

An Air Map for World Cinema: Aeroflot as an Infrastructure for Cinematic Internationalism

ELENA RAZLOGOVA

On August 5, 1967, Senegalese cineaste Ousmane Sembène left Moscow bitter and angry. He had just finished his stint as a documentary jury member at the Moscow International Film Festival, where he had been an honored guest, and his film opened the Senegalese Film Week that followed the festival.¹ During his stay, he conversed with Soviet directors Roman Karmen, Malik Kayumov, and his mentor, Mark Donskoi, who had taught him filmmaking at the Gorky Studio in 1962. He assembled African delegates, including guests from Mali and Guinea, for several informal discussions. He saw what he declared a “masterpiece,” a documentary about North Vietnamese struggle against the United States, *Hanoi, Tuesday the 13th* (*Hanoi, Martes 13*, 1967), by Cuban director Santiago Álvarez. He attended the Soviet premiere of his first feature film, an award-winning indictment of French neocolonialism, *Black Girl* (*La Noire de ...*, 1966), at the historic Moscow Theater near Mayakovsky Square in the center of the city.² Soviet and foreign reporters besieged him with interview requests. But disappointments marred his stay, beginning with his earliest moments in the country, when Sembène arrived at Sheremetyevo airport without an entry visa and had to wait four hours to get one. An interpreter assigned to him by the festival met him at the airport; this nervous young woman, enthusiastic but inexperienced, never let him go anywhere alone. The Soviets fully covered Sembène’s airfare, hotel, and meals, but

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¹The details of Sembène’s stay come from several sources: A. Sutarmina, report on working with Sembène as an interpreter at the 1967 Moscow festival, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI), f. 2936, op. 4, ed. khr. 1593, ll. 27–30; and Galina Chernova, letter to the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Contacts (SSOD), Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. P9576, op. 14, ed. khr. 169, l. 62. For more on Sembène and the Soviet Union see Françoise Blum et al., “Au cœur des réseaux africano-soviétiques avec Sembène Ousmane: Exposé et correspondances,” *Sources: Matériaux & terrains en études africaines* (forthcoming 2021).

²Sovexportfilm bought *Black Girl* for general distribution, but never released it.

he had no money for a taxi to move around the city. His friend and producer, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, who had planned the Senegalese Film Week and was supposed to deliver a lecture on African cinema at the event, did not make it to Moscow at all. Vieyra and two other Senegalese official delegates spent the week “sitting on their suitcases” in Dakar, waiting for their plane tickets.³ These indignities of mobility overshadowed Sembène’s many transnational encounters at the festival and undermined Soviet claims of supporting cinemas from Asia, Africa, and Latin America—what in the West was then called the “Third World” and now, the “Global South.”⁴

Sembène’s friend Galina Chernova, a Soviet historian of African art, detailed his complaints in an impassioned letter to the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Contacts (SSOD). Her letter, without intending so, also addresses popular spectatorship of Global South cinemas in the Soviet Union. Soviet organizers distributed eighty free tickets to the opening of the Senegalese Film Week among Senegalese and Soviet diplomats, Communist party officials, and cultural institutions, including the African Studies Institute where Chernova worked. Senegalese flags adorned the walls. The Senegalese ambassador and the veteran Soviet documentarian Roman Karmen each delivered speeches before the screening. Later the ambassador thanked the organizers for a successful diplomatic event.⁵ But regular Muscovites filled many of the 850 seats at the Moscow Theater where *Black Girl* premiered. Chernova described the audience: “All tickets were distributed through the general box office, with a random public (*sluchainaia publika*) filling the front rows; two were drunk; a few left [in the middle of the film].”⁶ A year earlier, *Black Girl* screened at the Cannes International Film Festival as a French national Jean Vigo Prize winner, to an exclusive audience of industry professionals, the only spectators allowed at top European festivals. No doubt, Sembène was shocked at the sight of inebriated workmen wandering in and out during his Moscow premiere. But Soviet film festivals did not serve only cultural elites. Festival films, including Global South pictures, played to ordinary Soviets who cheered the movies they liked or, when displeased, booed or left the theater.⁷ They were active participants in Soviet cinematic internationalism.

Given the dual diplomatic and popular nature of Soviet festivals, the “cinematic internationalisms” they engendered become crucial for understanding Soviet culture at large and its place in the world.⁸ Up to the early 1970s, film festivals served as a United Nations of cinema, with national governments selecting films as they would today for the Oscars

³This phrase is from Chernova, letter to SSOD. Chernova’s language reflects her own perceptions as well as her personal conversations with Sembène. For details of Senegalese Film Week organization here and in the next paragraph see RGALI, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 1120.

⁴For the project of “Thirdworldism” see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York, 2007).

⁵RGALI, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 1120, l. 39.

⁶GARF, f. P9576, op. 14, ed. khr. 169, l. 62.

⁷See, for example, Hank Werba, “Moscow Fans Finance Film Festival,” *Variety*, July 30, 1975, as well as further discussion in this article.

⁸In this article I focus on the Global South. For socialist “cinematic internationalism” as it applies to Soviet cinematic connections to Eastern Europe see Marsha Siefert, “Soviet Cinematic Internationalism and Socialist Film Making, 1955–1972,” in *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War*, ed. Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild (Cham, 2016), 161–93.

competition.⁹ Most festivals, including the Moscow International Film Festival, founded in 1959, showcased Western cinema and its stars.¹⁰ Yet Soviet festivals courted Global South cinemas to a greater extent than the top European festivals. In the 1970s, Cannes did not feature a single film from sub-Saharan Africa in competition. Moscow featured six, from Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana.¹¹ In 1968 the Soviets launched the Tashkent Festival for Asian, African, and (from 1976) Latin American Cinema, which scholars have called “the venue where one could see the largest number and widest variety of films representing the world beyond Europe and North America.”¹² The much-discussed Soviet longing for Western culture needs to be placed in the context of this “special media ecology.”¹³ Internationalism in the decolonization era involved solidarity with Global South liberation struggles.¹⁴ Air travel became an essential transportation network for this “cinematic international,” including the Global South and the “Soviet South,” the country’s Central Asian and Caucasian republics.¹⁵

⁹On film festival history see Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam, 2008); Marijke de Valck et al., *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (London, 2016); and Andreas Kötzing and Caroline Moine, eds., *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts: Film Festivals in the Cold War* (Gottingen, 2016).

¹⁰Vanessa R. Schwartz, “The Cannes Film Festival and the Marketing of Cosmopolitanism,” in *It’s so French! Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago, 2007). On the Moscow festival see Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, 2011), 107–10; Eleonory Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 172–78; and Stefano Pisu, *Il 20 secolo sul red carpet: Politica, economia e cultura nei festival internazionali del cinema, 1932–1976* (Milan, 2016), 209–46.

¹¹For statistics on Global South representation at Soviet vs European festivals see Elena Razlogova, “World Cinema at Soviet Festivals: Cultural Diplomacy and Personal Ties,” *Studies in European Cinema* 17:2 (2020): 143–45.

¹²Rossen Djagalov and Masha Salazkina, “Tashkent ’68: A Cinematic Contact Zone,” *Slavic Review* 75:2 (2016): 280. Work on the Tashkent festival includes Rossen Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and the Third Worlds* (Montreal, 2020), 137–72; Masha Kirasirova, “Building Anti-Colonial Utopia: The Politics of Space in Soviet Tashkent in the ‘Long 1960s,’” in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building*, ed. Jian Chen et al. (Abingdon, 2018), 61–62; Kirasirova, “The Eastern International: The ‘Domestic East’ and the ‘Foreign East’ in Soviet-Arab Relations, 1917–68” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2014), 347–391; and Masha Salazkina, “World Socialist Cinema: Cultural Affinities, Strategic Alliances, Affective Solidarities,” book manuscript in progress.

¹³For “special media ecology” see Jie Li, “Gained in Translation: The Reception of Foreign Cinema in Mao’s China,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 13:1 (2019): 71–72. For Soviet longing for the “West” see especially Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die*; and Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2005), 158–206.

¹⁴Partha Chatterjee, “Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism: Some Observations from Modern Indian History,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36:2 (2016): 320–34; Manu Goswami, “Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms,” *American Historical Review* 117:5 (2012): 1461–85. For a definition of internationalism that focuses on international institutions (such as the United Nations) rather than movements see Glenda Sluga and Patricia M. Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, England, 2016); and Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2015). For a film history that explicitly links internationalism to solidarity see José Miguel Palacios, “Passages of Exile: Chilean Cinema 1973–2016” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2017). Socialist internationalisms, of course, sustained their own solidarities, as shown in Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca, 2019); and Siefert, “Soviet Cinematic Internationalism and Socialist Film Making, 1955–1972.”

¹⁵Artemy M. Kalinovsky, “Writing the Soviet South into the History of the Cold War and Decolonization,” in *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, ed. James Mark et al. (Bloomington,

In this article I focus on Aeroflot, the Soviet state airline, as an infrastructure for cinematic internationalism. In the era of decolonization and the Cold War, national cinema and national airlines became a symbol of sovereignty and modernization for decolonized states: “New nations first want two things, namely their own airline and their own film industry,” U.S. film industry weekly *Variety* quoted an anonymous American diplomat in 1969.¹⁶ The expansion of global air travel fueled diverse forms of state-sponsored internationalism, including international writers’ congresses, concert tours, and especially art and film festivals.¹⁷ Aeroflot thus represented modernity, mobility, and connection. Sembène’s Sheremetyevo misadventures, however, point to a coercive side of Soviet state support for the cinematic international. As a socio-technical system, Aeroflot represented Soviet power, from prearranged state-sponsored travel routes and strict visa regimes to interpreter-minders surveilling visitors’ every move. An infrastructural view pays attention to these informal connections yet accounts for Soviet institutional, economic, and technological power that shaped these cinematic encounters.¹⁸ In what follows, I argue that as an infrastructure, Soviet official internationalism—its technologies, bureaucracies, and expenditures—enabled multiple internationalist projects, some conceived elsewhere and working toward goals tangential or inimical to Soviet state purposes.¹⁹ Although Aeroflot was an engine of official Soviet internationalism, Thirdworldist alliances forged at Moscow and Tashkent often bypassed, contradicted, or exceeded Soviet diplomatic goals.

DURING THE COLD WAR, film festivals served as a major stage for cultural competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as the main way for decolonized Asian and African states to showcase their new national cinemas. The first, one-off Soviet international

2020), 189–208. Katarina Clark uses the term “the literary international” to denote alliances with Global South writers in her “The Soviet Project of the 1930s to Found a ‘World Literature’ and British Literary Internationalism,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 80:4 (2019): 403–25.

¹⁶“Global Production Hit 3,500 Pix in ’68,” *Variety*, February 5, 1969.

¹⁷On the importance of air travel for international connections in the decolonization era see Su Lin Lewis, “Skies That Bind: Air Travel in the Bandung Era,” *Afro-Asian Visions*, June 27, 2019, <https://medium.com/afro-asian-visions/skies-that-bind-air-travel-in-the-bandung-era-feac8e844993>. On the limits of travel in this era see Carolien Stolte, “Grounded—On Not Travelling in the Bandung Era,” *Afro-Asian Visions*, March 26, 2019, <https://medium.com/afro-asian-visions/grounded-on-not-travelling-in-the-bandung-era-83b3031ed809>.

¹⁸My understanding of “infrastructure” as it pertains to cinema is informed most directly by Brian Larkin’s articulation of “technical, financial and institutional infrastructures” of film production, distribution, and exhibition. See Brian Larkin, “The Grounds of Circulation: Rethinking African Film and Media,” *Politique africaine* 153:1 (2019): 105; as well as idem, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, 2008). For a useful survey of the “infrastructure studies” field see idem, “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 327–43.

¹⁹On official, state-sponsored internationalism see, for example, David C. Engerman, “The Second World’s Third World,” *Kritika* 12:1 (2011): 183–211; Kristin Roth-Ey, “How Do You Listen to Radio Moscow? Moscow’s Broadcasters, ‘Third World’ Listeners, and the Space of the Airwaves in the Cold War,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 98:4 (2020): 712–41; and Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* (Lawrence, 2014). On “unofficial” internationalist exchanges and alliances see Anne E. Gorsuch, “‘Cuba, My Love’: The Romance of Revolutionary Cuba in the Soviet Sixties,” *American Historical Review* 120:2 (2015): 497–526; Tobias Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism After Stalin: Interaction and Exchange Between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge, England, 2017); and Elizabeth McGuire, *Red at Heart: How Chinese Communists Fell in Love with the Russian Revolution* (New York, 2018).

film festival, in Moscow in 1935, already invited films from Japan, China, and Turkey.²⁰ After the war, resurgent decolonization movements culminated in the 1955 Bandung Conference of Asian and African states that eventually led to the Non-Aligned Movement.²¹ In response, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev announced the policy of peaceful coexistence with the West and solidarity with anticolonial liberation movements in Africa and Asia. The 1957 Festival for Youth and Students in Moscow invited hundreds of delegates from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, including several hundred visitors from China. African delegations that came specifically for the film festival part of the event included Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, then a young filmmaker.²² Aeroflot, founded in 1923, expanded rapidly in this period to accommodate the Soviet turn to internationalism, flying Soviet envoys abroad and foreign visitors to conferences and festivals in the Soviet Union.²³

In 1958 the First Afro-Asian Film Festival in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, hailed the “Bandung spirit” as inspiration.²⁴ By then Tashkent had become the air hub of Soviet Central Asia and a showcase of socialist development for its many visitors from decolonized states.²⁵ Reporting on the festival, the premiere Soviet film journal *Iskusstvo kino* opened with a map view:

If we try to mark on the map of the globe the most important centers of cinema’s development and trace the transformations that took place in the “geography of film art” in the last years, we will see a surprising and encouraging picture. ... Blank areas that abounded on the Asian and African continents are gradually disappearing. The peoples who shook off the yoke of colonialism are developing their national cultures at unprecedented pace. One sign of this process is the birth and fast growth of national cinemas in Asian and African countries where only recently there were none.²⁶

By bringing together Asian and African cinemas in one place, the article suggested, the Soviet festival redrew the map of world cinema, much like decolonization redrew the world

²⁰Valerii Fomin, “The First International ...: About the History of the Moscow International Film Festival,” in *Directory of World Cinema: Russia 2*, ed. Birgit Beumers (Bristol, 2015), 19–27.

²¹On the Bandung conference see, among many other works, Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH, 2010).

²²Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, “Le cinéma au 6 Festival mondial de la jeunesse et des étudiants à Moscou,” in *Le cinéma et l’Afrique* (Paris, 1969), 74–89.

²³On Aeroflot history see Steven E. Harris, “Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age: Aeroflot Passengers and Aviation Culture under Nikita Khrushchev,” *Kritika* 21:3 (2020): 591–626; Steven E. Harris, “The World’s Largest Airline: How Aeroflot Learned to Stop Worrying and Became a Corporation,” *Laboratorium* 13:1 (2021): 20–56; Betsy Rose Gidwitz, “The Political and Economic Implications of the International Routes of Aeroflot” (Ph.D., University of Washington, 1976); and Peter Svik, *Civil Aviation and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Cham, 2020).

²⁴“Dukh Bandunga v zhizni i v iskusstve,” *Iskusstvo kino*, October 1958. The second installment of this festival would take place in Cairo in 1960 and the third in Jakarta in 1964. For more on this festival see Masha Kirasirova, “The Eastern International”; and Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism*.

²⁵Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh, 2010); on air travel, see *ibid.*, 237. For Central Asian republics as showcases of Soviet internationalism see Masha Kirasirova, “‘Sons of Muslims’ in Moscow: Soviet Central Asian Mediators to the Foreign East, 1955–1962,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2011): 106–32; and Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca, 2018).

²⁶“Dukh Bandunga v zhizni i v iskusstve.”

political map. In Europe, film festivals adopted city symbols as emblems, such as a bear for Berlin, or a winged lion for Venice. The Moscow and Tashkent festivals chose the globe as an emblem. In 1963 the tilt of globe in the Moscow festival emblem mirrored the world map of Aeroflot routes on the poster promoting the new Soviet-designed IL-62 airplane (figs. 1 and 2). Like Aeroflot, Soviet festivals aspired to bring together the entire world, including decolonized cinemas. In the liberated nations, airlines and film production units sprung up simultaneously, from Ghana Airways and the Ghana Film Unit in 1957 to pan-African entities such as Air Afrique, founded in 1961 and co-owned by several West African states, along with French investment, and the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI), formed in 1969.²⁷ When, in 1958, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra called for the creation of independent African film industries, he remarked: “Those who think that we are utopians, we refer to certain underdeveloped countries, where residents travel by air as easily as others, in France, by train.”²⁸ In 1966, Air Afrique became the main airline of the First World Festival of Negro Arts, bringing guests, including filmmakers, from around the African continent to Dakar, Senegal, for this pioneering pan-African cultural event.²⁹



FIG. 1 The emblem of the Moscow Film Festival, *Sputnik kinofestivalia*, no. 3 (July 9, 1963): 1.



FIG. 2 Aeroflot poster, 1963

²⁷While countries such as India and Egypt established national airlines and film industries well before the Cold War, and Ethiopia founded its own airline in 1945, Ghana is the first example of founding both industries as a gesture of sovereignty, within a year of winning independence. See “Independence in the Air: African Aviation in the 1960s,” online exhibit, Transportation Library, Northwestern University, accessed December 20, 2020, <https://sites.northwestern.edu/independenceintheair/>.

²⁸Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, “Propos sur le cinema africain,” *Présence africaine* 22 (1958): 117. Except when noted, all translations are mine.

²⁹Air Afrique transported the majority of invited guests from Africa and Europe for whom the festival provided transportation. See Folder 17, Fonds de Festival mondial des arts negres, 1963–1967, National Archives of

The Afro-Asian Film Festival represented the first, nascent stage of Aeroflot-film festival cooperation. International air travel in this period covered several days, many stops, and many airlines. In Ousmane Sembène's novel *L'Harmattan*, poet Lèye travels in 1958 from Accra, Ghana to Tashkent to participate in the First Afro-Asian Writers Conference. Sembène himself was a delegate to this conference, which took place two months after the Afro-Asian Film Festival. "From Accra, I take a plane to Cairo," Lèye describes his itinerary to a friend. "Cairo-Rome. Rome-Prague. Prague-Moscow. Moscow-Tashkent."³⁰ This arduous multi-stopover air journey was typical for delegates from decolonized states who crisscrossed continents to the many international assemblies after Bandung. The Indonesian delegation to the Afro-Asian Film Festival departed for Tashkent on the thirteenth anniversary of their country's independence. They first flew from Jakarta to Saigon, and from Saigon to Karachi on a private French airline, Transports Aériens Intercontinentaux. TAI service included a celebratory toast in Saigon with the other passengers; an Indonesian flag adorned the champagne bottle. In Karachi, they attended a reception in Indonesia's honor and held a press conference for local journalists. The delegates then switched to government-owned Pakistan Airways for the flight to Kabul. Aeroflot served only the final leg of the trip, from Kabul to Tashkent.³¹ This route had been established in 1923 as part of one of the first Soviet international air agreements.

With Aeroflot playing only a minor role, participating decolonized states had complete control over which of their citizens could participate in a festival. The Soviet Union did fund travel for most delegates to the Afro-Asian Writers Conference, but cinema at this point was less important for Soviet diplomacy than literature, and foreign airline tickets were expensive. So each of the fourteen participating Asian and African states covered travel for its own delegates and determined what films and people could come. As a result, dissident directors could not attend. The Indonesian revolutionary drama *Turang* (1957) was a great success at Tashkent, and the Soviets bought it for general distribution. Yet its director, Bachtiar Siagian, could not enjoy this triumph and was not even credited at the festival as the maker of the film. Siagian was out of favor with Indonesian state officials because his previous, censored film sided with farmers and traders against a state urban-development project in Jakarta.³² He was not the only director eclipsed by national self-fashioning. India and Ceylon, to the delight of Tashkent audiences, brought popular song-and-dance melodramas instead of art films by auteurs Satyajit Ray and Lester James Peries that played a year earlier at the Cannes Film Festival. China and Ghana chose to represent their national cinemas with militant anti-imperialist documentaries by European directors, both uncredited: Dutch Joris Ivens and British Sean Graham, respectively. By letting participating nations take care of the airfare, the festival emphasized cinematic sovereignty, in accordance with the spirit of Bandung.

Senegal. On the importance of air travel at FESMAN see also Tobias Wofford, "Diasporic Returns in the Jet Age: The First World Festival of Negro Arts and the Promise of Air Travel," *Interventions* 20:7 (2018): 952–64.

³⁰Ousmane Sembène, *L'Harmattan*, vol. 1, *Referendum* (Paris, 1964), 139.

³¹"Delegasi Indonesia ke Festival Film Asia-Afrika di Tasjkent," *Mimbar penerangan (Jakarta)*, November 1958. On the way back, Harioto toured Mosfilm studio in Moscow.

³²Krishna Sen, *Indonesian Cinema: Framing the New Order* (London, 1994), 43.

The first decade of the Moscow International Film Festival represented the second stage of Aeroflot as the Soviet film festival infrastructure. In the 1960s the airline became an official carrier of the festival. The 1969 Moscow festival newsletter made that clear by granting Aeroflot a place in a cartoon “map” of festival activities (fig. 3). The Soviet Civil Aviation Ministry was present at the 1965 Moscow Film Festival beyond its carrier duties, bestowing its own prize on a French sci-fi film, *Heaven on One's Head* (*Le ciel sur la tête*, dir. Yves Ciampi, 1965; fig. 4). As a carrier, it provided tickets for most guests, especially those whose travel was covered by the Soviets. Aeroflot managed tickets sales and exchanges, and provided a representative for the Service Bureau, operated during the festival by Intourist, the Soviet state tourist agency. The organizing committee for each festival included a representative from the Foreign Tourism Board of the USSR Council of Ministers.³³ During and after the festival, many delegates took tourist and professional trips to major cities, such as Leningrad, Kiev, Tashkent, or Tbilisi, also operated by Aeroflot. The Service Bureau, staffed mostly by women, arranged transportation by taxi, train, and air. Aeroflot provided only one representative to the bureau, not nearly enough to accommodate up to nine hundred globe-trotting participants.³⁴ As a result, the airline came to symbolize the inefficiencies of socialist economy to international festival guests.



FIG. 3 VI Moscow International Film Festival. Drawing by G. Ogonodnikov, *Sputnik kinofestivalia*, no. 1 (July 7, 1969): 1.

³³RGALI, f. 2944, op. 24, ed. khr. 31, l. 26.

³⁴RGALI, f. 2936, op 4, ed. khr. 1593, ll. 123, 128; RGALI, f. 2944, op. 24, ed. khr. 58, l. 8 (900 guests).

Aeroflot service during the Moscow film festival gave festival delegates a bitter taste of Soviet socialist experience. Visitors who reserved return tickets before the festival found their reservations cancelled.³⁵ Guests who revised their travel arrangements during the festival found that ticket exchanges took several days to process or were denied outright.³⁶



FIG. 4 IV Moscow International Film Festival. French film director Yves Ciampi receives the USSR Ministry of Civil Aviation prize, a Soviet Il-62 aircraft model, for *Heaven on One's Head*. July 14, 1965. Photo by Mikhail Ozersky. RIA Novosti.

It fell on the interpreters assigned to delegates to run around and solve these problems, sometimes making several trips between the Service Bureau and Sheremetyevo airport to change one ticket.³⁷ As a result, Aeroflot led in complaints conveyed in interpreters' reports from the 1965 and 1967 Moscow festivals.³⁸ The Aeroflot representative was rude to Cuban and Spanish guests.³⁹ Hungarian delegates had to schlep to Sheremetyevo themselves to change their reservation.⁴⁰ Service Bureau personnel spent their time procuring festival movie tickets for their relatives and friends instead of doing their job.⁴¹ All this *blat* and red tape led to unfavorable comparisons with Western airlines. After waiting until the night before his trip to Leningrad to get his ticket, one Japanese guest pointed out that in Italy it only took ten minutes to get a plane ticket for a trip between two cities within the country.⁴²

³⁵RGALI, f. 2936, op. 1, ed. khr. 2058, l. 71.

³⁶Ibid., op. 4, ed. khr. 1593, l. 258.

³⁷Ibid., l. 61.

³⁸In addition to other citations in this and the following paragraph see also RGALI, f. 2936, op. 1, ed. khr. 2057, l. 100, and ed. khr. 2058, l. 130. Food service was a close second among complaints, followed by difficulties in getting film schedules and tickets.

³⁹RGALI, f. 2936, op. 4, ed. khr. 1593, ll. 73, 123.

⁴⁰Ibid., l. 61.

⁴¹Ibid., l. 183.

⁴²Ibid., op. 1, ed. khr. 2058, l. 117.

Aeroflot's inefficiencies reproduced global inequalities. When the Aeroflot representative told British delegates at the 1965 Moscow festival that their tickets could not be changed in two days, they went to the British European Airways office and got it done in one minute.⁴³ But most guests could not afford to go to other airlines. Aeroflot's fares were cheaper in comparison to Western companies, and most guests who got their tickets for free, courtesy of the festival, had to stay with the Soviet airline.⁴⁴ The red tape affected Global South guests the most. At the 1965 festival the head of the United Arab Republic (UAR) delegation was invited by the East German delegation to visit Berlin. It took him five days, including four interpreter's trips and two personal trips to the Service Bureau, to change his first-class Moscow-Cairo ticket for an economy Moscow-Berlin-Athens-Cairo ticket, before he was able to take advantage of the invitation.⁴⁵ The sole Ugandan delegate to the same festival had his suitcase with all his publicity materials go to London instead of Moscow when he changed planes in Frankfurt. It took a week to get it back, and festival staff only compounded the injury by promising to get it "tomorrow" every day of that week.⁴⁶ The two-man Tunisian delegation to the 1967 festival included Omar Khelifi, director of the competition entry *The Dawn (Al fajn, 1966)*, the first Tunisian feature film. Tunisians enjoyed the festival, including a Mosfilm tour and a Soviet film classics retrospective, and wanted to delay their departure until after the closing ceremony. But Aeroflot had no tickets available for that date and they had to leave early.⁴⁷ While wealthy and connected Westerners could go elsewhere for help, Aeroflot imperiled new creative transnational connections for Global South cineastes.

Global South filmmakers who did not arrive via diplomatic channels but were personally invited because of their international reputation encountered the most difficulties on their journey. No festival representatives came to the airport to greet the Brazilians Joaquim Pedro de Andrade and Mário Carneiro, members of the acclaimed Brazilian *cinema novo* movement. They had come to the 1965 Moscow festival at the invitation of the Soviet Filmmakers Union to participate in a symposium on documentary cinema, but encountered only a Brazilian embassy official upon landing. While Ousmane Sembène was incensed at his lackluster airport welcome, de Andrade and Carneiro took it in stride and adopted a *flâneur* attitude on their trip, wandering the city, taking photographs of street scenes, and shopping for vinyl and Marxist literature.⁴⁸ Still, the dissident status of these filmmakers in relation to their own governments compounded Soviet slights. De Andrade and Carneiro worked in Europe: after the 1964 coup, the new right-wing Brazilian government subjected leftist *cinema novo* filmmakers to censorship and blacklisting.⁴⁹ Sembène clashed with Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor because he opposed Senghor's *negritude*

⁴³Now British Airways (ibid., ed. khr. 2057, l. 124.

⁴⁴On cheaper fares see Harris, "The World's Largest Airline," 46–47.

⁴⁵RGALI, f. 2936, op. 1, ed. khr. 2057, l. 127.

⁴⁶Ibid., ed. khr. 2058, l. 139.

⁴⁷Ibid., op. 4, ed. khr. 1593, l. 258.

⁴⁸Ibid., op. 1, ed. khr. 2058, l. 23.

⁴⁹On Brazilian filmmakers in Europe see Regina Câmara, "From Karlovy Vary to Cannes: Brazilian Cinema Novo at European Film Festivals in the 1960s," in *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts: Film Festivals in the Cold War*, ed. Andreas Kötzing and Caroline Moine (Gottingen, 2016), 63–76.

theory of African culture.⁵⁰ Forced to cobble together sundry international support for making and showing their projects, de Andrade, Carneiro, and Sembène from their first moments at a Soviet airport found themselves on the margins of Soviet film festival diplomacy.

The crucial work of cinematic internationalism happened at the margins of film festival diplomacy, however. This work escaped the notice of official assessments, such as a West German government report on the 1965 Moscow festival, obtained by the KGB and passed on as a classified file to the State Committee for Cinematography (Goskino). This report detailed West German diplomatic goals, which were closely aligned with U.S. interests at the festival. It noted among participants the “so-called ‘Liberation Front of South Vietnam’”—American foes in the Vietnam War. It also reported that the Federal Republic of Germany’s entry in the competition, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (*Onkel Toms Hütte*, dir. Géza von Radányi, 1965), countered Soviet propaganda, “interpreting the racial question in the USA not as a struggle between white and black populations, but rather as a struggle between different groups of whites for black equality.” According to the report, the official delegation united all West Germans at the festival with these lofty political goals despite Soviet efforts to split them along ideological lines.⁵¹ In fact, some West German participants mixed instead with anticolonial cineastes.⁵² Herbert Stettner, the head of Asian Film Week in Frankfurt, met with the Mongolian delegation to invite them to his festival.⁵³ Hilmar Hoffmann, the head of the Oberhausen Short Film Festival, saw revolutionary Vietnamese documentaries; he panned the films but avowed sympathy with the North Vietnamese cause in their war with the Americans.⁵⁴ Soviet festival organizers cared little for these Thirdworldist activities: in his report on the festival, KGB Chairman Vladimir Semichastny zeroed in on U.S., West European, and Israeli spying and propaganda.⁵⁵ But leftist Westerners like Stettner and Hoffman came to Moscow precisely because they could see Global South and socialist cinemas unavailable anywhere else.⁵⁶ At the next festival, two years later, Stettner was courting Mongolians again, while Hoffmann developed an appreciation for Vietnamese militant cinema, promoting it on the documentary jury together with Sembène.⁵⁷ Official, diplomatic, and security reports contain little trace of these informal transnational encounters.

⁵⁰On disagreements between Senghor and Sembène in this period see David Murphy, “Culture, Development, and the African Renaissance: Ousmane Sembène and Léopold Senghor at the World Festival of Negro Arts (Dakar 1966),” in *Ousmane Sembène and the Politics of Culture*, ed. Amadou T. Fofana and Lifongo J. Vetinde (Lanham, 2015), 1–16.

⁵¹RGALI, f. 2944, op. 24, ed. khr. 58, ll. 20–26, quote on p. 24.

⁵²On support of Third World struggles in West Germany see Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, 2012).

⁵³RGALI, f. 2936, op. 4, ed. khr. 1593, l. 151.

⁵⁴Ibid., op. 1, ed. khr. 2058, l. 62. Hoffmann was less enthusiastic about the North Vietnamese cause in his review of the festival in *Christ und Welt* (Stuttgart, Germany), June 30, 1965, translated in RGALI, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 407, ll. 14–18.

⁵⁵Ibid., op. 24, ed. khr. 58, ll. 7–14 (Goskino report); Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI), f. 5, op. 36, ed. khr. 154 (KGB report).

⁵⁶Other paths of contact were also available—Karlov Vary and Leipzig film festival, for example, as well as radical European festivals, including the Asian Film Week.

⁵⁷RGALI, f. 2936, op. 4, ed. khr. 1593, l. 151; *ibid.*, l. 26.

The emergence of the Tashkent Festival for African, Asian, and (later) Latin American Cinema in 1968 represents the third, most developed, stage of Aeroflot as a cinematic infrastructure. In addition to official delegations, still mostly funded by participating states, film professionals could be invited, and their trips funded, by the festival organizing committee, the professional Filmmakers Union, or the state import-export organization, Sovexportfilm. A private panoramic photograph of Tashkent airport in the mid-1970s shows the mass of Global South guests (with flowers), and their welcoming committee (fig. 5). Most of these Global South guests came at Soviet expense. They came, as the plane behind them makes clear, courtesy of Aeroflot.



FIG. 5 Tashkent festival guests upon arrival, with an Aeroflot plane in the background. Late 1970s. Photograph from a private collection.

Ordinarily, the Ministry of Civil Aviation resisted such arrangements. Aid to “developing countries”—airplanes, spare parts, pilots, and repair crews—was a different budget category than hard currency profits from tickets sold abroad. In 1968 the ministry sent costly equipment and specialists to fifteen countries: Afghanistan, Algiers, Cameroon, Congo (Brazzaville), Cuba, Guinea, India, Iran, Iraq, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, UAR, Vietnam, and Yemen.⁵⁸ Also in 1968, the Journalists Union expected thirty-two visiting Asian and African journalists, many of whom could not come unless their fare was paid by the Soviets. The Journalists Union asked the ministry to provide travel vouchers for rubles, so the visitors could exchange them for tickets at Aeroflot offices abroad. The ministry refused: “this proposal will lead to changes in the planning system for foreign currency airfare profits and would require revisions to the foreign currency plan of the Ministry of Civil Aviation for 1968, which would be inappropriate.”⁵⁹ Film festival air travel issues were decided at a higher level, however. At the planning stages of each festival, the Central

⁵⁸Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 55, op. 1, ed. khr. 563.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, ed. khr. 514, ll. 90 (ministry’s refusal), 93–94 (Journalists Union’s request). On the importance of hard currency for Aeroflot see Harris, “The World’s Largest Airline,” 29.

Committee of the Communist Party ordered the Civil Aviation Ministry of the USSR to “allow the festival organizing committee to transport foreign guests of the festival to the USSR and back with Soviet planes with payment for all expenses in Russian rubles.”⁶⁰ Aeroflot complied.⁶¹

The airline’s limited routes still constrained world cinema maps drawn by Soviet festivals. In the early 1970s, Aeroflot’s only Latin American destinations were still Havana and Lima (see fig. 2).⁶² As a result, despite persistent demands from Latin American filmmakers to include them in the Tashkent Festival, as late as 1974 the organizing committee advised: “because of ... great foreign currency expenses for their travel, in 1974 we should confine ourselves to only selected representatives and films from the Latin American continent.”⁶³ The festival officially added Latin America only in 1976. Within the USSR, even between nearby Soviet cities, air travel remained the most expensive and thus prestigious means of transportation. In 1979, Moscow organizers put Francis Ford Coppola, at the festival with his *Apocalypse Now* (1979), on a plane to Leningrad as an honored guest, while everyone else traveled by train. Unfortunately, Moscow festival staff forgot to arrange for someone to meet Coppola in Leningrad, so he had to rely on his own wits and rudimentary Russian to get from the airport to his hotel.⁶⁴

Aeroflot travelers’ activities were not as easily controlled by the USSR, or, for that matter, their own governments. Although Ousmane Sembène blamed the USSR for botching Paulin Vieyra’s visit Moscow in 1967, his own government was mainly to blame. At the last moment, the Senegalese embassy advised the Soviets to consider Sembène, who was already in Moscow, as the delegate “in place of the previously invited Senegalese filmmaker,” Vieyra.⁶⁵ Conversely, at Tashkent in 1968, Senegalese cineastes’ mobility no longer depended on their government. When Sembène was personally invited to bring his new film *Mandabi* to the Tashkent festival, he insisted that Vieyra also come, with all expenses covered.⁶⁶ The Soviets complied. During the preparation of the 1968 Tashkent festival, several Arab delegations declined invitations because Tashkent overlapped with the Carthage Festival of Arab and African Cinema in Tunisia, at the time the main cinema event for the region. The Soviets then organized a charter Aeroflot flight that would transport all invitees participating at Carthage to Tashkent.⁶⁷ As a result, all Arab delegates came, including the Carthage festival head, Tahar Cheriaa, who also initially had declined.⁶⁸ Aeroflot ensured a coup for the Soviets, who could now proclaim to have organized the most representative

⁶⁰RGALI, f. 2944, op. 25, ed. khr. 70, ll. 3.

⁶¹See, for example, vouchers for Senegalese filmmakers in RGALI, f. 3159, op. 1, ed. khr. 207, l. 31.

⁶²Gidwitz, “The Political and Economic Implications,” 583.

⁶³RGALI, f. 2944, op. 25, ed. khr. 70, l. 3.

⁶⁴Tom Luddy, interview by author, March 1, 2019. Luddy was a frequent Moscow festival guest as the co-founder of the Telluride International Film Festival in Colorado. He also worked at Coppola’s Zoetrope Studios.

⁶⁵RGALI, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 1120, l. 32. Combined financial and geopolitical considerations could explain this decision. Senghor was aligned more with France and the United States than the Soviet Union, a country he never visited. He also favored literature and visual arts more than cinema.

⁶⁶RGALI, f. 2936, op. 4, op. 1833, l. 50.

⁶⁷RGALI, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 1200, l. 2.

⁶⁸RGALI, f. 2936, op. 4, ed. khr. 1833, l. 36 (declined); RGALI, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 1203, l. 7 (thank you letter after attending the festival).

forum of African and Asian cinema in the world. But it also allowed African delegates to continue planning their own organization, the Pan-African Association of Filmmakers, spearheaded by Cheriaa, Sembène, and Vieyra. Their organizing began at Carthage, continued at Tashkent, and concluded with the formation of the Association at the First Pan-African Festival in Algiers in 1969, finalized at the Carthage festival in 1970.⁶⁹ The Tashkent festival became a juncture in the pan-African network where international cinematic organizing took place.

In sum, Aeroflot, an engine of official Soviet internationalism, became an infrastructure for cinematic Thirdworldism.⁷⁰ Moscow and Tashkent became nodes on anticolonial and socialist film festival circuits that also included Carthage, Ouagadougou, Viña del Mar, Leipzig, and Karlovy Vary, among others.⁷¹ In the 1970s stateless filmmakers especially used both Soviet festivals to promote their work and causes. Socialist countries eased visa requirements for revolutionary cineastes. Palestinian filmmakers, many living in exile in different countries, preferred Leipzig over Arab film festivals. Unlike the Arab states, East Germany let them in without permanent travel papers.⁷² The USSR made crossing borders easier for revolutionary exiles as well. Palestinian films and speeches at the 1974 Tashkent festival reached as far as the United States via *Variety* reporter Gordon Hitchens.⁷³ Chilean cineastes, in exile after the 1973 coup that ended Salvador Allende's presidency, organized a major conference devoted to the future of Chilean cinema at the 1979 Moscow festival.⁷⁴ These cinematic associations and individual filmmakers used the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union to hijack those countries' infrastructures for their own purposes. FEPACI representatives, for example, attended every Moscow and Tashkent festival in the 1970s, with their travel covered by Sovexportfilm. But they also toured the United States in 1973 on the invitation of the U.S. State Department, visiting New York and Hollywood to discuss assistance for the production and distribution of African films.⁷⁵ While historians have focused on Global South *states* using superpower rivalry to achieve

⁶⁹Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Le cinéma au 1er Festival culturel panafricain d'Alger," *Présence Africaine*, no. 72 (1969): 190–201; Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington, 2001), 35–50; James Eskridge Genova, *Cinema and Development in West Africa* (Bloomington, 2013), 128–57.

⁷⁰On "cinematic Thirdworldism" see Mariano Mestman, "From Algiers to Buenos Aires: The Third World Cinema Committee (1973–74)," *New Cinemas* 1:1 (2002): 40–53.

⁷¹Andre Paquet, "The 'Fespaco' of Ouagadougou: Towards Unity in African Cinema," *Cinéaste* 6:1 (1973): 36–38; Amanda Rueda, "1967–2007: 40 años de los Encuentros de Viña del Mar o de la constitución del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano," *Cinémas d'Amérique Latine*, no. 15 (2007): 93–101; Caroline Moine, *Screened Encounters: The Leipzig Documentary Film Festival, 1955–1990* (New York, 2018); Jindřiška Bláhová, "National, Socialist, Global: The Changing Roles of the Karlovy Vary Film Festival, 1946–1956," in *Cinema in Service of the State: Perspectives on Film Culture in the GDR and Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960*, ed. Lars Karl (New York, 2017), 245–72.

⁷²Nadia G. Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* (Austin, 2018), 142.

⁷³Gordon Hitchens, "Palestinian Agit-Prop Filmmers Fear Fund Choke-off in K's Wake," *Variety*, June 12, 1974.

⁷⁴José Miguel Palacios, "Resistance vs Exile: The Political Rhetoric of Chilean Exile Cinema in the 1970s," *Jump Cut*, no. 57 (Fall 2016), <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc57.2016/-PalaciosChile/index.html>.

⁷⁵Syd Cassyd, "African Filmmakers Visit in Hollywood," *Boxoffice* (July 16, 1973); "African Directors Feted in N.Y.," *Back Stage* (April 20, 1973); "African Cinema," *Variety* (April 11, 1973). FEPACI also relied on France for support, which was a source of tensions between Francophone and Anglophone African filmmakers; see Olivier Barlet, "The Ambivalence of French Funding," *Black Camera* 3:2 (2012): 205–16.

national liberation, nation-building, and modernization, here a *transnational cultural movement* used the superpowers' Cold War agenda to build Global South film-production and distribution infrastructures.⁷⁶

Soviet spectators remained skeptical about the promise of Aeroflot and air travel in general. On Soviet screens, Bollywood films like *Sangam* (dir. Raj Kapoor, 1964) celebrated Air India as a symbol of middle-class mobility and consumer culture.⁷⁷ Some Soviet and West African films took a more skeptical view. During the tragic finale of *Black Girl*, Sembène's camera pans over an advertisement for Air Afrique just as a white Frenchman descends to Dakar carrying the suitcase of his black maid who had committed suicide in France (fig. 6). This shot alludes to the false promise of independence the airline represented.⁷⁸



FIG. 6 Air Afrique sign in the finale of Ousmane Sembène's *Black Girl*, 1966.

In a Soviet comedy, *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (*Kavkazskaia plennitsa*, dir. Leonid Gaidai, 1967), Aeroflot posters adorn the walls, advertising routes to London, Beijing, and Delhi, while a character makes a toast, wishing “that our desires match our means” (fig. 7).

⁷⁶On political movements and Cold War infrastructures see Andrew M. Ivaska, “Leveraging Alternatives: Early Frelimo, the Soviet Union, and the Infrastructure of African Political Exile,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 41:1 (2021): 11–26. On states see Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga, “A Plundering Tiger with Its Deadly Cubs? The USSR and China as Weapons in the Engineering of a ‘Zimbabwean Nation,’ 1945–2009,” in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, ed. Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 231–66; David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA, 2018); and Matthew James Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford, 2002).

⁷⁷Ranjani Mazumdar, “Aviation, Tourism and Dreaming in 1960s Bombay Cinema,” *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 2:2 (2011): 143–49. *Sangam* played at the 1965 Moscow festival, when Raj Kapur served as a jury member, and was released in the USSR in 1968.

⁷⁸For another example see an Air Afrique appearance in *Soleil Ô* (1972) by Mauritanian director Med Hondo.

Illustrator Viktor Aseriants designed these posters in the mid-1960s for a series “Via Moscow” that invited foreigners to traverse continents through Soviet airspace on Aeroflot planes.⁷⁹ The man listening to the speech, Shurik, is a Russian ethnographer doing fieldwork in an unnamed republic in the Caucasus Mountains. He is recording the toast as an ancient ritual from his “native informant.” The scene thus mocks the viewer’s desire both for the inaccessible Global South—Beijing and Delhi—and for the Soviet South next door. Gaidai, not a frequent international festival traveler, made his comedies, all of them blockbusters, primarily for Soviet audiences.⁸⁰ He reminded spectators that travel abroad was out of reach for most ordinary Soviet citizens.⁸¹



FIG. 7 Aeroflot posters from the “Via Moscow” series by Viktor Aseriants in Leonid Gaidai’s *Kavkazskaia plennitsa*, 1967.

For Soviets who could not fly off to foreign lands, Aeroflot served as a gateway to world cinemas. In an unpublished article for *Iskusstvo kino*, written on the eve of the 1972 Tashkent festival, Uzbek director Ali Khamraev confessed: “I try to arrange for a business trip to Moscow during the festival.” His five-hour red-eye flight back to Tashkent—“over Europe; after the Urals, over Asia; after the Aral sea, Central Asia”—allowed him to observe his audience up close: “As you sink deeper into your seat,” he described, “around you are business travelers, soldiers, women with children, pensioners.”⁸² Many Soviet cinephiles

⁷⁹Volia Liakhov, *Sovetskii reklamnyi plakat i reklamnaia grafika, 1933–1973* (Moscow, 1977), 28, 82.

⁸⁰Elena Prokhorova, “The Man Who Made Them Laugh: Leonid Gaidai, the King of Soviet Comedy,” in *A Companion to Russian Cinema*, ed. Birgit Beumers (Chichester, 2016), 520.

⁸¹Steven Harris argues that Aeroflot promoted a socialist internationalism that did not include mobility across borders for Soviet citizens. See Harris, “Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age,” 594.

⁸²Ali Khamraev, “Mysli vokrug festivalia” [1972], RGALI, f. 2912, op. 4, ed. khr. 662, l. 1.

flew Aeroflot to festivals as well. Moscow critic Neya Zorkaya remembered the Soviet festivals in post-Soviet times:

Where are you, the legendary July spectator in festival Moscow, you, who arranged a vacation in Solikamsk or Akmolinsk to make it to a Fellini film? Where did you go, the sold-out festival halls, the nighttime queues with sign-up lists, the excited exchanges of coveted tickets near “October” or “Kosmos” theaters (“I will give you two for ‘Ludvig,’ and you give me two evening tickets for ‘The Last Metro’ in Dom Kino”).⁸³

While most out-of-town Soviet cinephiles arranged their vacations to see European art cinema by Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, or François Truffaut, the Soviet festival media ecology required them to see Global South cinema as well. In Moscow, festival tickets sold out long before the schedule of screenings became available, making it impossible to predict what films one would see. Each screening was usually a double-feature, with an African, Asian, or Latin American film preceding a coveted European or American picture.⁸⁴ Some spectators skipped the first film, but others went out of curiosity, as the *Black Girl* screening shows. For some, it was more than curiosity. Liya Golden, a researcher at the Institute of Africa and a daughter of an African American engineer, took a Moscow-Tashkent flight every two years to see African films at the festival. “The larger halls were taken up with Japanese and Indian films,” she remembers, “and the Africans were shown in smaller halls to smaller audiences. From early morning to late at night, I sat watching the small screen.”⁸⁵ The genre also mattered. At the 1974 festival, Uzbek audiences loved a Philippine crime caper *Kill the Pushers* (*Pumatay ng Pushers*, dir. Augusto Buenaventura, 1972). Aesthetes grumbled but Sovexportfilm bought the film for distribution.⁸⁶ After Uzbek spectators gave a Pakistani melodrama *Dolls of Clay* (dir. Nadeem Baig, 1973) an ovation, Marxist Indian director Mrinal Sen lamented that the Soviet masses remained politically backward despite their fifty years of socialism.⁸⁷

Expanded Aeroflot transportation in the late 1960s and 1970s provided uncensored transnational cinematic experiences for the local public. Ideally, Soviet representatives selected festival films and either rejected unacceptable pictures, or suggested which parts of films to edit out for screenings, paying special attention to cutting “explicitly erotic

⁸³Neya Zorkaia, “‘Vchera’ i ‘segodnia’ Moskovskogo kinofestivalia,” *Iskusstvo kino*, December 1995, 37.

⁸⁴The same practice existed for the screenings of festival films that traveled to major Soviet cities after the festival.

⁸⁵Lily Golden, *My Long Journey Home* (Chicago, 2002), 132. Liya Oliverovna Golden was the prominent black Russian social activist, scholar, and mother of Russian TV star Yelena Khanga. Liya Golden—also known as “Lily”—was born on July 18, 1934, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She was a daughter of Oliver Golden and Bertha Golden, who immigrated to the Soviet Union from the United States in 1931.

⁸⁶Ambros Eichenberger, “The Second World Organizes a Festival for the Third,” *Zoom-Filmberater (Switzerland)* 13 (1974), in *III Kinofestival' stran Azii i Afriki v Tashkente: Otkliki zarubezhnoi pressy* (Moscow, 1975), 100. *Kill the Pushers* came out in the USSR in 1977.

⁸⁷Devendra Kumar, “Tashkent Promises a Cinematic Brotherhood,” *Cine-Advance* (India), July 11, 1974, in *III Kinofestival' stran Azii i Afriki v Tashkente*, 85. Indian song-and-dance melodramas also attracted big crowds; see Sudha Rajagopalan, *Indian Films in Soviet Cinemas: The Culture of Movie-Going after Stalin* (Bloomington, 2009).

episodes.”⁸⁸ But not all films could be seen in advance. In 1974 a Swiss labor newspaper reporter complimented Tashkent organizers’ ability “to account for the possibility of unexpected changes in the program, to include a film brought at the last moment in a director’s suitcase.”⁸⁹ Soviet censors could not edit or translate such “suitcase cinema” in advance. The 1967 Moscow festival officials, for example, rejected a subtitled print of *Who Is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (dir. Mike Nichols, 1966) because it included a literal Russian translation of the phrase “fucking moon.” The unsubtitled print arrived with the delegation. Warned to omit obscenities—“You don’t want to risk your career for a moment of bliss!”—translators censored dialogue during the surveilled official screenings at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses. But they translated the phrase directly in regular theaters.⁹⁰ At Tashkent in 1968, twenty-two-year-old Elparid Kholdayev went to see the Japanese festival entry *Black Cat* (*Kuroneko*, dir. Kaneto Shindo, 1968), because of its eroticism and violence—a style he could not have experienced at a regular Soviet movie theater. He knew that festival organizers did not have time to edit out the objectionable scenes from last-minute reels.⁹¹

For filmmakers from the Soviet South, suitcase cinema enabled transnational connections at the Moscow and Tashkent film festivals, providing an opportunity to break into the world stage and find new global audiences. Georgian director Otar Iosseliani was not allowed to show his films officially at the 1979 Moscow film festival, but instead, as one observer described, flew from Tbilisi with “his own prints of his newest film, rent[ed] a small theater and a bus, [and] cart[ed] his foreign fans to a secret screening.” Ulrich Gregor, a co-founder of the Forum for Young Cinema at Berlinale, attended one such private screening of Iosseliani’s *Pastorale* (1975) at the offices of the magazine *Sovetskii ekran*. Gregor invited Iosseliani to Berlin, where the film three years later won a FIPRESCI critics’ prize.⁹² Ali Khamrayev, based in Tashkent, did not have to take his film by plane to the 1968 festival. He arranged a private screening of his latest, *White, White Storks* (*Belye, belye aisty*, 1966), for director Masaki Kobayashi and his Japanese colleagues. He also became their guide to Tashkent. In the old town, on a bet, he knocked on the gate of a random house and the inhabitants fed them a “grandiose” feast. A few months later, his Japanese friends hosted him in Tokyo, where he met Akira Kurosawa.⁹³

“Suitcase cinema” occasionally elided not just Soviet, but also foreign diplomatic control. In 1972 a Syrian film distributor upon arrival to Tashkent convinced the organizers to include his film in the official program instead of the picture originally preselected by

⁸⁸RGALI, f. 3159, op. 1, ed. khr. 18, l. 11. Selection commissions usually paid more attention to erotic scenes than to any objectionable ideological content; while extreme violence was considered objectionable, revolutionary violence remained acceptable.

⁸⁹E. Simanet (M. Giraud), “Tashkent Festival: For the Friendship between Peoples!” *Voix Ouvrière* (Geneva, Switzerland), June 25, 1974, in *III Kinofestival' stran Azii i Afriki v Tashkente*, 90.

⁹⁰Kirill Razlogov, *Moi festivali* (Moscow, 2015), 33.

⁹¹“South by Soviet East: Uzbekistan’s Rule-Breaking Feast of Film,” *Eurasianet*, October 5, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/south-by-soviet-east-uzbekistans-rule-breaking-feast-of-film>.

⁹²Jay Leyda, draft of letter to an unknown recipient, [1979], box 11, folder 5, Jay and Si-Lan Chen Leyda Papers, Tamiment Library and Robert Wagner Archives, New York University; Naum Kleiman, interview by author, September 10, 2018. For more on Iosseliani see Erik R. Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (Oxford, 2017), 221–26.

⁹³Khamraev, “Mysli vokrug festivalia,” 11–12.

the Syrian government and vetted by Soviet representatives.⁹⁴ In 1969, American film critic and documentarian Gordon Hitchens approached producer Jack Valenti, head of the U.S. delegation to the Moscow festival. Hitchens offered to bring with him to the festival “non-Hollywood productions ... including films by Black and Puerto Rican youngsters.” In response, he got an official reply: “All invitations both to guests and to films are to be transmitted through our Embassy in Moscow, or the Department of State.”⁹⁵ In other words, any films for Moscow would have to be vetted by the U.S. government. Little did the official know that Hitchens had already brought a U.S. Navy wartime propaganda short, *Our Enemy Japan* (dir. Frank Capra, 1943), to the Tashkent festival a year earlier, to show to Soviet and Japanese delegates.⁹⁶ In subsequent years, Hitchens brought in his suitcases American independent films by women and “minorities” for special “screening sessions” where “film industry figures, film scholars, et al, can see something of our non-Hollywood production.”⁹⁷

Foreign producers preferred to move their film canisters in and out of the USSR as luggage because they could not control airmail delivery. In 1968, Hitchens loaned *Our Enemy Japan* to the Soviets to make copies and return by mail. He never got it back, despite numerous requests to Tashkent and Moscow authorities.⁹⁸ When films flew in unsupervised, producers lost track of their own footage completely. Soviet audiences occasionally benefited. In the months following the 1968 Tashkent festival, Eagle Films Company of Bombay sent several desperate letters to festival officials asking to return two prints of their lavish historical melodrama *Amrapali* (dir. Lekh Tandon, 1966). The company sent the prints at the request of the Indian government, one via the Indian embassy for the Indian Week in Moscow and another directly to Tashkent for the festival. Producers hoped to sell the film to the USSR at the festival market, but instead learned “from reliable sources that our picture is being exhibited actually in a regular manner” in theaters without paying a cent for the distribution rights.⁹⁹ Eagle Films requested several times that the film be airshipped back via the Indian embassy in Kabul so the King of Afghanistan could see it, but instead Soviet spectators enjoyed the pirated reels. *Amrapali* was officially released in the USSR only in 1976.

AS AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE OFFICIAL SOVIET INTERNATIONALISM, Aeroflot produced multiple publics at the Tashkent and Moscow film festivals. For filmmakers from the Soviet South, Aeroflot enabled transnational encounters, providing an opportunity to break into the world stage and find new global audiences. Films by Khamraev and Iosseliani traveled to Asian and European festivals after being screened to festival visitors at home. Soviet audiences, especially at Tashkent, gravitated toward popular Global South genres, aided by suitcase

⁹⁴RGALI, f. 2936, op. 4, ed. khr. 2798, l. 7.

⁹⁵Gordon Hitchens to Jack Valenti, May 30, 1969, and Bruce Herschensohn to Gordon Hitchens, June 10, 1969, both in VI International Film Festival Moscow July 7–22, 1969, folder 2; Background Reports Relating to Film Festivals, 1953–1982, Record Group 306; U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁹⁶RGALI, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 1203, ll. 22–23.

⁹⁷Hitchens to Valenti; “Hitchens to Moscow,” *Variety*, May 30, 1973.

⁹⁸RGALI, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 1203, ll. 22–23.

⁹⁹Ibid., ll. 17, 29, 35–37.

cinema and by enterprising film festival officials. Their popular internationalism was in tension with the Thirdworldism embraced by militant filmmakers from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Militant Global South filmmakers used Soviet festivals as a terrain for anti-imperialist institution-building across the Global South. Aeroflot made the diverse international involvement at Soviet festivals possible, while constraining further expansion, especially to Latin America. The economics of air travel thus affected “world cinema maps” that emerged at these festivals. Aeroflot produced inequalities among festival guests: filmmakers from the Global South, whose travel was covered by the festival, were at the mercy of Aeroflot’s delays, while festival guests from Western Europe and the United States could count on their own national airlines for transportation. At the same time, from 1968 on Global South filmmakers could travel to Soviet festivals independently of their national governments, and could forge Thirdworldist alliances that bypassed the Soviet diplomatic goals Aeroflot was supposed to serve.