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ჩემი ბედნიერი ოჯახი

Chemi bednieri ojakhi

My Happy Family

Nana & Simon

Producer Jonas Katzenstein, Maximilian Leo, Simon Groß, Nana Ekvimishvili, Guillaume de Seille. **Production companies** Augenschein Filmproduktion (Köln, Germany), Polare Film (Tiflis, Georgia), Arizona Productions (Paris, France). **Directed by** Nana Ekvimishvili, Simon Groß. **Screenplay** Nana Ekvimishvili. **Director of photography** Tudor Vladimir Panduru. **Editor** Stefan Stabenow. **Sound design** Paata Godziashvili. **Sound** Andreas Hildebrandt. **Production design** Kote Japharidze.

With Ia Shugliashvili (Manana), Merab Ninidze (Soso), Berta Khapava (Lamara), Tsisia Qumsishvili (Nino), Giorgi Khurtsilava (Vakho), Giorgi Tabidze (Lasha), Goven Cheishvili (Otar), Dimitri Oragvelidze (Rezo).

Colour. 120 min. Georgian.

Premiere January 22, 2017, Sundance Film Festival

World sales Memento Films

Manana tears open the windows of her new flat and won't be closing them again. Distant street noises, cheerful birdsong and the gentle sound of the wind from the soundtrack to her new life. The 52-year-old has left her family, without justifying her actions, without any arguments. There doesn't seem to be any fixed reason for her having moved out. When she's asked why, she doesn't say anything and thus turns the question around. It's more family structures themselves from which Manana wishes to extricate herself. The roles you have to play, the functions you have to take on so that things keep running smoothly, but which also lead to your going under or becoming invisible. Now Manana sits at the open window, playing the guitar and singing Georgian songs, whose melancholy rhythm infuses the film. Whenever she happens to return to the family home, everything seems just as she left it: the grandmother is roasting a chicken, the grandfather is contemplating death, the adult children are waiting for their lives to finally begin, her husband Soso is chain-smoking and the wardrobe continues to squeak.

Anke Leweke

A realistic extended-family life

In a patriarchal society like Georgia, many people are of the opinion that women have a harder time than men do. They have less money, less protection and less respect. For the most part that is true, but not because a woman is worth less than a man, but because the people around her think that she is and this way of thinking is what forms society and determines the norms in that society.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, where people used churches as warehouses and belief in God was basically forbidden, religious belief surged back again and after seventy years of stagnation, people turned back to the church. Essentially, the Christian Orthodox Church today supports women having fewer rights and receiving less respect and appreciation within the family and in society. The sermons, which many people follow blindly, clearly put the man at the head of the family and expect the woman to be subordinate to him.

Furthermore, this situation is often justified as being part of the culture and tradition. This reasoning with regard to women's situation in society is commonly heard during public discussions in Georgia.

Manana is a fifty-two-year-old woman who, after a long life together with her family, now wants to live alone and for the first time in her life does what she wants to do, following her own inner voice. The film also deals with the relationships between women of different generations. Manana talks to her daughter and encourages her to do things she herself never could. On the other hand, Manana's relationship with her mother is completely different. She was never able to do what she wanted either, but she never encouraged Manana to do things differently. The three women in the film represent the three generations of women in Georgia today.

Typical and untypical Georgian

The film also deals with the group dynamic phenomenon that is family. For the most part in Georgia, people are happy when they are surrounded by family. It's basically a primary instinct, to be with those close to you and to protect and support each other. Being so close to one another does not only have economic repercussions, but also social and cultural consequences as well. While European culture strives for an individualisation of the person, group dynamics and communal living characterise Georgian culture much more. Living so closely with one another can, of course, be complicated. No one has any privacy and one person's opinion can quickly become the opinion of other family members too. Family members have a great deal of influence over one another. It takes an enormous act of strength and courage to live life the way you want to and break through this cycle, once the dynamic has become entrenched. For twenty-five years, Manana had not changed her life, exactly because of this, but after a certain moment in time, she begins to move her life in a completely different direction and decides to live alone. As a result of this move, an unaccustomed distance arises not only between her and her family, but also between Manana and her husband, giving her a whole new perspective on how she views herself.

In *Chemi bednieri ojakhi*, there is a whole range of things that make this family different from a normal Georgian family. For example, Manana lives with her husband and her own parents, whereby it would be much more typical for her to live with her husband and her in-laws. A couple usually lives with the man's

parents. If the husband's parents don't have an apartment and the wife's parents do, then it can happen that the husband moves in with his parents-in-law. Soso is also not a stereotypical Georgian man, at least not the type of figure we have been shown day in and day out over the past few years in the news. He is not the stereotypical Georgian man who gets violent when his wife leaves him. In general, Soso is understanding and empathetic towards his wife.

Other aspects of the film however, do show the norms of Georgian life. There is a domineering mother like Lamara, who, despite her strength and dominance, shares the patriarchal values of society: for example a small apartment with too many people living together under one roof; the 'we-are-a-family-and can't-survive-without-each-other' feeling; relatives who take family allegiance much too seriously; being worried about what other people think of your family; also real love and caring between family members; as well as constantly butting into other people's business, but perhaps justifiably. It has also become quite common in Georgia for young people to get married and then divorce relatively quickly again. Soso's secret double life is also not an unusual story.

A nursing home is out of question

On the other hand, what is very unusual is for a fifty-two-year old woman to leave her family. Western societies have already experienced many of these things and many ways of life that are a matter of course in the West are hotly debated in Georgia. Many generations live under one roof in traditional Georgian families, whereas in Western families children move out at a young age, and old people spend their final days in a nursing home. In Georgia, the oldest member of the family more or less remains the head of the family until their dying breath and is universally respected as such. Currently in Georgia, it would be unthinkable to separate the older generation from their families and put them in a nursing home, even if they no longer support the family financially and are what you would typically call a 'burden' on the family. Human needs are universal. Is the West going in the right direction with regard to family and marriage, a world where the extended family is practically non-existent anymore? Does that make people happier in general? If each person in Manana's family were in a position to support themselves financially and chose to live a separate life, would they then be happier? Or would they prefer to sit at a big table with all the others every day? As filmmakers we do not wish to answer these questions, because our main goal is nothing more than to let the audience dive into a slice of realistic Georgian extended-family life, and to bring our characters, whom you cannot really describe with words, to life on screen.

Nana & Simon



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Nana Ekvimishvili was born in 1978 in Tbilisi, Georgia. She studied Acting and Screenwriting/Dramaturgy at the Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf in Potsdam. Nana Ekvimishvili collaborated with Simon Groß on the screenplay for his debut film, *Fata Morgana*, as well as on the screenplay for *Grzeli nateli dgeebi*, which they also directed together. In 2012, she and Simon Groß founded the production company Polare Film, based in Georgia. *Chemi bednieri ojakhi* is her second full-length feature film.



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Simon Groß was born in Berlin on 8 May 1976. He studied Directing at the University of Television and Film Munich. In 2006, he made his first full-length film, *Fata Morgana*. With Marc Wächter, he founded the production company Indiz Film in Germany, and with Nana Ekvimishvili, he started Polare Films in Georgia. *Chemi bednieri ojakhi* is his second full-length feature film.

Films

Nana Ekvimishvili: 2007: *Dakarguli Khmeleti/Lost Mainland* (22 min.). 2011: *Deda/Waiting for Mum* (8 min.). 2013: *Grzeli nateli dgeebi/In Bloom* (102 min., Berlinale Forum 2013). 2017: *Chemi bednieri ojakhi / My Happy Family*.

Simon Groß: 1998: *Sündenfall/Fall of Man* (19 min.). 2001: *Nachtrausch/Elated by Night* (13 min.). 2007: *Fata Morgana* (90 min.). 2013: *Grzeli nateli dgeebi/In Bloom* (102 min., Berlinale Forum 2013). 2017: *Chemi bednieri ojakhi / My Happy Family*.