

CRUELTY AND TOLERANCE THROUGH THE LENS OF NEW WAVE OF GEORGIAN CINEMA

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It is not easy to live in a society that “has its demands.” It does not like “different people” who do not behave “like others,” or think, talk, or look like them. They wear earrings, “ripped” jeans, short dresses or chokhas. There are plenty of constant dangers in society that does not understand, does not want to “see” and accept the reality in which there is no usual “order” but someone is trying to “break” the frames. It is a society that creates “legitimized” conditions and forces you to live as you “must live.” But you are not able to live like that.

There is never peace and tranquility in an intolerant society. And not because it cannot be forgiving and supportive but because it cannot imagine otherwise. It does not know otherwise. It passed thought such way, it was taught that way, it was raised that way, and was trapped that way. It is a victim of such “knowledge,” and it also demands a victim. Such is the rule and tradition. Today’s reality, unfortunately, assures us that violence has become a “commonplace” and “permissible” act for people of all ages. There is almost no relief because recent history and the present have left their mark on everything. A psychocultural tragedy of the nation does not go to the finale. It does not end.

Therefore, even in the 21st century, young or “middle” generations of Georgian directors, independently and as a whole, focus on the existence of such a society, its main target and victim. They focus on the action of destructive forces, which have no opponents, actually. They are not “sought.” And, consequently, the power of resistance is searched in the new generation and given to the young.

Society, as always and everywhere, is divided into two: abusers and victims. Few can free themselves from such redistribution. The gaze of the directors of New Wave is divided between these two poles.

Levan Akin’s *And Then We Danced* (2019), Lasha Tskvitinidze’s *I am Beso* (2014), Levan Koguashvili’s *Blind Dates* (2013), Nana Ekvimishvili and Simon Gross’s *In*

Bloom (2013) Teona Mghvdeladze-Grenade and Thierry Grenade’s *Brother* (2014), Levan Tutberidze’s *A Trip to Karabakh* (2006) and *Moira* (2015), Vano Burduli’s *The Conflict Zone* (2009), Zaza Urushadze’s *The Guardian* (2012), Giga Liklikadze’s *Pig* (2019), Uta Beria’s *Negative Numbers* (2019) are dedicated to the above-mentioned similar, different or atypical problems or themes presenting not only the reality of today, but also reveal the tendencies and directions of modern Georgian cinema.

Most of their films create a multifaceted range of “misplaced” children and young people “lost” in time and space, their monotonous day, social, mental, or sociological problems. At the same time, in general, an “inner” portrait of a ruthless and rarely supporting society is being depicted within the panorama of today’s Georgia.

A large part of this society is struggling to survive, by any means. Children: adolescents, young people “take advantage” of their example, what they see and understand, and this is another and main crime of parents as adults. Like the guilt or mistakes of their parents’ parents when their children and now, parents, were young.

And in these conditions, against the background of such entity, directors focus on the importance of young people’s choice. They describe stories of people within the preconditions and boundaries of specific events who, by personal decision, opposition, behavior, choice of path, must determine their own and possibly the present and future of the country, they must change things, improve them, create a better system. Or, otherwise, must destroy them, too.

The representatives of the Georgian New Wave are not so much interested in the urgency of the problems (such as, social issues, “class” discrimination, wars and their consequences, drug addiction, and other main topics that revolve around the Georgian cinema in the 21st century). Rather, by showing such a reality, they try to analyze what is behind the “façade,” what is sometimes

seen and sometimes not seen, what we sometimes see or cannot/do not see and what has many reasons, grounds and results. I will single out a few of these films, a new way indicator and outline the countures.

After *Street Days* (2010), Levan Koguashvili, in *Blind Dates*, creates a metaphorical image of society, without any pathos and sharp dramatic means or dramatization of the story.

The protagonist of the film is a 40-year-old man. The story is based on his, his friends', parents', different types of "accidentally" encountered people and is built on a small, interconnected chain of coincidences of each of them. There are neither gloomy or tragic, nor "thrilling" or extreme adventures. The director tells the story humorously, lightly and freely.

Blind Dates is a parable about modern society which no longer wants, if not able (unlike the protagonists of the 1960s and 1980s), to move forward, change or achieve something. Maybe that is why this story is perceived as more dramatic and alarming. These are the barriers to be overcome and finding oneself is necessary for those who want to create a new reality.

Similar topics are presented in Nana Ekvimishvili and Simon Gross's film *In Bloom*, though through the opposite, more tragic, approach and stylistics.

What happens in the country governs the life of every citizen, affects the condition of every family, spiritually or physically (as it really is). People lose face, are inert towards everyone and everything. In their small "kingdoms" they use force over the weak, and obey the strong. Strength is manifested in weapons and physical superiority. Then a murder takes place, in front of indifferent and frightened passers-by and everything finally changes....

The time of action is the beginning of the 1990s. An old neighborhood of Tbilisi, which seems to be closed and cut off from the outside world. The main heroes are 14-year-old girls (surrounded by difficult family relationships). They have to get to know life, figure out people and relationships, make discoveries and make choices, in difficult and extreme situations, independently. As life is gloomy and hard for the heroes of the film (compared to Levan Koguashvili's characters), there is so much hope that this generation will be able to put up with the vi-

olence and deviate from the path of the "fathers." They must not obey their "traditions" and find a solution themselves. The main thing is that they make a choice. Their generation makes a choice and "calls" others to live in this way, to move in that direction.

A murder takes place and we find a similar picture of violence in Lasha Tskvitinidze's debut film *I am Beso*. The victim is a member of the LGBT community, a friend of the main character, Beso's older gay brother. This, too, is the result of a violent environment in which everyone abuses, from parents to school children. Here, no one loves anybody and no one sympathizes with anyone. Some people's lives are already gone, for some as if everything should be ahead, but it is not.

Beso, like the protagonists of *In Bloom*, is a school-boy, but unlike them, he is a boy with a full set of "boyish" problems: theft, surreptitious world, quarrels, "readiness to fight", case discussion, drugs, bullying, unacceptance of people of non-traditional orientation and persecution, identity obstacles, expulsion, in the "backstage" of reality of the extremely poor and completely hopeless layer of society.

"... Perhaps in order to forget for a while where we come from and to remember that something is rotten in our Denmark as well. Simply, kings stealing the throne, traitorous queens, and reflexive-frowned princes have been replaced by Chernobyl scarred and dim-witted fathers, mothers aged in the market places, and realistic-rapper teenagers."¹

By changing times and circumstances, no one's life has changed. Only the characters are relocated and "familiar" places of the action are replaced by new ones. The old neighborhood of Tbilisi has been replaced by the ugly streets of one of the regions of Georgia. Nobody cares how Beso's life will continue and how the murder and the brother's escape from the country will affect the boy's future.

Also, it seems that nothing has changed in Giga Liklikadze's film *Pig*, which contains many familiar topics and problems of the time and the latest Georgian cinema. But in the case of this and Lasha Tskvitinidze's *I am Beso*, the position, attitude and perceptions of the directors are changed and different.

Pig is a film about a world where people are unre-

1 Bukhrikidze, I am,, 04.12. 2014.

alized. Where there is no room for creativity (and even sex). It is a parable of unfulfilled violence, unrealized criminals who chain their captive, curse, humiliate but still do not physically abuse him. And not just because they act on the instinct of “class solidarity” but because they are not able to be evil (they are afraid of their grandmother). They cannot even comprehend; they are not tough guys in reality, but are just “pederasts.” *Pig* is a parable about a very poor country where people can do nothing anymore.”²

The characters in Levan Akin’s film *And Then We Danced* are also young, but they live in a different time, when the long and “dark” days of the 1990’s are left behind; despite similar problems in social, political, everyday life and mentality, they have other contradictions and thoughts than Beso and his peers had from the films of Nana Ekvimishvili and Simon Gross or Giga Liklikadze.

There are no parents here to fight against their children. There are no families here that deteriorate their children’s lives. Here, there are normal fathers, mothers, and grandmothers who take care of their children and grandchildren and they too respond to them with love and care.

In the center, there is the love story of two young men. At first glance, we will witness an unusual process of first sight, gaze, discovery, falling in love, the birth of passion, the unusual process of a relationship. The process of self and identity research.

Levan Akin is free from many complexes that our society worries about. He tells the story whose main message, the main line, is the drama of young people in the modern world and the drama of this society itself, which exists in difficult conditions, based on the experience of the present or the past.

The past and present of each of them, the reality in which they found themselves, along with other factors, human or psychological, also show a metaphorical picture of the reality in the state. More precisely, it shows this in the first place. For the older generation, everything is left in the past—for some glory, or wealth, for others happiness and the joy of being together. Existence and everyday life overpowered them and deprived them of the ability to perceive the present and hope for the future. They also had to live in these circumstances, in

these socio-political conditions, in the environment of such moral laws of this society, and so it continues.

And just when society can no longer perform its duties, it is supposed to perform in front of each of its members, a great force of resistance is born that gives freedom. When this happens, a rebel will inevitably appear, which starts moving against the current and confronts the society.

In order to analyze what and why is happening today, you need to remember what and how it happened yesterday and then combine these two “dimensions.” Turn the past into the present and look at the future in this context, to give up what you have already done, to give up violence that inevitably and always leads to violence.

A person is responsible not only for what he wanted, but also for what he had to do as a result of his own actions, although he did not have any opportunity to imagine these results, much less avoid them. Such is the perception of the world of the ancient Greeks, the position and motivation of any behavior of the characters of myths and tragedies, which is directed against the decision of the gods, fate. And, as a result, people become heroes.

A lot has changed in the world since then. The events of the last 30 years in Georgia, in the conditions of changed values, have established other norms and criteria of responsibility or irresponsibility. It so happened that today society seems to be responsible for nothing and there is nothing to worry about, except its own (it cannot be even called prosperity), elemental, physiological, satisfying instincts.

Part of the heroes of modern Georgian cinema makes a choice, not only between violence and peace, but also between pitilessness, intolerance and forgiveness, with this step they are freed from the painful feeling of hatred.

Freedom and love, warmth and support are gained by young people themselves, at the cost of pain, conflict with themselves and those around them and they win this ruthless and brutal war. Violence is confronted with peace or, more precisely, with a fight for it.

As a sign of protest against this reality, the directors of these Georgian films try to see the past, to look through the eyes of modern man, to understand causes and consequences, to evaluate a specific time and make

² Gvakharia, Poverty as Grace, 06. 12. 2019.

it general, to enter a door (which has previously been closed because someone did not have the power to open it, to overcome his “committed action” or inactiveness), and to win.

Despite the identity of the themes that move from film to film, the main thing that has changed is the attitude of the directors toward seeing the problems and the ways to solve them. The style and manner of narration have changed, manifesting in the generation a new perception of the world of new thinking and liberation from the tragic feeling of the past and the present.

Today, the first resistance has been overcome and with the creation of the rebellious heroes of *In Bloom*, as well as in the films by Giga Liklikadze, Levan Akin and

Lasha Tskvitinidze, the latest Georgian cinema has acquired new features. These films have become messengers of the New Wave, because in them, in a new space and in a new context, for the first time and directly, the main message was pronounced and the grounds for the films of the first decade of the 21st century were gradually prepared and which can determine the future of the national cinema and Georgian society.

However, “I mean, how do you know what you’re going to do till you do it? The answer is, you don’t. I think I am, but how do I know? I swear it’s a stupid question.”³

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³ Salinger J.D. The Catcher, 2014, pg.114