

Setting the Stage for Soviet and Afro-Asian Solidarity at Tashkent

From 1968 to the late 1980s, the Tashkent Festival of Cinemas of Asia and Africa (and, after 1976, Latin America) was the venue where one could see the greatest number and widest variety of films representing the world beyond Europe and North America. The figures, cited in Soviet media, are impressive. The first edition of the festival showcased seventy-two feature fiction films and forty-four documentaries from forty-nine countries of Asia and Africa, hosting a total of 240 guests from more than fifty countries. By 1976, 109 countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America—as well as various stateless organizations (UN, UNESCO, Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Patriotic Forces of Chile, the organization representing the Chilean communists and socialists in exile)—presented 210 films. The subsequent, fifth edition featured as many as seventy public events—roundtable discussions and press conferences—in addition to film screenings, reportedly attended by more than two hundred thousand people.¹

Yet these numbers do little to give us an accurate idea of the Tashkent festival's uniqueness. Taking place over the course of a week, with all screenings open to the public (many of them taking place in the two-thousand-seat Palace of Culture), the festival featured a highly eclectic selection of films. Its goal was to showcase as many types of cinematic expressions from Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the participating countries were willing or able to offer. As a result, the festival selection combined fiction and documentary; militant political filmmaking and commercial genre films (ones deemed sufficiently progressive by Soviet standards); institutional nonfiction (newsreels, travelogues, industrial and educational films); independent productions; combat documentaries made on location; and lavish musical melodramas. This eclectic selection stood very much apart from the developments at the international (European) film festival circuit, where the promotion of individual auteurs was gradually becoming the norm during that exact period,



FIGURE 1.1. Hotel Uzbekistan: festival logo and slogan in French, Spanish, and English. Photo used by permission of Sputnik International.

solidifying the specific aesthetic criteria we now think of as “art cinema.”² Many of the cinematic categories included at Tashkent, such as commercial genre films, wouldn’t be shown on the European festival circuit. Others, such as industrial, ethnographic, or educational nonfiction, would be assigned to their own specialized festivals. Instead of reinforcing existent and continuously widening political-aesthetic divisions across commercial, state-produced, and independent cinemas (or between Brechtian cinema of political modernism and Lukácsian realism, or “Cinema du Papa” and the New Wave cinemas), at Tashkent the Indian megastar Raj Kapoor shared space and screen time with the Bengal modernist Mrinal Sen, avant-gardist Med Hondo with old-fashioned realists like Tewfiq Saleh or Yamamoto Satsuo, and PLO combat films with UNESCO-produced ethnographic documentaries. Diplomats and bureaucratic officials participated at roundtable discussions alongside political exiles from various global battlefronts—all in the name of “Peace, Progress, and Freedom of the Peoples,” the festival’s slogan (fig. 1.1).

TASHKENT FESTIVAL AS COLD WAR SOFT POWER

The heterogeneity of the Tashkent festival as a cultural space and a contact zone was reflected in the multiplicity of roles it performed. The festival’s *raison d’être* was to serve as a tool of cultural diplomacy and an attempt at exercising Soviet soft power in Asia, Africa, and Latin America through cinema. Yet the motivations, ideas, and experiences of the festival participants—hosts, guests, and audiences—did not always coincide with the Soviet state’s vision, producing effects that, while not necessarily conflicting with the official framework, often bypassed or exceeded it.

Contrary to an assumption that the selection of films at such a festival must display pro-Soviet propaganda, here there was little need or expectation of it; neither was this a site where a specific film aesthetic or ideological formula (socialist-realist

or otherwise) was especially demanded. From the viewpoint of the Soviet organizers, the very existence of the festival, with its considerable geographic scale and reach, was in itself a sufficient demonstration of the success of its ideological goals, which included positioning the Soviet Union—and its public-sector film industry—as the model for cultural development worldwide and “an indicator of economic and political progress,” as David Engerman observes in relation to a similar logic running through self-assessments of Soviet economic aid of the period.³

Nor were the oft-repeated slogans of affinities and solidarities at the festival entirely a projection of the Soviet state. In addition to the importance of the sense of a shared cultural heritage and other articulations of regional unity (whether pan-Asian, -Arab, -African, or Latin American), most of the participants of the festival shared a sense of the heightened social and political function of cinema, however differently their specific political beliefs may have been. For most of them, politicization of cinema was not antithetical either to the medium’s aesthetic value or to its entertainment potential (as was commonly assumed in film discourses in the West at the time). The notion of an independent national cinema in a postcolonial context was itself already a necessarily political concept. For most of Tashkent’s guests the ability to represent one’s own national culture (as against the one imposed by the colonial or neocolonial gaze) on global screens awarded their productions with an understandably heightened sense of a cultural, social, and political mission. This was even more evident in countries that were still undergoing active struggle—whether with colonial or neocolonial forces, internal or external. Film-making in these conditions was a highly politically charged and potentially dangerous act, raising the stakes of every utterance. Ironically, this experience resonated with the everyday life of Soviet (and other socialist) filmmakers, whose proximity to a state apparatus meant that, paraphrasing Denise Youngblood, no film could ever be “only” a movie—creating further affinities between the Soviet and Third World filmmakers, even if some of them could only be voiced indirectly.⁴

For the foreign participants of the festival, the Soviet position vis-à-vis the US hegemony, both in the realm of realpolitik and in the global film market, was also a crucial factor for making strategic alliances. For many African, Asian and Latin American countries, the creation of an independent national cinema depended on the kind of political stability and economic development that Soviet aid could offer, whether on the official state level or specifically in terms of infrastructure and training, or both. Thus, many film industries and cultural institutions were eager to take advantage of the possibilities offered by the Soviet bloc: possibilities of exchange and collaboration, of building greater distribution and exhibition networks, and of learning from filmmakers and institutions with whom they may not otherwise have come in contact.

And at Tashkent, just as in real geopolitics of aid, participation did not entail exclusivity: the festival committee accepted films that had already been entered into other festivals, as well as films that had already been commercially released and had their initial run. These films were shown in the so-called informational

section of the program, but this distinction was secondary. The festival did not have a real competition program; instead, it awarded many prizes from Soviet and international organizations such as All-Soviet and Soviet republics' creative unions, the Soviet Peace Committee, Afro-Asian solidarity organizations, international friendship societies, and almost all the main journals and newspapers from Uzbekistan. The list of these awards was long, a concession to the film producers' desire for acquiring credentials within the global system of film distribution, where such recognition was important, especially for younger film industries. For most of its existence, the Tashkent festival continued to be an event eagerly anticipated by local audiences, providing the vibrancy and excitement of a cosmopolitan film culture and being fully appreciated by its participants for the warmth and generosity of the hosts and its endless stream of food, drinks, music, and dancing—in addition to providing possibilities for exchange and networking, formal and informal.

SELECTION PROCESS

If the festival itself was meant to be a spontaneous celebration of both cinema and solidarity, the preparation for it was a highly controlled serious state business. Particular attention was given to the selection of Soviet films to be screened as part of its market section: this was determined at meetings of the top-level committee at Goskino (the central Soviet state organization governing cinema), its *kollegiia*, which included Goskino's top officials as well as representatives from the Communist Party and Sovexportfilm (the state agency in charge of film import and export). This committee approved all the big decisions in all areas of cinematic apparatus and its broader ideological framework: from the thematic plan, to financing targets, import-export selections, international festival participation, and the organization and financing of international coproductions. Its main ideological focus with regard to international relations was using cinema as a form of political outreach, specifically through the distribution of Soviet films abroad, whether through commercial or noncommercial sectors. The Tashkent festival was identified as a particularly important site for attracting foreign distributors from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and, more generally, for drawing international attention to Soviet cinema. The committee was considerably less attentive to the selection of foreign films, which were largely handled by the festival's organizing committee and members of the Filmmakers Union.⁵

Rossen Djalalov describes in detail the Soviet institutional aspects of the organization of the festival's first (1968) edition, the combination of the ideological and commercial pressures faced by organizers, and their efforts in reaching out to the largest, most diverse number of participants.⁶ To determine the selection of foreign films represented at the festival, in the months leading to it the Soviet festival, organizers sent two- or three-person delegations to the Asian and Middle

Eastern countries to persuade the cultural establishment to participate in selecting the films to be screened. In addition to Goskino and Sovexportfilm officials, these delegations usually included Central Asian filmmakers involved in their republics' filmmakers' unions. They were tasked with establishing contacts with filmmakers and helping to select films, actors, and directors to represent each country. The process varied depending on the location. In India and Japan, for example, the delegation would approach commercial studios and individual artists and cultural figures with invitations to participate in the film festival and together view the films for potential inclusion. In countries where the state played a more decisive role in film production and distribution, local cultural ministries often reserved the final say on what films and figures would be chosen to participate, sometimes allowing input from festival organizers, sometimes not. In other areas, invitations were issued on the basis of having seen a film or established contacts at one of the other international film festivals.⁷

Ultimately, specific selections depended not on Soviet organizers but on the various cultural and political actors who represented the cinemas of their countries. The selection committee also exercised relatively little censorship, especially in the early years of the festival, when organizers were particularly concerned with establishing new connections and providing the broadest possible coverage at the festival. Archival records available from the late 1970s and early 1980s reveal few cases when films offered for inclusion were rejected outright—whether for depictions of violence (Japan), eroticism (Brazil), or religion (Lebanon) deemed excessive by the Soviet viewing committee.⁸

The relatively lower level of vigilance of ideological aspects of the festival mirrors the dynamics of Soviet films' import selection: films from capitalist countries, especially Europe and the US, were closely examined at official meetings at the highest levels and were often censored, whereas even on their commercial release, films from Asia, Africa, and Latin America received a considerably lower level of scrutiny.⁹ As setting up international coproductions became increasingly important for the Soviet film industry in the 1970s, that also emerged as a major institutional goal at the festival, which meant even more attention to the convivial atmosphere as a way to attract further cooperation.¹⁰ Overall, despite its clearly defined ideological and commercial stakes, Soviet control over the Tashkent festival experience was less intense than might be otherwise assumed.

FESTIVAL AUDIENCES

If the Tashkent festival was primarily oriented toward an international public, it was also very much about the local audience, who were welcomed into enormous screening venues at low prices, allowing for the maximum number of spectators. Seminars and discussions were also open to the public. This was significant as an ideological gesture, as Elena Razlogova notes in her discussion of the Afro-Asian

film circuit of the previous decade, constructed deliberately in opposition to Western festivals (which tended to be a lot more exclusive), as well as, for example, the Asian Film Festival (which was oriented toward industry insiders).¹¹ The festival was a major cultural event for Tashkent's residents, shaping generations of moviegoing audiences' experience of cinema. It transformed, however fleetingly, the flow of life in the city, creating a powerful symbolic opening to the world through the screenings, as well as through the presence of the foreign delegations and their daily engagement with the city and its inhabitants. If the festival has been largely forgotten by film historians, it is still vividly remembered by its audiences, as evidenced by enthusiastic and nostalgic memoirs on various social media.

As with all things related to the Soviet Union, it is worth underscoring the scale of such events and the sheer number of people they involved, which, consequently, speaks to their impact. Given that the larger festival movie theaters seated approximately twenty-five hundred people, the Egyptian delegation's claim in 1974 that their films were seen by at least twelve thousand viewers is probably no exaggeration. The festival films were also shown in other locations around Central Asia and the rest of the USSR, and often the filmmakers would travel with the screenings. For example, in 1974 the Afghan, Iraqi, and Bangladeshi delegations went from screenings in Tashkent to Dushanbe, Tajikistan, where they met representatives of the Tajik film studio to discuss possible coproductions and reported an enthusiastic audience reception. Critics from Afghanistan were particularly happy to see how thrilled the audiences in Tajikistan were to watch films "in a language they could understand."¹² In addition to providing a glimpse into Soviet practices of language dubbing, these moments speak to the transnational cultural affinities such cinematic experience represented.

Given the limitation of international TV programming and the virtual absence of international travel possibilities in the Soviet world, it is hard to overestimate how exciting the panorama of the world presented at the festival was to its audiences, making for the popularity of even the documentary film selection. In addition to the films, the presence of foreign guests created a powerful impact on the people in Tashkent. When visitors from all over the world (including such enormously popular stars as the Kapoors) were seen on the streets of Tashkent or talking to audiences after screenings and at events, both formal and informal, they temporarily disrupted the otherwise prevailing Soviet sense of cultural isolation, injecting a rare element of cosmopolitanism into ordinary life.¹³

Dzhasur Iskhakov, who volunteered for the festival in the late 1970s, describes the intensity of the festival preparation process "on the ground": in anticipation of the arrival of international guests, the roads and building facades were renovated, as were movie theaters and hotels. The train taking festival guests on a scheduled jaunt to the ancient city of Samarkand was especially equipped with the newest train cars and amenities such as new pillows and sheets (these being sleeping compartments, which were, normally, much more spartan), and the



FIGURE 1.2. The festival celebration spills out onto the streets. Photo from author's private collection.

train's conductors were selected for their youth and good looks. Banners were hand-drawn, and competitions and rehearsals took place for the many musical and dance events, which formed a crucial part of the festival program.¹⁴ While this may evoke the Potemkin village, the local participants viewed it as an opportunity to spruce up the city, as a genuine celebration and as an expression of hospitality and conviviality directed at their exciting guests.

MUSIC AND DANCE AS CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

Performing arts—music and dance—were especially prominent and were incorporated into the festival both formally and informally (fig. 1.2). At their airport arrival, guests were greeted by musicians playing typical Uzbek wind musical instruments, *karnays* (pipes of four to five meters), giving unforgettable performances, which would continue to accompany the festival celebrations.

Virtually every night there were concerts, enormous events held at concert halls at the opening and closing of the festival, as well as smaller performances at hotels and restaurants, where guests were taken every evening for dinners. Music performers were also invited as parts of national delegations. For example, for the 1968 edition, the organizers were hoping to bring Fairuz, the great Lebanese singer, to the event, but she was unable to attend, so they settled on Sabah, another famous actress-performer.¹⁵ Egyptian and Indian delegations were especially famed for including musicians and dancers—some directly connected to the film industry, others brought in as part of the delegation. In 1968, for example, Hemant Kumar, a famous playback singer and music director, was a guest of the festival. Guests also sometimes broke into impromptu performances at the many meals and receptions held both at restaurants and at the homes of local filmmakers such as Latif Faziev, Kamil Iarmatov, and Ali Khamraev (a practice that would have been impossible in Moscow, where all interactions with foreign guests were limited to official public areas), which would inevitably turn into parties with everyone singing and dancing.

This aspect of the festival is much commented on in reviews and memoirs of the participants. The 1968 review of Ambros Eichenberger, then vice president of the International Catholic Office of Cinema (OCIC), compares Tashkent favorably to the newly minted Teheran festival of 1967, damning the latter as a “luxurious ghetto” in comparison to the opportunities for “genuine human contact” provided in Uzbekistan. He says that he “has never been at a festival where there was as much dancing and—yes!—eating. . . . A true celebration!”¹⁶ The 1972 festival review in the Madras newspaper *Movieland*, “Tashkent Fete—An Eye-Witness Report,” hit a similar tone: “It was a real treat to hear Nargis, Simi, Sukhdev and others sing and dance with real zest and enthusiasm. Even Nageswara Rao [who was almost seventy] joined the dancing. It was a rare sight to see Americans, Africans, Arabs, Indians, Japanese dancing to Uzbek rhythm.” And Bombay-based *Cine Advance* similarly reports on the celebration of Nargis’s birthday in Tashkent, where “the Egyptian star Zubeda [*sic*], the Lebanese artiste Silvana, who was incidentally the real ‘oomph’ girl of the Festival, Simi, Sukhdev and others danced on occasion.”¹⁷

Such use of music and dance as ways to generate publicity, as well as forms of cultural diplomacy, is, of course, not unusual. Classical music and ballet (as much as circus and cinema) served as privileged forms of Soviet soft power abroad, underscoring socialism’s cultural gains.¹⁸ Domestically, the folklore of various Soviet republics was routinely showcased in all state celebrations. By the 1970s, such performances were perceived as some of the most ossified and inauthentic cultural practices. Yuri Slezkine famously called them “one of the most visible and apparently least popular aspects of Soviet official culture.”¹⁹ Afro-Asian folkloric performances for Soviet audiences were in some ways continuous, intended to present an authentic shared folkloric culture in opposition to the West’s manufactured entertainment industry. In the 1960s and 1970s, the growing popularity of Western youth culture associated with rock and roll, especially—but not at all exclusively—in urban centers like Moscow and Leningrad, created anxiety within socialist cultural bureaucracies. Folklorically inflected popular music from the Third World was intended as an official alternative to such ideologically dangerous manifestations.²⁰

But while in many ways imposed and supported from above, many popular expressions of folk music and dance in the Soviet 1960s and 1970s did accrue genuine grassroots support through amateur groups (including but not limited to school children).²¹ But even more important, traditional music and dance were simply part of everyday life: independent from its official manifestations, they formed an essential part of any informal celebration or family gathering, where traditional music was often performed and folk singing took place alongside pop music and dance. Beyond official cultural diplomacy, the emphasis on music and dance at Tashkent was an extension of genuine local cultural practices of hospitality and celebration. Moreover, singing and dancing (as well as impromptu

poetry recitations) proved to be an important point of cultural affinity with the guests from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, most of whom had a similar relationship with their own traditional culture—something that set them apart from Western European participants, as Eichenberger’s quote demonstrates. Indeed, the prominence of music and dance at the festival distinguishes Tashkent from most European film festivals, aligning it, instead, with such Afro-Asian events as Dakar, Algiers, and Lagos arts festivals, where formal and informal artistic performances served similar complex functions.²²

FESTIVAL AS A CULTURAL STATE OF EXCEPTION

Blurring the otherwise clearly drawn boundaries between official and unofficial, international and domestic spheres, the Tashkent festival was a clear exception for Soviet norms of the time. The Soviet Union was notorious for indicting informal contacts between locals and foreign visitors. Breaking this rule could lead to serious official consequences. At the Moscow film festival, to discourage spontaneous exchanges, spaces were demarcated in terms of access, and no deviation from the assigned zones and scheduled events was allowed. At Tashkent, volunteers, translators, and other local participants were also given clear instructions, and the presence and involvement of the “curators” from the party and the KGB was certainly part of the organization of the event. Yet, in addition to the official “excursions” (such as visits to landmark farms, factories, or museums), foreign guests were allowed relatively free movement around the city, still accompanied by their local hosts but with considerably less punitive control from the authorities. As a result, foreigners often found themselves making impromptu trips to informal kebab and tea houses (which technically occupied a gray zone between legal and illegal businesses, as many were held in people’s yards or homes) organized by local festival participants as a way to introduce the guests to the “local flavor” (*kolorit*) and demonstrate the famed “Eastern hospitality.”²³ While all Soviet participants were strictly warned by “curators” not to let foreign guests see any drunkenness, dirt, or poverty, local volunteers, many of whom were students, and participating filmmakers were easily convinced and even eager to give their guests a more authentic experience of the city and a taste of local customs.²⁴ This was often done precisely as a way to offset the overly official, highly ideological ossified tone of many such events—something that Soviet participants were even more sensitive to and intolerant of than some of their guests. And it clearly did result in an atmosphere that was conducive to the “genuine human contact” referred to by Eichenberger—with musical and dance performances being part of this informal exchange, as well as a confirmation of shared cultural practices and norms.

As a result, in many ways the festival succeeded in operationalizing its utopian vision as a site in which alliances, affinities, and solidarities were actually forged and nourished. This took place, on the one hand, through its film programs,

which succeeded in creating a shared mediatic sphere, a symbolic space of cultural and political projections and imaginaries. On the other hand, its live events—discussions, seminars, informal exchanges, and performances—produced a social space of direct interpersonal and intercultural encounters, affective bonding, and political organizing. While the live aspect, being immediate and ephemeral, is historically difficult to trace, the mediatic left a record of a shared body of cinematic work. Some of these films came to occupy an important role in the history of world cinema as we know it; others are known only by “area” specialists; others are remembered fondly by audiences but ignored by critics and historians; yet others disappeared entirely as minor casualties of wars, geopolitical turmoil, and neoliberal neglect.

But before we take a closer look at this shared body of socialist world cinema, the rest of this chapter reconstructs the simultaneous and often conflicting historical, political, and cultural forces that shaped the Tashkent festival and the institutional infrastructures that allowed it to operate as a unique contact zone of Soviet bloc and Third World film culture. To assess the significance of Tashkent as the location for Afro-Asian solidarity, I draw out the dual impact of the Bandung and the 20th Communist Party Congress on the cultural relations between the Soviet Union and the Afro-Asian sphere. I discuss the role of festivals in this changing international terrain and the development of Central Asian and Transcaucasian film industries of this process, placing them within the intersecting contexts of the socialist and Third-Worldist film festival circuit of the 1960s.

THE BANDUNG AND THE 20TH CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE USSR

The two defining moments of this shared history are the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung and Khrushchev’s subsequent reorientation of Soviet international policy. The first allowed for the development of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization and the Non-Aligned and Tricontinental movements. The second shaped the political context for the Soviet organizers’ conception of the Tashkent festival, where the outgrowths of those two moments converged.

The Bandung conference was held in Indonesia in April 1955, headed by Indonesian president Sukarno and Indian president Nehru. With representatives from twenty-nine countries, this meeting, coming at the height of the first Cold War confrontation between the Western nations and the socialist bloc, was a watershed moment, both symbolically and in terms of its impact on global politics. It signaled to both Cold War superpowers the emergence of another geopolitical force sufficiently powerful to significantly impact and reorient their international agendas. The Bandung moment was defined by a shared anticolonial (and in some ways anti-Western) pan-Asian vision that was ideologically oriented toward statist and nationalist economies within prosocialist and antiwar nation-states.²⁵ It heralded

the formation of a new community, united in its pursuit of decolonization and its consequences—national sovereignty, autonomy from the Global North, and solidarity. Symbolically, it embodied the shared sentiments and experiences of international solidarity and laid foundations for the formation of what Vijay Prasad termed the *project* of Third-Worldism.²⁶ Even as it proved to be full of internal contradictions and tensions (between nationalism and internationalism; between the different conceptions of its underlying goals and methods of achieving them; between different attitudes toward race), the Bandung nonetheless provided a powerful and complex shared ideology, which shaped the cultural production of the area, including cinema, for decades to come.

This moment also coincided with and was in many ways responsible for the post-Stalinist Soviet turn toward the “developing world” as manifested at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR in February 1956. Alongside his famous “secret speech,” which denounced Stalin’s cult of personality, Khrushchev, as part of the congress, also announced the return to Lenin’s vision of global historical development and heralded the arrival of the new era (of decolonialization) “when the peoples of the East play an active part in deciding the destinies of the whole world, and when they have become a new and mighty factor in international relations.” Hence, the report pledged to support, “free of any political or military obligations,” the newly liberated postcolonial nations, “although they do not belong to the socialist world system.”²⁷ The Soviet Union followed up by cosponsoring a UN draft declaration—the “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples”—denouncing colonialism in all its forms and demanding immediate independence for all subjugated peoples. Most Western powers abstained in that vote, which served to increase the credibility of the Soviet leader in the eyes of the rest of the world. Political support was extended not only to communists but to wider coalitions of leftist antiwar activists. And in line with this expanded vision of antiwar alliances, even one of the defining features of the Leninist ideology, the need for a *revolutionary* transformation as a path to socialism, was now negotiable, with other forms of transition to socialism becoming acceptable for future Soviet allies, thus considerably opening its “zone of friendship.”²⁸

Given the enormous impact of these cultural developments, it is tempting to entertain the notion of a Bandung cinema, especially as the leaders of the movement—Egypt, India, China, and Indonesia in particular—were, indeed, also the homes of the most significant film industries (after Japan, and along with the Philippines) of the nonaligned world, with significant circulation all over Asia and, increasingly, Africa.²⁹ Anticolonialism and anti-imperialism moved from the level of clandestine militance and became a matter of state and cultural agendas. And while nationalist and nation-building cinematic discourses were particularly dominant in the context of newly independent postcolonial nations, their cinemas in the subsequent decades broadly reflected this emphasis on progressive social

values. Economically, this was manifested through the growth of public-sector film industries in the Arab world and Africa in the post-Bandung era. In India, while allowing a robust (and largely politically progressive) private sector for the film industry, the state-run Films Division documentary film production became a clear extension of national(ist) ideologies.

At the same time, the anticommunist Western bloc also used state instruments such as the US Information Agency (USIA) to intervene in film production and distribution, creating a particularly strong network connecting Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, South Vietnam, Singapore, and the Philippines but active all over Asia (as well as, subsequently, Africa and Latin America).³⁰ In the face of these developments, the Bandung spirit of autonomy and solidarity was *de facto* aligned with Soviet cinema in opposition to the monopolies of US and Western European film circuits, creating networks that extended to the Soviet bloc as uniquely capable of providing support in anticolonialist cinematic endeavors.

The implications of these developments on Soviet culture were equally significant. Eleonory Gilburd argues persuasively for impact of the policy of peaceful coexistence on the legitimization of the notion of cultural relations within Soviet international policy, justifiable through the commitment to peace and decolonization, which she describes as opening new “spaces for translation, exhibition, and creativity.”³¹ Gilburd’s insight is particularly pertinent to the dynamics of the creation of a shared global socialist film culture through the emergence of the phenomenon of the international festival. Festivals, with their ties to youth culture as an unexpectedly powerful mode of conducting soft power, lent an aura of spontaneity to the slogans of socialist internationalism, reconnecting to the kind of cosmopolitanism that was stigmatized under Stalin. While these festivals extended to all areas of cultural activity, including literature and the visual arts, they quickly found their most popular and durable manifestation in film exhibition practices.

EUPHORIA OF THE THAW AND DECOLONIZATION IN THE SOVIET UNION

The largest and most successful of the international events in the Soviet Union was the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow in 1957, a two-week-long celebration that brought more than 340,000 foreign guests from 131 countries to the Soviet capital. Experienced as an expression of euphoria over the Thaw and a new spirit of international cooperation, mutual understanding, peace, and friendship—the slogans under which the event was organized—the festival dispelled the Soviet reputation for dourness and rigidity. Asian, African, and Latin American delegates formed part of the celebrations, and the issue of colonialism was raised repeatedly during the festival: there was a political rally against the bloodshed in the Middle East and fireworks and bonfires (!) in support of

independence for “colonial peoples.”³² There was also a five-day-long debate conducted among cinema students on the topic of “Heroes in Film” and a showing of 230 films from all over the world, which served as the first step in the foundation for the Moscow film festival. It awarded one of its top prizes to a Japanese film, Imai Tadashi’s *The Darkness at Noon* (*Mahiru no ankoku*, 1956)—setting the trend within the socialist bloc’s film culture, whose impact would be evident in the programming of the Tashkent festival.

The Youth Festival inaugurated and demonstrated powerfully the cultural and affective impact of festivals as true popular celebrations meant to create a temporary suspension of cultural and political boundaries. Perhaps not as radical as Bakhtin’s notion of the carnival, this festival and others really did disrupt the normalized social and political regime: as Gilburd points out, even the regular visa regime was suspended, requiring only a special festival entry permit, accorded to almost anyone who applied.³³ Given the way that passport and visa regimes absolutely defined the geopolitics of the Cold War, this exceptional generosity speaks to the uniqueness and remarkable symbolic weight of this event, and it prefigures the flexibility with visas awarded to, in particular, Arab and African guests of the socialist film circuit, including Tashkent, which would be crucial to their participation.³⁴ The Youth Festival planners’ attempt to create a new “softer” image of Soviet socialism to foster a shared and very broadly conceived (pro)socialist internationalist public space was carried out so successfully that it marked an era.³⁵ Although none of the later manifestations of Soviet internationalism ever quite lived up to this early euphoric phase, Soviet cultural policy certainly succeeded in rousing popular enthusiasm toward Africa, Asia, and Latin America and a desire for cultural exchange.

The 1959 Cuban revolution was another event that generated a profound cultural resonance in the Third World and the socialist bloc. It was concrete proof that the revolution in the traditional sense, as an uprising of the people, could become a reality—a notion that had great impact all over Asia, Africa, and especially Latin America but had all but disappeared from the routinized contemporary socialist world. Thus in the Soviet bloc, the iconography of the Cuban revolution allowed people to find (however temporarily) in Anne Gorsuch’s words, “socialist inspiration and emotional meaning” in other countries’ revolutionary uprisings.³⁶ Following the Year of Africa, with wide coverage of the African independence movement all over the socialist world, on February 15, 1961, in protest of the assassination of Congolese prime minister Patrice Lumumba, a six-thousand-strong protest was staged in front of the Belgian embassy in Moscow.³⁷ As officially sanctioned as they were, such events expressed an authentic, grassroots feeling of solidarity, which was formative for Soviet culture of the 1960s, leading up to the Tashkent festival.

The enthusiasm for the promise of a better future for the Global South as both a surrogate for and extension of the cultural and political opening of the Soviet bloc mixed easily with cinephilia and excitement over all things foreign. Film festivals,

in particular, would prove to mobilize audiences' love of cinema as a powerful sensory and aesthetic form into a mode of social practice. Absorbing various cinematic cultures into a shared hybrid one, film festivals could offer a stable cultural space of exchange for the newly independent or (post)revolutionary cinemas as a promise of the new progressive global order to come.

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL CIRCUIT IN THE SOVIET BLOC

Many Asian, African, and Latin American filmmakers were attracted to the overall infrastructure of film culture in the socialist bloc—its educational institutions, its distribution and exhibition system, its geopolitical openness to emerging cinemas. It provided both an important model for development and an opportunity for a different network for international circulation. Socialist film festivals actively promoted such an understanding of their function. Already by 1950, the selection of Karlovy Vary—the socialist bloc's first international film festival—included China and India and celebrated Mexican cinema with many awards, an example soon followed by Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, Egypt, and Japan.³⁸ In contrast to Western European festivals, by 1960, almost half of the countries represented at Karlovy Vary were from Asia, Latin America, or Africa.³⁹

Another feature of Karlovy Vary that further promoted the vision of a socialist film festival as a space of cultural and geopolitical exchange was its Open Forum: starting in 1958, it included a series of seminars with discussions, which ranged from issues in aesthetics and creative processes to international distribution and infrastructural problems. Bringing together filmmakers and various cultural figures (artists, scholars, and writers) from both sides of the Iron Curtain, as well as a sizable number of Asian participants, the forum reenacted the debates within contemporary cinema on realism, style, emergence of "New Cinemas," and the social and political function of art. From its very beginning, the festival included film critics and historians on the jury: George Sadoul (who also contributed to the organization of the festival in the 1950s), Guido Aristarco, Umberto Barbaro, Jerzy Toeplitz, and others. The diversity of participants allowed for some lively disagreements outside of orthodox socialist framing, in which ideological positions were crystalized and factions formed.⁴⁰

The centrality of discussions and seminars was a novelty for film festivals at the time.⁴¹ Karlovy Vary's Open Forum underscored cinema's role in public culture beyond the marketplace, taking up issues of politics and development over stylistic innovation or technique (a feature of socialist film culture to which I will return in chapter 4). The international marketplace was, indeed, also part of the festival and a motivating factor for most national cinemas to participate in it. In fact, this is why in 1955 it applied to become a member of the International Federation of Film Producers Association (FIAPF). Even so, its international scope was considered secondary to its public, more cultural, and political manifestations. These

conflicting agendas, in the words of Jindřiška Bláhová, “could be pursued under the umbrella of political consensus and shielded by the new impulses of Cold War cultural diplomacy as well as the festival motto ‘For the noble endeavors of the humankind, for the lasting friendship between nations.’”⁴²

Starting in 1962, Karlovy Vary included a special symposium: Young and Emerging Cinemas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁴³ In its first edition, it included fourteen participating countries.⁴⁴ The festival also awarded a large number of “thematic” prizes, including the International Prize of Peace, International Prize of Labour, the Prize of the Struggle for Freedom, the Prize for the Struggle for Social Progress, the Prize of Friendship between Nations, the Prize for the Struggle for a Better World, the Prize for the Struggle for New Man, and the Prize for the Efforts Made to Create the New Man, as well as other nonstatutory prizes by various organizations.⁴⁵ The festival also accepted animation, reflecting that mode’s high standing within Eastern European film culture. In other words, Karlovy Vary was a prototype of the way socialist film festivals were to be conceived and organized.⁴⁶ From 1959, it would alternate with the Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF), which would play a similar function.

MIFF was a major event in the life of Soviet capital, widely covered by the press.⁴⁷ A “category A” festival, it had three competitive programs: feature films, documentary, and short films. But it also included retrospectives and an out-of-competition section with films that had already been screened at other festivals. Those were often Western films, including some that, although critically or commercially successful, had no chance of gaining wider commercial distribution in the USSR owing to their costs or ideology, or both.⁴⁸ Other cultural events and discussion seminars were traditionally held in Moscow immediately following the festival. For many film-producing nations, the Moscow festival, alongside Karlovy Vary, was the premier socialist bloc site for displaying their films. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the competition sections of both Moscow and Karlovy Vary became increasingly more aligned with the Western conception of auteur cinema—albeit with a strong ideological (socialist or progressive) bent, while their documentary and short film sections were generally more explicitly political and more geographically diverse.

Unlike Karlovy Vary and Moscow, the Leipzig Documentary Film Week (Leipzig Dok) took place on a much smaller scale, dedicated solely to shorts and documentary production and with a clearer ideological remit. Set up originally to showcase socialist film production in response to the festival growth on the other side of the Iron Curtain, by the late 1950s it turned to a broader geography, including films from Egypt, Korea, Vietnam, and Uruguay, and quickly established a reputation as a major site for the exhibition of international(ist) revolutionary nonfiction cinema.⁴⁹ Already in 1961, both Cuban and Algerian documentaries were at the center of the festival program, with filmmakers and producers from both countries present, creating long-lasting ties among them.⁵⁰ Of particular consequence to the filmmakers from the Global South was the Solidarity Fund,

which was affiliated with the state-run GDR Solidarity Committee responsible for financing aid to the Third World, with its prize for revolutionary cinemas. First named after Dziga Vertov, then after Joris Ivens, who spearheaded this initiative, and finally after 1971 (once Ivens's Maoism effectively earned him expulsion from the socialist bloc) retitled the Combatant Camera Award, it included a cash prize, black-and-white film stock, and an 8 mm movie camera.⁵¹

1960s SOCIALIST INTERNATIONALISM

The Combatant Camera Award at Leipzig speaks to the intensification of Cold War politics leading up to the Tashkent festival's creation and its geopolitical and ideological complexities. The first major shift took place in 1961, when the doctrine of "peaceful coexistence," aimed at deescalating the relationship with the US post-Cuban Missile Crisis, was advanced at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). This notion was put into question by many Non-Aligned countries and deepened the Sino-Soviet split, forcing communist parties of the world to take sides. This was particularly consequential since Khrushchev's increased support for many of the newly independent noncommunist states in Asia and Africa often came at a cost to their oppositional communist parties, creating further rifts.⁵²

As Jeremy Friedman shows, "according to Chinese sources, in the year 1960 Soviet loan guarantees to 'nationalist' (nonsocialist developing) countries eclipsed loan guarantees to socialist countries by over 50 percent."⁵³ The Soviet support at the time came largely through technical and economic aid, which by 1961 had reached almost 2.5 billion rubles (roughly \$2.64 billion) and covered Afghanistan, India, and the United Arab Republic, as well as Iraq, Guinea, Ghana, Indonesia, Ceylon, Ethiopia, Mali, and Pakistan.⁵⁴ The aid clearly served the Soviet Union's geopolitical objectives rather than emerging anti-imperialist struggles. The Soviet Union was trying to win neutral countries away from not only Washington but China as well. For instance, while the Soviets had largely stood on the sidelines for the Algerian revolution, when Algiers subsequently emerged as one of the key centers of the anti-imperialist movement, Khrushchev committed to increase the amount of Soviet aid to the country. It included loans, technological and logistical support, and military assistance to Ben Bella's government, strategically timed to coincide with Algeria's hosting of the Bandung meeting, which was roiled by the Chinese delegation actively trying to ban Soviet participation.⁵⁵

In 1964, another shift took place in Soviet politics as Khrushchev came under increasing attack from within the CPSU for his poor handling of both international policy (the humiliation of the Cuban Missile Crisis) and the domestic economic sphere (his unsuccessful agrarian reforms). He was forced to resign, making way for Leonid Brezhnev as the general secretary of CPSU, a post he would hold until his death in 1982. Although the overall tenor of the policies toward Asia, Africa,

and Latin America did not change significantly under Brezhnev, the policy of peaceful coexistence was ideologically muted, while Soviet foreign aid policy gradually shifted toward military aid as tensions increased all over Asia and Africa owing to the Vietnam War, the India-Pakistan War of 1965, and the fall of Sukarno in Indonesia.⁵⁶

The decisive event for African international politics, which had repercussions for Third-Worldism, was the 1966 coup in Ghana that overthrew Kwame Nkrumah with CIA support. While it undermined the earlier optimism about “African socialism,” of which Nkrumah was a leader, and led to Ghana’s breaking ties with the Soviet Union, it also pushed left-leaning African leaders to pursue more radical alternatives (whether allying with China, as was the case in Tanzania, or the Soviet Union). Nkrumah’s fall also cleared the way for one of his critics, Amílcar Cabral, whose advocacy of the central role of the revolutionary vanguard in the national liberation movements sparked a more active stage in their struggles against Portugal, driving them closer to Cuba and the Soviet Union.⁵⁷

EMERGENCE OF CUBA AS A THIRD-WORLIDIST LEADER

The Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s created a genuine crisis within the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization (OPSAA), which developed out of the Bandung. The split eventually resulted in China’s *de facto* withdrawal from the organization, followed by its expulsion of the pro-Chinese liberation movements. While these developments incited some opposition from Chinese-aligned Cuba, they nonetheless opened the space for Cuba’s growing status as a Third World leader. This new status was most clearly manifested culturally in the Tricontinental Conference, which took place in Havana in January 1966. With Tricontinental, Cuba not only formally extended OPSAA into Latin America (OPSAAAL) but also took charge of defining the shifting conception of internationalism.

The vision that emerged was at once more radical in its open support of guerilla armed struggle around the world and in its emphasis on transracial (rather than class-based) solidarity, while foregrounding the racialized aspect of the global anti-imperialist struggles, including those within the US.⁵⁸ The scale and ambition of the Tricontinental Conference, which included 512 delegates from eighty-two countries, as well as almost three hundred observers, endowed Cuba with an undeniable aura as a global cultural model.⁵⁹ Robert Young notes that “not since the early days of the Comintern had any organization proposed an international global alliance against imperialism.”⁶⁰ The Soviet Union tried to catch up to Cuba, strategically employing the conference’s emphasis on race, where Sharof Rashidov, the solidly orthodox head of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, delivered “an impassioned speech” describing the ethnic diversity of the representatives of the Soviet cultural and political apparatus through his own personal history.⁶¹ Yet,

as Anne Garland Mahler's account of the conference affirms, "Even as the Soviet Union paid for the transportation of many of the delegates from Africa and the Middle East to Havana, and even as the Soviets were largely subsidizing Cuba in this moment . . . as the ideology and discourse of Tricontinentalism would be developed in propaganda materials in the coming years, the Soviet Union would continue to occupy a marginal position."⁶² The difference between Cuba and the USSR was visible even in the design of the posters and Tricontinental magazine, which drew heavily on the pop art and aesthetics we associate with the psychedelic "Western" 1960s youth culture, with cartoon strips, bold and striking imagery, and visual humor, in contrast to the Soviet socialist realism–infused style of the time.⁶³

In an effort to regain its credibility in the eyes of its African and Asian allies, in 1967, following the Tricontinental Conference, the Soviet Solidarity committee agreed that it was necessary to expand its activities and organize more public events, conferences, and seminars, especially for foreign students, on issues of major concern to the Afro-Asian states. At the top of the list were Vietnam, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and liberation struggles in Africa.⁶⁴ Here, too, the Soviets were lagging behind Cuba, whose internationalist films quickly became a major inspiration for politically committed filmmakers worldwide.⁶⁵ The posters for these films were designed by the artistic director of Tricontinental, Alfredo Rostgaard, helping articulate a shared style.⁶⁶

As we will see, the Tashkent festival certainly sought to fulfill that same role but operated within a space where Soviet primacy was still less contested. This geography was particularly pertinent in the aftermath of the Six-Day War in Egypt, when Israel attacked Egypt preemptively and then its neighbors (Jordan and Syria), using its Western-supplied military to inflict a crushing defeat on the allied Arab combatant countries, taking control of the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Soviet military support for Egypt during and after the Six-Day War signaled the seriousness of its commitment to aid the otherwise "Non-Aligned" nations and to the Palestinian cause, which, as much as Vietnam, united the Left in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. And unlike the earlier era, by the late 1960s, this commitment increasingly meant military support combined with "soft power."⁶⁷ Given its geography, Central Asia—and Tashkent in particular—would play an increasingly important role in this process.

SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA IN THE AFRO-ASIAN CULTURAL NETWORK

The crucial role of Central Asia in Soviet international policy and cultural diplomacy emerged in the 1950s. Masha Kirasirova details how in response to both the Chinese and Western accusations of Soviet colonizing attitudes toward its own racialized minorities, the Soviet Union undertook "a large-scale redistribution of influence and responsibilities for work with foreign countries among Soviet

Central Asian and Caucasian peoples.”⁶⁸ This meant elevating Central Asia’s party elite, creating new routes for advancement within Soviet cultural diplomacy. The direct involvement of Central Asian (and Caucasian) cultural elites was seen by Soviet leadership as a way to gain ideologically acceptable entry into the non-aligned Afro-Asian circuit.⁶⁹ This was particularly important given that China used racial rhetoric in its demands for the exclusion of the Soviet Union (as well as Yugoslavia) from Afro-Asian alliances. As both Egypt and Algeria, leading voices in the movement, had their own racialized divides between their hereditary elites and Indigenous populations, these tactics proved unsuccessful.⁷⁰ But in response, Tashkent provided a perfect location for a Soviet demonstration of cultural and historical affinities, which placed Central Asia at the crossroads of Asian civilizations.

The emphasis on cinema was a crucial part of this new positioning. It fit in particularly well within the modernization ethos and emphasis on technology and industry that were crucial for the logic of “catching up to the West,” a logic that directed both socialist and postcolonial states’ development. Moreover, as the Soviets knew well, film was a popular cultural form that transcended levels of literacy and, as such, was particularly effective for both the creation of a national identity and projecting it internationally. Thus, showcasing the vitality of Central Asian and Transcaucasian film industries through their international exhibition and events such as the Tashkent festival integrated Soviet cinema into the Afro-Asian cultural sphere on terms that emphasized their shared affinities while at the same time demonstrating the successes of Soviet modernization.

As Elena Razlogova recounts in her work, the Afro-Asian cinematic network began to take shape during this very period, and the Soviet Union was eager to play a key role in the process.⁷¹ Thus, expanding from the Asian Film Week in Beijing in 1957, the first Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF) took place in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1958, with subsequent meetings in Cairo in 1960 and Jakarta in 1964. While assigning key importance to these festivals as “the earliest articulation of ‘cinematic Third Worldism,’” Razlogova describes the stiff official protocol combined with the technological and cultural incompetence of the organizers of the Tashkent session and its evolution through the early 1960s from the popular cinemas of the Bandung powers toward the revolutionary anti-imperialist cinemas represented by Vietnam and China.⁷² She concludes that this festival cycle was indeed foundational for the subsequent Tashkent Festival of Cinemas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as conference organizers learned from the logistical mistakes of the earlier organizers and developed the vision of the festival as a venue for presenting a wide range of industrial South-South connections alternative to Hollywood’s domination.⁷³

The strengthening of the role of Central Asia as a site for potential affinities was a response to the failure of Soviet cinema to achieve a dominant position at the Cairo and Jakarta Afro-Asian events. Masha Kirasirova cites the official report, which offered the following recommendations for moving forward:

1) participate in yearly Afro-Asian festivals by sending films and filmmakers from Central Asia and the Caucasus; 2) expand cultural relations with Eastern countries by organizing film premieres in the foreign East with delegations of directors and leading actors from Central Asia and the Caucasus; 3) increase production of co-productions dramatizing Eastern legends and tales that would be familiar to peoples of the East using the best creative powers of Central Asia and Caucasus; 4) increase the total number of Soviet films shown in the East, especially in Central and South Africa; 5) exchange documentary films with countries of the East; and finally, 6) produce more documentary and short films about the accomplishments of peoples of Central Asia and Caucasus, including a series of films about the lives of Muslims in the Soviet Union for distribution in countries of the foreign East.⁷⁴

We will see how many of these recommendations were, indeed, fulfilled as part of the Tashkent festival's history.

Overall, the extension of the Soviet film industrial infrastructure—and its de facto decentralization—into Central Asia was crucial for both the Soviet film industry's recovery from its postwar crisis and Soviet international policies. As Artemy Kalinovsky demonstrates, "Over the course of the 1950s Central Asia became the frontline region in the ideological battle for the Third World," and effective representation of vibrant and autonomous cultures of the Soviet East in cinema was crucial for the creation of a positive image of the Soviet Union abroad, especially in Asia and Africa, as a truly anti-imperialist and anticolonialist force.⁷⁵ In Kalinovsky's compelling articulation, "the wave of decolonization occurring beyond the USSR's borders provided the impetus to complete the 'decolonization' of the Central Asian republics within a Soviet framework."⁷⁶

SOVIET IMPERIAL LEGACIES, SOCIALIST UNIVERSALISM, AND WORLD CULTURE

It is tempting to assume that the relationship between the Russo-Soviet center and its Central Asian republics merely refracted its older colonial models of governance. Yet its distinctiveness is well worth reflecting upon—especially as it fully manifested in the status of Central Asian cinema both within the Soviet film industry and in its international projection, at the Tashkent festival. Michael Rouland summarizes the relationship between the Soviet "center" and Central Asian cinemas: "From the arrival of film projectors at the end of the nineteenth century through the dynamic pre-war years and until the collapse of the Soviet Union, cinema in Central Asia benefited from significant Soviet investment and suffered from its ideological control."⁷⁷ The highly developed and accomplished Central Asian and Transcaucasian cinemas aptly demonstrate the impact of such investment. All too aware of the potential weakness of a new postcolonial nation, many cultural and political elites in Asia and Africa viewed the Soviet model of a multinational postrevolutionary state as an intriguing alternative. Even as they were

tied to nationalist ideologies, this vision resonated with the many attempts during that period to create multinational—that is, pan-Arab or pan-African—models of governance.

Such models were also consistent with the Soviet policy of promoting—and in many cases, actively creating—“national cultures” within its republics (many of which, historically, did not have a unified national identity before their annexation by Russia or within the Soviet Union). Promoting the creation of a national consciousness was crucial to the original Leninist plan as a way of addressing the problem of underdevelopment with its absence of the industrial proletariat as the motor of world revolution. In the conditions of underdevelopment, national culture would both encourage modernization and occupy the role of the revolutionary vanguard.⁷⁸

Thus, while many of the postcolonial Asian and African state ideologies in the 1960s were rooted simultaneously in nationalist and internationalist (or at the very least, regionalist) orientation, their Central Asian counterparts were likewise “doubly assimilated” into their respective national republics and Soviet identities (themselves articulated as a form of internationalism).⁷⁹ As we will see, the Tashkent festival thus clearly foregrounded the imperative of “triple assimilation” for Central Asian cinemas as national, Soviet, and Third World–internationalist, a position that resonated with many other participants’ sense of their postcolonial (rather than colonial) condition.

Beyond such symbolic operations, the economic and legal structures of ownership within socialism, even in its Soviet incarnation, did offer, at least on the surface, a reversal of colonial accumulation and serfdom.⁸⁰ Especially as Russian serfdom was not racially based, the Soviet state confronted its colonial legacies through a distinctively Marxist model. Unlike European colonial cultural technologies, which served to crystalize the categories of the colonizers and the colonized as opposites, as Francine Hirsch demonstrates, the Soviet assimilation model instead “used them to eliminate these oppositions—to ‘modernize’ and transform all the lands and peoples of the former Russian Empire, and bring them into the Soviet whole.”⁸¹ The post-Stalinist opening of the Khrushchev era further reshaped notions of universalism, moving away from Leninist-Stalinist class determinism toward what is frequently described as a liberalization of the Thaw.

The combination of the early Soviet class-based universalism of the Marxist model with the liberal universalist one, which entered the country with its post-Stalinist cultural opening, may appear particularly troubling for our contemporary understanding of the decolonial project (as liberalism’s foundational assumptions have been shown repeatedly to be interconnected and directly complicit with the colonial project and racial capitalism).⁸² Yet the structure that emerged in the 1960s was quite distinct. Within the Soviet context, the liberal elements (foregrounding individual experience, the private sphere, personal artistic vision, the cult of authenticity) were grounded in a decidedly nonliberal economic,

legal, and political reality, necessitating a notion of personal rights and freedoms dialectically mediated through the practices of the collective. The contours of what constituted such a collectivity became increasingly ambiguous and porous, its only definition coming through its orientation toward building socialism; much of the rest appeared culturally negotiable, at least in theory.

The utopian dimension of this worldview was emblemized by space exploration, which seemed to point to a community that was not only global but extended into the cosmos itself (a utopian image, whose dependency on the militarization and the global arms race in retrospect is particularly striking). This cosmic orientation coincided with the Soviet entry and participation in intragovernmental agencies such as UNESCO. As Gilburd demonstrates, Soviet cultural institutions of the 1950s and 1960s were oriented toward the goal of a “common world culture,” providing a vision of “the original and permanent unity of mankind.” The term *civilization* in this particular Soviet context, according to Gilburd, was connotatively distinct from its meaning in the West: it was not acquired through adopting Western models but rather accumulated through “generational continuity, history and heritage.”⁸³ Thus the Soviet version of world literary heritage early on included the *Mahabharata* and *The Shahnameh* alongside the *Iliad*. Underneath the cultural differences was one shared world heritage corresponding to the universal of a common humanity in its broadest and most utopian sense.

This common humanity—with its progressive and reactionary cultures as parts and stages within this shared world civilization—was understood to be moving toward the ultimate stage of the commons, that of communist society. Within this worldview, modernization, with its technocracy and rational management, was legitimate only as a path to communism, meant to merely accelerate the already-existing progressive elements of world heritage. Thus, Soviet cultural modernization projects of the 1920s and 1930s—such as deveiling and rejecting traditional kinship structures (arranged marriages or polygamy) in the Muslim republics—were presented as a necessary and natural, if accelerated, phase of collective socio-cultural development, not an eradication of traditional culture.

Films, in particular, were called on to separate those elements deemed regressive (i.e., not leading to the ultimate victory of communism and the creation of world commons) from national heritage without devalorizing it. Ultimately, despite the considerable investment in the promotion of this world culture, including its non-Western iterations, the socialist evolutionary framework of global development, with its stages of modernization, both created new hierarchies and reinforced many old ones. Soviet culture (cinematic or otherwise) never completely overcame many imperial legacies, transforming them in ways that were significantly different from Euro-American neocolonial models. Paradoxically, it was the cultivated status of the Soviet Union as a fierce critic of (capitalist) modernity and a powerful embodiment of its alternative (socialist) modality that allowed for the exceptional successes of its state-supported cinematic apparatus, while simultaneously leading

to the gradual loss of faith in the state as a viable structure for creative commons, especially on the part of the creative cadres themselves.⁸⁴ This very contradiction allowed for additional affinities and intimacies across postcolonial Asia, Africa, and Latin America in a way that further integrated Central Asia into the Afro-Asian cultural sphere, making the Tashkent festival a unique agent of this shared imaginary. This role, however, was only possible in the context of the development and growth of these film industries and cultures—a process the Soviets had referred to since the 1920s as *cinefication*.

CINEFICATION OF THE SOVIET EAST

In the 1950s, the Soviet film industry was slowly emerging from its crisis of low productivity, the so-called film famine (*malokartinë*): from only seven films produced in 1951, by 1957 that number increased to ninety-seven.⁸⁵ In its postwar economic recovery, the Soviet Union lagged behind Japan (whose film production peaked at 547 in 1960) and India (with 305 films produced in 1960), making Soviet cinema more of an ideological model than an industrial cinematic power. While film production throughout the Soviet Union picked up considerably in the 1960s, the demand for cinema in the country was so massive that production capacity (especially because of the shortage of film stock) could not keep up. Expanding cinefication into the republics was therefore not only ideologically but economically necessary—leading to considerable investment in the building and modernization of studios and cinematic networks of the Central Asian republics and Transcaucasia and the training of local cadres of filmmakers during the Khrushchev era. Combined with the cultural and political opening discussed earlier, this investment resulted in a veritable explosion of film production from those regions. Thematically and formally distinctive in their exploration of both their respective national and regional cultures and their relationship to modernization and socialism, these productions resonated strongly with Third World film cultures, as the Tashkent festival will aptly demonstrate.⁸⁶

By the early 1960s, however, the ideological significance of these films, as well as their local popularity, meant Central Asian film studios were pressured to satisfy the demand for films by increasing their production, which meant a rapid expansion of the whole cinematic apparatus. Kirasirova describes this process in important detail, and it is worth quoting her at length:

Because of the international significance of the production and consumption of Central Asian and Caucasian films, responsibility for the subsequent development of national film industries was turned over to the highest-level Party administrators. In Uzbekistan, the First Secretary [of the Central Committee], Sharof Rashidov, personally requested updates on the progress of Uzbek “cinefication” and film production. On August 26, 1964, the head of the State Committee of the Uzbek Council of Ministers responsible for cinematography (and the future minister

of culture of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic), Azizhon Kaiumov, reported to Rashidov about Uzbekfilm's expanding group of qualified cadres including 18 new graduates of Moscow's VGIK and Leningrad's film school.

In 1965, the Uzbek Ministry of Cinematography had planned to build 34 new movie theatres, to train 250 film technicians, and to increase the number of film-screening halls to 2223 by 1970, paying special attention to the countryside. In the Samarkand region alone, film audiences increased by 1.625 million from 1964 to 1965, and the proceeds from ticket sales increased by 295,000 rubles.⁸⁷

While Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia remained, until the USSR dissolved, the leading Republican studios in terms of production and overall symbolic importance within the system, similar initiatives to increase film production and significantly boost film culture took place all over the Central Asian and Transcaucasian republics in the 1960s. And while VGIK in Moscow remained a crucial center of education and formation of future Soviet (and Third-Worldist) filmmakers, the Soviet Filmmakers Union provided support for the establishment of the Advanced Screenwriting Courses as an additional venue for formal film education. It was designed to attract established literary talents to cinema, providing impetus for greater collaboration between literature (which in the early 1960s Soviet Union reflected the lively artistic culture of the Thaw) and filmmaking. Its third cohort (1965–67) included thirty young writers from the republics, including two guaranteed spots per each Central-Asian republic—a development that had significant impact on Central Asian cinema.⁸⁸

As a result of all these developments, the mid-1960s saw the production of some of the classics of national cinemas of the region: Bulat Mansurov's *The Contest* (*Sostiazanie*, Turkmenistan, 1963); Melis Ubukeev's *White Mountains* (*Belye gory*, Kirgizstan, 1965); Elyor Ishmukhamedov's *Tenderness* (*Nezhnost'*, Uzbekistan, 1966); Shaken Aimanov's *Land of the Fathers* (*Zemlia ottsov*, Kazakhstan, 1966); Ali Kharmaev's *White, White Storks* (*Belye, belye aisty*, Uzbekistan, 1966); and Tolomush Okeev's *The Sky of Our Childhood* (*Nebo nashego detstva*, Kirgizstan, 1966). Combining elements of the Thaw culture of the Soviet 1960s with its emphasis on the authenticity, lyricism, and personal expression with stylistic features of both neorealism and international New Wave cinemas, these films led the new cinematic movement of "poetic cinema" in the Soviet Union.

Kirgiz cinema of the 1960s, in particular, came to be referred to as "the Kirgiz miracle" as Okeev's *The Sky of Our Childhood* came to signify for many young Central Asian filmmakers the kind of cinema that could truly speak to their cultural and national sensibilities and experiences in a way that Soviet cinema, until then, had completely failed to do. These films were foundational for marking the growth of cinematic national consciousness of the Soviet Central Asian republics, negotiating persistent tensions between the realities of socialist modernization and an authentic Indigenous exploration of their local and regional heritage.

Despite increasing censorship taking hold in the late 1960s, there was an undeniable shift in the artistic production within the republics. The sheer number of

productions allowed for the articulation of a wider range of genres and styles. The culture of the regions also underwent a transformation through the construction of theaters and other screening venues. To give just one example, in 1965 in Tajikistan there were six mobile children's movie theaters using buses (ZIL-158) as a way to provide service to preschool-age kids directly at daycares and the newly built high-rise housing projects in Dushanbe, Kulabe, Kurganstub, and Leninabad.⁸⁹ Even though the largest-grossing Soviet films were still Russian-language films, made at one of the Russian (and occasionally, Ukrainian) studios, starring popular actors, most of whom were based in Moscow or Leningrad, local film cultures were more mixed.⁹⁰ As the new generation of VGIK-educated Central Asian filmmakers returned to their "home" studios full of enthusiasm for the kind of new national cinema they were eager to make, the approval of audiences in Moscow or Leningrad was not a main concern.⁹¹ The national ("All-Soviet") film festivals founded during that time also became an important venue, allowing republican filmmakers to meet and see each other's films, creating personal relationships and exchanges that would prove crucial for the emergence of the New Cinemas at those republican studios.⁹²

FILM IMPORT-EXPORT IN THE SOVIET UNION

At the same time that the Soviet film industry reached its furthest peripheries in terms of both production and exhibition, it also came to rely increasingly on cinematic import-export relationships with Third World regions. With the intensification of the Cold War, the early 1960s Soviet film exports to capitalist countries declined radically, so expanding the market to Asia, Africa, and Latin America was a particularly pressing—and ultimately successful—strategy. For imports, the excitement of all things foreign, which burst out with the Thaw (and continued for the duration of the Soviet Union's existence), came to define both popular and elite cinematic tastes—tastes that, albeit in different ways, extended beyond the Euro-Hollywood canon.⁹³

As Marina Kosinova and Kristin Roth-Ey, among others, have demonstrated, film imports were highly profitable, especially those from Asia and Latin America. Even in the postwar Stalin period, film exhibition in the Soviet Union included a proportionally large number of foreign films. Alongside the so-called Trophy films taken from Germany at the end of the war, Soviet audiences enjoyed many non-Western films: from the late 1940s, at least one Mexican, Egyptian, Argentinian, and Japanese film a year, as well as several Indian and, until 1965, many Chinese films, added up to a fairly large percentage of total product and accounted for an even larger share of revenues.⁹⁴ The international film festival circuit was key to crafting business deals with international distribution companies.

The asymmetry between the rapturous reception of foreign films in the USSR and the reception of Soviet film exports to Western countries was stark. Soviet films, once they were purchased abroad, had, generally speaking, a very limited

exhibition run, and Western film distributors insisted on a one-to-one agreement, where for every Soviet film purchased by a European or North American company, the Soviet Union had to reciprocate with an equivalent purchase. The framework differed in the case of developing countries. With them, the Soviet Union could trade in-kind goods. As a result, Soviet exports to developing countries increased dramatically from the 1950s into the 1960s, accounting for a large part of Soviet film export. By the early 1960s, Sovexport was active in twenty-five countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where it controlled Soviet distribution within commercial exhibition. Other kinds of screenings of Soviet cinema were organized by cultural organizations (such as friendship societies) and embassies. These screenings were often retrospectives, including films from earlier periods, which were more popular than the more contemporary selections.⁹⁵

But while the classics, such as films by Eisenstein, were always in demand—especially within film society movements growing all over Asia, Latin America, and even the US—it became apparent that the contemporary selection of Soviet films sent abroad had to meet some of the cultural and ideological specificities of the host countries. The opportunity to take advantage of cultural affinities among the countries of the Soviet and “foreign” East required a knowledge of film and sensitivity beyond the scope of the normal Soviet trade representative abroad. For this reason, establishing informal contacts leading to cinematic exchanges and deals with foreign film institutions and individuals was relegated to the newly created Union of Soviet Filmmakers, while Sovexport continued to fully control commercial film import and export (and the party often had the final say in making decisions), and both of these organizations played a role in the Tashkent festival selection.⁹⁶

SOVIET FILM CULTURE OF THE LATE 1960s

Thus, during the Thaw, film production all over the Soviet Union experienced a boom. Film culture underwent significant internationalization through the Moscow film festival, special exhibition series (the so-called weeks of various national foreign cinemas shown around the country), the overall increase of film imports and exports, coproductions, filmmakers’ traveling the world, and translations of texts for publication in newly founded specialized film magazines and journals. At the same time, the end of the Thaw signaled a much stricter ideological party control and restructuring of Soviet film institutions. While the relationship between film production and the state became increasingly complicated, film exhibition was at its height. Thus, in 1963, in response to the need for greater control over the growing sector, the State Committee for Cinematography—a stand-alone department responsible directly to the party—was formed (it was later reorganized in 1966 and 1972 as Goskino). Its purview included virtually all aspects of cinematic culture (except import-export, which remained under the auspices of the Ministry

of Trade). One of its many functions was administering the “thematic plan” for production—planning not only how many films were to be produced each year at each of the film studios but also their genres and themes. Film projects were adjudicated on the basis of the “literary scenario” submitted for the committee’s approval for the inclusion in the following year’s thematic plan.⁹⁷ The filmmakers at the republican studios faced additional bureaucratic obstacles as they had to go through an extra layer of approval and institutional scrutiny, which could be even more conservative than those in Moscow.

The broad dynamic intensified in 1968, as Soviet reactions to the Prague spring incited the intensification of ideological struggle. Valerii Fomin, a leading contemporary Soviet film historian, describes this moment:

Precisely the sixties, especially toward their middle, were the “Golden Age” of Soviet cinema. Everything was in movement, everything was growing. And this energy of shared dynamism was blocked at the very moment when our cinema was at its height. The fateful turning point was in 1968. It’s that year when the record number of films and projects were put to death. This mass, bloody reprisal did not fail to have consequences—the dynamism of filmmaking was broken, it slowed down. In an effort to avoid the death hold of censorship, Soviet cinema retreats toward film adaptations of literary classics, hides behind parables, science fiction, or “foreign themes.” But in vain!⁹⁸

Even acknowledging the exaggeration behind Fomin’s emphatic claims (“bloody reprisal,” “put to death”), it is clear that 1968 was a highly contentious year, full of strife within the Soviet filmmaking community, as political and artistic positions began to crystalize through clearly marked subcultures in filmmaking circles.⁹⁹ From this perspective, the opening of the Tashkent film festival appeared to many as a diversionary tactic, disconnected from what was of the utmost importance to the cinematic and cultural community. Seen from the outside, it may have looked like a final gasp of the Soviet Union’s efforts to retain its geopolitical status, equally disconnected from the arrival of a new kind of radical global politics we now associate with that iconic year.

1968 IN WORLD FILM CULTURE

To position the festival more precisely vis-à-vis these global developments requires us to draw out the meaning of this moment for global cinematic cultures—especially those that intersected directly with Tashkent’s.¹⁰⁰ Despite its now almost-ubiquitous connotation, from the non-European position “1968” does not always function as a shorthand for the new political culture. As Susana Draper notes, “The moment of ’68 is a figure saturated by projections and evaluations: *point of origin, watershed history, democratizing instance, historical failure*. However, the more we look and read, the more its contours, its dates, its coherence are blurred.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, the resonances of the Long Sixties around the world had different temporalities,

and many of their manifestations and pressure points could be more importantly located before or after 1968, as in the 1967 War in the Middle East or the 1966 CIA-backed coup in Ghana.

At the same time, student-led uprisings in Paris and the events of the Prague Spring together delivered the final blow to any possibility of considering the Soviet Union the center of the international(ist) movement. Even though very few Soviet allies from Africa, Asia, or Latin America openly condemned the invasion, even fewer publicly supported it. And despite the lack of public outcry from Third-Worldist allies, Soviet reputation was significantly tarnished as the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia fully manifested what was already tacitly understood about the Soviet attitude toward smaller nations in its sphere, as well as its tolerance of dissent. The events of 1968 in Paris, Prague, and Mexico City heralded a definitive shift to a new, horizontal way to think about politics and the production of culture. A key notion in this shift was that of independence, challenging the political and cultural relationship to both the party and the state, as well as the rejection of the superpowers, best exemplified by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's canonical manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema," which denounced the Hollywood model's reach within even socialist film production.¹⁰²

Unsurprisingly, within the Soviet bloc, Solanas and Getino's cinematic embodiment of these ideas—*The Hour of the Furnaces* (*La hora de los hornos*, 1968)—was screened at Karlovy Vary but never in the Soviet Union. Nor was the notion of Third Cinema, with or without direct references to the manifesto, ever acknowledged in Soviet film criticism and history. Thus it was certainly not Tashkent but rather the Pesaro festival in Italy that was embraced by militant Latin American filmmakers as a meeting place for filmmakers "committed to the construction of the revolutionary cinema."¹⁰³ That same year, the Cuban delegation openly joined forces with the French in protesting the organizers' of the Leipzig festival silencing dissenting voices in response to the events in Prague.¹⁰⁴ Their protests did not, of course, prevent Cuban filmmakers from participating and accepting awards both in Leipzig and Karlovy Vary or from attending the Tashkent festival as guests that year. But they did clearly signal their allegiances.

The exuberant reception of *The Hour of the Furnaces* at the Pesaro festival in 1968 has acquired legendary status in the heroic narrative of that year. Pesaro's nomination as a festival of "New Cinemas" resonated strongly with the moment, mapping the new cinematic developments onto the rhetoric of "newness" and generational turnover associated with the "Global '68" mentality (even if, in fact, many of the main cultural actors were in their fifties or older). What most of these New Cinemas shared with the so-called originary movement—that is, the French New Wave—is their rhetorical rejection of the "cinema du papa." What counted for "old" was different in each particular context. For many, it was commercial cinema, whether of one's own nation or Hollywood; for some, in the Eastern bloc, it meant (socialist) realist cinema; for others, it was cinema of the public

sector or “independent cinema” of the previous generation or, as in the case of Africa, colonial cinema. Often, all of these different referents were rhetorically equated. But the notion of marking a generational difference necessitated both the invention of a new formal language and a new politics, even if New Cinema filmmakers often heatedly disagreed on the content of the new politics and the form of this new aesthetic.

The emergence of this “New Cinema” was often rooted in cinephilia, materially realized in film societies, cine-clubs, film journals, museums, and film schools.¹⁰⁵ This was as true for Brazil and Egypt as for France. Incidentally, the (re)discovery of Eisenstein and Vertov as formative influences on the New Cinemas globally is a consequence of their forming the canon of such alternative film exhibition sites (often as the only explicitly political films within this canon). In the socialist bloc, in the relative absence of alternative venues such as cine-clubs or independent journals, film schools functioned as the major conduits of cinephilia. Film schools were often the spaces where a new generation of filmmakers encountered films that inspired their own formal experimentation. The schools provided new filmmakers with spaces for developing and articulating these ideas of “newness.” Other times, various experimental production units, either as part of the main film industry or even in such unlikely spaces as the army, served a similar function in forming the new generation of Eastern European and Soviet practitioners of New Cinemas.¹⁰⁶

By the late 1960s, the ideology of the New Cinemas often demanded the rejection of those formative institutional spaces and the creation of new ones, often via new film festival circuits. For Latin America, this solidification of different national movements (Cinema Novo in Brazil, Cine Liberación in Argentina, Grupo Ukamau in Bolivia, Cine Independiente in Mexico, ICAIC productions in Cuba) into something recognizable as the New Latin America Cinema crystalized in the 1967 and 1969 editions of the Viña del Mar Festival in Chile and in Merida, Venezuela, in 1968.¹⁰⁷ And for Africa and the Arab world, the 1966 Carthage Film Festival for African and Arab cinemas (FCC), the 1969 Pan-African Film Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), and the 1972 International Festival for the Young Filmmakers in Damascus marked similar developments.

CONCLUSION

The Tashkent film festival, although founded in 1968, never became a central part of the scene I have described. Yet its repeated antiwar, anti-imperialist rhetoric (with both Vietnam and Palestine at the center of the imaginary geography it projected) appears to be sufficient to create consensus among the left-leaning participants from Asia and Africa (and soon Latin America as well), including those aligned with the New Left, just as it was for communist parties internationally.¹⁰⁸ As a result, Tashkent was not affected by the boycotts against the Soviet invasion

in Prague, and the event took place as planned. In many ways, the 1968 Tashkent festival, rather than heralding the arrival of New Cinemas, provided a snapshot of the state of a wide range of film institutions globally, which were not usually seen in one place elsewhere.

Overall, despite the expectations of 1968 as the year of radical youth culture, the first edition of the Tashkent festival presented the constellation of socialist world cinema as primarily that of “the fathers.” The photographs and documentary footage are quite telling in this respect, showing mostly middle-aged men, mostly in suits (although some in local traditional attire), mostly nonwhite (although the Black African representatives still visually stand out): an image seemingly rather removed from the iconography of “The Global Sixties” focused on European and American youth. Unlike the “groovy” graphic design and posters accompanying, for example, the Tricontinental Conference in Cuba in 1966, the press coverage of the 1968 Tashkent festival placed greater visual emphasis on the diversity of “traditional cultures” represented there—with images of local dress, traditional musical instruments, and ethnic diversity surpassing by far any explicitly political or youth-oriented imagery.¹⁰⁹

Another aspect of the festival was its participants’ single-minded commitment to cinema. While television is often discussed as a competing force in most contexts, and engagement with intermediality becomes defining for the radical avant-gardes of the era, Tashkent’s discussions may seem somehow archaic in their assumption of the stability and primacy of film as an object and a cultural practice.¹¹⁰ The same is true for their general adherence to the principles of narrative cinema, at least in fiction (documentary selections were more varied—although still dominated by traditional forms). Narrative conventions and modes represented by the films at the festival did, indeed, vary a great deal (just as they did on the European Art Cinema festival circuit of the time), and so did their ideological positions—both in terms of aesthetics/style and politics. But looking at the festival selection as a whole, it is easy to see a predominance of a certain humanist, social-realist strand, at least within fiction cinema. The exact contours of this mode were broader and more inclusive than what our persistent association of the Global Sixties cinemas, with their Brechtian self-reflexivity and montage as the only mode of oppositional cinematic practices, would lead us to believe.

To explore these differences, the next chapters turn to the festival program in its first decade in some detail, drawing on the specific transnational contexts of circulation and reception between the Soviet Union and participating regions. Taken together, the films presented at the festival form a distinct cinematic sphere: a particular configuration of world socialist cinema. This cinema’s internal coherence was exemplified by the Tashkent festival, but it extended far beyond the festival contours, as the concluding chapters of this book will demonstrate.