Tashkent Festival Critical Discourses

This chapter will focus on the discourses—emerging from seminar presentations, press conferences, and festival press coverage—that formed a crucial part of the Tashkent festival from 1968 to 1980, demonstrating the participants' understanding of cinema's social and cultural function. These discussions challenge many Western assumptions about film and politics—assumptions, that still color our contemporary mainstream scholarly approaches to cinema during the Cold War period. Most of their main topics and governing tropes—concerns over the monopolies governing global film distribution and its effect on the developing national film industries; the understanding of cultural, social, and political functions of cinema and its most explicitly militant embodiment in the metaphor of "cinema as a weapon"; the denunciation of violence and sexuality onscreen as expressions of dehumanizing effects of decadent Western bourgeois ideology— were widely shared across the different groups represented at the festival. More contentious, however, were questions of realism, aesthetics, and definitions of a national culture or distinctions between popular and commercial cinemas or artistic experimentation and social responsibility. As such, the discourses emerging from the festival form a heterotopic space vis-à-vis not only "the West" but also across the various local, national, regional, and geopolitical entities and identities manifested in these discussions and accounts—simultaneously shaping and reinforcing specific alliances, affinities, and solidarities, while also pointing to other unspoken differences and divergences.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Each edition of the festival, from 1968 onward, included roundtable discussions— officially called "creative discussions on the role of film art in the fight for peace, social progress, and the freedom of the peoples"—that took place over one or two days and brought together somewhere between twelve and twenty presenters,

FIGURE 4.1. Roundtable creative discussion at Tashkent. Photo from author's private collection.

most of whom were foreign guests (fig. 4.1). Thematically mirroring the slogan of the festival, these roundtables were open to the public, and the texts of the presentations were subsequently included in a printed edition (in Russian). In addition to these official roundtable discussions, there were also multiple solidarity meetings occasioned by specific political events, as well as daily press conferences, which often spilled out into more open public exchanges between the members of different national delegations. And, of course, the festival produced a considerable amount of coverage in a wide range of local (Uzbek), Soviet (Russian-language), and foreign publications.

The format of these discussions and solidarity meetings fit in comfortably with such rituals in the Soviet era, complete with the announcement of Leonid Brezhnev's greetings to the participants and guests of the festival and the guests sending their salutations to the General Secretary of the Communist Party. The presentations forming these events were unidirectional; the "discussion" did not include any input from the audience or spontaneous remarks from the participants, although they could put their name on the list to deliver an address, even if they had not been formally invited to do so.[1] The explicitly political nature of many of these presentations and press conferences, however, could have real political consequences for speakers. Thus Tahar Cheriaa, the Tunisian organizer of the Carthage film festival, was jailed briefly by Bourguiba's government when it was reported that he'd spoken out against the president at the festival. The Tunisian ambassador to the Soviet Union demanded the record of his remarks from the organizers, who, in turn, claimed they were unable to find it given the high number of various speeches given at the festival (which allowed Cheriaa to refute the accusation).[2]

If these presentations were largely intended as ritual demonstrations of shared ideological positions, they also provided festival participants with a crucial overview of the "state of the field" for many national industries and progressive movements, presenting basic information about different national film industries and cultures. Such updates served a crucial educational function within the global information regime, which was otherwise entirely controlled by the five wire services. Of these, one was Soviet TASS, and the other four—AP, AFP, UPI,

and Reuters– were NATO-based, with the advent of satellite broadcasting further exacerbating this global news-media imbalance.[3] In such a mediatic regime, these presentations and reports from the various festival delegations were often the only direct source of information that Asian, African, and Latin American participants could access about political and cultural developments in different nations, especially as related to cinema. As such, they collectively produced knowledge that could be operationalized transnationally by filmmakers and cultural institutions for whom the ideal of socialist internationalism was still alive.

The presentations were not censored by the Soviet hosts, nor did the participants apparently adjust their remarks to cleave to the Soviet line, as is evident from the wide range of topics and claims. In fact, their presentations are remarkably consistent with other recorded statements—manifestos, resolutions, interviews—at Third-Worldist gatherings taking place outside the Soviet sphere. For example, the Montreal 1974 international meeting of political filmmakers, which included several figures, such as Littín and Cheriaa, who were hosted at Tashkent, was resolutely non-Soviet in its geopolitical formation and rhetoric.[4] Its final resolution denounced "the intervention of imperialism and its allies in Latin America, Africa and Asia . . . the Zionist aggression against the arab [sic] people of the Middle East . . . [and] the repression hitting the cultural workers of the arts and culture in Chile and Palestine"—phrasing that mirrored almost exactly that of the Tashkent festival communique the same year.[5] Thus, while the film selection at the Tashkent festival differed from its radical Third-Worldist counterparts, the discourses that it generated did not. This was at least in part due to the crucial role played by the shared understanding of the role of film festivals as first and foremost fulfilling a social, cultural, and political function. In this sense, the formulaic slogan of the festival—"cinema in the fight for peace, social progress, and freedom of the peoples"—actually reflected the beliefs of the festival's participants. Tashkent foregrounded a shared awareness on the part of its participants and audience of cinema as political motivator, agent of international solidarity, cultural diplomacy, national or regional cultural identity, and educator in the broadest political and epistemological sense. Yet with its inclusion of genre cinema, which fit best under an umbrella of entertainment, the festival simultaneously brought out many internal frictions concerning the specific parameters of these various functions of cinema and film festivals in a way that was largely erased from the art cinema circuit.

CINEMA AT THE FESTIVALS: ART, EDUCATION, OR ENTERTAINMENT?

Many of the internal contradictions allude to the colonial origins of these debates. In the context of African film (festival) history, Lindiwe Dovey, building on Aboubakar Sanogo's argument, identifies the friction between "education" and "entertainment" at colonial film screenings:

> Reading between the lines of the documentation that we have of these early film festivals in Africa, it is possible to conjure a clash of interpretations—*(dis)sensus communis*—around the meanings and value inherent in the festivals and the films they screened. For many Africans, as Sanogo suggests . . . , the screenings afforded an opportunity for leisure through the act of gathering with other people amid storytelling and song. For many of the organizers, however, the intention was moral and scientific instruction, and the incorporation of Africans into a European logic, economy, and way of behaving.[6]

Especially given the colonial history of Central Asia within the Soviet context, something similar could be said about Tashkent as well, whose role was understood by its organizers as at least in part consisting in educating its audiences with the goal of incorporating them into the socialist progressivist community. Thus, concerns about the representation of sex and violence and their harmful effects on the audiences were a recurring theme in the discussions, ultimately addressing the didactic understanding of socialist cinema and its impact. Given the multiethnic and multiracial context of the festival, there's an uncomfortable echo here of the colonialist agenda of "educating" non-European races, resonating with Dovey's and Sanogo's discussion of colonial film exhibition legacies, which privileged easily digestible films, devoid of too much formal experimentation, while also excluding any "harmful" elements such as sex and violence of "unsuitable" commercial cinema.[7]

At the same time, the festival also privileged exactly the kind of community-sharing aspect of leisure that, as Sanogo suggests, was so important for film screenings in the colonial contexts. Moreover, for its audiences, participants, and cultural workers involved in the festival, it offered a rare and exciting engagement with the world—a form of virtual travel that would otherwise be unavailable to most in the audience, as well as an equally rare chance to interact with people from all over the world, offering another form of affective proximity, further highlighted by the fact that many of them were "stars" whom audiences recognized from the big screen. In short, it created an experience of imaginary and affective global community for audiences and participants alike, an almost-utopian form of world-building that was multiethnic, multiracial, and culturally heterogeneous. The tensions between these two structuring principles of the festival experience—its governmentality and its jouissance—are crucial to our understanding of its politics and aesthetics.

In terms of the former, while Tashkent certainly imposed no clearly defined "norms" to its selection, the logic of taste-formation as an essential task of all cultural events and forms of cinematic curatorship was inscribed in the festival's self-conception. In this it was consistent with the revolutionary rhetoric of "the New Man" endogenous to the discourse of socialist revolutions in particular, and the more "radical" and independent theorists of the New (political) cinemas were even more invested in this notion. While many of them believed commercial film harmed audiences by corrupting their taste and channeling their desires into

complicity with their oppressors, for Soviet bureaucrats, in the best tradition of socialist realism, this same logic applied instead to overly formally experimental cinema, which failed didactically to be legible to the "masses" and was easily susceptible to ideological misinterpretation. Both theorists and bureaucrats assumed a patronizing attitude toward the audiences and "the masses," reproducing the colonialist mind-set even within a decidedly anticolonialist position. Yet, as Dovey explores in her discussion of African film exhibition, these various political legacies, bringing together colonial anxieties, educational function of cinema, and its potential for revolutionary practice nonetheless made explicit "the centrality of human activity to cultural production, and the centrality of audiences to the meanings of this cultural production," thus simultaneously affirming their agency.[8]

A similar dynamic surfaces in the Tashkent seminars, where behind the often expressed concerns about how to form spectators' consciousness through progressive cinema, there lurked the suspicion that people are fundamentally sentimental and irrational. Discussions of the economic mechanisms of cultural colonialism were inseparable from strategies for effective education of the spectator. Even in socialist countries where film distribution and exhibition were already fully state-controlled, concerns about audiences' consistent preferences for foreign, commercial, and other ideologically problematic cinemas never ceased. From Eisenstein on, leftist filmmakers and critics were caught in a paradox: on the one hand, valorizing the creation of active and engaged film viewers and, on the other hand, fighting to overcome viewers' equally active resistance that demanded pleasure defined on their own terms.

These attitudes can be glimpsed in the reviews of the festival, where European observers noted the fact that the local Uzbek audience openly and loudly expressed their opinions of the festival's fare, which led one Swiss reviewer to negatively compare the audience at Tashkent ("uneducated and undisciplined") to those in Moscow.[9] Similarly, Western critics were openly negative about the quality of the films overall. Gordon Hitchens, an important international film journalist and the founder in 1962 of the magazine *Film Comment*, was a committed leftist who attended all the early editions of the festival. He regularly expressed his dismay at the conservatism, both formal and political, of most of the films he saw. "While the word revolution is heard everywhere at the festival, the films are often passive, of simplified or escapist character," he wrote in his 1974 festival review.[10] This opinion certainly mirrored that of many participants themselves, who had strong and extremely divided views on the matter. Yet it becomes hard to separate such views from his complaints about the lack of air-conditioning or swimming pools at the hotels or his assumptions about the inherent inferiority of what he refers to as the "anthropological" qualities of these films, which needed to be transcended through revolutionary forms derived from European and American political aesthetics.[11]

In their lament over insufficiently developed aesthetic norms, such judgments resonate with the views of most Western critics, who tacitly assumed that "world

cinema" was synonymous with the lowering of the quality of festival film selec-
tions. This is not to say that African, Asian, and Latin American participants of
Tashkent were indifferent or blind to aesthetic questions, but their particular colo-
nial and postcolonial experiences of the global film culture provided them with a
better sense of economic and political hierarchies underwriting these positions.
Far from being more "naive" or less cosmopolitan (as many Western film critics
would assume), their approaches were formed by a different conception of film
culture, one that understood cinema as a cultural and social form and activity. This
is what Med Hondo referred to when, at the 1972 Tashkent creative discussion,
he explained his own political and aesthetic position against the autonomy of the
artwork by stating that "making cinema for cinema's sake is an unforgivable luxury
for Africans."[12] Perhaps Ousmane Sembene best expressed this notion when he
argued that "in light of global history and the assaults of slavery and colonialism
on black Africans, it makes more sense to use the term 'culture' than 'art' to speak
about human expression, since culture grounds expression in human production,
whereas art is too readily associated with an abstracted aesthetics."[13] And, echoing
the Latin American manifestos on Third and Imperfect cinema, Paulin Vieyra, in
his 1974 Tashkent presentation, put it even more categorially: "In African culture
and civilization there is no such tendency as 'art for the sake of art.' Our art is
always functional, whether it's cinema, music or sculpture. It depends on specific
needs, specific situation[s], specific ceremonies, and our traditions. I can say today
that our cinema is thus a cinema of struggle, cinema of combat. . . . We are politi-
cally independent and must also be culturally independent, even if we are not yet
economically independent."[14]

   Indeed, a festival like Tashkent rejected the supposedly universalist assump-
tions of aesthetic autonomy upheld by many other festivals, allowing for culturally
and politically situated values that were precisely meant to enable filmmaking and
were aligned neither with Hollywood nor the art cinema canons of such festi-
vals as Venice or Cannes. This alternative spectrum, however, was diverse and far
from indiscriminate. In many cases, the festival's invitees were its harshest crit-
ics. For example, Senegalese Vieyra, Indian Mrinal Sen, and Cuban José Massip
all articulated their criticisms of the film selections by articulating the need for a
political filmmaking that was genuinely independent in spirit from official statist
position and propaganda. Their critiques, however, were reserved for completely
different films, speaking to the diversity of precise positions within this seemingly
coherent camp. Thus, Massip, in his review of the 1968 Tashkent festival in *Cine
Cubano*, says that the festival was dominated by "the tendency towards anti-truth
and anti-realism" and films of "overwhelming technical primitivism, rudimentary
commercialization, folkloric populism, which was nothing less than a[n] under-
developed and weak assimilation of the over-developed commercial stereotype"—
in which he saw "the mirror of what was our cinema before the triumph of the
revolution."[15] Predictably, then, his criticisms were reserved for the selection of

the films from "reactionary" regimes such as Morocco and Jordan (not realizing, for example, that Jordanian film was part of the Palestinian resistance).

Massip's praise, however, was directed not only at Vietnamese war films but also films made by the People's Democratic Republic of Korea. In contrast, Guy Hennebelle, the radical French critic and great supporter of Third World and Cuban cinema, directed the force of his ire at the same Korean film praised by Massip as the worst example of socialist realism. While acknowledging this, Massip nonetheless justifies his position by the fact that the audience was clearly moved by the film and applauded at the end (as was, in fact, a standard audience response for almost all Tashkent screenings, especially ones attended by the national delegations representing the film).[16] Massip similarly singles out a film by "his friend Diagne Costa," to which he dedicates a paragraph full of exuberant praise. Vieyra, however, in his discussion of the same film, harshly criticized its naivete and lack of aesthetic rigor, linking Costa's filmmaking directly with the propaganda of the Guinean state.[17] One could suspect that this criticism may also have had something to do with the delicate political alignments between Senegal and Guinea at the time, as well as Vieyra's even more complicated position within Senegalese state politics.[18] In the meantime, Massip also expressed his disappointment with Satyajit Ray's absence at the festival, dominated by commercial cinemas of India, which he compared to the Mexican Golden Age cinema (to whose legacy revolutionary Cuba saw itself in opposition). Mrinal Sen in 1974, instead, specifically singled out Ray as a filmmaker whose recognition rested on the success of his films in the West, a tendency Sen hoped that filmmakers represented at Tashkent could avoid—a remark that provoked outrage within the Indian delegation, which saw it as a betrayal of national unity.[19]

These instances demonstrate that the participants' agreement on seeing cinema as a point of intersection of political, social, and cultural life, rather than its own autonomous realm, in no way led to unanimity of theoretical positions or the evaluation of specific films. And yet, analysis of the filmmakers' and critics' discourses at the creative discussions at Tashkent do reveal some particularly forceful shared tropes. These are, in particular, the dominance of foreign film monopolies, especially in film distribution, the notion of cinema as a weapon, and the need for filmmakers' direct involvement in institutional and political life. Within these shared concerns, we can identify a materialist approach that gives systematic shape to a socialist international cinema theory, one rooted in issues of geopolitical economy, spectatorial and production cultures, and social function of cinema in opposition to strictly formal concerns. More implicit issues that emerge from within these discursive tropes, however, are the shifting parameters of such notions as national culture, definitions of realism, and, finally, the conflict between entertainment and political functions of cinema, particularly concerns over the impact of screen representations of sex and violence. In what follows, this chapter reconstructs these discourses and their implications. Just as I did

with the festival programming, I place them simultaneously within the Soviet institutional context and the multiple national and regional debates and polemics of the era.

GEOPOLITICS OF FILM MONOPOLIES

All participants at Tashkent shared, to a greater or lesser degree, an ideology that emphasized anti-imperialism and anticolonialism, including in their relationship to cinema. Unsurprisingly, virtually all participants in these discussions over the decade worried about the dominance of film monopolies—in particular, foreign ones—in most Asian, African, and Latin American countries. Heavily resourced and established, they blocked distribution and exhibition of national cinemas and progressive films in general, and de facto shaped audience tastes. African filmmakers in particular—Sembene, Vieyra, Hondo, Sébastien Kamba, Souheil Ben Barka, and many others—voiced at every edition of Tashkent the same complaint: an African who wanted to see African films would have to go abroad, for all this person would see at home were either European and American films or commercial productions from India and Egypt. Nor was this an exclusively African concern. For countries with more developed commercial film industries, the endogenous studio system combined with the privileged distribution of the commercially dominant international cinemas, had the same effect: choking off independent productions and limiting the circulation of other international films, even those from neighboring countries. It was also a concern that the more radical filmmakers shared with the cultural elites (such as representatives of cinematheques, film societies, and art museums, ranging from Turkey to Brazil, who were also part of the Tashkent delegations) interested in preserving and promoting art cinema as precisely an alternative to the commercial film monopolies.

The problem of film distribution was framed in three overlapping but slightly distinct ways: first, through the junction of monopoly and imperialism, aimed not only at profit-making but also at sidelining of cinema that could articulate an authentic national culture; second, as a question of political economy, focusing on the mode of film production, where big studio monopolies, whether domestic or foreign, sought to extinguish smaller independent productions, with the effect that national culture became identified only with the economically dominant structures fabricating a mass culture in its image; and third, as a problem of ideological taste formation in audiences, where reactionary bourgeois entertainment, whether domestic or national, aimed at creating a taste for further entertainment, prevented audiences from engaging with politically progressive cinema and, by extension, from the social reproduction of a critical (or revolutionary) consciousness.

Indeed, this problematic is prevalent in the discourse of the broadly leftist leaning African, Asian, and Latin American filmmakers and critics throughout the

1960s and 1970s.[20] Nowhere, perhaps, is the issue more emphatically stated than in the opening line of the Tunisian film critic Tahar Cheriaa's book *Écrans d'abondance . . . ou cinémas de libération en Afrique?*: "The problem of distribution is incontrovertibly the key problem—the one that largely determines all the rest—materially affecting the cinema of the African and Arab countries."[21] The struggle for the liberation of an authentically independent national cinema was inherent to the total project of decolonization: full political and cultural self-realization on both national and international scale. Since at least the 1920s, cinema had been seen as a uniquely powerful tool that could reach beyond the limits of literacy (both in regions where literacy rates were extremely low and internationally, among audiences that did not understand other languages). In so doing, it could incorporate other vital elements of repressed cultural expression (orality, music, visual culture, local poetic heritage and traditions). Even the less political radical among African, Asian, and Latin American participants were keenly aware of the economic geopolitically distributed disparities within the global world cinema networks and stressed the importance of cinema's role in developing a national culture.

The US economic monopoly of international film distribution impacted even Soviet cinema, albeit in a different way. Starting from the early 1960s, US companies abroad took an increasingly aggressive stance to limit cinematic exchanges (especially commercial ones) with the Soviet Union. For example, many of the British, Italian, and French films' international exhibition rights belonged to US distributors who did not allow for films to be sold to the USSR, in spite of the economic benefit that would accrue to producing countries.[22] Furthermore, the film community was acutely aware of the pervasiveness of USAI cinematic activities all over Asia and Latin America, to which the Tashkent festival presented itself as an explicit alternative.[23]

In this respect, however, the Soviet Union's position was a clear result of bilateral Cold War logic, in that Soviet film import-export policies did favor these regions (for example, by allowing barter trade) but in ways largely aimed at increasing Soviet film distribution or coproductions, neglecting the goals of developing truly multilateral cinematic cooperation across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Yet the absence of a formal competition, with a variety of awards given by different organizations at Tashkent, created a space for screening films that was freer from the market, which would otherwise be dependent on the more hierarchical award structures. Moreover, the informal ties established among the filmmakers at the festival who were looking for alternatives to the commercial networks did allow for greater exchanges among them, independently from Soviet hosts' agendas.[24]

The idea of using the festival as a springboard for an international organization for mutual support for the production, distribution, and exhibition of progressive cinema across the continents was brought up at literally every roundtable discussion at Tashkent. Thus, in 1972, as part of his presentation at that year's creative

discussion, the Egyptian writer and journalist 'Abd al-Rahman al-Khamisi (in exile from Egypt and studying in Moscow at the time) suggested setting up a committee to help develop film exhibition, including the construction of movie theaters and other infrastructure, in the countries of Asia and Africa—enthusiastically seconded by the Guinean delegate.[25] Farid Ahmed, the head of the National Film Corporation of Pakistan in 1974, made a proposal for an Afro-Asian film center to promote realist filmmaking, with exchanges of films using a barter system.[26] In 1976, using the same forum, Ibrahim Jalal, the famous actor-director and head of the Film Union of Iraq, suggested creating a development bank for film financing, bringing together progressive cinemas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[27] Basu Bhattacharya made the same proposal in 1978, supported by the Mexican José Estrada and the Tunisian representative of FEPACI, who lamented the failed attempts to set just such a committee in 1974 in Montreal (a meeting to which filmmakers from the Soviet bloc, excepting Cuba, were not invited), suggesting Tashkent as an alternative.[28] But despite these repeated proposals, which Soviet organizers politely promised to consider, nothing happened.

Nor was this the first time that the Soviet film bureaucracy was challenged to live up to its internationalist ideals: as Rossen Djagalov documents, as early as 1962, Joris Ivens, the famous internationalist filmmaker and recipient of the 1954 Stalin Peace prize, called on the Soviet Minister of Culture to support the creation of a center for the training of young Latin American political filmmakers—requesting film stock and cameras, as well as financing for a permanent center in Latin America to encourage aspiring political filmmakers to make documentaries based on their local reality, thus launching a structure built on already existing trans–Latin American networks that could rely on Soviet funding. Despite his persistent and repeated requests, Ivens never received an answer. Djagalov attributes the lack of interest in this project to the Soviet policy of not supporting guerilla movements (to which this film training would be without a doubt directly contributing).[29]

The lack of engagement of the Soviet film bureaucracies with the proposals by the festival's participants to support concrete steps toward the creation of alternative distribution networks makes visible the limits of Soviet cultural policy vis-à-vis South-South movements beyond the rhetoric of solidarity. Goskino and Sovexportfilm alike were increasingly oriented toward commercial interests—if, at least on the part of Goskino, this was the only way to support the increasingly hard-to-maintain cinematic infrastructure. The Central Asian and Transcaucasian studios, as well as individual filmmakers who were genuinely interested in more direct exchanges, had limited autonomy given that all international projects had to go through Moscow's approval and funding. These filmmakers might well have felt a particular sense of affinity for the difficulties experienced by postcolonial film industries, but even though this may have enabled closer personal bonds, it was hardly conducive to addressing the large-scale systemic problems that all Tashkent presenters were so eager to identify and combat.

FIGURE 4.2. Cinema as a weapon: original poster of the Algerian Cinematheque. Scan of the original poster from author's private collection.

CINEMA AS A WEAPON

The problem of international film distribution for progressive films was also framed through these discussions in regional and international(ist) terms as blocking venues for shared political actions and grassroots activism, in particular with nations engaged in anticolonial and anti-imperialist liberation wars. Discussions of cinema's direct participation in these struggles formed another extensive trope at these seminar presentations, signaled by the use of the metaphor of film as weapon. This metaphor was visualized on posters for both the Palestinian Film Unit and the Algerian cinematheque, which featured an image of a camera as a gun (fig. 4.2), as well as across Latin America—discursively appearing in virtually every presentation at Tashkent

The tone was set by the Soviet filmmaker Azhdar Ibragimov, who in his festival opening speech recounted an anecdote he heard from his Vietnamese colleagues about a peasant who asked if a film camera could shoot the enemy.[30] Virtually every presentation at the Tashkent creative discussions from that year on, also operated with the metaphor of cinema as a weapon in the fight for peace. Some participants used it as a metaphor of the war against imperialism and capitalism, or bourgeois ideology more broadly. In the 1968 creative discussion, for example, the Japanese critic Yamada Kazuo responded to Ibragimov's anecdote with a warning about cinema being also used as a weapon by our enemies, "the reactionary, war-mongering film capitalists." The Minister of Culture of Guinea further elaborated

on cinema as a "double-edge sword which could create or kill," and the Algerian representative extolled cinema's role more specifically as a form of creative and moral self-realization for soldiers traumatized on the battlefield.[31] Mrinal Sen and S. Sukhdev in 1972 both offered their reflections on the impossibility of a progressive filmmaker to stay out of the fight and therefore the need to make cinema as effective a weapon as possible.[32]

Several participants expressed a more literal understanding of the act of filmmaking as directly participating in the revolutionary wars for independence, underscoring a material consideration of the relationship between warfare and cinema; after all, the filmmakers of this generation often began as cameramen on the front, whether in the Soviet case it meant the Second World War or the more shifting guerilla tactics characteristic of Vietnamese, Algerian, Palestinian, Bangladeshi, or Angolan wars of liberation. Palestinian presentations offered particularly vivid articulations of these experiences in a way that is entirely consistent with the 1974 manifestos of the Palestinian Cinema Group and Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine, as both groups were represented at Tashkent.[33]

Soviet organizers' voices often set the militant tone for these discussions. The weapon metaphor and its realities in Soviet film history hark back to Eisenstein's formulation of a "cine-fist" following the 1917 revolution and consequent civil war, which served as film training for many early Soviet filmmakers. By the 1960s, the reference was usually to the Soviet experience of World War II—which was repeatedly emphasized at Tashkent by Soviet participants. Vladimir Baskakov, one of the main ideologues of cinema in the 1960s and 1970s Soviet state apparatus, whose speeches frequently opened creative discussions at Tashkent was particularly insistent on this point. His career and his ideological positions are particularly effective in illustrating the official Soviet state culture of which the festival was inevitably a part and its intersection with the cinematic cultures the festival hosted. Between 1963 and 1972, he was deputy head of Goskino, directly in charge of festivals (both international festivals in the USSR and Soviet films at international festivals—which meant that he was part of the official delegations of virtually all the important film festivals during this period). After the restructuring of Goskino in 1973, he was appointed head of the Research Institute of Theory and History of Cinematography (as part of VGIK), which was allegedly reopened just to provide him with a suitably prestigious position.[34] In both of these capacities, he was a permanent fixture at the Tashkent seminars, often setting the agenda for the discussions.

Baskakov was notorious for his dogmatic views and ideological militancy and for his direct involvement in censorship; he was always keen to decipher potentially "ideologically dangerous hidden elements" in films.[35] He was the author of several books on cinema, including such telling titles as *Contradictory Screen: The Spiritual Crisis of Bourgeois Society and Cinema, Combating Screen: Contemporary*

Ideological Struggle and the Art of Cinema, and *The Dispute Continues*.[36] He declared socialist realism the only viable weapon against both Western mass art ("Hollywood and its epigones") and the "decadent" elitist cinema, which "pretends to be philosophically and politically relevant." In this latter category, Baskakov included virtually all European postwar auteurs, making a prosecutorial case against their "ultra-leftist" films.[37] From the late 1960s through the perestroika period, his position was directly restated (sometimes verbatim) by many Soviet film critics writing about Western cinema. An exception could be made, however, for some anticolonialist and anti-imperialist films: thus Georgii Bogemskii, the Soviet film critic "in charge" of Italian cinema, singled out Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (*Ma'rakat al-Jaza'ir*, 1966), Valerio Zurlini's *Black Jesus* (*Seduto alla sua destra*, 1968), and Valentino Orsini's Fanon-inspired *The Wretched of the Earth* (*I Dannati della Terra*, 1969) as exceptions to the "decadent ultra-leftists" (such as Jean Luc Godard).[38]

Baskakov began his career as a correspondent during the Second World War. Like virtually all his Soviet colleagues at the Tashkent festival, he was part of "the frontline generation."[39] This experience was foundational for his understanding of the role of cinema in the propagation of ideology: in his writings he repeatedly returns to the idea that Soviet socialist-realist films of the 1930s ideologically prepared people for fighting Nazis and that wartime cinema was indispensable for shaping the patriotic spirit of the people.[40] Within the Soviet context, such a position represented a backlash to the questioning and reconsiderations of the wartime experience and appropriate modes of its commemoration that emerged in the period of the Thaw and the cinema of the 1960s.[41] But while Baskakov's celebrations of heroism had little resonance among the Soviet artistic intelligentsia of the period, at Tashkent it was framed as a testament to the power of (Soviet) cinema. Rather than emphasizing the importance of socialist realism, it confirmed Soviet socialism's effectiveness as a form of organization, military as well as symbolic, against foreign and domestic enemies, demonstrated through its victory in the war against the Nazis.[42]

The continuous and multifaceted use of the war metaphors at Tashkent created an analytical continuum among the economic, military, and cinematic spheres, which helped identify "Western" economic dominance in global film distribution and circulation as a front in a greater war. This notion found profound resonance among festival participants and their material context of both postcolonial state formations and liberation struggles (including, in the Latin American context, the experience of dictatorship and state oppression). For many of them, even Baskakov's decidedly conservative rhetoric of heroism evoked different associations than it did for their contemporary Soviet filmmakers. Yet the idea of a shared enemy—imperialism in its foreign and domestic manifestations—allowed for sufficient structures of identifications across the national and regional contexts to overcome objections among even those Third-Worldist political filmmakers who were otherwise pointedly hostile to such jingoism.

FIGURE 4.3. *Left to right:* Mrinal Sen (India), Chingiz Aitmatov (USSR), and Ramu Kariat (India) at the 1974 Tashkent festival. Photo from author's private collection.

(SOCIALIST) REALISM AND THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL CULTURE

Explicit mentions of socialist realism were rare even among the Soviet presenters at Tashkent. Many of them were themselves representatives of the Thaw period, who defined themselves in opposition to Stalinism and aesthetic ideologies associated with it. Nonetheless, the broader issue of realism—often qualified as "humanist"—was often promoted by Soviet presenters during roundtable discussions. Its particularly vocal defender was another veteran mediator of Soviet-Afro-Asian exchanges, Chingiz Aitmatov (fig. 4.3), the celebrated Kyrgyz writer (and author of many screenplays adapted for cinema) whose works were translated into 150 languages.[43] In his presentations at the creative discussions in 1972 and 1974, he explicitly links realism to the concept of a national culture. Less concerned with defining it than defending it against the threat of "mass culture," which, according to him, placed all "truly national" cultural forms under erasure, he repeatedly attacked the "pseudo-romanticism" of the popular cinemas "of the East" (presumably referring to Egypt and India). Such cinemas, he argued, were only superficially national or popular—no different from the "pseudo art of neocapitalism" characteristic of the "mass culture of the West," which offered no connection to the experience and culture of the people.[44]

In offering realism as a guarantor of the link between the people and art at these Tashkent discussions, Aitmatov tended to couple the term *realism* with the

adjective *psychological* and repeatedly offered Japanese antiwar cinema as its best model. This choice may seem surprising as Japanese cinema was a somewhat unusual point of reference for cinematic realism of the era (unlike Italian neo-realism or its non-Western iterations). Nor did it speak to any obvious political affiliations—as of all the countries at the festival, Japan was certainly the furthest from the socialist bloc in its socioeconomic policies and geopolitical alignments. Aitmatov's aesthetic criteria emerge as largely based on personal preferences: for him, as for many other Central Asian artists, Japanese cinema served as the source of great inspiration (so much so that he offended the Indian delegation in 1968 when in a speech at the festival he failed to mention India as a major cinematic industry in Asia at all, focusing his attention entirely on Japan; he had to apologize afterward).[45]

This preference, however, was fully acceptable on the terms of the Soviet cultural apparatus and socialist internationalism, within which Aitmatov realized his aspirations. He was elevated to the highest echelons of the Soviet government, cochair of head of the Soviet Committee of Solidarity with the countries of Asia and Africa. Yet in his own fiction the overwhelming affect is that of melancholy—over the passing of the cultural traditions and ways of life—outweighing in its affect the celebration of the victory of Soviet modernization. His writings were known to some of the participants of the Tashkent meetings, and in turn, Aitmatov was conversant with Asian, African, and Latin American literature, being involved in many of the translation projects of the decade. A remarkably talented Central Asian artist committed to the local culture and its folklore, mythologies, and epic forms, he saw his engagement with these traditional forms as fully compatible with the broader notion of realism—as was the case for so many other 1960s and 1970s writers from the Global South, as demonstrated by the enormous global success of the Boom Literature and magical realism.

Yet Aitmatov did not appreciate Med Hondo's statement, made during the 1972 seminar discussion at Tashkent, in reference to cinema's European origins and Hondo's own position as a filmmaker in France, that he had to "learn cinema from the enemy and express himself in the language of the enemy."[46] Aitmatov, who had the last word in the creative discussion that year, rebuked such a sentiment, insisting instead on the need to "adopt and continue developing the artistic experience of psychological realism" characteristic of "the more developed European cultures," in the interests of "our own cultural self-expression"—therefore positioning himself in direct opposition to Hondo's aesthetic principles.[47] It was unusual for the Soviet hosts to enter into direct debates with the positions expressed by the guests at these roundtable discussions. Perhaps the comment about having to express oneself in the language of the enemy struck home with Aitmatov, who around that time was starting to write in Russian rather than his native Kyrgyz.[48]

To fully understand Aitmatov's critique, we will take a short but relevant detour here on the Soviet reception of the figure who was particularly influential for radical filmmakers such as Hondo: Frantz Fanon. Even though Fanon's writings

had little cultural or political impact in the Soviet Union and were consistently undermined by the Soviet Marxist establishment, the few critical commentaries that did come out in the 1960s and 1970s can shed light on Aitmatov's rejection of Hondo's—undoubtedly Fanonian—position on adopting "the language of the enemy." While Fanon was partially translated into Russian as early as 1962, his critical reception was as controversial as it was underwhelming. Yet references to him and his work, as well as some translated excerpts, were framed as *culturally* and *artistically* relevant; thus, his famous essay "On National Culture" was included in its entirety in an anthology of African literature.[49]

Unlike the liberal reception of Fanon in the West, however, it was not his defense of violence (which was so important for the Third-Worldist filmmakers and theorists) that was the point of contention for the Soviet Marxist establishment; as previous discussions in this chapter make clear, such a position was rather consistent with the Soviet ethos. Violence in the context of Fanon's work was understood by Soviet commentators specifically as the "armed resistance of the people," and its transformative value lay in the politicization of the people in combat; it was particularly important because it provided the legitimization of its power post-Independence. In other words, the collective political consciousness that resulted from participation in armed struggle included the sense of responsibility for the nation, thus placing the people who participated in anticolonial violence in the position of legitimate national leadership after the liberation.[50]

What was truly unacceptable for Fanon's Soviet critics, instead, was his suggestion that African, or more generally postcolonial, nations may not follow the path of progress exactly as charted by their (European) socialist counterparts. Fanon's foregrounding of racial identification above class formation, and, even more crucially, his rejection of the Eurocentric logic of development, which placed postcolonial nations in need of catching up to the West, were simply unimaginable for the Soviet Marxist establishment that insisted on the need for "developing" postcolonial countries' "assimilation of the historical experience of Europe as a necessary condition of progress."[51] Fanon's dismissal of the European working class as an appropriate historical model for emulation amounted to disqualifying him as a Marxist theorist worthy of translation in the Soviet Union.

Following the same logic, Aitmatov's need to defend European (read: Russian) cultural tradition as foundational for the development of his own (Kyrghyz—and internationalist) culture was a response to Hondo's suggestion that this may in fact amount to "speaking the language of the enemy." But even more, Hondo's insight—consistent with Fanon's reading of national culture as, above all, dialectically tied to whatever form best constitutes its liberatory needs—that African cinema was not going to follow a prescribed set of aesthetic and ideological forms (stemming from its European antecedents as the more "developed" progressive traditions) appears to have troubled Aitmatov. As James Mark and Quinn Slobodian observe in the context of the socialist bloc's engagement with the postcolonial world, "alternative political imaginaries, whether around anti-imperialism, rights

or cultural revolution, always carried the potential of eroding the legitimacy of regimes from the inside."[52] It is this anxiety—of alternative political imaginaries that may entirely exceed the two offered by the Cold War—that lurks behind Soviet critical engagement with Marxist postcolonial critiques, even those embedded in the familiar narratives of "cinema as a weapon" such as Hondo's: that solidarity may not be fully subsumed under the iconography of the Russian revolution, and liberation may not take the path prescribed by the Soviet state. This anxiety was no doubt much more palpable for a figure such as Aitmatov—a man who was at once fully embedded in the Soviet cultural apparatus yet was equally dedicated to the preservation and cultivation of his local traditions and Afro-Asian internationalist solidarity. His defense of realism is best understood in this context rather than as endorsing the rhetoric of socialist realism, however performatively.

In the 1978 debates, the veteran Soviet director Sergei Gerasimov edged even further away from socialist realism by invoking "the lessons of early Soviet film theory" as a way to "go beyond the tired old notions of realism or romanticism."[53] This move is particularly striking in Gerasimov's case, given his own strong historical association with socialist realism; by this time he was certainly one of the oldest and politically "reliable" representatives of the Soviet film establishment. His carrier spanned an early engagement with eccentric avant-garde of the 1920s as an actor in the Leningrad FEKS, war documentaries, and some of the classics of socialist realism (such as *The Young Guard* [*Molodaia Gvardiia*, 1948] and *And Quiet Flows the Don* [*Tikhii Don*, 1958]). A skilled diplomat who always managed to remain on the official side of developments in Soviet film policy and ideology, Gerasimov here seems to contradict the overall consensus on the importance of *realism*, along with *humanism*, at Tashkent discussions throughout the decade. However differently it may have been understood—whether through the introduction of documentary techniques, linkages of emblematic images, attention to ordinary cultural life, or rejection of the usual entertainment narrative trajectories—*realism* was a privileged term in Tashkent throughout the decade, used as a proxy for progressive political and social engagement in cinema.[54] Yet evidently its frequent usage hid a status decline, even in Soviet discourses, so that by 1978 this broad umbrella term was increasingly sidelined (even as the use of demonized stylistic and formal alternatives such as *formalism* still served to justify censorship well into the early 1980s).

POPULAR CINEMA VS. POLITICAL AVANT-GARDES

The capaciousness of the notion of realism as it emerges from the Tashkent discussions was certainly a somewhat effective way to avoid the inevitable clash between mainstream cinematic forms and avant-gardism, which characterized the film culture of the long 1960s. The reception of the Latin American program of the festival's 1974 edition provides a good illustration of the peculiarities of this dynamic

at Tashkent. Brazil's selection (the first one at the festival) that year included Leon Hirszman's *São Bernardo* (1971), an adaptation of an eponymous 1930s novel of social critique by Graciliano Ramos, whose other novel, *Barren Lives* (*Vidas secas*, 1938), became one of Nelson Pereira dos Santos's most celebrated (including in the socialist bloc) early films of Cinema Novo. Directed by one of the other members of the movement—its most outspoken Marxist intellectual, reader, and admirer of Eisenstein and member of the Communist Party, whose 1965 documentary short *Absolute Majority* (*Maioria absoluta*) is cited in *The Hour of the Furnaces*—the film was originally censored in its home country. This stark minimalist analysis of economic relations filmed in sparse one-shot flashback sequences with a voice-over narration was subsequently screened at Cannes and won an award at the Berlin festival's Forum of New Cinema.[55] At Tashkent, it was praised by all European critics from both sides of the Iron Curtain, many of whom unequivocally named it the best film at the festival.[56]

Yet, despite Hirszman's undeniable Marxist and anticolonialist credentials, as well as his film's solid literary origins, *São Bernardo* was barely mentioned in festival reviews by the Soviet critics (who perhaps lacked sufficient cultural mediators in those early days of Latin American participation to make better sense of it). The film similarly failed to impress their Arab and Asian counterparts, who completely ignored it in their reviews. And local audiences, most likely disappointed by the film's failure to conform to their experience of popular Latin American cinemas, passed their judgment by leaving the massive twenty-five-hundred-seat movie theater in a "veritable exodus," as reported in one festival review.[57]

The audience's preferred Latin American selection was *If the Singer Is Silenced* (*Si se calla el cantor*, Enrique Dawi, 1973), an Argentinian melodrama about working conditions in the mining industry. The film starred a famous neofolkloric singer (and an active Communist Party member), Horacio Guarany, who had been long familiar to Soviet audiences, starting with the Moscow Youth Festival in 1957, in which his music was featured.[58] Capitalizing on its Tashkent reception, Guarany's film ended up screened commercially in the Soviet Union, its songs introduced to listeners and distributed through the popular music audio-magazine *Krugozor*.[59] The film was lauded for its emotional authenticity and accessibility, *realist* qualities presumed to be lacking in *São Bernardo*, despite the two films' similar politics.

Despite the Soviet penchant for waging wars against so-called excessive formalism in art, such divisions within film culture tastes were far from unique to state socialism. In many film discourses in the Middle East and India of the period, the term *experimentation* was often loaded with negative, pro-Western connotations, understood even by many important filmmakers as antithetical to the political and social goals of filmmaking, as well as threatening to their national foundations. Prem Vaidya, one of the cameramen at the Films Division, reported that during John Grierson's visit in the early 1970s, Grierson strongly and publicly criticized FD for their experimental films, which according to him had very limited reach

and therefore little utility in terms of didactic value, amounting to a waste of governmental money. K. A. Abbas similarly appealed to the filmmakers to not apply to the government for support of experimental cinema he saw as overly indulgent.[60] In a different, although not unrelated, vein, Ray (!) criticized Sen's film *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) with a similar rhetoric, equating its (mild) formal experimentalism with pandering to the taste of the "minority audience" that wants a film that "looks a bit like its French counterpart but is essentially old-fashioned and Indian beneath its trendy habit."[61] Sen's and other artists' critiques vis-à-vis Tashkent's programming must also be understood within the context of such polemics, indicative of an increasingly combative cultural environment—made more so by the state's involvement.

In sub-Saharan Africa this process of segmentation and the emergence of an alternative film aesthetic did not take place to the same degree as in more established, and consequently more stratified, cinematic spheres. Yet FEPACI held the most radical position in this respect, criticizing openly many of the most popular films of the period—from Cheikh Tidiane Aw's *The Bronze Bracelet* (*Le bracelet de bronze*, 1974) to Djibril Diop Mambety's *The Journey of the Hyena* (*Touki Bouki*, 1973) and Cameroonian Daniel Kamwa's *Pedicab* (*Pousse-pousse*, 1975)—as naive and insufficiently politically committed.[62] All three were successes on the international film circuits on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Yet, as Cheriaa notes in *Écrans d'abondance*, even these films ultimately faced the same problems of production and distribution as did the more explicitly political ones. In that respect, their situation was different from places that had established commercially successful productions or clearly articulated formulas for state-supported filmmaking, leading to greater divisions within both filmmaking and film-viewing cultures.

More generally, the African debates on film form tended focus on the need to develop and preserve its uniquely African identity. Hondo, for example, was very keen to emphasize that the experimental qualities of his films come from the organic orality and hybridity of African traditions and therefore, by extension, are related more to tradition than to experimentation.[63] Maghreb's cultural heritage was similarly at the center of Ben Barka's films, no matter how modernist its techniques.[64] The importance of the oral tradition of African storytelling as foundational for an African film aesthetic was particularly stressed, even in Soviet film discourses of the 1970s. Aleksandr Karaganov, another important ideologue of the Soviet cinema establishment in charge of international exchanges, in his 1976 account of the debates in Tashkent and Moscow referred to Vieyra's insistence on African cinema's being rooted in oral tradition rather than literary sources. This contradicted the dogma of Soviet film scholarship, which since the 1930s insisted on the primacy of the script in cinematic production. Showing an uncharacteristic degree of cultural sensitivity and self-criticism, Karaganov acknowledges that his initial disagreement with Vieyra was an expression of the problematic tendency of film scholars, like himself, to fall back on the experience of the "older film industries" when making theoretical claims. He affirms the need to resist this

habit because "such a narrow approach may lead to a certain 'Eurocentrism' which disrupts the study of the younger cinemas of Africa, which are developing under different historical conditions and different foundations and traditions."[65]

Karaganov's surprising reflection demonstrates that Soviet criticism could be considerably less dogmatic when approaching non-Western cinemas (reflected in the fact that Fanon, for example, was accepted as an "African writer" but not as a Marxist political theorist). But it also reveals that rigid oppositions between the popular and the avant-garde, or tradition and experimentation, which framed so many European cinematic polemics of the long 1960s, were not necessarily either the most relevant or the most productive ways to approach the world cinema one encountered at a forum like Tashkent. Overall, the debates at Tashkent are consistent with the assertion of the authors of *Film and Television Genres of the Late Soviet Era* that "more often than not, [Soviet critics and audiences] privileged a discussion of ideas/ideals over the film style."[66] In the case of international dialogues, this meant that film discourses tended to focus on political and economic problems. In this, they were similar to many Marxist-inflected Asian, African, and Latin American critics who even in the 1960s and 1970s continued to emphasize (for understandable reasons!) the material conditions for production, reception, and circulation of cinema. This set them apart from critics and scholars from Europe, the UK, and the US of that period, whose embrace of structuralist and psychoanalytical models of Marxist analysis rejected as politically reactionary the realism and humanism so vaunted by the Soviets. More important, with the exception of a handful of critics (such as Guy Hennebelle in France), these new theoretical approaches also relegated the work of earlier scholars who focused on the political and economic infrastructures of cinema to the status of "vulgar Marxism"—even while being fully aware that their counterparts in the Global South still foregrounded materialist approaches over textual analysis.[67]

As a result, Soviet film critics' denunciations of privileging formal elements as politically motivated did not seem so far-fetched to the Tashkent guests: Liudmila Budiak in her account of the cinemas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America claims that the overvalorization of formal elements by French critics undermined their political significance. She gives two examples of this from the French "bourgeois press": Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina's *Chronicle of the Years of Ember* (*Waqa'i' Sanawat al-Jamr*, 1975), which won the Golden Palm at Cannes and was successfully screened at both Tashkent and Moscow; and Mrinal Sen's *Chorus* (1974), winner of the Silver prize at the Moscow International Film Festival. In the case of the former, the French press foregrounded the Hollywood aesthetic and high production values over its anticolonial and revolutionary pathos; in the latter, it celebrated Sen's film's avant-garde techniques over its overt social critique. According to Budiak, in both cases, foregrounding cinematic technique made it easier to absorb these films into "bourgeois mass culture," cleansed of their "national roots" and references to socialism, thus delinking stylistic choices and formal experiments from the question that is, indeed, crucial for these filmmakers: the future of their

respective national cinemas.[68] Despite Budiak's dogmatism (deliberately ignoring the argument that formal characteristics of a film do, in fact, shape its ideological import), it nonetheless articulates a keen understanding of the operative privileging of high formalism in the international film discourses of the period, weaponized to dismiss cinemas from Asia, Africa, and Latin America—a tendency that was consistent with most Tashkent participants' experiences.

THE FILMMAKER'S SOCIAL
AND INSTITUTIONAL ROLE

As these examples demonstrate, festival discussions focused largely on the analysis of material and social reproduction as constitutive of cinematic experience in all its forms, paying particular attention to the way the medium constructs social and political reality both in symbolic and in concrete forms. Thus, Iraqi-born filmmaker Kais al-Zubaidi, who at Tashkent was representing Syria in his 1974 intervention, began with the grand claim that cinema is "one of the forms of nation-building." As part of this process, however, he emphasized the need for cinema to act as a critical—and not merely celebratory—reflection of the social process (thus implicitly arguing against the heroic tendency in socialist realism and the revolutionary epic that was endemic in Soviet and Arab "progressive" cinemas alike). As part of this praxis, however, he called on filmmakers and critics to be directly involved in shaping the institutional and economic bases of a national cinematic apparatus.[69]

Such a state- and nation-building framework strongly resonated with both postcolonial and socialist realities and the experiences of many guests at the Tashkent festival. But in reality, for many progressive filmmakers, their commitment to expressing their subjective vision through cinema would at a certain point conflict with the stress on the collectivity that such a framework entails. This problem emerges in al-Zubaidi's own production of *The Yazerli* (discussed in chapter 3), which was rejected by the Syrian state for which it was produced, as well as by the Leipzig film festival. The reason given by both was that the film's formal experimentation resulted, according to its critics, in an insufficiently transparent political position, to al-Zubaidi's great dismay.[70] Acknowledging and negotiating such conflicting artistic and social demands presented a challenge for many politically committed filmmakers. Reconceptualizing the very figure of an auteur in social and materialist terms that demonstrated political agency and command over the means of productions (instead of its traditional conception as the bearer of a privileged subjectivity) was a way to reconcile some of those contradictions. Such a notion of the heightened political and specifically *institutional* role of a filmmaker in all aspects of cinematic culture was highly relevant in the socialist context.

Soviet filmmakers—starting with Lev Kuleshov and Eisenstein in the 1920s and 1930s, and continuing with Gerasimov, Mikhail Romm, and Mark Donskoi

in the postwar period—played key roles in the development of film education through VGIK, as many international filmmakers who studied there experienced firsthand.[71] Although most Soviet filmmakers were certainly constrained in their exercise of institutional power by directives "from above," many Soviet presenters of the Tashkent seminars were also leaders of the Filmmakers' Union (whether on the national or the republics' level), which meant that they had some influence in regard to many of the more internationally oriented institutional changes of the 1960s. Even such a scholar as Valerii Fomin, who is otherwise extremely critical of the Soviet film industry and its state governance system, asserts that the very existence of the Filmmakers Union did allow for the creation and accumulation of initiatives coming from within the filmmakers' own communities. Conceptualized in one of the most liberal periods of Soviet history (the late 1950s), the union did, at least to some extent, function as a dialogue partner to the state- and party-mandated form of governance.[72] Although it was by no means fully "autonomous," and was in many ways obedient to larger state institutions and party directives, the union involved filmmakers (at least its leading figures) in the shaping of cinematic processes. Many of them fought tirelessly for the improvement of the working, social, and living conditions of its members, as well as getting involved in censorship battles on all levels. This was sufficient to warrant discussions of the possibility of shutting down all the creative unions during the reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s.[73]

As early as the union's first meeting in 1957, even before its official recognition, the expansion of international ties was at the center of discussion. The goal of such expansion, from the perspective of the organization, was not so much to advance Soviet film distribution (as was often the case for Sovexportfilm) but rather to enable the involvement of filmmakers and other members of the union in establishing direct relationships with "progressive institutions" abroad—film schools, archives, and museums, as well as filmmakers and critics.[74] The union was thus finely tuned to establish relationships with "developing countries." Before the official state apparatus would be delegated to conduct business, informal artistic and cultural ties had to be put in place. Thus, the "international committee" of the union was put in charge of establishing contacts with international film organizations and associations (through UNESCO and others) to advance Soviet participation at international film events and informally promote institutional and cultural ties. This included paper media, notably the union's own monthly "informational bulletin of foreign cinema," which included information about new foreign films, directors, and so forth. These were often based on reports of the delegations from the union from international festivals and other trips abroad, as well as translations of foreign film publications. This level of knowledge and international exchange was unique among Soviet cultural institutions, where nothing compared to the union's globally informed monthly bulletin.[75] The establishment of new film festivals (both national and international) was also under the union's mission.

Thus, the Tashkent festival was, in many ways, itself a result of Filmmakers' Union initiatives as much as it was an extension of a Soviet geopolitical agenda, which spoke to the importance of the filmmakers' civic engagements.

A good example of this is Georgii Chukhrai, a participant in Tashkent seminars and the celebrated director of such Thaw classics as *Forty-First* (*Sorok pervyi*, 1956) and *Ballad of a Soldier* (*Ballada o soldate*, 1959). He was a decorated war veteran whose entrance to VGIK was delayed, first, because he was drafted and then because he was convalescing from the serious wounds he suffered during the war. A protégé of Romm and Ivan Pyr'ev, Chukhrai was an archetypal member of the Soviet official film establishment, in charge of one of the sections of the union and the founder of the Experimental Creative Studio (ETK; from the 1968 Experimental Creative Union).[76] While filmmakers like Chukhrai were limited in their ability to effect change, their level of institutional involvement marked a strong departure from the narrow professional and artistic roles assigned to artists within a "traditional" private studio system. In constant institutional battles and under threat of censorship, they often had to continuously articulate their and their peers' ideas in relation to institutional and ideological demands, solutions to ongoing problems of scarcity, and the poor quality of technological infrastructure due to underfunding, leading to a culture of "tinkering" shared by cinematographers and other technical members of the crew, all qualities that, outside of the socialist system, are more often associated with the DIY culture of independent, activist, or experimental filmmakers. Such experiences provided additional points of affinity with the Tashkent guests, who were very familiar with such challenges and were eager to realize the opportunities such a different understanding of an auteur entailed.

Chukhrai's intervention at the 1972 Tashkent roundtable, however, did not address any of these aspects of his long artistic and institutional career. Instead, it deserves closer examination here not only for its unusual liveliness and emotional impact but also for its explicit linking of the war experience as central to cinema. As we have seen, this topic was central to many discussions at Tashkent, with critiques of violence and sexuality on (bourgeois) screens. As such, my examination will enable a pivot from the emphasis on Cold War geopolitics as organizing the practices and discourses at Tashkent, on which this book has centered until now, to a more ambivalent and perhaps surprising topic of gender and sexuality within both the Tashkent festival and world socialist cinema at large, on which the rest of this chapter and the following one will focus.

SEXUALITY ON THE SCREEN

As repeated rhetoric against the representation of sex and sexuality on the screen used in many roundtable presentations demonstrates, this was perhaps the most obvious implicit criteria for potential exclusion of films at the Tashkent festival (as well as all other socialist festivals)—albeit one that was largely unchallenged by the participants. An Egyptian reviewer of the 1974 festival reported that at a press

conference, the head of Goskino Filipp Ermash asserted that films shown at the festival could not include any depiction of "deviant love."[77] This claim is somewhat dubious in detail, if not in essence: homosexuality in the Soviet Union at the time was taboo to the point that it was never referred to publicly, so it is highly unlikely that Ermash's comments would even touch on such an unmentionable subject.[78]

But if explicitly stating such rules was not done, the report certainly reflected both the perception and the reality of film exhibition within this shared cinematic sphere. Thus Egypt's own censorship norms (de facto in place even before the 1976 law) among other codes of "moral behavior" prohibited depictions of "naked human bodies or the inordinate emphasis on individual erotic parts and . . . sexually arousing scenes."[79] Egypt's code was typical of production norms in both South Asia and Middle East cinemas. The Soviet Union, while lacking an official code, adhered largely to the same standards, and foreign films were frequently censored on these grounds. At Tashkent, this restriction affected mostly Latin American films, and reports from the official Soviet selection committee often contain recommendations to either exclude or shorten some of the films that contained too many "erotic scenes" (a clause affecting even films by established political filmmakers such as Miguel Littín's *Widow of Montiel* [*La viuda de Montiel*, 1980], based on a short story by Gabriel García Márquez). Japanese films, in contrast, were often singled out in these reports for overly graphic depictions of violence, making them "inappropriate for wide audiences."[80]

Keen and passionate attention of Soviet critics to these issues is evident in their surprising familiarity with the phenomenon of the rise of "pink cinema" in Japan, which they frequently mentioned as a symptom of decline of the Japanese film industry. For example, Soviet film critic Semion Chertok, in reviewing the state of world cinema as seen at Tashkent in 1978, concludes his otherwise enthusiastic account of the films by progressive Japanese filmmakers by referencing the prevalence of graphic depictions of sexuality in Japanese cinema at large: "Pornofilms [from Japan] were never brought to Tashkent. But excessive realism and broad interpretation of the freedom of mores and reconsideration of moral criteria are palpable even in the works dealing with serious social problems."[81] Similarly, Soviet film critics were quick to point to the Shaw brothers films from Hong Kong as exerting an unhealthy influence on Asian films. Martial arts were widely practiced in the Soviet Union at the time, spanning devoted subcultures only partially under the control of state institutions. Though in our period kung-fu films were largely unknown in the Soviet Union (they would flood the video market only in the 1980s) and certainly were never included in Tashkent selection, Bruce Lee's posters (brought from abroad, copied, or reproduced) were prized possessions among fans. Soviet film authorities had good reason to suspect that martial arts films from "enemy territory" would be wildly popular and were unwilling to take such risks.[82]

Such attitudes are thoroughly reflected in seminar discussions, where worries about sex and violence on the screen were voiced surprisingly often by a large number of participants. Of course, this "moral panic" was far from unique to either

the socialist or Third World cinemas. In the 1970s, the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) held a conference on "eroticism and violence in cinema" in Milan, where Japanese cinema was one of the focal points of discussion.[83] Indeed, Japanese film critic Yamada Kazuo (who presented lengthy reports at every roundtable at Tashkent between 1968 and 1980) notably condemned "pink films" and horror as primarily responsible for the virtual destruction of Japanese cinema (although he failed to mention that 1970s films by Shindo Kaneto, who was nearly as revered by the Soviets as Kurosawa, were deemed too sexually explicit for Tashkent).[84] Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani participants likewise emphatically supported the view that sexuality and violence were antithetical to the didactic aims of progressive cinema. A quick glance through the Indian mainstream film journal *Filmfare* of the late 1960s and early 1970s finds judgments almost identical to the Soviets' (while, in a time-honored tradition, featuring many images to properly illustrate just how shocking the "Western" depicting of sexuality onscreen could be).[85]

Chukhrai's 1972 intervention at Tashkent offers perhaps the most colorful discussion of this issue, enlivened by his reminiscence of watching "erotic films" during a visit to West Berlin, where his impression was that all movie theaters ("except just one") showed nothing but erotica. He admits to being curious, "having never seen films like that before," and deciding to watch one. After he found the film "really bad," he thought maybe he should sample another one, but this one turned out to be even worse! Having subjected himself to this difficult test, Chukhrai recounted his impressions to his German colleagues—who just mocked him for his prudishness and fear of naked bodies. Chukhrai assures his audience that "as a married man who has never had any problem with either intimacy or nudity," his problem with "sexual films" was not related to prudishness. Instead, he theorizes his objection to erotic cinema as rooted in his unwillingness to accept making a public spectacle and commercial product out of the most intimate moments of people's lives. "Sexual films destroy human beings, lowering them to the animalistic level—both those who have to act in them and those who watch them." In a somewhat surprising twist, he concludes by bringing together the issue of privacy and the question of the war. In both sex films and war, Chukhrai argues, dehumanization is an essential representational tactic, reducing people to objects instead of real existing people. Thus, the culture of sex films and the culture of military aggression are part of the same system of reification and oppression.[86]

Chukhrai's critique resonates uncannily with the feminist antipornography discourse of the same period in the West, while his attention to actors' experiences now comes across as shockingly consistent with some more contemporary critiques of the exploitation of labor, even in mainstream filmmaking. Yet in the Soviet context of the 1970s, they betray an almost comical unwillingness to accept erotic pleasures as constitutive of cinematic experience despite all the evidence provided by Tashkent audiences (including the hosts), whose enthusiasm for anything even mildly erotic on the screen was expressed quite exuberantly.[87]

While it is certainly true that such concerns shaped film discourses from the beginning of cinema, in the late 1960s discussions of "eroticism and violence" reached fever pitch in the Soviet Union. The *zasilie* (forceful presence) of sex and violence onscreen was, indeed, the mantra of the official Soviet cultural stance toward "Western"—especially American—cinemas. The 1960s head of Goskino, Alexei Romanov, was known to take a strong stance on this issue, going so far as to make comments approving the US Hays Code, repeatedly stressing the need to combat all such tendencies in Soviet cinema:

> Western Cinema has become extremely dirty. Sex and eroticism aren't even a point of contention, this stage is past. Nowadays pornography has taken over the screen, completely and fully. The code of decency, which was in effect in the US in the 1930s, is thrown into the trash. Governments pass laws legalizing pornography, as in Denmark.
>
> Under these conditions, it is particularly important for our cinema to keep up the fight against the filth, arriving from . . . that world. And this fight should be merciless and uncompromising.[88]

The intensification of the rhetoric of "filth" in discussions of nudity and sexuality on the screen in the 1960s was, indeed, symptomatic of the global reaction to the loosening of film censorship laws all over Europe and the US, a loosening that went beyond the simple Left/Right ideological divide. In the Soviet Union, it happened in the context of the liberalization of the Thaw, with its valorization of authenticity and the subjective—and, therefore, intimate—experiences as an alternative to Stalinist culture and its desexualization of love and marriage.[89] However timid the intimacy of the Thaw-era cinema may appear now, it represented a big change and was truly shocking for many viewers.[90] But it also reflected an increasing divide heralded by the arrival of youth culture—and young audiences—associated with sexual liberation and with "the West" (although "the West" in this case could be as close as the less censored films of Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia). For the Soviet film critical establishment, this concern was particularly focused on the dangers of the New "Freudian Left," exemplified by Marcuse and Reich, "ultra-radical leftist" political movements, and European auteur cinemas and New Waves, both East and West (Jiří Menzel and Věra Chytilová; Pier Paolo Pasolini and Louis Malle)— all presented as mere perversions indicative of decadent bourgeois culture. The obvious appeal of these explorations of sexuality on the screen to youth in particular constituted a major threat to socialist ideology.[91] Thus the representative of the Belarus studio in 1966 called directly on Goskino to "send a strong message" to the young people at their own studio, de facto asking for increased censorship on the national level: "We have young directors, and their youth is just pouring out of them, they . . . try to stuff their films as much as possible with veiled pornography. It takes a lot of work for us to talk them out of it, to convince them to reject this. But if our studio, God forbid, hears that it's not necessary—this will be just terrible for our studio."[92]

Chukhrai, however, was not known for such pious attitudes; in fact, despite his high position within the Soviet film establishment, he earned quite a reputation for his independent streak. In 1963, as the president of the jury of the Moscow film festival, he insisted on awarding the top prize to Federico Fellini's 8½ (*Otto e mezzo*, 1963) against explicit orders to award a Soviet film, and he refused to buckle to considerable pressure from the party, which resulted in Fellini getting the prize, and although the film wasn't commercially released in the Soviet Union until the 1980s, it became as iconic for Soviet cinephiles as it did for their international counterparts—in no small part owing to its lively depiction of sexuality.[93] Chukhrai was also the direct target of attacks by the Chinese and Vietnamese antirevisionist campaigns of the 1960s, who accused him of undermining the importance of class struggle in his films through his embrace of lyricism and humanism—a specific reference to the centrality of love and romance in them.[94]

Chukhrai's linking of sexualized bodies on the screen with the slaughtered bodies of war victims reveals some of the larger ideological stakes in this opposition. Whether in its commodified commercialized form or in its antisystemic, anti-institutional anarchic and libertarian construction, sexuality on the screen falls outside social and political forms that are traditionally constitutive of socialist collectivity. The sexual autonomy of a cinematic subject (whether liberal or radical) appears as antithetical to organized collective action. While perfect for a revolt against the system, this makes it, in turn, quite different from the understanding of love as it is articulated in "progressive" ideologies and cinematic forms of global socialism of the 1960s and 1970s, where it is instead constitutive of and directly contributing to broader ideological goals and portrayed as a productive force, enabling social reproduction.[95]

Andrei Shcherbenok underscores the specifically socialist construction of love as an experience, which can only have signification in relation to broader historical and social context. In his discussion of the onscreen kiss in the Thaw-period film *Fidelity* (*Vernost'*, Petr Todorovskii, 1965) as compared to *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942), he argues that in the Soviet case, both love and its implicit physical consummation can only take place within an intersubjective space that is never rendered entirely private, even—and especially—when not depicted onscreen:

> . . . whereas in *Casablanca* the sexual scene between Rick and Ilsa temporarily isolates them from the context of World War II, in *Fidelity* the war is inextricably linked with the encounter between the man and the girl, and it is this connection that contributes decisively to transforming their "sleeping with" into love. . . .
>
> Love in Soviet cinema does not require a conventional romantic plotline but rather a cinematic articulation of "sleeping with" that entangles it with the larger intersubjective, cultural and historical world.[96]

Shcherbenok concludes that the prohibition on the depiction of sex scenes in Soviet cinema (at least in the 1960s) is not simply bourgeois cultural repression but rather a symbolic relationship between the individual and the collective: "imagining a

sexual act of the man and the girl in *Fidelity* would cut off the larger intersubjective and cultural context that constitutes the cinematic sexualization of their desire and would thereby reduce it to a mere corporeality." Identified by Shcherbenok specifically as "war, heroism and self-sacrifice," such required context certainly offers a rich set of signifiers of national(ist) and socialist objectives.[97]

Nor is such a critique of sexual representation as a figuration of liberal subjectivity entirely unique to the Soviet case. This representational dynamic strongly resonates with the way that Madhava Prasad, in his *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, famously articulates the informal taboo on kissing in Indian popular cinema as a prohibition of the private (i.e., liberal capitalist) sphere, where "the representation of the private . . . engenders the 'same-faced' voyeurism of the cinema and presupposes the reality of the subject's solitude in the act of voyeuristic perception, and the dissolution of the substantive communal relation into the atomistic individualism of capitalist social relations."[98] Common to both Shcherbenok's and Prasad's analysis is an implicit rejection of representation of sexuality constructed through (modern) liberal subjectivity, albeit serving different ideological purposes.

In Prasad's analysis of Indian cinema, this mechanism is a mere disavowal: a "symptomatic cultural protocol whose origins lie in the need to prevent a dissolution of pre-capitalist patriarchal enclaves." It is a prohibition of the acknowledgment of the capitalist nature of the Indian nation-state, where "socialism was only involved as ideology, and Congress socialism was no more than a protective shield for the development of indigenous capitalism, the emerging capitalist culture [that] had to be disavowed and this disavowal was the only (negative) proof of the existence of socialism."[99] In the case of the Soviet cinema of the Thaw, Shcherbenok's analysis takes a similar cultural protocol, not as a form of disavowal but as a visual representation of affect, integrating it into the broader fabric of collective social and historical forces rather than a separate private sphere.

Within the Soviet context, the exclusion of sexuality (and especially its nonheteronormative manifestations) from the political and public sphere has been frequently understood as the result of the state's violation of the private (as policing and surveillance culture). Further exacerbating the opposition between the personal and the public (understood to be complicit with the official state-controlled culture), the private sphere became increasingly valorized in late socialism (especially in the dissident circles).[100] This attitude certainly characterized cultural and personal attitudes throughout the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, preventing queer activism from entering into the public domain even after the fall of communism.[101] This experience further resonated with similar dynamics in postcolonial nation-state contexts (and the many authoritarian regimes of the Global South during that period).[102] Yet, while the repressive state apparatus certainly had its impact and shaped the rhetorical structures, especially of its victims, it does not offer an explanation that can fully account for the complex dynamics of a different redistribution and constant renegotiations of private and public spheres either in the

Global South or in the late socialist societies, which ultimately find their representation in world socialist cinema at Tashkent, as well as in the discourses around it.[103]

It is useful to compare the official socialist representational regime with the (neo)liberal one: in Lauren Berlant's brilliant exploration, the opposition is precisely between the vision where "social forces and problems of living that seem not about the private 'you' are, nonetheless, central to the shape of your story" and one where the centrality of aspirations of domestic privacy (with its narratives of heteronormative romance and sex) is the fantasy that brings an illusion of control and the possibility of "passion, care and good intention" as a way of disavowing the persistent experience of disempowerment of public life and economic precarity.[104] The former gives us a reversal of the latter while nonetheless fully preserving the logic of heteronormativity.

In both the Indian and Soviet cases, the mechanisms of cultural censorship of onscreen sexual representation clearly speak to a different symbolic relationship from the dominant neoliberal one, one that cannot not be legible through the Hollywood (or Western capitalist) model of sexuality precisely because it is explicitly set up in opposition to it. Bhaskar Sarkar elaborates on this dilemma: "In cinema, sensualized depictions of women were accepted so long as their professed intent was the negotiation of collective dilemmas and so long as a moral-spiritual dimension prevailed. But charges of Western influence and un-Indian excess arose whenever a female character's sexuality, as primarily an expression of personal desire, threatened patriarchal prohibitions crucial to modern state formations. Since the 'true' core of an Indian self was supposedly impervious to external influences, Westernized expressions of individuated sexuality were considered deviant and perverse."[105]

The nationalist logic of these discourses, setting up an opposition between the West's individuated sexuality and the moral-spiritual (and political, in the case of socialist rhetoric) alternative, sheds further light on Tashkent's film discourses as another way cultural affinities were created, giving us a broader sense of what was at stake in opposing the purported onslaught of sexuality on the screen. Yet the very sense of crisis, signaled by these fervent condemnations, communicates the same sense, discussed by Berlant in the neoliberal context, that "the normative relays between personal and collective ethics [have] become frayed and exposed."[106]

These high stakes—and the different solutions for rethinking the relationship between the private and public—become even more evident when we place this debate in the context of the historical alliance between women's movements and the activism between socialist blocs and the Third World during the same period. The next chapter will draw out this broader cultural history to further contextualize the way gender played out at the festival—in its discourses, practices, and representations, as well as in absences and omissions—and point beyond the festival's contours to consider alternative modes of gendered production and representation within world socialist cinema.