



Karlovy Vary  
International Film Festival  
Official Selection – Competition

სიბუღა

# K H I B U L A

a film by George Ovashvili



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ხიბულა

# K H I B U L A

A film by George Ovashvili

Feature film, Georgia/Germany/France 2017, 99 minutes

with Hossein Mahjoob, Kishvard Manvelishvili,  
Nodar Dzidziguri, Zurab Antelava

## Pressbook



## Synopsis

A man elected by his people to become the head of a newly independent country, gets ousted by a coup d'état shortly after. He flees into the mountains where loyal troops are rumored to be waiting for him. He plans to meet them and come back from his exile to regain his power. Full of hope he is following his guardians into the mountains, in order to regroup with his true followers and reach the popped-off glory times again. But the journey turns out to be a restless one, between trust and distrust, between hope and despair. His dreams blend with reality as his feelings of insecurity grow. Finally, he has to meet his fate.



## George Ovashvili

is a Georgian director, writer and producer. He made his debut with two short films WAGONETTE (1997) and EYE LEVEL (2005).

His first feature film THE OTHER BANK premiered at the Berlin Film Festival's Generation Section in 2009 and won over 50 international prizes. His second feature CORN ISLAND won the Crystal Globe at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2014 and was shortlisted for the Academy's best foreign-language film nomination in 2015.

## Credits

Director: George Ovashvili  
Genre: Drama  
Original Title: Khibula  
English Title: Khibula  
Country of Production: Georgia, Germany, France  
Year of Production: 2017  
Length: 99 min.  
Shooting Format: 35 mm  
Original Language: Georgian

## Cast

Hossein Mahjoob, Kishvard Manvelishvili, Nodar Dzidziguri, Lika Babluani, Zurab Antelava, Lidia Chilashvili, Galoba Gambarov

## Crew

Director: George Ovashvili  
Screenplay: Roelof Jan Minneboo, George Ovashvili  
Director of Photography: Enrico Lucidi  
Editor: Sun-Min Kim  
Sound: Johannes Doberenz  
Music: Josef Bardanashvili  
Producers: George Ovashvili, Eike Goreczka,  
Christoph Kukula, Guillaume de Seille  
Co-Produced by: Alexander Bohr (ZDF/ARTE)  
Production Companies: Alamdary (Georgia), 42film (Germany),  
Arizona Productions (France) and ZDF/ARTE

## Financial support from

Prix ARTE des Relations Internationales à l'Atelier  
de la Cinéfondation du Festival de Cannes

Cinemed Development Award Montpellier

Eurimages

Georgian National Film Center

Ministry of Culture Georgia

Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung

CNC - Aide aux cinémas du Monde

ZDF/ARTE



## Interview with George Ovashvili

***What kind of reactions to the film do you expect?***

KHIBULA deals with a much more complicated subject than CORN ISLAND. I always knew this is a subject that rouses radical opinions till this day. I think this film will renew the discussion between the two radical parts of the country. Even more than 20 years after the fact, it's hard to find an opinion that is in the middle. There will be discussions; I think that both sides will criticize the film. But my decision to make this film is not about taking a risk or provoking a scandal. Neither am I searching for subjects that will make me a name. The reason I am interested in this story is completely different. I really want to explore a human being who first has power and then loses it. It's a transformation. Power brings you an illusion that makes you think you are given everything, it puts you out of reality. And then suddenly, the power is lost.

The film is not biographical. Even though it does not aim to be a political film, it will be such in a certain way, since the people know the story of our first president. In his last days, he stayed in the mountains with just a few supporters around him. But again, I'm not on a certain side of the story. I try to be outside of the story, out of this situation. Maybe everybody will try to define which side I am on. I know it will be controversial. But I do my job, I try to say what I want to say.

***It's not important what the artist wanted to say, but what he said. It's not always the same thing.***

Yes. Mostly, the two are quite different.

***KHIBULA seems like a somewhat edgier and stronger approach than your previous films. Was this a new challenge for you? What was the most challenging part?***

I think this is the most difficult project I did so far. Technically it was hard, because all the time we were trying to figure out how to shoot the next scene. We were struggling against nature but in different places and situations than in case of CORN ISLAND. For CORN ISLAND we had just one location. We had to create the nature, the island and the corn, but still for KHIBULA it was more difficult. Sometimes I was wondering whether I really had the power to do this, but at a certain moment I felt that we would manage, we would bring the story to the end.

***What was the breaking point - when did you realize that you will make it?***

You spend such a long time reading the script, searching, casting, making the director's script, the storyboard. In that moment you



feel strong, you are ready to shoot. But when you go on the set, suddenly there are doubts. I'm asking myself - What am I doing? During the shoot of CORN ISLAND it was the same. But then there is this moment when you catch something in your frame and in your character. You suddenly know, you had been searching for exactly this. It's just one moment. If that happens, you are good. You know, you have to preserve this and you know where you are going. This is what keeps you going. It gives you the power and the motivation to fight.

***In your films the force of nature is very important. You portray both a fight between men and nature, but it's also an affair, a relationship. In KHIBULA the president goes to the mountains, because he wants to be protected. But then nature turns against him. How do you imagine nature works for and against the president?***

Nature by itself has two completely opposite faces. Nature protects and devastates men at the same time. It is exactly this kind of two-faced nature that I want to show. The struggle between those two faces pervades the whole film. Sometimes we see the nature which is helping the president to understand himself and to find answers. In another moment, it turns totally, completely against him, it tries to destroy him as a human. It changes all the time. I think this is one of

the main lines of the film: nature helping us to find ourselves. That is why nature can appear to us in a variety of ways. You have to be on your guard all the time and you have to understand what nature wants from you. Maybe it helps you or it might want to kill you.

***You wrote the script with Roelof Jan Minneboo, who also co-wrote CORN ISLAND. What moved you to tell this story of power and did you in the beginning have the idea to base it on a historical person?***

In CORN ISLAND I had an idea with another scriptwriter and based on this idea we created the story. Later Roelof joined us. For KHIBULA we had a real subject, real facts and from there we started to create an idea, the idea of power, of change from illusion to reality. One of the reasons why I got involved in this project was the mysterious death of the first president. We don't have an answer till this day. Maybe it was suicide, many people say he was killed. It was a very mysterious and very painful moment in the history of our country. The nation that elected its first president with 98 % of population's vote still has no answer. What happened? We need an answer in order to be free and to move on. But if the answer is withheld, we stay on the same spot, even after 20 years. In the beginning, I researched in order to find an explanation. I walked all the way they had walked in their last 50 days. I started to dive into this man, into his mind, his reasons and

motivations. When I realized that this was a really interesting story I made it more general. The problem is not local, neither in terms of the time period nor the place. No, it's a very general question: When a nation creates an idol and it suddenly disappears – why is that? This is how I see the film. It is not about Gamsakhurdia. It is in some way, but in another way, it really isn't. It is a story about any leader in the history of this world. Many of them had the same destiny. Many of them finished their lives almost the same way.

***In the film it is not clear whether the president really has followers or whether maybe he is delusional. Do you think this happens to a lot of leaders? Because with some leaders of today one has to wonder – are they doing what they are doing for the benefit of the people or are they just fooling us.***

That's a good question. I was thinking about this all the time. After the president was kicked out, he returned to the country for the second time. Why? In order to restore power, but it was impossible. Maybe it was a kind of an illusion. This illusion was his first big problem. Somehow, he believed that he could help his people. He had to realize that nobody from his 98 % of supporters were left. He had a few real possibilities to leave the country and save himself physically. He couldn't be killed or arrested, because still he was

a legitimate president. But the president refused, he would never leave, although he knew that this was his end. Why? Not because he still had the illusion of getting his power back. He completely realized the fatality of his situation. One cannot really grasp what was going on in his mind. He just disappeared. Geographically, for 50 days they were walking in a circle. They came back to where they started and he ended his life. There was no rationality. This makes the character of the president really interesting.

***Do you think he preferred to die after realizing he wouldn't recover his power and couldn't be there for the people?***

If so it would be a positive moment. I live for my people or I don't live at all. It's somehow out of the power of human. It's something more.

***What is Khibula?***

Khibula is one small, almost unknown village. It is the village where the president died. It's a symbol for Georgia. When I was writing the script, I had Khibula just as a working title, and my French producer was astounded and said, it would have to be the title. I said, nobody will understand. But he said, that's exactly why it has to be the title. If you don't know what is Khibula, you will ask.

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