not mark the success of the Kazakh New Wave in achieving a unique documentary look.

Other modernist cinematic techniques used by the Kazakh New Wave films were the long take and jump cuts aesthetics, along with the use of “freeze” frames, highly indicative of their inspirations from the French New Wave. Along with the elements discussed above, the long take aesthetic is also imperative to creating an everyday, documentary style in cinema. Darezhan Omirbayev used long takes occasionally in *Kairat*, starting from the film's first one-minute-long cut. The true long take aesthetic is expressed in *The Last Stop* and more so in *Homewrecker* with many of the films' shots lasting from one to two minutes throughout the movie. The latter film also employs some jump cuts, which makes the film unique and marks the direct evidence of the French New Wave's influence.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Abay Karpykov, the director of *A Little Fish in Love*, often uses “freeze” frames, which are a powerful tool for either reminding the viewer that film is only a set of moving images or for a dramatic effect underlining the film's optimistic ambiguity at the end.¹⁵¹ These frames are used at least three times: during the silent film format episode at the start of the movie; in the episode with Zhaken and his female friend posing for a picture in a photolab in the middle

¹⁴⁶ 1. Horton and Brashinsky, 241. 2. Aprymov, “Naperekor Mifu”, 70.

¹⁴⁷ Aprymov, “Naperekor Mifu”, 70.

¹⁴⁸ Abikeyeva, in an interview with Aprymov, “Naperekor Mifu”, 70.

¹⁴⁹ Alexander Shpagin, “V kontse, v nachale, ili nigde?”, *Iskusstvo Kino* 9, (1990): 69.

¹⁵⁰ On jump cuts, see note 49 from above.

¹⁵¹ On “freeze” frames, see note 51 from above.

of the film; and at the final closing of the film. Such an approach to filmmaking in the Kazakh New Wave films in the context of conventional Kazakh cinema helps the directors gain a unique *auteur* style which involves a style of the everyday life that is achieved. The modernist effects listed above demonstrate a rebellion on the part of the Kazakh New Wave directors against a “serious” filmmaking of their predecessors, which was the Socialist Realist cinema.

However, at the same time, despite their different representations of reality and different techniques employed, there is a degree of similarity between the Kazakh New Wave and Socialist Realist cinema that happens on the level of realism. The documentary approach that the Kazakh New Wave achieved through the innovative techniques borrowed from *new waves* has a paradoxical point of coincidence with a highly realist style of Socialist Realism. The approaches of the two representationally different cinemas become quite similar, as their capacities of staging realism overlap. Socialist Realist cinema worked on providing the “illusion of ‘reflection’” and did it quite successfully eventually erasing the distinction between reality and fiction.

The documentary style achieved by the Kazakh New Wave, similar to the staging of realism in Socialist Realist cinema, gave their films the same powerful illusion of real life. Such a continuity in cinematic methods of ethnographic representation or day-to-day life form was noticed by Rico Isaacs in his comparison of the Kazakh New Wave and earlier films of Kazakh cinema.¹⁵² Serik Aprymov, the director of *The Last Stop*, admitted that contrary to popular opinion, there is no “documentalism” or “reality” in his film, saying, “the paradox is that the majority takes the absolute fiction created by me as a chronicle [or depiction of historical reality].”¹⁵³ Aprymov had realized the capacity to stage realism without the viewer’s realization back in the years of VGIK workshop when he made a short film about aul life. Aprymov recalled that one Czech student had commented on the film stating, “the Kazakh village was recreated on the screen

¹⁵² Isaacs, “The Disruption of Time”, 116.

¹⁵³ Aprymov, “Naperekor Mifu”, 70.

[i.e. in Aprymov's film] with such clarity that he saw it with his own eyes".¹⁵⁴ "Then", continued the Kazakh director, "I realized that I can make one believe in something that is not really there."¹⁵⁵

Along the similar lines, Abay Karpykov admitted that in his films he avoided any claims to reality and adhered to illusory qualities of realism. In his discussion of *A Little Fish in Love*, he claimed that films only represent a "construction of one's own world" and, unlike other directors, he did not want to "impose the so-called real world" on his audience in this movie.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, despite people questioning how much of the film was reality or the director's personal views, the director admitted he had made up everything in the film using irony.¹⁵⁷ Noting that even neorealist films were a fairy tale, Karpykov said that his goal in *A Little Fish in Love* was not to "'make' realism", but to "find for realities a certain conditional form."¹⁵⁸ Thus, the Kazakh New Wave filmmakers demonstrate (along with their awareness about it) the capacity to grant their productions a profound illusion of reality, which was the main goal of Socialist Realist art as well. Even though Socialist Realist films had produced representations of life that were drastically different from those in the Kazakh New Wave productions, both approached realism in a similar way. Thus, here is another paradox of the Kazakh New Wave's desire to overcome Socialist Realism: Sergei Soloviov's Kazakh students from VGIK sought to achieve that "overcoming" by creating their own representations of reality that would be different from those of the conventional Kazakh cinema, as well as by using innovative techniques borrowed inherently from the Western *new waves*. However, this new documentary style of the Kazakh New Wave led to a successful staging of realism, which, ironically, was also the main function of all Socialist *Realist* art.

Conclusion

Emerging in the era of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the Kazakh New Wave was not totally consumed by influences coming from the world outside of the Soviet Union. Rather, it came as a result of both global

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Karpykov, in "Prishlo Novoie Pokolenie", 80.

¹⁵⁷ Karpykov, in "Prishlo Novoie Pokolenie", 80.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

and local premises. Global cinematic current of *new waves*, set primarily by Italian Neorealists and the French New Wave and followed by others across the world, influenced the young and ambitious students of Sergei Soloviov during their time at VGIK workshop. An analysis of their learning environment and the larger sociopolitical context in the Soviet Union at the time reveal some global premises for the emergence of the Kazakh New Wave that it shared with other *new waves* across the world. However, it was not a completely global phenomenon, as it may seem at first glance. Socialist Realism, a rigid political-aesthetic program that remained persistent in Soviet art throughout the Soviet period and in Kazakhstan for long after Stalin's death, became a cause for concern on the part of the Kazakh New Wave. The young Kazakh filmmakers rebelled against the Socialist Realist legacy of conventional Kazakh cinema dating to the period before perestroika and aimed to eventually overcome it in their films.

An analysis of thematic, literary, and technical contents of the Kazakh New Wave's film productions set a task of identifying the global *new wave* inspirations and influences on the Kazakh directors, as well as the films' deviations from Socialist Realist cinema of the past. It revealed that, on the one hand, the Kazakh New Wave rejected the themes, literary elements, and the old style of Socialist Realism, supplanting them with taboo topics, less text, and modernist effects all inspired by the global *new waves*. On the other hand, with the use of some themes and effects coming from their global counterparts, in some ways the Kazakh New Wave achieves a dialectical interaction with Socialist Realism through a similarity with and continuation of the latter's ideals and stylistic approaches.

A possible limitation of this research could be its juxtaposition of Socialist Realism and global *new waves*, presented here as being on the opposite sides of cinema aesthetics, which sometimes could result in self-contradiction for the author. The contradiction arises due to two factors that have not been taken into account in this paper. First, there is a reason to suggest that *new waves* and *new cinemas* around the world coming from the outside of the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20th century had built many of their theories and practices on those of the Russian avant-garde cinema of the 1920s and the early 1930s, which in the Soviet Union was followed and officially replaced by the doctrine of Socialist Realism. Second, in 1992, Boris Groys argued that the project of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union itself was primarily a

realization of the ideals of the Russian avant-garde cinema movement of the 1920s.¹⁵⁹ Thus, future scholars of the Kazakh New Wave and other cinemas of “post-socialist condition”, which aimed to break away from Socialist Realism, could benefit from exploring the question of the influence of the Russian avant-garde cinema that preceded both the emergence of Socialist Realism and global *new waves*.

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¹⁵⁹ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avante-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

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Filmography

(Note: This list only mentions the films extensively analyzed in this essay. The films mentioned briefly are not covered in this list.)

A Little Fish in Love (Vliublennaja rybka, Kazakhfilm, 1989) director: Abai Karpykov; scriptwriter: Abai Karpykov, Boris Rikhovskii; cast: Bopesh Zhandayev, Galina Shatenova, Natal'ya Novikova, Satar Dikambayev. Running time: 79 minutes.

Homewrecker (Razluchnitsa, Kazakhfilm, 1991) director: Amir Karakulov; scriptwriter: Amir Karakulov; cast: Adil Turkbenbayev, Rustem Turkbenbayev, Dana Kairbekova. Running time: 82 minutes.

The Last Stop (Kiian, Kazakhfilm, 1989) director: Serik Aprymov; scriptwriter: Serik Aprymov; cast: Sabit Kurmanbekov, Bakhitzhan Alpeisov, Murat Akhmetov. Running time: 78 minutes.

Kairat (Kairat, Kazakhfilm, 1991) director: Darezhan Omirbayev; scriptwriter: Darezhan Omirbayev; cast: Kairat Makhmedov, Indira Zheksembayeva. Running time: 72 minutes.