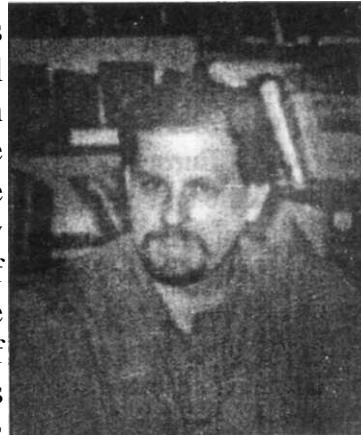


CINEMA FOR THE "SOVIET EAST": NATIONAL FACT AND REVOLUTIONARY FICTION IN EARLY AZERBAIJANI FILM*

*Michael G. SMITH***
(USA)

Before the eyes of the vast, ignorant masses of the eastern nationalities, the fast-moving frames of cinema will reproduce the many achievements of human knowledge. For the illiterate audience, the electric beam of the magic motion-picture lamp will define new concepts and images, will make the wealth of knowledge more easily accessible to the backward mind. Bakinskii rabochii, 18 September 1923

Pictures, so the first Bolsheviks believed, speak louder than words. Visual propaganda was essential in their campaign to reach the illiterate and poorly literate masses, to engage them in a new Soviet style of life. By the end of the civil war, every leading member of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party valued the political uses of film. As commissar of nationalities, Iosef Stalin recognized its potential; in his simple expression, film was "the greatest means



of mass agitation."¹ Like cinema, the Bolsheviks appeared at the confluence of two worlds, the traditional and the modern. For them, film was the perfect medium by which to critique the old and celebrate the new. Film viewed the world as they did, with one measure of hard realism, another of soft utopianism. Through montage, a movie could concentrate experience in a manageable time frame and unify story and spectacle, freezing life for display and dissection at a moment of traumatic

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** Assistant professor in the Department of History, Purdue University.

social change.²

Movies attracted audiences by constructing worlds of seemingly factual truth, worlds of a stable and fixed reality. Cinematographers promised that film would "pry apart and expose all facets of reality without deception" and "depict the mutability of all phenomena through time and space." This made film an important teaching tool, "a powerful lever for creating an elemental new culture." Film delivered a double punch of realism, combining photographic certainty with narrative force, predicating history upon the perfect illusions of the moving picture.³

Films, therefore, did not simply represent reality as it was, but. recreated it as the Bolsheviks thought it ought to be, as "revolutionary romanticism" or "socialist realism," replete with positive heroes, master plots, and the supreme value of "party allegiance" (partiinosf).⁴ The medium and message were perhaps most important in the multilingual borderlands of the "Soviet east," where Bolshevik words (first and foremost in Russian) lost their power of communication and command. The "east" referred to the predominantly Muslim Caucasus and Central Asia, along with Siberia and the Far East. Georgia and Armenia, as westernized, Christian nations, were usually exempt from the category. Nariman Narimanov, a leading Azerbaijani Bolshevik, put it most bluntly when he wrote that, "in the east, where people are accustomed to thinking not by logical reasoning but by images, cinema is the single most powerful means of mass propaganda."⁵ For the "dark" (temnye) and "backward" (otstalye) peoples at Russia's frontier with Asia, film became a mind-altering medium, the virtual reality of the early twentieth century. Cinematic socialist realism would show these peoples the way to the future, but not without first revealing to them the horrors of their own past and present. For there was a darker underside to the socialist realist equation, a style I call "national realism." It spotlighted the shadowy world of traditional "everyday life" (byt) and the archaic "popular mentality" (narodnost'),

creating a colorful backdrop of national facts and "local color" (kolorit) to better

screen the abstract communist future.⁶ National realism and socialist realism became the negative and positive poles of Soviet film. The east became a stage where the Old World fought with the new, where tradition gave way to modernity, where Bolshevik fictions about class, religion, and gender converged in the making of a revolutionary culture.

But what exactly was the status of the "national" within this historical trajectory? This article charts the realist style in national film as a distinct orientalist approach to the Soviet east, a cultural imperialism embodying the classical distinctions of Edward Said's analysis.⁷ Rather than reflect local realities, national realism tended more to project condescending ethnic prejudices onto the screen. In aesthetic terms, it meant deconstructing the national borderlands into a body of typical scenes, settings, and characters. Cameras spanned the wild, open spaces of the steppe and the Caucasus Mountains; or the plowed fields and dilapidated mosques of Turkic villages; or the quaint historic monuments of Baku and Samarkand. Stories were set within backward Muslim society, governed by uncleanness, ignorance, superstition, and brutality. Characters were simply a function of their setting. The most memorable were as primitive and instinctual as the nature around them: fanatical clerics guided by human lusts rather than faith; despotic beks driven by greed and power rather than justice; women and children made helpless by both.

In the early years, these themes were the superficial products of traditional European orientalism, Russian style. "Oriental exotica," driven by popular market demand, dominated the film industry. By the mid-1920s, party ideologists began to legitimate and perpetuate these themes as the aesthetic component of the Communist Party's line in nationality policy. Filmmakers fused national settings with socialist plots much as the party merged "national forms" with "proletarian content," a political formula that Stalin announced in 1925 and that presumed to balance ethnic territorialism with party centralism in the federal USSR state.⁸ The effect was to highlight just how doomed national forms were within the unfolding dialectic of Soviet

communism and its "union of the eastern peasantry with the Russian proletariat." The old ethnic prejudices gave way to a chauvinistic Marxism, by its very ideology predisposed against the undeveloped east. National realism reduced the eastern peoples to ethnographic and folkloric material, cardboard scenery easily wheeled into or out of the live revolutionary drama. National facts dissolved into the fictional story lines of the Russian revolution. The eastern peoples could never hope to act on their own in the world, but only be acted upon by it. Change always came from the outside, the seeds of consciousness planted by progressive, Russian authority. More than just an approach, then, cinematic national realism became one of Moscow's preferred political means of engaging, the east, dominating it, conquering it. through cultural hegemony.⁹

Azerbaijan was the place to start, and Baku was a city the Bolsheviks could understand. At the turn of the century, it was the center of the nascent petroleum industry, more a wild frontier town than a sleepy port of call on the Caspian Sea. Thousands of "Europeans" (Slavs, Jews, Armenians, and Georgians), as well as Caucasian and Iranian Muslims, flocked there to make a living, maybe even their fortunes. Their dreams and perils were narrated in Baku's first feature film, *Oil and Its Millions Are My Masters* (V tsarstve nefi i millionov, 1916). Based upon the short story written by the popular journalist, Ibragim Musabekov, the film dramatized the story of a poor Muslim boy whom by a combination of wit and good fortune exchanged his rags for the riches of an oil millionaire. But with perfect dramatic pitch he lost his soul in the process. This was a timely production for oil-rich Baku, and one typical of other Russian productions of the day which moralized on the pleasures and pains, hopes and despairs, of modern life.¹⁰ The Bolsheviks went to Baku too, if for a different kind of fortune. Their revolutionary underground became a school for the likes of Stalin, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Anastasi Mikoian, Sergei Kirov, and Lavrentii Beria. Baku was theirs: urban, industrial, and cosmopolitan. By the time the Red Army marched into the city in late April of 1920, after a few years of shaky independence under the "Democratic Republic," Azerbaijani Turks were a minority in their own capital, most of them desperately poor and uneducated, still tied to their native villages. They were a small island in Baku, and Baku was a small island of Europe in a sea of Muslim Azerbaijan.¹¹

This unique ethnic and social diversity, which reduced the native population to a vulnerable minority in the capital and a malleable majority beyond, made the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) a perfect staging ground for the integration of the non-Russian territories of the USSR into the mainstream of a new Soviet culture. If the Bolsheviks could successfully undermine the power of Islam and modernize social values in everyday Azerbaijani life, then they might also present the country as a shining example of revolutionary achievement. They made these points unequivocally clear at the First Congress of the Peoples of the East (Baku, September 1920), one of the most photographed and publicized events of the civil war period. Here they strategically aligned the principles of national and colonial revolution: to raise up the oppressed peoples of the old Russian empire meant to raise them up everywhere in Asia. Troubled by the delay of revolution in Western Europe, the Bolsheviks turned east, experiencing what one leading historian has called an "'orientalization' of Marxism." In the lavish spectacles of the congress, decorated with the ornaments of Russian communism and the traditional costumes of the "orient," the Bolsheviks lay down the challenge of colonial revolution before the trembling empires of Europe. Baku, standing at the "frontiers of Muslimdom," became their "gateway to the east."¹² In turn, Azerbaijani cinema (Azerkino) became the vanguard in what V.I. Lenin called the "cinematization of the east," which eventually encompassed the work of "Eastern Cinema" (Vostokkino) in the RSFSR and the republican film industries in Central Asia. The accent at the Baku congress and in these new cinema industries was less on the national, more on the colonial. Azerkino, for example, never made a movie about Azerbaijani nation building. Cinema became a vehicle, not to raise nations up to self-rule, but to spread Bolshevik power, values, and

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propaganda out ward to the Asian parts of the empire. Ideology counted more than independence.¹³

Like other national cinemas, Azerkino's first productions were factual documentaries; yet even they were implicated in the orientalist paradigm. Among the most heralded were newsreels of the Red Army marching into Baku, or chronicles like *Travels in Azerbaijan*, *The Struggle against Locusts*, and *The First Congress of the People of the East*.¹⁴

These were the trophy films of the revolution and civil war on the national peripheries. They gave material proof that the far horizons of the Russian-Soviet domain, scenes of dramatic struggle and great hope, were once again whole. Narimanov first recognized the inherent chauvinism of these films when he commented on the official postcard photographs of the Baku Congress, which displayed the peoples of the east in "all kinds of poses," outfitted with all the hackneyed military garb-the mountain caps, turbans, revolvers, sabers (kinzhali), and cartridge belts (shashki)-of a swashbuckling adventure movie. He joked that the western public would certainly look upon such pathetic figures, stock types in Europe's own images of the east, and understand that the Bolsheviks staged only a quaint show, not a great threat, to Europe's remaining colonial interests in Asia. Narimanov's remarks were telling. They came amid the Bolshevik party's first concerted purge of national-communist deviations throughout the RSFSR and its satellite states, purges that counted Narimanov and some of his own countrymen as victims.¹⁵ In deciding who would rule over whom, the party also decided who would define whom. Who would shape the national imagination in public discourse and popular culture. At the dawn of the Soviet era, we find a most interesting convergence of forces. As the Communist Party experienced its turn to "orientalization", it came to rely more and more on traditional European "orientalist" prejudices. In one form or another, eastern exotica fast became the rule in national film.

During the early and middle 1920s, the era of the "bourgeois entertainment film" and "commercial deviation" (kommercheskii uklon), the Ail-Union Soviet Cinema Organization (Sovkino) set the pace. In the midst of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the Soviet State promoted economic and social reconstruction through flexible market forces and self-financing provisions in many industries. Profit margins drove most of the film industry; and profit margins meant foreign imports, the most popular films on the market. Urban filmgoers remained eager consumers of modern culture, just as they had been before the revolution. Of the sixty-five pictures shown at Baku's fanciest movie houses in the fall of 1925, only four were Soviet. The rest were escapist adventures, mysteries, and melodramas like *Tarzan*, *King of the Circus*, *Fear of the Yukon*, and *The Thief of Baghdad*. Newspaper advertisements promised audiences "amazing stunts," "masses of cowboys," and "lightly clad dancers." America's "cinematic juggernaut," in Denise Youngblood's colorful terms, had reached Baku.¹⁶ Foreign films were so profitable an enterprise that the Baku Commissariat of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, the Council of Peoples' Commissars of the ASSR, the Commission to Strengthen the Red Army and Navy, the State Oil Company, the Aviation-Chemical Council, and several leading labor and professional unions were also in the movie business. In defiance of Azerkino's official state monopoly, they chased the profits to be made by screening the wildly popular foreign imports in the public movie houses and workers' clubs under their jurisdictions. Sometimes they even resorted to "sideshow" attractions (live magic and circus performances) in their theaters. The Aviation-Chemical Council even claimed that it depended on film receipts to make urgent purchases of industrial goods from Moscow, pleading to the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party that without foreign film profits the oil fields would stop pumping.¹⁷

Foreign imports were simply not enough to build up needed capital reserves and offer well-deserved rest and relaxation to workers. Sovkino and its national affiliates in Tbilisi, Erevan, Bukhara, Tashkent, and Alma-Ata also rifade' their own popular films, mixing one part serious ideology with two parts casual entertainment. Georgian cinematographers led the way. The public especially loved

Ivan Perestiani's *Arsen Dzhordzhiashvili* (1921) for its passionate and brave revolutionary hero and his *Little Red Devils* (1923) for its action scenes of the civil war, featuring "legendary rumors" about the anarchist leader, Nestor Makhno. Both were financially successful throughout the USSR. A torrent of "pseudo-national films" soon followed, from adaptations of M. Lermontov's highbrow *Hero of Our Time*, to lowbrow pieces like *Lost Treasure*, *Minaret of Death*, and *The Leper Woman*. These films were usually shot on location, always with European directors, often with native acting talent. Sometimes they were loosely based on folk legends or historical events, filled with rich, realistic detail. To European cinematographers, this made them "national" enough.¹⁸ Native audiences were unconvinced; they walked out of *Minaret of Death* at its Bukhara premiere, embarrassed by its distorted portrayal of Muslim life. But to Sovkino and its affiliates, native audiences did not matter. They made these movies for urban Russian audiences, who still craved the old stereotypes of exotica: high cliffs, mountain streams, bustling bazaars, men on horseback, and fearsome bandits. They treated the national peripheries as little more than back lots and backwater markets, without regard for local peculiarities, and they viewed their peoples as convenient extras, already in costume.¹⁹

Baku was no different. The European NEPmen engaged in filmmaking there planned to make the same kind of movies, mostly historical dramas and adventures about the anti-colonial revolutions in the east. After all, they joked, the pockets of the monied classes of Baku were bulging with cash for new homemade hits; they already "devoured 42,000 watermelons and smoked 100,000 expensive cigarettes in a day." London and Berlin, Istanbul and Teheran were also ready markets, for they still highly prized "the boulevard concoctions of Parisian eastern exoticism." As the newly appointed director of the Baku film studio, A. A. Litvinov dreamed of making it into what he called the "Universal City" of the Soviet Union. Baku, with its tropical climate, would become the "Hollywood of the east." For him, film was far too profitable a commodity to place in the hands of the natives. He and scores of "Europeans" dominated Azerkino: most were Russians, Jews, and Georgians; only three were Azerbaijani Turks, one of them the janitor.²⁰

The studio's most successful "shock-commercial film" was its first feature production, *Legend of the Maiden Tower* (*Legenda o devichei bashne*, 1924). This film used genuine native materials: Dzhafar Dzhaharly's recently composed poem about the legend; Baku's famed historical monument (the Maiden Tower); costumes and props on loan from the city's historical museum; and leading actors from the State Turkic Theater, backed by nearly a thousand local extras. Modeled on the medieval folkloric tale about romance and betrayal at the tower, the plot reached its climax with the tragic young heroine flinging herself from the tower onto the rocks of the Caspian Sea below, rather than betray her true love and remain the khan's captive. But the seasoned artistic and stage talent of V.V. Balliuzek turned all of this into a rather trite piece, filled with the usual harems, dazzling courts, and a series of well-crafted abduction, escape, and battle scenes. In one incident, the khan himself beheaded a treasonous eunuch, whose blood flowed, from his decapitated body like a small fountain. Little matter that this was not Azerbaijan, but only what city audiences imagined Azerbaijan to be. Critics described the film as "picturesque," fast-paced, and "electrifying." Baku movie houses sold out for three weeks in a row during the April 1924 premiere.²¹

Inspired by this success, Litvinov set out to conquer the cinematic world. Using the rich scenery of the Caucasus as a convenient backdrop for his typical Hollywood plots, he made "proletarian" comedic adventures like *An Eye for an Eye, Gas for Gas* (*Oko za oko, Gaz za gaz*, 1924), based on documentary footage of workers' resorts, with cameo appearances by Lev Trotskii, Aleksei Rykov, Nadezhda Krupskaya, and Demian Bednyi - all of whom just happened to be on vacation at the time of filming. *On Different Shores* (*Na raznykh beregakh*, 1925), was his attempt at a "red detective" film, based on Marietta Shaginian's popular "Mess-Mend" novels. Set amid the factories, shipyards, and oil foreign commercialism followed during

1927 and 1928. The profitability of films collapsed. Party ideologues now took aim against what they called "cinema-trash," foreign and domestic films with an accent on the popular rather than the ideological. Teenage audiences, they

complained, backed by the thousands of "street orphans" (*bezprizornye*) who made their way to temperate Baku, sometimes created scenes of "bedlam" outside the movie houses as they waited in line for such films, even spitting and swearing at the mounted police called out to keep order. Such brazen public scenes damaged the party's disciplinary efforts on the cultural front. Soon teenagers would have little to wait in line for.²⁵

By 1927, the agitational-propaganda department of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party (under the direction of the Armenian Bolshevik, Levon Mirzoian) took control over the film industry, finally introducing the party's long-standing imperatives for "nativization" (*korenizatsiia*) and "cinematication" (*kinofikatsiia*) of the national borderlands, which were meant to integrate these areas more fully into the life of the Soviet state. The results were mixed. The party made contact, engaging the native peoples in innovative ways. But contact meant as much conflict and disappointment as consensus building. More and more native Azerbaijanis, some of them intellectuals in the tradition of the nineteenth-century Muslim enlightenment (among them, Abbas Mirza Sharifzade and Dzhabar Dzhabarly), filled positions within the industry. They were promoted as the profits waned. Yet they were still under the burdensome, direction and censorship of European outsiders, about whom they became ever more critical and resentful in coming years.²⁶

Cinema also made its first forays into the distant provinces of Azerbaijan, a process that made impressive achievements over the next decade, at least in the number of movie houses.²⁷

Popular enthusiasm ran high in the beginning. On the new revolutionary holidays of the Soviet regime, the women and children of Nukha flocked to the cinema house where they were presented with free film previews. Workers and peasants in Agdash were so excited by their first movie that they followed "every little movement on the

screen" and did not want it to end. Azerkino made serious attempts to reach them with titles in Azerbaijan's New Latin alphabet, recently commissioned by the Bolshevik party in Moscow to do battle with the traditional Arabic script of Islam. Almost 100 films, most of them features, were edited in the new alphabet and became popular vehicles for basic literacy.²⁸ The Central Committee may have suppressed market commercialism, but its new cinema imperatives did little to raise the national peripheries out of their second-rate status as backwater markets. National cinema studios throughout the USSR were troubled, thanks largely to Sovkino, which obstructed their efforts in the Caucasus and Central Asia, mostly because of its desire to maintain a monopoly on cinema profits. Outside Baku, "apathy" about cinema began to spread from the largest cities (Gandzha, Nukha, and Lenkoran) to the smallest villages. When their rising expectations and tastes could not be satisfied, people lost their love of film as quickly as they had found it. Azerkino used only its shoddiest equipment to service the provinces on account of the rough roads and strain of transportation. Coupled with the long distances between movie houses and the unreliability of electricity, this meant that people waited months between films or suffered through long runs of the same one. Many believed that cinema was meant only for those few who knew Russian well enough to read the titles. After all, most national-language titles were made only for "ideologically sound" Soviet movies that had been preapproved by the party for screening in workers' and peasants' regions. In a word, movies that were no fun-tattered copies of low-budget dramas like *The Elder Vasilii Griaznov*

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or preachy pieces like *The Struggle with Malaria*.

Disgusted with the excesses of European "orientalia," which were characterized by a "hatred of the peoples of the east," the ideologues with the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party also turned their attention to making a new kind of realistic feature film. As part of its initiatives in NEP gradualism and social peace, what Sheila Fitzpatrick has called a "soft line" in cultural policy, Moscow urged party members to proceed with extreme caution in dealing with local

religious and ethnic sensibilities. In their militant campaigns against Islam, party members were to avoid the use of blunt force and were instead to rely on the more subtle instruments of persuasion. Film was just such an instrument, their most "powerful agitator" with the non-Russian public. "Images are stronger than words," they proclaimed, especially in the Muslim east, where the peasants were still in the throes of "ignorance and darkness," still suffering under the "yoke of superstition and the opiate of religion."³¹ This principle had already been tested through the critical realism of the master story writer and dramatist of the nineteenth century, M. F. Akhundov; in the lighthearted satires of the playwright, Uzeir Gadzhibekov, several of which were made into films during 1917 and 1918; and in the plays that the Turkic Satirical-Agitational Theater staged all over the country between 1921 and 1929. Centering on the everyday lives of local audiences and poking fun at the stubborn vestiges of male chauvinism within the Muslim religious establishment, their stories dramatized the classics of Turkic folklore and literature. By building on these initiatives and by effectively co-opting native trends, the Central Committee hoped that film might similarly open its antireligious campaigns with simple stories, characters, and images that would hold traditional Islam up to ridicule³². But if the themes of modernization were the same, the goals were radically different. Native modernizers had set out to reform Islam, to secularize its values in civic consciousness. Moscow had in mind its eradication from national life.

The realist style in national film was born in this atmosphere of managed Cultural Revolution. Azerkino cinematographers pioneered this realism with *In the Name of God* (*Vo imia Boga*, 1925), directed by the Baku stage director and longtime Bolshevik sympathizer, Abbas Mirza Sharifzade and written by one of Russia's leading communist propagandists, P. A. Bliakhin³³. Touted as the "first great anti-religious film" of the Soviet era, its plot revolved around a reprobate cleric who was eventually condemned by Soviet justice, but not before he ruined the lives of the women he had seduced and caused the death of an innocent young boy. Its very title, mimicking the opening lines of the

Koran, set the sacrilegious tone. Azerkino's strategy was to release it as the opening volley in the party's battle with the Shiite Muslim holy season of Maggerem (the first month of the lunar year) and its associated ritual, "shakhsei-vakhsei," in which devout Muslims beat themselves with bared swords or whips and proclaim the cryptic chant, "shakhsei-vakhsei" (Shah Hussein, O Hussein), to commemorate his martyrdom. The film, which included a very realistic scene of self-flagellation, was shown in the neighborhoods of Baku and in the provinces with the aim of exposing Islam's "ignorance, darkness, and fanaticism." To communist ideologists, this was not hyperbole but fact. In the fall of 1924, a cinema troupe (the director G. Kravchenko, cameraman V. Lemke, and a veteran actor from the Baku stage, Mamedov) traveled to the village of Shikhov to shoot "shaksei-vakhsei" for an agitational film. But as Mamedov was acting out the ritual, a crowd of devout villagers, irate at the travesty of their religious customs, began to throw rocks at the camera. Kravchenko and Lemke fled for their lives, their camera equipment in tow. Mamedov would have been stoned to death were it not for the intervention of other Azerbaijani actors. In a scene fit for the best American western, a detachment of twenty-five mounted soldiers then liberated him from the crowd and whisked him off to the local hospital for treatment. None of this was actually caught on camera, unfortunately, as Kravchenko and Lemke were still in flight.

In the Name of God was a monumental achievement for the young Soviet Propaganda State. As a film in the national realist style, it opened a new chapter in cinema history, which would now reflect the "everyday life," "darkness," and "diffuse backwardness" of the peoples of the east. These themes dominated the work of Azerkino, Vostokkino, and Central Asian cinema for the decades to come.³⁴ Sometimes their movies were known as examples of "ethnographic" realism because they set out to photograph the distant lands and cultures of the USSR as neutral, objective, national facts. The party had made this style respectable with its new political formula for the USSR-"national in form, socialist in content." Cinematographers turned it into great art, splicing national forms (raw native talent, historical chronicles, exotic rituals, and brilliant scene photography) into the master plot of socialist realism, a cinematic montage for the east. Bek Nazarov's *Khaspush* (1928), Nikolai Shengelaia's *Eliso* (1928), and Vsevolod Pudovkin's renowned *Storm over Asia* (1929) perfected the style. Memorable protagonists were at the center of their stories, characters once locked in time, now liberated by revolutionary forces far beyond their comprehension or control. In a moment of rare honesty, Bek Nazarov recognized the hazards of their endeavor, calling it "dark" (mrachnyi) rather than "ethnographic" realism because these films took such a patronizing approach to the east, illuminating the injustice of Muslim customary law, clerical corruption, religious fanaticism, and the chronic dirt, disease, and ignorance. Realism was less concerned with distinct national cultures than with generalized eastern backwardness. It turned national form into ignoble savagery. Or as one national representative noted, the style smacked of the old-fashioned distinction between the cultured "west and uncultured east."³⁵

The Soviet government had established Azerkino and its "eastern" affiliates - each with its own domestic infrastructure, each dedicated to such serious and high-minded themes - in order to overcome the remnants of ethnic prejudice from late imperial culture. Instead, these industries ended up institutionalizing Marxist chauvinism, giving ethnic prejudice a more legitimate space on the screen. Rather than fulfilling the promise of national self-determination, nativization in cinema merely locked native cadres into new Orientalist images of themselves. In one of the most notorious cases, Azerkino enlisted the leading members of the Baku Theater to make *Gadzhi Kara* (1928). Sharifzade once again directed. A cast of Azerbaijan's finest stage actors joined the production. The popular Azerbaijani writer, Dzhafar Dzhabbarly, wrote the script for the movie, based on a favorite story from the works of M. F. Akhundov, who had originally crafted it as a comedy about the follies of merchants and landowners in the early years of Russian conquest. But the party censors were not amused.

They turned the story into a heavy-handed drama about the class struggle against religion and traditional village life. Thus prepared by the highest standard of native participation and political correctness, the film was distributed to movie houses. Audiences responded by ignoring it.³⁶

By the fall of 1928, in unison with Moscow's initial drive to collectivize village farms and persecute what was left of established religion, the anti-Islam campaign moved from images to action throughout the USSR. In the Muslim Caucasus and Central Asia, the party closed down the religious schools and began to persecute clerics for their influence in the countryside. The campaign also began a frontal attack on a tradition still precious to many fathers and husbands, the veil. By focusing its energies on the "surrogate proletariat," Muslim women, Moscow sought to bring class struggle to the gender front. Ritual "unveilings" became a dramatic public display of the reaches of Soviet power on the peripheries³⁷.

Yet from such severe actions the campaign moved back to milder images. Popular resistance to the anti-Islam campaign was strong. Some men beat or murdered their wives and daughters for rejecting the veil. Most village women were unable to even imagine the audacity.³⁸ So the party again turned to film for its power to agitate and move the masses. To ideologues intent on shaking the foundations of Islamic culture and exploiting the boulevard tastes of most audiences, Muslim women offered considerable propaganda and entertainment potential. They could be portrayed as revolutionaries with sex appeal, still vulnerable to the old patriarchy, still the objects of male desire, but thereby all the more provocative when unveiled as full-fledged participants in Soviet power. Women's liberation, drawing from a long tradition of their exotic portrayal in Russian fiction about the Caucasus, now became a favorite theme in Soviet film. Dziga Vertov applied it successfully in his *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) as a colorful metaphor for the greater colonial revolution in the east, as if the east itself were a woman, anxious to be unmasked, set free. Dozens of Muslim women unveiled themselves on movie screens over the next few decades, sometimes quite dramatically, as in the case of the Azerkino production of *Ismet* (1934), in which the wind ripped the main character's veil from her face as she flew in an open-air cockpit (see figure 1).³⁹

Azerbaijan's first contribution to this genre was a classic, *SeviV* (1929). Directed by Dzhabarly and Bek Nazarov (both under the guidance of Vsevolod Pudovkin, who was passing through Baku at the time), it was the story of an impressionable young wife struggling to break free from the strictures of Muslim life (the veil, customary law,



Figure 1. *Ismet* (left, played by Kh. Mikhci'son), now a student at flight school, is confronted by her veiled family elders (*Ismet*, 1934).

and her husband). *SeviV* offers an interesting case study into the shifting boundaries between cinematic fact and fiction. The directors claimed to have scoured the streets and schools of Baku for weeks looking for the right woman to play the lead role. In the tradition of Sergei Eizenshtein, Dzhabarly wanted an amateur, an ordinary woman who might help to overthrow the

established patriarchy and give true inspiration to the thousands of women who were about to enter the schools and workplaces of Soviet Azerbaijan. He and Bek Nazarov finally found their woman-Izzet Orudzheva-during a walk along the Caspian Sea embankment. As they followed her home, eyeing her all the way, looking more and more indecent to the poor, unsuspecting girl, they became convinced that she was the right choice. Orudzheva had no acting experience whatsoever, but was the first female student at the Baku Petrochemical Institute, a living example of the spirit of Sevil in real life. *Sevil* and its sequel, *Almas* (1934), proved that fairy tales can come true. As Orudzheva reminisced, at first she was shy and still trapped in her traditional roles, but slowly she emerged as an outgoing and confident person and actress. Her struggles in real life fused with Sevil's struggles on the screen. Orudzheva went on to become one of the first female petroleum engineers in the whole USSR; likewise, Sevil joined the Women's Department of the Central Committee (Zhenotdel), and in her later incarnation as the young communist, Almas, fought for Soviet values in the Azerbaijani countryside. "They were me," Orudzheva later reminisced, "although acted out in different life settings." For Azerbaijani women, in turn, Sevil and Almas became "symbols of emancipation."⁴⁰

To the dismay, but reluctant acceptance, of party ideological censors, Sevil contained unabashed scenes of bourgeois life, naughty romance, and raw adventure. Like several other successful pictures of the early Soviet era including Iakov Protozanov's *Aelita*, *Queen of Mars* and Avram Room's *Third Meshchanskaia Street* - it gleefully portrayed the decadence of the 1920s. Among its villains was a rather sympathetic "philistine bank director" and his colorful, "Frenchified bourgeois coquette." Viewers were treated to elaborate scenes of Baku nightlife. But these wrappings made the propaganda message of the film, centered on Sevil's liberation, all the more appealing. It enjoyed financial success at home and abroad (mainly in Turkey and China). It was also a propaganda victory. Bek Nazarov reported that at one showing in Baku he personally watched as women leaving the movie house "threw off their veils and walked out of the theater with open faces." The party's entertainment gamble, a function of the "soft line" in culture, had paid off. Its administrators had taken control over national film, but not on their own exclusive terms, and not without exploiting the popular taste for amusement and distraction. The ideological idiom of Soviet power had adapted itself to the narrative language of cinema.

Less powerful in popular effect, but more visually stunning, was *Daughter of Gilan* (Doch' Giliana, 1928), set in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Gilan (northern Iran) during 1920 and 1921 and filmed partly in the southern border town of Lenkoran. Azerkino finally made a movie to fulfill the charge of the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East: to inspire the oppressed colonial peripheries to rise up in revolt. The story pitted the Gilan rebel leader and Bolshevik ally, Mirza Kuchik Khan, against the forces of British imperialism and reactionary Iranian feudalism. Originally titled "The Bronze Moon" in Iurii Slezkin's early scripts, it was more melodrama than propaganda. Critics noted that the film had little to do with revolutionary history or politics. In one evocative dance scene, the character Maro - clad only in bells, peacock feathers, and a snake-enticing her suitor to drink a glass of cognac perched on her own lips. Moved by what he had just witnessed, the villain then offered to buy her from the tavern owner for her weight in gold. Only at the very end of the film did the leading female character rather awkwardly take up arms for the Bolshevik revolution. Much of the propaganda message was lost by then, but audiences did not mind. The movie was also a remarkable accomplishment of film narrative and technique. The Russian director, Lev Murashko, and the cameraman, I. S. Frolov, applied Eizenshtein's montage techniques with great effect in scenes that mingled images of Caucasian dancers, English soldiers on bicycles, and mounted communist guerrillas; or that spliced together the grotesque faces and the behinds of British officers and their horses.⁴²

Fact and fiction, entertainment and propaganda fused creatively in the production of one of Azerkino's finest films, *The Twenty-Six*

Commissars (Dvadtsat'shest' komissarov, 1933), directed by the Georgian N. Shengelaia. This film, dedicated to the leading Bolsheviks "martyred" by White forces during the civil war, had been discussed at the highest levels of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party for years.⁴³ Bliakhin (coming off his successes with *Little Red Devils* and *In the Name of God*) wrote the script by navigating between the artistic extremes of Eizenshtein and Room, both of whom had been invited to Baku to make the film but declined. In the style of Eizenshtein's Battleship Potemkin, Bliakhin dramatized the "main forces of the epoch," the proletarian and peasant masses, expressly forbidding the twenty-six from assuming "poses along the lines of a Napoleon or heroes in Shakespeare." Their revolutionary values of "simplicity and naturalism" counted most, not bourgeois cinematic "sentimentality." "We need to reveal their strength of will," he wrote, "their certainty of victory, their endurance." But in the style of Room's *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, Bliakhin also paid attention to a handful of fictional characters: Meshkov, a "'Russian bear,' a good-hearted happy knight"; and Dzhangir, a "typical Turk with clearly expressed national features-handsome, resourceful, hot-tempered and strong." They were necessary, he thought, to please the simple tastes of the movie-going public.⁴⁴

Baku's top party echelons took special care to provide the script with the proper mix of historical realism and adventuresome drama. They wanted to photograph the look and feel of Baku. Veterans from the civil war days, who had actually lived through the events, debated even the smallest details of the film, down to the right kind of sunflower seeds that certain characters munched on for snacks. Yet others in the discussions proposed bending history in order to tap into the "revolutionary pathos" of the civil war era. In one completely fabricated scene, the Bolshevik commissar S. G. Shaumian flew in a seaplane to view the grand city of Baku. As one party leader asked at the discussions, "Will the history of the revolution really suffer if Shaumian flies?" After all, with the right camera angle, the scene perfectly lifted the dramatic pace. Cinema made it all so easy. Little

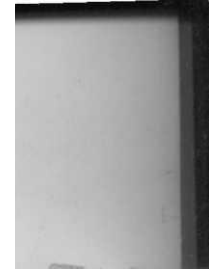
matter that history was falsified. The enormity of the events and the sacrifice of the twenty-six demanded a degree of artistic license, socialist style.⁴⁵

By the time *The Twenty-Six Commissars* was released in 1933, the principle of socialist license was already becoming the rule in Soviet cinema. The propaganda state harnessed art and culture to serve the practical needs of, the Five-Year Plans: industrialization and collectivization. Ideas and images on the printed page and on screen now justified the tremendous economic and social dislocations of these years. The Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party delivered an ultimatum that Azerkino produce and distribute films totally devoted to the goal of "socialist construction" and therefore to "completely desist from releasing apolitical, ideologically unsound films." To enforce this decree, the Central Committee's "Artistic -Political Council," backed by censors at Sovkino in Moscow, policed the whole processes of filmmaking - from the original idea, through the writing and revision of scripts, to the actual production and screening. Stalin played the role of "chief censor" by giving his final approval.⁴⁶ Cinematographers now refined the realist style in national film; their imperative, to "cultivate the mass viewer in the spirit of socialism." They still highlighted "local color" to represent the benefits of secularism, women's emancipation, and Bolshevik rule but now applied the heroic Russian model of sovietization and collectivization with more vigor. If native characters had once loomed large against the backdrop of indigenous backwardness, now they shrunk before the might of the Russian model, what Robert Tucker has called a kind of "national Bolshevism." The best and brightest native communists adopted the look, lifestyles, and values of Russians. Their task was to "illustrate the victory of the new over the old, but to illustrate it on our national ground."⁴⁷

In effect, socialist realism meant a hardening of ethnic stereotypes, a sharpening of Soviet orientalist categories. Its ideological prescriptions threw the Old World into harsher relief, making it seem more backward, more villainous than ever-National films now

recounted the struggle with the brutal nature of Central Asia and Siberia. The struggle may have been fierce, but the rewards were also great, especially for the Russian frontiersmen who, with the help of European science and technology, forced nature to yield its riches: reindeer, cotton, oil, or even rare gems.⁴⁸ National films also began to portray the east as a scene of dangers, as a wild frontier of bandits to be conquered over and over again by brave Soviet "frontier guards" (pogranichniki), especially in the deserts and mountains of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, where Basmachi and other rebels still roamed⁴⁹. In Azerbaijan's first "socialist realist" films, the representatives of traditional Islamic culture reached new lows as scoundrels: husbands more abusive, mullahs greedier, mobs more fanatic than ever. They made the Soviet future-represented by clean factories, efficient collective farms, and the streamlined Latin script-look all the brighter. None of these movies made for great cinema. Sovkino judged them mediocre at best. But it also valued these works as native products meant largely for native audiences. They were decent second-rate films from distant second-rate republics.⁵⁰

To its credit, the Soviet film industry did seek to promote mutual respect and harmony between the country's ethnic groups, albeit at the cost of their own cultural self-determination. Azerkino struck all negative portrayals of Armenians and Russians in one of its scripts, even as the most innocent ethnic humor. In a story about the Kazakh uprising against the tsarist regime in 1916, Vostokkino took special care to create sympathetic Russian characters so as not to incite any russophobia among the local population." It also scrapped a 1929 script, described as an "everyday drama" about cannibalism among the Votiak peoples, for being too inflammatory. Several nationality films taught a more explicit lesson about Soviet internationalism, most often through stories about interethnic romances between Christian girls and Muslim boys, or Russian pig farmers and Dagestani shepherds the Romeos and Juliets of the Soviet present.⁵¹ Demeaning ethnic stereotypes still crept into film scenarios. During debates at the Baku film studio in 1934, Azerbaijani cinematographers acknowledged the



need for characters who were "national in form," who displayed a distinct "national color." Audiences should feel the right "psychology" of their fellow natives on film, should "recognize **even** the dog lying on the rooftop" of the peasant's hut. Yet the cinematographers also saw a danger in such typecasting, for the characters **might** "then become "grotesque" and laughable to Russian audiences, or **embarrassing to** Azerbaijanis. They warned that the folk props of wine and barbecued meat **Ocebab**) in the average script were shallow representations of national culture, that they "smelled of the old attitude toward the east."⁵² Boris Barnet's *At the Deepest Blue Sea* (Usamogo sinego moria, 1935), a comedy about the antics of a Caspian fishing collective, proved this point all too well. Both Russian and Azerbaijani reviewers criticized Iusuf, the movie's main Azerbaijani character, as being too simple and cheerful, "too detailed a national character," especially when he sang and played the mandolin. Here was proof that what they called the "banalities" of "eastern exoticism" were not yet dead in Soviet film. But Barnet, a veteran director from the experimental Russian studios of the early 1920s, was simply toeing the general line, outfitting the movie with the stock figures of every class and nationality who filled the entertaining "mass" comedies of the day.⁵³

The dominant genre within cinematic socialist realism was the "historical-revolutionary" film, usually covering the events before and during the Bolshevik revolution. In it we see political interference and ethnic stereotyping in clearest relief. Almost all of the major Soviet nationalities made such films, but with one crucial difference: in Georgian and Armenian productions, the active revolutionaries and Bolsheviks were almost always natives who made their own kind of revolution for their own peoples.⁵⁴ The "backward" nationalities of the east were not so privileged. A whole series of Russian teachers-"the worker Andrei Kravtsov," the "soldier-Bolshevik Egor," the rebel leader Pugachev, the "Bolshevik Vasilii," or the "great" V.I.Lenin -taught the natives the proper lessons about class consciousness and revolutionary activity. Some of these peoples were so "small" - like the

poor Chukchi -that they were not even involved in revolutionary events. They faced no greater enemy than their own poor hygiene and shamanist practices, which the kind "social worker Kuznetsov" and the sympathetic teacher Tat'iana Petrovna worked patiently to overcome.⁵⁵

Like these productions, Azerkino's historical-revolutionary films scripted a fictional Bolshevik past and constructed a new historical memory for the Azerbaijani people. Facts were still important; socialist realism meant that writers and directors should root their stories in reality. But the heightened emphasis on fiction, on the master plot, meant that they should also flatten the facts, manipulate history to the party's liking. Characters in *They Came from Baku* (Bakinty, 1938) and *Peasants* (Kendliliar, 1939), set during the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, were sketched according to the new lore of Soviet orientalism, by special order from the Central Committees of the Russian Communist Party and the Azerbaijani Communist Party. The Slavs in the former were the professionals and activists like the healer and teacher, Dr. Mikhailov; or the "bearded Russian master worker," the steadfast Zakharych, who politely removed his shoes and spoke some Azerbaijani when visiting the home of a Turk. The Azerbaijanis, in contrast, were the artless pledges of Russian hegemony, like the "dark faced" and "slow speaking" oil driller Dzhafar, just one man among the masses of "poorly dressed Turkic workers," who were less acting extras than simple props set against the oil rigs of Baku. The images of Azerbaijanis in *Peasants* were even more "memorable and graphic" (one of Moscow's script conditions), especially in contrast with the alert and class-conscious Slavic character, Petro. Goidarnir, the "singing revolutionary," was the voice of "popular grief and the "spontaneous rebel" (figure 2). Ul'fet, his romantic interest and revolutionary partner, was the daughter of a common, poor Azerbaijani peasant, the "personification of fear." Mekhmandarbek, the feudal lord and master, was sly, two-faced, and despotic" (figure 3).⁵⁶

Behind the scenes, native critics in Azerkino and the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party were troubled by these chauvinist distinctions. As more and more of them filled positions

within the government and party apparatuses, they became politicized} to their own ethnicity and to the ways in which it was projected onto the big screens remarkable development given the severity of the purges against the national intelligentsia between 1928 and 1938.⁵⁷ Movie characters, they protested, spoke in "proverbs," in a demeaning folkloric speech, not in the "everyday, genuine -language of) Azerbaijanis." Dzhafar's character was "schematic, primitive, and! naive"; his dialogue was childlike and impish. He sang and danced in happier moments and even played the fool in order to trick the jailer and save his Russian comrades from punishment. Poor Dzhafar was little more than the courtjester of the Baku revolutionary underground. But these protests went largely unanswered. The propaganda state's elaborate system of surveillance and control silenced them. At a high party conference called to deal with the criticisms, M. D. Bagirov (head of the Azerbaijani Communist Party) stood firm. He agreed to "enliven" Dzhafar's character and to add a few more Turkic workers to the scenes. But he brooked no "fantastic" or "exaggerated" representations of Azerbaijani reality. Revolution was always made by Russians, after all; the "first seeds of Bolshevism were planted here by Russian revolutionaries, sent by Lenin himself".⁵⁸

Cinematographers were much more cautious about representing the historical role of Stalin in the Transcaucasus underground. To promote the mystique of the "great leader" and protect themselves from any deviations, Bagirov and his censors never expressly portrayed Stalin as a character in *They Came from Baku*. Workers lovingly referred to him as Koba (his underground alias). Bolshevik revolutionaries from Tbilisi and Erevan smuggled his political directives into Baku by train. Dzhafar learned to read in prison by memorizing one of his books. The tsarist police scanned their files for his photograph. But like the prophet Mohammed, the face of Stalin never appeared in the picture. Nor did Stalin's face appear in the 1939 production of *Aina*, which centered around the "passionate love and unbounded loyalty of the Azerbaijani people for their father and teacher, leader and friend." To show her devotion, the central character (*Aina*) tried to stitch

Stalin's portrait into the fabric of an oriental carpet. All too human an artist in the face of such greatness, she could never quite "get the smile right." The Azerbaijani producers had an equally rough time in making this film, which they finally aborted after considerable expense and scandal.⁵⁹

These troubles were signs of a deeper pathology in the national film industry. The 1930s saw the advancement of natives in institutional terms. In Azerbaijan, they now comprised a majority of directors, assistant directors, artists, and scriptwriters. About a dozen studied the art and business of film at the State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow.⁶⁰ But these were quantitative rather than qualitative achievements. Native filmmakers at both Azerkino and Vostokkino suffered from an inferiority complex. All of their major productions were made with outside assistance of one kind or another, often with temporary experts (Balliuzek, Litvinov, Pudovkin, Murashko, Bek Nazarov, V. Turin, Shengelaia, and Barnet, as we have already seen) who were brought in to take charge of a film production but then left as soon as it was over. This reliance on outside help turned into a vicious cycle of self-doubt, with natives never fully learning or taking charge of production. Visitors from Moscow did not help matters with their public displays of chauvinism. Azerbaijani promotees at Azerkino complained that the European directors of the Literary-Artistic Department were ensconced in a "fortress" of racist attitudes against native talent and discriminated against their scripts. Others protested that a visiting cinematographer from Russia put on airs as their "god and tsar." On a shoot in Kazakhstan, the Vostokkino director Bykhov-skii was even accused of "dictatorial" and "great-power chauvinism" for treating his Tatar assistant like a lackey and for calling the Kazakh actors our "former dogs" and "dirty bastards."⁶¹

The dilemma went even deeper. Native screenwriters were often not fluent or eloquent enough in Russian, in the language of cinema, or in the

idiom of communism to write viable scripts. European directors and party censors were rarely pleased. Visiting directors often rewrote native scripts with urban Russian audiences and their own ethnic

prejudices in mind. They manipulated national color to better serve their plots, creating a set of sliding stereotypes with just a few national distinctions between them, as applicable to Yakutia as to Azerbaijan. In Vostokkino they distorted national images, creating Ingusli who were "wild people," Komi who were "sluggish and colorless," and Tatars who were "murderers, thugs, and prostitutes." European directors moved among so many different locations, and were so ignorant of local cultures, that their native characters began to look and feel the same. In the words of one critic, they created an "eternal primitive" for all places and times. Others protested that Vostokkino's movies mimicked the colonial novels of the British empire, filled with the crass imagery of European superiority and Asian backwardness, all the tired characters of lords, maharajahs, spies, lovers, murderers, and more spies. Only now the character of a "Lord Ramsey" was exchanged for a Soviet "Michurinite."⁶² A strange circular logic seemed to operate in national cinema. The undeveloped peoples of the east needed film in order to help propel them into the future; yet film recapitulated the very images of backwardness that it was designed to overcome.

Stock characters were so common in Vostokkino's productions, in part, because its directors needed movies that could sell universally across the expanse of the USSR, from one national region to the next. Silent movies made this possible. But with the advent of sound in the 1930s, Vostokkino's work became very nearly impossible. It was simply too expensive to make sound movies in the different non-Russian languages of the RSFSR. The individual markets were just too small. So the film industry began to rely more and more on dubbing Russian language productions into the non-Russian languages. Azerkino found its own special niche in the industry when it produced the first such dubbing in the history of Soviet cinema. *Chapaev*, the consummate socialist realist film, and a classic piece of orientalism in its own right holds the honor. Shua Sheikov spent six months, day and night, "teaching Chapaev to speak in Azerbaijani."⁶³ The dubbed version traveled throughout the Turkic-speaking republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as abroad in Turkey and northern

Persia. The Azerbaijanis now argued that Baku should become the center of a new dubbing industry for the east, with Azerbaijani as the Turkic lingua franca of cinema. Moscow was not convinced, favoring separate dubbing into the major Turkic languages. Its paramount concern was to maintain the purity of any Russian-language usage in all national films. A conference dedicated to the issue in 1938 announced that henceforth any use of Russian be spoken not by the national actors themselves, but be dubbed later into the purer, accent-free dialect of Russian speakers.⁶⁴ The advent of sound in film and radio had elevated the stock of the Russian language and its speakers, already the de facto standards of public discourse since the Five-Year Plans. Russification became an official priority in Soviet cultural life. Moscow now decreed that the eastern nationalities, Azerbaijanis included, exchange their half-born Latin alphabets for Russian Cyrillic. Their national schools were obliged to devote more time and energy to the teaching of Russian. Their dictionaries and lexicons were outfitted with new borrowings from Russian.⁶⁵

Russification spread into the movie houses as well. Cinema became a mass medium in the national peripheries during the 1930s, reaching millions of new viewers, almost exclusively with Soviet feature films.⁶⁶ Yet from Azerbaijan, to Dagestan, Mordovia, and Kazakhstan, the national cinema industries were in a state of disrepair and dysfunction. Their equipment was as old and tattered as ever. Then-movie houses were plagued by transportation lags, electric outages, and a shortage of films. Their protectionists were untrained and poorly paid, sometimes turning into itinerant salesmen to make a decent living

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as they traveled from town to town.

The movies that were screened in the national peripheries were usually Russian productions in the Russian language. In Azerbaijan, because of the complexities and delays in the dubbing process, only a handful of native-language productions ever circulated to viewers. So Russian-language

films were first shown for long stretches of time in any given region, only to return months later in their dubbed versions.⁶⁸ In the 1920s, pictures were supposed to speak to the

nationalities louder than words; by the 1940s, they were being served pictures that did not even speak. Although people still went to the movies, they were less active participants in the life of the screen than passive spectators of an incomprehensible world far away.

Russification was not a simple, unilateral dictate, from above. Moscow could afford to be somewhat generous in dispensing its patronage, could afford to negotiate with its national subordinates. Beginning with the mid-1930s, culture came in a high Soviet orbit, which most nationalities could reach through literary translations and film clubbing. The cinema epics and musicals of late Stalinism, embodying what Katerina Clark has called a "mythic Great Time" and Soviet Russian nationalism, now celebrated legendary heroes from the Russian past: everyone including Aleksandr Nevskii, Ivan the Terrible, Minin and Pozharskii, Pugachev and Razin, Peter the Great, and imperial warriors like Kutuzov, Suvorov, and Nakhimov.⁶⁹ But culture also came in dozens of lower national orbits, each of which followed Moscow's trajectory, if at its own pace. Through these lower orbits, the Soviet propaganda state reinvented the ethnic minorities of the USSR as subject nations, peopling their pasts, through the historical-biographical film, with heroes all their own. Usually they were writers or philosophers, sometimes legendary, at other times real. In the ideal case, they were contemporaries and admirers of A. S. Pushkin, newly minted as friend of the Decembrist rebels lover of Caucasus culture, and "father" of the Russian literary language. Lesser Pushkins to be sure, but like him they prefigured the Soviet future in all its glory.⁷⁰

In the Azerbaijani case, *Sabukhi, Son of the People* (1941) dramatized the life and work of M. F. Akhundov, "father" of the Azerbaijani enlightenment. Initially, with the backing of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, the screenwriter M. Rafili portrayed Akhundov as a secular humanist, the keeper of Azerbaijani national values. The popular musician, Ismail Dagestanly, played him as the "singer of a happy life." Again we see the legacies of nativization policy. Native cadres created characters to their own liking, in their own image. But in the end, Moscow party censors found

Akhundov's character too passive, too "meditative," too "pessimistic." Stalin expressed his own personal wish: the film should depict the "historically progressive significance of the unification of the Caucasus peoples with Russia" and the "vanguard role of the Russian intelligentsia." With such prodding, Rafili and the director Bek Nazarov edited the final cuts of the film, transformng Akhundov into an active, class-conscious figure, an eager student of the early Russian

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revolutionary movement and admirer of Pushkin's poetry.



Figure 4. The newlyweds, Askar (left, played by Rashid Betbutov) and Giu'chara (right, played by Leila Dzhevanshirova), sing of their happiness (*A Measure of Cloth*, 1945).

Moscow touched even deeper chords in popular memories by promoting stories set in far-off, mythical times, with simple propaganda value for the present. Viewers in the nationality regions were regaled with glamorous tales about medieval bards and star-crossed lovers. These were films in the neo-folkloric style of late Stalinism. *Narodnost'* became respectable again.⁷² Azerbaijan's contribution to this genre was the musical masterpiece, *A Measure of*

Cloth (Arshin mal alan, 1945), based on Uzeir Gadzhibekov's comical operetta from a traditional folktale, which followed the endearing courtship between the merchant, Askar, and the love of his life, Giu'l'chara (figure 4). Like other products of Stalinist folklorism, it bore the unmistakable stamp of G. V. Aleksandrov, the master of musical comedies, who once lectured Azerkino cinematographers on the art of making homespun movies, "good-natured" and "kind-hearted." It also drew from the memorable rhythms of Aleksandrov's musical collaborators - I. Dunaevskii, L. Utesov, and M. Blanter - who inspired Rashid Beibutov to sing the role of the lovable Askar. Moscow applauded the film as a reflection of Azerbaijani "national color," filled with delightful song and dance routines and several interlocking romantic plots. It was "a gleaming, cheerful subject, developing at a swift tempo."⁷³

While a fun movie to watch, *A Measure of Cloth* is a difficult movie to assess. On the one hand, it was one of the most celebrated "national" productions of Azerbaijani cinema (winner of a Stalin prize), the first to feature an all-Azerbaijani cast of writers, directors, composers, and actors-proof of the successes of "nativization" policy thus far. Appearing in theaters just in time for the victory against Hitler, a rather happy and lenient time by most accounts, it was also a favorite movie for the masses, punctuated with light, self-deprecating humor. Some critics have even argued that it served as a refuge for Azerbaijani communal identity: as a "sign of the moral health of the nation" in its struggles against Russian domination, as well as a foundational and transitional film, preparing the way for the more genuinely Azerbaijani movies (by design and production) of the 1950s and beyond.⁷⁴ Yet the movie also left Azerbaijanis with the message that the stereotypes of old were true; that they were members of a captive, folklorized nation; that theirs was a wistful nationalism, really no nationalism at all. The innocent, fun-loving characters of the film, against pastiche backdrops and bubbling fountains, fortified this message all the more. Indeed, the most lasting images of the Muslim peoples during World War II caught them singing and dancing in the

"cinema concert" series, designed to entertain the front line troops with the exotic sights and sounds of the peoples of the cast. The whole

world may have been at war; but the best they could do was sing.

During the war, Moscow launched a campaign to promote "love for the motherland," not simply for the Soviet Union but for one's native republic as well. Movies depicted Russians and non-Russians fighting fascism together. Aleksandrov's serial, *One Family*, filmed in Baku during 1943 with the assistance of several Azerbaijani cinematographers and dedicated to one family's passage through the war, served as a broader metaphor for the big family of peoples in the USSR.⁷⁷ Yet other films also resurrected patriotic military heroes from the Transcaucasus to stir national pride. From Georgia came *Georgir Saakadze* (1943); from Armenia, *David Bek* (1943); and from Azerbaijan, *Fatah Khan* (1947). They covered the fabled exploits of three early modern warriors in defending their homelands against Persian hegemony, usually with the help of Russia's tsars and generals. Fatah Khan was the most controversial. Moscow sponsored it during one of the first crises of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union still occupied the ethnically Azerbaijani territories of northern Iran and was playing a delicate game of brinkmanship at keeping them, possibly even uniting them into a larger satellite state. To fulfill these designs, the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party rejected the initial script, drafted by several Azerbaijani screenwriters, which painted Fatah Khan in rather sober and meditative tones. Instead, it charged the outsider, E. Dzigan, to center the film around an activist hero, with full attention to the fraternal alliance between the "elder brother" (Russia) and the subject peoples of the Transcaucasus in

their "progressive" struggles against the "Iranian yoke."⁷⁸ At the end of the picture "Fatali Khan" may have failed in his bid to unite the Azerbaijani lands against the foreign aggressor to the south. But as the wind picked up against his back, he and his troops vowed to continue the struggle, with "the many millions of Azerbaijani people," until "the day when the sun shines on a united Azerbaijan." Unfortunately, that day had not yet come, the Soviet Ministry of Cinematography decided

in 1948. By then the Azerbaijani crisis had abated and the film's sharp irredentist message proved too inflammatory. It was stored away in a secret vault in Moscow. Unlike its neighbors, Azerbaijan was not yet ready for such a bold national hero.⁷⁹

This is not life but the shadow of life and this is not movement but the soundless shadow of movement.⁸⁰ Maksim Gor'kii's cynical lament to the world at the dawn of the film age in 1896 seems equally relevant for the eastern nationalities half a century later. To the inexperienced audiences who first saw films like *In the Name of God* and *SeviV* in the 1920s on the movie screens of their dusty towns or villages, pictures certainly did speak louder than words. Film told its make-believe stories with a powerful effect, mixing reality and imagination, fact and illusion, life and its gray shadows. Film served the higher purpose that the Bolshevik party had first set for it, to propagate Soviet values in an imagery and language appropriate for the time and place, if always within a strict narrative uniformity. The party reached the distant eastern peoples with images of themselves encapsulated in messages from the future. As local settings gave way to socialist plots, national facts transformed into revolutionary fictions. Moscow could not look upon the borderlands of the east except from its own European center, its own forward position in the moving drama and progress of Marxist history. The more stylized films from the 1930s and 1940s - be they adventures like *They Came from Baku*, or historical dramas like *Sabukhi*, or musical comedies like *A Measure of Cloth* - were even simpler and more direct in their messages. By then, Azerbaijan and its neighbors could not make their own way in the world without Russian guidance. Films created not just new knowledge or fun entertainment, but, through a set of "ideological fictions," a whole new reality for the east. By inventing national history on film, the Soviet regime reinvented the history of the nation writ large. Cinema helps us to see just how much of a subjective, ideological construct the "nation" can be, made all the more believable by the objective facts marshaled to serve its creation. For under Soviet sponsorship, national traditions became symbols of

obedience and authority. The once backward borderlands became the

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happy colonies, the contented subject nations.

As I hope the Azerbaijani case study has shown, the nationalities themselves did not always believe these staged cinematic productions to be a fair and true representation of their homelands. They tried to Jib rate the "national" as an expression of their own collective memory and character. But Moscow confined it to an expression of its own stale orientalist forms. Native protests against Russian ethnic prejudices over the years testify to a resilient national awareness and pride. Yet those very protests were always muted or ignored. The experience in national filmmaking spoke less about the resilience of nativization and nation building, more about the creative power of the Soviet propaganda state to manipulate and generalize national images, to teach a lesson about "eastern backwardness" and the "fraternal friendship and unbreakable unity of the Soviet peoples".⁸²

The photographs were real, but communist ideology and European cultural prejudices intervened, emptying the nation of its content, reducing it to a manipulated form, coloring it with Russian privileges.

APPENDIX A Number of Azerbaijani Movie Houses, 1928-1935

	1928	1932	1935
	Silent	Silent	Silent/Sound
<i>Central (Baku)</i>			
Theaters	10	18(1 sound)	19/3
Clubs(open)	31	12	33/9
Clubs (closed)	70	90	90/2
Traveling	-	1	21/0
<i>Provincial</i>			
Stationary	50	27	82/2
Traveling	24	94	• 132/0
<i>Schools</i>	-	67	125/0

Source: I compiled these institutional statistics from a variety of Azerkino reports (1928) in GANI, f. 57, op. 1, d. 577,1. 8; GANI, f. 57, op. 1, d. 479; and (1932-1935) in GANI, f.57, op. 1, d. 1090, 114; GANI, f.796, op. 10, d.629.

APPENDIX B

Number of Azerbaijani Movie Houses and Languages of Films Shown, 1940

	<u>Movie Houses</u>		<u>Language of Films</u>	
	Silent	Sound	Russian	Azerbaijani
Baku	20	186	55	.12
Kirovabad	27	62	52	3
Evlakh	15	51	24	0
Sabir Abad	12	31	29	4
Lenkoran	6	23	22	0
Khachmas	3	21	15	2
Nakhichevan	4	20	22	4
Stepanakert	8	17	24	3

Source: The chart's statistics are from GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 1141 (Azerkino report to the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, 1940), I. 44.

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NOTES:

1. Stalin quoted at the Thirteenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1924, from Richard Taylor, *The Politics Of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, Eng., 1979), 64. For background, see Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton, 1985), 158.
2. For more on the Bolshevik appreciation of film, see Taylor, *Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 34-36. On film as a peculiarly modern enterprise, see Stanley Corkin, *Realism and the Birth of the Modern United States: Cinema, Literature, and Culture* (Athens, Ga., 1996), 12-13, 194; and Leo Chamey and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, 1995).
3. Quoted from Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii Azerbaidzhanskoi respubliki (GANI), f. 816, op. 7s, d. 6 (Azerkino production report, 1923), I. 37. "Cinema is nothing but an illusion," Stalin once said, "but its laws are dictated by life." Quoted in Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (New York, 1991), 148. For fuller treatments of realism in early Soviet film, see Denise Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918-1935* (Ann Arbor, 1985), 29-30, 76-79, 224-25.
4. For these general descriptions of socialist realism, I have relied on Taylor, *Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 92-94; Rufus Mathewson, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, 2d ed. (Stanford, 1975); Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1981); Regine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic* (Stanford, 1992); and Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 5, 145, 148, chap. 8.
5. Narimanov, quoted from E. A. Kulibekov, *Kinoiskusstvo Azerbaidzhana* (Baku, 1960), 9-10. Nariman Narimanov (1870-1925) was a major figure in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party before and during the revolution, namely as a leader of the Azeri-Turk "Gummet" (Endeavor) fraction; afterward, he served in several top administrative posts in the Azerbaijani and Russian Soviet governments.
6. I use the problematic term *narodnost*¹ to mean those traditional cultural values of village or national life that, in the perspective of socialist realism, are worthy of assimilating into the proletarian culture of the future, along the "dialectic" from "spontaneity to consciousness." See the discussions in Robin, *Socialist Realism*, 51-55; Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 84; and C. V. James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (New York, 1973).

7. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979), 145, 205. On orientalism in Soviet cinema, see Lino Micciche, "The Cinema of the Transcaucasian and Central Asian Soviet Republics," in Anna Lawton, ed., *The Red Screen: Politics, Society and Art in Soviet Cinema* (London, 1992), 300. For a rare study of Soviet orientalism in architecture, see Greg Castillo, "'Peoples at an Exhibition: Soviet Architecture and The National Question,'" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 715-46.

8. For background on Soviet nationalities policy, I have relied on Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, 1984); Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union*, trans. Karen Forster and Oswald Forster (Boulder, Colo., 1991); and Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993).

9. Quoted from GANI, f. 1305, op. 1, d. 49 (Azerkino production reports, 1925-1928), 1. 25; and GANI, f. 816s, op. 2, d. 128 (Azerkino production reports, 1925-1928), 11. 1-48. For the broader discussion, see Said, *Orientalism*, 5, 153-55.

10. Hereafter, I will use the term European in this same sense, to refer to any non-Muslim living or working in the Muslim Caucasus and Central Asia. Starring a beloved actor and progressive thinker from the Baku Theater, Gusein Arablinskii, and appearing in both Russian titles and Azeri-Turkic titles, the film was a hit. The leading folk musicians of Baku-Dzhabbar, Kurba, and Gulu-performed live at the premiers. To accommodate religious sensibilities, movie houses offered separate seating and viewing for Muslim women. The producers even published the script, in AZERi Turkic, as a separate piece of pulp fiction. G. Mamedova, "Prolog," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 2 April 1972. For more on life in late imperial Baku and the effects of Russian colonial rule, see Kurban Said's novel, *Ali and Nino*, trans. Jenia Graman (New York, 1970). On late imperial cinema, see Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception* (London, 1994).

11. For background, see Audrey Altstadt-Mirhadi, "Baku: Transformation of a Muslim Town," in Michael F. Hamm, ed., *The City in Late Imperial Russia* (Bloomington, 1986), 284; and Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985).

12. See Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, chap. 3. Quoted from Helene Carrere d'Encausse, "Determinants and Parameters of Soviet Nationality Policy," in

Jeremy Azrael, ed., *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices* (New York, 1978), 45. For the documents of the congress, see John Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920-First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York, 1993). Quoted from Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literature i iskusstva (RGALT), f. 989, op. 1, d. 445 (Azerkino "Report for Presentation at the All-Union Conference on Film," 29 March 1924), I. 89.

13. Vladimir Lenin, quoted in his "Directive on Cinema Affairs" (17 January 1922), in Richard Taylor, ed. and trans., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in documents history of national Documents* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 56. The official government history of national film framed Azerbaijan's early contributions in these same terms. *Istoriia sovetskogo kino, 1917-1967*, vol. I, 1917-1931 (Moscow, 1969), 221, 680. Azerkino was established on 4 July 1920 as the Photographic and Cinematic Department of the People's Commissariat for Education (it was reorganized as the Azerbaijani Photographic and Cinematic Directorate on 5 March 1923). For background, I have relied on N. Gadzhinskaia, *Kino-iskusstvo strany ognei: Polveka azerbaidzhanskogo kino, 1920-1970 gg.* (Moscow, 1971). For a relevant discussion of the role of ideology in revolutions, see Theda Skocpol, "Cultural Idioms and Political Ideologies in the Revolutionary Reconstruction of State Power," *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (New York, 1994), 199.

14. On the birth of national film as photographic documentary, see L. Kh. Mamatova, *Mnogonatsionalnoe sovetskoe kino-iskusstvo* (Moscow, 1982), 7; *Istoriia sovetskogo kino*, 1:713-20; and M. Z. Rzaeva, *Dokumentalnoe kino Azerbaidzhana* (Baku, 1971).

15. Quoted from Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv politicheskikh partii i obshchestvennykh dvizhenii Azerbaidzhanskoi respubliki (GAPPOD) f 609, op.1, d.1 19 (Narimanov's top-secret report, "Toward a History of Our Revolution in the Borderlands," presented to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party and comrade Stalin, December 1923), I. 12. In this report, Narimanov lashed out at Moscow's russifying elites in Azerbaijan. For background on the national purges of these years, see Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford, 1992), 122-24; and Stephen Blank, "Stalin's First Victim: The Trial of Sultangaliev," *Russian History* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 155-78.

16. Audience favorites included Mary Pickford's *Daddy Longlegs* and *Soap Bubbles*, Norma Talmedge's *Yes or No* (*Two Ladies*), and Reginald Denny's

Leather Gloves. On the influence of American cinema in the Soviet Union, see Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (New York, 1992), 17-19, 43-51; and in Europe more generally, Victoria de Grazia, "Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinema, 1920-1960," *Journal of Modern History* 61 (March 1989): 53-87. GAPPOD, f 1, op. 235, d. 199 (Box-office records and receipts), II. 34-43, 65.

17. GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 199 (Azerkino production reports, 1925-1926, and the Aviation-Chemical Council's "Letter to the TsK AKP," June 1926), H. 43, 50.

18. On the popular "eastern" films, see Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era*, 16-20; Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 59, 77-79, 87; Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 45; *Istoriia sovetskogo kino*, 1:201-10, 218-19, 618-19, 626-27, 657, 709-12 and *Bakinskii rabochii*, 31 October 1923, 22 May 1924, and 31 March 1924. Most of Makhno's campaigns were fought on the steppes of Ukraine, but *Little Red Devils* was set amid the "wild mountains, rivers, forests and cascades" of the North Caucasus-much more romantic. From Leyda, *Kino*, 168. Several Georgian and Armenian cinematographers (Ivan Perestiani, Nikolai Shengelaia, Mikhail Chiaureli, and Amo Bek Nazarov) were among the USSR's most successful directors.

19. RGALI, f. 2489, op. 1, d. I (Vostokkino production reports), II. 85-90, 114.

20. Quoted from GANI, f. 57, op. 1, d. 23 (M. S. Saiapin's remarks in the Narkompros ASSR reports, September and December 1920), II. 477-83, 800. Litvinov quoted from GANI, f. 816, op. 7s, d. 6 (Azerkino and NKRRKI-Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate-investigation reports, 1924), II. 58-60, 74-77; and "Kino: Perspektivy nashei kino-promyshlennosti," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 18 May 1924. GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 6 (Personnel statistics), I. 295. GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 199 (Personnel statistics), II. 43, 55.

21. Over the next two years, the film remained a popular attraction in the city: 13,795 viewers filed into theaters to see it (as compared to the average of 5,000); it brought in 8,300 rubles in gross receipts (as compared with the average of 3,000). It also played well throughout the Soviet Union. Among the native actors who joined the production were Ismail Idaiatzade, Ibragim Azeri, and Khanafi Teregulov. The star attractions were Ernesto Vagram (Vagram Papazian) and Sofia Zhozeffi. "Kino," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 14 March 1924. V. V. Balliuzek (1881-1957) had been an artist and costume

designer for the Ermoliev film factory in 1914; during his illustrious career, he worked on such films as *Queen of spades*, *Father Sergei*, and *Cigarette Girl of Mosselprom*.

22. Another feature was *The Oil Worker at Rest and Recuperation* (*Gorniak-neftik na otdykhe i lechenii*, 1924). Marietta Shaginian wrote a series of books in the 1920s, based on the Nat Pinkerton detective series in the United States, recounting the struggles between valiant workers and vile

capitalist conspirators. "Mess Mend" was their secret password. See Marietta Shaginian, *Mess Mend: Yankees in Petrograd*, trans., with an introduction, Samuel D. Cioran (Ann Arbor, 1991).

23. "Kino", *Bakinskii rabochii*, 10 April 1924. RGALI, f. 989, op. 1, d. 383 -(Narkompros ASSR administrative documents, 1923) 11. 21-22, 39, 159; GANI, f. 57, op. 1, d. 387; (Narkompros materials, 1924-1927), I. 6 GANI, f. 57, op. 5, d. 42 (Narkompros 1924-1927).

24. GANI, f. 816s, op. 2, d. 128 (NKRKI investigation materials, 1925-28)? H. 1-22, 55-60. GAPPOD, f. 1, Op. 235, d. 199 (Azerkino production report and related materials, 1925), H. 34-43, 65. On the broader disputes between Sovkino and the Main Committees on Political Education, see Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 38-39; and Kenéz, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 90. One of Litvinov's bombs, *Baigush* (1924), a typical "eastern" adventure story, was so bad that a special commission of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party judged it totally "ridiculous and unacceptable," forbidding its exhibition anywhere in the USSR. Azerkino quickly sent out a phony news release, sadly reporting that a "carelessly thrown cigarette" had ignited three parts of the movie's negatives, destroying them in one repair. It had cost nearly 17,000 rubles to make; an accidental screening in the southern city of Lenkoran brought grand total of 41 rubles.

25. Ia. Andreev, "Dovorno bezobraziiia," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 1 June 1928. GANI, f. 816, op. 7s, d. 6 (Azerkino and NKRKI reports, 1924), H. 58-60, 74-77, 81. Alan M. Bali, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930* (Berkeley, 1994), 24-25.

26. GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 6 (Personnel statistics), 1. 295; GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 199 (Personnel statistics), 11. 43, 55. Before it was closed, the Baku film studio trained Dzhabar Dzhabarly, Mikail Mikailov, and Agarza Kuliev as its first native directors.

27. For details on the number of movie houses in both Baku and the provinces, see appendix A.

28. Reports on film in the provinces (1926 and 1928), in GANI, f. 57, op. 1, d. 449, 1. 1; and d. 479, 1. 179.

29. Taylor, *Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 92. Sovkino tried over and over again to restrict Vostokkino's control over Russian populations within non-Russian regions, or to prevent its movies from being screened in the USSR. Vostokkino discussions (1928-1931) in RGALI, f. 2489, op. 1; d. 1, 1. 103; d. 10, 11. 94-95; d. 38, 1. 4.

30. Azerkino production reports (1926-1929) in GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 1, 1. 6; and d. 8, 11. 327, 347; f. 1305, op. 1, d. 49, 1. 32; f. 57, op. 1, d. 577, 1. 16.

Sometimes Azerkino smuggled commercial films into the villages against the prohibitions of the censors, simply to make a profit. Happy was that day for the eager village audience. Main Committees on Political Education reports (1926), in GANI, f. 57, op. 1, d. 449, 1. 6; 235 d. 199, 1. 53.

31. Quotes from the Azerkino reports (1924 and 1925), in GANI f. 379, op. 3, d. 259, 1. 51; and GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 199, 1. 37. Quotes from "Na anti-religioznom fronte," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 3 July 1924, and "Vo imia boga, miloserdnogo i milostivogo," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 15 July 1925. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The 'Soft Line' in Culture and Its Enemies," *The Cultural Front, Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, 1992), 91.

32. The director B. Svetlov filmed two of Gadzhibekov's works, *A Measure of Cloth* (*Arshin mal alan*) and *If Not This, Then That* (*Ne ta, tak eta*), in 1918. Azerkino filmed them again in 1945 and 1957, respectively. GANI f. 57, op. 1, d. 752 (Report on the theater's activities), 1. 4. On the Azerbaijani enlightenment in general, and its mutations under the Soviet regime, see Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (New York, 1995), 25-36.

33. Bliakhin was the author of the recent hit, *Little Red Devils*. Sharifzade, who directed with the guidance of Balliuzek and Litvinov, was a veteran dramatist who had helped to stage anticlerical satires and pro-Bolshevik agitational plays in earlier years. Riza Akhundov, "Kak proshla antimageramskaia kampaniia," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 10 August 1925. "Kino: S'emka shakhsei-vakhsei," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 2 October 1924.

34. Makhmudbekov, "Ob azerbaidzhanskoi kinomatografii," *Trud* (Baku), 17 December 1927. Vostokkino founding protocols and production plans (1928-1929 and 1930-1931) in RGALI, f. 2489, op. 1, d. 1, 1. 34; d. 3, 11. 2, 9; d. 19, 1. 82; and d. 11, 1.

35. For background, see *Istoriia sovetskogo kino*, 1:300-304, 658-67; Mamatova, *Mnogonatsional'noe sovetskoe kino-iskusstvo*, 46-47; and Leyda,

Kino, 248-50. The quote is from a lakut representative, quoted in RGALI, f. 2489, op. 1, d. I (Vostokkino production reports), 1. 94.

36. On Gadzhi Kara, see GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 8 (Protocol of the Repertory Committee of Narkompros), 1. 23; and the commentary in "Sona (Gadzhi Kara)," in the Latin-script publication, Gandzh ishchi (Young worker), 15 March 1929. I has not been able to find any existing copies of this film. Among the theater stars participating were M. A. Aliev, Aziza Mamedova, G. A. Abasov, Sona Gadzhieva, and S. Rukhulla.

37. For background, see Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton, 1974); and Shoshana Keller, "The Struggle against Islam in Uzbekistan, 1921-1941: Policy, Bureaucracy, and Reality" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1995), 5, 41. On Azerbaijan, see Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, "The 'Ali-Bayramov' Club, the journal *Sharg* Gadini, and the Socialization of Azeri Women, 1920-1930," in *Central Asian Survey* 5, nos. 3-4 (1986): 221-239; Dzheikhun Gadzhibeili, *Izbrannoe* (Baku, 1993); and the interior police and agitational-propaganda documents in GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 74, d. 280 (Documents of the State Political Directorate and of the Agitation-Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, September 1928), U. 4-26.

38. GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 74, d. 282 ("Top Secret Protocol of the Secret Department of the TsK AKP," 11 November 1928, "On the Struggle with Hooliganism Related to the Removal of the Veil"), 1. 133.

39. Also see the discussions of such movies as *Vtoraia zhena* (Uzbekkino, 1927), *Chadra* (Uzbekkino, 1927), and *Doch' sviatogo* (Uzbekkino, 1931), in *Istoriia sovetskogo kino*, 1:702-9; and in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: Annotirovannyi katalog*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1961-1968). For historical background on Russian cultural paradigms of Caucasus women, see Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (New York, 1994).

40. GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 8 (Azerkino Production report, 1927), 11.238, 294-297. N. Pashkin, "Izzet-khanuni: Ocherk," *Sotsialisticheskaia inzhinieria*, 3 November 1972. Izzet Orudzheva, "My shli riad riadom," *Molodezh' Azerbaidzhana*, 16 November 1978. Orudzheva defended her dissertation, "Methods to Improve Oil-Based Lubricants," in 1947 and eventually became

a doctor of engineering science and an academician. *Almas*, Azerkino's first sound film, was directed by Dzhabbarly.

41. Quoted from A. Gurvich, "Sevil'," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 19 June 1929. A. Bek-Nazarov, *Zapiski aktera i kinorezhissera* (Moscow 1965), 159-62. Reviews of the film in the Baku Latin-script newspaper, *Yeni Yol* (New path), 21 June 1929 and 25 June 1929, testified to its popularity. For background on the "decadent" 1920s, see Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (New York, 1992), chap. 2.

42. See the favorable reviews of the film in *Yeni Yol*, 13 July 1928 and 2 December 1928. For more on the Gilan Republic, see Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan*, 94-100; and Janet Afary, "The Contentious Historiography of the Gilan Republic in Iran: A Critical Exploration," *Iranian Studies* 28, nos. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1995): 5.

43. For the events surrounding the executions of the "twenty-six," see Ronald G. Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 1972). The hagiography went into full swing when the Azerbaijani Communist Party celebrated their memory in print and commissioned the film. See : GANI, f. 379, op. 3, d. 45 (Decree of the Baku Committee, 26 July 1923), 1. 60; and the special edition of *Bakinskii rabochii*, 20 September 1923.

44. GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 6 (Azerkino production materials, 1926), II. 43-48. RGALI, f. 2214, op. 2, d. 10 (Room's report). Quoted from RGALI, f. 2214, op. 2, d. 11 (P. A. Bliakhin's screenplay, 1926).

45. Quoted from RGALI, f. 2214, op. 1, d. 25 (Stenogram of the meeting of the Agitation-Propaganda Department of the Baku Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, 18 February 1927). When it finally appeared in 1933, the film was a critical success but a popular failure. For more on falsified representations of the twenty-six commissars, including Isaak Brodskii's imaginative painting, see Peter Hopkirk, *Like Hidden Fire: The Plot to Bring Down the British Empire* (New York, 1994), 390.

46. Quoted from GANI, f. 379, op. 3, d. 4381 (Decree of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party and the Director's Board of the NKRRK ASSR on control over and purge of Azerkino, 31 May 1931), 1.17. For background, see Richard Taylor, "A 'Cinema for the Millions': Soviet Socialist Realism and the Problem of Film Comedy," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 (1983): 439-61; Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 145; Leyda, *Kino*, 303.

47. Quoted from GANI, f.2926, op.1, d.25 (Azerkino production report, 1934), 1. 15. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva Azerbaidzhanskoi respubliki (GALI) f. 330, op. 1, d. 35 (Protocol of the Baku Film Studio Conference, March 1940), I. 7. Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York, 1990), 568; and Tucker, *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia* (New York, 1987),
48. See such pieces as *Zabyt' nellzia* (1931); *Sem' serdets* (Turkmenskoe kino, 1934); *Khizhina starogo luvena* (MosfiPm, 1935); *Liudi doliny sumbar* (Turkmenskoe kino, 1938); *Novyi gorizont* (Bakinskaia kinostudiia, 1940); *Sad* (Stalinabadaskaia kinostudiia, 1939); and *Almazy* (Sverdlovskaia kinostudiia, 1947)-in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*.
49. See such pieces as *Ai-gul* (Soiuzdefii'm, 1936); *Umbar* (Turkmenfil'm, 1936); *Trinadtsat'* (MosfiPm, 1936); *Druz'^ia vstrechaiutsia vnov'* (Tadzhikskoe kino, 1939); *Pogranichniki* (Ashkhabadskaia kinostudiia, 1940); *Zastava v gorakh* (Mosfil'm, 1953)-in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fiPmy*.
- 50.1 have in mind such Azerkino movies as *Letif* (1934), *Ismet* (1934), and *Almas* (1934). Sovkino reviews in RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d. 112; and d. 113, 11. 1-6, 26-27. 51. GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 8 (Protocol of the Repertory Committee of Narkompros), 1. 23. RGALI, f. 2489, op. 1, d. I (Script discussions at Vostokkino, 1928), 1. 22. See the descriptions of *Giulli* (1927); *Eliso* (1928); *Dom na vulkane* (1928); *Asal'* (Tashkentskaia kinostudiia, 1940); *Svinarka i pastukh* (MosfiPm, 1941); and *Nerushimaia druzhba* (Erevanskaia kinostudiia, 1939) - in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fiPmy*.
52. GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 14 (Protocols of the Literary Department of the Baku film factory, February and March 1934), II. 7-14, 17-18, 20-23.
53. Quoted from RGALI, f. 2441, op. 1, d. 28 (Typed Sovkino stenogram, 1 April 1936), 11. 1-6. Critique of the film in the Baku Latin-script newspaper, *Adabiyat* (Literature), 1 June 1936, no. 13. For background about Soviet-Russian mass comedies, see Richard Stites, "Soviet Movies for the Masses and for Historians," *Historical journal of Film, Radio and Television* 11, no. 3 (1991): 243-52.
54. See the descriptions of *Poslednii maskarad* (1934); *Pepo* (Armenkino, 1935); *Arsen* (Goskinprom Gruzii, 1937); *Karo* (Armenkino, 1937); *Zangezur* (Armenkino, 1938); *Sevanskie rybaki* (Erevanskaia kinostudiia,

- 1939); Kadzhana (Tbilisskaia kinostudiia, 1941); and Georgii Saakadze (Tbilisskaia kinostudiia, 1943) - in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye filmy*.
55. See the descriptions of *Krytyifurgon* (1927); *Kliatva* (Uzbekfil'm, 1937); *Druzia* (Lenfil'm, 1938); *A-angel'dy* (Lenfil'm, 1938); *Salavat Iulaev* (Soiuzdetfil'm, 1940); *Romantiki* (Soiuzdetfil'm, 1941); *Ego zovut Sukhe-Bator* (Mongolkino, 1942); *Dzhambul* (Alma-Atinskaia kinostudiia, 1952); *Bai i batrak* (Tashkentskaia kinostudiia, 1954) - in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*.
56. The character descriptions for *Bakintsy* (directed by V.Turin) are from RGALI, f.2450, op. 2, d. 144 (V.Turin's script); and for *Kendliliar* (directed by Samed Mardanov) from GALI, f. 330, op. 1, d. 26 (Main Cinematography Directorate of the Council of Peoples' Commissars SSSR, April 1937), 11.1-2. *Kendliliar* should not be confused with Fridrikh Ermler's *Peasants* (1935).
57. For background on the purges, see Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, chap. 8; and Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 81- 87.
58. The criticisms were voiced in GALI, f. 330, op. 5, d. 4 (Protocol of the Artistic Council of the Baku Film Studio, December 1940), U. 14-16; and in GALI, f. 330, op. 1, d. 29 (Materials of the Azerkino conference, September 1936), I. 77. Bagirov quoted from GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 795 (Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party discussions of the script, fall of 1937), 1. 13.
59. GALI, f. 330, op. 1, d. 35 (Comments by Rasul Rza, Mustafaev, and Sheikov, Deceniber 1939), 11. 12-18. In fact, four major Azerkino projects of the mid-1930s, largely native in design and production, were shelved just after completion, mostly because of low quality. See *Istoriia sovetskogo kino, 1917-1967*, vol. 2, 1931-1941 (Moscow, 1973), 443.
60. GANI, f 37, op. 1, d. 1090 (Azerkino production reports, 1934), 1. 4; and GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 1141 (Azerkino production reports, 1940), 1. 28. Among those recruited by the State Institute of Cinematography were Samed Mardanov, Ali Sattar Atakishiev, Rza Takhmasib, Mekhti Gusein, Rasul Rza, Enver Mamedkhanly, Sabit Rakhman, Gusein Seidzade, Tafik Tagizade, and Niiazi Badalov. Native Azerbaijani writers - Samed Vurgun, Mirza Ibragimov, Mekhti Gusein, Suleiman Rustam - also began to play more active roles in the writing of scripts and the production of films.
61. GANI, f. 57, op. 1, d. 1090 (Azerkino report, 1934), I. 12. GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 795 (Letter of protest from Niiazi Badalov to the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, October 1936), I. 17. GALI,

f. 330, op. 1, d. 75 (Discussion, 1937), 11. 99-100. Letters of protest (1933) in RGALI, E 2489, op. 1, d. 25, 1. 91; and d. 52, 11. 68-69.

62. Quoted from Vostokkino script reviews (1929-193!) in RGALI, f. 2489, op. 1, d. 10, 1. 106; and d. 3, 1. 6; and d. 38, U. 3-5, 10-39. Script reviews (1930 and 1935) in RGALI, f. 2489, op. 1, d. 11, Ü. 29, 49; and d. 108, 1. 77. On the cult of Russian scientists in Soviet film (including the agronomist Michurin), see Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 240.

63. The original story begins as a detachment of Russian workers make their way east across the Urals during the civil war, where they finally meet Chapaev, the 'fiery steed of the steppes.' He embodies the peasant vices of instinct and license, disorder and anger - the earmarks of what I would call an internal Russian orientalism. But his vices become virtues when directed to the Bolshevik cause, feeding the "dialectic" from peasant spontaneity to proletarian consciousness. Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 84. On the dubbed version, see RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d. 34 (Protocol of the "Commission to Establish Norms and Standards for Film Dubbing," of the Main Directorate for the Production of Feature Films, or Kinokomitet, of Sovkino, 1938), TJ. 1-8. Sheikov was a graduate of the Azerbaijani State Theatrical Tekhnikum and the Moscow Meierkhol'd Theater. Nikolai Ibalov, "Zhizn', otdannaia kino," Baku, 18 September 1981.

64. RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d. 34 (Protocols of the conference on dubbing, 28 September 1938), 11. 48-49, 64.

65. Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 148-55.

66. By 1941, six and a half million people filled the movie houses of Azerbaijan, largely as a result of the introduction of cinema to the provinces. They watched 330 Soviet and only 12 foreign films. Statistics (1932-1941) compiled from GALI, f. 330, op. 1, d. 211, 1. 56; GANI, f. 411, op. 8, d. 61, 1. 119; GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 23, 1. 4; GANI, f. 411, op. 8, d. 186, 11. 137-41.

67. GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 141 (Azerkino report to the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, 1940), I. 44. GANI, f. 2926, op. 1, d. 9 (Stenogram of a meeting of cinema administrators, 1935), I. 23. Vostokkino documents (1930) in RGALI f. 2489, op. 1, d. 52, 1. 94; d. 20, 11. 37-38, 125, 239; and d. 19, 1. 69. In fact, the whole USSR suffered from a "movie shortage" (malohartina) between 1927 and 1937. See Maya Turovskaya, "The 1930s and 1940s: Cinema in Context," in Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, eds., *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema* (New York, 1993), 42.

68. GAPPOD, f. 1, op. 235, d. 141 (Report of the Directorate for Cinefication, 1940), U. 62-71. In 1940, of 63 Russian-language films in the Azerkino inventory, only 5 were dubbed into Azerbaijani, including one such copy of *They Came from Baku* for the whole country. For details on the language of film shown, see appendix B.

69. Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 39-40. Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 201-2. Richard Taylor, "Red Stars, Positive Heroes and Personality Cults," in Taylor and Spring, eds., *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, 88.

70. See the descriptions of *Puteshestvie v Arzrum* (Lenfil'm, 1936); *Syn Mongolii* (Lenfil'm, 1936); *Pesni Abaia* (Alma-Atinskaia kinostudiia, 1945); David Guramishvili (Tbilisskaia kinostudiia, 1946); Alisher Navoi (Tashkentskaia kinostudiia, 1947); *Kolybel' poeta* (Tbilisskaia kinostudiia, 1947) - in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*. On the Pushkin cult, see Marcus C. Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880* (Ithaca, 1989). For more on the limited revival of national cultures at this time, see Lowell Tillett, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, 1969); and James von Geldern, "The Center and the Periphery: Cultural and Social Geography in the Mass Culture of the 1930s," in Stephen White, ed., *New Directions in Soviet History* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990), 75-76.

71. RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d. 1280 (Script reviews and reports, 1938), U. 2-55. Bek-Nazarov, *Zapiski aktera*, 216-18.

72. See the descriptions of *Kadzheti* (Goskinprom Gruzii, 1936); *Nasreddin v Bukhare* (Tashkentskaia kinostudiia, 1943); *Takhir i Zukhra* (Tashkentskaia kinostudiia, 1945); *Volshebnyi kristall* (Ashkhabadskaia kinostudiia, 1945); *Pokhozhdeniia Nasreddina* (Tashkentskaia kinostudiia, 1946); *Anait* (Erevanskaia kinostudiia, 1947); *Keto i kote* (Tbilisskaia kinostudiia, 1948); and *Dalekaia nevesta* (Ashkhabadskaia kinostudiia, 1948) - in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*.

73. Quoted from GALI, f. 330, op. I, d. 9 (Aleksandrov's report, "Elementy rezhisserskogo stsenariia," 15 October 1942), n. 1-2. Quoted from GALI, f. 330, op. 1, d. 58 (Goskino report, 1944), I. 37. GALI, f. 330, op. 1, d. 58

(Azerkino documents), 1. 99. For background, see Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 74-75, 88-91.

74. At a screening of the film (sponsored by the International Research and Exchanges Board and the Kennan Institute for Russian Studies) at the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic

Studies (Washington, D.C., October 1995), the capacity audience laughed throughout the film and applauded at the end. The quote is from Rakhman Badalov, "Mifologiya Azerbaidzhanskogo kino," paper presented at the Kennan Institute for Russian Studies, Washington, D.C., October 1995.

75. For more of the "singing films" of the war years, see such movies as *Tadzhikskii kinokontsert* (Dushanbe kino, 1943), *Kontsert piati respubliki* (Ashkhabadskaia kinostudiia, 1944), and *Pod zvuki dombr* (Alma-Atinskaia kinostudiia, 1944) - in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*.

76. Quoted from G.Abaszade, "Podniat' kinoobslyuzhivanie na uroven' trebovani voennogo vremeni," *Bakinskii rabochii*, 27 March 1943.

77. See the descriptions of such films as *Syn Tadzhikhistana* (Dushanbe kinostudiia, 1942) and *Otvazhnye druzia* (Tashkentskaia kinostudiia, 1941), in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*. Mikailov and Takhmasib assisted Aleksandrov.

78. Quoted from RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d.1 485 (Materials of the Ministry of Cinematography of the USSR, 1947), U. 1-6. For background on the crisis, and its political and cultural dimensions, see Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijani Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992); and Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan*, chap. 6.

79. Quoted from RGALI, f. 2450, op. 2, d. 1484 (Director's script). GALI, f. 330, op. 1, d. 16 (Ministry correspondence, 1948), 1. 8. The movie was not released until after Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956.

80. Maxim Gorky, "The Lumiere Cinematograph" (4 July 1896), in Taylor, ed. and trans. *Film Factory*, 25.

81. The quote is from Said, *Orientalism*, 94, 321. On the nation as "construct," see the discussion in Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, chap. 1; and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983). On the use of traditions as "models of command" and "models of modern behaviour," see Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, Eng., 1984).

82. In his memoir of Azerbaijani cinema, A. Aliev, "Dukhovnyi mir sovremennika," *Pravda vostoka* (6 June 1980), cited Narimanov's statement about "eastern backwardness" ((quoted earlier in this article) as if it were really true. Quotes from Mamed Kurbanov, "Polveka sluzheniia narodu i ego

iskusstvu," Baku, 26 August 1969; and A. Iskenderov, "Tvorcheskoe sodruzhestvo, vzaimopomoshch¹," Baku, 24 July 1972.

Xülasə

"SOVET ŞƏRQİNDƏ" KİNO: ERKƏN AZƏRBAYCAN FİMLƏRİNDƏ MİLLİ AMİL VƏ İNQİLABI ƏFSANƏ

Michael G. SMITH

(ABŞ)

Kommunistlər filmin böyük təbliğat vasitəsi olduğunu qeyd edir, "forma-ca, milli və məzmunca proletar" Sovet incəsənəti yaratmağa çalışırdılar.

İlk Bakı filmi "B uapcTBe HeqbTH H MHJIHOHOB" 1916-cı ildə çəkilmişdi. 20-ci illərdə isə kino vacib sənət növü kimi inkişafa başladı. Bu dövrdə Bakı bir bolşevik şəhəri idi, bu kosmopolit şəhərdə azərbaycanlılar azlıqda idilər. Lakin Şərqdə bolşevik təbliğatı aparmaq üçün Bakı müsəlman-dünya-sının ön cəbhəsinə çevrilirdi.

Azərkinonun ilk məhsullan sənədli filmlər idi. A.A.Litvinovun direktor olduğu bu kino sənəti mərkəzində əksəriyyəti ruslar, yəhudilər, gürcülər təşkil edirdilər, orada yalnız üç azərbaycanlı vardı.

1924-cü ildə çəkilmiş "Jlerenna o aeBHHeH 6auHe" filmi uğurlu oldu, tamaşaçıların böyük diqqətini çəkdi.

1925-ci ildə məhərrəmlik, şaxsey-vaxsey əleyhinə yönəlmiş "Bo HMH Bora" filmi yaradıldı.

1927-ci ildə AKP MK təbliğat şöbəsinin müdiri Levon Mirzoyan kino sənayesini öz nəzarəti altına aldı.

Savadsızlığın aradan qaldırılması üçün yeni latın əlifbasını öyrətməyə xidmət edən yüzə yaxın sənədli film çəkildi.

1928-ci ildə C.Cabbarlının eyni adlı məşhur əsər (M.F.Axundov) üzrə hazırladığı ssenari əsasında Abbas Mirzə Şərifzadə "Hacı Qara" filmi çəkdi. Ancaq partiya senzurası bu maraqlı mövzunu təhrif edib filmi din və ənənəvi kənd həyatına qarşı sinfi mübarizə şəklinə saldırdı. Tamaşaçılar bu filmə maraq göstərmədilər.

Qadın azadlığı kinonun əsas mövzularından birinə çevrildi. 1928-ci ilin "floqb THJiaHa" filmi böyük uğur qazanmadı. 1929-cu ilin "Sevil" filmi isə tək Azərbaycanda deyil Türkiyə və Çində də geniş yayıldı. Filmin rejissor-ları C.Cabbarlı və Bek-Nazarov idi. Baş rolda İzzət Orucova oynadı. O, həmçinin 1934-cü ilin "Almaz" filmində də baş rolu ifa etdi. Azərbaycan və ümumiyyətlə Şərq qadınları üçün Sevil və Almaz emansipasiya simvolları idi.

1934-cü ildə Azərkino "İsmət" filmi başa çatdırdı.

1933-cü ildə N.Şenqelayanın rejissoru olduğu "fBaauaTb mecTb KOMHC-capoB" Azərkinonun ən gözəl filmlərindən biri oldu. Bu zamandan başlayaraq sosializm quruculuğu əsas mövzu, "sosialist realizmi" əsas metod oldu.

1935-ci ilin "Y caMoro CHHero Mopa" filmi balıqçılar haqqında komediya idi və xeyli tənqiddə məruz qaldı.

30-cu illərin ikinci yarısında üstünlük "tarixi-inqilabi" filmlərə verildi. 1938-də "EaKHHUbi" və 1939-da "Kəndlilər" filmləri ekranlara buraxıldı. Sonuncu film milli hisslərin qızışmasına səbəb oldu. Azərbaycanlıların (filmdə Cəfər) ifrat inqilabçılığı M.C.Bağirovun xoşuna gəlmədi. Onun fikrincə film "sxematik, primitiv və sadələşmiş" idi. O, "Bolşevizmin ilk toxumlarını burda Leninin özü tərəfindən göndərilən rus inqilabçıları səpirlər" deyərək azərbaycanlıların daha doğru-dürüst təsvir edilməsini tələb etdi.

30-cu illərdə kino sənayesində azərbaycanlı kadrlar artdı və çoxluq təşkil etdi. Rusiyadan gələn rejissor və digər kino sənətkarları ilə yerlilər arasında narazılıqlar əmələ gəldi.

Məşhur "Çapayev" filmi azərbaycancaya dublyaj edildi və Qafqaz, Mərkəzi Asiya respublikalarında, eləcə də Türkiyədə və Şimali İranda göstəril-di. Azərbaycanlılar Türk dünyasında nümayiş etdinnək üçün azərbaycan di-linə dublyajlar edilməsinin məqsəduyğunluğunu isbat etməyə çalışırdılar. Moskva isə ayn-ayn türk dillərinə dublyaj olunmasını düzgün hesab edirdi.

30-cu illərdə mədəniyyət Sovet orbitində üstün sahə hesab olunur, ruslar öz keçmiş tarixlərinə aid bir çox fihnlər çəkirdilər. Digər tərəfdən isə rus-laşdınna siyasəti güclənir, latın qrafikası rus kirili ilə əvəz edilir, məktəblər-də rus dilinə aynlan vaxt artırılır, milli dildə leksikona rus terminləri doldu-mlurdu.

1941-ci ildə Azərbaycan maarifçiliyinin atası hesab olunan M.F.Axundov haqqında "Səbuhi" filmi çəkildi. M.Rəfilinin ssenari müəllifi, Bek-Nazaro-vun direktor və İsmayıl Dağıstanlının Səbuhi rolunda çəkildiyi bu film Moskva senzurasının xoşuna gəlmədi. Axundovun çox passiv və çox pessimist olması işə yaramadı. Stalin filmdə "Qafqaz xalqlarının Rusiya ilə birləşməsinin mütərəqqi əhəmiyyətini, rus ziyahlarının avanqard rolunun göstərilməsini" zəruri hesab etdi. Film buna uyğun yenidən işlənildi.

1945-ci ildə Ü.Hacıbəyovun operettası əsasında çəkilən "Arşın mal alan" filmi tam azərbaycanlılar tərkibində çəkişmişdi. Böyük uğur qazanan bu film Stalin mükafatı aldı.

1947-ci ilin "Fətəli xan" filminin əsas ideyası azərbaycanlıların Rusiyanın köməyi ilə İranla aparılan müharibə nəticəsində "Azərbaycanın birliyi" (Cənubla bərabər) əldə etmək uğrunda mübarizəsi idi. Sovet senzurası 1948-ci ildə filmin ekranlara yolunu dayandırdı və yalnız 1956-cı ildə Xuruşovun 20-ci partiya qurultayında Stalini tənqidindən sonra film nümayiş etdirilməyə başladı.

Azərbaycanda o dövrlərdə göstərilmiş filmlərin sayı və dili haqqında statistik mə'lumat bəllidir. Misal olaraq 1940-cı ilə baxaq:

	Rusca	<u>azərbaycanca</u>
Bakı	55 52 24	
Kirovabad	29 22 15	
Yevlax	22 24	
Sabirabad	12	
Lənkəran	3	
Xaçmaz	0	
Naxçıvan	4	
Stepanakert	0	
	2	
	4	
	3	