

AN INCONSPICUOUS SEXUAL DISSIDENT IN THE GEORGIAN SOVIET
REPUBLIC: SUBJECTIFICATION, SOCIAL CLASSES AND THE CULTURE OF
SUSPICION IN THE LATE SOVIET PERIOD

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An inconspicuous sexual dissident in the Georgian Soviet republic: Subjectification, social classes and the culture of suspicion in the late Soviet period

*Un dissident sexuel discret dans la république soviétique de Géorgie :
subjectivation, classes sociales et culture de la suspicion dans la période
soviétique tardive*

Arthur Clech



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ARTHUR CLECH

AN INCONSPICUOUS SEXUAL DISSIDENT IN THE GEORGIAN SOVIET REPUBLIC

Subjectification, social classes and the culture of suspicion in the late Soviet period

“For the totalitarian mindset, the person who loves differently is a dissident,” claimed Igor’ Kon, a prominent academic figure who, during *Perestroika*, fought for the annulment of the antisodomy legislation as a product of the Stalinist legacy. Indeed, the antisodomy articles, introduced in the Soviet Russian and Georgian penal codes in 1934, remained in force until 1993 for Russia, and until 2000 for Georgia.¹ Igor’ Kon coins a neologism, *inakoliubiashchii* [the one who loves differently] from the Russian term for dissidents: *inakomysliashchii* [the one who thinks differently]. The correlation hinted at in this word-play feeds into a tradition of interpretation which envisions the totalitarian experience as one of direct confrontation between state and individual: a confrontation, as some understand it, which holds true for the entire Soviet period. I seek to further explore the ramifications of the correlation proposed between alternative forms of love and dissidence by means of a late Soviet period case study of a Georgian man subject to police surveillance because of his homosexuality.

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1. Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual Dissent*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); Dan Healey, *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi* (London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Rustam Alexander, “New Light on the Prosecution of Soviet Homosexuals under Brezhnev,” *Russian history*, 46, 1 (2019): 1-28.

On the basis of the life story of Shota F., I attempt to get a better understanding of the process of subjectification, (*subjectivation* in French). According to Frédéric Gros, “Concepts such as subjectification, practice of self, and self-relation are markedly underdefined [...] and are perhaps more to be understood as frames of reference for the interpretation of historical phenomena [...]”² Nevertheless, Judith Revel gives a definition of late Foucault’s concept: “the process by which the constitution of subjectivity is achieved” by an individual, a process underlying his response to such scrutiny.³ My perspective is a Foucauldian one and the article will focus on how Shota F. responded implicitly to the imperative that one “ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code.”⁴ This code is cultural and social in nature, and highly stigmatizing, as reflected both by the criminalization and by the pathologizing of same-sex desire in the Soviet Union.⁵ The threat of repression and denunciation had an effect in the male Soviet homosexual process of subjectification. In protecting his “private life” from the “collective” gaze⁶, Shota F.’s fear of the danger of denunciation overlaps with his fear of those who do not belong to the intelligentsia. His perception of repression is bound with his perception of social class, a strong filter for the Soviet and Georgian intelligentsia to which he belongs, however much the latter sought to dismiss class as an operative factor in Soviet society.

This article argues that a sense of communality and solidarity based on shared homosexuality, although possible in the late Soviet period, was weakened by at least two circumstances: firstly, the prevalence of professional identity and class solidarity over sexual solidarity and, secondly, the culture of suspicion which pervaded the late Soviet period.

2. Frédéric Gros, “Sujet moral et soi éthique chez Foucault,” *Archives de Philosophie*, 65, 2 (2002): 229-237.

3. Judith Revel, “subjectivation,” *Dictionnaire Foucault*, (P.: Ellipses), 128.

4. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, Vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 26.

5. These constraints could also in different ways threaten female sexual dissident. Uladzimir Valodzin, “Criminal prosecution of homosexuals in the Soviet Union (1946-1991): numbers and discourses” (Florence: EUI HEC), 2, 2020; Arthur Clech, “Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic: Tema or the Shared Forms of Late Soviet Homosexual Subjectivities,” *Slavic Review*, 77, 1 (2018): 6-29, see the revised version in R. Mole, ed., *Soviet and post-Soviet sexualities* (London: Routledge, 2019): 32-55.

6. Francesca Stella, *Lesbian Lives in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia: Post/socialism and Gendered Sexualities* (New York: 2015), 89, 93, 50, 51. Alisa Zhabenko, “‘Lesbianstva ne bylo!’: nelegitimnyi gendernyi kontrakt v sovetskoï Rossii [‘There was no lesbianism’: The illegitimate gender contract in Soviet Russia],” in *Konstruiruia ‘sovetskoe’? Politicheskoe soznanie, povsednevnye praktiki, novye identichnosti: materialy nauchnoi konferentsii studentov i aspirantov* [Constructing the ‘Soviet’? Political Consciousness, Everyday Practices, New Identities: Research Material Students And Ph.D. Students] (SPb., 2011), 89.

A case study in male same-sex subjectification

My understanding of this case study is not only based on the analysis of in-depth interviews of nine Georgian men, born between 1950 and 1978, conducted both in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi (2015, 2016) and in a provincial city within Georgia, but also on interviews conducted with 50 men and women who experienced same-sex desire in the late Soviet period, most of whom live in Moscow, St. Petersburg and elsewhere in Russia.⁷ Dwelling on Shota F's experiences allows us to better understand how a number of key features, present in narratives I have explored in previous articles, fit together.⁸ A further rationale for focusing on a case study drawn from Georgia is that the study of the history of Soviet homosexualities has been thus far very Russo-centric. The interest of this case study also derives, lastly, from the unusual level of prominence it accords to the issue of the policing of homosexuality.

The life story of Shota F. provides insights into one trajectory of homosexual subjectification in the late Soviet period open to a member of the intelligentsia—though Shota F.'s sense of belonging to the intelligentsia appears to have silenced and invisibilised his same-sex desire. Since his adolescence, in the 1960s, what he heard about same-sex desire gave him a clear awareness of its stigmatization and its association with the Soviet prison world. It was only during his medical studies that he learned that homosexuality was defined as a mental illness, and that sodomy between two men was punishable by law. However, unlike some other respondents I have interviewed, he did not invest an identity of “patient” nor did feel at fault or guilty of any crime.⁹ Shota F. was able to open a space for the free expression of his desire shaped around the contours imposed by his avoidance strategies, a space within which he succeeded at developing a positive understanding of his personal sexual desire. He thereby avoided criminal and psychiatric repression while refusing to subscribe to the discourses that authorized them. However, this adaptation implied sacrifices: he had to move to Tbilisi, in an attempt to preserve the respectability he enjoyed as a doctor. However deep the reserves of resourcefulness and autonomy on which this sexual dissident thereby drew, his story attests to an inter-class mistrust—inherited from the Stalinist culture of suspicion—and a class solidarity typical of the late Soviet intelligentsia.

7. I have chosen to focus in this article on male homosexual subjectification after conducting an interview with the director of the Women's Initiatives Supporting Group (WISG), Ekaterine Aghdgomelashvili. I learnt from her that she and other feminist's activists had interviewed at that time around 20 Georgian women who lived their same-sex desire in the late Soviet period. I was informed that these women were so afraid of being identified by their husbands or sons—some of them even entertained the possibility of suicide if their identities were to be revealed—that they refused outright to assent to their testimonies appearing in scientific or other publications, even on condition of anonymity. Interview in Tbilisi, November 2016.

8. Arthur Clech, “Des subjectivités homosexuelles dans une URSS multinationale,” *Le Mouvement social*, 260 (July-September 2017): 99; Clech, “Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic...”

9. Clech, “Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic...”

The present article gives a social class reading of late Soviet subjectivities. Although Francesca Stella has done much to bring the importance of gender injunctions for the process of subjectification to light, questions of masculinity, nationality and social status remain understudied.¹⁰ To redress this balance, my analysis of the Shota F. case study dwells on social status affiliations and aims to arrive at a deeper understanding of the extent to which, among male sexual dissidents, certain attitudes of the intelligentsia towards other social groups enhanced some forms of solidarity while diminishing others. The potential for solidarity that existed among men living a homosexual desire and belonging to the same socio-professional environment did not necessarily lead to a sense of self at a collective level, to a “community.”¹¹ To understand why, we must give a sense of the selective nature of the culture of suspicion which continued to permeate late Soviet society, and the class dimension which structured it.

A selective social class contempt

In resonance with Adi Kuntsman’s analysis of contempt shown among the asexual intelligentsia for the oversexualized and homosexualized lumpenproletariat in the labour camps¹², Francesca Stella reconstructs how queer networks were commonly perceived by members of the intelligentsia from her exchanges with lesbian respondents: “For those, like Tamara (born 1952, Moscow), who had been vaguely aware of them [queer networks], their clandestine character prompted associations with the criminal world and sexual promiscuity, engendering dis-identification, particularly among women belonging to the educated intelligentsia.”¹³

Queer Soviet spaces were also the object of such associations, in particular the *pleshka*, the Soviet cruising space for male sexual dissidents par excellence—women

10. Stella, *Lesbian Lives in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*; Shorena Gabunia, “Gay Culture and Public Places in Tbilisi,” in Tsypylma Darieva, Wolfgang Kaschuba, eds., *Urban Spaces after Socialism, Ethnographies of Public Places in Eurasian Cities* (Berlin: Campus Verlag, 2011), 247-260. See also Paul Manning, Zaza Shatirishvili, “The exoticism and eroticism of the city: The ‘kinto’ and his city,” in Darieva et al., eds, *Urban Spaces after Socialism*, 261-281; Clech, “Des subjectivités homosexuelles dans une URSS multinationale.” On masculinity and the role of the family in Soviet Georgia: Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, “The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia’s Second Economy,” *Soviet Studies*, 35, 4 (1983): 548-549. About late Soviet Georgia, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Indiana University Press, 1994), 292-318.

11. Daniel P. Schluter, *Gay Life In The Former USSR: Fraternity Without Community* (New York – London, 2002).

12. The sociologist analyses the tension between the intelligentsia and the “lumpenproletariat” on the basis of Zhuk’s sources data. Ol’ga Zhuk, *Russkie amazonki: istoriia lesbiiskoi subkul’tury Rossii. XX vek*. [Russian amazons: A history of lesbian subcultures in Russia. Twentieth century] (M., 1998); Adi Kuntsman, “With a Shade of Disgust: Affective Politics of Sexuality and Class in Memoirs of the Stalinist Gulag,” *Slavic Review*, 68, 2 (2009): 308-328.

13. Stella, *Lesbian Lives in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, 63.

were somewhat marginal to the *pleshka*—in both a Russian and Georgian context.¹⁴ For the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, Shoren Gabunia shows how visiting such places was a social marker for gays.¹⁵ Dan Healey also notes that: “The sensibilities of the *pleshka*’s *habitués* merit closer attention. Some, reflecting the intelligentsia prejudice that held open queerness to be criminal, have tended to associate life on the ‘circuit’ with law-breaking, a lack of education, and the dangers of the Soviet street, dismissing it as hazardous and coarse.”¹⁶

To complement the social readings of space which dwell on the lumpenproletariat, I have sought to bring out how Shota F.’s narrative, as well as in those of other Russian and Georgian respondents I have interviewed, shed light on a widely shared ethic of professionalism among the intelligentsia of the late Soviet period in general. This ethic was reinforced by public announcements made during the Brezhnev era which implicitly but unmistakably conferred superiority to the intelligentsia over the proletariat.¹⁷

The existence of social classes is a tricky question for a supposedly egalitarian society. In order to underline the State’s role in social differentiation, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Simon Kordonsky apprehend Soviet society not in terms of social classes but as a *soslovie* system: “‘soslovnost’, a legal category that defines the individual’s rights and obligations to the state.”¹⁸ Other researchers such as Egil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi and Eleanor Townsley rely on Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital in asserting that state socialism was not and could not be a class society because, according to them, “cultural capital” [the first bourdieusian attribute of social class] was not “dominant.”¹⁹

14. This place was not only for men, as Francesca Stella quoted directly from her respondents. Ibid.

15. Gabunia, “Gay Culture and Public Places in Tbilisi,” 247-260. In general, a *pleshka* is a square (often the one where a statue of Lenin is erected), but it could be located on the outskirts of a subway station, etc. Schluter, *Gay Life In The Former USSR*, 89-94; Laurie Essig, *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self and the Other* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999); Dan Healey, “Moscow” in D. Higgs, ed., *Queer Sites: Gay Urban Histories Since 1600*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 38-60; Healey, *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*, 99-100, Yevgeniy Fiks, *Moscow* (New York: Ugly Duckling Press, 2013); Clech, “Des subjectivités homosexuelles dans une URSS multinationale,” 95-96.

16. Healey, *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*, 101, note 41, 243.

17. Anna Paretskaya, “A Middle Class Without Capitalism?” in Neringa Klumbyte and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, eds., *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism* (Lexington Books, 2014), 50. Thanks to Dan Healey for this reference.

18. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia,” *The Journal of Modern History*, 65, 4 (1993): 745-770; Simon Kordonskii, *Soslovnaia struktura postsovetskoi Rossii* [The *soslovie* system of post-Soviet Russia], (M.: Institut Fonda Obshchestvennoe mnenie, 2008), 46-72.

19. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1990). Egil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi and Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists: Class Formation and Elite Struggles in Post-Communist Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1998), 7.

More convincingly, Anna Paretskaya, who also relies on Bourdieu's analysis, demonstrates that "the ascendancy of cultural capital as a source of distinction began years before the fall of socialism."²⁰ The second Bourdieusian attribute relates to social class and concerns profession or credentials and could also be applied alongside cultural capital to the doctor Shota F. He benefits from symbolic recognition in Soviet society, and as such his capital is more cultural than economic in nature.

If we follow Paretskaya's analysis, a new Soviet intelligentsia originated "[...] at the instigation of the Party itself, which through its rhetoric gave this nascent group identity," and she adds, "that people did respond to the Party's encouragement to work toward self-cultivation, independent thinking and autonomous action."²¹ Despite the evident virtues of Paretskaya's definition, Shota F.'s biography clearly attests to the independent thinking and autonomous action which she cites as key markers of belonging to this emerging group, it does not take into account the equally crucial process of subjectification deployed by the individual to reappropriate his relationship with the self. Shota F. does not follow the official state definition of "intelligentsia" in terms of profession and instead refers to intelligentsia in abstract individual psychological terms, dismissing the existence of social classes. He also does not follow the definition of his same-sex desire in terms of criminalization or pathologisation, and his biography, as we will see, reveals considerable agency.

The respondents self-perception notwithstanding, the notion of intelligentsia employed in this article as a category of analysis will be based on social class. This approach allows us to bring to the fore the level of proximity that a sense of belonging to a specific group enables or prevents: a belonging which concerns not only the relation between individual and the State (as in the case of the category of *soslovie*), but also between members of a class, and between its members and members of other social classes. In Shota F.'s case, his relationship to the state is ambiguous: as a member of the intelligentsia, he sought social and professional promotion; as a sexual dissident, however, he chose not to become a member of the party in order to avoid bringing his sexuality to the attention of the State party. He refused professional promotion on the same grounds. During the period of the ascension of the intelligentsia within key institutional structures, his in-between social positioning played a central role in the trajectory of male same-sex subjectification which he pursued in the face of State police surveillance and within a culture of suspicion²². Shota F. attests to an internalized social stratification through the way in which he describes potential informers exclusively in other social groups. In so doing, he deploys subconsciously a class reading of Soviet society.

20. Paretskaya, "A Middle Class Without Capitalism?" 59. To be precise, a new scientifically and technical intelligentsia appears since the 30s under the State's initiative.

21. Precisely, Paretskaya draws a parallel between the intelligentsia and today's middle class, a parallel that does not directly enlighten our understanding of Soviet social classes. *Ibid.*

22. Marc Ferro, "Y a-t-il "trop de démocratie" en URSS ?" *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 40, 4 (1985): 819.

Conditions of Shota F.'s interview²³

For reasons of anonymity, I do not specify the first name, the date of birth, the domain of specialism of this doctor, or the city where he was born. Shota is a very common first name, and I give an invented initial of the family name (F.). Shota F. was born in the early 1950s in one of Georgia's largest cities. This interview took place in his little apartment in the city of Tbilisi.

This individual gave me an interview only because he wanted to be obliging towards a mutual gay friend. He perceived me as a young gay French scholar. As in the case of other Russian respondents, he belongs to a set of individuals to whom researchers cannot easily gain access. I was very fortunate in that, through encounters such as this one, I gained access to a discourse which was not conventionally structured, replete with pauses and periods of hesitancy as more distant memories were being recalled, the gaps ironed out of the narratives of interviewees who have already told their story more than once.

Despite his difficulty in using Russian instead of Georgian, the former language facilitated Shota F.'s recall of the Soviet past in which he practised as a doctor in a multinational city with Russian as the *lingua franca*.²⁴ Not being a Russian speaker myself, this relative disadvantage made it possible to escape a linguistic hegemony, and at the same time encouraged a reciprocal kindness and indulgence. Special efforts were made to understand each other, a process which cultivated a deeper sense of trust. The words Shota F. uses to identify same-sex desire are sometimes part of a Soviet lexicon, but also bear witness to the new era, starting in 2000 when same-sex relations were no longer penalized or pathologized in independent Georgia²⁵. Of course, the attempt at memory construction relating to this period is in itself a practice of subjectification, one which is slow and meticulous, and in which the interviewee takes the most active part.

When it comes to oral history and the complex interplay of remembering and forgetting, within a memory which operates so selectively, we need to examine the material with great caution, cross-checking with historical sources²⁶. It is imperative that we document and reconstruct how the criminalization of male homosexuality

23. Interview with Shota F., Tbilisi, November 2016. Further, non-referenced quotations are from this interview.

24. Only in 1975, did the Georgian population of Tbilisi become more numerous than the Armenian (Greek, Jews and Russian were also numerous in that multinational city). Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 299.

25. Ekaterine Aghdgomelashvili, "From Prejudice to Equality: Attitudes, Knowledge, and Information Regarding the LGBT Community and Their Rights" (Tbilisi: Women's Initiatives Supporting Group [WISG], 2016).

26. Patrick Champagne, "L'enquête par l'entretien : la pratique du sociologue" in Fabrice d'Almeida and Denis Maréchal, eds., *Histoire orale en question* (P.: INA "Médias histoire," 2013), 87; Philippe Joutard, "Une histoire orale contestée qui affirme son originalité" in Philippe Joutard, ed., *Histoire et mémoires, conflits et alliances* (P.: La Découverte, « Poche/Sciences humaines et sociales », 2015), 149-166. Alistair Thomson, "Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History," *The Oral History Review*, 34, 1 (2007): 49-70.

impacted on the biographical trajectory of late Soviet period sexual dissidents as revealed through their own narratives – on this police archives could not possibly shed light. The fact that it is constructed 40 years after the event (in this case the questioning by the police of Shota F.), need not be seen as a mark of the unreliability of his testimony. A critical analysis of Shota F.'s narrative raises ethical considerations, among which the obligation to avoid reproducing the Soviet culture of suspicion which caused so much suffering among sexual dissidents : an analysis which seeks to be critical need not itself reproduce this suspicion or be equated with it²⁷. This culture of suspicion was an effective tool of social control used by the State against dissenting sexual solidarities as it will be shown in this article.

First of all, I will show that Shota F. possessed an acute awareness of the stigma and repression of same-sex desire. Deploying an avoidance strategy, he deliberately stifled some of his professional ambitions. He also states that he became aware of the risks he faced through the sharing of experiences with men with whom he was involved sexually, including those within his professional milieu. Then, I will focus on a particular moment in his narrative, his questioning by the police, and trace the impact it had on his life course. I shall bring out the significance of the suspicions he harboured concerning his sexual partner that I interpret as being informed to a significant extent by perception of social class differences. Shota F. suspects two men, whose social status appears inferior or superior to his own, of being informers. This incident gives us insight into the Soviet culture of suspicion, which cast a long shadow over all men sharing same-sex desire regardless of social identity, the perception of which nevertheless was coloured by and interlaced with perception of social difference. In counterpoint to this suspicion was his investment in his own professional identity as a medical doctor and the strong feeling of belonging primarily to a professional body that he implicitly trusted. Finally, I will focus on his attitude towards the psychiatrization of same-sex desire, of which one of his acquaintances was a victim. In his retelling, it appears as a point of no-return, as a social erasing with irreversible consequences: any person who was identified as mentally ill was threatened by exclusion from the working world, around which all social life considered acceptable by the Soviet regime was organized.

An acute awareness of the stigma and repression of same-sex desire in late Soviet culture

Shota F. graduated from the faculty of medicine in Tbilisi at the beginning of the 1970s, after having spent his childhood in another Georgian city. When he was 16 years old, while walking around in the playground with other young boys, a man who had just been released from jail told him that he, like other inmates, had engaged in sexual intercourse with men. The frequency with which my respondents refer to

27. Erin Jessee, "The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings," *The Oral History Review*, 38, 2 (2011): 307.

the prison environment when mentioning their earliest exposure to same-sex desire may itself have shaped their perception of such desire, loading it with the semantic charge of violence and the stigma carried by those who are receptive in sexual intercourse²⁸. The ubiquity of the homo-sexual prison imaginary outside places of detention is a Soviet singularity and peculiar to the contemporary post-Soviet space, Georgia being no exception²⁹. Apart from the Russian term *pederast*, which prevailed at the time in Georgian, his native language, he learned the meaning of the Georgian term *katami*, which was directly translated from the Russian *petukh* [rooster] and which is used to refer to a receptive man in intercourse. Both words were used interchangeably as part of what one may holistically call Soviet language straddling linguistic divides³⁰. The fact that these words are borrowed or translated from Russian shows the porosity of the Soviet prison imaginary whose sexual representations circulated widely across the Soviet Union.

Shota F. (hereafter S.F.): When I was young, the word *goluboi* was not in use.³¹

A. Clech (hereafter A.C.): Really?

S.F.: I just used the word “pederast.” Only these shameful (*pozornye*) words

A.C.: So, until the 80s you knew only the word “pederast”, and “gay”... When did you learn this word, do you remember?

S.F. No, I was young, when I learned this word “gay,” but people did not know it

A.C.: And how did you learn it? Through...

S.F.: No, I read. I read reviews and newspapers. And I often met some foreigners. I went to GDR and I learned the word from them.

Shota F. developed a clear awareness of the possible dangers linked to his same-sex desire in the Soviet context. A complex process of subjectification emerges from his narrative, one which unfolds according to a cultural, legal and social code. When he was an adolescent, he found out about the social stigma, the *pozor* (opprobrium), and the reference to the world of prisons, overlapping with the trope of the sexual domination of so-called “passive” homosexuals (*katami*), with which male same-sex desire is associated.³² Then, at the faculty of medicine, where he began to study at the end of the sixties, he took a course in Criminology in which his professor, a jurist, taught the official definitions of same-sex desire: the first definition, a

28. Healey, *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*, 27-50.

29. Kuntsman, “With a Shade of Disgust...”

30. For Georgian, I use the National transliteration system: <http://www.transliteration.com/transliteration/en/georgian/national/> Beside vernacular queer terminology, one can observe both a Soviet queer language and a stigmatizing one appearing in different languages spoken at that time, some of them originating from Soviet prisons. About late Russian Soviet lexical: Vladimir Kozlovskii, *Argo russkoi gomoseksual'noi subkul'tury: materialy k izucheniiu* [The Argot of the Russian Gay Subculture: Research Material] (Benson, VT, 1986), 119-146.

31. For queer lexical correspondences used by my respondents, the term *tsisperi* [sky blue] is a loan from the Russian *goluboi* [sky blue], which means gay for a man.

32. For an analysis of gay shame in Soviet context, see: Clech, “Homosexual Subjectivities of the Late Soviet Period: between Solidarity and Culture of Suspicion,” Ph.D. defended in EHESS (Paris), 2018. On the basis of it, a book will be published in the Editions de l'INED in 2022.

criminalizing one, stated that male homosexuality was punishable by law and the second, a pathologizing one, which stated that, in general, same-sex desire was considered as a mental disorder.³³ In the same period, Shota F. subscribed to the journal *Semeinoe zdravookhranenie* [protection of family health] in which same-sex desire was presented as an illness.

His awareness of the stigmatization of male homosexuality, its criminalization, and its pathologization, had consequences for his profession life in terms of the limits it led him to place on his career. As an ever-present menace, this repression contributed to the subjectification process of Shota F. in that it drove him towards the cultivation of personal mechanisms of self-censorship.

Professional ambitions sacrificed for survival strategies

In the 1970s and 1980s, the communist party succeeded to enlarge significantly its numbers inciting Soviet citizens, especially those from intelligentsia, to become party members.³⁴ However, during this period, joining the communist party rarely implied ideological adherence or political involvement.³⁵ Generally, joining the party was a career advancement strategy, since it signified loyalty to the Soviet regime, and could entail surveillance of the communist's family and sexual behaviour. In Shota F.'s case, such promotion might have threatened his personal life by heightening the attention which he received from his colleagues and superiors. More than anything, like my other respondents, he feared the *oglasaka*, the public disclosure or exposure of his homosexuality.³⁶ Shota F., for his part, forbade himself from joining the party because of the fear of personal scrutiny from colleagues or patients on behalf of the authorities which targeted, according to him, mostly those who held prestigious posts:

A.C.: Were you a member of the communist party at that time?

S.F.: No, never, never. So many times after my graduation it was suggested that I join, but I didn't want to.

A.C.: Why?

33. For a better understanding of legal discourses: Rustam Alexander, "Soviet Legal and Criminological Debates on the Decriminalization of Homosexuality (1965–75)," *Slavic Review*, 77, 1 (2018): 30-52. It should be noted that Shota F. did not remember any ideological definition of homosexuality as "foreign" to the proletariat, and, as a result, to the Soviet nation, like many of my Russian and Georgian respondents. However, such definition could exist, see Egor's testimony. Clech, "Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic."

34. Ferro, "Y a-t-il "trop de démocratie" en URSS ?" 818.

35. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until it Was no More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press) 2006.

36. Essentially, the fear that homosexuality would be made public derived from the fear of moral judgment (*moral'noe osuzhdenie*). Clech, "Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic," 19.

S.F.: You know, then they would suggest I become a chief medical officer. But I always thought that if it were discovered, then it would be very bad for me, and if I were a chief medical officer, it would be even worse.

A.C.: If one discovered that you are homosexual, it would have had consequences for your career...

S.F.: Absolutely, yes... And then I thought if suddenly an informer wrote to "somewhere upstairs" (*gde-to naverkhu*)...

A.C.: To denounce you

S.F.: To denounce me, and it would be even worse.

Upward social mobility might be expected to entail social recognition and respectability; in this case, however, promotion would have made him more vulnerable and more subject to social control in that he faced a heightened risk of being reported to the administrative authorities ("*gde-to naverkhu*"), and the consequences would have been extremely damaging. Perhaps this strategy deployed by Shota F. was part of a more general strategy of Soviet repressive realities inherited from Stalinism. Researching medicine in the Gulag, Dan Healey notices, while engaging with the diary of a Gulag doctor of the Stalinist period, that the latter eschewed any form of professional promotion: he refused to take on more responsibilities.³⁷ Shota F. adopted a similar Soviet avoidance strategy, what I call an economy of vigilance. The respectability of a person with a high social status could be jeopardized not only by stigmatization but by the possibility of exclusion, or at least social downgrading accompanied with a strong pressure to resign. Because of gossip or the fear of blackmail, a person might agree to compromise in order to escape ostracism and the public exposure of his sexuality:

<among his colleagues, there was a researcher in medicine, a member of the communist party >

S.F.: When I saw him, I told him: why did you accept this position? It will be very difficult for you. You like loitering in the toilets to pick someone up, you have so many students who you will not recognize, but they do know you.

A.C.: Was he in jail?

S.F.: No, no, he wasn't, he resigned a year later

A.C.: What year was it?

S.F.: It was about 75–78. It was his own initiative to resign.

Shota F.'s narrative might be emblematic of a more general trend when he mentions the risk of shattered professional careers in the case of an outing. He recounts how he implemented avoidance strategies, and why he renounced any aspirations towards executive positions:

37. Thanks to Dan Healey for sharing his data: Nikolai Alekseevich Glazov, *Koshmar parallel' nogo mira: zapiski vracha* [Parallel world nightmare: Doctor's notes] (Novosibirsk: Iz-vo Novosibirskoi gos. obl. nauchnoi biblioteki, 1999), 51, 73, 115, 119, 158, 175.

You know, that's why I didn't want to be a head physician or to work in the ministry of health. Because the higher you climb the career ladder, the more people are interested in you and in your personal life. And I didn't want that interest.

To escape this threat, Shota F. like others among his peers including one of his colleagues, consciously refused promotions. Subjectification is at work precisely in self-censorship, in his refusal to join the Communist Party, which therefore conditioned his career choices. Censorship was evident in the choices of someone who benefited from the apparent respectability associated with the status of being a married man or a father:

S.F.: I have one friend, he's also a doctor, he has a high-pitched voice like women have. And he told me—he was a chief medical officer in a hospital—: I was offered the position of the head physician, and I didn't want to accept it, because of my voice. He has a wife, two children.

A.C.: And he was homosexual?

S.F.: Yes, and we are still friends.³⁸

It is worth stressing that what was questioned was not only the same-sex desire of Shota F.'s friend but also his way of experiencing masculinity. In other words, not only same-sex desire but also a prescriptive gender norm regarding masculinity (here the pitch of his voice) could be sufficiently oppressive to push individuals to avoid professional promotion so as not to be exposed to the scrutiny of the public.

Denying or disqualifying social and sexual differences in a putatively egalitarian society

The late Soviet period has a singular relationship to the expression of differences in social status and sexuality, and the way in which Shota F. articulates such differences is telling. Although, according to the doxa, they were destined to disappear, social differences had diversified and stabilized and hardly corresponded to the rigid official definition of a Soviet people divided between the intelligentsia and proletariat. During interviews, individuals who lived their same-sex desire in the USSR tend to reproduce a Soviet discourse that aimed at erasing existing social hierarchies, or even at denying their existence. Sexuality in general, and same-sex desire in particular, were also taboo, creating a lack of an appropriate vocabulary for the discussion of such issues: only the Russian obscene language—the mat—expressed it, and its use was a marker of social and gendered status.

Social and sexual differences are thus ambiguous: they are either denied or when mentioned, immediately disqualified so as to avoid conferring on them any form of

38. Notably, the category of bisexuality is not considered here.

social existence. For two individuals of comparable social status, shared same-sex desire could be a source of solidarity, irrespective of age difference: for instance, “one of my mother’s classmates was a school principal, he was gay <anachronistic use of the term>. And we were friends. Everyone knew each other, almost everyone.” In this regard, he emphasizes the interconnection between people in Georgia, even in a big city such as Tbilisi, which takes us far from the characteristic anonymity of Russian Soviet big cities like Moscow and Leningrad: “I went to school there, I was born there. I know almost everyone. Even here <in Tbilissi>, I know almost everyone, although it’s a big city. And there, even more so.”

The social differentiation silenced in the Soviet public discourse could, of course, be articulated in private circles. The people Shota F. met at this time belonged to a rather homogeneous social milieu, which he felt needed explanation:

S.F.: I knew about 20, or 30.... I would be lying if I told you that they were from peasant or workers’ milieu.

A.C.: Yes, I just wanted to ask you about it, even if you had intercourse with them...

S.F.: No, you know, the thing is I didn’t communicate [*obshchat’sia*] with them. If I lived in a village, I would be in touch with peasants, probably. Do you understand? If I worked in a factory, certainly, I would be in touch with workers.

Nevertheless, he reports having had intercourse with a bus driver and with a taxi driver:

S.F.: You know, I had intercourse with peasants, with workers, or a bus driver. The important thing is not whether you have a degree or not, you have to be an *intelligentnyi* person, an interesting person... I had an affair with a bus driver, we went out in the evenings.

Typically, presenting himself as a member of the intelligentsia, he claims a particular code, on the one hand, while refusing to express social contempt, which would itself run counter to this code, on the other. Also, by the same token, he reproduces a discourse common to the intelligentsia of that time, aspiring to valorize the interiority of the subjects rather than rely exclusively on markers of their social status. While insisting elsewhere on the “spiritual qualities” (*duhovny’e*) of the intelligentsia, he explicitly refuses to reproduce the official definition which tended to limit its membership—whether creative or scientific-technical—to well-educated individuals. Rather, Shota F. talks in terms of *intelligentnost’* which refers mostly to individual qualities rather than a more general term of intelligentsia as a social group.³⁹ By so doing, he rejects the category of social status affiliation for defining an individual because of its perceived narrowness as a sociological category: professional belonging does not serve to define a person. His discourse is characteristic of the

39. Iurii Mihailovich Lotman, *Kul’ tura i intelligentnost’/Vospitanie Dushi* [Culture and ethos of the intelligentsia/ Education of the Soul] (SPb.: Iskusstvo-SPb, 2003), 499.

intelligentsia in its aversion to the objectification of human beings, an objectification that the intelligentsia attributed to Marxist ideology as it was understood at that time in the USSR. His denying or disqualifying social stratification will play a significant role in his narration of the incident involving police interrogation.

Questioning by the police and escape to Tbilissi

In a forest⁴⁰ not far from the city, two policemen questioned Shota F. right after he had had sexual intercourse with a taxi driver:

It was in 1975. We were fucking (*trakhalis* ') in the forest. Suddenly, a police car approached us, and they caught (*vziali*) us. [...] The policemen could not have seen the sexual act. It was the end. We were putting our pants on. But, of course, the fact itself, and besides, it occurred in a forest, certainly, it was enough... No, if they had performed expertise, they, certainly, would have found out. But in the end, they turned out to be good people.

This confrontation with the police entailed the possibility of being condemned for sodomy. For obvious reasons it represented a significant event in his life, one which made him aware of the urgency of escaping from the town where his sexuality put him in danger. Shota F. chose to move to the capital city Tbilisi, which afforded him greater anonymity:

Then my supervisor was informed. My supervisor was informed <he insists on this repetition>. But, maybe, he didn't want to do it, but he was forced to do it, the police forced him, but he just alluded to it <to the questioning by the police>. And I immediately understood what he was referring to. And it convinced me to immediately exchange my flat for a flat in Tbilisi.

Repression was based on social control at the workplace, social and economic life being tightly woven around it: compared to capitalist societies, in the USSR the workplace seems to have played a more holistic role in allocating individuals a place in society. Furthermore, this repression was carried out according to modalities characteristic of the late Soviet period, not through the official organs of repression, but mostly through the mediation of professional hierarchies: the police phoned Shota F.'s supervisor. Without being open about it, his immediate superior favoured a more discreet or implicit forms of criticism.

This narrative shows that, in some cases, despite the severe penal framework, there were nevertheless degrees of application: the police questioned Shota F. but

40. "In smaller cities and towns, where there was unlikely to be a full-fledged cruising area, or *pleshka*, similar city parks and pathways in wooded areas must often served the same purpose." Schluter, *Gay Life In The Former USSR*, 93.

they did not put him in jail. Shota F's social status may have protected him from legal proceedings. Nevertheless, his supervisor at the hospital spoke to Shota F. even if he did so with deference, perhaps in recognition of their shared belonging to an intelligentsia which prohibited any explicit discussion of personal sexual life:⁴¹ members of the intelligentsia understood each other's desire to protect their private life (*chastnaia zhizn'*) from collective examination.⁴² As homosexuality was officially castigated, it was safer to be silent about it, in order to protect the integrity of a personal sphere which, concomitantly, was given wider scope during the late Soviet period.⁴³ Speaking out about homosexuality could take place only in the register of public blame.⁴⁴ This particular supervisor did not choose humiliation—since any explicit reference to Shota F.'s same-sex desire would be perceived as degrading, especially coming from another man. Shota F. speaks of the discreet way his superior exercised his authority with gratitude, and as a result does not want to judge him from a moral standpoint. Shota F. indeed justifies his superior's behaviour because it remained consistent with his professional ethics as well as that of the intelligentsia.

Similarly, his judgment of the police does not betray any trace of resentment or outrage at any injustice inflicted upon him. On the contrary, he personalizes their relations, considering that he had dealt with “good people”:

A.C.: And the policemen, they didn't do anything...

S.F.: No, they didn't... (They haven't written anything...)

A.C.: They just asked you...

S.F.: Yes, yes. No, when they learned about my work and who I am, they, probably informed my supervisor.

A.C.: So they just questioned you? How did it happen?

S.F.: He... No, no, it happened in a car. They took me to their car, separately, they interrogated me. I told them all the truth, where I worked, who I am, and they released me, then they took him <taxi driver>, certainly, they also tried to find out who he was. But he was a nobody, he was a taxi driver. A beautiful boy. It was his initiative...

A.C.: And they released you immediately...

S.F.: Yes, yes.⁴⁵

41. Clech, “Des subjectivités homosexuelles dans une URSS multinationale,” 99-100.

42. *Chastnaia zhizn'* [private life] had assumed a negative connotation since the October Revolution because it was considered as external to the collectivity while *lichnaia zhizn'* (personal life) was valued because it was associated with the development of *lichnost'* [personality] within it. After Stalinism a new “liberal” ethos of the intelligentsia emerged that maintained some Soviet features. Malte Griesse, *Communiquer, juger et agir sous Staline: la personne prise entre ses liens avec les proches et son rapport au système politico-idéologique* (Francfort-sur-le-Main: Peter Lang, 2011). Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Igal Halfin, “Sintaksis bol'shevistskogo sub'ekta [Syntax of the Bolshevik subject],” *Ab Imperio*, 3 (2002):406.

43. Pinsky, “Subjectivity after Stalin, Russian Studies in History,” *Journal Russian Studies in History* (20 March 2020):79-88.

44. Stella, *Lives in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, 50, 51. Zhabenko, ““Lesbiianstva ne bylo!”...,” 89.

45. Shota F. does not know what happened then to the driver.

He shows that both he and the police had a keen awareness of the social stratification that prevailed in the Soviet Union: the taxi driver “was a nobody,” for Shota F. just as he was for the police. As a doctor, Shota F. was perceived by policemen as “someone.” While it is not possible to prove here that the repression of same-sex desire varied according to the social position of the victim in Soviet society, suspicion is framed in social class categories that are shared by both Shota F. and the policemen.

From my interview with Shota F., it is difficult to restore the perception of the policemen and the logic that presided over their actions. The fact that the police showed some zeal in informing his superior does not, however, lead Shota F. to castigate them in a moral sense as individuals. For him the police as an institution was responsible for directing his supervisor to summon Shota F.: “It was the police who had forced him.” There is an understanding of the event that allows for a disembodiment of the specific enactment of repression, as if the institution itself could function autonomously, independent from the will of its agents. In his narrative, Shota F. tends to separate his peaceful questioning by the two policemen from the moment when the police referred the incident to their superiors. The first is understood through a moral and individual prism that allocates the police officers a “good” role while the second is interpreted as a depersonalized form of threat.

This is how this threat of punishment, violence at a symbolic level, in other words, when delegated to the institution, appears subjectively more bearable and does not give rise to a feeling of injustice. This same feeling of injustice could, inversely, be transferred onto the sexual partner. This reversal of accusation is forged in Soviet modalities within a particular culture of suspicion which had been promoted since Stalinism.

Social differences and the culture of suspicion

Like most Soviet citizens, Shota F. seemed loyal to the regime. All the more so since he had contacts in the Georgian Communist Party of his hometown: “I knew the members of the central committee, with the City Council. My former classmates worked there, my friends, that’s why I was in touch with them.” Moreover, he was one of few Soviet citizens allowed to go on vacation several times to the GDR.⁴⁶ His relatively high status did have an impact on his perception of social relations. In this interview, he reveals an attitude found among other interviewees claiming to be members of the intelligentsia. Shota F. identifies informers among the men who assert their same-sex desire in public spaces: they were more visible than Shota F. himself, and he supposed that their lack of concern over their visibility implied they didn’t fear repression unlike the vast majority of Soviet homosexuals. It is for this reason that he concluded that they might have collaborated with the

46. His request had to be checked by the KGB and supported by his supervisor.

KGB.⁴⁷ He points out what he deems to be their “vulgarity,” described in terms of affectation of manners or effeminacy coupled with a lack of education and culture. In the characteristic terms of the late Soviet intelligentsia, semiotician Yuri Lotman described the lack of *intelligentnost’* in terms of shamelessness (*besстыdstvo*).⁴⁸ In the case of Shota F., his suspicions are directed to a person with whom he shares a same-sex desire but from whom he was separated by social differences:

A.C.: And you stopped communicating with this taxi driver?

S.F.: With whom? He... He wanted me again. But after that, I didn't. Because I had a feeling that, maybe, he was an informer. Do you understand?

It could be an expression of prejudice on Shota F.'s part toward a less educated person, he thought he was likely to be instrumentalized by the authorities. Many oral and written testimonies report that the police and the KGB recruited informers and agents provocateurs among men whom they had previously interpolated as Shota F. and the taxi driver had been. But Shota F. does not suspect his colleagues nor other members of the intelligentsia: this would mean dissociating himself from a social class with which he feels a strong sense of belonging, despite the fact that the recruitment of informers was carried out within all social circles, as evidenced by the case of a famous poet Gennadij Trifonov forced to collaborate with the KGB in the second half of the 1960s.

The need to protect one's public reputation characterizes the attitude of the intelligentsia towards body and sexuality. Its claim of the exemplarity of “intellectual independence” and “morality” could be weakened as soon as the suspicion of homosexuality arose, a precariousness which in turn could be exploited by the KGB. Moreover, homosexuality was perceived as a threat which on a symbolic level evoked the violence of labour camp, the only place where same-sex desire attained any degree of visibility in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the literature on labour camps produced a discourse which presents similar features: openness about same-sex desire, between men or women, was possible only in the camps but not for members of the intelligentsia. It was seen by the latter as morally and aesthetically degrading and associated with the lumpenproletariat, or more generally with the proletariat. Political prisoners were held together with common criminals and were introduced to their world. To prove that they had nothing in common with people of that sort, who were portrayed as animals or monsters, they had to demonstrate their moral and aesthetic superiority, an injunction which made any public show of sexuality impossible: they had to protect themselves from the element of “vice” which such a show would suggest. The first expression of violence was its visibility, in itself

47. They did not hesitate to “make a show”: this expression suggests a moral judgment on the alleged exhibition by these men of their homosexuality. In expressing their same-sex desire openly, they contravened the ethics of restraint to which the *intelligentsia* was beholden. Clech, “Des subjectivités homosexuelles dans une URSS multinationale,” 99; Clech, “Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic...,” 27-28.

48. Lotman, *Kul'tura i intelligentnost'*, 499.

considered as a force of corruption; or even as a threat to their social identity, to their belonging to the intelligentsia.⁴⁹

A culture of suspicion allowed the authorities to exercise social control, breaking up solidarity among sexual dissidents who could not thereby produce a positive discourse relating to their individual or collective identity, nor a discourse grounding any claim to inalienable rights. Besides, criminalization of homosexuality contributed to its clandestinity and, indeed fostered its isolation, even among Soviet dissidents. The latter, some of whom professedly adhered to nationalistic, religious, and therefore often patriarchal codes of behaviour, never expressed solidarity with sexual dissidents. The dissidents' strategy of transparency did not fit well with the fear of being outed themselves.

Outing in public space: The fear of informers

The social control of men who expressed same-sex desire is crystallized in the figure of the informer, the fear of which contributed much to their atomization. This control, concentrated around the figure of the informer, is perhaps a legacy of Stalinism which set about to undermine all forms of solidarity, even within the working class.⁵⁰ It cultivated an environment within which public space was considered a source of danger: this is where you could be betrayed, especially in the Soviet queer cruising space par excellence: the "*pleshka*." At the end of the 1970s, in Tbilisi, a trolleybus station next to a metro station was one of these spaces:

S.F.: One day, I was standing next to the metro station Rustaveli, and there was a *pleshka*, where were gathering those (*éti*), and where there was all of that. And one acquaintance, he was a prosecutor in a quarter of Tbilisi, his acquaintances, his friends, I also knew him, they were standing... I never went to speak with those people. I always...

A.C.: People who went to the *pleshka*, for you it was...

S.F.: Yes, yes, it was not so interesting, of course. And suddenly... I stood apart. A policeman went around. He called him... yes, one of them approached the policeman and said... Yes, to the policeman, and pointed the finger at me and said: "You know, he sucks dick."⁵¹

A.C.: And he showed...

S.F.: Yes, he showed me, and he approached me, the policeman, he took me aside, and told me that this person said that. And then, he asked where I worked, and I told him all the truth. And he released me. No more conversation.

A.C.: And he didn't record your particulars.

S.F.: No, he didn't ask for my family name, he didn't ask anything.

49. Zhuk, *Russkie amazonki*; Kuntsman, "With a Shade of Disgust..."

50. Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Production Relations, 1928-1941*, 1986.

51. Maybe a translation from an insult in Georgian: *q'lis mts'oveli* (cocksucker).

At first glance, the role played by the prosecutor in this story does not fail to surprise the reader. On closer inspection, in the USSR, a prosecutor had to be a member of the party and benefited from social recognition. In this case, according to Shota F., he was a corrupt prosecutor.⁵² Shota F. does not perceive this man as a member of the intelligentsia: what this prosecutor represented, his proximity to the state and the suspect origin of his wealth were at odds with the moral values of independence, probity, and decency held dear by the intelligentsia.⁵³ That this prosecutor could go to a *pleshka* without showing the same vigilance as Shota F. indicates a high level of indifference to the risks involved. Such visibility appears to sit uneasily with his (high) social status until we understand that it was allowed to him in exchange for informing against his peers. In this narrative, the same *dramatis personae* emerge as in the case of the police questioning described earlier: the policeman who does not perform his official duty, and the figure of the informer. As a doctor and therefore respected figure, Shota F. was once more protected against arrest. Notably, his professional identity, as a doctor is, according to him, his only true identity (“I tell him the whole truth”); not his same-sex desire.

The interview reveals a strong sense of belonging to a milieu of doctors whose solidarity he praised. On several occasions Shota F. used a collective “we” to affirm shared solidarity among doctors with statements such as “I felt better among the doctors,” “we <he and the other doctors> stood together.” This sense of belonging to a professional body supports the existence of a strong professional identity. At the same time, he never entertained the notion that sharing a same-sex desire could be a source of social identity and denied any form of community with other homosexual men.

Like other Russian or Georgian respondents, Shota F. didn’t directly fear the application of the Georgian and Russian Soviet antisodomy articles. To understand why, I raised the subject of Sergei Parajanov (1924-1990), the famous film director, an Armenian from Tbilisi. Parajanov was twice sentenced under antisodomy laws: in 1948 in Tbilisi and 1973 in Kyiv. The second sentence was pronounced while Shota F. was already practising as a doctor. Officially, he was condemned not only for “sodomy” but also for “sodomy with the use of force.” Shota F. thought that he had no need to worry about penal prosecutions because he had engaged only in consensual sexual intercourse. He further emphasized that he had never been involved in relations with minors.⁵⁴ His implicit message was clearly that sharp distinction was to be drawn between himself and Parajanov who was accused of

52. The informal economy and corruption, especially within the judiciary, is a salient feature of the late Soviet era, and it is even truer for Soviet Georgia. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 293-313.

53. A prosecutor is a bureaucrat, and should not be confused with the intelligentsia. George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979).

54. KGB set ambushes by recruiting minors with a pre-existing judicial record to compromise those who disturbed the regime, or asked neighbors for false testimony. Lev Samoilov (L.S. Klein), *Perevernutyi mir* (SPb.: FARN 1993), 6.

raping a member of the Communist Party. While Shota F. was aware of the lack of any basis for the accusations against Parajanov, it seems that this case did not worry him:

S.F.: They could not accuse me of paedophilia. So what did I have to fear? Why would they single me out?

A.C.: And in his case, you think that it was paedophilia?

S.F.: No, it probably wasn't, but, certainly, he spoke so openly about this issue and he acted so openly that, maybe, it was... And he was such a good filmmaker and he could be free in making films the way he wanted to, it must have played some role in his arrest.

A.C.: And that's why it could not concern you

S.F.: Yes, it was enough <for arresting him>. . . He crossed the accepted limits. He was so free, he spoke about it to everyone that he loved doing it.

Parajanov's imprisonment is explained in terms of what he 'spoke', or his prolixity, and in what he 'did', or in his flamboyance under the public gaze: "He spoke to everyone that he loved doing it." He appears to single out the element of visibility as the target of penal prosecution, rather than the same-sex desire itself. He did not connect his incidents in the forest and at the Rustavelli with Parajanov's, although he knew him and many of his lovers. Parajanov was not perceived by Shota F. as a member of the intelligentsia because of his openness over what was deemed shameful. In Shota F.'s own words, the film director exhibited "shamelessness" (Lotman) and challenged the intelligentsia's ethos of decency. That might explain why Shota F. does not identify himself with Parajanov and his reticence to express a sense of belonging to a community of sexual dissidents. The objective existence of the anti-sodomy article which enables the repression and incrimination of Parajanov and Shota F. does not serve for Shota F. as the basis for any rapprochement. The two incidents Shota F. experienced were made objectively possible by the antisodomy article used against Parajanov, but they acquired a certain subjective value for my interviewee. These incidents did not raise for Shota F. the spectre of arrest and penalization, it was rather the threat to his respectable professional identity which was uppermost on his mind, an identity which was strongly linked with a social status affiliation to the intelligentsia.

Psychiatrization of same-sex desire: the point of non-return

Soviet forensic psychiatry played a significant role in repressing and stigmatizing same-sex desire.⁵⁵ Given that, unlike some other respondents, Shota F. did not

55. Dan Healey, "Russian and Soviet Forensic Psychiatry: Troubled and Troubling," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 37, 1 (Elsevier, 2014): 71-81; about juridical, medical and sex education literature on homosexuality under Brezhnev: Rustam Alexander, "Homosexuality in the USSR (1956-82)," Ph. D thesis (University of Melbourne, 2018). More generally about Soviet psychiatry: Grégory Dufaud, *Une Histoire de la psychiatrie soviétique* (P.: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2021).

consider himself sick, one may suppose that his medical studies gave him the self-confidence to come to his own understanding over what constitutes a disease or not: “You know, I always thought that disease (*bolezn*´) is when something hurts (*bolit*)”: Shota F. had clearly arrived at his own medical counter-discourse based on the observation of his body which he then generalizes to produce a dissident discourse at odds with Soviet official medical discourse, relying on linguistic proximity in Russian between “disease” and “hurt.” Some of his colleagues agreed with him in private, and he distinguished doctors from the medical establishment just as policemen on the beat were distinct from the police as an institution. He maintained that the psychiatrization of same-sex desire in the late Soviet period was generalized:

In the Soviet Union, when a person, for example, acknowledged that he was homosexual (*gomoseksualist*), he was sent to a psychiatric hospital. He stayed there for two months, doctors made a diagnosis, and they [homosexuals] all received a disability pension.

He gives an example of an incident that occurred in the Soviet army in the late 1970s or early 1980s. A soldier “confessed” his homosexuality after he was caught having sex with another man. This admission did not lead him to be incarcerated but to be interned in a psychiatric hospital:

S.F.: Yes, I know one person, he served in the army, they accepted him in the army, they caught him with someone, or something like that, and then... He was not prosecuted, they were adults. Then he was sent to the hospital, I know it, and he received a disability pension.

A.C.: He was not sent to jail?

No, no, he was immediately recalled from the army.

Today, Shota F. is aware that in the same period, a similar psychiatric-based discourse on homosexuality prevailed in the United States and in Western Europe. During the time period covered by the interviews, he also knew that such a discourse was prevalent in the GDR, which, in his eyes, was part of the West.⁵⁶

S.F.: Yes, for example, in GDR, I learned from my friend that they went to the conscription office and they said that they were gay and they didn’t want you to serve in the army.

A.C.: Yes, in 1968, they abolished the <antisodomy> article.

S.F.: Yes, after they abolished it.

56. The GDR belonged to the West in the Soviet imaginary for its material wealth.

His numerous visits to a German couple of heterosexual friends fed his Soviet imagination on the West inclining him to idealize the GDR.⁵⁷ By their own initiative, some German “gays” were exempted from military service, while in the USSR if two men were caught and at least one of them was a “gomoseksualist” (a pathologizing term), he was forced to go to a psychiatric hospital and submit to a medical diagnosis.⁵⁸ Being identified as mentally ill threatened professional and social integration, as did being categorized as an “invalid.” Here professional identity played a major normative role, indeed an ideological one because idleness was forbidden in a society organized around work.⁵⁹ Such a diagnosis entailed the added danger for the individual subject to it of acquiring the status of being an outlaw and of being reduced to total marginalization.

Shota F.’s story is striking as he never seems to criticize the system for criminalizing homosexuality and presenting it as a mental illness: violence appears to lose its threatening reality as soon as it is taken over by the institution. As in the case of the police, the medical institution is not questioned at any time in his discourse. Both institutions are perceived as a sort of necessity to which Shota F. seeks to accommodate.⁶⁰ To emit any form of criticism against such State institutions would run counter to the way Shota F. had chosen to run his life, as a conforming law-abiding Soviet citizen.

We have addressed in this article a specific aspect of a late Soviet sexual dissident’s subjectification, reconstructing the avoidance strategies Shota F. deployed in the face of the threat of denunciation. That his fear limited itself to stigmatization, and did not extend to penalization, does not diminish the capacity of this repression to shape his trajectory of subjectification. Firstly, in practical terms, Shota F. managed objectively to escape imprisonment twice. Secondly, his fears of being denounced do not lead him to blame the institutions for the repression. He does not link the denunciation to the reality of penal repression, although the latter requires the former as its antecedent, which demonstrates the extent to which stigmatized individuals can adjust their perception of their situation on a subjective level, in order to better accept the restrictions that they have to face.

The feeling of belonging to a professional group, or even a category of people he identifies with the intelligentsia, serves as a social marker rendering all those

57. About “Imaginary West,” see Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 34-35; 158-162.

58. On psychiatric repression and police filing sexual dissidents and blackmailing, see Kyle Frackman, “Persistent Ambivalence: Theorizing Queer East German Studies,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, 2018.

59. See: Clech, “Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic,” 18; Masha Gessen, *The Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men in the Russian Federation: An International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission Report* (San Francisco, 1994), 16.

60. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*; Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

outside potentially suspicious. Ever suspicious of the possibility that they might be informers, social stratification, internalized by Shota F. allowed the Soviet regime to regulate sexual dissent.

Repression, psychiatric or criminal, of homosexuality was less directly exercised than used as a dissuasive threat. This threat relied on social control whose first lever was the professional milieu. Shota F. accepted this social control from his colleagues for the sake of protecting his belonging to a collectivity he highly valued. The threat of ostracism internalized by Shota F. led to the reproduction of mechanisms of self-censorship in relation to his professional choices. Adopting an avoidance strategy, he did not join the Communist Party or accept promotions for fear that higher posts would increase the chances of his sexuality being exposed. The threat of denunciation would force him at the very least to resign, as some of his peers had done.

His homosexual subjectivity unfolds in a field of possibilities that he limits according to Soviet avoidance strategies, or what I call an economy of vigilance. This is how I would characterize his subjectification. It does not offer any place for solidarity on the basis of shared same-sex desire without the antecedent support of class solidarity. No homosexual community is conceivable for this man in the late Soviet period. The figure of the informer is infused with the dimension of class difference, and is indeed framed in privative terms: an informer appears as a non-member of the intelligentsia—whether he is a taxi driver or a prosecutor. This apprehension had a dissuasive effect and prevented him from identifying with other men on the basis of their shared sexuality. At the same time, social differentiation permitted identification and solidarity with those belonging to the intelligentsia. Shota F. insists on his corporate affinity with other medical doctors, whatever their sexuality. However, this sense of belonging has one notable limitation: he did not trust all of his peers enough to let them know about his same-sex desire.

Shota F. narrative brings out some striking aspects of his personal understanding of the mechanisms of repression, and attests to a realistic evaluation of the risks of becoming one of its victims. At the same time, it also testifies to the means used by our subject of study to avoid punishment. Above all, it is telling that, after his experience of being questioned by the police, it was the threat of social stigmatization and not penalization which was uppermost on his mind. Further, this particular experience illustrates how a shared sexual desire was refracted through the prism of a neo-Stalinist Soviet culture of suspicion that undermined solidarities by dividing and atomizing Soviet society, limiting individuals in the extent to which they could have recourse to each other. However, this article has shown a shared experience that survived in pockets: in giving advice to his peers, Shota F. shared knowledge with men living a homosexual desire and belonging to the same socio-professional environment. It suggests how the experiences of peers contributed to trajectories of male homosexual subjectification. This awareness allowed them to take preventive action to avoid punishment and stigma.

The late Soviet period is marked above all by the survival of a Stalinist culture of suspicion which prevented solidarities, while leaving room nevertheless for the affirmation of the intelligentsia: the intelligentsia took on privileged status within

the communist party to the detriment of workers.⁶¹ Shota F., for his part, does not entertain the thought that an informer could be one of his colleagues or a member of the intelligentsia: class solidarity prevailed over solidarity based on a shared sexual desire. Regulation of sexuality, including social control, did have its limitations: this sexual dissident continued to have intercourse with non-members of the intelligentsia without, however, fully trusting them. The inter-class control of sexual dissidents attests to a degree of atomization among members of the *inakoliubiashchie*: an atomization which was decisive without becoming absolute.

In closing, it might be remarked that Shota F. provides us with a counter-narrative to that of Foucault in “West and the Truth of Sex”⁶²: when he “told all the truth,” he asserted his professional identity as a doctor. Like many other sexual dissidents I have interviewed, he did not ratify sexuality as a domain the exploration of which would lead the individual to an understanding of the true nature of oneself. While I have dwelled here on how social status informed the process of male same-sex subjectification for a member of the intelligentsia, a similiar case study for a member of the working class may be the focus of a subsequent research project. Indeed, intersectionality could be a relevant framework of analysis for a better understanding of the process by which the constitution of subjectivity is achieved by sexual dissidents, a process which implies not only social status, but also the question of nationality and gender.

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61. Ferro, “Y a-t-il “trop de démocratie” en URSS ?” 819-820.

62. Michel Foucault and Lawrence E. Winters, “The West and the Truth of Sex,” *SubStance*, 6/7, 20 (1978):5-8.