

**RESIDENT PERSPECTIVE: THE EVACUATION OF SOVIET FILM STUDIOS TO
KAZAKHSTAN, 1941-1944**

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of History

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2019

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Abstract

This thesis deals with one of the hardest periods in Soviet cinematography, the evacuation during World War II. Moscow and Leningrad studios, the two major film producing engines in the entire Union, were evacuated to Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. Together with the local studio they formed a new one, Central Joint Film Studio (TsOKS), the aim of which was to keep producing films and support the war cause by lifting up the spirits. The evacuation has been researched before a considerable number of times, but majority of them were concerned mostly with the perspective of the evacuees or of the center. This thesis provides an insight into what the locals thought and felt about the incoming people, their relationships and work together.

The thesis is based on archival research I conducted in Alma-Ata. The documents are different kinds of reports, complaints and meeting minutes that give a hint about the feeling Kazakh SSR authorities and Kazakhs working in the studio had. The evacuation presented a unique opportunity for Kazakhstan to develop their own national cinema and produce films that all other republics would see. The authorities saw hope in the middle of the War and were ready to provide anything they could to the studio and the great renowned filmmakers that were coming with it, such as Eisenstein. While some of the evacuees were eager to help the war cause and to help Kazakh cinema, some were not as fast to change their habits. If changing to war mode of working was more important and more people understood it, working on Kazakh themed films seemed less so. Local films were often delayed on different stages of production and the number of those films was extremely small. In addition to that, some of the studio workers were operating on a bargaining basis, they required more supplies from the authorities (food, fuel, cars, other materials) in exchange for working on Kazakh films. After a while, Kazakh authorities, Kazakh studio workers and other supplies providing agencies started to grow tired of such attitude, and either started writing more complaints or simply stopped the support.

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Abbreviations

Agitprop – Agitation and Propaganda Department

AP RK – Presidential Archive of Republic of Kazakhstan

KazSSR – Kazakh Soviet Socialistic Republic

Lenfilm – Leningrad film studio

Mosfilm – Moscow film studio

Sovnarkom or SNK – Council of People's Commissars

TsGA RK – Central State Archive of Republic of Kazakhstan

TsK KPbK – Central Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kazakhstan

TsK USSR or TsK VKPb – Central Committee of the Soviet Union

TsOKS – Central Joint Studio of Feature Film

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics

VGIK – All-Union State Institute of Cinematography

Vostokkino – Oriental cinema or eastern cinema

Introduction

In 1941, a new film studio was established in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, the aim of which was to produce films on Kazakh topics and develop national cinematography. Part of this endeavor was educating local population to fill different positions on the studio from actors and directors to editing and lighting professionals. As an example of this, in 1943 comrade Okasov¹, an experienced Kazakh inventory manager (*hozyaistvenniy rabotnik*), was transferred to work at a new studio.² However, his appointment as a chief administrator of the props department almost immediately stirred reaction from Moscow film director, Vladimir Vainshtok. He claimed that Okasov will not be able to handle the work. Vainshtok's objections were not found reasonable and the deputy director of the studio insisted on Okasov's appointment. Following this, Vainshtok asked for help from the head of the props department. Together, they invited Okasov to their office at six in the evening and ordered him to bring "six pairs of oxen, a hundred sheep, forty cows and six carts" by six in the morning.³ In addition, they threatened him with dismissal should he fail to finish the task. Okasov then asked if there was an order from where he should get it, they replied: "There is no order. It is your job to get it. Go and find it wherever you want. You came here to work – you should be a capable man."⁴ Then Okasov asked if they could at least give him a horse to get to the collective farm and acquire what was requested, but again was given a negative answer. At that point he understood that Vainshtok and the head of the department wanted him to quit and handed in his resignation. Vainshtok scoffed at Okasov: "What a smart man, he finally realized the complexity of working in cinema."⁵

¹ All the documents usually refer to people as 'comrades', so it is hard to find out what some of the first names of people were that is why I will refer to them as comrades as well.

² AP RK: fond 708/ opis' 7-1/ delo 689, p.50.

³ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p50.

⁴ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p51.

⁵ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p51.

To understand this little episode, one needs to look on the context of the World War II and the evacuation of cultural institutions in the Soviet Union. When the Nazi troops attacked the Soviet frontier in the summer of 1941 and later successfully progressed inside the country, the Soviet government started evacuating civilian population, institutions and industries further to the South-East, Caucasus and Central Asia.⁶ Cultural institutions, such as theatres or film studios were deemed important for the war cause no less than factories producing goods for the front. Thus, they were evacuated together with people working there, so that once there, they could resume the work. Artists of all sorts were to maintain the spirits and to mobilize people to put all their effort to win the War, be that small concerts for the troops or films for all-Union screens.⁷

The value of the film as a means of delivering a certain message to a wide array of people has been recognized from the formation of the USSR in 1920s.⁸ Lenin said that “of all art forms the most important one for us is film,” and this phrase got picked up by cinema workers and was cited until the collapse of the USSR.⁹ By the beginning of the War, Soviet filmmaking had already been distinguished in the world and was successfully serving Soviet propaganda. When the War started Stalin wanted the cinema industry to continue producing films. Major film studios from Western parts of the Union were relocated to capitals of different Central Asian republics. For example, big studios from Moscow and Leningrad such as Animation Studio (*Soyuzmultfilm*), Children’s Film Studio (*Soyuzdetfilm*), Moscow Film Studio (*Mosfilm*), Leningrad Film Studio (*Lenfilm*) were evacuated to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan respectively.¹⁰ In this thesis, I am looking only on two of them, the ones considered the most

⁶ Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 34–35.

⁷ Erina Therese Megowan, *For Fatherland, For Culture: State, Intelligentsia and Evacuated Culture in Russia’s Regions, 1941-1945* (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2015).

⁸ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture.”

⁹ K.M. Anderson and L.V. Maximenkov, *Kultura i Vlast Ot Stalina Do Gorbacheva: Kremlevskii Kinoteatr 1928-1953. Dokumenty.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005).

¹⁰ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture.”

important in the USSR, Lenfilm and Mosfilm. They were merged with Alma-Ata Feature Film Studio and together formed a new Central Joint Film Studio (TsOKS), which operated until 1944.

Establishment of the new studio in the heart of Kazakh SSR entailed challenges for both the evacuees and the residents of the city. Besides expected hardships and scarcity of resources that the war and evacuation bring, the studio workers had to manage relationships within as well as outside the studio. TsOKS was dominated by the evacuated filmmakers both in terms of number and power dynamics. Previously, Alma-Ata did not have its own feature film studio. The first Kazakh film ‘Amangeldi’ was produced in 1938 on Lenfilm by Alma-Ata Newsreel Studio workers. Thus, Alma-Ata had few professionals trained in cinema, especially feature film, and had worse and less equipment. That is why, local workers from this studio were put either under apprenticeship of more experienced Russian filmmakers or on auxiliary positions.

The above-mentioned episode was part of a seven-page complaint filed to the secretary of Agitation and Propaganda Department of KazSSR by the deputy director of TsOKS, Kabysh Siranov. He was the only Kazakh and local person in a high administrative position in the studio, which consisted of a significant number of evacuated workers.¹¹ Kabysh Siranov becomes one of the important people for this research because he provides both local and inside-the-studio perspective. This complaint reveals some of the attitudes of the local workers in the studio towards the evacuees, the way they were treated, and how it made them perceive the evacuees. This aspect of the evacuation usually does not receive enough scholarly attention. The evacuation is often discussed in terms of an opportunity for creative development away from the center and relaxation of control, especially for directors such as Eisenstein. His masterpiece, ‘Ivan the Terrible,’ was entirely shot and edited during the evacuation, and its production as well

¹¹ The archival documents often juxtapose “local” and “Kazakh” workers, which makes it unclear whether they mean people that live in Alma-Ata permanently or the nationality.

as creative value have often been discussed in literature of various disciplines.¹² Alternatively, challenges for the evacuees of having to leave their homes and their zones of comfort, hardships of the journey, deprivations during the settlement and almost unknown environment have been uncovered.¹³ However, the perspective of the hosting side is rarely considered, and this is what I intent to contribute to with my research.

The establishment of TsOKS posed certain challenges to the local filmmakers and authorities, but also promised new unique opportunities for the development of the Kazakh cinema industry and KazSSR as a whole. This thesis will try to provide the local perspective on the evacuation, what opportunities they saw, what preparations they had to perform, what they expected from the evacuees and what all this turned out to be. My research is mainly a social history of the wartime filmmaking. Social history is often about the relationships of people, not political or abstractly theoretical.¹⁴ It focuses on disregarded actors in history, on concrete individuals.¹⁵ In my research, I am looking upon studio workers that were not Stalin Award laureates from the center but were administrative or cultural workers from the periphery, who were only starting to understand cinematography. It is in a way uncovering center–periphery relationships, when the center suddenly had to meet the periphery, and both had to deal with each other.

My findings are primarily based on close readings of archival material, official documents, meeting minutes and complaints, written by the studio staff and governmental officials. These can be found in Presidential Archive or Central State Archive in Almaty. Some of the documents of that time travelled back with their respective studios and are now located in Russian archives such as Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) and State

¹² See Joan Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible* (New York: I.B.Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2009).

¹³ Manley, "To the Tashkent Station."

¹⁴ "Social history," Encyclopedia Britannica, inc., November 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-history>.

¹⁵ Raphael Samuel, "What is Social History?" *History Today* 35, no. 3, (March 1985), <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/what-social-history>

Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). The work on them has been done by several scholars, including Pozner, Bernstein, Megowan and others, and I am going to rely on their research regarding the information I did not have access to. However, archives in Almaty are still researched poorly and until last year remained unpublished.¹⁶ Valerie Pozner has conducted a useful research working both in Russian and Kazakh archives, which also included perspective of the locals, but she still focused her attention more on the wider story, but her research had been a great help in constructing this thesis. Kazakh films overall received fairly low coverage. One of the few Kazakh film historians Gulnara Abikeyeva pointed out that besides her there is only work by Bauyrzhan Nogerbek and a student thesis from Soviet times that was not published at all.¹⁷ This does not include old research such as Siranov's, who wrote history of cinema and film analysis.

Based on documents such as the complaint mentioned before (which will play a big role later) I will argue that Alma-Ata officials and film workers had high hopes for the arrival of the renowned and experienced filmmakers, but later faced materialistic and bargain driven attitude, that made them feel inferior. What follows are the three chapters: 1) background information on the Soviet policies on film, policies about nationalities, the context of the World War II in Soviet Union cinema, evacuation to the Eastern republics, and coming together of the Central Joint Film Studio; 2) examination of the archival material in terms of expectations of the Kazakhstani officials and a certain amount of irritation after a couple years of work; 3) the production details of Kazakh themed films, their significance and the discussion of their content.

¹⁶ Valerie Pozner, "Daleko Ot Voyny? Tvorcheskkiye i Proizvodstvennyye Logiki v Evacuatsii (Far from the War? Creative and Production Logics in Evacuation)," in *Perezhit' Voyny: Kinoindustriya v SSSR 1939-1949 Gody (Survive the War: Cinema Industry in USSR, 1939-1949)* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2018), 28–99.

¹⁷ Gulnara Abikeyeva, "Istoriya Kino Kazakhskoi SSR, Perestroiki i Pervyh Let Nezavisimogo Kazakhstana (History of Cinema of Kazakh SSR, Perestroika and First Years of Independent Kazakhstan)," in *Istoriya Natsionalnykh Kinematografiy (History of National Cinematographies)* (Moscow: Novyi Institut Kulturologii, 2018).

Chapter One

Before and After: Culture, Film, Kazakhstan and Evacuation

The relationships between evacuees and locals are complex and in order to understand them better and put them in context this chapter will look into earlier developments of the Soviet era that somehow influenced the relationships or the situation. There are many aspects at play when talking about the evacuated studios: the art and cinema policies of the Soviet Union, the history and cinema of Soviet Kazakhstan, the shift World War II brought, the evacuation, and the coming of all of these together. These topics can be expanded further into detail and separate researches can be conducted on small portions of them (for example nationalism in Kazakh SSR). However, the aim of this chapter is to collect all of them together in a more coherent narrative that would help understanding the core of the problem that will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Culture and film in the Soviet Union

The Soviet Central Committee quickly realized that cinema as a new way of entertainment and art could help educate the masses in the way convenient to the Committee.¹⁸ The Soviet government wanted to create a “new soviet man” and thus started to create a unified standard for everything, including history, literature and cinema¹⁹. In the era of Stalinism, “Stalin eventually became, metaphorically speaking, chief literary, drama, film, art and music critic.”²⁰ The Soviet government rewrote entire history to make their own power seem more legitimate

¹⁸Jamie Miller, “Soviet Cinema, 1929–41: The Development of Industry and Infrastructure,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 1 (2006): 103–24.

¹⁹ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 81.

²⁰ Evtuhov, Catherine. *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2004, 683.

and to shape knowledge the way it would be beneficial for them. In 1937-38, books on history such as ‘History of All-Union Communist Party’ or ‘Short Course on the History of the USSR’ appeared, which portrayed a socialist perspective on historical events with clear-cut tsarist oppressors and Bolshevik liberators.²¹ This was one of the prominent topics in the pre-war time in all fields: education, literature, and cinema.

A unified standard for literature was also developed, classics was chosen carefully. Pushkin is a good example, because he was first condemned as a bourgeois writer, but then was revived to the extent that he was made the “founder of Russian literary language.”²² Together with Tolstoy and Lermontov, he was pushed on people in different literary reviews, in schools and libraries; this went to a mass and ridiculous scale.²³ Historians ‘erased’ everything that came before Pushkin as if before him there was no literary culture in Russia.²⁴ Bulgakov, on the contrary, had many problems with publishing or staging, because his ideas were unacceptable, until he found a way out by using historical figures and remakes of others’ works.²⁵ Gradually, historical figures were becoming a popular topic in cultural sphere. Partly, this was due to a new policy of ‘socialist realism’ imposed on writers in 1934. Socialist realism came down to few simple characteristics: “simplicity of form and content, easily accessible messages that conformed to the goals of Party and state, action-oriented ‘positive heroes,’ and clearly recognizable enemies.”²⁶ Using historical figures as action-oriented heroes was convenient, because it allowed reinterpretation of the history and at the same time was considered more entertaining.

²¹ Brandenberger, David. “National Bolshevism,” p.64; Shayakhmetov, Mukhamet. *The Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad under Stalin*, (London: Stacey International, 2006), 246.

²² Brandenberger. “National Bolshevism,” 79

²³ Brandenberger. “National Bolshevism,” 82

²⁴ Brandenberger. “National Bolshevism,” 81

²⁵ Brandenberger. “National Bolshevism,” 84

²⁶ Denise J. Youngblood, “Socialist Realism, 1933-1940,” in *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 31.

Being entertaining as well as educating was the task for the cinematography as well, especially after relative artistic freedom of Cultural Revolution of the New Economic Policy era was replaced by censorship and constantly changing rules. One of such examples could be a film ‘Borderlands’ (*Okraina*, 1933) by Boris Barnet about the World War I, that initially was praised, but then was criticized because it challenged the socialist realism paradigm and was ideologically weak. Indeed, the Party line was constantly changing in 1930s, making it hard producing films or any kind of art.

One of the huge successes of that time, nevertheless, was the 1934 film ‘Chapaev’ produced by Vasilyev brothers. The film is about a Russian revolutionary figure that led the fight for Russia during the World War I and the Civil war.²⁷ The film sold more than fifty million tickets by the end of the 1930s and was well received by the foreign audiences as well.²⁸ The success of ‘Chapaev’ led to a commission of more similar films of revolutionary heroes in other Soviet Republics, one of the more popular examples of which is Ukrainian ‘Shchors’ by Aleksandr Dovzhenko.²⁹ Chapaev’s figure was first popularized in eponymous book by Dmitry Furmanov, which served as basis for the film. However, book Chapaev was modified to fit the ideology. According to Denise Youngblood, “unruly, impulsive and politically ignorant” Chapaev in the film was “tamed” by the Party, just as socialist realism intended individual spontaneity be put to use of the government.³⁰ The film showed that it was possible to create films that would be both ideologically correct and entertaining.

Another important development in the Soviet cinematography was portrayal of women. Women stopped being passive actors, they were on par with men, capable of work and if need be fight. A female character in ‘Chapaev,’ Anka, is a strong woman, who does not let men have

²⁷ Bauyrzhan Nogerbek, “The Various Births of Kazakh Cinema,” in *Cinema in Central Asia* (London: I.B.Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2013), 59.

²⁸ Youngblood, “Socialist Realism, 1933-1940,” 37.

²⁹ Nogerbek. “The Various Birth of Kazakh Cinema.” 59

³⁰ Youngblood, “Socialist Realism, 1933-1940,” 38.

advantage of her, and is actively participating in the battle, knowing how to operate a gun. She is a representative of what the Soviets wanted to be a 'new woman' to the 'new soviet man'.³¹ The new woman had to be both desirable and active. The film by Leo Arnshtam 'Girlfriends' (*Podrugi*, 1935) shows a group of female friends that joined the front of World War I as nurses and participated in one of the battles.³² Their portrayal was showing that a Soviet woman can be feminine and can fight with a gun at the same time.

1930s was a tough time for everybody, and especially intelligentsia, who were walking the thin ice because the line was everchanging. The terror brought on people by the Bolsheviks later in the beginning of the World War II manifested in desires of some to be liberated by Germans. However, in this stressful situation filmmakers still managed to create films that would be a success. Historical drama became one of the popular genres of films, it could accommodate a lot of the requirements. These policies were followed in every Republic, but Central Asia, the East of the USSR had much more going on.

Kazakh cinematography

After coming to power, Bolsheviks had to deal with a large territory of the former Russian Empire, where quite a big number of people were illiterate, and, in this regard, films were useful means of conveying important ideas to such people. The vast country had to get to all the ethnicities and cultures that inhabited its lands, and since those cultures were very different, in order to appeal to them they had established film studios in almost all component republics.³³ The aim of such studios was to create films that would be teaching communist ideals and be relatable to the local population, and at the same time would acquaint Russian population

³¹ Youngblood, "Socialist Realism, 1933-1940," 41.

³² Youngblood, "Socialist Realism, 1933-1940," 53.

³³ Gabrielle Chomentowski, "Vostokkino and the Foundation of the Central Asian Cinema," in *Cinema in Central Asia* (London: I.B.Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2013), 33.

with these Eastern cultures. The studios would also create films that would denounce certain practices that did not lie within the Soviet line, such as Islam or religion overall, veiling of women and other “backward” traditions.³⁴

In 1928, Vostokkino Studio was launched by the Central Committee as a joint-stock company.³⁵ It had shareholders and studios in “the north Caucasus, the Volga territories, northern Siberia, the Far East, Buryatia, Kazakhstan and Kirghizia.”³⁶ Vostokkino was responsible for both producing films and creating opportunities for local populations to see them, meaning building cinema theatres in cities and equipping mobile film units to reach rural areas. It was part of *cinemafication*³⁷ campaign aimed at supplying every corner of the USSR with films about Soviet ideals.³⁸ Another task of the studio was training local population in professions such as film directors, scriptwriters, actors, and so on. This reflected the nationalities policy of *korenizatsiya* of the 1920s in the Soviet Union.³⁹ Korenizatsiya, which will be discussed more in the following section of this chapter, basically meant promoting local populations and cultures.

Vostokkino became important for the development of cinema in Central Asia, and in Kazakhstan in particular. Alma-Ata was one of the flagman cities of the studio and covered the area of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Karakalpak Autonomous Region.⁴⁰ First films to produce there were newsreels ‘The Latest News’ (*Posledniye Izvestiya*), which, according to Nogerbek, were showing success of socialist reformation of the steppe, while omitting the terror, famine

³⁴ Bauyrzhan Nogerbek. "The Various Birth of Kazakh Cinema," 59

³⁵ Chomentowski. "Vostokkino" and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 34.

³⁶ Chomentowski. "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 37

³⁷ Measures aimed at building cinemas and creating mobile cinema installations, continuous improvement of cinematographic equipment and improving the conditions and quality of the demonstration of motion pictures. (Russian Dictionary of Foreign Words http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/dic_fwords/45417)

³⁸ Miller. "Soviet Cinema, 1929-41," 104

³⁹ Chomentowski. "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 33

⁴⁰ Chomentowski. "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 38

caused by the Soviet imposed secretary to the republic, deaths and repressions.⁴¹ The studio did not have its own shooting pavilions, mainly the work was conducted in the open. To edit their films Vostokkino used already established studios such as Mosfilm.⁴² On the other hand, more experienced colleagues from Moscow arrived in Alma-Ata to help and teach, while new filmmakers came to try themselves. Vostokkino was running on modest funding, which constrained it from producing feature films. One of the most successful Vostokkino productions in Alma-Ata was the first full-length documentary film with a Kazakh theme, 'Turksib' (1929), a film about the construction of the major railroad that connected Turkestan and Siberia.⁴³

In 1932, the studio shifted to producing exclusively feature films. Over the short period of its existence, it created over fifty feature films, much of which disappeared.⁴⁴ On Kazakh theme Vostokkino produced three films, which became the first Kazakh features, unlike the popular opinion dictates, attributing the title 'first' to 1938 film 'Amangeldi.' The first two of these features, 'The Songs of the Steppe' (*Pesni Stepi*) and 'The Freeze' (*Jut*) unfortunately are lost, the third one 'The Secrets of Karatau' (*Taina Karatau*) was about caoutchouc cultivation in Kazakhstan.

However, in the 1930s, the tides shifted for Vostokkino. Attitude of the government changed, previous policies aimed at developing each nations' color such as korenizatsiya changed to the favoring of class.⁴⁵ Now, the studio received different accusations of being "a front of nationalism and corruption."⁴⁶ In the period known as the Great Terror, when Stalin started purges on everyone and everything that potentially could threaten his power, a semi-private organization has suffered more purges. Moreover, insufficiency of funds did not enable

⁴¹ Nogerbek, "The Various Birth of Kazakh Cinema," 58

⁴² Chomentowski, "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 38

⁴³ Chomentowski, "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 39-41

⁴⁴ Chomentowski, "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 41

⁴⁵ Chomentowski, "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 34

⁴⁶ Chomentowski, "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 34

the studio to produce good quality films. As a result, Vostokkino was closed and replaced by governmental studios in each republic. There were reports that Kazakh politicians did not think that Vostokkino conducted adequate work in creating filmmaking professionals and that some Russian filmmakers mistreated local filmmakers.⁴⁷ This is a precedent to what is yet to come when another entity would be tasked with the development of Kazakh cinema, while putting Kazakh and Russian filmmakers together.

In 1935, Alma-Ata Newsreel Studio was opened instead of Vostokkino. Initially, the studio's objective was producing newsreel about the life in the republic in a regular program titled the 'Soviet Kazakhstan' (*Sovetskii Kazakhstan*) and sending material to bigger studios for other all-Union programs.⁴⁸ Later, the studio started producing feature films with Kazakh themes. In 1938, the studio released the film 'Amangeldi,' the plot of which revolved around a 1916 uprising in Kazakh steppes against tsarist colonialism and exploitation and the leader of that uprising, Amangeldi Imanov. This was a direct response of the Kazakh authorities to the 'Chapaev' craze, but unlike 'Shchors' it was not commissioned from above.⁴⁹ It also fell well into the concept of socialist realism, and what was more important, underpinned the brotherly relationships of Russians and Kazakhs, where Russians are a bigger, wiser brother. This film is considered to be the 'first' Kazakh film. Such statement was first used by the central government to satisfy demand for national films, and later was sustained and reinforced throughout the existence of the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ 'Amangeldi' was produced by Moisei Levin, a Lenfilm director, with participation of both local and Russian writers, composers and actors. Russian filmmakers were still an important component of film production.

⁴⁷ Chomentowski, "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 43

⁴⁸ Nogerbek, "The Various Birth of Kazakh Cinema," 57

⁴⁹ Nogerbek, "The Various Birth of Kazakh Cinema," 57

⁵⁰ This is still considered to be true by the majority, especially popular press.

Another film produced on the studio that followed Soviet policies was ‘Raikhan’ (1940) produced by Moisei Levin and Sergei Bartenev. The film depicts how a woman that obtained education can change society around her and represent party ideals. As it was mentioned above, a new soviet woman was constructed through films just as much as a soviet man. In Central Asia, ‘new woman’ implicated more than in European parts of the country. One of the aims of the Soviet state was distancing Soviet people of Central Asia from backward traditions of colonial times, which to a large extent included expanding the rights of women. This put a start to emancipation campaign, women were not to be ‘bought’ from their parents, they did not have to cover their faces or their heads, they could receive education. The Soviet government started giving the women what the previous regime could not, thus, developing a class of working people loyal to the Soviet Union.⁵¹ ‘Raikhan,’ unlike earlier films, did not portray a woman that suffered under backward traditions. Being one of later films, it showed the main character as a strong active woman, who still however had to fight with representatives of local backward traditions – the old bourgeoisie, in Kazakh *bais*.

By the beginning of 1940s, Kazakh cinematography already had its sprouts, but it still needed development in all spheres. That is why Kazakh authorities wanted to establish Alma-Ata Feature Film Studio, that would concentrate solely on features and would have a big potential. The German invasion created a new unique opportunity for the Kazakh cinema, which is the central focus of chapter two.

Soviet nationalities policy: korenizatsiya

Before going further and talking about the Great Patriotic War⁵² let me rewind a little and introduce more context on korenizatsiya, as it proves to be echoed during the War. After

⁵¹ Chomentowski, "Vostokkino and Foundations of Central Asian Cinema," 43.

⁵² For Soviet Union WWII started with German invasion in the summer of 1941, and they have been calling it Great Patriotic War.

Bolsheviks have established a new government, intelligentsia of Turkic populations was realizing importance of ethnic consciousness. They were promoting interests of their ethnicities and cultural groups, going as far as creating entities such as Turkestan Autonomous Republic inside the new state, which would be focusing on their ethnic and religious interests⁵³ Some people of the Turkic populations wanted to get rid of Russians overall. Realizing the potential growth and danger of ethnic consciousness Lenin devised Nationalities Policy, the idea of which was to create economic equality among nationalities.⁵⁴

The large part of the Nationalities Policy in non-Russian republics was korenizatsiya (also known as indigenization). The primary aim of korenizatsiya was “to conquer the trust of the natives; to show that we are not imperialists,” to differentiate Soviet and tsarist rule in Central Asia.⁵⁵ The book ‘The History of Kazakh SSR’ when talking about the 1916 uprising in Kazakhstan is actively emphasizing that the uprising was not against Russians, it was against colonialism.⁵⁶ Under korenizatsiya national languages were promoted, printed media was supposed to be in these languages. It was mandatory for organizations to have people literate in local official languages, the European (Russian, Ukrainian) settlers had to learn it as well. The national cadres were also highly promoted, they were preferred over Russians when considered for a job and educating them in different professions was of high importance, so they were put under apprenticeship of skilled European workers. It gave hope to representatives of nationalities, their nation finally being primary.

The preferential attitude with the nationals was not taken well by the European settlers. It so happened that proletariats were mainly Europeans, while Kazakhs mainly were rural, and thus

⁵³ Geoffrey Wheeler, “The Consolidation of Soviet Power,” in *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc., 1963), 123.

⁵⁴ Wheeler, “The Consolidation of Soviet Power,” 131.

⁵⁵ Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire and Revolution in the Early USSR* (London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 165.

⁵⁶ A. N. Nusupbekov, “The History of Kazakh SSR: from Antiquity till Today. Volume III,” *Science* (KazSSR, 1979), 443.

were perceived as backward by the Europeans.⁵⁷ Ethnic conflicts often rose up. The local population did not like settlers taking their good lands. The settlers did not like having to teach locals, who only slowed down the work, they did not like that nationals were preferred for jobs or that they had to learn their languages. Since settlers were the main support of the Soviet government in those regions, in the end, the Central Committee decided to favor them. The linguistic korenizatsiya was casted aside, preferences for jobs were diminished, though still educating and hiring local workers was important. This sets a good stage for the nationality questions being asked when talking about the matter such as evacuation. It also explains why during the War the local authorities were not only eager to hire other residents of Kazakhstan to work on the studio, but also were often emphasizing that Kazakhs among Kazakhstani workers are not as many as it should have been.

After korenizatsiya was cancelled, another policy became the prime policy on nationalities – the Friendship of Peoples, in particular the friendship with Russians. Friendship of Peoples allowed for nationalities to have some of their cultural traits, while the aim was still to create a Soviet man, a new nation, which largely favored Russian culture and history. Facilitating this friendship was important in every sphere, including filmmaking. I will not go too deep into nationalities policies because it is itself a vast field that requires its own research, I am merely using bits of it to explain why archival material that I will examine in the next chapter could have concerns about nationality of employees.

The Great Patriotic War on screen

June 22, 1941 changed lives of ordinary Soviet people when German troops invaded Soviet frontier. Immediately the society was mobilized, industries re-oriented, new priorities set. Literature, cinema, radio, theatre, all were about the war effort, all had the “Motherland

⁵⁷ Khalid, “Making Uzbekistan,” 167

summons!” “Motherland in danger” notion to them.⁵⁸ According to Youngblood, between 1941-1945 seventy per cent of all films produced were on the topic of war.⁵⁹ The cinema industry was evacuated to safe areas, which meant it was deemed important for the war cause by the Soviet government. The aim of film studios was to create films that would sustain the morale of Soviet population. The films about the war were to be shown to soldiers at the front and to civilians at the rear. It was important to portray the war as the ultimate fight to save their motherland and no matter who one was, soldier or civilian, young or old, everyone had to contribute to the inevitable victory.⁶⁰

In the first half of the War, when the Soviets were on defensive, the films created were trying to soften the realities of the war. Filmmakers who wanted to show realities of the frontlines were strongly discouraged from it. The central Soviet government was trying to “hide the extent of the catastrophe from the citizens.”⁶¹ This was achieved by shifting focus away from the front to the partisans, who also suffered from the invasion and could potentially be portrayed realistically, while still not showing the devastating horror of the war, because that would only demoralize the population. At the same time, female figures were becoming foreground of such films. The endeavor to put woman on stronger position, where she would participate in the society as well as a man was continuing. Previous female characters from revolutionary World War I films (such as ‘Chapaev’s Anka) were joined by new heroes, who also represented that motherland that summoned for the fight.⁶² Fridrikh Ermler’s 1943 film ‘She defends the Motherland’ (*Ona zashchichayet rodinu*) portrays a woman that was a good mother and wife, but the war made her a capable leader of the partisan group, who fears nothing and inspires people.

⁵⁸ Barber and Harrison. “The Soviet Home Front”, 69

⁵⁹ Denise J. Youngblood, “A War Remembered: Soviet Films of the Great Patriotic War,” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (June 2001): 840.

⁶⁰ Denise J. Youngblood, “The Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945,” in *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 56.

⁶¹ Denise J. Youngblood, “The Great Patriotic War,” 58.

⁶² Youngblood, “The Great Patriotic War,” 60

The film shows harsh life of partisans, losing their loved ones, barely surviving in the woods, the fear and doubt even among their own people. The main character is also harsh in leading, and harsh with those who thinks about deserting to Germans, she shoots the traitors without a drop of doubt in the victory of the Soviet Union. She, however, is one of the harsher examples of females in film, majority of women were still portrayed in the duality of being both feminine, caring and capable to defend themselves.⁶³ Another example of focus on women far from the front was Aleksandr Stolper's and Boris Ivanov's film 'Wait for Me' (*Zhdi menya*) released in 1943. This film compares two women in the rear, both of whom are waiting for their men, but only one of them being faithful. The simple act of waiting, not abandoning, supporting and believing was as important for the morale as the fight itself.

When the Red Army defeated Germans at Stalingrad in the beginning of 1943, the War turned from defensive to offensive. This changed the approach towards film topics, what was discouraged previously was now permitted.⁶⁴ The brutality of the war could be shown, soldiers of all types were finally in the focus, films such as 'The Invasion' (*Nashestviye*, 1944) by Abram Room were released. Women were gradually removed from the centrality of films.

As before the war, one of the popular themes was historical figures, however during the war their implementation rose to a bigger scale. Numerous posters featured heroes like Alexandr Nevskii, Mikhail Kutuzov, Alexandr Suvorov and so on. Moscow Central Committee, and in particular Stalin, presented the Soviet Party militants as descendants of Russian military heroes who fought for protection against Western aggressors.⁶⁵ Propaganda connected current generation with these heroes in an attempt to create the image of a nation that had always been a fighter. Numerous placards used Stalin's words: "In this war, may you draw inspiration from the

⁶³ Youngblood, "The Great Patriotic War," 69.

⁶⁴ Youngblood, "The Great Patriotic War," 78.

⁶⁵ Brandenberger, "National Bolshevism," 117

valiant example of our great ancestors!”⁶⁶ From the beginning of the war, the motherland was identified with Russia, centrality of Russian people, which existed before the war, intensified. As Carmack puts it, “Front-line articles frequently characterized Russian as the gateway to ‘the leading culture of the Soviet Union.’”⁶⁷ Thus, Russian oriented movies overshadowed national ones, Russians were considered the most important of all nationalities. Unwillingness to film much on non-Russian themes may have resulted in Kazakh authorities’ concerns about proper representation of national themes in films.

The coming of the war, however terrible, had its positive sides, especially for the intelligentsia. Only several years prior they have suffered waves of massive repressions, but the war became an opportunity for them to prove their worth to the Bolshevik government.⁶⁸ Active participation of all types of artists (writers publishing newspaper articles, singers and actors going with concerts to the front, filmmakers creating films about the war) gained them recognition from the Soviet government, which realized the importance of uplifting spirits among its population. Cultural workers realized soon their position, Sergei Eisenstein wrote that “we are soldiers of art.”⁶⁹ After the war, because of their support of the government and war cause, status of cultural institutions in some ways improved.

Evacuation: the process and hardships

The war had impact not only on stories that would be shown in films, it changed the entire industry for a brief time. As cinema was recognized by the center as an important tool for supporting the war cause, in order to save the industry and make it produce as many films as

⁶⁶ Brandenberger, “National Bolshevism,” 119

⁶⁷ Roberto J. Carmack, “History and Hero-Making: Patriotic Narratives and the Sovietization of Kazakh Front-Line Propaganda, 1941–1945,” *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 1 (2014): 100.

⁶⁸ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture,” 161.

⁶⁹ Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009): 120.

before, the studios were evacuated to Central Asian republics. In 1941, the Statute on evacuation defined evacuation as “carrying out in wartime of fundamental measures to remove valuable property, institutions, factories, and human contingents from regions under military threat.”⁷⁰ A few days after the invasion a special committee, a Council of Evacuation was created for that purpose.⁷¹ Until the last moment before the German invasion, Stalin did not believe that the war would spread onto the Soviet territory, which is why preparations for the evacuation were sudden, rapid, and chaotic.⁷² However, a month into the war evacuations became relatively orderly, including those from Moscow. Entire industries were moved to different places in republics far from the front lines and distributed to places where they would be useful. Whatever could not be taken with them to the place of the evacuation was demolished, so that Nazis could not use it for their armies.⁷³

Council of Evacuation was responsible for all stages of the process of evacuation. It was supposed to create plans, timetables, set priorities, distribute the industries based on their usefulness for the war, provide means of transportation, monitor the realization of the process, take care of living space and food supply for the evacuated.⁷⁴ However, because of the hasty nature of the evacuation, a lot of work was vested upon directors of the industries.⁷⁵ They were to make lists of those important enough to be evacuated and were to supervise the whole process for their institution from the point of departure to the point of settlement in the designated city. Individuals in this system were measured in their worth to the needs of the war, only most crucial workers could go.⁷⁶ It was not an easy task to measure the worth of each person. Lenfilm director Ivan Glotov was told by the chairman of the Cinema Issues Committee Ivan Bolshakov

⁷⁰ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 129

⁷¹ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 21

⁷² Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 25

⁷³ Sanford R. Lieberman, “The Evacuation of Industry in the Soviet Union during World War II,” *Soviet Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 1983): 99.

⁷⁴ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 29

⁷⁵ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture,” 45

⁷⁶ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 36

that he had to shorten the list of evacuees from the studio from 630 to no more than 500.⁷⁷ The worth of people was reflected in their priority for the evacuation, which at large depended on privileges. Clear hierarchy both inside institutions and among them was characteristic in this period. Moscow and Leningrad evacuees were in higher priorities than any other city, award winning artists were more important than others, state apparatus workers were in high priority as well.⁷⁸ Being closer to the top of this hierarchy meant priority in evacuation as well as priority during settlement.

Evacuation also entailed negative reactions. As well as directors of studios and industries were responsible for the evacuation process of their entities, regional administration and police was accountable for the evacuation of theirs. However, not all of them were ready for such a task. Even prioritized position as Party workers or regional authorities did not prevent some of the them from abandoning their positions and evacuating only themselves.⁷⁹ Artistic director of Soiuzdetfilm, Sergei Iutkevich after bombings of Moscow, as a producer of the film ‘How the steel was tempered’ (*Kak zakalyalas stal*, 1942) arranged a shooting expedition of the film and left, though the film was not yet ready for production.⁸⁰ Such behavior on their part was frowned upon, they were accused of cowardice, irresponsibility and non-Party demeanor. For instance, under similar accusations the secretary of the city Klinitsy was fired as a punishment for such action, which could be as well considered desertion.⁸¹ Nevertheless, civilian population was also prone to self-evacuation. People that lived closer to the frontline, taking into account that it was fast moving inside the country, often saw soldiers retreat, evacuees run from villages and towns that were newly occupied, all of them telling tales of German atrocities.⁸² This negatively

⁷⁷ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture,” 77

⁷⁸ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture,” 70

⁷⁹ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 50

⁸⁰ Seth Bernstein, “Wartime Filmmaking on the Margins: Soiuzdetfilm in Evacuation in Stalinabad, 1941–43,” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 9, no. 1 (2015): 29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503132.2015.1011869>.

⁸¹ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 64

⁸² Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 52

affected the morale and led to self-evacuation, which was unlawful at the time. The flow of information did not help the situation either. As well as with films when Central Committee did not want to show atrocities of the war that would demoralize population, the information from the front was also carefully structured not to let out too much.⁸³ Hearing from other evacuees about occupation of cities that was not on the official news yet, and seeing members of their regional authorities flee was spreading the panic among civilian population, which was the main cause for self-evacuation.

The journey “into the unknown,” as Eisenstein put it, was a hard task.⁸⁴ For a lot of people leaving almost everything behind and going to a new place, where they did not know what could happen was fearful. Some people refused evacuating because of this. Filmmakers in Leningrad were notified of their evacuation the same day their train was to depart.⁸⁵ They had few hours to collect a hand bag of their belongings and take their families. Family connections became extremely important during the evacuation, sometimes it was the only way to be evacuated at all, for people were usually to evacuate with their institutions.⁸⁶ Trains and train stations were crowded with people. Equipment and other crucial material often travelled with their organizations. Some alternative ways of evacuation were by car, by boat or by foot, all of which were equally treacherous, and also reflected priorities of the travelers.⁸⁷ Along the way the Council of Evacuation had put a number of evacuation centers where people could rest, eat, receive medical help and wait for their next transport. Evacuation often required transfer, which was often delayed, because of the shortage of transportation, and because, if trains carried evacuees to the rear, they also had to carry fresh soldiers to the front.⁸⁸ Sometimes people would disembark their trains earlier, usually opting to stay in bigger cities rather than in villages they

⁸³ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 68

⁸⁴ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 119

⁸⁵ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture,” 58

⁸⁶ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 124

⁸⁷ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 126-127

⁸⁸ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 132

were designated to. Cities were more desirable because of higher probability of better food supply and job vacancies. Other times people were going further than planned, because cities were overflowing with evacuees and city authorities trying to deal with huge numbers sent people onto other locations.⁸⁹ Many people did not survive the journey.

Upon arriving, the life in the evacuation was no easier, especially if one did not have privileges. Getting food was difficult, not everyone was receiving rations, and even those were not enough. Filmmakers in Alma-Ata were constantly complaining that the food they receive is not enough. The prices in markets were extremely high and kept growing, especially in the cities. The locals could easily use the situation to their advantage, because evacuees had no other choice.⁹⁰ Salaries were also not enough, compared to Moscow or Leningrad they were much smaller. Evacuees had to sell the few possessions they had with them to feed themselves and their families, keeping in mind that sometimes the whole family was attached to the one person who was evacuating as a part of an organization. Familial and other connections played a huge role in survival. Nadezhda Mandelstam was one of the few who were lucky to have important enough friends: her sister-in-law, who was a member of the Union of Artists, was giving her ration card to use, Anna Akhmatova was sharing food and apartment with her, Kornei Chukovskiy's family helped her get permission to stay in Tashkent.⁹¹

Housing was also a problem. Organizations were allocated housing, but in cities full of evacuees it was never enough, and the conditions were often unsatisfactory. In Alma-Ata, several evacuated film studios workers re-appropriated some of the premises which were supposed to be a part of the studio as a living space. Non-privileged people were in even worse position, having to rent rooms from locals or just live on the streets. People with questionable backgrounds, such as European refugees, criminals, people with German descent were not at all

⁸⁹ Manley, "To the Tashkent Station," 139

⁹⁰ Manley, "To the Tashkent Station," 178

⁹¹ Manley, "To the Tashkent Station," 170

to receive any state help.⁹² They were the ones living on the street and they were the ones creating unsanitary conditions that were favorable for the spread of diseases, including typhus caused by hunger.

Besides basic needs there were other preoccupations in evacuated cities. Reinstating production and supporting the war was the primary goal of evacuation. Factories increased the production and were able to supply the front with important weaponry and material, being able to outrace German production in some areas.⁹³ Intelligentsia was writing newspaper articles, staging plays and concerts, creating films, conducting lectures, all to support patriotic outreach and to lighten the mood at least for a brief while. Other people were contributing by collecting and donating clothes or donating blood.⁹⁴ Many children became orphans because of the war, so local families adopted them. A newsreel that revisited the war years after its end showed a boy, an orphan from Leningrad, who was adopted by a Kazakh teacher and was given Kazakh name Arystan Kainarbayev, who later became an architect of Alma-Ata's famous mountain ice rink 'Medeo'.⁹⁵

Authorities of receiving cities had their own interests in hosting the evacuees. Being a host city to industries or cultural institutions could raise the status of the city on the map of the USSR.⁹⁶ Moreover, such guests could positively influence the life in the city itself by helping develop their industrial or cultural potential. Kazakhstani authorities wanted to use evacuated studios to create national cinema, which was almost non-existent considering previous films were produced by Russian filmmakers. Regional authorities also tried to "establish a new status

⁹² Manley, "To the Tashkent Station," 191

⁹³ Manley, "To the Tashkent Station," 210

⁹⁴ Manley, "To the Tashkent Station," 210

⁹⁵ The video was made by Kazakh news portal. It combined Soviet newsreel with an modern interview of an evacuee from Leningrad. The video was posted in 2014, however it does not say who created the newsreel and when it was produced. It is most likely it was part of regular newsreel 'Soviet Kazakhstan' and belonged to mid-1970s, the time when ice rink was built. *Khronika Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny. Evakuirovanniye v Kazakhstan (Chronicle of the Great Patriotic War. Evacuated to Kazakhstan)*, Newsreel (Tengri News, n.d.), <https://tengrinews.kz/tv/rubriki/kinohronika/1586/>.

⁹⁶ Megowan, "For Fatherland, For Culture," 84

quo,” through which they could influence work of hosted institutions and demand attention to the growth of national culture.⁹⁷ Pre-war hierarchies, though, did not like such tendencies, preserving their power even in decentralized nature of the evacuation was substantial to them.⁹⁸ For example, in cinematography before the war film studios were accountable to Cinematography Issues Committee, which in turn was accountable to the Central Party Committee. During the war however, regional authorities sought to insert themselves into this hierarchy leading to tensions among studios, Cinematography Issues Committee and themselves. Some other tensions were led up to by the arrival of huge numbers of evacuees, who were flooding cities, taking up living space and making local organizations squeeze.⁹⁹

There is no surprise that stirring and mixing different populations became a source of problems. The chaotic nature of the evacuation, the panic and fear it carried, bad organization, poor living conditions. The evacuation, however, was considered a success in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰ After all, it managed to save lives of thousands of civilians, and what is more important, to ensure renovation of work of many organizations, which directly contributed to the victory.

Conclusion

The Great Patriotic War changed the Soviet Union. Culture and intelligentsia suddenly became important. Being previously massively repressed, they became an important ally for the Soviet state. As reflected in the evacuation and the priority put on cultural institutions, culture became a “critical source of Soviet identity.”¹⁰¹ Cultural developments found a new way of expression – through the lens of the war. After summer 1941 everything had to be about the war,

⁹⁷ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture,” 234

⁹⁸ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture,” 83

⁹⁹ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 229

¹⁰⁰ Manley, “To the Tashkent Station,” 173

¹⁰¹ Megowan, “For Fatherland, For Culture,” 84

all the effort was turned toward victory, including films. Feminine but strong women now were occupying work places of men who were on the front, or fighting on partisan front, or simply waiting for soldiers to return. Revisiting history and its heroes was the way to show the audience that regardless of how many times their motherland was attacked, their ancestors were able to withstand. Focusing more on Russian heroes and Russian ancestry reasserted the importance of Russians over other nationalities.

The invasion also brought on the evacuation and redistribution of the state wealth, material as well as people. Many people who were considered high professionals and thus significant for renovating the work of their organization went through a tough journey to get to the places where they would be the most useful. City authorities were eager about receiving such important guests, who could help them raise the level of their city, and perhaps republic in the hierarchy of the Soviet Union. Institutions from big cities such as Moscow or Leningrad were among the most desirable ones, regional authorities sought to involve them in as much development of their culture as possible. Evacuation of Mosfilm and Lenfilm is one of such opportunities for Kazakhstan since their cinema industry was dependent on filmmakers from these studios anyways. The next chapter will deal with these particular institutions from the point of view of the receiving side, as to what hopes were put on their arrival and what it eventually resulted in.

Chapter Two

The Unknown Side of Cinema Front

In January of 1944, comrade Yesbatyrov, a Kazakh who was working as a film director on the Central Joint Film Studio (TsOKS), wanted to get a haircut at one of Alma-Ata's barbershops.¹⁰² He did not have much time, because he was rushed by colleagues who accompanied him, so he asked comrade Geht to let him go first. When Geht refused and reasserted that he was there first, to which the barber and couple more people bore witness, Yesbatyrov got angry. In his gush of anger, he uttered: "They should shave first all Mosfilm and Lenfilm workers, Jews, and then, lastly Kazakhs and Kazfilm."¹⁰³ Such words were immediately reported as being antisemitic and Yesbatyrov was excluded from the party bureau of TsOKS. Later, a party bureau meeting on this matter was held, where he and several other Kazakh colleagues tried to defend him. He was said to be a man of quick and bad temper, but he nonetheless was a good worker, always helped Jews, and, also, he admitted his mistake. The party bureau ruled that it was not antisemitism¹⁰⁴ after all, but was bordering it, and his dismissal from the party organization was cancelled. A member of the bureau, comrade Maizalish, who was unhappy with Yesbatyrov's behavior asked: "Why did he say Mosfilm, Lenfilm, what was the sense? You can feel the hostility in these words, but why is it there?"¹⁰⁵

The reason for Yesbatyrov's resentment lies within the growing distrust and irritation among Alma-Ata filmmakers and the evacuees. Over the few years, the evacuation, that at first

¹⁰² AP RK: 1302/1/3/p5

¹⁰³ Translations of documents are minorly altered to make better sense in English.

¹⁰⁴ Antisemitism was gradually becoming a bigger concern during the war. Local population often associated Jews with evacuees, because indeed a lot of them were, including directors from Moscow and Leningrad. In addition, Nazi propaganda was trying to reach Muslim population, which also led to antisemitic moods. Preoccupation of antisemitism and Jews take a large place in the history of the WWII and the evacuation. However, my research is not connected to it and thus will not go deep into this topic. Moreover, among the archival documents I worked with, there were only two cases of antisemitism during the evacuation, one of them being Yesbatyrov case, and the other case of cafeteria lady, so there is not much to base research on antisemitism.

¹⁰⁵ AP RK: 1302/1/3/p6

promised cultural development and rise in national status, created problems and tensions. The evacuees did not feel that they owed anything to Kazakh Republic for hosting them and saw their primary goal as producing as much of war related films as possible. The locals, on the other hand, had a different understanding. Both Kazakh regional authorities and filmmakers thought that the studio should put as much importance on Kazakh films and development of Kazakh national cinema as on war movies. From the first days until the re-evacuation this had been the stumbling block during the work on TsOKS. This chapter will argue that the initial hope from the opportunity of hosting such important institutions as Mosfilm and Lenfilm turned into discontent and irritation.

The brighter side

Before discussing in detail tensions in the relationships on TsOKS, it is necessary to state that not everything was negative. It is the nature of archival documents to focus on negative sides, problems and disruptions, for when everything is good there is nothing to write about. The evacuation of TsOKS had a positive effect on Kazakh cinematography, it fostered its development in a certain way, and many film historians admitted the contribution TsOKS made. Alma-Ata was briefly named “Soviet Hollywood on the Chinese border,”¹⁰⁶ to this day Kazakhstan prides itself on hosting such important institutions and producing eighty per cent of all films during the WWII.¹⁰⁷ Kabysh Siranov was a deputy director of TsOKS through the majority of its existence, and he was the one to write the huge complaint about the work and relationships on the studio, part of which was featured in the introduction to this thesis and will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter. He later became film historian, and in 1966, he published a book ‘Cinema of Soviet Kazakhstan,’ where he retold the story of TsOKS,

¹⁰⁶ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p44

¹⁰⁷ Bernstein, ‘Wartime Filmmaking on the Margins,’ 28.

remembering mainly positive aspects. It suggests that twenty years after the evacuation he was able to see mainly positive developments the evacuation has brought. He acknowledges that in the brief period after the war has started but before the studios arrived at Alma-Ata, there was nothing to do on the studio. There was not enough technical or creative staff because of the conscription, those who stayed did not have much work because of the lack of scenarios, the equipment was also insufficient.¹⁰⁸ The arrival of evacuee filmmakers allowed for the continuation of the work on the studio. Evacuees also held classes and lectures on different fields of filmmaking, which allowed for the formation of local filmmakers.¹⁰⁹ There should be a benefit of doubt however to his positive outlook, he was publishing in the Soviet Union, where he could not criticize much governmental endeavor and bring out to the public's attention all the petty problems they had back then.

The evacuation was not always seen as negative by evacuees either. Many memoirs describe the warm reception they got in Kazakhstan, the relatively unconflicted atmosphere and the freedoms of creativity they got when the center was further away and busy with other concerns.¹¹⁰ Some evacuees had positive relationships with Kazakhs and were eager to help them in the development of their cinematography. In December 1943, Yefim Aron and Vera Stroyeva received titles of 'Honorary artists of KazSSR,' and twenty-six more people got letters of distinction.¹¹¹ Stroyeva's husband Grigoriy Roshal was also often helping Kazakh cinematography and cadres, he held acting classes and was a director of one of Kazakh films. In 1981, Roshal appeared in a newsreel issue of 'Soviet Kazakhstan,' where he arrived at Alma-Ata

¹⁰⁸ Kabysh Siranov, *Kino Iskustvo Sovetskogo Kazakhstana* (Cinema of Soviet Kazakhstan) (Alma-Ata: Publishing house "Kazakhstan," 1966), 72.

¹⁰⁹ Siranov, *Kino Iskustvo Sovetskogo Kazakhstana*, 82

¹¹⁰ Valerie Pozner, "Daleko Ot Voyny? Tvorcheskoye i Proizvodstvennyye Logiki v Evacuatsii (Far from the War? Creative and Production Logics in Evacuation)," in *Perezhit' Voyny: Kinoindustriya v SSSR 1939-1949 Gody* (Survive the War: Cinema Industry in USSR, 1939-1949) (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2018), 28.

¹¹¹ AP RK: 708/7-1/690/p201-203

to celebrate the forty-year anniversary of TsOKS.¹¹² Though this thesis focuses on negative aspects of the evacuation, the achievements and positive aspects should not be forgotten.

Installation of TsOKS

Kazakhstan, as it was mentioned in the first chapter, for a long time did not have its own feature film studio. Previously studios like Vostokkino or Alma-Ata Newsreel Studio were conducting the double job but feature film production was not as frequent and as good. Russian newsreel workers also arrived in Alma-Ata and were working there until the end of the war.¹¹³ Newsreel studio was to produce all-Union films, other Central Asian republics and Caucasus were to send their material to Alma-Ata. It is important to note now that I will not look on the relationships and tensions of the Newsreel Studio during the World War II, even though it also had evacuee workers such as Dziga Vertov. Looking on both studios would prove to be a bigger job, and this studio had less archival documents about its work. It seems that the Newsreel studio did not have as much drama or conflicts as TsOKS, they were working quite peacefully, newsreel production requires less work after all, especially when a lot of documentary filmmakers were trying to capture the war on the front. Based on the documents that I have, the studio was making two full-length films about Kazakhstan – ‘To you, front’ and ‘8th guards’ regiment,’ only the first being finished, which will be discussed in chapter three.

“Shortly before the war, I was approached by the chairman of Council of People’s Commissars (SNK) KazSSR comrade Undasynov with a request to organize film production in the republic. [...] Came August and the question of the evacuation of Lenfilm arose. This is when I remembered the discussion with Undasynov and called him. He immediately agreed to

¹¹² Daulbayeva, *Soviet Kazakhstan #34*, Newsreel, 1981.

¹¹³ AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p46

host Lenfilm and promised to help accommodate the studio.”¹¹⁴ This is how Ivan Bolshakov, the chairman of the Cinematography Issues Committee remembered the beginning of TsOKS. On September 12, 1941 SNK KazSSR issued a decree about the organization of Alma-Ata Feature Film Studio and on its basis temporarily accommodate Lenfilm.¹¹⁵ When Mosfilm’s time to evacuate came “Comrades Polonskiy [Cinematography Issues Committee member], Trauberg [artistic director of Lenfilm] and Ermler [artistic director of Mosfilm] suggested to organize a united Alma-Ata feature film studio, which will receive all arriving Mosfilm equipment, and will be staffed by all present in Alma-Ata Mosfilm and Lenfilm creative and administrative workers.”¹¹⁶ Both studios nevertheless wanted to have their people as directors of the new studio, Mosfilm and Lenfilm were longtime rivals.¹¹⁷ Kazakh authorities proposed Sergali Tolybekov, who was working as the director of Kazakh Pedagogical Institute. However, Bolshakov met with the secretary of the Central Committee of Kazakhstan (TsK KPbK) Nikolay Skvortsov to discuss details, one of which was to lower Tolybekov to a deputy director, and put Mikhail Tikhonov, a member of Cinematography Issues Committee, as a director, because he had more experience.¹¹⁸ Apparently, Tikhonov was a more neutral figure. By the end of October, 130 people of creative personnel from Mosfilm and Lenfilm have already arrived at Alma-Ata, and 150-160 more of lesser status were expected.¹¹⁹

Alma-Ata greeted the big filmmaking studios with eagerness, evacuated people received the best possible conditions. M.Tokareva, instructor of Agitation and Propaganda Department (*Agitprop*) of Kazakhstan wrote to the secretary of TsK KPbK Skvortsov about the measures taken to accommodate TsOKS, especially what have Kazakh authorities given to them. “By the

¹¹⁴ “Kino vo vremya voyny: kak snimali filmy v evakuatsii Mosfilm i Lenfilm (Cinema during the war: how Mosfilm and Lenfilm shot films in the evacuation),” Kutura.RF, Ministry of Culture of Russia, <https://www.culture.ru/materials/104904/kino-dlya-pobedy>

¹¹⁵ AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p44

¹¹⁶ AP RK: 708/6-1/565/p14

¹¹⁷ Pozner, “*Daleko Ot Voyny?*” 50

¹¹⁸ AP RK: 708/6-1/567/p10

¹¹⁹ AP RK:708/6-1/565/p14

decision of TsK KPbK and SNK KazSSR, TsOKS were given two new big buildings: cinema theatre ‘Ala-Tau’ and Palace of Culture¹²⁰ to re-equip for studio. As a result, the studio will have six pavilions, totaling 2300 sq.m., sound room, viewing room, laboratory and other rooms for different departments.”¹²¹ Technical basis was covered by the equipment evacuated from Mosfilm. As for the living space, “SNK KazSSR has provided 4000 sq.m. of living space for 500¹²² workers and their families. The studio already received a brand-new house of 635 sq.m., 1500 sq.m. in houses of *Gorkomhoz* (city utilities), and 103 rooms in the only hotel in the city, ‘House of Unions’.”¹²³ Such elaborate information was featured in this report for the first time, but later was picked up by other members of Kazakh authorities and filmmakers, which started the tradition of listing all that before starting a complaint.

In June 1943, Agitprop secretary comrade Abdykalykov wrote a request to TsK KPbK about the future of the studio. Continuing the tradition of Tokareva (who wrote her report in December 1941), he listed what Kazakh authorities had given the studio, but also added that three canteens had been arranged for workers, differentiating their status – “leading creative workers, creative workers and technical staff, workers and servers,” meaning cleaning personnel, canteen staff, and so on.¹²⁴ The request then states that Republican organizations helped the studio to appropriate the given buildings by providing working force and raw materials: “Thanks to this, building process on the studio was finished in a short time and in 1942 the studio released eleven full-length films and two film-collections.” It also signifies that local authorities thought that the studio’s success was their merit. “All these oblige the studio leadership to treat the

¹²⁰ Kazakh State University was using premises of this Palace for their Biology Department’s laboratories and wanted to keep it that way. They expressed concern over TsOKS leadership not being able to use the workspace properly referring to the way they treated ‘Ala-Tau’ (though did not specify how exactly), but their requests to keep the building were denied. (708/6-1/570/p13)

¹²¹ AP RK: 708/5-2/112/p45

¹²² February 1942 statistics provided by Tokareva lists only around 400 evacuees. Was that an attempt of exaggeration to make argument seem more convincing?

¹²³ AP RK: 708/5-2/112/p46

¹²⁴ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p32

Republic well and help it create and develop the national cinema.”¹²⁵ The authorities themselves started bargain based relationships by pointing this out, and later complained about evacuees demanding material goods in exchange for Kazakh films. While Kazakh government thought that the studio was obliged to help them because of all listed above, the studio most likely thought it was the government’s job. Before re-evacuating artistic director of TsOKS Fridrikh Ermler said: “People that arrived here did not promise anything, they were doing a task set by the government.”¹²⁶

Some of the first tasks of the newly established studio was to finish previous motion pictures and start creating films related to the war, which included afore-mentioned ‘She defends the Motherland,’ ‘The Invasion,’ ‘Wait for me.’ Among the arrivals were a few of the most prominent cinema workers, film directors such as Sergei Eisenstein, brothers Gerogiy and Sergei Vasilyevs, Grigoriy Roshal, Mikhail Romm, Fridrikh Ermler, actors such as Mikhail Nazvanov, Nikolay Mordvinov, Nikolay Cherkasov; writers like Mikhail Zoshchenko, Konstantin Paustovsky, Sergey Mikhalkov, Samuil Marshak.¹²⁷ This elite of Soviet cinematography was teaching locals in professions necessary for the cinema, usually on the basis of Moscow State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK).¹²⁸ In fact, in November 1941 Tokareva wrote a report to secretary of Kazakhstan Skvortsov explaining unnecessary of the work of VGIK in Alma-Ata.¹²⁹ She argued that cinematography even before the War had an excess of creative workers (with only half of them being busy), and there was still a reserve of such people that could work during the War. According to her, the best way to teach young filmmakers was and always would be through practice, so teaching Kazakh cadres could be accomplished on TsOKS itself. The

¹²⁵ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p32

¹²⁶ AP RK: 1302/1/4b/p97 backside

¹²⁷ Givi Paliashvili, "Ivan the Terrible, Antosha Rybkin and Others." Kontinent <http://www.kontinent.kz/2000/04/25.html>

¹²⁸ Michael Rouland, Gulnara Abikeyeva, and Brigit Baumers, *Cinema on Central Asia: Rewriting Cultural Histories* (London: I.B.Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2013), 78.

¹²⁹ AP RK: 708/5-1/701/p33-34

teachers of VGIK were anyway working there, actors came from theatre and scriptwriters from literature, so there was no need to teach them too. “Thus, now and in the future five years cinematography will not be experiencing shortage of cadres. In light of this situation, it becomes obvious that in such harsh circumstances working of State Institute of Cinematography is not necessary. [...] I consider it necessary to temporarily close the Institute and give the premises they are occupying to Moscow Aviation Institute”, which was more important for the war cause. The Institute was not closed however.

Let the work begin: delays, deficit and reluctance to transfer to the war mode

Arriving to the place of the evacuation was only the first step in restoring production of films in the rear. Lenfilm in its hasty evacuation brought almost no equipment, most of Mosfilm equipment was sent right after the filmmakers. Not all of it came, though, some was lost, some arrived at the wrong destination, other damaged in transportation.¹³⁰ Because of that, until spring of 1942 all material for editing was sent to Tashkent, where some other studios were evacuated and where the Cinematography Issues Committee presided.¹³¹ Moreover, the republic did not have its own studio, so allocated by Kazakh TsK space needed to be re-appropriated to become a studio. The construction work was going slowly and took almost until the summer of 1942, which in turn slowed down the production of the films.¹³² A complaint without signature or date (at least on this copy¹³³) was sent to secretary of Agitprop Abdykalykov with information that the studio was supposed to release 17 films by the end of 1942, but currently only released 2.¹³⁴ The document allows to suggest that it was written around May or June of that year. The reason

¹³⁰ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 59

¹³¹ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 56

¹³² AP RK: 708/5-1/695/p4

¹³³ A lot of documents in the archives do not have signatures, dates or names of addressees sometimes. This is perhaps because they were the copies that were kept, while the originals travelled with evacuated studios back to be preserved there.

¹³⁴ AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p54

however for this delay was the fact that scenarios that had been approved by Bolshakov were remade time and time again by film directors. For example, ‘Kotovskiy’ was being in production for two years. The complaint accuses administration of the studio for “indulging in self-serving and individualistic directors” who have “exorbitant for the wartime demands.”¹³⁵

Exorbitant demands indeed were a new unanticipated problem in the evacuation. Valerie Pozner, who had investigated other archives in addition to the ones I worked in, explained that being replaced from the front, not seeing the atrocities of the war led to many evacuees’ unwillingness to comprehend the needs to transform their production habits.¹³⁶ Behavior like this caused a negative reaction from the Soviet government, especially from agencies such as the Cinematography Issues Committee, and from fellow evacuees, those who did understand the importance of shifting production mode.¹³⁷ In the situation of war, keeping the old habits was in a way a destructive behavior. When the filmmakers were leaving their cities, under the impression of the danger they were ready “to wash the floors” on the studio.¹³⁸ The longer they spent time in the evacuation, as Lev Kuleshov put it, the more a little voice in the back of their heads was suggesting building a mental wall as if nothing horrible was happening.

Furthermore, there was too many people of creative workers and significantly not enough of administrative staff. A decree by TsK KPbK from 1942 said that there were too many creative workers among the evacuees, namely directors (only 35 out of 47 necessary) and actors (only 30 out of 63 actually working).¹³⁹ The amount of necessary people for a film was “artificially increased”, they got paid for nothing and created “unhealthy environment.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p54

¹³⁶ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 80

¹³⁷ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 84

¹³⁸ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 82

¹³⁹ AP RK: 708/5-1/701/p17

¹⁴⁰ AP RK: 708/5-1/701/p17

Everybody wanted a sweet spot, far from the war. To recall, Agitprop instructor Tokareva was suggesting temporarily closing VGIK, because there was more than enough of creative workers.

One of the solutions to this problem was making those of creative workers who do not have projects to assume administrative position. Unfortunately, not many people were fond of this idea, often thinking that it was below their status as recognized artists. In a document that seems to be made by someone from Kazakh authorities (like Agitprop) a person criticized the work on TsOKS. “Film ‘Mashenka’ ... stands idle because of laxity and disorganization of film crew. ...Stolper and Ivanov ...demand a car every time, and if denied disrupt (*sryvayut*) the work of the entire crew.”¹⁴¹ The document overall reflects on the unproductive atmosphere on the studio. “The studio does not have the combat atmosphere, a number of people wander in corridors,” referring to creative workers who did not have projects, but still were receiving salaries and with their presence only disrupted the work atmosphere.¹⁴² It also suggests that many cultural workers tried to look useful by expanding crew to unnecessary numbers, so that they would not be fired or conscripted.

Foregoing was complemented with more every-day and mundane concerns. Though the studio was allocated living space, it was not enough for all the evacuees, so some of it was the premises that were initially allotted for the studio.¹⁴³ The supply of the electricity was also becoming a problem, shootings were often disrupted or had to be rescheduled for the nighttime because during the day the energy went to factories.¹⁴⁴ It was also a problem for daily activities because one could not simply boil water for drinking or prepare food. Sanitary conditions were also unsatisfactory, there was a shortage of cleaning personnel.¹⁴⁵ The evacuees did not like the situation and were thinking that the regional authorities were not doing a good job. TsOKS

¹⁴¹ AP RK: 708/5-1/695/p4

¹⁴² AP RK: 708/5-1/695/p4

¹⁴³ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 364

¹⁴⁴ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 59

¹⁴⁵ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 85

director Tikhonov and artistic director Ermler wrote in 1941 a complaint to SNK KazSSR expressing their discontent and were unhappy with the position of the studio where it became a “beggar.”¹⁴⁶

Two years later the begging did not stop. Tikhonov sent to TsK KPbK secretary Skvortsov a big list of everything that the studio needed. This included teaching locals to fill administrative positions, creating a recreation house “like in Moscow” for writers so that they could go there for a creative retreat – testifies to the different level of conditions in center and periphery.¹⁴⁷ They asked to allocate housing for arriving male actors, because there was a big shortage of males, permit creating a new orchestra, because the local one is too busy, while a new one would help create soundtracks and would give radio concerts as well – for them allocate living space, and provide salary. The studio also needed a lot of different materials and workforce: they needed metals, wood, bricks, cables and so on, and “no less than 100 people” to use those materials to build more on the studio. They wanted students to be used as extras, they wanted a reserve on train tickets for arriving artists and for group shooting expeditions, they wanted their own train for the same purposes. They wanted to expand their premises by getting hold of more buildings, including one of Kazakh State University buildings. They wanted more living space as well, and accommodating it with beds, tables and things alike. They wanted to use museum exhibits without any obstruction (which would be later referred to in Siranov’s big complaint). Some of those requests seem reasonable, especially ones about fixing showers because people could not shower, which also could lead to diseases. However, they still asked quite a number of things and emphasized that help of local organizations was imperative for the work of the studio both at that time and in the future. By that time, this continued flow of

¹⁴⁶ TsGA RK: 1367/7/547/p18

¹⁴⁷ AP RK: 708/7-1/708/pp11-19

requests for more help in the eyes of Kazakhstani authorities was accumulating, while there was almost no result from what they already had contributed.

The nature of the relationships as bargain-oriented caused a lot of worrying from the side of the local government. They were trying to gain control of the situation by reasserting that favors need to be returned. The struggle for more power was one of the challenges that the Kazakh authorities had tried to resolve constantly.

Intervention into the hierarchy

Requesting supplies and bargain-based relationships were in fact triggered by the local authorities themselves, though by the end they suffered because of it more than they gained. They provided TsOKS with as much as they could, prioritizing them over local cultural institutions, instead demanding creating films on Kazakh material. Initially they perhaps were trying to create a leverage but ended up in a disadvantaged position. They were complaining (Agitprop to TsK KPbK, TsK KPbK to TsK USSR) that the studio did not fulfill its end of the promise, while receiving all the help. The evacuees, on the other hand, were complaining that local authorities do not provide enough materials, provision, living space thereby disrupting the work of the studio, which had an important task of making films for the Union.¹⁴⁸ Whose interests should be secured, who was above who in the hierarchy was a pressing issue, especially in the first year of the evacuation.

TsOKS, as well as other evacuated studios, during the war faced with complication of the hierarchy of power.¹⁴⁹ In pre-war time, studios had a clear understanding of power dynamics: filmmakers answer to the studio administration, the studio answers to the Cinematography Issues Committee, the Committee answers to the Central Committee of the USSR. In the evacuation the

¹⁴⁸ Pozner, "Daleko ot Voyny?" 41

¹⁴⁹ Pozner, "Daleko ot Voyny?" 32

habitual hierarchy was destabilized. Now the local authorities tried to insert themselves into the hierarchy, and it was hard to determine who was more important, the Cinematography Issues Committee or the local government. It was clear however that permission of both was necessary for any films to produce. In the letter to Skvortsov about the production of Kazakh film ‘Abay’, the studio leadership wrote: “After your approval, the script for ‘Abay’ will be presented for approval to Cinematography Issues Committee of SNK USSR.”¹⁵⁰ This suggests that the Committee was still above the Kazakh government.

The production process overall and of Kazakh films especially interested Kazakh TsK and Agitprop. Considering the fact that every central committee of a republic was responsible for the control of activities of cultural institutions that were on its territory, TsK KPbK wanted control over TsOKS as well. It wanted to have access to all scripts produced, wanted to participate in preview process, and wanted to give comments on produced films as well. The studio, however, did not think that it was necessary to share with local authorities anything that did not concern national theme. For the studio workers, who in majority were evacuees, the local government presented uncustomary branch of power hierarchy, they were from the center, they were used to receiving directions right from the top without any intermediaries. It was hard for the Kazakh authorities also because there was not much made on the national theme, so there was practically nothing they could see. Throughout TsOKS’s existence they had to press the studio in order to get any satisfaction of their queries. Familiar already Agitprop representative Tokareva in the winter of 1941 wrote to secretary of TsK KPbK:

“Despite the attention and help from TsK KPbK and SNK KazSSR to the newly organized studio, the chairman of the Cinematography Issues Committee comr.Bolshakov gives wrong orientations – to evade control and guidance from TsK KPbK in the work process of the studio, which creates problems. For example, comr.Bolshakov ordered the director of the studio comr.Tikhonov not to give us [TsK KPbK] to review scripts of non-Kazakh films, because, allegedly, they will be reviewed by TsK VKPb. To resolve the problem, a special

¹⁵⁰ AP RK: 708/7-1/251/p1

conversation was held with secretary of Agitprop comr. Buzurbayev,¹⁵¹ the studio director comr. Tikhonov and artistic director comr. Ermler, after which we received the scripts. Artistic union of the studio was created on comr. Bolshakov's orders without including a representative of TsK KPbK, though comr. Bolshakov knows very well that artistic unions of studios should include a representative of the ruling party organ, on territory of which the studio is located. As a result of such orientation from comr. Bolshakov, the studio workers usually turn to TsK KPbK only with supply and material issues (getting apartments, building materials, etc.)”¹⁵²

This problem became serious enough for Skvortsov to send it to Moscow to the deputy head of Agitation and Propaganda Department.¹⁵³ To acquire some control SNK KazSSR devised a project – Regional Cinematography Issues Committee, which would change the power dynamics of cinematography.¹⁵⁴ The chairman of the Cinematography Issues Committee Bolshakov, being a man who was eager to keep his power over the cinema industry panicked. He wrote to Skvortsov that some SNK KazSSR members, and their chairman Undasynov among them, spread “a wrong idea about the direction of the work of evacuated to Alma-Ata Mosfilm and Lenfilm. These comrades think that the evacuated studios should make films mainly on Kazakhstan material.”¹⁵⁵ He clearly was unhappy with such development and was trying to keep control over the studio, to neutralize the SNK members. He stated that such regional committees were discussed by TsK VKPb and SNK of USSR and the idea of them was rejected. “Mosfilm and Lenfilm, being studios from the capital, before the war released more than 50% of all films that go to all-Union screens. Thus, switching of major part to Kazakhstani thematic would significantly limit the release of highly artistic films on current topics, that have all-Union significance”¹⁵⁶ (as if Kazakh films could not be highly artistic and on current topics). He wanted

¹⁵¹ Gabdulla Buzurbayev died on December 26, 1941 in a plane crash along with other 25 TsK KPbK employees. The letter of Tokareva is dated December 26, 1941. Abdykalykov became secretary of Agitprop after him.

¹⁵² AP RK: 708/5-1/112/p46

¹⁵³ AP RK: 708/5-1/112/p48

¹⁵⁴ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 37

¹⁵⁵ AP RK: 708/6-2/567/p10

¹⁵⁶ AP RK: 708/6-2/567/p10

Skvortsov to make SNK members stop spreading incorrect political motives and stop disorienting the studio's work by that.¹⁵⁷

"You supported and agreed with me on this by appointing comr. Tikhonov as the studio director," wrote Bolshakov showing that he had his grip on the studio by putting his own man in charge.¹⁵⁸ Many complaints on Tikhonov (usually by Tokareva) suggest that Bolshakov found the right person for himself, not as firm and authoritative, which kept power in Bolshakov's hands. Similar happened to K.A. Polonskiy and Mikhail Romm, who were placed as plenipotentiary and artistic chief of all Central Asian cinema.¹⁵⁹ 'Kremlin Theatre' document collection said that conflicts seem to be the core of all archival documents.¹⁶⁰ All due to the fact that the fight for power in the Soviet cinematography was constant, different agencies were distrustful of each other. Bolshakov was not a popular and beloved figure in cinematography. This is expressed in different reports by Agitprop of all Soviet Union and in Romm's personal letter to Stalin.¹⁶¹

Alternatively, there were other channels of relationships of the evacuees with the local authorities. Because of de-centralization, a lot of decisions were made on the spot, bypassing the Cinematography Issues Committee, already made decisions from above could be avoided or postponed.¹⁶² Filmmakers also had separate relationships with local authorities, although often these were used to receive privileges. Film director Yefim Dzigan was suspended from production of 'Regional Committee Secretary' (*Sekretar Raikoma*) by studio administration. He sent complaints about this to the secretary of TsK KPbK Skvortsov, to the secretary of Agitprop

¹⁵⁷ Pozner, "Daleko ot Voiny?" 37

¹⁵⁸ AP RK: 708/6-2/567/p10

¹⁵⁹ Pozner, "Daleko ot Voiny?" 35

¹⁶⁰ K.M. Anderson and L.V. Maximenkov, *Kultura i Vlast Ot Stalina Do Gorbacheva: Kremlevskii Kinoteatr 1928-1953. Dokumenty*. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005), p.11.

¹⁶¹ Anderson "Kultura i Vlast Ot Stalina Do Gorbacheva," 647-649; 974-679.

¹⁶² Pozner, "Daleko ot Voiny?" 48

of KazSSR Abdykalykov, to Bolshakov and couple more places.¹⁶³ This proves there were separate relationships, and not only Kazakhstani workers had them, evacuees as well. Tokareva was very disappointed by the studio work and in particular with the administration and Tikhonov, who “signed in his own helplessness.”¹⁶⁴ She criticized Tikhonov for not putting Dzigan to order but did admit that the suspension of Dzigan was justified. She listed somewhat arrogant behavior on part of Dzigan, which supports the idea of Pozner that some of evacuee filmmakers were thinking about their status and did not feel the war as it would have been felt in Moscow. Different loyalties and the fight for the power was a major concern of tensions.

In spite of this, the tensions that existed on TsOKS were nothing compared to the situation of Soiuzdetfilm (Union Children Film Studio) that was evacuated to Stalinabad (modern Dushanbe), Tajikistan. Tikhonov, TsOKS director was optimistic saying on one of party bureau meetings that “In comparison with other national studios...our situation is not bad. Considering we arrived at an almost empty place.”¹⁶⁵ Unlike Alma-Ata, Stalinabad was a further and more secluded space, which did not facilitate the creative freedom, but instead led to decadent mood.¹⁶⁶ Soiuzdetfilm was one of the leading studios of the Soviet Union, but because it was replaced to Stalinabad, the studio found itself in decline. Evacuation was emotionally deteriorating people everywhere, but in Stalinabad people felt constant longing to return. Klementii Mints, film director and scriptwriter of Soiuzdetfilm was begging Bolshakov to transfer him to a place that was not a cultural desert.¹⁶⁷ The journey of this studio to Stalinabad was even harder than that of Mosfilms or Lenfilms, they reached Alma-Ata, but had to go further. If TsOKS had problems with equipment arriving, Soiuzdetfilm had it two-fold.

¹⁶³ AP RK: 708/6-1/554/p1-2

¹⁶⁴ AP RK: 708/6-1/554/p2

¹⁶⁵ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p28back

¹⁶⁶ Seth Bernstein, “Wartime Filmmaking on the Margins: Soiuzdetfilm in Evacuation in Stalinabad, 1941–43,” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 9, no. 1 (2015): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503132.2015.1011869>.

¹⁶⁷ Bernstein, “Wartime filmmaking on the margins,” 24

The relationships on the studio was even worse. Creative personnel and the studio administration had schism in relationships, each side blaming the other for the unproductivity of the studio.¹⁶⁸ The administration accused filmmakers of being unable to adapt to the wartime production mode. The workers blamed the studio for not being able to organize the work properly. Such accusations were fueled by the behavior of several members of administration during the evacuation.¹⁶⁹ Sergei Iutkevich had organized shooting expedition to a film that was not ready for production and prematurely left the capital. In addition, Tajik government also tried to insert themselves in the filmmaking hierarchy. Just as in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan wanted the studio to create films based on national material and was trying to persuade the studio, but its administration did not consider that these films were worth spending time and effort.¹⁷⁰ Intervention of the authorities increased already existing tensions inside the studio. Workers and Tajik government started to have closer relationships, simultaneously avoiding control of the studio administration. Mints, for example, took a script of the film he wrote directly to the Tajik TsK.¹⁷¹ Bernstein suggests, that Soiuzdetfilm situation served as an example of how disrupted hierarchies could negatively affect the work on any studio and people personally, and for that reason Regional Cinematography Issues Committee project in Kazakhstan was discontinued.¹⁷²

The tensions on TsOKS started right away, when the question of power dynamics arose. Unwillingness to share control or relinquish it was a struggle that never ended. Kazakh state administration was often trying to pressure the studio to stop asking and start doing, to make Kazakh films and to teach Kazakh cadres.

¹⁶⁸ Bernstein, "Wartime filmmaking on the margins," 30

¹⁶⁹ Bernstein, "Wartime filmmaking on the margins," 30

¹⁷⁰ Bernstein, "Wartime filmmaking on the margins," 33

¹⁷¹ Bernstein, "Wartime filmmaking on the margins," 31

¹⁷² Bernstein, "Wartime filmmaking on the margins," 33

Kazakh cadres

The hope of Kazakhstan to develop national cinema was deeply rooted in the question of educating local population in the professions necessary for it, both technical and creative. A series of classes were conducted for such purposes, for montage and editing skills there were courses, for acting there was Roshal's group, VGIK had several classes and lectures on similar and other topics.¹⁷³ For scriptwriting Kazakh writers were writing the novel, then they gave it to experienced scriptwriters and together they appropriated the novel to a film.¹⁷⁴ However, for the republic it was imperative that not simply local population was taught, but as many representatives of Kazakh ethnicity as possible. VGIK director Ivan Glotov wrote to TsK KPbK about the deficit of Kazakh students saying that "In the previous years, the Institute did not give enough attention to Kazakh students. Testament to this is that the person to receive a higher education in cinematography was the first and the only one so far (K.Siranov)."¹⁷⁵ The letter Glotov wrote shows what portion of Kazakhs were taught, out of ninety seven enrollees that year, only eight were Kazakhs, two of whom were men and were taken to the front anyway. By the summer of 1943, the shortage of men started to manifest itself, be that male actors or male students.

A report written approximately in September 1941 without title, date or signature, but seems to be from outside the studio (perhaps Agitprop), listed extensively all measures that should be taken on TsOKS regarding national films and cadres. "It is necessary to include in all major departments of 'Lenfilm' several local cadres [...] When choosing local cadres [they] need to aim at the maximum number of Kazakhs."¹⁷⁶ Other reports often provide statistics of hired people. In February 1942, "In total the studio has 972 workers. 253 came from Mosfilm, 151

¹⁷³ Pozner, "Daleko ot Voyny?" 61

¹⁷⁴ AP RK: 708/7-1/708/p107-108

¹⁷⁵ AP RK: 708/7-1/708/p171

¹⁷⁶ AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p29

from Lenfilm. From the local population 545 persons were hired, among them 96 Kazakhs.”¹⁷⁷ In June 1942, 119 out of 1222 were Kazakhs; in January 1944, 144 out of 1430.¹⁷⁸ The need to hire people of Kazakh ethnicity and the need to report about it in such statistics reflects korenizatsiya effects from 1930s, or what was left of it. The need to hire workers of the nationality of the republic still existed, but it was not pursued as much, Russian workers still sometimes were in priority. This especially concerned creative worker positions. A 1942 decree by TsK KPbK assessed the work of TsOKS on cadre preparation and stated that “Kazakhs are used mainly in technical job – no preparation of creative collective has been made.”¹⁷⁹

Relationships among Kazakh cadres and the evacuees was seen by the locals as problematic as well. Yesbatyrov said that “Some heads [of departments] look on Kazakh cadres as bastards [illegitimate children].”¹⁸⁰ Siranov, the deputy director of TsOKS, thought that “some heads of departments distrust Kazakh cadres.”¹⁸¹ On party bureau meeting, he said that Levin did not want to take Kazakh workers because he did not know them, to which Tikhonov disagreed.¹⁸² Levin, in fact, was one of those who actually supported the development of Kazakh cinema, he was one of the first to work with them (‘Amangeldi’) and he wanted to continue making Kazakh films, but was not allowed to by the studio.¹⁸³ The protocol of that meeting also ruled that Siranov and Vainshtok should keep their “abnormal relationships” professional. Based on these meeting minutes, Siranov seems like a conflicting person, he is always voicing his complaints. Many evacuees saw him as the agent of the TsK KPbK, “like a representative from TsK KPbK and of Kazakh people, not defending the interests of the studio.”¹⁸⁴ Kazakh workers

¹⁷⁷ AP RK: 708/6-1/566/p16

¹⁷⁸ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 61

¹⁷⁹ AP RK: 708/5-1/701/p17

¹⁸⁰ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p56

¹⁸¹ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p57

¹⁸² AP RK: 1302/1/1/p55.

¹⁸³ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 373

¹⁸⁴ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p53

also did not like him because of his connection to Kazakh authorities, some were jealous of his privileged position.¹⁸⁵

There was also a problem of unprofessional Kazakh workers getting paid a lot (700 to 1300 rubles), while they were bad workers.¹⁸⁶ But there were some good filmmakers as well, people such as comrade Beisekov, who before worked as a director in Kazakh Academy Theatre. However, in February 1943 there was a report on Beisekov, which said that he pushed inappropriate demands, he wanted to direct a movie himself, while not having an experience in cinema, he simply “never touched a camera.”¹⁸⁷ Studio leadership, Tikhonov, Pyryev (as artistic director) and Siranov, all agreed to fire Beisekov. Perhaps, over a period of time Beisekov acquired a sense that he was important, perhaps because he was one of the local filmmakers that were to be cared about by republican authorities and, thus, the studio. It is possible that some bad apples among locals made it a little harder to trust others.

The possible answer to the distrust from the evacuees toward local workers could also be explained by several occasions that took place in the beginning of the work on TsOKS. When shooting ‘Kazakh cinematic concert’ (*Kazakhskii kinokontsert*) actors were taken from local theatre, and studio workers were complaining that these Kazakh actors “treat the shooting ugly,” meaning they often ignore the shooting or come late, which probably contributed to evacuee thinking of Kazakhs as unprofessional.¹⁸⁸ Other person calls Yesbatyrov, the one who would be later pressed with antisemitic charges, and one other person “lazy.”¹⁸⁹ Ermler said in one of the meetings: “We, specialists, want to help Kazakhs in learning the art of cinema,” but there were people who did not want to learn, but wanted to work on their own, which Ermler thought was

¹⁸⁵ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 91

¹⁸⁶ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p27

¹⁸⁷ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p27

¹⁸⁸ AP RK: 1302/1/2/p94

¹⁸⁹ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p28back

too soon, they were not ready. He also said that only three persons went to the organized classes, “[...] but I want them to understand that we are not their babysitters.”¹⁹⁰

Babysitters, it seems, was exactly what the locals wanted for Kazakh cadres. In a report that detailed measures on preparation of local cadres, when talking about “possible forms of help” Lenfilm workers were supposed to help all local filmmakers on daily basis.¹⁹¹ In every step of the production the evacuees should have been aiding locals, be their consultants, work together, conduct lectures and seminars on all professions in cinema; experienced directors, writers, and others should have been attached to Kazakh personnel. The wording also was “Lenfilm must help”, “Lenfilm needs to provide lecturers,” which conveys the feeling that it was Lenfilm who was indebted to Kazakhstan.¹⁹² Tikhonov disagreed with such organization of work, he disagreed that Kazakhs should have been in every department of the studio, instead they should be in main areas of work, and be attached to experienced ones, not the other way around.¹⁹³

By June 1943 the situation with cadres did not improve. Agitprop secretary wrote a request to TsK KPbK about the future of the studio and touched upon the problem of Kazakh workers:

“Such indifferent treatment is felt in questions of bringing up of Kazakh cadres in cinema. [...] TsK KPbK sent several people to the studio, cultural and capable. They were eager to learn from masters of cinema and become workers of Kazakh Soviet cinema. The studio leadership, instead of surrounding them with attention and teaching them, continues neglecting and pushing them away. There was even a number of situations when they tried to disperse (*razognat*’) some of them.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p28back

¹⁹¹ AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p33

¹⁹² AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p33

¹⁹³ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p55

¹⁹⁴ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p33

The Kazakh administration was feeling that all their efforts to promote Kazakh workers were only put aside and pushed away by the studio. There still seems to be a conception in their heads that the evacuees should “surround them with attention.”

Employing Kazakh nationals to work on the studio was important for the local government as a part of the development of national cinematography. From the very beginning they were insisting on employing as much of them as possible, however, the numbers did not exceed ten per cent of the total workforce on the studio. This policy was a remnant of the korenizatsiya policy in more ways than just emphasis on hiring nationals. The probable reason why there were not so many Kazakhs could be the same as why korenizatsiya evoked grudge in European populations – Kazakh workers were too unexperienced, they led rural way of life, and the number of proletariats probably did not rise in the beginning of 1940s as compared to 1930s.

Culmination of tensions: Siranov's complaint

Delays in work, constant requests of material support, mistreatment of Kazakh cadres and Kazakh themes metaphorically culminated in the complaint Kabysh Siranov wrote to TsK KPbK in the summer of 1943. It reflects all the issues Kazakh filmmakers had with the work on the studio and involves specific vivid examples. He started by reminding that TsOKS was supposed to develop Kazakh cinematography, “a big and honorable task of bringing up Kazakh cadres.” According to him, “The central print wrote that Alma-Ata is future Soviet Hollywood.”¹⁹⁵ It indeed was the greatest ambition of TsK KPbK, to create such a cinema industry in Kazakhstan, so that films would go to the Union and maybe world level.¹⁹⁶ However,

“The administration [of the studio] and the leading filmmakers understood the task in a wrong way. They think that by bringing up Kazakh cadres, releasing some film on Kazakh topic they are making a huge favor¹⁹⁷ to Kazakhstan. Based on this absolutely unserious, at times non-party understating of their task, they treat the production of Kazakh films

¹⁹⁵ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p44

¹⁹⁶ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 39

¹⁹⁷ Underlining kept as in the original.

speculatively: ‘If Kazakhstan will help us with petroleum, premises, food – we, if you please, will make a Kazakh film. If Kazakhstan will not [give us anything] – we will not give [the films] too.’¹⁹⁸

It is no surprise that such attitude from the evacuees would cause a negative reaction from Siranov. He had close connection with the Kazakh authorities and at the same time was working inside the studio, he saw what had been given to the studio, and he saw how the evacuees treated and responded to the demands made by Kazakhs. Siranov provided examples from inside the studio reactions. He talked about Leonid Trauberg and Ivan Pyryev, ex and current artistic directors saying things such as “why are you asking us to produce Kazakh films when you do not give us neither butter nor meat” or “Kazakhstan very badly feeds us and despite that demands films from us.”¹⁹⁹ The evacuees perhaps got used to receiving perks from the local authorities, who were happy to give them in the beginning, but seeing no result they started to press more, whilst the evacuees, at least some of them, started to use this system for their own gain.

Siranov, as if replying to these complaints listed everything the local authorities and institutions had done for the good of the studio. He listed all the living spaces the studio workers had been given saying that it was “a lot more living space than any other organization has, they live, considering the situation of the city, in the best conditions.”²⁰⁰ No doubt, he refers to the fact that Alma-Ata is receiving not only the two film studios, but a lot more of evacuees, cultural institutions, industries and people. He proceeded by saying that the studio had four different canteens for the evacuees and their families, and in addition they received dry rations (*suhoi paiok*). Some of the more famous actors and directors even used their position to get individual rations.²⁰¹ “The studio workers eat much better than defense enterprises workers and local

¹⁹⁸ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p44-45

¹⁹⁹ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p45

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ This might have been the way these famous people were helping less fortunate evacuee friends, as many people were trying to use connection in their situation. The authorities did not know what they were using it for,

cultural workers.”²⁰² When listing canteens Siranov mentioned that some of them served good food, while others were the ones of the best in the city. This shows that evacuees, that had been living in the center for a long time were used to different standards, and they had a different point of reference compared to the locals regarding the food quality. But it is not the fault of locals their food standards were lower. This also suggests that the evacuees did not see or did not want to admit that the War had altered the conditions of life and that they had to adapt.

In addition to what TsK KPbK and SNK KazSSR did for the studio, Siranov talked about how other institutions of party organs helped in production of films. Two theatres had to merge into one temporarily and leave their premises, different city level party organs provided the studio with material and food, brought together local population to help different films (as extras most likely), petroleum, food was provided extra. Ex-secretary of another city helped in delivery of a steamship, which was featured in one of the films.²⁰³ Still “Some of the studio workers are claiming that they produced a number of films without any help from Kazakhstan, on their own.”²⁰⁴ Such statements felt “unfair” to Siranov, and perhaps other locals as well. They felt left out, even in non-Kazakh productions their role was not acknowledged.

In this complaint, Siranov spells out how exactly Kazakhstani institutions and authorities felt about the studio and its workers. He stated: “All organizations treated the needs and requests from the studio favorably and with respect. But scamming attempts from some of the studio workers spoiled this relationship. On false pretenses, they took from local organizations all they personally needed.”²⁰⁵ He gave two examples, one of the head of the scriptwriting studio, who asked and received from tobacco factory several thousand packs of cigarettes to send to the front,

as far as they were concerned, the evacuees were using it for themselves. Siranov, however, could have known this fact, but overlooked it.

²⁰² AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p46

²⁰³ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p47

²⁰⁴ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p46

²⁰⁵ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p47

which ended up in his own possession. The other example was of Republican Historical Museum, which gave rare valuable exhibits for historical films, but the studio workers lost them, broke them and damaged them, which is why the museum stopped giving exhibits. “Local organizations started to treat the studio with distrust. The studio is to blame itself. It compromised itself.”²⁰⁶ Not only the Kazakh government was keen on hosting two big studios of the all-Union significance, different organizations were too. The relationships among locals, especially local institutions, started off as good, hopeful, but the studio spoiled them. This neglect and disrespect from the studio allowed locals to think that the evacuees thought of themselves as superior, not only separate people and institutions, but the entire nation. Russians had that hint of colonialism in their mentality, which led them to disdain Kazakh culture.²⁰⁷

TsOKS did not care much about Kazakh themes in films, they treated them as “alien”, did not allocate materials or equipment. According to Siranov, all Kazakh films were produced only by local workers, though as he noted, they were in the plans for the studio. Kazakh novellas were being in production twice as long as any other novella, ‘Cinematic concert’ was threatened by Tikhonov to be conserved if the authorities would not close the opera theatre for shootings. This proves that Tikhonov, meaning administration, supported the bargain-based relationships. Full length feature film ‘Jambul’ was being in preparation period for seven month and still had almost nothing except for the script, because studio did not give materials for props and costumes. Local organizations provided extra materials for the film. The studio director Tikhonov fired Yesbatyrov from directorship of the film as “incapable worker,” to which Siranov could not agree. Yesbatyrov, though “having a number of flaws²⁰⁸ is still not a hopeless worker. With ‘Jambul’ he was and still is working well.”²⁰⁹ When Siranov wanted to figure out

²⁰⁶ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p48

²⁰⁷ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 90

²⁰⁸ By writing that, Siranov indicated that he defended Yesbatyrov not because he was a local, but because of his merit. Kazakhs did not try to favor their own nation.

²⁰⁹ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p52

why Yesbatyrov was fired, Tikhonov replied that it was a proposition from SNK KazSSR chairman, which turned out to be not true.²¹⁰ It turned out that some sly people such as Vainshtok and Obolenskiy knowing that this film was a “lucrative job” (*hlebnoye mesto*), tried to grab the leadership of the film for themselves and put their person as a director.”²¹¹ That is why they made Tikhonov fire Yesbatyrov. These Vainshtok and Obolensky were also featured in the Okasov case that I presented at the very beginning of the thesis, which featured them making a man bring an entire horde of cattle within twelve hours.

This complaint was the biggest and the most elaborate complaint about the work of the studio. Usually, discontentment is accompanied with the report on the work of the studio, as being an official document that has to reflect on negative aspects of the work. However, this one seems to be led to by accumulating irritation and perhaps anger. Many of the instances provided by Siranov suggest that evacuees put themselves higher than the locals. Some were not afraid to abuse their position, they portrayed traits of colonialism and possibly racism. On such premises the tensions are not unexpected.

Re-evacuation leftovers

Perhaps when the re-evacuation was announced both evacuees and locals drew a breath. Notwithstanding, re-evacuation also meant problems for the TsK KPbK, the work on development of national cinematography conducted on TsOKS did not seem sufficient to them. First bells of the re-evacuation rang in January 1943, when the decision of Mosfilm return was made. Gradually, Mosfilm filmmakers were summoned to Moscow to start restoring the studio. This meant also taking a part of the equipment TsOKS had, and Mosfilm equipment was the technical base of the studio, because Lenfilm did not manage to evacuate much of their

²¹⁰ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p52

²¹¹ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p52

equipment. The major call to return to Moscow induced in a lot of evacuees a “suitcase mood,” they were waiting to go home any moment.²¹² Departure of Mosfilm induced an attempt from Kazakh authorities to rename TSOKS to Kazakhfilm, the other reason being the “absence of the possibility of restoration of Lenfilm in Leningrad in closest future.”²¹³ How did that mean that the studio should be renamed remains unclear.

Re-evacuation inevitably brought Kazakh filmmakers and administration to an understanding that the work would have to be restructured and the studio in Alma-Ata would have to find a way to work on its own. In June 1943, Agitprop secretary wrote a request to TsK KPbK worried about the future of the studio “Bolshakov is gradually calling back people to Moscow and taking out the equipment, he does not even consider it important to notify authorities of the Republic about it. Why is equipment being taken out, for what purpose, is he thinking to leave anything for Alma-Ata studio, what are its perspectives – these questions interest us a lot.”²¹⁴ The authorities were worried and alarmed that the studio was already leaving and almost nothing of what they expected had been completed. Neglect in the studio caused acceleration of the discontent of the authorities, their tone became pushier, they even proposed to ask Bolshakov questions directly, who happened to be visiting Alma-Ata around that time. The questions were basic, such as what should be the number of films produced per year and what equipment should stay, which shows how little Cinematography Issues Committee accounted for that. The new statistics said that there were 500 local workers, 236 of whom were Kazakhs, and only 24 are professionals (directors, cameramen, assistants, actors). “Both in number and in their qualifications, this is far from satisfying the needs of the Alma-Ata studio [...] it is necessary to secure a number of people from evacuees for Alma-Ata studio [...] without whom the studio, as

²¹² AP RK: 1302/1/4a/p152

²¹³ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p34

²¹⁴ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p33

one of the advanced in the Union, cannot exist.”²¹⁵ The authorities, Agitprop in particular, were feeling entitled to be demanding what they did not receive. As gaining more confidence by the end of the request, Agitprop proceeds to state: “Confirm the plan for the release of Kazakh full-length films [...] In 1944, renew the production of ‘Jambul’.”²¹⁶

In the beginning of 1944, Lenfilm started planning its return to Leningrad and distributing workers among there and Alma-Ata.²¹⁷ The last attempt of Kazakh Central Committee to gain something with TsOKS before total re-evacuation was conducting the Week of Kazakh Cinema. The Week was characterized by the screening of the films already created on Kazakh material, several lectures and guest talks by leading creative workers about the work of cinematography, TsOKS and the future of Kazakh cinema.²¹⁸ To compare, Stalinabad did not receive satisfactory results for their national cinema from the evacuation either. In May 1943, when Soiuzdetfilm was packing to re-evacuate Tajik government trying to keep equipment forbade its removal, which was resolved only through intervention from Moscow and Bolshakov.²¹⁹ As a last goodbye they conducted two-week courses for Tajik youth.

By mid-1944, the studio in Alma-Ata was entering its decline. Newsreel studio and Feature film studios in Alma-Ata merged into one and became Kazakhfilm and Siranov became the studio director. Cinema theatre ‘Ala-Tau’ was restored as a theatre, it ceased to be a part of the studio.²²⁰ In 1945, there was a fire in one of the pavilions, that damaged the central pavilion, props warehouses, some equipment and the roof of the building.²²¹ Repair works would involve a lot of money and time, especially with the winter coming.²²² As if this was not enough, the

²¹⁵ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p33back

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ AP RK: 1302/1/4b/p97

²¹⁸ Siranov, “Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana,” 77-79

²¹⁹ Bernstein, “Wartime filmmaking on the margins,” 36

²²⁰ AP RK: 8/8/575/p86

²²¹ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 73

²²² Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 360

vultures were circling around the studio and stealing as much as they could, including film equipment. An audit of the studio in 1946 found that the studio had 1.7 million rubles squandered or thieved.

From the end of evacuation, the Alma-Ata studio was left in a disadvantageous situation. The buildings were either redistributed or damaged, the equipment was either damaged or stolen, the work on educating local cadres did not work out well, there were hardly enough professionals to produce good films. From that time for the next ten years the studio was in decline, producing only newsreels and barely being able to release two full features ('Jambul' (1952) and 'The Golden Horn' (*Zolotoi rog*, 1948)).

Conclusion

The evacuation of Mosfilm and Lenfilm and formation of TsOKS has been often accredited as the beginning of Kazakh cinema industry, as the boost that the republic was so waiting for. Although the two and a half years that TsOKS existed cannot be dismissed, the overall result on the Kazakh cinematography was not grand as the republican authorities had hoped for in the beginning of the evacuation. Building up expectations, Kazakh government tried to give to the studio as much as possible, so that those resources would help the development of Kazakh films and consequently would lift up the level of the Republic. However, filmmakers from the center had their own idea of their purpose in the evacuation.

The evacuees in general divided into two categories. The first one consisted of people who understood the situation of the war, who transformed their working habits and accounted for the shortages of resources. Among this group were people who wanted to help Kazakhstan in developing its national cinema. The second category were the people who relaxed in a place far from the front and atrocities and did not want to change their mode of work. This group included those who abused their status and connections with the local government to achieve personal

gain and nearly blackmailed local authorities with their power over making films on Kazakh themes.

Albeit such attitude from several evacuee filmmakers, Kazakh authorities were not helpless. They tried to establish their influence by trying to enter the hierarchy of control over the studio activities. Attempt at creating Regional Cinematography Issues Committee showed the studio leadership and Cinematography Issues Committee of the USSR that Kazakhstan was not going to give the idea of national cinema, that they were determined to achieve the desirable outcome. Kazakh authorities kept pressing the studio to produce Kazakh films and were somewhat successful. Constant struggle with the studio on this issue will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Kazakh Films During the War

Besides teaching Kazakhs how to make films, the other major purpose of TsOKS, in the eyes of TsK KPbK, was making films on local topics. This was the main preoccupation throughout residing of evacuees in Alma-Ata. For Kazakhstan such films were a way of presenting itself to other republics, of their culture, of the work done, of their contribution to the war and to Soviet Union functioning overall. Getting the studio to make these films was a tricky task. The studio saw as its goal production of films for the whole Union, the local theme did not interest the studio as much. Coming from the center, many of them never had to create anything else except all-Union films.

Kazakh government tirelessly reminded the studio that it should create Kazakh films too, that war films could be made about the rear as well, and that Kazakhstan could be a good example of the rear. They complained that evacuees did not see the importance of such a topic as Kazakhstan and the rear.²²³ To calm the authorities the studio was promising to make films, but it was taking a minor position for the studio leadership. Oftentimes, the many scripts on Kazakh topics were not accepted, the ones that were took a long time to rewrite and later to produce. This did not go unnoticed by Agitprop and TsK KPbK, they often complained that the films are in production for much longer than a regular amount of time for similar films.

By the end of the war, TsOKS produced six films based on Kazakh material. These were three shorts ‘Song of a Giant’ (*Pesn velikana*) ‘Soldier’s son’ (*Syn boitsa*) and ‘The White Rose’ (*Belaya roza*) two of which became Kazakh ‘Fighting Film Collection’ (*Boyevoi kinosbornik*) and the other one was included into another collection. In 1942, Alma-Ata Newsreel Studio released a film that was a combination of feature film and documentary material, which was

²²³ Siranov, “Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana,” 142

called ‘To you, front’ (*Tebe, front*). Next came ‘To the Sound of Dombyras’²²⁴ (*Pod zvuki dombry*) the concert of Kazakh folk music recorded and edited into a film, which was usually referred to as ‘Kazakh Cinematic Concert.’ The last one to be produced during the war was a full-length feature film ‘The Songs of Abay’ (*Pesni Abaya*), about Kazakh poet and philosopher. There was one more film that was in the plans since before the evacuation, but its production was dragged and postponed all the time, it was on and off and on again. It was dragged so much that it was released only in 1952. The film was ‘Jambul’ and was about a Kazakh folk singer, who was still alive when the film started production, but unfortunately did not live to see the film.

The quality of films also did not please Kazakhs. Kabysh Siranov wrote in his book about the history of Kazakh cinema an extensive criticism of those films. Even though the book was all about praising the Soviet state and Russian filmmakers for their endowment into developing national cinematography, Siranov criticized the films’ plot and the representation of certain themes in them. He wrote that all the films of that period were alike “like twins,” made by a specific standard they did not provide much depth to characters and were unrelatable.²²⁵ This chapter will discuss not only the problems during the making of Kazakh films, it will also look onto the films themselves and analyze their plot and messages.

Kazakh themed films

Kazakh authorities were preoccupied with the attitude of the studio towards topic of Kazakhstan in films. A decree by TsK KPbK from April 1942 assessed the work of TsOKS, saying that the thematic plan was good, but the administration “underestimated the importance of

²²⁴ Dombyra is Kazakh string instrument in the form of a long-necked lute, the most common of all Kazakh instruments. Its variations can be met in many Turkic cultures.

²²⁵ Siranov, “Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana,” 143

creating films about the rear and Kazakhstan as well.”²²⁶ Another request from Agitprop said that the studio “neglects the growth of Kazakh cinematography.”²²⁷ After five months of the studio working in Alma-Ata, Kazakh films like ‘Jambul’ had no ready script and not one short was produced. Which is why TsK ruled to create several Kazakh films. The decree showed that local government would insist on and demand Kazakh films no matter what, they thought that it was the studio’s duty to create them. They were worried that the development of Kazakh cinema is very slow. An unsigned report stated that the list of Kazakh films presented by the studio director Tikhonov was a formal document that did not show the real picture.²²⁸ In April 1943, a list of new scripts on Kazakh themes was sent to Agitprop secretary, listing eight new scrips with summaries, one of which is even written by Brodsky.²²⁹ Of those eight only ‘Abay’ was eventually released. In the same year, the list of films screened in Alma-Ata region had 119 films in total.²³⁰ Only six of them were Kazakh themed, which included two shorts and two pre-war films; also, some Ukrainian, Georgian, Uzbek and Mongolian productions. Kazakh authorities from the very beginning were fighting for the studio to make Kazakh films, but effectively by 1943 only two short novellas were released. Locals were concerned that the studio did not put enough attention to Kazakh films.

The fact that TsOKS was ushering the local theme aside manifested itself in different forms. The studio produced ‘Kazakh Fighting Film Collection’ consisting of two small novellas, which “were in the making for a year” while usually it takes three to four months to make similar films.²³¹ This was because “Kazakh films on the studio are considered Kazakhstani, and are pushed back to the background – they do not give equipment, shooting pavilions, etc.” A new project, “Kazakh cinematic concert’, not a feature film, but just a shooting of musicians was also

²²⁶ AP RK: 708/5-1/701/p16

²²⁷ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p32back

²²⁸ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 41

²²⁹ AP RK: 708/7-1/708/p107-108

²³⁰ AP RK: 8/8/575/p44

²³¹ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p32back

in the making for too long (more than usual two-three month). Vainshtok wanted to send all the filmmakers working on ‘Jambul’ to do agricultural work instead of shooting.²³² SNK KazSSR chairman Undasynov wrote that some of evacuees were dismissing Kazakh themes because the goal of the studio was to produce all-Union and maybe global scale films.²³³ Undasynov was in perplexity as to why films about Kazakhstan cannot be of all-Union or global scale. For him, the work of Kazakhstani people was equally worth noting as the rest. The aforementioned Agitprop request also stated the role of Kazakh soldiers on the front, trying to show that their republic was not inferior to any other, because “warriors Kazakhs” also fought and died, contributed equally to the War.²³⁴ Why then their national cinema should be inferior? Such attitude from the studio workers evoked in Kazakh authorities the idea that they were inferior, which they did not intend to accept. Perhaps, because of this pressure, the studio did create three shorts for fighting film collection the same year, so that the government would lighten the control and stop demanding.

It is worth noting that the novella ‘Soldier’s son’ though is said to be Kazakh, in fact the only Kazakh character in the film is playing only a supporting role. The plot of the short is revolving around a Russian soldier Vorobyev who in a conversation with his Kazakh companion says he does not like children. The soldiers are amid the fight, they temporarily pushed back Nazis, but they returned. As a shield Nazis used women and children from a neighboring village. One woman shouted “Shoot them!” and was shot herself, falling on the ground with her infant son still alive. Soviet soldiers managed to counterattack and save villagers. The baby was still lying on his mother’s dead body, so Kazakh soldier volunteered to get him. When he was wounded and could not continue, Vorobyev went after him and the baby. After the battle, the Kazakh soldier wanted to take the baby and send him to his family in Kazakhstan. Vorobyev took a liking to a baby and asked to keep him too. Kazakh gave way and the boy was sent to

²³² Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 45

²³³ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voiny?” 39

²³⁴ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p32 backside

Vorobyev's mother. It is interesting that Siranov in his book when describing the film wrote that a soldier was sent to get baby from Nazis, but a bullet killed him, so the Kazakh soldier went after the baby and later sent him to his family. Was that an attempt on Siranov's part to embellish or there was another version of the film is unclear.

In December 1942, a report by Tikhonov on plan for 1942 had a list of films produced, which included the only local film, 'Kazakh Fighting Film Collection.'²³⁵ The report stated that in its majority, the plan had been fulfilled with only minor delays on couple of films, which should be sorted by the beginning of the new year. 'Kazakh Fighting Film Collection' had delays also, like many other films, due to the coming of winter, which meant that summer-oriented script needed to be changed and, thus, delayed. The report also stated that the plan of seventeen films (not counting Kazakh collection) was fulfilled, unlike usual eleven-twelve films of Mosfilm or Lenfilm. However, some of them were projects that moved there together with evacuees like 'A guy from our city' (*Paren iz nashego goroda*). Tikhonov also noted that a successful fulfillment of the plan was achieved even with worse technical base than they had before the War. During the summer of the next year, Agitprop secretary wrote a request concerning the help Republican organizations provided to the studio to appropriate the given buildings by supplying it with working force and raw materials. "Thanks to this, building process on the studio was finished in a short time and in 1942 the studio released 11 full-length films and 2 film-collections."²³⁶ This shows that whatever the studio promised to finish in December 1942 was not finished, because Tikhonov's report listed thirteen films and five collections that would be released by the end of the year.²³⁷

At the same time as Tikhonov, Agitprop instructor Tokareva wrote her own report on the same matter, where she agreed that the plan would be fulfilled by the end of the year, but listed

²³⁵ AP RK: 708/6-1/565/p35-36

²³⁶ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p32

²³⁷ AP RK: 708/6-1/565/p35

problems that had occurred during the year, mainly reasons for delays.²³⁸ One of them was the process of remaking scripts, always changing them for time of the year (with summer coming winter-oriented script needed to be re-appropriated, but then, when they were not finished during the summer, the script again had to be altered), and modifications that occur if the director changes. This could just show that she and Agitprop of KazSSR were simply not entirely familiar with the process of filmmaking. Usually script changes made her disappointed the most, while in the hierarchical controlled system this was what you got when so many controllers gave comments on how to change a script. Another point was again the organization of the work on the studio. “An ideologically wrong film was given to a young and an inexperienced director and a cameraman [...] The group being on expedition, all by themselves, shot defective material and the project has been conserved.”²³⁹ Tokareva pointed out a lot more problems, the fact that there were not enough scriptwriters and thus all the scenarios were redundant, four artistic directors had changed in the course of one year, which also led to inadequate work. Regarding the delays of ‘Jambul’ and two Kazakh shorts she said: “Several studio workers treated the production of Kazakh films as something insignificant and secondary, thus the work on these films is extremely slow. [...] Future plans for the work with Kazakh thematic are not thought through and not organized.”²⁴⁰

Films with Kazakh themes were often treated poorly, making them was avoided, resources for their production were not allocated, neither were professionals. Scripts were re-written more times than should have been, which could have been a direct cause of Kazakh authorities demanding control, thus making the approval process longer. One of the worst examples of this was a film ‘Jambul,’ that took ten years to be released.

²³⁸ AP RK: 708/6-1/566/p43

²³⁹ AP RK: 708/6-1/566/p44

²⁴⁰ AP RK: 708/6-1/566/p46

Jambul

One of the examples of how the evacuees treated Kazakh films is ‘Jambul.’ The production took slightly more than ten years. Constant remakes of the script and postponing of the production has reflected on the quality of the film itself. The film is a biopic based on events from real life of famous Kazakh folk singer and composer Jambul Jabayev (1845-1945), who by the time the film appeared in plans was ninety-five years old. The aim of the film was to commemorate his life and his talent in traditional improvisational singing. Jambul became well-known in Kazakh steppes in tsarist times by roaming the steppe, seeing the way people live and singing songs about that.²⁴¹ He also became famous for winning contests in improvisational singing from other famous singers. He supported the October Revolution, he supported the reforms it was bringing. In the Soviet times he became even more popular when his compositions were written down, published and translated to Russian. Jambul was a laureate of Stalin Award for his poems.²⁴² All this made him a good candidate to make film about.

Siranov in the his 1960s book wrote that the reason Jambul was a good character for the film was because his personal life was similar to the destiny of his people, the story of his life, his hopes, his struggles was also a story of Kazakh people.²⁴³ He criticizes, however, that the filmmakers were not able to show history of Kazakhstan properly, they only made it superficially.²⁴⁴ The plan for Kazakh films in 1941 had Jambul’s summary that said: “On the example of the characters that appear throughout the film, author shows a wide panorama of social trends in Kazakhstan in the end of the last and beginning of our centuries [...] shows

²⁴¹ “Jambul Jabayev,” Livelib, <https://www.livelib.ru/author/195836-dzhambul-dzhabaev>

²⁴² AP RK: 708/5-1/693/p2

²⁴³ Siranov, “Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana,” 249

²⁴⁴ Siranov, “Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana,” 259

traditions of freedom loving Kazakh people, that could find happiness only in brotherly family of Soviet Union.”²⁴⁵

Production conundrum

The film first appeared in plans around the summer of 1941, when Alma-Ata Feature Film Studio was already planned to open and to host Mosfilm and Lenfilm, but the evacuation did not start yet. Kazakh government was so excited about the new studio, they made a plan of films on Kazakh topics that could be produced.²⁴⁶ Of the eight planned films only ‘Jambul’ got its chance. On the meeting of Kazakh writers and Tokareva from Agotprop about Kazakh films, Tazhibayev, the writer for ‘Jambul’ was criticized for slow progress.²⁴⁷ The script was supposed to be finished by December of that year, but in April 1942 a decree from TsK of Kazakhstan complained that the script was not yet finished.²⁴⁸ It is not surprising that once the evacuees started to arrive, a new studio with new aims was established, the film’s importance faded.

The preparation work started in August 1942. Production group consisted of Kazakh beginner workers under instructions from Grigori Roshal, who saw the importance of making of national films.²⁴⁹ However, later the film was conserved and Roshal was transferred to another, more ambitious Kazakh project, ‘Abay’.²⁵⁰ The scriptwriter for the film was A.Tazhibayev. In the spring of 1942, the chief editor of scriptwriting studio wrote a report saying that for ‘Jambul’ writer Tazhibayev and a consultant M.Ya.Snider were hired and wrote a whole script.²⁵¹ But then, film director Leo Arnshtam joined the production and wanted changes in the script, so they were re-making it again, without the help of the consultant now. By the end of 1942, the film

²⁴⁵ AP RK: 708/5-1/692/p37

²⁴⁶ AP RK: 708/5-1/692/p37

²⁴⁷ AP RK: 708/6-1/566/p12)

²⁴⁸ AP RK: 708/5-1/701/p26

²⁴⁹ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p57

²⁵⁰ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 39

²⁵¹ AP RK: 708/6-1/567/p41

was still in a preparation mode, costumes, props and shooting places on nature were not found because of the “weak organization of leadership of the motion picture” by the director Arnshtam.²⁵²

Arnshtam was supposed to receive a new contract for this film but thought that the compensation was not enough, and the studio decided to discuss it after the script would be done.²⁵³ Since the work on ‘Jambul’ had stopped, he got paid nothing, and later left the production. In Tikhonov’s end-of-year report ‘Jambul’ among other films was pushed into 1943.²⁵⁴ In June 1943, Agitprop wanted to renew ‘Jambul,’ Bolshakov agreed, probably thinking it would be a gesture of good will or at least a way to make Kazakh authorities less demanding.²⁵⁵ The new director became Yesbatyrov.

Siranov’s huge complaint also touched upon ‘Jambul,’ which was discussed in previous chapter as well. It stated that local workers had to work on Kazakh films without the help of the studio, ‘Jambul’ was for seven months in preparation and nothing but the script was ready anyway.²⁵⁶ In January 1943, SNK KazSSR decreed the renewal²⁵⁷ of ‘Jambul’ and apparently the work started moving forward. Before the decree the studio did not allocate ‘Jambul’ any materials for props and costumes. SNK decree gave the film supplies as extra, on top of what the studio had. Local organizations provided extra materials for the film. Knowing this, knowing that this film was a “lucrative job (*hlebnoye mesto*), some sly people such as Vainshtok and Obolenskiy tried to grab the leadership of the film for themselves and put their person as a director.” That is why they made Tikhonov fire Yesbatyrov from directorship as “incapable worker,” to which Siranov could not agree. Yesbatyrov, though “having a number of flaws is

²⁵² AP RK: 708/6-1/565/p36

²⁵³ AP RK: 708/6-1/567/p41

²⁵⁴ AP RK: 708/6-1/565/p36

²⁵⁵ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 39

²⁵⁶ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p52

²⁵⁷ The dates on documents and some other sources suggest different time for the conservation and renewal of the film. It all creates confusion and only proves that the production of the film was a mess.

still not a hopeless worker. With ‘Jambul’ he was and still is working good.” When Siranov wanted to figure out why Yesbatyrov was fired, Tikhonov replied that it was a proposition from SNK KazSSR chairman, which turned out to be not true.²⁵⁸

Re-evacuation of filmmakers back to Moscow and Leningrad affected the production as well. Gradually growing re-evacuation meant that less and less professionals were left to finish the film. Evacuees did not teach many of the locals to the professional level, so there was no one capable enough left to finish the work. At the same time, a lot of people were stealing from the studio props, equipment, anything, because there was not much control. Moreover, there was a fire on the studio. Thus, ‘Jambul,’ which was supposed to be released in 1950 by that point, had to be postponed again.²⁵⁹

In the end, the film was released in 1952. The director of the film in the opening credits was Yefim Dzigan, who perhaps was invited to finish the mess that a film was. Scriptwriters were Tazhibayev together with N.Pogodin. Among some other Kazakh surnames appearing in the credits were composer M.Tulebayev, editor E.Abdirkina and costume designer A.Saajan, and, of course, acting crew with Shaken Aimanov as Jambul. The numerous remakes in the script, changing of several directors, conservation and renewal of the film – it all left its mark on the final product.

Plot

‘Jambul’ starts in the nineteenth century with a young Jambul receiving a dombyra (a national string instrument) from a dying master singer.²⁶⁰ There is another singer, Shayakhmet, who is also after this dombra. He is backed by a *bai*, a Kazakh analog of a bourgeois. Both of them are angry that Jambul inherited the dombra. Then, without any transfer the film skips to

²⁵⁸ AP RK: 708/7-1/689/p52

²⁵⁹ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 77

²⁶⁰ Yefim Dzigan, *Jambul*, biopic (Alma-Ata Feature Film Studio, 1952).

several years later, with a text saying that Jambul was traveling for a long time. He is returning home and, on the way, stops people from chasing a boy, who was supposed to be punished for the bai's dog's death. With the boy Jambul returns to his old village, where he sees his love Saltanat, whom he wants to marry. To get her, he has to ask the above mentioned bai for permission and pay the price for the bride. The bai is smug, he makes Jambul sing praises to his dead dog. Jambul could not step on his pride and instead offended him by saying that it would be better if the dog lived, but the bai died instead. Bai was infuriated, which led to a chase after Jambul and him not getting married to Saltanat.

Now the film simply leaps through the time to 1903. Jambul attends a festival where locals praise a Russian tsarist representative, a governor. Shayakhmet, the bitter singer from the beginning who did not receive dombyra is singing praises to the tsarist rule and the Russian king. He proposes a musical battle²⁶¹ to everyone present, which Jambul accepts. Jambul sings: "You serve white king from the top of your head to the tip of your tail."²⁶² The governor for some reason gets angry at these words: "He is a trouble maker!"

Next, the film leaps to 1906. Russian tsarists burn unruly Kazakh villages and make singers sign refusal to sing revolutionary songs. Signing this does not prevent Jambul from signing and raising villages against tsarism. Tsarist government was trying to find him and hang for raising villages for revolts. After a while, he got captured, but the Russian soldiers did not know that he was Jambul. His son sneaks into his prison with the help of a Russian soldier and tells to conceal his identity and that his wife, the boy's mother had died. Russian soldiers are questioning people about Jambul, and apparently find out that their prisoner is the Jambul

²⁶¹ The musical challenge is a traditional Kazakh music style, where contestants have to come up with lyrics and tune on the spot while sustaining the tune of the opponent and responding to his lyrics. This is called aitys, and this is how usually singers achieved popularity and respect in the steppe, including Jambul.

²⁶² Yefim Dzigan, *Jambul*, biopic (Alma-Ata Feature Film Studio, 1952), 19:12.

himself. They lead him somewhere, where he sings a song, however, it is very unclear what has happened in that scene.

A jump to 1918, the Revolution is coming, red flags everywhere. One of the regions wants to send people to meet with Lenin, and wants to include Jambul, who is too sick to come out. Several people bring to his house a declaration that talks about ending tsarist rule and equalizing nations. Undersigned by Lenin and Stalin (who was a Commissar for nationalities committee back then), Jambul leaps from the bed when he hears the declaration. Following, Jambul is riding to return the herd of the bai from fleeing from country²⁶³. The bai pleads Jambul, asks for help, promises to pay, but he says that the bai's time is over. Fresh communists return to Jambul his dombra, previously lost. Jambul, for some mysterious reason visits a school, where he finds granddaughter of his former love Saltanat and he falls into memories of the past, his hardships and tells that these children have a brighter future.

Again, the film is jumping through time, this time to 1936. Progress had happened, cars now drive in Kazakh lands, collective farms are said to be working well, factories are being built. Culture is also thriving, theatres are opening. Jambul is called to Alma-Ata, where he met couple old friends and was invited to Moscow for a "decade of Kazakh art". In Moscow, he visited Lenin's mausoleum, expressing deep love and appreciation.

1941, the World War II reached the USSR, soldiers are leaving for the front. Jambul sends his son off to the War. He pep talks him, saying to always remember that his father never feared any enemy. When he receives news that his son died at war, he cries, but then says that he will still call people to fight for their motherland. The film does not forget to reference his famous poem dedicated to Leningrad blockade. When the singer heard the hardships people of

²⁶³ Most probably the bai tries to flee to China, as many Kazakhs did when the Bolsheviks came.

Leningrad were suffering, he needed to help them maintain spirits, he called for them to keep strong.

Finally, we reach the final year, 1945, the War has just ended, the victory is celebrated everywhere. Jambul is ninety-nine, he has a doctor at his bed, but he still is spirited and thinks that he needs to see the youth and celebrate the Victory day with them. He sneaks away from his strict doctor and goes to celebration, where everybody is happy to see him.

Analysis

In the first plan for the movie creation ‘Jambul’ was supposed to consist of only three parts.²⁶⁴ The first one, young Jambul tried to help oppressed by a bai people through songs, failed and left for steppe. In the second, he in 1916’s uprising was fighting against forced conscription of Kazakhs to the WWI, which is parallel to the plot of the earlier film, ‘Amangeldi.’ In the third, he left a hospital when heard that Nazi’s were coming and called for Kazakhs to join the war. All of those to some extent were featured in the final version. This is to portray how the script changed, because, unfortunately, other archival documents did not include descriptions or summaries of other versions.

The structure of the film itself fragmented and incoherent. It starts with the conflict right away, it does not provide establishment, the audience does not get a chance to know who Jambul is. There are seven leaps in time throughout the whole movie, some of them being more than twenty years. Such leaps are not bad on their own, but by the end of the movie it is becoming too much. Looks like the ones who wound up working on the film in the end wanted to include as many themes, as many old footage as possible into the final film. This is a sign of amateur filmmaking, they could have accomplished this objective through cinematic techniques at the same time developing one period more thoroughly. The dialogs could introduce brief moments

²⁶⁴ AP RK: 708/5-1/692/p37

of Jambul's past, flashbacks could be used for more sophisticated moments, camera movement and associations could be used effectively to present leaps, instead of flipping title card every time. Siranov somewhat justifies these leaps by saying that the story loses integrity, if use only couple episodes of Jambul's life it would not show the full picture. He still criticized the way it was represented in the film, the fragmentation, absence of connection through plot or artistic techniques.²⁶⁵ He admits though that portraying a hundred-year life is a difficult job.²⁶⁶ It also on some level suggests that the writers did not know much about the singer's life in each particular moment in order to concentrate on one. Authors of the film, according to Siranov, while taking the facts from Jambul's real life, also invent other moments so that the story would feel fuller and would appeal to the audience.²⁶⁷ Such is the characteristics of historical creative productions, including novels. He admits, however, that authors of Jambul did not do a good job of adding imagined moments because they either had limited imagination, were not familiar with their subject or were lacking experience.²⁶⁸

The character of Jambul is also not developed very well. As Siranov notes, Jambul is shown from his youth to his old age, but the only change that can be seen is his aging.²⁶⁹ His outlook, his thoughts and convictions stay the same. There is no personal growth, no life progress. For example, when Jambul is captured the audience is suddenly presented with his son. How Jambul has a son, who is the boy's mother, how he met her, and how he moved on from pursuing and loving Saltant is outside of the picture, the audience sees only the end result. None of other characters are developed either, they all are appearing and disappearing without reason or motivation. At the tsarist festival Jambul meets Bekbolat, a revolutionary, who was freely criticizing the festival. There is no character development for Bekbolat, he is referred to several

²⁶⁵ Siranov, "Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana," 249, 259

²⁶⁶ Siranov, "Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana," 260

²⁶⁷ Siranov, "Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana," 256

²⁶⁸ Siranov, "Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana," 258

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

times in the film, but is never really shown, so when Jambul is bitter about his death, the audience does not feel the emotional connection.

Another example happens after Tsarist soldiers realize that they captured Jambul and lead him to what looks like an execution. The scene never explains what exactly happened, he was put on trial or was supposed to be shot, but after singing a sad song...unclear. He was not executed, but how the plot moved from a swan song to sudden October Revolution is not shown. When Jambul sings a sad song, on the background stands a Russian woman, who was suddenly introduced couple of scenes before trying to help Jambul conceal his identity. The character of this woman appears out of nowhere, she jumps right into action in her first appearance trying to convince a Russian lieutenant to set Jambul free. When Jambul sings, the underdeveloped character of the woman stands behind soldiers crying, and the viewers are supposed to have sympathy towards her as a channel for their emotions, which does not happen because of complete confusion of the meaning of the scene. The bai that runs after trial there trying to find and kill Jambul is also unnecessary here. Neither his presence, nor absence would affect plot, so it seems, seems like it is one of the earlier shots.

One more plot problem, which could indeed be an indication that the film's writers were not experienced in scriptwriting is the way Jambul resolves problems of people and their gullibility. In a scene where people were chasing a boy Jambul tells them to not give the boy to the bai, they immediately agree to what he says. Why then were they so eagerly chasing him? This portrays simple people as a mob who can be convinced of anything, and who change their minds easily. A similar example appears later as well. When he stopped the herd of the bai from fleeing from country, Jambul talked bai's people out of obeying him with several words. This is an attempt to show him as a wise person able to solve conflicts, but the end result was not as convincing, it only made people look foolish.

Furthermore, 'Jambul' is full of colonialism elements. First of all, the film tries to condemn colonial past of tsarism by showing Jambul sing: "You serve white king from the top of your head to the tip of your tail." It does not seem to be such a big insult to react like the governor did, the whole festival was said to be compromised. Again, script problem. Other elements are portrayed in the appearance of some characters. When Jambul visits a school, he is wearing long coat, traditional of that time, the Kazakh children in the class he was visiting also were wearing traditional clothes. The Russian teacher, on the contrary, wears a costume made of later, more Soviet like fashion, representing the advancements the Russians bring and also in a way portraying their superiority over Kazakhs, who still did not understand progress. Such appearance could be true to life at that point in time but choosing to show it in 1950s portrays the attitude how national films should have been made. Nations should always remember what they owe to the Russian people and Lenin (and by extension Stalin) in particular. These elements were also made to contrast the progress over future twenty years brought by communists. Jambul now carries an umbrella, perhaps to signify that progress has reached everyone, including the great signer, but it looks superficial.

The Friendship of Peoples and acknowledgement of the contribution Russian big brother made to the development of modern Kazakhstan is one of the recurring topics. The declaration about ending tsarist rule and equalizing nations means that Russians saved Kazakhs from oppression. Jambul leaps from bed when he hears the declaration, as if showing what the reaction to this fact should be. The film also reminds the audience that Bolsheviks ended old feudal type traditions, the ones that did not allow Jambul to marry to his beloved Saltanat and destined him to regret this until his death. The film, however, when showing the prosperous life in collective farms forgets to mention the hunger and deaths that it brought to the steppe.

The overall impression of the film is rather unsatisfactory, the many mistakes and problems stand in the way of enjoying the film.

Songs of Abay

As opposed to tricky production of ‘Jambul,’ another ambitious project, which turned out to be less problematic was the film ‘Songs of Abay.’ The film was initially supposed to replace ‘Jambul’ and be another one on historical topic, a popular theme in films since 1930s. ‘Abay,’ which was its preliminary name that was used a lot in documents, is about a famous national poet and thinker, sort of Kazakh Pushkin. Abay Kunanbayev²⁷⁰ (1845-1904), was born in a rich family. His father was one of local judges and Abay often helped him learning how the judiciary system worked.²⁷¹ From the very youth he did not like and condemned bribery and working for personal gain that so many bais portrayed. Being a representative of that class, nevertheless, he had the opportunity to get education. He later used his education and experience to write poems, books with words of edification. Abay taught the steppe about Russian poets like Pushkin.²⁷² He translated his work and work of many others such as Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolay Nekrasov, reading whom affected his outlook.

The film about Abay showed him trying to strengthen ties with Russian “democratic circles” against colonialism, for friendship with Russians and bringing progress to Kazakhs.²⁷³ 1945, the year of the release of the film, was a hundred-year anniversary of his birth. Grigory Roshal, one of the esteemed Russian directors, was working on this film as a director, together with Yefim Aron, less famous director, but who devoted a lot of his time and effort into developing Kazakh cinema. The script was written by Mukhtar Auezov,²⁷⁴ renowned Kazakh poet and writer with Roshal’s help. The soundtrack for the film was written by a well-known

²⁷⁰ His actual name was Ibragim Kunanbayev, the nickname Abay, which means ‘careful’, was given to him by his grandmother.

²⁷¹ “Abay Kunanbayev: Biography,” *Internet Portal Nur*, last modified September 28, 2017. <https://www.nur.kz/1631921-abay-kunanbaev-biografiya.html>

²⁷² Siranov, “Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana,” 138

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Mukhtar Auezov was related to Abay, and though he did not learn from Abay himself, he knew Abay’s family. One of Auezov’s biggest literary works is four-book novel “The way of Abay.” The novel was awarded Stalin and Lenin Awards.

Kazakh composer Latif Hamidi. Other three Kazakhs listed in credits all were working as assistants to Russians in different position. The idea of the film was supposed to be not a life description of Abay, but an illustration of his poem that he started reciting in the beginning of the film. Abay's participation in the plot was supposed to be his point of view on unjust events.²⁷⁵

Production

'Abay' appeared in plans initially to replace 'Jambul,' but when it was renewed, the studio did not leave making of 'Abay.'²⁷⁶ Unlike 'Jambul,' 'Abay' did not have as many problems in the production process, once the script was approved the work progressed without delays. This could be a direct consequence of Roshal, famous and honored Moscow filmmaker, being the director. Before the script was approved though it caused problems. An overwhelming majority of archival documents discusses the problems different people saw with the script, starting from centrality of Abay's figure to small comments on betterment of the plot.

In August 1943, the studio finished the script and sent it for approval to TsK KPbK, which made several suggestions to rewrite. The reply said that the author Auezov based the script on his play 'Abay', where "...conflicts happened around Abay, not with Abay... Abay himself rarely shows up on the stage."²⁷⁷ The script now was showing him as "a poet and thinker, who understood correctly his aim – to enlighten his people by fighting backwardness and spreading European culture, especially advanced Russian culture." This again shows the necessary tropes for Kazakh films, and possibly all cultural compositions, to show how Russian brother is always ahead of time and is always helping, but still does not take agency from local populations.

²⁷⁵ Siranov, "Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana," 271

²⁷⁶ AP RK: 708/6-1/566/p12

²⁷⁷ AP RK: 708/7-1/251/p1

In October of the same year another review of the script was written. Agitprop and Department of Political Enlightenment Institutions in a report to Skvortsov listed several plot points that as it will be later seen were taken into account in later production such as “arguments between Naiman and Kerei tribes over the river Bekanas.”²⁷⁸ The tribe fight was part of the film, but as a side plot, not the central conflict, and the tribes used were smaller, these two are quite prominent. The river was taken out completely. Another plot point that was altered was an “unnatural death of Aidar from poison, given to him by his friend Azim.”²⁷⁹ In the final version, the poison was given by the rival apprentice of Abay, Sharip.

One of the problems raised in the report was the roles of Dolgopolov and Abay himself. “The author [Auezov] did not uncover the figure of Russian revolutionary democrat of 70s – Dolgopolov [...] All he does...is only sympathize with Abay... but does not affect or lead Abay to social topics. It is hard to imagine that such a revolutionary would not be eager to enlighten and introduce peoples of colonial East to the social fight in Russia.”²⁸⁰ At the same time “Abay was deprived of any active participation [...] Abay is shown through thoughts and actions of others, which diminishes his role as a main character. [...] Abay in all scenes is included as a judge, just a bit more than the others, but he does not move forward public thought...does not impact the result of the fight.”²⁸¹ This was changed in the film, although he was not the main character, he did impact the result in every stage. The poster for the film is still not Abay in the center, but Azhar, a female lead.

Once, a script meeting was conducted with literary workers of the Republic where more comments were made.²⁸² Some liked the script, some criticized it a lot. There were still comments about the script not actually showing Abay’s importance, Abay is a passive actor in

²⁷⁸ AP RK: 708/7-1/251/p90

²⁷⁹ AP RK: 708/7-1/251/p92

²⁸⁰ AP RK: 708/7-1/251/p91

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² AP RK: 708/9/1379/p164-167

the script. Some other moments were suggested to take off, most of which indeed were, such as Azhar singing right after being pulled out of the river, while something else was added.

Approval of the script also took time. In the autumn of 1943, Tikhonov wrote to TsK KPbK asking why they still did not approve the script. He wrote that the discussions showed that the script was satisfactory, Cinematography Issues Committee approved it.²⁸³ It is unclear why they were delaying so much. The studio could not start producing the film without TsK KPbK approval because it is a Kazakh themed movie.²⁸⁴ After several requests to approve the script, the handwritten response on one of them wondered why did the secretary have to do this instead of Agitprop.

In April 1945, a pyrotechnic sparkle that was used for filming ‘Abay’ ignited props and caused a big fire on the studio, which left it in a devastating condition. The fire was long, it happened at night, and thus damaged a lot. Putting out that fire was hard because there was not enough water or not enough pressure in the pump (which was a direct cause of electricity shortage common in the city). Central pavilion, roof and props storage got burned.²⁸⁵ This, however, did not affect the production, the film was released in 1945. Opening credits already attributed the film to Alma-Ata Film Studio instead of TsOKS.

Plot

Knowing what was not supposed to be in the film and what was edited, let the chapter proceed to the film itself. The film opens with Abay walking in the steppe, he is arriving to an archeological excavation. Nifont Dolgopolov, a Russian doctor who was exiled to Kazakh steppes, had found a grave of an old Kazakh man and made several suggestions on its dating. Other Kazakhs around him started discussing the meaning of death and life and the life’s

²⁸³ AP RK: 708/9/1379/p135

²⁸⁴ AP RK: 708/9/1379/p140

²⁸⁵ Pozner, “Daleko ot Voyny?” 73.

purpose, while reciting poetry from Suleiman (probably Suleiman the Magnificent) and Omar Khayyam. Abay is also reciting his own, newly written poem. This is where supposedly the film moves to show the plot of the poem.

Abay's apprentice, Aydar is being chased, he ran off with a widowed Azhar, who is in love with him. The tradition dictates, if a woman's husband dies, she has to re-marry to his brother, but Aydar and Azhar love each other and want to be together. Abay arrives on time with his other apprentices and vouches for Aydar. A bai that was in charge of the chase agrees to take this case to the trial, secretly wanting to kill Abay. Azhar and Aydar are locked in separate yurts before trial. Azhar's husband's brother is trying to persuade her to forget all this, and marry him, otherwise he will not allow his sister Mariyam to marry Abay's son Abish. In the next scene, we see that Azhar did not give in because Mariyam tells her friend that she now is not allowed to marry her beloved Abish, and if need be, inspired by Azhar's example, she will run away. Aydar, being locked in Abay's village is composing poetry in a non-pressure environment, while Azhar is thinking to kill herself.

While waiting for the trial, many try to warn Abay against it and to help him escape deathly endeavor, but he is responding that love and happiness deserve to win. He argues that laws are made by people and, when people need it, laws should be changed. Dolgopolov compares Abay to Pushkin and Lermontov, great people who died in vain. Abay cannot defend himself on the trial, because he vouched for the couple and thus became the defendant, that is why his apprentice Sharip will be his and Aydar's representative. Abay's opponents try to convince Sharip to stop being in Abay's shadow, make his own way, which included helping them a little on the trial. Sharip does not agree but does not refuse.

Came the day of trial. Two representatives from each side speak. The prosecuting side argued for the murder of the two lovers because they were threatening traditions and the reputation of their tribe. The defense, Sharip, was asking to understand the passion of love, but

ran out of arguments. Abay wanted to step in, causing half the people's discontent, while the other half decided to support him. When Abay was allowed to speak, he successfully re-battled the opponent's arguments, showing they were based on partial truth. The judge decided that Azhar and Aydar were indeed guilty, but Abay was right that the times are changing so he forgives them. Sharip was unhappy with his performance, and also with Aydar for endangering Abay. Aydar suggested that Sharip is jealous, which offended him deeply. Abay's son Abish suddenly comes back from Saint Petersburg, just in time to witness the trial. Mariyam, sister of a guy Azhar was supposed to re-marry, runs to greet her beloved, but he is cold to her. She thinks he does not love her anymore, but still goes to live in Abay's village.

Title cards flips and tells us that Aydar and Azhar are getting married, but the enemies are preparing a new strike. Sharip is again approached by Abay's enemies, suggesting that he poisons Abay. Sharip becomes angry with this suggestion, for him Abay is something so great, he has a fanatical devotion to the poet. But he wants to cleanse Abay his own way.

The wedding begins, a sequence of Kazakh traditions that are usually in a play at a wedding is shown. Everyone is happy, they sing songs, Abay praises Aydar in one of them. Sharip is indeed jealous that Aydar got Abay's appreciation and slips several drops of the poison into his drink, and then gives it to Aydar as a peace offering. Governor of the region is unhappy that Dolgoplov made friends with Abay and decides to send him away. Dolgoplov leaves the next morning, taking with him a hope as the only doctor there to cure Aydar. Aydar did not feel the poison, but gradually started feeling worse, and then dropped dead looking at Sharip, whose face blurred and took a shape of Lenin's face. It is hard to say what this signifies, but it definitely surprises.

The village mourns Aydar's death. A yesterday bride Azhar takes off her jewelry, she is now twice widowed. Suddenly, Abay's enemies from the trial arrive with entire army, to attack, they wanted Abay dead, not Aydar, because he was the one stirring the masses. Among them is

the guy Azhar was supposed to re-marry, brother of Mariyam, who came to claim back his sister, who is living in the village, neither a bride nor a wife, he does not want her to suffer. Mariyam says farewell to Abish, Abay's son, since he does not love her she has nothing to do there. Turns out he loves her "more than life", but he is sick and did not want neither her nor his father to worry and carry this burden. She does not care, and they decide to get married. She tells it to her brother, and he calms down.

But the other enemies are not happy, they want Abay dead. Abay tries to persuade them to stop the fight, greater fights are coming (perhaps hinting the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917). They do not listen, they strike him on the head. He lives, but the strike sparkles the fight, and the enemy flees. Sharip runs to injured Abay, who suspects that Sharip killed Aydar and casts him away. A new day comes, Aydar is buried, and Abay's youngest apprentice writes a poem about him. Abay overhears it and hugs the boy, as a sign that there is always hope in the young.

Analysis

The film overall seems coherent, it has an interesting story and is less indulging in pleasing Soviet tropes of 'Eastern' film, perhaps because the director was Roshal, well-known, with good reputation in the Center, he had more liberties. That, however, does not mean that class struggle is absent from the film. The antagonists are saying that by protecting the couple Abay goes against the rulers of the land and by extension, tsar. In his appearance, Abay is walking in the steppe, with a book in one hand and dressed in European style, a vest, shirt and trousers, in contrast to Jambyl, who lived later, but looked more indigenous (which however could be a result of different financial status.) 'Songs of Abay' also started with written text saying that the events happened back when "A dark night was reigning over the Kazakh steppe, the elder, trying to keep their power were igniting tribal feuds. Old laws and traditions were entangling Kazakhs." It already portrays denunciation of old traditions, such as Azhar's situation. The prosecuting side argued for the murder of the two lovers because they were

threatening traditions and the reputation of their tribe, which showed that representatives of old traditions did not leave easily. The denunciation, especially in the title card, is perhaps not to actually propagate it to the audience, but to remind them where they were, what a dark time it was before the USSR.

The dedication to Abay also says that he was a poet, enlightener and a friend to the best of Russian people. Dolgoplov in one episode was giving a metaphor for the Bolshevik ideas, who were still further in the future, but such metaphor expressed that people were not happy with tsarism already back then. He said to look at the thumb, big, rough, like a worker, but without it nothing can be done, the hand cannot hold anything.²⁸⁶ If you put all the fingers together, and fasten it with the thumb, it makes a fist, and fist can punch. When people are together, they are powerful, but the workers need not to be casted away by others.

One more trope for Soviet films in Central Asia is portraying a strong woman. Azhar is capable of fighting for her own happiness, she is not blindly following traditions, she is bold and willing to pursue her happiness and protect loved ones – she says that Aydar is not to be blamed for their escape, they should kill her instead of him. Azhar, as a woman is also the one who suffers in such situation more. Locked away she was thinking of killing herself. It is interesting however that in a closed yurt suddenly a hinge appeared from nowhere and was gone to nowhere. Siranov, writing his book on Kazakh cinema history, which included analysis of the films, states that Azhar's character is not fully developed.²⁸⁷ For him, she does not participate in any action, the only things she does is expressing her love towards Aydar.

Women, nevertheless, are also allowed to learn, little girls are taught music. There is an example what these girls can become. An adult woman arrives to the village, she has a strong personality and has brought books and songs from other respected individuals from afar, she is a

²⁸⁶ Grigoriy Roshal and Yefim Aron, *Pesni Abaya (Songs of Abay)* (Alma-Ata Feature Film Studio, 1945), 30: 36.

²⁸⁷ Siranov, "Kino iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana," 138

learned woman. In contrast to ‘Jambyl’, small elements in ‘Abay’ show that the steppe is not hopeless and savage. There are learned men, who know thinkers like Darwin or Chernyshevskiy, who compose songs and poetry, who are respected. There is also a different kind of learnedness, one of the friends of Abay is often citing different proverbs that are connected to history or wisdom. Dolgopolov with his Kazakh friend prepared fireworks for the wedding, which shows their knowledge not only of poetry, but also of sciences.

All the introduced in the beginning elements play out in the end, all the suspicions and wonders of why they introduce certain elements in the end play a big part. Poison given to Aydar by Sharip, is one of the plot devises in the movie that was well foreshadowed and was a culmination of their rivalry. Love line between Mariyam and Abish is a little unnecessary though. The only explanation is that it justifies the change of mind in Mariyam’s brother, who even protected Abay before he was stroke, which shows the audience that opposing sides can find compromise. The preparations for the wedding that are shown after the title card, which said that enemies were getting ready to strike makes the wedding seem less happy because the audience is in an anticipation of worse.

The film overall is enjoyable, it uses necessary for the Soviet Union class ideals and the Friendship of the Peoples, but it does not fall into colonialism. Despite the criticism that Abay is not central to the plot, the film still manages to show his achievements, just in a subtler way, not in the clear-cut fashion of socialist realism.

Ivan the Terrible

One of the most famous movies made during the evacuation was Eisenstein’s ‘Ivan the Terrible’ (*Ivan Grozniy*). The film was entirely shot on the landscapes of Alma-Ata, the taking of Kazan was taken near Kaskelen, the moment when people pleaded tsar to reassume the throne was shot on Sairan lake, many other footages were taken in natural environments of Alma-Ata and its regions. Production of ‘Ivan’ was one of the most important endeavors for the studio, so it

tried to make Eisenstein's conditions as best as possible, allocating him all the needed resources. This section will present how 'Ivan' was treated on the studio, so that the treatment of Kazakh films became more apparent. I will not discuss artistic value of the film or the plot, it has been done for so many times already.²⁸⁸

The importance of the film was established from the very beginning of the production. In a discussion over making of 'Ivan' involved such famous people as Sergei Eisenstein, Fridrikh Ermler, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Eduard Tisse, Moisei Levin, and Leonid Trauberg. Trauberg said that "The first part should be released this year... the entire studio will help," while Ermler pointed out: "The release of 'Ivan the Terrible' has a big political meaning for the country. ... The studio should work round-the-clock."²⁸⁹ Bolshakov sent a memo asking to finish 'Ivan' as fast as possible, apparently having this request from TsK VKPb. The meeting was trying to rush the release of 'Ivan', especially of the first part, there were rumors of not making it that year. Eisenstein to this responded that "the first part without the second one has no value. Taking of Kazan serves as a trampoline to the Terrible's future victories."²⁹⁰ Because shooting of Ivan was taking more time, they occupied pavilion that was necessary for 'Kazakh Cinematic Concert,' which led to problems for 'Concert' – the actors could not wait for too long and had to leave.²⁹¹

In May 1942, Eisenstein wrote a speech (perhaps for performing or to print in a newspaper) where he called everyone and Jews most of all to contribute to the war cause in every possible way, including creative ways. This major call to Jews was one of the strategies of Stalin to lay aside antisemitism and gain support of all Jews around the world.²⁹² The prove of success was support of Jews of Palestine who collected money (and managed to send some medical equipment to the front) and spread all propagandistic materials from the USSR,

²⁸⁸ Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible*.

²⁸⁹ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p20

²⁹⁰ AP RK: 1302/1/1/p20 backside

²⁹¹ AP RK: 1302/1/2/p95

²⁹² Alexander Lokshin. "Brothers Jews of all world," *Lechaim*, May 2005. <https://lechaim.ru/ARHIV/157/lokshin.htm>

including films. Being a Jew in these conditions was very much important, no matter that they were away from the frontline. In the beginning of the War aligning with Jews was seen as more positive compared to later trends when focus shifted to Russianness taking the lead.

In his speech, he also expresses how people of culture and creativity can be as helpful as soldiers and factories workers, which aligns with Erina Megowan's argument that cultural workers have found a way to prove their loyalty to the regime through active support of war cause.

"I continue working on a film, like everyone in our country is working in these days of struggle and glory on a field that is most fit for him: millions on the fronts, millions in factories, producing weapons and ammunition, millions on fields, taking care of supplying armies with bread. We, artists, carry out our share of work on wide fields and immense fronts of culture and art. [...] Sons of Jews, whoever has a talent – join the fight to crush the enemy with the brilliance of your gift, talent, genius."²⁹³

Here he also explains the propagandistic meaning of his "Ivan the Terrible".

"I am working on a big epic film that shows how sixteen-century Russia ... fought under command of Ivan the Fourth against German aggression ... as greedily, as hopelessly and unsuccessfully as now! [...] And the aim of my film is to bring to the screen from depth of XVI century this patriotic call, addressed to those who fight today: let us be terrible to the invader, terrible with those who support him, those who do not fight against him!"²⁹⁴

Electricity was one of the biggest concerns of the production, because it could not be directly influenced by the studio leadership. Electricity was turned off during daytime in the city, so that industries could work to a maximum, however, pavilion where 'Ivan the Terrible' was shooting always had electricity, showing that it was the most important film for the studio.²⁹⁵ Despite the negotiation for 'Ivan's' pavilion to have constant energy flux, there still were two-three hours a day when the energy was shut down or the voltage was weak.²⁹⁶ Shut downs of electricity led to damaging of a lot of shot material, because editing machines damaged the

²⁹³ AP RK: 708/6-1/565/p26, 28

²⁹⁴ AP RK: 708/6-1/565/p28, 29

²⁹⁵ AP RK: 708/7-1/690/p56

²⁹⁶ AP RK: 708/7-1/690/p107

footage if the energy was shut down even for a brief moment.²⁹⁷ Such material in turn had to be re-shot, which delayed the work. The problem was fast dealt with by TsK KPbK and Agitprop, which indicates that Eisenstein and ‘Ivan’ were outside of conflict, untouchable.²⁹⁸

Also, although majority of shootings took place in Alma-Ata, there were still a lot of work outside of it: some winter shooting took place in Novosibirsk, and everything sound related was made in Moscow, including soundtrack by Sergei Prokofiyev, renowned Soviet composer. The hardest decoration not only on TsKOS, but in Soviet cinematography overall, at that point, was ‘Uspenskiy Cathedral,’ where Ivan was crowned in the film and where his wife’s coffin stood in Part I.²⁹⁹ Neither of the parts were still ready by that point because they tried to film both of them, which is understandable, ‘Uspenskiy Cathedral’ was big and complicated and was needed in both parts, and there was no space to storage it.

In 1943, Tikhonov asked TsK KPbK to postpone conscription of some people from the studio because they were busy as lighting people of ‘Ivan’ and according to handwritten words on top of document, they were freed of conscription.³⁰⁰ There was special treatment not only of the film, but of everyone who in some way was employed there.

These several examples show how evacuees films differed from local, all that the studio was not giving to Kazakh films it was giving to ‘Ivan’ and similar productions. Seeing this and comparing it was probably impossible not to feel inferior. However, ‘Ivan’ was a little too special, the importance of its production was understood by everybody.

²⁹⁷ AP RK: 708/7-1/690/p182

²⁹⁸ AP RK: 708/7-1/690/p108

²⁹⁹ AP RK: 708/7-1/690/p105

³⁰⁰ AP RK: 708/7-1/690/p120

To you, front

It is also worth briefly looking onto such a project as collaboration, which reveals issues, that neither the studio, nor the authorities cared about – other institutions. Newsreel workers also were evacuated to Alma-Ata and working there. At some point, Newsreel Studio thought of making a joint project with TsOKS. It was Dziga Vertov's "To you, front."³⁰¹ The film contains both feature film elements and documentary elements. The story starts with a Kazakh girl Saule seeing off her beloved Jamil to the war.³⁰² While he was fighting she took his position on the lead mining shaft. She was working hard and was sending letters to the front about her job, about the progress, and about how she was going to beat his record. Jamil is reading Saule's letters and starts imagining the work not only on his old factory, but on all industries. His imagination is in fact newsreel material.

In January 1942, Vertov and V.Turin³⁰³ made a proposition to create a joint, newsreel and feature, film about the rear, about Kazakhstan. The film was supposed to show that "Kazakh people together with other peoples...exerts every effort to defeat fascist troops."³⁰⁴ A film that will "document for the history of a still growing role of Soviet Kazakhstan in strengthening of the front, in helping the Red Army, in directly participating in battles. [...] A film about the leap to the future... a film about people of Kazakhstan [...] We want to show on individual example of Kazakhstan how a true friendship of peoples of Soviet Union prospered." Seems that these two really wanted to help the war cause and wanted to develop Kazakh cinema, as they requested help of local writers. Also, they did think that Kazakhstan did a good job. The reason for the collaboration was that "The film that we want to create cannot be a usual feature 'acting film' because of necessity to cover a lot of material, but it cannot be a usual newsreel film because of

³⁰¹ AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p46

³⁰² Dziga Vertov, *Tebe, Front (To You, Front)* (Alma-Ata Newsreel Studio, 1942).

³⁰³ Turin worked on newsreel 'Turksib' about the construction of railroad from Turkestan to Siberia, so he had prior relationships with Kazakh filmmaking.

³⁰⁴ AP RK: 708/6-1/563/p2

necessity of strong emotional effect on the audience.”³⁰⁵ TsOKS was very supportive of this idea.³⁰⁶

TsOKS was in the privilege in the republic, putting all other institutions into less fortunate positions. Even the ones that had evacuees were suffering from the domination of TsOKS. In March 1942, Alma-Ata Newsreel Studio director wrote a memorandum (*dokladnaya zapiska*) to TsK KPbK secretary that their studio was experiencing harsh shortage of materials and equipment in every department and asked for help to get some of those from TsOKS.

“Since December 1941 Alma-Ata Newsreel Studio releases not only local film-journal ‘Soviet Kazakhstan’, but also is a filial branch of Central Newsreel Studio and releases four journals a month with information from the front, journal ‘Pioneer’, journal ‘Soviet Art’ ... and four shorts and one full-length film. [...] Our numerous requests to Cinematography Issues Committee about strengthening of our technical base for completion of such a big program until this day remain unanswered. Central Joint Studio, while having a huge amount of different film equipment, not particularly busy, is refusing to help us and by all means avoids giving us the equipment.”³⁰⁷

Perhaps there was not as many evacuee and professional workers and TsOKS did not trust Newsreel with its equipment. I have not found any reaction to this by TsOKS. Problems with equipment can be seen in the film itself. Sometimes transitions and descriptions of industries and farms are read by a narrator, but sometimes they are written in title cards, perhaps because of bad quality sound equipment.

In spring 1942, director of the Newsreel Studio Akhmedov had a proposition to give all the work on the film to the Newsreel studio, because some of their journals were cancelled.³⁰⁸ Seems strange because they were just recently complaining about not having enough resources. Perhaps their complaint and this important film by also an important filmmaker helped them resolve some of those issues.

³⁰⁵ AP RK: 708/6-1/563/p2

³⁰⁶ AP RK: 708/6-1/563/p1

³⁰⁷ AP RK: 708/6-1/566/p23

³⁰⁸ AP RK: 708/6-1/567/p98

‘To you, front’ adds to the point made by Siranov that institutions distrust each other and that TsOKS spoiled majority of them itself.

Conclusion

Kazakh films and their creation were a concern that local authorities were pursuing from the very beginning of the evacuation. They hoped to receive as many films on Kazakh theme as possible and all by hands of professionals, who are recognized not only in the entire Union, but also sometimes in the world. Local government was tirelessly pursuing production of Kazakh films and were ready to put pressure. Gradually, the government was able to achieve production of six films and one more was in the making but was released much later.

The way evacuees, both filmmakers and the studio leadership, treated Kazakh films made Kazakhs feel bitter every time. They were realizing their inferiority in front of the representatives of the center and of Russian big brother. As it often happens, big brothers do not like to play with younger siblings. Production conundrums of Kazakh films only prove that national cinema was in disadvantageous position. This is especially seen in comparison to films such as ‘Ivan the Terrible,’ the main production of the studio during the war.

The films presented in this chapter portray not only individual examples of setting Kazakh films aside, but also what are the tropes that Kazakh films usually follow. This shows how the national cinema would be different from all-Union. Also, local films presented topics quite narrow, about the history or historical figures that no one except Kazakhs would understand, with Kazakh folklore and sometimes vocabulary. Despite the hopes of Kazakh administration, such films would make it outside the republic only with a slight chance. ‘Songs of Abay’ are presented here as a sort of exclusion from the rule, and as what approximately was the hopes of TsK KPbK: fairly fast production, not much problems, good director and crew, and no abuse of power.

Conclusion

“During this sacred war of heroic people of the Soviet Union with beastly gangs of fascists, cinema, as the strongest tool of mass agitation and propaganda, acquires exceptionally important role.”³⁰⁹ The significance of the medium of film for the Soviet Union and for the war cause was restated not once. The evacuation of the studios from European part of the country to Central Asia proved it further. Cultural institutions, including cinema industry received a high priority in the evacuation, which reflected in the mode of transportation, in the resources and premises allocated to them in cities of evacuation, in the attitude of local authorities. Alma-Ata, as well as every other city or town cherished the idea of the status these institutions would bring. Kazakhstan, in addition, was hoping to develop their national cinema with the help of the evacuee filmmakers. Throughout the evacuation they did not stop reasserting that they wanted the studio to teach local population, especially Kazakhs, and to produce films on Kazakh material. The studio, on the other hand, was ambiguous on this regard. Some of the filmmakers wanted to help both the war and Kazakh cinema, establishing teaching groups and making films. Other filmmakers and studio administration saw it differently, being representatives of the center, they thought that producing films of all-Union level was far more important, they saw Kazakh themes as too narrow.

Such difference in opinions, especially the clash of interest from Kazakh government and the studio administration led to tensions and complaints. Kazakh government was trying to establish control by entering the hierarchy of filmmaking process, about which Cinematography Issues Committee was particularly not happy. To get results from the studio, local authorities had to put pressure, otherwise, perhaps, they would not get the results they got. Production of Kazakh films for the most part was a difficult process that involved many remakes of the script, fight for

³⁰⁹ AP RK: 708/5-1/699/p10

resources, and numerous delays. Seeing this attitude and comparing it to non-Kazakh films made locals felt inferior.

Looking at the films themselves, one can see what was expected of them. The only two full-length films made during the evacuation were both about local representatives of intelligentsia. This indeed was a narrow topic, few people outside the republic would know who these historical figures were and would relate to the history that was supposed to accompany the plot of the film. The two films are two extremes of Kazakh film production during the existence of TsOKS. ‘Jambul’ is the one that was postponed, cancelled, renewed, that had several directors, multiple script rewrites and very little resources allocated, which later affected the result. ‘Songs of Abay,’ on the contrary, was the film that was produced fairly fast with minor problems and as a story was more successful.

Re-evacuation presented Kazakh cinematography with a dilemma. The authorities were worried that the studios were starting to leave, but effectively not much was accomplished. Re-evacuation left the remaining Alma-Ata studio in a poor condition, which were worsened by theft and the fire. It also showed what exactly evacuee filmmakers managed to achieve for the development of Kazakh cinema. By 1945, only three shorts, one cinematic concert and one full-length films were made on TsOKS – it was not enough. This could be not such a big problem if the evacuees taught many Kazakhs to a professional level, they then could be able to produce their own films, but this did not happen either. In November 1945, Siranov, who became a studio director, wrote a report about all films made on the studio since the beginning of the evacuation.³¹⁰ In 1942, TsOKS released eleven full-length films, which other documents confirm. In 1943, the studio released eight films, including ‘Kazakh cinematic concert’ and ‘Kazakh film collection,’ which consisted of the short novellas. In 1944, however, the studio released only three films, because it was the peak of re-evacuation. Also, they transferred other

³¹⁰ AP RK: 708/9/1379/p22-26

three films to other studios, most likely Mosfilm and Lenfilm just took their projects with them. In 1945, the studio had four films in production, of which only ‘Songs of Abay’ got released. From then on dark times started for Kazakhfilm, which was established after the evacuation and merging with Alma-Ata Newsreel Studio. In Siranov’s December request to award some filmmakers he mentioned that the studio released one feature film, ‘Abay’ and eight newsreels. Newsreels became the bulk of production until 1950s. Since 1945 and until 1954 the studio released only two film, ‘Golden horn’ (1948) and ‘Jambul’ (1952), this period is also known as film famine (*malokartinye*).³¹¹ In 1954, Kazakh cinema industry finally was able to recuperate when Shaken Aimanov became the studio’s director. Shaken Aimanov was an actor during the evacuation, he was the one playing Jambul and Abay’s apprentice Sharip. Perhaps on these productions he learned how to make films and later became film director, maybe there was bigger influence evacuee filmmakers left, it was just unseen. Aimanov produced many films starting 1954, which brought him recognition, and the studio was later named after him. These films became the core and classics of Kazakh cinema.

³¹¹ Nogerbek, “The Various Births of Kazakh cinema” 63

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