Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies
JICS 2025, 1: 140-151
DOI: 10.29329/almamater.2025.1286.9

A Utopian Approach to Asif Kapadia's *Ali and Nino*: Love, Multiculturalism, Freedom, and the Bolsheviks

Kanan Aghasiyev[1]

Abstract

This article explores the cinematic adaptation of Kurban Said's novel *Ali and Nino*, directed by Asif Kapadia and released on October 27, 2016. Leaving Baku during the Russian Bolshevik occupation in 1920, Said's novel mirrors his unique dual association with both German and Azerbaijani literary traditions. The film brings to life the bi-ethnic love story of Nino Kipiani, a Christian Georgian girl, and Ali, a Muslim Azerbaijani, set against the political turmoil surrounding Azerbaijani independence from the Russian Empire during World War I. This article thoroughly examines the characters' utopian quest for freedom, love, and family amidst these historical upheavals. It discusses the concept of utopia as an idealized vision of society and critically analyses how the film portrays the characters' relentless pursuit of their lofty dreams despite the severe political constraints they face. Moreover, the article explores the significant impact of the Bolshevik occupation on the utopian dreams of love, modern multiculturalism, and freedom depicted in Ali and Nino. By closely examining the film, the article reveals how these historical challenges shape the characters' lives and their aspirations for a better future. It highlights the enduring struggle between personal desires and political realities, showcasing how the characters navigate their complex world while striving to maintain their cultural identities and personal convictions. In doing so, the film not only presents a poignant love story but also offers a profound commentary on the broader social and political issues of the time. The analysis underscores the timeless relevance of these themes, demonstrating how the pursuit of utopia, though fraught with obstacles, remains a powerful and enduring human effort. Through its exploration of these multifaceted themes, the article provides a deeper understanding the novel's cinematic adaptation, emphasizing the enduring power of love and freedom in the face of adversity.

Keywords: *Ali and Nino*, Kurban Said, Essad Bey, Lev Nussimbaum, Utopia, Asif Kapadia, Azerbaijan

Introduction

The feature film Ali and Nino, directed by Asif Kapadia, released on October 27, 2016, serving as an adaptation of Kurban Said's [Lev Nussimbaum's] novel by the same name, who also wrote under the name Essad Bey. Despite Said had a complex background as an ethnic Russian

[1] PhD Candidate in English Language and Literature, Department of Western Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Letters, Karabük University, Karabük, Türkiye, kaasiyev@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0001-3969-1879.

How to cite this article: Aghasiyev, K. (2025). A Utopian Approach to Asif Kapadia's Ali and Nino: Love, Multiculturalism, Freedom, and the Bolsheviks. In: *Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies 2:1*, 140-151.
Submitted: 24.07.2024
Accepted: 09.11.2024

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Jew, he is considered a German author and was affiliated with the German Writers Union until 1935. Today he is recognized in Azerbaijan as a significant figure in exile/national-Azerbaijani literature (cf. Acar, 2018). Forced to flee his hometown Baku in his adolescence from the Russian Bolshevik occupation in 1920, Said (Essad Bey) with his ethnic Russian-Jewish and cultural Azerbaijani background and his Western lifestyle in Germany and Austria, gave his novel a dual association with German and Azerbaijani literary traditions (Maurer, 2023).[2] Additionally, by writing another novel under the title of *The Girl from The Golden Horn* (1938), he became more known in Oriental literary arena (Ayuningtyas, 2012). Today in Azerbaijan, the novel *Ali and Nino* is revered as a national love story, prompting its cinematic adaptation. Like the novel, the film delves into the struggle for love before the backdrop of the political upheavals of their time, namely the Azerbaijani independence from the Russian Empire towards the end of World War I.

This article aims to spot a light onto the main characters, Nino Kipiani, a Christian Georgian girl, and Ali, a Muslim Azerbaijani, as they embark on a dual utopian quest—striving for Azerbaijan's freedom while nurturing their love and aspiring to build a family (cf. Tekin, 2023). However, as Bolshevik forces seize control of the country and dismantle the progress made by Ali, Nino, and their compatriots in their pursuit of a democratic, modern, and free state (cf. Qasımlı, 2022), their utopian aspirations for modernity, Western values, democracy, and cultural diversity prove short-lived, lasting less than two years.

The theoretical background of this article explores the "concept of utopia." It discusses how utopia represents an idealized vision of a perfect society, characterized by harmony, equality, and prosperity for all its members. Furthermore, it examines the role of utopian literary criticism or theory, which analyses how literature depicts and critiques ideal societies, reflecting cultural values and aspirations. Ultimately, the text argues that dreaming of a utopia without considering practical constraints or historical realities is itself a utopian attempt, as seen in the film *Ali and Nino*, where characters pursue ambitious dreams in the middle of political challenges. Additionally, in the discussion part, I will analyse the utopian dream of love, modern multiculturalism, and freedom and how all these three dreams are occupied by the Bolsheviks in the movie *Ali and Nino*.

Theoretical and Dictionary Background on the "Concept of Utopia"

As it is known, utopia can be considered a place, a society, or a community in which everyone lives happily with almost no problem or problems with the ultimate and fastest solutions ever. The citizen of a utopic society does not struggle with daily challenges, like working for many hours or fight with each other (or with other countries) to gain more lands (cf. Tekin 2024a, Tekin 2024b). Additionally, a utopia is a place where everyone is equally treated, and no discrimination finds its way towards the residents of this society.

[2] Hans-Jürgen Maurer, „Əli və Nino romanı ərasında Qurban Səid müəllif adının genezisi" in Azərbaycan Milli Elmlər Akademiyasının Filologiya və Sənətşünaslıq jurnalının, 2022-ci il №12022; „Der Roman Ali und Nino und sein Autor Kurban Said: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Publikationsgeschichte des Romans und zum Schicksal seines Autors", in Literatur- und Kulturtransfer zwischen Europa und dem Kaukasus, ISBN 978-3-949550-04-1, Frankfurt 2023 (English translation on academia.com); www.EssadBeyTruthAlert.com.

Though the earliest example of a utopian literature dates back to the Ancient Greek times (Zhurkova & Khomutnikova, 2019) and Aristotle (Donato, 2024), the term was initially used in Sir Thomas More's "Utopia" (Sadeq et al., 2011), which was released in Latin under the title *Libellus…de optimo reipublicae statu, deque nova insula Utopia* (1516; *Discussing the Ideal State of the Republic and the Newfound Island Utopia*). More uses two Greek words to create the word *utopia*: "not" (ou) and "place" (topos), the word signified "nowhere." While on his diplomatic mission to Flanders in 1515, More penned *Book II of Utopia*, depicting a pagan and communist city-state where reason governed all institutions and policies. This ideal state aimed to starkly contrast the chaotic politics of Europe. The portrayal of Utopia is narrated by a mysterious voyager named Raphael Hythloday,[3] who argues that communism is the sole remedy for egoism in both personal and societal realms.[4] To have an understanding about the word *utopia*, we might consider the following quote:

> A good general definition of utopia appears to be that of Moritz Kaufman (1879 […]): "What is a Utopia? Strictly speaking, it means a 'nowhere Land', some happy island far away, where perfect social relations prevail, and human beings, living under an immaculate constitution and faultless governments, enjoy a simple and happy existence, free from the turmoil, the harassing cares, and endless worries of actual life." (Ertuğrul & Parlas, 2015, n.p.)

If we check online English dictionaries, it is possible to see relatively close definitions of the word "utopia." In *Cambridge Dictionary*, the word is described as "a perfect society in which people work well with each other and are happy"(1)[5] and as "a perfect society in which everyone is happy" (2).[6] Additionally, *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, defines the word utopia as: "a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions"(3), "an impractical scheme for social improvement"(4), and "an imaginary and indefinitely remote place (5)".[7] However, *Brittanica* explains the word utopia by giving the following definition: "Utopia, an ideal commonwealth whose inhabitants exist under seemingly perfect conditions. Hence utopian and utopianism are words used to denote visionary reform that tends to be impossibly idealistic" (6).[8]

With the above-mentioned six different and yet similar definitions, it is possible to come to a conclusion that utopia is a strong dream. It is a place of happiness and unity. If we look at the first (1) definition of the word given by *Cambridge Dictionary*, it is possible to see that the definition focuses on human behaviours and states the importance of respect amongst people. Thus, we may understand a place where everyone happily listens to one another and shows respect. Additionally, the second (2) definition by the *Cambridge Dictionary* provides us with a single idea: Happiness. This definition does not clarify the conditions that people live in as in the first definition. Here, we see that a utopia is a place of happiness. It does not necessarily

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[3] To read more about the ideas of the character:
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/more/works/utopia/ch2a.html
[4] To read more about the story: https://www.britannica.com/topic/utopia
[5] (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), and (6) are the numbers of the dictionary definitions. I use this numbering method in order to give clear and understandable explanations about the definitions in the following two paragraphs.
[6] For both definitions, check the following link to get more examples:
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/utopia
[7] To read more about the definitions, follow the link: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/utopia
[8] To read more about the Britannica definition of the word, follow the link below:
https://www.britannica.com/topic/utopia

clarify if these people respect each other as in the first definition, or if people are poor or rich. It does not clarify the social, economic, and political conditions. The only clarification we take from the quote is the importance of happiness. However, unlike the second and as well as first definitions, the third (3) definition by *Merriam Webster Dictionary* of the word gives assumingly detailed explanation: "a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions". Thus, it is understandable that a utopia is a place where laws, governments, and social conditions are perfect. Even though the definition does not state if the people in this society are happy enough, it could be reasonable to say that if all the mentioned three factors are ideal, then people of the society are happy enough in the utmost possibility.

However, the fourth (4) definition by *Merriam Webster Dictionary* does not provide us a with a possible hope, as it states the phrase: "impractical scheme (for social improvement)". Now, if we look at the definition of the phrase "impractical scheme,"[9] we could comprehend that the hoped social improvements cannot be achieved, as the scheme [or the road map] is not applicable, practicable, or unsuitable. As a result, even though there is a map to reach utopia, the road map to go there is not usable (Aghasiyev, 2024). Thus, the possibility of having a utopia is impossibly possible.

The last definition (5) by *Merriam Webster Dictionary* illustrates a place that is imaginary and indefinitely remote. The definition clearly states that this place can only exist in our dreams if we focus on the word "imaginary." Meaning that, we can only imagine it. However, the second phrase "indefinitely remote" gives us hope that utopia might exist, though it is endlessly[10] far away. Therefore, living in a modern human world and having achieved almost all the geographical discoveries, it is possible to say that "indefinitely remote" utopia does not exist on earth (at least looking at the phrase from geographical perspective). However, if we follow the timely perspective of the phrase, we may hope for a possible utopia, but not anytime soon. Focusing on this dictionary-meaning, we can say that reaching this utopian world is not any different than reaching the borders of the universe. The last definition by *Brittanica* (6) shows us another questionably possible answer in which we can see that such a society is not possible: "Utopia, an ideal commonwealth whose inhabitants exist under seemingly perfect conditions. Hence utopian and utopianism are words used to denote visionary reform that tends to be impossibly idealistic" (6). Consequently, even though the first sentence of the definition explains that everyone in this society use the facilities of this society equally, just as in Sir Thomas More's Raphael Hythloday's descriptive communist society, if we are to follow the word "commonwealth"[11] in the definition. Yet, the second part of the definition clearly states the phrase "impossibly idealistic." Meaning that, this idealism is not reachable.

In literature, even though there is no clear definition of Utopian Literary Theory or Criticism, it is possible to say that Utopian Literary Criticism or Theory might examine literature—particularly works that depict ideal societies or worlds—through the lens of utopian ideals and principles. It explores how literature imagines and portrays perfect or idealized societies, often as a critique or commentary on existing social, political, or economic systems. Utopian literary

[9]Collins Dictionary: Impractical scheme.
[10]Collins Dictionary: Indefinitely remote.
[11]Commonwealth is a political entity formed on legal principles for the mutual well-being or common good: follow the link for details: https://www.britannica.com/topic/commonwealth-political-science

criticism analyzes how these literary works envision utopian societies, the ideologies they espouse, and the implications of their ideals for real-world societies. It also considers how utopian literature reflects cultural values, desires, and anxieties of the time in which it was written.

Now, summing up all the definitions above, we could say that the term "utopian dream" refers to an idealistic vision or fantasy of a perfect society or world where everything is harmonious, equitable, and prosperous for all its inhabitants. It represents an imagined state of existence characterized by an absence of societal problems such as poverty, inequality, or conflict; being a contrary insight of dystopia (cf. Güven & Edman, 2024). The term describes ambitious, but perhaps unrealistic, aspirations for societal improvement or transformation. However, in this article, I strongly claim that dreaming without considering the geographical conditions and knowing that historical facts would not allow the dreamer to achieve their (his/her) dreams is a utopian matter: It is a utopian dream. In the movie *Ali and Nino* [as well as in the novel], we see that Ali's and Nino's dreams about their love, their modern multicultural free republic is a utopic [utopian] dream for that time period.

Discussion

The plot of the film is about the love of a South Caucasian couple: Ali and Nino. While Ali Khan Shirvanshir[12] is an Azerbaijani Muslim, Nino Kipiani is depicted as a Georgian Christian living in Azerbaijan's oil booming capital Baku. However, they are not ordinary lovers. Both of them are from different noble families. While Nino is a Georgian princess, Ali is portrayed as the last of the Shirvanshahs[13] who ruled the eastern part of Azerbaijan for almost seven centuries. However, since both of them are from different cultural and religious backgrounds, it is not easy for them to unite. Even though Ali's father agrees that Ali could marry her, Nino's father insists that they should wait until the war was over. In this part of the story the third important character of the film appears: Malik, an Armenian friend of both Ali and Nino. While he promises to help Ali convince Nino's parents to consent to the marriage, he decides to kidnap Nino after an opera performance in Baku. Hearing this, Ali ends up killing Malik in the oil fields of Baku while he himself gets injured badly. As Malik's family start looking for Ali, he is sent to Dagestan by his father, where Ali slowly recovers. In the meantime, Nino's parents understand that their daughter is ruined because she was kidnapped. They come to ask Ali's father if Ali would still marry her. However, the Khan strongly refuses their request, and he feels humiliated. After all, it was his son who had asked for Nino's hand before, and her father had declined Ali's proposal. Father Kipiani's reasoning had been the war. Understanding

[12] The last name "Shirvanshir" is a reference to the Shirvanshahs of Baku. Shirvanshahs were to rulers of The State of Shirvanshahs (Check the footnote below).

[13] The State of Shirvanshah ("Şirvanşah dövləti" in Azerbaijani) existed between 861 and 1538. The palace of the state remains in Baku, Azerbaijan, to this day. In the film, it is possible to see the palace, and it is depicted that Ali and his family live there. In the novel Ali and Nino, the author portrays Ali as one of the last Shirvanshahs, even though the state had collapsed hundreds of years before 1918. However, Kurban Said (Essad Bey) creates the fictional Shirvanshah Ali to touch the hearts of his readers, as the Shirvanshahs are regarded as one of the most longstanding dynasties in Azerbaijan and the entire Muslim world. Thus, the writer aims to show his readers that his character Ali is a very important royal prince. In the film, Asif Kapadia does not alter Kurban Said's character and represents him as a royal of the Shirvanshahs, as well as a royal of all Azerbaijan.

that their daughter has no value anymore since her reputation is ruined by Malik, the parents decide to send Nino to Moscow. However, Nino opposes this decision and asks Ali's friend Seyid Mustafa, the Mullah, to take her to the mountains, to Ali. Seyid does as Nino asks. In the mountains, Ali and Nino make love for the first time and are getting married by Seyid Mustafa, as he solemnizes them by authority of the religious scripts.

As time passes, the war ends. Ali and his wife Nino return back to their city, Baku. Towards the end of World War I, The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic[14] declares its independence from Russian on 28 May of 1918 and Ali is assigned in the position of Deputy Foreign Minister. Both Ali and Nino start welcoming diplomatic guests from abroad in their palace. However, while the republic, its founders, and Ali think that they have secured all the diplomatic relations with their neighbours, the Russian Bolsheviks start to attack the newly founded republic. The prime minster, Fatali Khan Khoyiski[15] and Ali with his wife Nino and little baby try to flee the country to Geogia. On half of the way, Ali gets off the train and dies on a bridge while defending the last breaths of his country from the Russian troops. The PM Khoyiski gets assassinated after six weeks, and Nino stays in Geogia forever.

It is important to note that even though Ali and Nino are fictional characters, the historical background of the story matches with the happenings in Azerbaijan in that time. At first, the plot of the film gives us an image of a romantic drama. However, as the events unfold, we can see the film to be about the history of Azerbaijan, World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the fall of a modern state: The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, alongside the love of Ali and Nino.

The themes of "the (Bolshevik) occupation of love, the occupation modern multiculturalism, and the occupation of freedom" are direct references to the short-lasting marriage and happiness of Ali and Nino with their little baby. At the beginning of the film, the director portrays a scene where Ali finds the courage to talk with his father about his plan for marrying Nino. If one has not read the novel, one could easily assume that the father would reject Ali's love for the Christian girl. However, surprisingly, the Khan does not oppose Ali's love for the Christian princess and even states "I should like my grandson to be born in May. It is a lucky month."[16] The entire scene shows Ali's love for Nino Kipiani and the confidence in his speech proves it. Now, in this scene, we may find two important factors in which we could see the reference to the month of May. And second, the desire for multicultural society in which families from different backgrounds and religions can form. The month of May is the month when the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan announced its independence in 1918. Thus, even though in this scene the republic is not created yet, we still see the desire for it. The director uses a foreshadowing technique in order to inform the viewers that the month of May is the month of independence and freedom. As well as, the birth of a new child is almost like a birth of a new country: Azerbaijan.

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[14] The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic lived between 1918-1920. Led and founded by Mahammad Amin Rasulzade (Mehmed Emin Resulzâde) Former President of the Azerbaijani National Council.

[15] Another important diplomat and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ADR (The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic). He is shown as the Prime Minister in the film.

[16] *Ali and Nino*, 03:30 minute.

The second factor, the multicultural family shows itself in Ali's dream as he is a Muslim while his future wife is a Christian. The scene depicts that Ali is in favour of such diverse modern multicultural societies. However, the time period that they lived in did not support the dream Ali has about living in a mixed family, even though Baku was a very multicultural city. Although Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians, and Russians lived in Baku together, mixed marriages among Muslims and Christians were not common. Thus, Ali's dream can be counted as a utopic dream for his time. Additionally, knowing that Russia still was very powerful, the foreshadowing prediction of the father about the month of May is another element of utopianism: Knowing that Russia would never allow a new country to emerge inside or outside its borders.

In the scene where Ali refuses to drink wine in Kipiani's (Nino's father's) summer house, we see that at first, he is tried to be convinced by Nino's father, Prince Kipiani, as he states "[i]t can do you no harm."[17] Seeing this, Nino interferes and says that Ali Khan does not drink alcohol as it is against his religion. However, the audience is witnessing a flexibility in Ali's religious beliefs, and he raises his glass in Prince Kipiani's honour. The given scene could be interpreted as that Ali is ready to make exceptional choices when needed to achieve his love and his dream of a multicultural, diverse family. Even though today the majority of Azerbaijanis are Muslims, alcohol is still a part in their culture although it is forbidden in the religion. However, for Ali's time, this act would be a revolutionary step to take. Therefore, it could be said that Ali's act is another example for of his strong desire for a multicultural and diverse family, which would not be possible for his time.

Picture 1: Ali and Nino in the Kipianis' garden.[18]

The picture above is from the scene where Ali tells Nino about his plan of marrying her. Since Nino is a royal princess, Ali states that she will lose her title once she marries him. Hearing this, Nino does not react a bit and continues to be happy as she was. The scene shows that being with Ali is her true desire, just as it is for Ali, and her title does not mean anything for her. As the scene continues, Nino asks a very expected question: "Will you stay with me and take no other wives?"[19] Her question is not in vain, as it was common for Muslim men to have more than one wife in Azerbaijan in those times. Though Ali states that he will not take other wives, she continues asking "[w]on't your father demand that I become a Muslim?" And as expected, Ali states that his father will not demand it from her. This scene shows us two important facts: Polygamy and religious strictness. As I have already mentioned, it was

[17] Ibid: 06:20 minute (Note: All the following Ibid footnotes refer to the film).
[18] Ibid: 09:33 minute.
[19] Ibid: 09:35 minute.

common for men to have more than one wife in Azerbaijan back in the old days. However, if a man married a non-Muslim woman, the woman had to convert to Islam. Ali's "no" answers depict his intentions that for him it does not matter what religion she has or what his religion and societal norms demand from him. His act would be a revolutionary for his time and as much as would be utopian.

Picture 2. Ali, holding a book about his ancestors while talking about the Russian occupation of Azerbaijan and the history of his family.[20]

As the story unfolds, a scene between Ali's father and Ali Khan is presented. We hear Ali's words about his motherland being occupied by the Russian Empire while he is holding a [history?] book about his ancestors. To clarify himself to his father why he does not want to participate in World War I on the side of the Czar, he states: "We have grown used to think ourselves as part of Russia. We are not. They invaded us a hundred years ago[21] and took away our family's[22] power. We are an occupied country. (…) I should be proud to die in battle when the time comes. But this is not our fight."[23]

The quote above illustrates Ali's dreams for an independent homeland. The book in his hand shows the history of his country and the importance remembering one's past, so that they(he/she) might step into the future. Ali is trying to step into the future. A future where his country might be free, and his own history might be told. The scene depicts his willpower for freedom and readiness to sacrifice his life if necessary, while understanding that the fight of the Christian world and the Czar is not his and his people's fight. However, certain questions arise: How utopic is(was) this dream? Was it possible to escape the claws of Russian imperialism? Was the dream of an independent and free state unreachable? Well, the history shows: Yes, his dream for an independent and free homeland was a utopic unreachable imagination. However, even though he does not go to war, the war affects Ali's plans for marrying Nino. When he visits Prince Kipiani, Nino's father, he uses the war as an excuse and

[20] Ibid: 12:42 minute.

[21] Russia invaded Azerbaijan, and in the Treaty of Türkmənçay in 1828, divided its lands between Iran and itself. The northern part of Azerbaijan became part of Russia, while the southern part was ceded to Iran. Today, the northern region is known as the Republic of Azerbaijan, which gained independence in 1918 and again in 1991. The southern region, referred to as South Azerbaijan, has been a part of Iran since the treaty in 1828. The term "South Azerbaijan" is commonly used to describe the Iranian Azerbaijani regions: West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, and Ardabil.

[22] He refers to the family of Shirvanshahs. The (ex) royal family of Baku.

[23] Ibid: 12:42-13:47 minutes.

says that it would be better to wait and see the result of the war: "I think we should wait and see it's [the war's] outcome."[24]

Ali refuses to fight in the war, but both of his childhood friends join the army. As he visits his friends in a café, Russian soldiers are ordering pork for themselves and the waiter put the pork on Ali's friend's table, saying "[c]ourtesy to the officers." The Russians laugh at the shocked faces of the Muslim soldiers. Ali's friend says "[y]ou [Ali] were so right not to join them."[25] Way before, Ali had told his friends that this fight was not their fight and they should not join the army. However, they did not listen. The pork scene illustrates the discrimination which the Muslim and [possibly non-Russian] soldiers faced in the Russian army. Even though they all fight for the Czar and for the empire, the Muslim soldiers are being discriminated and made fun of.

Fatali Khan Khoyski, Ali Khan, Ali's father, and many others gather to talk about the future of their occupied country. While Fatali Khan states that they can be "the first [free] democratic Muslim nation", Ali supports his own ideas: "I agree with Fatali Khan. We should liberate ourselves. And I do not mean to go back to the way it was before the Russians came. I mean we should create a modern progressive country and run it ourselves."[26] The given speech of Ali shows the desire of him and the people in the meeting for a modern, progressive and democratic country. As Fatali Khan says, indeed Azerbaijan becomes the first democratic Muslim country[27] on 28 May of 1918: "I declare a creation of a new sovereign nation. It will guarantee civil and political rights to its all citizens regardless of ethnic origin, religion, class, or gender. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. (…) Our flag is raised, and it will never fall.[28]"

Picture 3. Fatali Khan declares[29] the independence of Azerbaijan on 28th of May 1918.[30]

The given quote and the picture (3) above promise a new state that provides all rights to its citizens. A sate that does not discriminate against anyone based on their origin, religion, calls,

[24] Ibid: 16:33 minute.
[25] Ibid: 20:00-20:25 minutes.
[26] Ibid: 24:07-25:05 minutes.
[27] The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was the first secular democratic republic in the Turkic and Muslim worlds.
[28] Ibid: 1:10-1:11 minute.
[29] The scene lacks historical facts about the members who declared the independence of Azerbaijan.
[30] Ibid: 1:10 minute.

and gender.[31] Everyone has equal rights in this democratic state, just like Ali Khan dreamt. Even the Treaty of Versailles guarantees the independence of Azerbaijan.

However, this democratic state lasts only two years, then the Bolsheviks occupy Azerbaijan and end the existence of the republic by. Looking at the definitions of the word *utopia*, it could be said that Ali and Fatali Khan's dream of a modern democratic state is a different form of a utopian dream considering the dystopic factor of the Bolshevik Russia. As the time passes, the Bolsheviks do not keep their promise and start attacking Azerbaijan. Quickly, the outnumbered new country loses its independence to Russia. Russia starts controlling the same lands it once used to control [by force]. Ali Khan, after losing his newly founded republic, freedom, modern multiculturalism, democracy, and everything they built so far, says goodbye to his wife and his little baby, as they are boarding a train to Georgia on train while he stays behind to fight the Russians.

Picture 4. Ali, looking at his wife Nino, and daughter for the last time.[32]

Picture 5. Ali Khan dies on the bridge after fighting the Russian troops while the Republic takes its last breaths.[33]

Picture 4 shows the heartbreaking scene of the end of Ali and Nino's dreams about their love. Now, that Ali has lost everything he built for his country, his love, and his family, he stays behind, knowing that he will not be able to see them again, knowing that the words that he

[31] Based on the facts, the republic indeed was a highly democratic state: "The law on the first republican parliament determined the national composition of the parliament like the following: Moslems-80 [Azerbaijanis], Armenians-21, Russians-10, Germans-1, Jews-1, Georgian National Council-1, Baku Trade Unions-3, Baku Council of Oil Industrialists and Commercial Industrial Council-2." (https://axc.preslib.az/en/page/OWziBFAHuy).

[32] Ibid: 1:30 minute.

[33] Ibid: 1:34 minute.

told his father about dying for his own land[34] are going to become true soon. Accordingly, the scene in picture 5 illustrates the dying dream of a free independent country, love, freedom, and democracy. Ali's death is the death of The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic; is the death of a utopian dream [for that time].

Conclusion

The film *Ali and Nino*, directed by Asif Kapadia and released on October 27, 2016, is an adaptation of Kurban Said's novel of the same name. Despite Said's complex background as an ethnic Russian Jew, he is primarily recognized as a German author and was affiliated with the German Writers Union until 1935. However, in Azerbaijan, he is esteemed as a significant figure in exile-Azerbaijani literature. Forced to leave Baku during the Russian Bolshevik occupation in 1920, Said's diverse background and Western lifestyle in Germany lent his novel a dual association with both German and Azerbaijani literary traditions. The story revolves around the main characters, Nino Kipiani, a Christian Georgian girl, and Ali, a Muslim Azerbaijani, leading the challenges of bi-ethnic love against the backdrop of Azerbaijan's struggle for independence from the Russian Empire during World War I. The narrative delves into their aspirations for freedom, love, and family amidst political upheaval.

The article's theoretical framework explored the concept of utopia, representing an idealized vision of a perfect society characterized by harmony, equality, and prosperity. Furthermore, it examined the role of utopian literary criticism in analysing how literature reflects cultural values and critiques ideal societies. The central argument states that pursuing utopian dreams without considering practical constraints or historical realities is itself a utopian attempt. This is exemplified in *Ali and Nino*, where characters strive for ambitious ideals amid political challenges. In the article, I have discussed that Ali Khan's dream of having a multicultural family and a society, as well the desire to have an independent democratic modern multicultural state is a utopian dream, since the time was not allowing any chance to have these dreams to be reality, as the Bolsheviks destroyed whatever Ali, Nino, Fatali Khan, and all the other fought and dreamt for – Russia of that time was the dystopic nightmare of the newly founded The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

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