

SHINAGANI GAZAPKHULEBIS Q'VAILOBA

Inner Blooming Springs

Director Tiku Kobiashvili

Georgia | 2025

45 min. | Georgian with English subtitles

Cinematography Tiku Kobiashvili. **Editing** Tiku Kobiashvili.
Music Nika Kharashvili, Teo Kelberashvili. **With** Tina Matchavariani, Luka Chibukhaia, Tamar Tavartkiladze, Lazare Eliazashvili, Tamara Kalabegashvili, Nina Kipshidze, Giorgi Gelashvili, Anuki Sharia.

Synopsis

It's 2024. Tens of thousands protest on the streets of Tbilisi against the so-called "Foreign Agents" law. The previous year, pressure from the street made the government withdraw its draft law. Now it's back on the agenda. Tina, Luka and director Tiku Kobiashvili and their friends are in the thick of it, but they don't see themselves as belonging to clear camps. They're shaping their futures for themselves instead, trying to find out who they are and what they can do. Tina and Luka are studying acting and fighting the dos and don'ts of the profession: the more standardised you look, the more opportunities you have. Who do I want to be? Who are we? The camera, that "strange animal" forms part of this intimate friendship. Tiku isn't an observer, but rather a friend and part of things when the group's boisterous games show how tightly knit the group is. If anyone from the circle is arrested at a demo, she's supposed to film it. The friends share an approach to life whose political nature stems from prioritising being there for each other and avoiding creating leaders even in the midst of protest. Together, they gather courage for what is coming. As fire they burn. (Christiane Büchner)

Tiku Kobiashvili, 22 years old, is a photographer, film student, and filmmaker. She holds a bachelor of Audio-Visual Arts from the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs. She is currently training as a camera technician and assistant camera operator, and aspires to build a career as a cinematographer in the future.

Films: 2021: Saq'inule / The Icebound (short film). 2022: Zenitis Ambebi / Stories of Zenit (short film). 2023: Skhivi Cdomili / Ignis Fatuus (short film). 2025: Shinagani gazapkhulebis q'vaviloba / Inner Blooming Springs.

Young and Brave

SHINAGANI GAZAPKHULEBIS Q'VAILOBA (Inner Blooming Springs) is shown in a program together with GOUCHANG (Fruit Farm) by Nana Xi and NAGOTA (Nudity) by Sabina Bakaeva under the title "Young and Brave".

Director's Statement

The Camera Transformed Into a Collaborator

Thrown into a political crisis, auto-ethnography became a way to adapt and fight back

The ordinary has always been political and will remain so, especially when you are an inseparable part of the urban (and very political) environment of Tbilisi. When I began working on my documentary I embarked on an introspective journey, crafting a visual narrative about two friends living in Tbilisi's urban landscape. The story explores their individual and shared experiences and examines the emotional shifts experienced by every young adult. With my camera in hand, I became the film's third character. Using a subjective, hand-held filming style, I followed Tina and Luka every step of the way: in their homes, on the streets, at the university. Throughout this process, the camera became more than just a tool. It became another character of the story, both separate from me and an inseparable extension of myself.

My main interest as a filmmaker was based on observing a state of "limbo", attempting to break through it, and observing my own emotional state from a distant perspective during a very self-reflective phase in life. Memory and transformation are the two themes that currently fascinate me the most and I decided to connect them to the film. I began capturing my everyday life and rediscovering my friends through the lens of my camera.

On April 8, 2024, during a parliamentary bureau meeting, the Georgian Parliament discussed the draft bill titled "On Transparency of Foreign Influence." By April 12, the Legal Issues Committee began working on this so-called "foreign agents" law. Soon after, large-scale protests and demonstrations erupted against what was now called the "Russian law", becoming an inseparable part of our daily lives. The calm, ordinary rhythm of life was suddenly disrupted by a process that we were unwillingly drawn into.

Routines are shattered, and the environment throws you into a state of shock. The responsibilities that once took priority are now pushed to the background. All of this unfolds as you come to realize that your future is under threat. A political crisis begins, and you recognize that your country is radically shifting its political trajectory. You find yourself in a massive, collective struggle, fighting for a better future for your country. Gradually, standing in front of the parliament for hours, inhaling tear gas and dealing with the constant disappointment become the new normal. This process transforms into a routine, your primary responsibility.

Naturally, these events became an inseparable part of the film. Alongside Tina, Luka and my camera, I joined the protests, and the film's narrative focus shifted to the suddenly altered political landscape in the country. Protesting became a fundamental part of our ordinary life – a routine that we eventually adapted to. It far exceeded anything we had ever experienced before, even though a constant state of protesting was nothing new to us.

Auto-ethnography became my most significant methodology

and the storytelling approach I chose during the filmmaking process. I observed a reality deeply familiar to me: the people and environment I knew so intimately. Through the lens of the camera, I began to embody, preserve, and study memory and change from my own perspective. The camera transformed into a collaborator, observing alongside me. It also became an observer of myself as the film's third character. In some sense, the film evolved into both a portrait of Tina and Luka and an autobiographical self-portrait.

With the camera in my hand, I held the power to capture a moment and control it. I could turn an event or a person into something tangible, physical. I became its owner, deciding how I want to reinterpret it. During the physical and emotional battle against oppressive forces, I realized that I held a weapon more powerful than any other. It was a weapon feared by all, one that people instinctively avoid. I held a camera – an instrument that captures real events exactly as they are. It captures violence, injustice, lies, fear, and triumph exactly as they really are. In a critical moment, I knew that with my press card in hand, I could be a stronger woman than a masked policeman with violence in his hands.

I found my reflections in my city, in my friends, and in my favorite places. I aligned myself with the camera, I was fighting with its help, and I allowed it to protect me. My characters, through their involvement in the political changes of Tbilisi, have created a collective image and face for all young people engaged in this process, myself included. My small group of friends turned out to be significantly political. Tina and Luka's personal stories gained public and political significance. We experienced and we adapted together. Auto-ethnography became a practice of adaptation – a way to get used to the rhythms, forces, and currents that were shaping our social life at that moment.

Tiku Kobiashvili

Interview

“My Camera is my shield and my weapon”

Christiane Büchner, Heike Winkel and Barbara Wurm discussing the young generation and filmmaking in Georgia's politically uncertain times with Tiku Kobiashvili

Barbara Wurm: Tiku, while we are talking, on Tbilisi's streets, perhaps in front of your window, people demonstrating against the introduction of the “Foreign-agent” aka “Russian” Law and the new regime in Georgia are being beaten and suppressed. Against the hatred and the political violence, it seems, you have made a film with and about a group of young artists who are your friends – and protestors.

Tiku Kobiashvili: Yes, and I wanted to say thank you to Forum that you show my film. It's an unbelievable thing that's happening around me at this point. I would have imagined this to happen maybe, I don't know, in my 30s or 50s, when you do something great We are all excited.

BW: Will all protagonists of SHINAGANI GAZAPKULEBIS Q'AVILOBA (Inner Blooming Springs) come to Berlin?

TK: Yes, not only Tina and Luka, my closest friends and the main protagonists. Eleven people altogether will be attending the screening at Berlinale.

Christiane Büchner: At least with Luka, it seems that you had a lot of practice in filming each other or taking pictures before you started to actually make this film?

TK: Absolutely. When I turned 14, my grandpa gave me an analogue film camera, with which I started to film. I was familiar

with the acting school we have in Tbilisi. And this is where I met Tina and Luka. Luka is an active performer here in Tbilisi. Tina is trying to get accepted to study at the school. So, they were used to me always filming them. I'm the type of person who, within a group of friends, tries to capture everything because I always feel the importance of keeping all these memories. That's why Luka and me have this tradition of taking pictures of each other's feet – it's fun. Before I started shooting this film everybody was already used to me documenting their life and they felt comfortable with the camera. I actually started shooting for fun, more for us to look back on the clips when we get older. Besides being my friends, I got to know them differently from a different perspective through my camera.

BW: What about Tina's mother and the older generation.

TK: I'm very close to both Tina and Luka's families. And Tina's mother is the type of person about whom I could shoot a whole other film. She's expressive and loud, a friendly type of person, who is also used to me constantly filming, as I spend most of my free time at Tina's house. We have a relationship and she lets me into her personal space.

CB: What seems to have made your habit of filming this group of friends bigger was maybe when you realized that something is politically going on around you in Tbilisi, in Georgia, affecting your whole generation. When did you start to focus on the political changes through your friends?

TK: I started working on the film already a long time ago, focusing on my friends and their everyday lives. Then all of a sudden this „Russian Law“ was brought up by the government and protests started around us. Generally, I feel that when you are in Georgia, in Tbilisi, your whole life automatically becomes very political. This was not new to us. We just did not expect that it would have such a big effect on us and that it would be so intense and absurd. When I understood that something big was happening around us, that would become part of our lives, I instantly thought, okay, this is our everyday life now, this is the world we live in. And even if I had wanted to document small things or details that might not matter, I realized that this political part of our lives was now inseparable from the daily life of ours. During daytime we go on with our plans, with school and everything. And as soon as the sun goes down, we get into fighting our own parliament. It's like a war that you go to and you know you have to defend your country in order to remain free. There's no choice. The topic of Georgia and politics became inseparable with my film, it happened naturally.

CB: Could you briefly explain what is this „Russian Law“ and how it could affect you as young people?

TK: This law mimics a law they have in Russia. It cuts off all the money that's coming into the country from outside of Georgia. And if the government wants to close down the work of NGOs, this law helps to do so. It basically leads to a strict censorship of the work that is funded from the West. That's how I would explain it.

Heike Winkel: You said that your filming and politics came together very naturally. But when you look at it, what you do is not only not natural, but on the contrary, extraordinary, and extremely demanding on top, because the circumstances in which you had to film changed rapidly and became much more unstable, more dynamic, and also physically dangerous. Can you tell us about how you filmed under those circumstances on the streets?

TK: As a filmmaker, it becomes your duty. When you hold a camera in your hand, you have to film this. You have to spread the word as much as you can. Under any circumstances, you almost do not have a choice. It is terrifying, honestly terrifying. But with the camera, I have my camera in my hand, it acts like a

weapon in a way, as shield that is much stronger than the men in black who will do anything to ruin your physical mental well-being. So, it was even comforting to stand there, camera in hand, because I knew that when they see a camera, they avoid you. It worked as a kind of shield, while I knew that I am capturing a very true reality. Our society experiences a lack of information, and so I capture authentic images – it is all true, it is happening right in front of me. When you know you're documenting something that is absolutely yours, absolutely raw, you get stronger. I think my film is very raw in a way. And it is a strength that it gives you, so that you know, in case something happens – which is a possibility with all the gas cannons and the water sprays – you have evidence. And you kind of get ecstatic, too, while filming. I mean, at some point, the gas is so strong that you physically cannot breathe anymore. The eyes are burning, tears are pouring down. You lose control over not only the camera, but yourself. The first instinct is to get away to at least take a breath, but not in any second have I or anybody around me protesting thought of leaving. The gas and the water will not stop us from protesting. I had Tina and Luka on one side who were helping me out emotionally, physically. And on the other hand, I had my camera as my other friend.

BW: As I have little experience with that kind of violence, I want to ask you about the specific situation – which I imagine not only very dangerous, but also tricky in the sense that one cannot be sure about who is next to you – friend or enemy. Is that always clear to you? Do you at least feel sure that in your closer surroundings you are amongst friends?

TK: Fortunately, at least with my friends I am sure that they're on my side, definitely, because we go together and stand there day and night. It has now been more than 60 days already of nonstop protests (the interview was done in February 2025). However, it gets tricky with the older generation. We're obviously a post-Soviet country, so a lot of people from the older generation find comfort in anything that is closer to the so-called Soviet way to do things. But us, the younger generation, I could say that I do not even know a single person who would say that they're opposed to what we're protesting against.

CB: In your film, you choose not to include images shot from inside the violent demonstrations. We understand from your friend's preparations – writing down a lawyer's telephone number for example – what is going to happen. Why did you choose not to include these images?

TK: Honestly, I was not very confident and happy with the shots I had because at some point it got so intense that I felt like we had to move fast or run or run away, I used to put my camera in my bag for my safety, first of all. And the very intense parts of the film I shot with a GoPro, which I had on my helmet. However, when I started editing, I did not really think that the film needed the intensity of the actual parts of the protest, because I feel like I wanted to keep the film as light and as emotionally on a warmer side.

BW: And since you finished the film, has your situation or the situation of your friends changed? Did you face repressions, for example?

TK: Tina and Luka are in the Theater and Film University. And they have the status of students. However, all the lectures have stopped because of the demonstrations. The students have been sleeping in the hallway of the university. One of our most famous actors has been detained and still to this very day remains in prison. The students started to protest against the fact that not even now did the university know what to say in terms of solidarity to the detained actor, Andro Chichinadze. They have been living in the hallways of the university and sleeping there and protesting with huge bedsheets – quite impressively –, and the police have been coming over and taking down the banners and everything. But they've been staying in the university for

over a month already. So, the studying situation has gotten very difficult. In one theatre the work has stopped because of the protests. We're in a limbo situation, I would say, not going forward, not back. I don't have a clear vision of what's going to happen in the future, but right now, we are continuing to protest.

BW: How do you explain the reluctance of institutions or of people of a certain age?

TK: Unfortunately, I do not have an answer to that question. There are some people who find something profitable in being on the side of the parliament. So, they go against anything that would ruin their name or affect their position. I really do not understand how one can be a citizen of our country and not realize what is going on around you, so much so that you do not even get the impulse to get out and protest and be loud and fight with your whole energy with anything that you can. They do not realize how deep we already taken over by a government that tries to get everything under control.

HW: May I ask about that protest song about the lion? It sounds like an old folkloristic song.

TK: It's a very famous song by Jansugh Charkviani, „A Hymn to Freedom“, which does not really have any straightforward connection to protest. However, because of the lyrics of it, it is very encouraging, makes you feel strong. All the singing is meant to cheer ourselves up, to hear our voice.

BW: Where do you see your future? On the street with the camera, as a photographer or filmmaker in Georgia?

TK: That's a tough question. I'm not sure if I can even talk about the future. Right now, as of this very moment, I see myself in the streets with my camera documenting everything as much as I can. I see myself fighting until the very end because there is no way these people can beat us. I do not want to believe that this genuine love that we have for one another, for our dear country, cannot beat any of the things that they try to do to us or to our country. So as of right now, I see myself protesting until we get new elections and all the people who are detained are being released. Hopefully, that will happen soon, but the number of people being detained is rising, and some people have started a hunger strike. It is becoming extremely terrifying. Every day when I wake up, the first thing I try to make sure whether these people are still alive.

BW: Your education as camera-woman will guide you ...

TK: In the longer future, I would love to become a cinematographer. Right now, I am a camera trainee. I'm trying to become a camera technician. I'm working on film sets and advertisements sets. I would love to learn as much as possible about the technical parts of the camera and lighting.

BW: Your cinematography is already impressive. And we are looking forward to seeing your film on the big screen! This interview also serves the purpose of preparing for the discussion on "Filmmaking in Precarious Political Conditions", which Forum organizes together with Heike Winkel from the Federal Agency for Civic Education. You are the youngest participant on the panel.

HW: The panel is part of the Federal Agency's "Up to East" series and will be joined by filmmaker Salomé Jashi, the chair-woman and co-founder of the Documentary Association Georgia (DOCA Georgia), and Berlin based literary scholar Zaal Andronikashvili.

BW: Both, your film and the panel, are part of this year's Forum Special titled "Open Wounds, Open Words", to which, we thought, the young generation of (South) East Europe has a lot to contribute. You have proved this now. Thank you for the time out from protesting – and good luck with it!