

Title: (Ethno-)Gender Trouble in Kantemir Balagov's *Closeness* (2017)

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Abstract:

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, ethnic and regional identities in Russia have reasserted themselves. The process, however, has been complicated by Russia's ongoing tendency to see itself as an empire. Animated by insights from post-colonial theory and gender studies, the paper examines Kantemir Balagov's award-winning film *Closeness* (2017) and its representation of "otherness" and marginalization in Russia. The paper investigates how *Closeness* creates a structuring absence for Russian imperial ambition in the twenty-first century by focusing on women from a conservative Jewish community at the predominantly Muslim region of North Caucasus. In addition, the paper analyzes cultural marginalization and the emergence of regional cinematic traditions in contemporary Russia. It offers a detailed examination of the film's reception and its technical aspects as well as potential influences on Balagov, ranging from Aleksandr Sokurov (*The Russian Ark*, *Days of Eclipse*) to Abdelatif Kechiche (*Blue is the Warmest Color*). By focusing on Balagov's exploration of gender subjectivity, the paper also investigates *Closeness* in the context of the neo-traditionalist term in Russian domestic politics and attendant legislation, such as the decriminalization of domestic violence ("The Slapping Law") in 2017.