# Female Characters in Azerbaijani Cinema

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In the 120-year-old Azerbaijani cinema, in contrast to women's issues, male heroes as well as their problems and worldviews are well-represented. Only a limited number of movies feature female protagonists and explore their problems, and women are often portrayed as secondary characters. These crucial factors in our cinema are in fact a reflection of the social attitude towards women. By studying how women are represented in Azerbaijani cinema, it is also possible to clarify somewhat the public's views on women.

The main purpose of this article is to explore how women's issues are portrayed in Azerbaijani cinema. So far, only two articles, Aygun Aslanli's *Almazdan Ümbilnisəyə*[1] (*From Almaz to Umbilnisa*) and Alia Dadashova's *Fahişədən ögey anaya qədər*[2] (*From a Prostitute to a Stepmother*), briefly discuss women's issues in Azerbaijani cinema. In this article, I attempt to answer the following questions: What kind of female characters have been created since the beginning of our national cinema? How has the social position of women been portrayed? And are there new female characters in the modern cinema of Azerbaijan? At the same time, I try to clarify somewhat the reasons behind the androcentric position of our national cinema. I look at these issues in specific movies from the beginning of Azerbaijani cinema to the present.

Female characters are thematically classified to make the article clearer and more specific. *New Female Images* focuses on the fact that women's issues became the leading theme in cinema after the establishment of the Soviet government in the early XX century. Here, I look at the portrayal of the struggle for women's rights and the creation of new female characters, mainly in the context of the new political

situation and socialist realism (an artistic method in the USSR, aimed at using literature and art to serve the needs of socialism). *Woman is Honor* (*Qadın namusdur*) focuses on the approaches of the late 1950s and the subsequent movies which portrayed female heroes from a conservative point of view and preferred to portray them as the protectors of family values. The next section discusses the emergence of *shrewish women* characters in different years who opposed their husbands' commitment to their principles. In *Women are scapegoats*, I focused on the fact that in a number of our films, women, as victims of violence, became the subject of public condemnation, and I also analyzed the attitudes of the directors towards this phenomenon. In the next two sections first I examine how directors blame women more than men for infidelity and ignore the inner world of their women characters, and then I analyze films that discuss the fate of women during World War II and the Karabakh War. Finally, the last section, *The Existential Hero*, is about female characters who are in conflict with, and cannot find their places in, society. In these movies, the directors try to examine women from an existential aspect: a woman, whose lifestyle and thoughts are not in harmony with society, does not know how to deal with reality, fails to realize her true potential, and attempts to find meaning in her life.

**New Female Characters**

Women's problems are first broadly discussed in *Bismillah* which was directed by Abbas Mirza Sharifzadeh, one of the first Azerbaijani directors, in 1925. This film, which was shot in a realistic style and included some documentary footage, was a drama that covered important issues of the period such as religious fanaticism, women's rights, archaic traditions, and the activities of the Bolsheviks against the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Although the fate of a woman in a religious-patriarchal society is believed to give birth to new generations, *Bismillah* was the first movie that discussed the issue of women's freedom in Azerbaijan. Zeynab,

one of the main characters, does not reveal the fact that she was raped by a mullah and then her family forces her to marry another man. In the wedding scene, the sadness of Zeynab and the happiness of the other women are brought to the screen by the technique of cross-cutting, and this sharp contrast perfectly captures her tragedy and rightlessness. On the wedding night, when her husband learns that Zeynab is not virgin, he expels her from his house. Zeynab, while rejected by everybody, is captured by Musavat soldiers and forced into servitude on the plantations, and later she joins her Bolshevik brother Jafar in their struggle against the government. At the end, the frauds of the mullah are revealed and he is sentenced to imprisonment by the court. Thus, the rights of a raped woman are restored after the establishment of the Soviet government.[3]

In the following years, directors searched for new female characters and produced four consecutive movies in which the main protagonists were women. One of the main themes of Azerbaijani cinema during these years was the emancipation of women and the promotion of their rights. After the establishment of the Soviet government in Azerbaijan in April of 1920, some of the main points in the official decree of the Azerbaijan Revolution Committee published in the May 12 issue of the *Communist* newspaper were "the establishment of the Central Women's Club named after Ali Bayramov (1920), the I Congress of Azerbaijani Women (8-11 February 1921), and the establishment of the Eastern Women's Magazine (*Şərq qadını*, 1923)."[4] Reforms were also implemented in cinema: "The Soviet government gave great importance to the most popular art, cinema, since its early days. The organization of photo and cinema, established in 1920, was transformed into the Azerbaijan State Cinema in 1926 and began to produce movies. Between 1923 and 1931, movies such as *Qız qalası* (*Maiden Tower*), *Bismillah*, *Gilan qızı* (*Gilanian Girl*), *Hacı Qara* (*Haji Gara*, a male name), *Sevil* (*Sevil*, a female name), *Lətif* (*Latif*, a male name), *26 Bakı komissarı* (*26 Baku Commissars*)

were made in Baku."[5] Four films – *Gilanian Girl*, *Sevil*, *İsmət* (*Ismat*, a female name), *Almaz* (*Almaz*, a female name) – depicting the path of women's spiritual and political development during the years of socialism were also filmed during these years.

The purpose of *Gilanian Girl*, directed by Leo Moore in 1928, is to demonstrate how Sakina, a housewife whose rights were violated, turns into a revolutionary communist. Sakina is the wife of communist Haji Zakidar, the leader of the leading guerrillas against the Shah regime in Iran and the British troops which are supporting the Shah's government. Zakidar's brother, Haji Mubarak, does not support Sakina in this struggle; her reputation was besmirched by the slander of Haji Mubarak that she had flirted with him in exchange for jewelry. Zakidar, who is portrayed as a progressive man, believes his brother without even listening to his wife Sakina. This interesting paradox of Zakidar, who fails to change his attitude towards a woman while also trying to bring a revolution and change the country, shows that he demonstrates patriarchal male behavior by not listening to his wife. When Sakina was stoned by her neighbors for her "betrayal," her husband does not interfere. Zakidar learns about this slander only after his young son tells him the truth. After that, Haji Mubarak kills his brother Zakidar and forces Sakina to be a mistress to his friend. In the last scenes, the desperate Sakina joins the communist revolutionaries in their struggle against the British troops. However, the concept of a new female character was not fully developed in the director's interpretation. That is, we could not see Sakina in a new context because before Sakina began her struggle, during the process of her transition from a housewife to a social person, she is killed by British soldiers.

Play writer and director Jafar Jabbarli criticized the film in his *Where does Azerkino go?* article: "*Azerkino* does not produce movies based on the scripts of local screenwriters,

instead, it relies solely on invited [the movie's directors and screenwriters were Russian] screenwriters, and they write all sorts of [unrealistic] stories about Turkic men and women because they are unfamiliar with local life. Then the first Turk who reads the script protests and everything goes upside down. The same happened in *Gilanian Girl* too. [The foreign screenwriters] wrote such nonsense that they could not get out of the situation."[6] Jabbarli's criticism was not groundless. Cinema historian Aydin Kazimzadeh rightly points out that "[t]he name of the movie is *Gilanian Girl*. The audience expects that Gilanian girl Sakina will engage in revolutionary activities, and she will help her husband Haji Zakidar in this struggle. However, we see the opposite in the movie. Sakina's forced involvement in the love triangle distracts the viewers from the main issues."[7]

The other movie was *Sevil*, directed by Jafar Jabbarli and Alexander Beknazarov in 1929 based on the former's namesake play. In the movie, an illiterate housewife Sevil is under pressure from her husband Balash. Balash, who excessively values material things and falls in love with Adila, expels Sevil from her house and separates her from her child. Lonely Sevil begins her independent, albeit difficult, life. The movie features a dynamic installation of portraits of women resembling each other behind iron-plated windows. With the physical resemblance of women (all are sad and covered), the directors describe their overall visual biography, presenting an artistic interpretation (women are shown in a prison-like window) of the restrictions of their freedoms imposed by their husbands and society. The movie uses elaborate plans and enhanced expressions to reveal the psychological state of the characters. Multiple episodes through broken montage accurately describe family relationships. The scene where Balash compares Adila with Sevil was made with light ironic emphasis. For example, When Balash looks at Sevil's untidy hair, he remembers Adila and moans, and Sevil immediately tidies up her hair. Sevil's first objection to Balash (Balash

finds Sevil unconscious in the street, brings her home, and then Adile demands that Balash expel her again. As a protest against Balash's cowardice, Sevil throws away her chadra and leaves home) is presented in relation with the undergoing socio-political changes in the country. After that scene, the camera immediately runs away from Sevil, and the calendar shows April 28 (the day the Soviet government was established in Azerbaijan). With Sevil's subsequent portrayal among the people, her protest is excluded from the family drama and thus politicized: her joining the revolutionary process, fighting for women's rights, and her transformation are presented in propagandist documentary style. The directors briefly describe the encounter between Balash and Sevil. Balash, who lost his previous reputation and authority, comes to the reception of Sevil, who is now well-educated and a high-ranking Soviet official (the movie does not indicate her official position), and seeks her help because of his poor financial situation. Sevil's self-confident and stern looks collide with Balash's desperate looks. And Balash leaves her office in despair.

*Sevil* also introduces a more interesting and new female model for our cinema – Balash's sister, the symbol of diversity and laughter. The concept of a provocative character such as Gulush, who does not only mock people with an old-fashioned lifestyle, but also is sarcastic toward the modern lifestyle and consumerism, has always been relevant in Western cinema. In the final scene, Gulush leaves a dark room and on a sunny wide square she throws off her chadra, an act which was a novelty for our film industry at that time.

*Ismet*, directed by Mikhail Mikayilov in 1934, was produced for several reasons. The movie is about an oppressed woman's finding her own way and becoming a pilot. Mikayilov's comment on this is interesting: "*Ismet* plays a special role in my career. The film was shot at a time when Azerbaijani women threw of their chadras and joined public life. I was living in Icheri Sheher. One day a woman in our neighborhood burned herself. I saw it with my own eyes. Since then, I could not

forget the tragedy of that woman. But I had not seen the worst case yet. There was a workshop[8] for women at the current Palace of Happiness [*Səadət Sarayı*]. I heard that a woman named Sariyya Khalilova, who was participating in the workshops, was brutally murdered by her father and brother in 1933 for throwing off her chadra and going to the workshops. I also attended her funeral. There I saw that women took off their chadras and threw them under their feet. About the same time, I read an article in the newspaper about Leyla Mammadbeyova, the first Azerbaijani woman pilot. Finally, I started working on the script for *Ismet*. I combined all of these three topics."[9]

The director combined various female characters in one – Ismet. According to the plot, Samad's first wife could not tolerate the insults of her mother-in-law and her husband, thus she burns herself alive on their wedding day, and then Samad decides to marry for the second time. As a result of the insistence of his stern mother, Samad marries young Ismet. Ismet fails to get pregnant and is blamed by her husband. As he prepares to marry for the third time, Ismet leaves home and gets a job in a textile factory, thus, she manages to avoid her husband's numerous assassination plots. Samad thinks that Ismet is dishonoring him by leaving home and working. One day, pilots visit the textile factory and later Ismet is offered the chance to be a pilot. In one of the first episodes, in the wedding scene, after hearing the story of Samad's first wife's suicide, Ismet is scared, she hides under her bridal dress. This is a successful portrayal of the desperation of Ismet's situation. One of the most memorable episodes is when on the airplane the wind throws Ismet's chadra away. Although Ismet worked in the factory and she was active in public works, she could not dare to get rid of her chadra. If Mikayilov filmed it in a conventional way in which a woman throws away her chadra, it would be a rhetorical scene. However, the director's solution is rather reserved: the event occurs spontaneously and this approach saves the scene from pathos.

The point is that the event occurs as a result of wind, that is a natural phenomenon and this coincidence opens a new chapter in Ismet's life. The topics covered in the movie – blaming a woman for infertility and the desire of families to have a son – are still relevant in our society.

In the three movies I discussed, the presentation of women within the family was dictated by social and political reality. For it would be unnatural to present women as the founders of socialism who were suddenly transformed as a result of the cultural revolutionary policies. To make it possible, a wave of political and cultural changes would have had to be realized for the social transformation of women. The directors portrayed the injustices in the lives of all three women as grounds for new beginnings. Thus, while in *Gilanian Girl*, *Sevil*, and *Ismet*, we observe that women joined the social process, in *Almaz*, directed in 1936, we meet a modern and open-minded woman who directly participates in public life. Jabbarli wrote the script for *Almaz*, based on the eponymous play he wrote in 1931, formed the creative team, chose the actors, and made test screenings, but his sudden death halted the production of the movie. Therefore, the movie was directed by Agharza Guliyev and Grigori Braginsky. *Almaz* is remarkable for its visual transmission. The camera not only focuses on the characters, but it also enhances the artistic and aesthetic quality of the composition by highlighting the background images. In *Almaz*, which is the last silent film in the history of Azerbaijani national cinema, the directors tried to avoid ideological pathos as much as possible and they also emphasized women's rights and the struggle against backwardness.

In the movie, young Almaz goes to a remote village to work as a school teacher. In the first scene, a villager named Yakhshi (Good) tells her that she is pregnant, and asks her to keep her secret because otherwise, she can be killed by her relatives for the illegitimate child. In addition to teaching, Almaz advocates women's rights and launches an initiative to

transform the mosque into a weaving center to enable the local women to independently earn their own living. Rural conservatives go against this and try to defame Almaz, accusing her of advocating immorality to women and children. After a while, Yakhshi gives birth and then she has to give her baby to Almaz. The villagers accuse Almaz of giving birth to an illegitimate child and corrupting the children at school. At the end, a meeting is held with the participation of rural communities and the state commission. As a result, Almaz's innocence (that she did not corrupt the children) is revealed. Yakhshi also reveals that the mullah of the village raped her in the mosque and that the child is his.

The book describes Almaz's hesitations at several points, for example, her hesitation over taking Yakhshi's child and her desperation in the face of a villager's psychological attack. In the movie, on the contrary, Almaz is resolute in all these cases and is able to stand up to the accusations without any hesitation. Unlike the book, Almaz's bolder presentation in the movie was not accidental. After the death of Jabbarli, there were discussions in the film studio about his script. Braginsky proposes a change in the script, expressing his dissatisfaction with the overwhelming number of negative characters. One of the employees of the studio, Dubrovsky, disagrees with him by saying that "the main issue in the script is the character of Almaz. She is the carrier of the positive beginnings of Soviet realities. If she can keep her optimism throughout the movie, she would be 'Chapayev'[10] in a skirt. The script is entirely based on Almaz's struggles against evil forces."[11] Dubrovsky's view was that one of the goals of the Soviet government was to create and promote the image of a strong Soviet woman in Azerbaijani cinema.

**Women are Honor**

Throughout the 1940s and the mid-1950s, female characters remained in the background; the search for oil fields, the

dedication of oil workers during World War II (*Yeni horizont* [*New Horizon*], *Bakının işıqları* [*The Lights of Baku*], *Qara daşlar* [*The Black Stones*]) became popular and in those movies, the main characters were men. However, starting from the late 1950s, new movies with female protagonists were beginning to be produced: *Ögey ana* (*Stepmother*), *Onu bağışlamaq olarmı?* (*Can He Be Forgiven?*), *Aygün* (*Aygun*, a female name). If the women in *Ismet*, *Sevil*, *Gilanian girl*, and *Almaz* were excluded from the patriarchal family, protested against lawlessness and became socially active, the 1950s cinema emphasized the stronger loyalty of women to the family and their honor. Not only did male directors impose the 'ideal family woman' on their female heroes, they also placed social responsibility on them.

*Onun böyük ürəyi* (*Great Heart*), directed by Ajdar Ibrahimov, combines several identities in Samaya's personality: an exemplary family woman as well as socially active and hardworking woman. The story covers three periods: pre-war, war, and post-war. Samaya, who is studying at a construction technical school, is married to Ogtay. Her husband, who is arrested on corruption charges, works in the rear in Russia during the war, and after the war, he marries another woman there. Samaya, nevertheless, forgives her husband, faithfully waits for him, raises a child and works hard in construction. Although her husband betrays her, she remains loyal to her first love and is not married to anyone else. Her sacrifices as a woman and an employee are rewarded by the government and Samaya is promoted in her job. The director advocates this image of an exemplary woman in the character of Samaya.

In *Aygun*, directed by Kamil Rustambeyov in 1960, a woman is forced to choose between her professor and her family. Although Aygun wants to continue her education at the Conservatory, she halts her education because of her educated and jealous husband Amirkhan. The rationale behind Aygun's agreement with her husband's wishes is her love for him and her reluctance to destroy her family.

Dilara, one of the central characters of *Stepmother* is the second wife of Arif, who lives in a remote village. In the film's introduction, Ismail, Arif's son, gets angry when he learns that his father will bring him a new mother, and the director declares the main purpose of the story: Dilara must earn Ismail's love in order to preserve the new family. Throughout the movie, Dilara is trying to realize her husband's biggest wish – Ismail's acceptance of her as his mother. However, she must not only prove to Ismail or her husband that she is a real mother rather than a stepmother, but to all the villagers and the relatives. At the end, Dilara protects her family by proving that she is the ideal mother and woman.

In many episodes of the three movies, direct or indirect pressure from male directors on female characters can be observed. The director of *Stepmother* puts the main burden on the woman in the protection of the family. In *His big heart* and *Aygun*, although women are divorced from their husbands, they are protecting their honor (in the sense of "sexual purity") by not allowing a second man in their lives. Indeed, the directors who chose Aygun and Samaya as their heroes in their stories did not let any second man enter their lives, and by doing so, the directors emphasized the fact that these women remained loyal to their husbands (they were refusing marriage proposals, which demonstrated their strong stance, and the proud expression in their faces were often displayed by the cameras) despite being insulted by their actions. When Samaya learns about her husband's betrayal, she ends her own personal life and finds comfort in her daughter and her work. Aygun also follows Samaya's track, after divorcing her alcoholic husband who humiliated her, she dedicates herself to her career and her daughter, she rejects Elyar, an honest man who loves her, and then at the end, she returns to her husband. A woman's honor, her loyalty and affection to family, her taking all the burdens of family and her self-sacrifice are seemingly the main criteria of these movies.

*Böyük dayaq* (*Great Support*) directed by Habib Ismayilov in 1962, is also related to the previous movies. The movie shows the changes on a collective farm in the 1950s and the struggle for the establishment of democratic principles in leadership. Rustam, the chairman of the collective farm, does not want his daughter-in-law Maya, an agricultural expert, to work. Maya's husband Garash, who studied with Maya, also demands that she stay at home because he and his father do not believe in Maya's willingness to protect her honor. Maya gains the confidence of these two men after she proves to be a chaste woman. In various scenes, in order to demonstrate that Maya is a chaste woman, the director shows that she is grievous because of her husband's lack of confidence in her and that she rejects Salman who wants to be with her.

All of these movies are shot in a propagandist style, and in the presentation of directors, we see totally positive, programmed, and schematic women characters without any contradictions, complexities or mistakes. The directors did not explore the psychological and emotional aspects of women or their place in social life, and they did not give any alternative to their women characters. Thus, even though the women protagonists in the movies are the main characters, their stories usually are not diversified.

In the following years, a number of movies, which showed the importance in our mentality of the loyalty of women to their families, were filmed. *Tütək səsi* (*The Sound of a Flute*, 1975), which describes the social life during World War II, emphasizes women's honor. The whole village protests the marriage of Salayi, whose husband died in the war, with Jabrayil, the chairman of the collective farm. The villagers ignore the fact they were in love since their youth, and the local community refuses to accept the voluntary choices of these two individuals. In the views of the villagers, Jabrayil betrayed the honor of the (deceased) soldier, and the wife of the soldier was dishonored by marrying another man. The villagers also ignore the fact that Jabrayil is an honest and

hardworking chairman because for them a woman's honor is more important than honesty. More interestingly, we do not see any neutrality by director Rasim Ojagov towards these issues. Only two episodes in the movie reveal Ojagov's androcentric position.

The first episode is that the villagers gather in front of the house where Sayali and Jabrayil live and demand an explanation. The director confronts Ismet (meaning honor or dignity), whose husband died on the frontline, with Sayali. Ismet accuses Sayali of wrongdoing by saying that "you are not the only one who got the black paper [from the government that your husband died in the war]. What should we do now? Should we also follow your path?" In this episode, Ismet is portrayed as a reserved, innocent, and saint-like grievous women while Salayi is presented as an angry woman who became the slave of her passions. Thus, Ojagov positively portrays Ismet and the latter wins the argument with Sayali. The second episode is a sudden break of the mirror on the bedroom of Sayali and Jabrayil. In popular belief, a broken mirror symbolizes a misfortune. Just before this scene, Sayali regretfully told her husband that "there is no happiness for us if the community does not give its blessing" and at that exact moment by breaking the mirror Ojagov signals that he agrees with her statement. Like in many of our movies, here also the camera usually focuses on men rather than women in order to deeply explore the emotional state of the former.

Eldar Guliyev criticizes the notion of honor in *Bir cənub şəhərində* (*In a Southern City*, 1969). Unlike his predecessors, he refuses to use the propagandist style, the aesthetics of socialist realism, and the hero-antihero dichotomy. By using the aesthetics of Italian neorealism, Guliyev shows that the conservative values, which could not be altered by Soviet reforms, in our society are deeply embedded in our worldview. He introduces a character named Murad, who hesitates between an authoritarian family model and the liberal family model. *In a Southern City* was an antithesis to the previous movies, and

it was not surprising that the movie was banned at that time.[12] The movie describes events that took place in one of the central suburbs of Baku in the 1960s. Tofig could not accept his fiancé Solmaz's going to a movie with her classmates from university. Later, Tofig falls in love with a Russian woman and his marrying to another women is seen as a disgrace to Solmaz's honor by the latter's family. Solmaz's neighborhood expects Murad, her brother, to kill Tofig in order to clear his family's honor. During this process, Murad falls in love with a journalist named Rana. Murad's mother could not accept the fact that Rana has a friendship with Jahangir, a man in her neighborhood, and that sometimes she goes to Jahangir's home. Thus, Murad's mother does not think that Rana is appropriate to her family. In Murad's silence, we see that he does not agree with his mother's judgement. However, Murad has to remain quiet because he cannot dare to break the unwritten rules of the neighborhood. Therefore, the end remains open and the movie's message is ambiguous.

One of the main lines in Rustam Ibragimbekov's *Kabusun gözüylə* (*Through the Nightmare's Eyes*, 2010) drama is that the teenage brother considers himself responsible for the protection of his divorced sister Rana's honor. According to the plot, actress Tamilla falls in love with a French man named Richard. Because Tamilla is married, and Richard did not experience happiness in his previous marriages, they are scared to get married. Rana, Tamilla's friend, spreads the news that Richard is her own lover in order to protect her friend from her husband who treats Tamilla as his property. The fact that Richard stays at Rana's house is believed to be a disgrace to the latter's brother. He keeps his sister under control so that she cannot sleep with a man without a marriage and demands that they marry. The story ends with a seemingly fake happy ending: Tamilla gets divorced and reunites with her lover Richard while Rana returns to her a jealous and drunk husband. Although the director is generally right in the issues he deals with, I think he exaggerated reality in his

portrayal of the Azerbaijani male characters. His portrayal of all educated Azerbaijani men as uncivilized and patriarchal is not justified.

The question arises: why did our cinema, which previously portrayed women as strong and independent individuals without subjecting them to patriarchal norms and to its honor code, go back in the following years by limiting the emancipation of women, emphasizing the role of women at home as well as the importance of women's loyalty to the patriarchal honor code? Of course, these latter movies reflected the real attitude of Azerbaijani society towards women. The main issue, however, is that some of the directors, along with the public, also shared an androcentric position in this issue. One of the roots of the problem should be sought in the context of the Soviet revolution that occurred at the beginning of the last century. The emancipation of women became possible through radical rather than gradual reforms. "Changes in social conditions after the establishment of Soviet power also enabled the Azerbaijani woman to participate in public life. In a short period of time, hundreds and thousands of women enrolled in literacy courses, and participated in community and cultural events. However, changes in social conditions did not necessarily mean development in people's thoughts."[13] Thus, the abovementioned movies includes both male and female antagonists against female heroes. In *Gilanian Girl*, women in black chadra throw stones to Sakina who is in a white chadra. Ismet's mother-in-law and folk doctor try to create conditions for her husband to be killed. A group of women protests against using the mosque as a textile factory by Almaz.

It is interesting that in literature of the 1920s and 1930s, some male authors express ironic attitudes towards women's freedom. That is, some male writers could not accept that women were suddenly granted all freedoms, thus, they mocked this situation in their stories. "It was a time when the problem of female emancipation almost become a political issue

and seemingly it also implied a return to matriarchy. The process of extreme modernization of women by the environment is discussed in the works of Gantamir Gafur Efendiyev, especially in his story *Zeynab Tukazbanova*. Zeynab is so modernized that she is dissatisfied with male and female equality and demands women dominance. She even accepts her mother's last name and becomes Zeynab Tukazbanova."[14]

Another issue is that the new concept of women characters by Jafar Jabbarly, Sayid Huseyn and other writers was formed under the dictates of the Soviet revolution. However, the people still did not reject patriarchal values, and the revolution did not fundamentally change the conservative attitude towards woman. For example, in *Aygun*, although woman rightly leave home, this episode is presented with tragic music because Azerbaijanis think that family is sacred, and the departure of woman, that is the honor of the family, is a tragedy. The attitude of the intelligent Azerbaijani men towards women as a symbol of honor and the importance of her devotion to her family were also reflected in the articles of young literary critics in the 1960s. Such attitude once again confirms that although women's freedom was partially realized since the early 20th century, our society had largely remained androcentric. For example, in his *Sevildən Saçlıya* (*From Sevil to Sachli*) article, while Masud Alioglu supports the choices of Sevil and Almaz, he criticizes Sariyya – the protagonist of Ilyas Afandiyev's *Körpüsalanlar* (*Bridge Builders*, 1960) – for divorcing her careerist husband, who had a demeaning attitude towards women: "In *Bridge Builders* novel, Sariyya's free actions, which do not comply with family values, bother us [society?]. Sariyya neither follows the norms of modern life, nor our national traditions; she is a licentious and over-free woman. The errors of the writer's opinions stem from the fact that he tried to portray Sariyya as more progressive and modern form of today's girls. Sariyya's actions such as leaving her family without any moral justification and her intolerable behavior are depicted as an ideal and exemplary by

the author."[15] The first publication of *Bridges Builders* in the *Communist* newspaper was abruptly halted and many articles were written to criticize the novel on the ground that it violated our moral norms..[16]

**Shrewish Woman Characters**

Khrushchev's speech criticizing Stalinism after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1956 was one of the most significant events in the life of the 1960s generation. The relaxation of the regime enabled the 1960s generation to become active in some areas. The effect of this relaxation within the country also affected the cinema. Historian Jamil Hasanli writes that "[T]he continuation of the liberal course launched by Imam Mustafayev in the second half of the [19]50s and by Vali Akhundov in the [19]60s gave a powerful impetus to the development of literature, art, culture [and] eventually, free thinking. The decline in political pressure and Soviet persecution encouraged people to some extent."[17] The search for an ideal Soviet person was not attractive anymore for directors in the 1960s, the main subjects were not production and socialist nation-building because the directors were trying to avoid the illusion of socialist realism as much as possible. In the words of Bulat Okudzhava, "the main purpose [of that generation] was to humanize rather than to destroy the communist regime."[18]

The directors, who moved from the ideal to the real, sought to portray the individual from all sides. Conflict was not portrayed as between the positive and the negative, but in the individual's self-confidence, behavior, and in their relations with the social environment. In *Telefonçu qız* (*Telephonist Girl*, 1962), the director Hasan Seyidbeyli does not put responsibilities such as being a family woman and active in society on the protagonist Mehriban. Mehriban is a woman, who lost her mother at an early age, with childhood trauma and complexes, and who wants to prove herself in life. The

director is able to emphasize Mehriban's inner psychological struggle and to reduce the emotional distance between the character and the audience. In the 1960s, the thematic and stylistic modernization in cinema did not fundamentally change the directors' attitude towards women. Nevertheless, *In a Southern City* featured a new female character for our cinema. It is the wife of a police officer, who was not even one of the main characters, who is remembered as a shrew. A similar female character was further developed by *Bizim Cəbiş müəllim* (*Our Teacher, Jabi*sh), one of Hasan Seyidbayli's cult movies. Jabish is a man of principle and ideals, but his wife (who does not even have a name in the movie) is irritated by her husband's moralism and considers him a fool for not baking soap to make money. A woman character, which does not support her husband's commitment to his principles, is also found in films of subsequent years. In *Yay günlərinin xəzan yarpaqları* (*Fall Leaves of Summer Days*), directed by Tofig Ismayilov in 1986, Shamsi, a school director in a mountainous village, is the successor of Jabish. Most people do not like him because of his commitment to his principles and his honesty. His wife Nargiz is also opposes her husband and reprimands him for being honest and demands that they move to the city. Rasim Ojagov's thriller *İstintaq* (*Investigation*, 1979) creates a woman character who opposes her husband's commitment to his principles. The protagonist, Seyfi, exposes the corruption of high-ranking officials. His wife, however, is concerned about domestic issues, and she considers her husband a fool since he does not create a connection with ministers and does not not abuse his power. Similar female characters are also featured in movies such as *Qanun naminə* (*In the Name of the Law* by Mukhtar Dadashov, 1968) and *İmtahan* (*Exam* by Gulbeniz Azimzadeh and Shahmar Alekberov, 1987).

In *Həyat bizi sınayır* (*Life Tests Us*), directed by Shamil Mahmudbeyov in 1972, a teenager named Rashid comes from his village to the city – to his brother's home, who is a high-ranking official. Due to his brother's shrewish and

materialistic wife, Rashid leaves their home. The protagonist of David Imanov's *Zirzəmi* (*The Basement*, 1990) is an architect named Teymur. Teymur's wife asks him to accept well-paying projects. When Teymur takes orders to work in individual projects, he experiences an identity crisis as an artist. His wife accuses him of not earning enough money, being lazy and sitting at home all the day, and eventually she marries a successful dramaturgist. In *Dalan* (*Dead End*), directed by Elvin Rustamzadeh in 2019, Ramiz commits suicide due to his social and financial problems and his wife is partially responsible for his death because she has been accusing him of not earning enough money. For in our mentality, the stereotype remains intact that it is only the man's responsibility to earn money, and men are more responsible for strengthening this stereotype because in the view of most men, women should stay at home and take care of their children. Therefore, it is a biased approach by directors who ignore the reasons behind this stereotype which portrays women as materialistic and men as individuals committed to their principles.

**Women as scapegoats**

In Azerbaijani national cinema, a woman who has been the victim of physical violence is a scapegoat. In *Yeddi oğul istərəm* (*I Want Seven Sons*, Tofig Taghizadeh, 1970), filmed in the traditions of the Western about a battle between seven Komsomol members and some provincial noblemen, there is only one female character: Humay, a nobleman's daughter. Humay is engaged to Jalal, one of the seven komsomols fighting against Humay's father. In *I Want Seven Sons*, the main characters are men and a scene about Humay, although she has a supporting role, is one of the film's effective parts. Humay's father, Garay bey, an enemy of the Soviet system, has Jalal killed. The Komsomol leader, Bakhtiyar, blaming Humay for the death of his like-minded comrade, Jalal, beats her mercilessly. The director justifies Bakhtiyar's beating a woman, ascribing it to his emotional state—the deep sadness brought about by the loss of his friend. At the end of that scene, Humay affirms

the director's justification with the thought, "I forgive you for my father's blood," and the filmmaker abandons her to fate: Humay leaves the scene of the incident, turning into a small point on the screen, and it is unclear whether she will live or die. In this episode, the man does not enter into dialogue with the woman, does not try to understand, does not study the situation, makes a negative assessment, and chooses violence as the means of communication. I would use this episode to symbolize Azerbaijani cinema's attitude toward women. In the sense that, in most cases in our national cinema, directors do not give women the opportunity to speak or express themselves, relegating them to supporting roles, and women are either crushed under other plotlines, or lose to the dominance of the main male characters. Thus, the viewer does not get to know Humay.

Several films of the 1970s and 1980s show society's attitude toward violence against women. In Tofig Taghizadeh's *Evin kişisi* (*Man of the House*, 1978), Antiga, the lover of the policeman, Rovshan, is raped. The mothers of both Antiga and Rovshan think that if a girl is raped, she herself is to blame. It is no accident that in the film Panah, Antiga's rapist, goes unpunished, and he is not even held accountable for the crime he committed. Rovshan eventually returns to Antiga, but at the root of his return is not his understanding of the woman, but his feelings. In other words, Rovshan does not want to understand Antiga or to know how the incident occurred, he does not talk to her, does not listen to her, but blindly accuses the girl. The director shows society's inadequate response to a woman who has been sexually abused, and how a rape victim is too ashamed to make a complaint to the police. But at the same time, the filmmaker does not dwell this important problem and does examine it in depth. Antiga's story fades into the background of Rovshan's work and concerns at home.

The main theme of Abdul Makhmudov's *Üzü küləyə* (*Face to the Wind*, 1977) is environmental pollution and the conflict

revolves around a confrontation between bad and good people and the fight against the negative effects of the production process. One of the secondary plotlines is the love affair between the young scientist Ramiz and nature preserve employee Nargiz. The negative character Alibala attempts to rape Nargiz but unsuccessfully. Ramiz, who is aware of the incident, has his faith in Nargiz shaken, blaming her rather than Alibala. True, the film has a happy ending, and Nargiz and Ramiz get back together. The director shows that Ramiz's doubts were unfair. However, his approach was superficial, without going into the details or addressing the negative side of the traditional approach, such as the man doubting the woman, accusing without listening, blaming the woman for the rape attempt, and the woman justifying herself although she is not guilty. In other words, directors simply show the negative attitude towards women who have been sexually abused, without investigating the causes of the problem or presenting a different approach, process, or interpretation.

*Etimad telefonu* (*Helpline*), directed by Rustam Ibrahimbekov in 2001 and funded by UNESCO, is the first film to feature the word "gender" and to attempt to develop the theme of gender equality. However, the director does not create a dramatic basis for Rena's attempts to inform men about gender and her initiative to organize a helpline (a moral and psychological support service) the moment she steps off the plane upon her return from Moscow to Baku. From an aesthetic standpoint, the story's primitive attempts at propaganda and education render it useless and undermine the emotional impact of the content. Rena was raped by her stepfather when she was a teenager. Many years later, this woman, who never spoke to anyone about the rape, is going to get married. Circumstances cause her to reveal her secret to her fiancé, Sadig, on the helpline. When her fiancé learns about her personal tragedy, he is shocked and confused. The director leaves the ending open. However, in the movie, filmed in a documentary style, the Azerbaijani man's attitude toward the raped woman seems progressive.

Yavar Rzayev touches on aspects of culture in *İlahi məxluq* (*The Divine Creature*, 2011). A girl, an artist from the city, arrives at a summer pasture where a shepherd family is encamped. Under the female artist's influence, the shepherd's teenage son, Ismayil, begins to show an inclination for drawing, irritating his father. The shepherd, fearing that his son would leave home, tries to protect him at any cost from the girl's harmful influence. In the director's interpretation, the woman, representing art and the West, is in opposition to the father, an oriental despot tied to tradition and nature. His rape of the artist is how a man protects his family and son from a "foreign element" through violence. And the director does everything he can to justify the rape of the woman by the shepherd. In a few episodes, with body language and flirtation, the girl makes sexual invitations to the man, thus implicating her in her own rape. And the shepherd rapes the woman as she lies dressed as Venus in Joshua Reynolds' painting *Cupid Untying the Zone of Venus*. This is also the rape of culture by nature. The director portrays the danger coming from the West in the figure of a woman, saying that an independent, educated woman is a violation of family values □□and tradition. After the rape, the girl returns to the city. Ishmael is following in his father's footsteps, and family values □□triumph over innovation. At the end, Ismayil has grown up and his face expresses comfort and satisfaction. As for the girl, questions remain: why did she come here, what was her purpose or desire?

**Unfaithful and submissive women**

A topic that has not been studied by film critics in Azerbaijan is the image of the adulterous woman. Shamil Aliyev's *Etiraf* (*Confession*, 1992) is about Azad, who is encouraged by his friends to steal money in order to create a socio-political organization. But Azad is arrested and at the request of his friend Gabil, he takes all the blame. Upon leaving prison, Azad learns that his wife is married to his friend Adil, and his daughter does not recognize him as her

father. His wife's confession to adultery and that the child is not his, but Gabil's, is shown in wide shots, which at least visually prevents us from understanding the internal situation. In addition, the clarification of the characters' relationships occurs easily for some reason. The reasons that compelled or motivated her to commit adultery are not examined either visually or linguistically.

In Elvin Rustamzadeh's film *Dead End* (2019), Jabbar, a wealthy businessman, is a despotic husband, does not want his well-educated wife to work, and is indifferent to her. The crushing of her dream and her husband's infidelity encourage her affair with Yusif. The filmmaker places the guilt of adultery more on the woman, while Yusif, with whom she is unfaithful, and the husband who cheats on Arzu are relegated to the background. The director, coming from a tradition of patriarchal thought, questions women more than men. However, the director should not question the woman, but discover and reveal the psychological situation that led her to this. The director does not sufficiently establish idea that that Arzu began to cheat on her husband immediately after she became aware of her husband's other woman from a telephone conversation. The film does not look at how she lived up to then and how she came to this decision. Instead, we see Arzu getting a room to sleep with Yusif, whom she has just met, in the scene immediately after Arzu learns of her husband's infidelity.

In Emil Guliyev's *Second Act* there are only antiheroes. In the film, which depicts the lives of the residents of one of Baku's neighborhoods, a woman's honor is one of the most important issues in the lives of the residents, especially the men. The basis of the plot is betrayal: the betrayal of a friend, a wife, and a husband. The motif of betrayal comes to a culmination in the secret love affair between Arif and Samira, the wife of Tima, Arif's friend who had helped him selflessly. The scene in which the relationships in the love triangle Arif-Tima-Samira are clarified is given a lot of space, and most of the attention is on the woman's infidelity.

There is not much space in the plot given to the fact that Tima, in turn, was unfaithful to his wife, Samira, with another woman. In general, the filmmaker ignores an important function of art. How do the characters come through the psychological confrontation that has been presented to us on the screen, and what happened to determine their actions in their intimate world?

There are many male characters in *Second Act*, and the perspectives and problems of men make up the bulk of the film's plot. "Filmmakers prefer to show male characters and their feelings and behavior. Women are elements of the male world, details that help reveal the male characters."[19] And *Second Act* attributes the crisis of the family to social and mental causes. The main message of the film is that society is dirty and nobody is morally clean.

Javid Tavakkul, director of *My Dear Fellini* (2010), raises an important problem: a woman does not receive social support from the state, nor does she have opportunities to develop as an individual. He expresses artistically this systemic problem in a love triangle: a rich man – his mistress, who has financial problems – and a poor man who loves her. The director's interpretation allows us to look at a classic story from the angle of a woman's betrayal of herself. The main protagonist, Rasim, who wants to be a director, meets Leyla accidentally and finds out that Leyla is the mistress of the rich Jamal. When Jamal learns about the love affair between Leyla and Rasim, he follows them. At the end, Leyla solves the problem by killing herself and Jamal. The main character is still a man, and the woman is just a part of his story. Throughout the plot, Leyla, who is constantly depressed, can only deal with her sadness through alcohol and sleep. This does not allow us to see the woman's world in detail.

In two films that I will discuss, I will focus on the image of two submissive women, oppressed in a patriarchal world, in the context of the crisis of the modern family. In *Axınla aşağı*

(*Downstream*, Asif Rustamov, 2015) the family crisis is caused by an authoritarian father. Rowing coach Ali suffers because his son has no talent, his sexual relationship with his wife is long over, and he has a mistress. The father cuts his son from the team because of his weakness, and the family's situation is exacerbated by his son's unexpected death. The woman does not end her relationship with her husband even after the loss of her son, even trying to save their relations somehow. The filmmaker's main character is the father; he is the subject the director is studying. In this film, which never questions the husband's infidelity, we see a conciliatory and powerless woman.

In Ilgar Najaf's *Nar bağı* (*Pomegranate Orchard*, 2017) Qabil went to Russia because of a conflict with his father, leaving his wife, Sarah, and their child, and married there again. The family is unaware of his second marriage. The woman does not question her husband when he returns after many years, accepts him submissively, and once again becomes pregnant. Gabil sells the pomegranate orchard and abandons his family a second time. Thanks to her professionalism, the actress Ilaha Hasanova is able to show through body language alone the feelings of this provincial woman, abandoned by her husband, living a monotonous life, silent and helpless, showing the audience her inner world. Here the filmmaker's main focus is on the conflict between father and son, and the woman is secondary.

The image of a helpless female is also featured in Emil Abdullayev's *əfsanə qayıdır* (*Afsana Returns*, 2019). A wealthy woman, Afsana, forgives her husband, Giyas, despite his infidelity and insincerity. Family ties are preserved at the cost of a woman forgiving her husband who treats her without care or respect. Giyas, who has a mistress and would not leave his wife because of her wealth, in the final episodes has several catharses one after another which do not seem believable, as if now he was with his wife out of love and loyalty. Nor is it believable when his wife forgives him. The question is, why do male directors as a rule show oppressed,

submissive, resigned women? Why are there no images of women standing on their own two feet and protesting against the patriarchal world?

The main characters in *ər quyusu* (*The Husband Well*, 2017), a comedy-drama directed by the only female director, Saida Hagverdiyeva, are women. The director shows that girls' main goal in life is to have a family and how sisters in a provincial area, oppressed in a patriarchal world, are unable to get married and it is a tragedy for their parents. The attitudes toward women and strict traditions offer no alternative model of life to the sisters.

**Women and war**

War films (*The Sound of a Flute*, *Great Heart*, *Mən ki gözəl deyildim* [*I Wasn't Beautiful*]) convey a message of women loyal to their families and selfless on the homefront. In Rasim Ojagov's *Ölsəm bağışla* (*Forgive Me If I Die*, 1989), about the period following World War II, the discourse is a bit different. Gulya gets married without waiting for her lover, Yusif, to return from the war. In the course of the story, she leaves her husband and, at Yusif's insistence, moves to another city with him. The director depicts Yusif as in the right, because his lover married while he was at war and, now that he has returned, he has the right to take back what belongs to him. Naturally, this is another movie about a man. The reasons that caused the woman not to wait for him and marry, and what she experienced are simply "forgotten."

Ogtay Mirgasimov's social drama *Günaydın, mələyim* (*Good Morning, My Angel*, 2008) touches on the theme of male officials who use their status and view women as sex objects. Medina's husband died in the Karabakh war. The woman is trying to solve her social problems and get her son's benefits. She faces bureaucratic barriers because she does not have a formal marriage certificate, and officials suggest that she should become their mistress. The director is aware of the difficulty

of being a woman in society. The conflict with the environment that surrounds her (the inability to solve her problems because of bureaucratic obstacles, problems at the theater where she works, her rich neighbor's attempt to take her house, etc.), loneliness, and a lack of social and moral support cause Medina's feelings to wither away as she looks for justice. We see Madina's weaknesses, her loss of spirit, and at certain moments, her defeat in the face of these realities. To solve her problems, she agrees to live in the house of a rich man, Fuad. Fuad is concerned about her but decides to help her solve her problems only if she is his woman. But the woman cannot continue living with him for long. In the end, when she leaves him, it is not a result of her own volition. She leaves him because of some fortuitous positive developments in her career.

The events in Eldar Guliyev's *Girov* (*Hostage*, 2005) take place in a border village when the Karabakh war is just beginning, and the film's main character is Sona. Sona's husband has been taken hostage by the Armenian side. The villagers, in turn, take an Armenian villager hostage and bring him to the woman to exchange for her husband when the opportunity arises. The woman, who was left alone with three children when her husband was taken hostage, wavers between hate and compassion at different times. Even though her husband is killed, her feminine sensitivity, compassion, and understanding save her at the last moment from becoming a murderer and killing the innocent Armenian villager. The fact that, in light of her own situation, she identifies with the hostage's family situation plays a role in her not killing him. The theme of the film is humanity, and the director narrows the space of the conflict, transferring it from the battlefields of interethnic conflict to everyday life. In several episodes, the hostage enters into the family's life: digging in the garden, making a toy for the children, etc. He himself is a simple villager and father of three. These scenes could have been good material for the film to move beyond the concept of the nation to focus on the human

side. But, unfortunately, the director's approach to this important issue is overwrought, there are elements of socialist-realist aesthetics, in different situations and in relations to various characters the moral and psychological tension dictated by the situation is explored superficially, and in some cases no dramatic motivation has been established for the events.

In the chamber piece, *Nabat* (2014, Elchin Musaoghlu), faced with the danger of an enemy attack, everyone abandons the village except an elderly woman named Nabat. As well as touching on the themes of war and personal conflict, the director shows the woman protecting home and hearth, lighting lamps in the empty houses so that the village would not die.

**Existential hero**

In *Second Act* and *My Dear Fellini*, men's first reactions to women's infidelity focus on the material: "What was missing? I bought you everything you wanted." This is the point where Azerbaijan's national cinema breaks with the theme of women: our cinema, which burdens women with honor and the importance of family loyalty, forgets to explore women's inner worlds, and why they experience a moral crises and existential emptiness. In contrast to our cinema, the woman's world is more widely examined in literature, especially, from an existential perspective, in the works of young writers who began to write in the 1960s. It is no accident that the abovementioned *Boundless Night* was based on works by writers of that generation, and three other films – *Ötən ilin son gecəsi* (*The Last Night of Last Year*), *Təhminə* (*Tahmina*), and *Gün keçdi* (*The Day Has Passed*) – were based on the works of Anar.

The director of *The Last Night of Last Year* (1983), Gulbaniz Azimzadeh, is the only woman to achieve success as a director, and the number of feature films in her filmography is greater than that of other female directors. The film tells the story

of a woman named Hamida. On New Year's Eve, her children leave her alone, and she is comforted by listening to a cassette tape with the voice of her deceased husband. The director emphasizes Hamida's identity as a woman, rather than as a mother, and her loneliness as a woman: in one episode, she stands in front of the mirror, runs her hand across her face, and reflects on her lost youth and withered charms. Gulbaniz Azimzadeh works with feminine sensitivity and rather than describing Hamida's inner feelings and mood, she makes the audience feel them. Her posture, demonstrating loneliness and distress, shows her social isolation and estrangement from her children.

Huseyn Mehdiyev's *Özgə vaxtı* (*Another's Time*, 1996) is about a young woman who strongly feels a duty to fulfill her debt to her parents and dedicates her life to her father after he was crippled. It is no accident that the director chose a woman as the victim. In Azerbaijani society, girls are taught that it is their duty to care for the elderly, men, and younger brothers. The filmmaker shows the woman's gradual psychological and moral mutation. The woman, who chooses to live her father's life, experiences a crisis of her individuality, prematurely ages, and retreats inside herself.

The protagonist of *Sahilsiz gecə* (*Boundless Night*, Shahmar Alakbarov, 1989), Zubeyda, over time became a sex worker, spent her days in entertainment, and is now an old woman who is not loved in the village. Her father is repressed by the Soviet government, the rape of the helpless little girl, and the silence of the everyone around her, is shown as the starting point of her drama. Thus, in the film Zubeyda's choice is motivated by socio-political causes, and in her tragedy the director implicates society, which showed her indifference. Various situations revive Zubeyda's memories, creating associations with her past, and cutting from the action of the contemporary narrative, her portrait is completed by returning to the past in flashbacks. The director often focuses on the main character's loneliness. Even when

there are people around, Zubeyda's loneliness is accentuated in the frame, even in victory she is isolated. Zubeyda is a woman capable of self-reflection and looking at the past rationally.

In the melodrama *The Day Has Passed* (Arif Babayev, 1971), Asmar is a married woman in Moscow living a life with every sort of comfort and luxury. But in this life she cannot be happy and is constantly in spiritual distress. One day while Asmar is visiting Baku, she meets her first love and finds some spiritual comfort. But she lacks the will and the courage to change her life. She returns again to her husband, whom she does not love.

The eponymous protagonist of *Tahmina* (Rasim Ojagov, 1993) was a literary phenomenon. In Anar's novel, *The Sixth Floor of a Five-Story Building*, published in 1969, "literary criticism (along with the nation as a whole) could not immediately accept the figure of Tahmina." It was difficult for a conservative society to accept Tahmina's free sex life and her behavior which did not fit the moral code of the majority, and therefore she finds comfort in alcohol and dies at the end of the novel. Rasim Ojagov failed to turn *Tahmina* into a cinematic phenomenon or a female drama. The director does not answer questions about why Tahmina is lonely, why there is a gulf between her moral values and those of the people around her, and why she is alienated, and does not explore her spiritual life. In the film he is concerned with the problems of Zaur, Tahmina's lover.

In *Məkanın melodiyası* (*The Melody of Space*, 2004), Huseyn Mehdiyev touches on something, even if only superficially: one of the characters brings Rana's inner world and life experience to the forefront and, with an understanding approach, justifies her free sex life. The filmmaker does not identify the concept of honor with sex organs. He does not, however, spend much time on Rana's character. Mehdiyev's protagonist is Murad, an 80-year-old cellist.

Women’s conflicts with themselves and with the people around them are also evident in films such as *Burulğan* (*Whirlpool*, Eldar Guliyev, 1986), and *Onun bəlalı sevgisi* (*His Unfortunate Love*, Ziyafat Abbasov, 1980).

**Conclusion**

I have attempted to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the article about how female characters have been portrayed from the origins of Azerbaijani cinema to the present, and from what points of view directors have looked at their place, role, and identity. At the beginning of the century, at the initiative of the Soviet authorities, strong and powerful female characters were created. In subsequent years, women were squeezed into the confines of tradition and brought back under the rule of a certain type of men. In films made at various times, the emancipation of Azerbaijani women was limited, and they were forcibly turned her into bearers of family honor, or portrayed as shrews, or if they were raped they were also blamed for it, and their infidelity was questioned more than men’s. In many films, the stories of the women there were overshadowed by other plotlines. Even after the collapse of Soviet power, the transition to a new economic and political system and the values □□that were renewed during the independence period did not radically change the attitude towards women, and new female types did not appear on the screen in contemporary cinema.

In Azerbaijani cinema, women are usually in the background, not in the center of events, but in the periphery, next to a man as elements of his life story. In only a few films have women become the main characters, which is a very small number for the 120-year-old Azerbaijani national cinema. In general, male directors do not explore the situations in which female characters find themselves, or the moral and psychological context of their situation, but only observe the events superficially. As can be seen in this article, in most films, directors portray society’s conservative attitude toward

women. At the same time, using the potential of cinema, they demonstrated their commitment to the community and justified the current situation. Some directors, however, take a critical approach toward tradition and conservatism. However, even in those films the main characters are men.

While working on this subject, a number of important questions remained open: In Azerbaijani cinema, why are women and their problems ignored and at the center of very few films? What are the other reasons for the androcentric tendency observed? Why are the female characters presented oppressed, and who are they examined superficially? Why are there no stories of new, powerful, independent women as there were in Azerbaijani cinema at the turn of the century? In our modern cinema, why are there no studies of the physical and psychological abuse of women in the family, their second-class status, underage marriage of girls in the provinces, selective abortions, sexist treatment of women at different levels, and the role of women in violence against women. Another point is the exceedingly small number of female directors in our national cinema from the Soviet era to today. These questions demand research not only in the field of film studies, but also multidisciplinary research in the fields of cultural studies, sociology and history.

[1] Aygün Aslanlı, “Almazdan Ümbilnisəyə”, xeber365.com, 2015

[2] Aliyə Dadaşova, “Fahişədən ögey anaya qədər”, https://kulis.az/news/5749

[3] The negative presentation of the “Musavat member” in Soviet cinema and literature was a norm at that time. Let me also note that the movie was based on the script of Paul Blyakhin, a revolutionary activist who took over one of the most important positions in Baku after the establishment of the Soviet government.

[4] Azərbaycan sovet ədəbiyyatı tarixi: 2 cilddə, I c., Bakı: Azərbaycan SSR Elmlər Akademiyası Nəşriyyatı, 1967

[5]Azərbaycan sovet ədəbiyyatı tarixi: 2 cilddə, I c., Bakı: Azərbaycan SSR Elmlər Akademiyası Nəşriyyatı, 1967

[6]Aydın Kazımzadə, "Azərbaycanda kino işinin təşkili." Mədəniyyət, 10, 2011. http://www.anl.az/down/meqale/medeniyyet/2011/avqust/195124.htm

[7] Ibid.

[8] It was the first women's club, named after Ali Bayramov, in Baku. The club held discussions and meetings with women, who were also involved in sewing workshops organized the club.

[9]Aydın Kazımzadə, "Kinomuzun *İsməti*." Kaspi, 22-23, 2014. http://www.anl.az/down/meqale/kaspi_az/2014/mart/359575.htm

[10] Vasily Chapayev was commander of the Red Army in Russia at the beginning of the XX century. After his death, he became one of the symbols of courage and fearlessness.

[11] Aydın Kazımzadə, "*Almaz* – 75." Mədəniyyət, 10, 2011. http://www.anl.az/down/meqale/medeniyyet/2011/aprel/169539.htm

[12]Azərbaycanfilm http://www.azerbaijanfilm.az/haqqimizda/22-azrbaycanfilmin-qsa-tarixi.html

[13]Tehran əlişanoğlu, "Milli nəsrdə Azərbaycan obrazı" kitabı, Elm və təhsil nəşriyyatı, 2017

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