# Where the Nation Ends: Transnationalism and Affective Space in Post-Soviet Cinema

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The chapter discusses the specificities of the (de)construction of space in the cinema of post-Soviet Eurasia. It opens with a brief discussion of the relationship between space and nation in the context of Russian imperial and Soviet political history, paying special attention to the pivotal role that Soviet cinema played in the shaping of new national identities through the visual mapping of space, turning distant and abstract realms into home territories for the new Soviet citizen to identify with. The chapter then argues that a number of films coming from post-Soviet Eurasia reverse these older strategies by envisioning spaces where the boundaries and signs of political authority are deliberately deconstructed. The chapter focuses on two case studies Mikheil Kalatozishvili's *The Wild Field* [Dikoe pole, 2008] and Giorgi Ovashvili's *The Other Bank* [*gagma napiri*, 2008]. Each film, in its own way, focuses on 'transitional spaces' and by doing so opposes the preoccupation of nation states with mapping territories and constructing populations defined in terms of national identity. Instead of relating space to nation, these films put forward a radically disjointed vision of society based on individual, rather than collective, capacities to experience and act.

## On Territory, Nation and the State: The Post-Soviet Condition in Historical Context

It could be argued, with some simplification, that the rise of Western modernity, which is inseparable from the emergence of the sovereign nation state in seventeenth-century Europe, was predicated upon the drawing of territorial boundaries and the political demarcation of space. A certain 'sanctification' of national space and its becoming, through territorial delimitations as the constitutive element of national imagination and identity, emerged at the stage in European history when the old systems of allegiance and solidarity were abolished by the nationalist revolutions and new, horizontal ones, came to be instituted as the political norm of the modern world (Suny 2001: 27 and *passim*). It was this territorial 'closure' that produced politically bounded national spaces with physical borders designed to separate, 'excluding those who are not felt to belong, drawing a dividing line between the familiar and the foreign' (Wimmer 2002: 33).

While the principle of national sovereignty was, since the end of the eighteenth century, becoming the pre-eminent, normative form of political governance in much of Western and Central Europe, the specificity of social and political conditions in Russia precipitated a fundamentally different historical experience in the territorially much larger and vaguer Eurasian geopolitical context.[1] If the processes of social and political modernization in Europe were not only accompanied by, but even premised upon, the principle of the political sovereignty of the nation state, the Eurasian political context, shaped by the Greater Russian

[1] On the specificities of ethnic and territorial traditions of nationhood in European political history and variations in the understanding of the concept of political sovereignty in the European tradition, see Brubaker 1992: 1–17.

Empire, resisted such political and social modernization in more than one way.[2] Although the Russian imperial state was, at least since the times of Ivan IV, consistently preoccupied with state-building, this ambition mostly took the form of ongoing territorial expansion, rather than the strengthening of the institutions of a nation state.[3] Indeed, it was spatial extension that was central to the Russian national and political imagination of the imperial era, and this at the expense of more significant stratifications and demarcations, whether symbolic or physical.[4] The Russian imperial state failed, in fact, to politically appropriate its amassed space and map it according to the ethno-territorial principle on which the modern system of European nation states was built.[5]

By contrast, the state that then emerged on the ruins of the Russian Empire between 1917 and 1922 showed far greater consideration for the systematic political demarcation of this vast expanse to embark on what Bassin, Elly and Stockdale have termed 'the absorption of space into the overall process of historical evolution and development' (2010: 7). Indeed, the new Soviet state was quick to add two important principles to its territorial organization – namely, 'the ethnic composition of the population and the economic affinity or cohesion [ekonomicheskoe tiagotenie] of the region' (Matsuzato 1997: 189). Through the scrupulous ethnographic mapping of the land with which the new Soviet nations were meant to identify, the early Soviet state established a fundamentally new order of social organization, one that amalgamated the model of the ethno-territorial nation state (for each Union republic), with the principle of the multi-ethnic federation (for the Union as a whole).[6] This often precarious interplay between strategies of top-down supra-national assimilation, on the one hand, and individual nation-building, on the other, continued practically until the collapse of the Soviet project itself. The dismantlement of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in a new set of nation-building processes in every part of the former Union. Unsurprisingly, at the heart of these lay what Brubaker and Cooper have termed 'languages of identity' – that is, discursive strategies, the aim of which was to enhance the 'sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders' (Brubaker & Cooper 2000).

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[2] An attempt to reappraise the Russian imperial project as an enduring form of governance can be found in Jane Burbank's and Mark von Hagen's introductory article 'Coming into the Territory: Uncertainty and Empire' in Burbank et al. 2007: 1–27.

[3] On the confluence of national and imperial identity in Russian political imagination following Russia's vast territorial expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Tolz 2001: 155–191, Plokhy 2006: 250–298, Miller 2015: 309–369, and, especially, Ther 2015: 573–591. On the ways in which the three land empires (Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman) responded to the rise of the European nation-state see also Suny 2001: 29–30.

[4] Statistics show that the late-imperial Russian state divided its territory in a much smaller number of administrative units than its European counterparts. For example, while France in 1901 had '86 *départements* and 36,192 *communes*, each with an elected mayor […] European Russia with nearly four times the population and five times the territory of France had only 51 *guberniias*, 511 *uezds* and 10,257 *volosts'* (LeDonne, cit. Matsuzato 1997: 183–184). Cf. also Burbank et al. 2007: 5–6.

[5] Pushkin's words from his 1836 letter to Petr Chaadaev, in which Russia's boundless spaces (*immense étendue, neob"iatnye prostranstva*) are ascribed a constitutive role in the shaping of the Russian national imaginary, cannot therefore be interpreted as a discourse on nationhood in the modern sense of the word.

[6] On the intricacies of early-Soviet policy towards nationalities see Martin 2001 and Suny & Martin 2001. On the political conquest of nature as a strategy of Soviet nation-building see Hirsch 2005.

However, despite the prevalence, throughout the 1990s–2010s, of nation-building discourses in all post-Soviet states – discourses which continued to disintegrate the once unitary social and cultural sphere along the lines of national mobilization – there remained simultaneously a capillary network of counter-processes which continue to hold considerable influence over the lives of the people inhabiting this vast territory that was once the Soviet Union. Less visibly than official national narratives, these ostensibly marginal practices make their mark in the daily lives of post-Soviet societies and peoples: through trade routes (permitted or proscribed), migratory movements (deliberate or coerced), cultural flows (official and unofficial), communication networks (horizontal and vertical), and social imaginaries (old and new).[7] Indeed, through daily social, economic and cultural flows that span state boundaries, an everyday transnational experience challenges the hegemony of the post-Soviet discourses of identity and exclusion. In particular, the high level of migration mobility in the post-Soviet sphere blurs the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate political subjects, turning the hitherto excluded (refugees, diasporans, economic migrants and other non-citizens) into active interlocutors in the social and political debate. According to Nancy Fraser, processes of this kind call into question the traditionally conceived normative public sphere, imagined as organized around the full citizens of nation states. For Fraser, the new (essentially trans-national) form of society is a social assembly made of migratory subjects, 'legal aliens', and other fellow members joined together not necessarily by political legislation (that is, by being citizens of a given nation state), but 'by their co-imbrication in a common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives' (Fraser 2014: 18, 30).

Fraser's vision of what might be called a transnational condition foreshadows some of the fundamental aspects of post-Soviet societies. Practically none of the new post-Soviet states, from Ukraine and Belarus to the Baltic, Transcaucasian and Central Asian states, not to speak of the Russian Federation, have become homogeneous nation states – much as most of them would wish to be so. On the contrary, while actively pursuing the politics that would enable their greater internal cohesion on national grounds, the post-Soviet state remains a political entity in permanent tension between the unifying strategies of 'social closure' and the plethora of spontaneous transnational' practices, which appear to run directly counter to them.

## Space and/as Identity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Cinemas

The role that visual art, media and cinema in particular, have played in the shaping of Soviet and post-Soviet (trans)national imaginaries is nothing short of fundamental. As the French critic Jean Michel Frodon has argued, there is a close correspondence between the nation and the moving image on several levels. According to Frodon, both cinema and the nation rest upon a certain 'projection'. Just like the moving image, which exists far beyond its sheer materiality, a nation transcends 'a territory and even a nation-state' to establish itself in the form of an image, a 'projection [that] is recognized both […] by the population concerned, and at the same time, outside, by those who do not belong to it' (Frodon 1997: 136).

Indeed, 'the nation' exceeds the sum-total of the biological substance of a group of people and the geographical space on which they live. And just like the moving image, in order for a nation to emerge, a projection or image of it – that is, of an integrated community and a

[7] A 'social imaginary' is described by Charles Taylor (2002: 106 and *passim*) as the way in which ordinary people understand or 'imagine' their social surroundings in the widest possible sense, from political ideas and intellectual concepts to everyday human practices.

shared, politically mapped, space – has to take shape.[8] No-one understood the need for and the importance of the visual representation of space as a factor in this process better than the early-Soviet policy-makers and film-practitioners. The filmmakers of the Soviet era were on a mission to visually identify the endless localities of the new vast land, the unnamed, natural space that was to be turned into the Soviet Union as a politically charted territory. Moreover, as Emma Widdis has put it in her account of the visual strategies of mediating physical space in early Soviet cinema, '[u]nderstanding Sovietness, mean[t] understanding the space of Sovietness' (Widdis 2003: 3). Widdis is right when she points out that at the heart of this visual mastering of space by early-Soviet filmmakers was Marxist ideology. The strategy of a visual appropriation of the new land was premised upon Karl Marx's idea of the 'appropriation' (*Aneignung*) of human reality – something deemed essential to alleviating human alienation and thus fundamentally transforming the way the world is experienced.[9] However, the putative philosophical overtones of a call for a symbolic appropriation of geographical space to be mapped as 'Soviet' should not obscure the par-excellence state-building purpose of this cinematic procedure. As pointed out by Andrew Higson, the process of national identification in and through the moving image is always 'a hegemonizing, mythologizing process, involving the production and assignation of a set of meanings' (Higson 1989: 37). Higson's reminder here is an important one for our understanding of Soviet cinema's task in the building of the new state: to visually identify the vast and inarticulate space and then to hegemonically represent that space *qua* national space.

The visual strategies of the identification and assignation of space allow us to raise the key question that this chapter seeks to address: if the cinema of the early Soviet years was appropriating spaces, identifying them as politically and nationally mapped territories assigned to specific (Soviet) nations as their imaginary proprietors, how should we understand the opposite cinematic strategies in which the moving images 'dis-articulate' space and return the once charted territories back to the state of nameless and unmapped landmass? Although neglected by the growing body of literature on cinematic nation-building in the post-Soviet era, this question is highly pertinent. In the post-Soviet political landscape, when new political elites are abundantly using the power of the moving image to 're-appropriate' their national spaces,[10] we are at the same time witnesses to the rise of visual *counter-strategies*, which, each in their own way, challenge the politics of national(ist) mobilization. These revisionist cinematic narratives strategically obscure territorial demarcations and strategically disengage peoples from their designated 'national' spaces in order to make room for both individual agency and human affect to come to the fore.

The sections that follow will examine two post-Soviet film texts – Mikheil Kalatozishvili's *Dikoe pole* (*The Wild Field*) and Giorgi Ovashvili's *gagma napiri* (*The Other Bank*) – which, each in its own way, challenge the hegemony of the post-Soviet discourses of identity through particular cinematic deconstructions of space as an enclosed and politically

[8] Frodon here tacitly refers to Benedict Anderson's much-quoted pronouncement that nations are 'imagined communities' or unities of people who do not know of each other, but nonetheless 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 2006: 6).

[9] Marx advanced the concept of *Aneignung* in his early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) and further developed it in the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867).

[10] For example, by reintroducing the system of state commission (*goszakaz*) in 2008, the Russian Federation has legally formalized the utilization of the film industry for patriotic mobilization. In the words of Aleksandr Avdeev, the then Minister of Culture, the Russian state will resume its support for the films that 'espouse the ideas of humanism, spirituality, patriotism and other traditional moral values of Russia's peoples' (Fedina 2008).

demarcated category.[11] As we shall see, by unsettling the territory-state-nation continuum, these films' undoing of territorial demarcations acts as a statement of distrust towards the hegemonization of social space by nation-state discourses and, in turn, an affirmation of the powerful web of human relations, affects and individual agency across and beyond any such demarcations.

## The Disarticulation of Space in Mikheil Kalatozishvili's *The Wild Field*

[INSERT IMAGE]

Fig. 4.1. *The Wild Field* [Dikoe pole]. Dir. Mikheil Kalatozishvili. Russia, 2008.

Mikheil Kalatozishvili's film *The Wild Field* demonstrates an effort to eradicate the symbols of national identity on practically every level of production. Failing to attract any of the newly established national film-funding bodies (Russian, Kazakh, Azerbaijani, or Georgian), the film was produced by a small pool of private Russian investors. In a similar vein, the very title of the film suggests that extraterritoriality and an absence of boundaries will be one of the film's dominant themes. In use in sixteenth-century chronicles to describe the territories between the Dnepr River and the Black Sea, the term *dikoe pole* has carried the meaning of unbounded space, a landscape without social organization or political jurisdiction.

By setting the film in a nameless, uncharted landmass (the locations of the shoot were the steppes of Kazakhstan, but the diegetic space remains conspicuously unnamed throughout the film; Fig. 4.1), Kalatozishvili de-centres the concept of mapped space or demarcated territory as a locus of state power. This wide, uncharted land, which clearly signals a vacuum of power, emerges, in fact, as the film's central protagonist, through which, as one critic has observed, the 'trajectories of humans, animals and means of transportation ephemerally traverse' (Razlogov 2008: 51). Indeed, the diegetic space of the film is left without name or geographic coordinates, but, significantly, the episodic plot structure follows no particular narrative logic and even the cardinal events in the film unfold as if of their own accord. In this space without boundaries, with narrative action based around human affects and drives, the centre of the film's moral universe is Dmitrii Morozov, a young medical doctor, who lives a solitary life in the middle of the steppe with one goal: to help maintain the fragile equilibrium of the boundless steppe.

The domineering vastness and wilderness of the steppe, precariously organized not around any social structures, but the drives and affects of the people that traverse it, situate *The Wild Field* tantalizingly close to the genre of the Western. Yet, this (in itself transnational) cinematic connection has its limits insofar as the ideology of Kalatozishvili's film departs from the ethos of this classical Hollywood genre. If the American Western symbolically legitimizes the appropriation of landscape and turns conquest over nature into the foundational myth of a rising nation (Simmon 2003: 51–54), *The Wild Field* is doing precisely the reverse. By extolling the boundless space of the steppe and by instituting human drives and instincts as its

[11] Coterminous with the crisis of the state apparatus, the cinematic utilization of the uncharted geographical space has emerged as a visual trope denoting an end to history and politics already in the late Soviet years. Since Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) and Aleksandr Sokurov's *Dni zatmeniia* (1988), a number of film productions have articulated this dynamic, including *Lunnyi papa* (Khudoinazarov 1999), *Eiforiia* (Vyripaev 2006), *Tulpan* (Dvortsevoi 2008), *Kak ia provel etim letom* (Popogrebskii 2010), *Ovsianki* (Fedorchenko 2010), *V ozhidanii moria* (Khudoinazarov 2012), *Ispytanie* (Kott 2014), to name but some.

sole organizing force, the film puts forward a vision of primordial human associations in which elemental powers ultimately supersede organized forms of governance.[12]

This delegitimization of social order in the film is emphasized by the absence of any clear instances of the state, or any other authority. True, the lawman Riabov wears the insignia of a Soviet-era policeman (*militsioner*), but it is a minimal form of humanity, rather than any kind of social institution of law and order, that he enforces. When, having survived an armed incursion of a group of outlaws, he stops one of the local men from violating the corpses of the intruders (Fig. 4.2), we learn that the local men 'did not swear an oath to Moscow' (Lutsik and Samoriadov 2010: 107). This archaic formulation signals a post-historical condition of civilizational regress, an undoing of modernity conditioned upon the system of social closures performed by the nation state. In contrast, the 'wild field' of the steppe, as it is represented in the film, enacts the world without closures. The only recognizable sign of authority in the film is a white flag with a red cross on it, which flies from Morozov's home-surgery – a flag of no nation and an image generally associated with contested war zones. This too signals that the world of *The Wild Field* is a world of civilizational decline, in which every form of authority has been suspended.

[INSERT IMAGE]

Fig. 4.2. Incursion scene, *The Wild Field*.

The return to the primordial and the archaic in *The Wild Field* renders national identities superfluous, yet without, in fact, abolishing them as such. From Riabov's incident report, we learn that the attackers were 'two unknown men of uncertain nationality, presumably Asian' (Lutsik & Samoriadov 2010: 106). The assault itself was staged irrespective of the identity of either the attacked or the attackers and the directorial decision to keep the bodies of the intruders outside of the camera's purview only confirms this. What this radical collapsing of territorial, state and national identities seems to announce is that these categories not only have no agency, but that they no longer appear to have a *raison d'être* in what is a post-national universe. Indeed, since the concept of 'wild field' [dikoe pole] has neither centre nor periphery, it also has no insiders or outsiders, which renders the notion of social closure not only impossible, but also impertinent.

Lastly, the film's dissociation of space, territory and people not only suspends the political charting of space, but also puts an end to the subordination of that space to human agency, as well as, in turn, the subordination of individual agency to larger social structures. Nevertheless, Kalatozishvili's landscapes, which exist without social organization and political jurisdiction, are not simply natural or empty – they remain populated with and traversed by affective human capacities (positive and negative) – drives, instincts, emotions. Indeed, the film's radical undoing of political space serves not only the purpose of rejecting the political (de)limitations of human geography; this is also a radical, precarious and in no way optimistic, plea to look at this space as, in fact, an affective space, in which more basic human agency ultimately supersedes larger state-building ideologies.

[12] The steppe is, of course, a long-established trope of the Russian cultural imagination (e.g. see Chekhov's 1888 novella *The Steppe. History of a Journey* [Step'. Istoriia odnoi poezdki]). Kalatozishvili's own treatment of the steppe challenges the cinematic rendition of Central Asia known from early-Soviet cinematic practice, most notably Viktor Turin's monumental 1929 film *Turksib* in which the previously inert and unutilized Kazakh steppe (along with its peoples) is triumphantly mapped, industrialized and brought into civilization.

**The Reclamation of Space in Giorgi Ovashvili's *The Other Bank***

[INSERT IMAGE]

Fig. 4.3. *The Other Bank* [gagma napiri]. Dir. Giorgi Ovashvili, 2008.

Resistance to the 'sacralization' of national territory assumes a central ~~place~~ position in Giorgi Ovashvili's 2008 film *The Other Bank* [gagma napiri]. This international co-production of private funding bodies from Georgia and Kazakhstan tells the story of 12-year-old Tedo (Fig. 4.3) – an 'internally displaced person' (the United Nations euphemism used to categorize victims of political or other discrimination who, having to leave their primary homes, find refuge in other parts of their own country).[13] In the aftermath of the 1992–1993 military conflict in the breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia, during which the Georgian army was overpowered by the Russia-supported Abkhaz troupes, Tedo was forced out of his home together with other ethnic Georgians.[14] Now, eight years on, the film's protagonist lives with his mother in a derelict cabin on the outskirts of what the viewer only assumes to be the Georgian capital Tbilisi. The boy engages in petty crime and longs for a reunion with his father whom he had left behind in Abkhazia.

Ovashvili narrates the story in a visually matter-of-fact manner, but it takes even the informed viewer some effort to reconstruct the diegetic space of the narrative – that is, to establish with any accuracy the historical and spatial coordinates within which the narrative unfolds. Indeed, although the geographical locations in *The Other Bank* are real and are either mentioned or indicated (the river E~~l~~nguri, the Abkhaz town of Tkvarcheli, the capital of Georgia Tbilisi), the spatial coordinates in the film are blurred by the conspicuous absence of standard cinematic signposts, such as road signs or recognizable landmarks. Rather than having a primarily physical or geographical form, the narrative space of the film operates primarily as an affective and symbolic space. The space that Tedo traverses in the film is an emotive one and, as such, at all times in tension with this space's social organization and political demarcations (such as those exemplified by border-posts). Ultimately, Tedo's paternal quest, the sole reason of his journey through no-go conflict zones, is an attempt to re-appropriate this politically divided space of warring nations by transforming it into an intimate, personal one.

[INSERT IMAGE]

[13] Just like *The Wild Field*, *The Other Bank* failed to attract any of the state film funders in the region, with the exemption of a contribution by the local Georgian National Film Centre. This lack of interest stands in contrast with the logic of Eurasian and global film markets in which films are increasingly becoming joint transnational ventures. It testifies to the fact that the greatest beneficiary of transnational production circuits are commercial films and blockbusters. On the co-production and distribution dynamic of Russian and other post-Soviet film markets, see the summary of the European Audiovisual Observatory for 2016 (Talavera Milla & Fontaine 2016: 40–49).

[14] According to the last Soviet census (1989), ethnic Georgians made up 45.7% of the overall population in Abkhazia, with ethnic Abkhaz making 17.8%. The 1992–1993 civil war, which inflicted over 10,000 casualties across both sides, resulted in the expulsion and displacement of the entire Georgian population of Abkhazia, approximately 240,000 individuals (Trier et al. 2010: 17). For a succinct, but well-documented look at the historical, political and demographic aspects of the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict see Trier et al. 2010.

Fig. 4.4. Crossing of the EIinguri river, *The Other Bank*.

The film's optical minimalism, which restricts the representation of both cityscapes and landscapes to replace them with deliberately under-inscribed, insipid wastelands and suburban sceneries, successfully defamiliarizes the otherwise identifiable Georgian settings to achieve a more complex, emotive mapping of this space. However, this is not to say that, while unnamed, the liminal spaces in *The Other Bank* – bridges, railroads, border-crossings, military buffer zones – are not heavily imbricated with social and political meanings (Fig. 4.4). As one critic has put it, these non-neutral landscapes are etched with ongoing violence: they are Tedo's, and clearly everyone else's, 'pains of the past' (Pötzsch 2012: 186). The emotion Tedo feels for these landscapes of pain is precisely the driving force of his personal pursuit. Each step of his endeavour – his nearly fatal train journey, the hitch-hiking and border-crossing episodes during which he is a witness to rape and murder, or the equally precarious travels through Abkhazia – brings to bear this important, affective, re-inscription of a defamiliarized, alien space.[15]

With the micro-political history of the Trans-Caucasus in mind, one could say that Tedo's journey across inter-ethnic divides *reclaims* the space of the Caucasus from social and political closures and thereby challenges the ongoing post-Soviet discourses of national mobilization. Returning to Marx's idea about the appropriation of human experience more generally, one might interpret Tedo's reach across contested nation-state boundaries as an effort to reclaim the alienated world around him. If the post-Soviet nation-building strategies are about appropriating heterogeneous multi-ethnic spaces by various ethno-territorial closures (say, by declaring a particular territory an area of high historical import and turning that area into a national myth), Tedo's journey is then an attempt to undo these strategies and *re*-appropriate that space as a space that has meaning for him, as *his* 'homeland', in a 'truer', non-exclusive, sense of the term.

[INSERT IMAGE]

Fig. 4.5. Tedo atwith his former home in Abkhazia, *The Other Bank*.

However, practically all of Tedo's affective efforts seem to fail, with only one episode making an instructive exception. Having entered Abkhazia, Tedo stays overnight with an elderly Abkhaz couple, who, we learn, had lost their son in the 1992–1993 conflict. When Tedo's feigned muteness (his survival strategy on Abkhaz soil) is foiled and his hosts realize that he is an ethnic Georgian, a certain antagonism arises. Nevertheless, Tedo is eventually embraced by the couple in what could be understood as an act of symbolic adoption. Thus, the only instance when Tedo transforms the world around him is when he reaches out to the people whose world is, just like his own, shaped not by some state-ideological inscriptions of nationhood, but by an affective, personal testimony of loss (Fig. 4.5).

Having left his 'adoptive' Abkhaz 'home', Tedo's other sojourns again yield little success. The much desired paternal reunion comes to nothing when, upon returning to his former home, Tedo discovers that his father now has another family (Fig. 4.5) and when, on his way out of his birthtown, he is caught by an unknown armed group. When the ongoing violence and the omniscient traces of terror finally overcome his attempts to re-appropriate the disintegrated spaces of his life and his former country, Tedo is left with no active strategies with which to perform his task. Instead, he mentally transports himself to a rather different kind of space by daydreaming of going on safari in Africa. The film ends with scenes from the

[15] In his discussion of the relationship that pertains between human experience and space, Yi-Fu Tuan has argued that purposive movement and perception 'give human beings their familiar world of disparate objects in space' (1977: 12).

African savannah, the product of Tedo's imagining a symbolically non-political space – unmarked by ethno-territorial boundaries, free from social closures and exclusions.[16]

## Conclusion

The films of Mikheil Kalatozishvili and Giorgi Ovashvili both in their different ways deconstruct the meanings of national space as a means by which the relationship between a modern polity and a human individual is being established. Both films not only evade the limits and constraints of the dominant official nationalizing discourses, but explicitly counter these discourses through a strategy of cinematically de-/re-territorializing nationally inscribed and politically mapped spaces. What the visual strategies deployed in these two films perform is: 1) the de-legitimation of the authority of the nation state as a hegemonic social structure with power to identify its subjects as members of a particular nation (with everything else that then follows as a consequence of this 'subjection'); and 2) the releasing of individual human agency, above all in its affective (rather than rational) figurations, as the true, universal, subject of historical processes. Through a de-construction of key elements of national polities, these films ultimately question the applicability of certain political norms to the post-Soviet sphere and herald a vision of Eurasia as a fundamentally 'trans-national' space.

Kalatozishvili's *The Wild Field* is set in a boundless unidentified corner of the Eurasian steppe, which renders the idea of territorial statehood pointless. Somewhat paradoxically, this boundless space is configured as one large boundary, in which the power of human affects is unleashed to ambiguous effect. Kalatozishvili takes his film, in fact, to an uncertain, aporetic, if not pessimistic conclusion, insofar as the critique of state power and the affirmation of human individuality is shown to be by no means a necessarily creative force. Giorgi Ovashvili's *The Other Bank* challenges the legitimacy of the nation state to assign subjectivity in a different, but commensurable way. Unlike *The Wild Field*, *The Other Bank* is set in actual geographical locations, loaded with a history and politics that remain vital to the interpretation of the film. However, Ovashvili systematically defamiliarizes this 'real' space, while its road-movie structure and the prevalence in it of what Hamid Naficy (2001: 222–261) has termed 'transitional spaces and sites' (homecomings, border-crossings, bridges, train and bus travels) both highlights and contests nation-states' obsession with mapping territories, charting boundaries and constructing nations, not least by means of violence.

Significantly, however, both films circumvent optimistic or redemptive endings. In *The Wild Field*, the absence of social norms and boundaries unleashes human affects often with destructive effects, while the protagonist of *The Other Bank* is forced to yield to the discourses of national exclusion despite the moral high grounds that his position holds. Thus, in both films, the politics of transnationalism in post-Soviet Eurasia are rendered with scepticism: while being put forward as a necessary corrective to ongoing state-building projects in the region, they come forth as either precarious or feeble political alternatives to these projects.

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