# EPF UNIVERSITY

Eurasia Partnership Foundation

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# Armenia 3.0:
## Understanding 20th Century Armenia

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This book is based on nine video lectures delivered between December 2016 and March 2017. Its purpose is to provide a picture of how Armenia's 20th century history has left its legacy on today's society.

*Eurasia Partnership Foundation's (EPF)* guiding vision is a South Caucasus that is peaceful, conflict free and cooperative with civically engaged citizens, socially responsible businesses, and sustainable, accountable and effective third sector organizations. EPF works on critical thinking issues and alternative education methods for many years within its various programs: human rights, conflict transformation and peace-building, and civil society building. EPF is a team of highly motivated civil society and thought leaders and public figures, who dismantle the stereotypes and propaganda myths in their daily activities and participate in building the correct development path for Armenia. As a 'think and do tank', which works the full circle, from policy advice to implementation, and whose remit covers a very significant part of civil society and the media, EPF is well situated to boost the critical thinking agenda in Armenia.

This publication is a part of the series of manuals published under the "EPF University" heading. This publication is a part of Education, methodology of history, culture and values (EMHCV) direction. The series include texts which belong to four large thematic directions:

- Critical Thinking (CT)
- War and Peace (WP)
- Civil Society (CS)
- Education, methodology of history, culture and values (EMHCV)

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## Preface

These chapters are based on a series of video broadcasts (Jam Sessions, or JS) that I delivered from December 2016 to March 2017 in the company of my friends and colleagues: Isabella Sargsyan, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Robert Ghazinyan, Ani Tovmasyan, Gayane Mkrtchyan, Nane Pakevichyan, Armen Grigoryan, Artak Ayunts, and others. It took us two years to transcribe these lectures and edit them into an easy-to-read format for the English-language reader. During that time, a crucially important event took place in Armenia: the April 2018 Revolution, which provides great hope for curing the numerous social maladies that are discussed in these chapters. Looking at this text again, I came to the conclusion that its main idea is the introduction of the "post-Soviet" variable into all our calculations about reform and development. In the same vein, the April Revolution can be explained as a huge step, a rebellion against that variable. One can say that, with this Revolution, Armenia made a significant step towards ceasing to be a post-Soviet society. However, these "post-Soviet" diseases may come back. The virus may lay dormant for a while and then spring back to strike again. We have seen this pattern before in our society. Therefore, these chapters remain relevant and worth reading, even if only as an antidote. As I say in Chapter 9: I consider it important to offer this picture of the crisis in Armenia, in order to a) inform those who would like to be informed outside my usual echo chamber; and b) generate discussion and debate; even strong disagreement may help bring the discussion of these issues to the forefront of public attention.

The video broadcasts are available on our website[1]. This written version provides smoother language, more detail, and many references, but the ideas are the same. I express my deepest gratitude to the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) team and all those who made this project possible.

Looking forward to your feedback,

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan

March 18, 2020

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[1] Armenia 3.0, available at https://epfarmenia.am/Jam-session/Armenia-3-0

# Chapter 1. Introduction to Armenia 3.0: The Second Republic

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan (GTG): What do we mean by Armenia 3.0? Let's take the issue of the upcoming elections as an example.

Armenia 1.0 is a base level of awareness. If someone who lives outside the country has learned that Armenia will hold parliamentary elections in spring 2017, that is 1.0.

Armenia 2.0 adds widely-known context. If analysts assert that elections in Armenia have been rigged in the past, something must be done about it. One option is to mobilize thousands of election observers and to make sure that diasporan Armenians are among them, as they are acquiring a new and refreshed interest in issues such as elections, governance, and corruption in Armenia, which they had not previously focused on. That's all 2.0.

These chapters are about Armenia 3.0: a deep and profound discussion of the situation in Armenia, about the 'next level' issues that you can't read about in traditional news media.

The Diaspora has a traditional attitude along the lines of 'We are going to come down there and teach you because you guys have failed.'

That attitude elicits different responses from different parts of Armenian society. Some applaud it, some say 'You don't have anything to teach us,' and some, like me, say 'Let's both learn from each other.' There are things that the Diaspora, and particularly the Armenian-American community, can teach Armenia, and there are some things one needs to learn about Armenia. The more these contacts and connections deepen, the more it becomes obvious that the focus should be on learning about each other and from each other.

Some issues, such as election violations, are already topics of broad public discussion. Others have not yet received adequate attention. The assimilation of the Diaspora, the future of the Western Armenian dialect, and emigration from Armenia are only a few of these important issues.

The word 'corruption' often comes up in these discussions. To the question 'Why have they failed?' some will answer with 'Because they have become a corrupted society over these 20 something years of independence.'

Yesterday, I was reading about research that *Novaya Gazeta*[2] did on election rigging in one large district near Moscow. The woman who wrote the piece—it is an example of high-quality investigative journalism—says: 'I was approaching the teachers and asking them how they can teach good things, nice things, good values and, at the same time, rig the elections.' Why teachers? In Russia, as is also the case in Armenia, a significant proportion of the precinct electoral commission (PEC) heads are teachers. Electoral precincts are often situated in schools. In fact, in both countries, you now find that virtually all PEC heads are state employees. However, we have a rare exception with us today: Isabella.

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[2] Novaya Gazeta, Мытищи-гейт: https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2016/12/04/70762-kask-na-samom-dele-proshli-vybory-v-moskovskoy-oblasti

Isabella Sargsyan (IS): That's because of the way the law is written. I don't know if it's the same in Russia, but, in Armenia, the political parties with seats in parliament get to appoint a proportion of the PEC heads.

GTG: If your party has seats in the National Assembly, it can suggest a candidate or appoint a candidate for a PEC head. However, in practice, almost all PEC heads are linked to the system in one way or another. They are dependent on the system or dependent on a thing that I call *rhizome*, a term that some French post-modern philosophers have used. It means the roots of a plant. The Eurasia Partnership Foundation's (EPF's) contacts are a network. It may not be well-built, neat, nice, harmonic, and structured but it is a real living network. If a network is a positive association, a rhizome is a negative association. Unfortunately, the latter is what has expanded throughout Armenian society.

What is the *rhizome* in our country? If you are, for instance, a teacher at a public school, then you belong to the state system. If you don't do what the state system tells you, you will quickly be out of a job. If you are a teacher—especially if you are a school principal—it may not be a great salary, but it's still an opportunity: it is your share of power. Even if you are not corrupt, you have an opportunity. If you are fired, you may not be able to find another job. So your dependence leads you to become corrupt.

How does that happen? Even if you don't take gifts from the schoolchildren, even if you are a very fair teacher, when election time comes, the state system tells you: you have to do this and that to deliver x number of votes. That's how you become corrupt. This is one example of how the rhizome grows.

But say that, instead, you are a parent of a student in this school. You don't belong to the rhizome. You own an 'independent' small business in the community. Your child's teacher will let you know, not necessarily directly with words, that 'If you don't vote the right way, your child will not get the right grades.' In the blink of an eye, you become a member of the rhizome.

Later, your child grows up and is serving in the army. Nobody told you that you should vote this or that way. But you are afraid that they will find out how you voted. You have this fear because there are a lot of conspiracy theories floating around. You don't know how they would find out, but you assume it's possible. You're afraid your child in the army may suffer. He could be hazed… or worse. So you become a member of the rhizome, and your child also becomes a member of the rhizome. This practice is often built on blackmail.

IS: After the last rigged referendum,[3] they posted the voters' lists on the Internet, indicating who actually cast a ballot. They are just regular people. It comes down to this concept of '*the banality of evil*' that is elaborated in Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.*[4] It is the 'little people' who let this happen. It's not Hitler or Stalin himself. It is not Serzh Sargsyan himself who is marking people's ballots. It's all these 'little people.' They are your neighbors, your kids' teachers, the personnel at the polyclinic, very ordinary people, but

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[3] Armenia fraud claims mar referendum on constitution, BBC, December 2015: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35025853

[4] Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eichmann_in_Jerusalem; Eichmann in Jerusalem—I, The New Yorker: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1963/02/16/eichmann-in-jerusalem-i

they get into it due to the Soviet mentality. They don't feel personally responsible. If you talk to the same teacher in another situation, they would complain about corruption. They don't feel this essential link between what they are doing and the results it produces. That is part of this rhizome. These people make up the base of the pyramid. As Sergey Dovlatov[5] once asked, 'Who were the guys who wrote thousands and millions of *donoses* (false allegations)?' That explains how this system actually operates. Consider Eichmann.[6] He wasn't an evil guy; he was just an ordinary person, a banal guy with a family. He even helped his daughter-in-law, who was Jewish, to escape. In his daily life, he wasn't out of the ordinary. That's the problem with these people involved. And they make up quite a large number. There are about 3000 electoral precincts, with seven commission members at each of them. Okay, maybe two of them are from the opposition, but it makes no difference. Plus you have all the '*street authorities,*'[7] plus you have the school principals…

GTG: The Russian word *donos* means an unfounded or false allegation. It is another remnant of the Soviet society that hasn't fully disappeared. There are no more Gulags,[8] no one is being sent off to concentration camps, but the culture of fabricated allegations has not gone away. Our good friend and outstanding scholar Hranush Kharatyan[9] claims that, according to her research, there were not many *donoses* in their pure sense among Armenians during the Stalinist period. There were not many cases of a neighbor *voluntarily* writing a false allegation against their neighbor or a relative against a relative, a friend against a friend.

However, many false allegations were made through two avenues:

a) The Cheka[10] or NKVD[11], those who were in charge of the process of organizing repressions, would produce *donoses* themselves (e.g. by engaging their wives in writing scores of *donos* letters) to justify the arrests of those that had already been targeted.
b) Those already arrested were blackmailed or tortured to name their 'accomplices,' providing the basis for the next wave of arrests.

Therefore, we can conclude that the society, though not inclined to treachery by itself, was nevertheless immersed in a culture of false allegations either because of fear or because of the 'Eichmann phenomenon'—the *banality of evil*, as is the case with wives of NKVD employees writing scores of *donoses* with the same handwriting to help their husbands justify the arrests they were expected to make.

Gayane Mkrtchyan (GM): I wanted to go deeper into the 'root system' we were talking about. People who become victims of the so-called 'rhizome' *see the masses as an important element in*

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[5] Sergey Dovlatov, Russian journalist and writer, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergei_Dovlatov
[6] Otto Adolf Eichmann, German-Austrian Nazi SS Senior Assault Unit Leader, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Eichmann
[7] Criminal chiefs in the districts.
[8] The Gulag (Государственное управление лагерей) was the government agency in charge of the Soviet forced-labor camp-system, Encyclopedia Britannica: https://www.britannica.com/place/Gulag; Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulag
[9] Hranush Kharatyan, Armenian ethnographer, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hranush_Kharatyan
[10] Cheka, All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, the first of a succession of Soviet secret-police organizations, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheka
[11] NKVD, The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the interior ministry of the Soviet Union, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NKVD

*making decisions for societies but think of themselves as an unimportant unit in the mass.* There's this thinking: 'I was forced to make the wrong choice against my will, but the others were most probably not…' leading to the feeling: 'I am a victim but the others are most probably not.' As for the teachers, I think it goes back to the Soviet times. We thought that we were a happy society. We thought, 'We are powerful, we are free, and we are on top of the world (meaning the entire USSR).' But each one of the individuals separately meant nothing. You didn't have freedom, you didn't have mobility, you couldn't travel, and you had no money. This disparity between the person's power and the power of society, I think, comes from those times. That's why teachers do this nowadays, even those who are supposedly honest. I have personally witnessed it. You feel sorry for them because they are struggling between losing their job on one hand and losing the trust of the parents and the respect they have developed on the other. So, this case also comes back to the root, which is the disparity between the personal power of an individual and the power of the masses in which they believe.

GTG: This power of society may be quite an imaginary thing. There are these imagined things[12] we are talking about: a 'society,' a 'community,' a 'nation.' Then, there are the realities of these 'things.'

Several people heard Atom Egoyan's words [13] and did not feel comfortable with the Diaspora arriving and helping during the election. Some of them feel that it can create additional problems if it's done in an unprepared way. These people have a suggestion: 'If you want to understand Eastern Armenia, if you want to understand the current Armenian state, if you want to understand people who live here, you have to understand the past. You have to study 20th century Armenia, you have to study the 20th century Soviet Union, the Soviet life, the Soviet world. If you are focused on Armenia, you still can't forget that it was part of the Soviet Union. Many things that were peculiar to the Soviet Union were also applicable to Armenia in the same way or in a slightly modified way. To think that Armenia had a totally separate identity from the Soviet Union is just wishful thinking.'

Sometimes, when you are young, you think that nothing happened before you. I have experienced it myself when I was away from Armenia for 14 years. As you know, I left Armenia in 1993. I visited from time to time but did not move back until 2007. When I came back, I felt that nothing had changed. It might as well still be 1998. It was as if no history happened here, no big events happened. Electoral fraud during the Armenian presidential election in 2003[14] seemed only a 'small thing,' with the elections, the ensuing upheaval and ultimate crashing of the movement. The referendum on constitution changes in 2005[15] didn't seem to be a significant

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[12] Imagined community, a concept developed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book Imagined Communities, to analyze nationalism, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imagined_community
[13] 'Arsine Khanjian will be in Armenia during the election', ANI Armenian Research Center, September 26, 2016: https://www.aniarc.am/2016/09/26/atom-egoyan-arsine-khanjian/. Atom Egoyan's words: "This is not a political initiative; I'm not a member of any political party; neither of the initiators is a political party member. We just want democracy to be established in Armenia. Only the citizens of Armenia are entitled to vote, we just urge that the rights of the citizens of Armenia are preserved. The only thing, we - the representatives from Diaspora, can do is to observe, that these elections are fair and people in Armenia accept the results of those elections."
[14] 2003 Armenian presidential election, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_Armenian_presidential_election
[15] 2005 Armenian constitutional referendum, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_Armenian_constitutional_referendum

event either. They quickly fell off the news cycle. Immediately before I came back full-time, there were the parliamentary elections in May 2007.[16] It seemed to me (I was here as a journalist) that that election was also inconsequential. There's a certain objectivity to that feeling of mine. This phenomenon can be called a 'déjà vu of *zastoy*.' Zastoy is the 'stagnation' era in the history of the Soviet Union, usually referring to the time from the moment when Khrushchev[17] left office in 1964. Brezhnev[18] then came to power and the era of his governance was called zastoy.[19] It continued until 1985, when Gorbachev[20] started perestroika.[21]

IS: There was also Andropov[22] somewhere in between.

GTG: Well, there was stagnation throughout, in fact. It was a period when it seemed that nothing was happening in the public sphere, no changes were happening. When I came back in 2007, I had the same feeling: 'Nothing has changed, so I don't have much to learn.' I felt as if everything was exactly the same way as it was around 1998. Of course, this was not true, but that was my impression.

In the same way, if a new person arrives in Armenia (e.g. a diasporan Armenian from Europe or North America), their knowledge of Armenia starts from this point of their immersion into the country. Maybe they have some theoretical knowledge, but they take in what they see right now and don't go deeper. It may seem to them that nothing important happened in this part of the world before they arrived, that everything here is a given. It seems to me that they think there is nothing valuable or worthwhile in the part of Armenian history that took place before their visit. They like ancient history, churches, and legends but disregard the immediate recent history. Unfortunately, our 'official ideology' in textbooks does much the same. That irritates me. Of course, they 'know' that the Genocide happened and the Karabakh War happened, but some of them behave and speak as if nothing serious happened besides those two events over the last 100 years.

Unfortunately, because of this rhizome, because we have failed in many respects, it seems to me that many people who live in Armenia also think this way. De-education has been mentioned by Noam Chomsky[23] as a means for the kleptocratic oligarchy to govern the population. This criminal class, stemming from Soviet times, did everything to cut the umbilical cord of the present day to the immediate past so that people are not armed with the knowledge and

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[16] 2007 Armenian parliamentary election, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Armenian_parliamentary_election
[17] Nikita Khrushchev, Soviet statesman who led the Soviet Union during 1953-1964, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita_Khrushchev
[18] Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, Soviet politician, the fifth leader of the Soviet Union, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the governing Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from 1964-1982, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Brezhnev
[19] Era of Stagnation in Soviet Union during 1964-1985, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Era_of_Stagnation
[20] Mikhail Gorbachev, a Russian and Soviet politician (1985-1991), Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorbachev
[21] Perestroika, a political movement for reformation within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union during the 1980s and 1990s, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perestroika
[22] Yuri Andropov, a Soviet politician (1967-1984), General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (November 1982-February 1984), Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Andropov
[23] Noam Chomsky, American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, social critic, and political activist, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noam_Chomsky

understanding of where today's misfortunes come from. Nationalist ideology and mythologizing our national history was also used for this purpose.

There is an amazing degree of ignorance toward what happened over the last 100 years. Those who try to reform our educational system complain that people may not recognize names like Hovhannes Shiraz or Victor Hambardzumyan. The young generation appears illiterate, but our only source of information is the street *vox populi*, sometimes shown on TV. Of course, there's a lack of education, but what is the lack of education? It means that you may know some names but you haven't systematized the underlying importance of their contributions. This knowledge doesn't play a significant role in the life you are living today. Thus, I am not talking about the Diaspora only; even many among those who live in Armenia are unaware of their own country's 20th-century history.

We are a relatively small group of people who are concerned about 20th century Armenia. We say, 'Let's learn about 20th century Armenia, let's preserve 20th century Armenia, and let's understand 20th century Armenia, both the good and the bad, with its pros and cons, with all of its changes.'

There are people who don't know anything about the 20th century but want to contribute to Armenia. They should learn. There should be some folks who are learning from the 20th century, taking lessons from it, and passing them on to the others.

I'll give you another example of indifference toward issues that are far away. I was in Moscow on December 7, 1988, when the Spitak earthquake hit. I was what they call an *aspirant*, a graduate student, at Moscow State University and very much immersed in my work. Despite the fact that the Armenians at the university were in contact with each other, it took me two weeks to realize what had happened. I wasn't communicating with anybody while I worked on my paper. There was no Internet. There were phone calls but they were very expensive. My parents couldn't call me because I didn't have a phone in my dormitory room. Only I could call them. Consequently, I only learned about the scale of that event very late. Before I understood the scale, it was just another bit of news in the newspapers: 'OK, there was an earthquake. So what?' The full scale of the tragedy only became clear to me near New Year's Eve. When you don't know about something, it naturally doesn't seem significant to you.

Here is another story to this effect. I was trained as a Turkish language teacher at Yerevan State University. After graduate studies, I came back as a Turkish language teacher. In Soviet times, our group of students was very small. Only 4 to 6 students wanted to study Turkish. Of the people who studied with me, none of them had anything to do with Turkey. They were all students from Eastern Armenia; even if their ancestors suffered in the Genocide, they didn't bring that into the discussion. They were just studying Turkish because they wanted to become country specialists on Turkey.

Then, the Soviet Union started to collapse, and the universities reformed. Tuition fees were introduced, and more students started going to university. The class expanded from 5 or 6 people to 30 or 40.

I came to that class to teach Turkish and I suddenly learned that twenty or so of the students, a significant group, already knew Turkish. They knew Turkish better than I did in some respects. I

wasn't a native speaker, but most of them learned Turkish from their grandparents at home. In Soviet times, this wasn't public knowledge. Many people whose families survived the Genocide, from all over Armenia, continued using the Turkish language at home or at least understood it. But this was a hidden reality during the Soviet Armenia.

Why would they hide it? One reason may be deep negative emotions that Turkey was associated with for them. Another likely explanation is that they feared persecution, as Turkey was an enemy of the USSR during the Cold War. During Stalin's purges, many who knew Turkish and originated from Western Armenia or repatriated from the Diaspora were accused of being 'nationalists' and 'Dashnak-collaborators,' and were sent to labor camps in Siberia.

When Turkish TV channels became accessible in Armenia, many people began watching them. Some wanted to watch football or foreign films, even without understanding the language. But many people were also watching Turkish TV because they understood the language. They knew the language without having studied at the Turkish language department. That was very surprising to me as a teacher.

You have these hidden, niche elements in society.

Here is another example: I am very much from the Eastern part of the Armenian nation, which includes 'Russian Armenia,' Karabakh, and Iran. My ancestors all came from these regions; none had roots in Western Armenia. Once, my friend, whose ancestors are from Western Armenia, invited me to an annual celebration that takes place in Musaler, a small village near Yerevan. As you may know, repatriates often gave names from their lost homeland to their new settlements in Soviet Armenia. Musaler[24] was one of these cases.

I was extremely surprised to encounter this particular celebration. It was still prior to independence, so the festival wasn't advertised or publicized in the media. If not personally invited, you would not know about this festival. It would be interesting now to study how it was started and who 'allowed' it during the Soviet years.

There was a huge crowd. Many people were from Musaler, but there were also others from all over Armenia. Most had roots in Western Armenia and wanted to keep that memory alive. There were these big *kazans* (cauldrons) where *harissa*[25] was being cooked. The *harissa* was distributed in plates to everybody for free, and everyone was dancing. There were people with mustaches pointing upwards—it was very surprising for me to see so many people with these mustaches. I hadn't seen anything like it before, either in the streets of Yerevan or the villages I visited.

Again, this was an example of a niche element; it was a very important part of the Soviet Armenian reality but mostly hidden from view.

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[24] Musa Dagh, Armeniapedia: http://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/Musa_Dagh. Musa Dagh (*Dagh* is Turkish for mountain) or Musa Ler (*Ler* is Armenian for mountain) is a small mountain on the Mediterranean coast. Today it is on the Turkish side of the Turkish-Syrian border. In 1915, Armenian villagers mounted a defense there, which was immortalized in a famous novel by Franz Werfel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Forty_Days_of_Musa_Dagh

[25] Harisa, a traditional Armenian dish, with grains and meat, used in the village of Musa Ler's annual celebrations. Armeniapedia: http://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/Harisa

Robert Ghazinyan (RG): I think what is important to realize about the Soviet Union is that it had two major influences on Armenia: one very positive and one very negative. The positive influence is that, after centuries without statehood, Armenia formed governmental institutions and constructed cities, with all their positive and negative aspects. Armenia received a tradition of statehood, which served as the foundation for post-independence Armenia. I do not know what would have happened to Armenia if we did not have this tradition of statehood inherited from the Soviet Union.

However, the most negative influence, in my opinion, was that the Soviet system distorted the moral compasses of people—not just Armenians but all Soviet citizens. During the Soviet years, previously unacceptable practices became common and normal. For example, we talked about the culture of *donos*. People were writing false allegations about their neighbors and friends, so they would be arrested or deported from their community and free up an empty house. An immense distortion of morality took place. Many people in today's Armenia still have this problem of distorted morality. They inherited it from the past. Corruption is inherently negative. But if we ask people on the street how they perceive corruption, we might get a variety of answers, from very negative to very positive. Moreover, when talking about corruption, I don't think it is only the incumbent government's problem. There have been cases where some opposition-appointed PEC members at election polling stations have also behaved in a corrupt and dishonest way. It is an all-encompassing societal-cultural problem, in my opinion.

GTG: To sum up, we have a message for those Armenians and non-Armenians who want to understand Armenia deeper than just a superficial level:

*It is not enough to rely on expectations of national unity; we should study the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Soviet times. We should understand how it impacted today's Armenia. There were good and bad impacts during that time.*

*One important but difficult to grasp methodological issue is that there is an assumption that it was a 'good nation' before the Soviet Union came and spoiled it.*

But sociology and a positivist approach don't accept such an assumption. *It presents as if an ideal of good people or good nation can exist in reality, but they are not really there.* We can only talk about the way the existing mass or social-societal values and culture changed over time under the influence of the Soviet power and system. Sociologically speaking, we are talking about change. There was no nation that was 'ideal' and became 'worse' because somebody spoiled it. If one thinks this way, one inadvertently builds an imaginary concept of the nation, which may suit a staunch nationalist but doesn't work for an objective analyst who wants to adequately understand what happened. On the contrary, Robert is absolutely correct: *it was thanks to this 'model statehood,' 'pseudo-statehood,' 'rehearsal of statehood,' or 'proto-statehood' that we have an independent Armenia today.* Of course, the Genocide and the Stalinist years affected society very significantly, but it is too naïve to assume that, before the Genocide, there was an ideal nation out there that was ruined by its enemies. Everything that happened was more complex. There was the Soviet system on the one hand and a genuine urge to revive the nation, a constructive energy aimed at building the republic, on the other.

## Chapter 2. Uprooting and Rooting

As I said, sociologically speaking, there is no ideal nation. There was never this ideal nation at some time in the past that then started to deteriorate or change. Recently, a very smart person commented on something that I posted on Facebook, claiming this very fallacy. Who was that person? Of course, it was a diasporan Armenian from the western hemisphere. They said that our nation is great and, since we all belong to the same nation, we understand each other perfectly well. We all know that it is not how things are. We have various flocks within our nation. We come from a variety of geographical locations, different places and cultures. *The national mythology that we are all Armenians and therefore all similar and understand each other perfectly is pretty thin.* There are some things that really unite us as Armenians, but I am not going to discuss those now. We will move to them gradually, step by step.

In the first chapter, which discussed the Soviet times during the 20th century, I said that 'there were good things and bad things there.' That is a very simplistic categorization, which I usually try to avoid because it is stereotyping. Everything that happened then is interwoven. But I am going to use this approach and draw a picture, gradually giving a certain vision of the sociology of 20th-century Armenia, or rather its social theory. What should the major keywords be, around which we should try to understand this 20th-century history? An important one was mentioned in the previous chapter: *donos*, which is Russian for 'fabricated allegations.' Another one is 'street authorities.' This is all very much interconnected. Now I am starting to draw this picture which is my own mythology, although I think that you all here will agree with it. It is quite a well-known picture, at least in scientific circles in Russia and other post-Soviet states, or among the scholars who study the Soviet Union and its aftermath.

We start from the Genocide. A certain version of recent Armenian history starts at this point; it marks a 'rebirth.' What is important in the context of our topic is that many people escaped from Western Armenia, from the places where they were subjected to Genocide, and came to Eastern Armenia. There are various figures so it's difficult for me to give an exact number, but one of the largest figures I have heard is 700,000 people, with 300,000 orphans among them.

Other important events also took place during this period. First, Armenia achieved statehood in 1918 and then was Sovietized in 1920. One can't label these events as purely 'good' or purely 'bad,' but the Genocide and the First Republic show two different dynamics, which were taking place simultaneously at this moment of survival.

The film *Myasnikyan*[26] is a very interesting film, though very much within the Soviet discourse. It was made in 1976. It demonstrates what I am trying to say. The main feature, sociologically speaking, at the beginning of the Soviet period was an *atomized* society: orphans, people who have suffered huge psychological stress, 'post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).' This feature can also be characterized as *uprooting*.

People who had been uprooted came to Armenia. They started their lives anew. But when you are talking about Sovietization, of course, the characteristic term is the opposite: it is *rooting*

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[26] Delivery, Yerkunq (original title in Armenian), Wikipedia: https://hy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Երկունք_(ֆիլմ); IMDb: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0414696/. Full movie (in Armenian), Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vf2NQsuiXI; Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bdj4AxsJ8HQ

*(коренизация).* Among other things, whether or not we are grateful to the Russian or Bolshevik power, Sovietization also meant *building the society*, the community, the 'pseudo-state,' the republic from whatever we could. We are now continuing the work started by the Second Republic. The Bolshevik leaders committed some horrid acts against their Dashnak counterparts, who relinquished power. Later, they wrote *donoses,* rooting the culture of purges. But they were also building, building, and building. If this post-Genocide stream of refugees is the *uprooted* people who arrived here, the Soviet power and construction that followed was a tendency *to root* people, both those who were here beforehand and those who arrived anew, to this territory.

Quite soon after that, in the mid-1920s, we witnessed the arrival of *Stalinism.*[27] This is a very unclear term because we don't know when Stalinism actually arrived. It arrived gradually. But the Bolshevik power was not, of course, 'nice' even before Stalinism. Violence and the expectation of disastrous rule were present since 1917, when the October Revolution took place, and even earlier, during war, displacement, uprooting, and Genocide.[28] This power was always bad, whether Tzarist, '*Temporary Government,*'[29] or Bolshevik, but its horror somehow crystallized during the Stalinist times. From 1925-26, it started to become a very inhumane system.

We also had some seemingly good news, which also eventually acquired a tragic edge in some cases: *repatriation.* We have had several waves of repatriation. Very early in the 1920s, people like Tamanyan, Avetik Isahakyan, Martiros Saryan and Spendiarov arrived. It started immediately after independence, still during the Dashnaktsutyun rule. The Soviet power continued this policy. They called for intelligentsia and specialists to come to the newly established Soviet Armenian Republic.

Afterwards, we had the next large wave of repatriation. In 1944, with the Second World War still raging, preparation for repatriation and its propaganda had already started among the Armenian communities. This wave continued until at least 1949. A significant portion of people who came

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[27] Stalinism, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalinism

[28] See my review of Mikhayil Zygar's 'The Empire Should Die' (in Russian), where the essence of the anti-human power of the Russian Empire is discussed: https://www.gtergab.com/ru/news/essay/the-lessons-of-history-russian/145/ . The Russian Empire has been built on the value of denial of human life's worth and human dignity, and never fully reformed in this respect. This is a point widely recognized by many Russia-based thinkers and scholars of Russia, such as, most recently, writer Liudmila Ulitskaya, in particular: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2feYDfbja6E

[29] A provisional government of Russia established immediately following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II of the Russian Empire on 2 March [15 March, New Style] 1917. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Provisional_Government

during that time were then exiled to Siberia.[30] Tigran Paskevichyan created a series of films[31] and a website[32] on the destiny of these repatriates.

Stalin wanted to start a war in Turkey because he was winning World War II against Nazi Germany, and he assumed that he would be able to reabsorb the old Armenian territories in Turkey, Kars, Ardahan, Artvin, and the 'six vilayets,'[33] and perhaps more, and then he would need to repopulate these territories. That's why they started to prepare the repatriation of Armenians. Of course, propagandizing the Soviet Union in the countries where Armenian communities resided was another reason for conducting this campaign. It was important to demonstrate that the Soviet Union is a place where people want to come and live.[34]

Stalin's plan didn't materialize because the Allied leaders, Roosevelt and Churchill, probably told him 'No, you are not going to do that.' Eventually Stalin didn't attack Turkey.

However, since preparations had already been made, the repatriates started to arrive. They had a very mythologized understanding of where they were coming to. During the next stage, many of them were soon sent to Siberia.

They were bringing a different culture with them that deviated from the Stalinist culture, which had been established in Soviet Armenia. They were freer, they had relatives abroad, and they would complain in letters to the relatives, as well as loudly in public, that the propaganda which brought them to the USSR was a lie.

Deportations to Siberia in the 1940s continued the trend of the purges that happened in the 1920-30s, the extra-judicial killings which took away such big names as Yeghishe Charents, Aksel Bakunts, Vahan Totovents, and others. An immense number of Armenians took part in the Second World War and were killed or maimed. Despite all this, the repatriation waves still represented a part of the rooting process. Armenians from all over the world were coming here, starting to participate in life here and trying to rebuild a societal fabric in their own homeland.

Of course, *Stalinism and the Gulag are inseparable, and those of you who haven't read The Gulag Archipelago[35] by Alexander Solzhenitsyn,[36] that's the first thing, probably, to read about*

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[30] Dr. Hranush Kharatyan claims that about 15 thousand out of all the repatriates (which were about 85 thousand in total) were exiled, entire families. It has been widely believed, before her discovery, that this number was bigger. What happened, in fact, is that, apart from the psychological phenomenon of exaggerating the numbers of those who have had a misfortune, along with the exiled ones from the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, many other ethnic Armenians were exiled from other Soviet republics, such as Georgia, Ukraine (Crimea), Russia, Azerbaijan, etc. Thus, the entire number of Armenians exiled in approximately 1948 comes to about 50 thousand or a bit more.

[31] Hayrenadardz Project, YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-_clA3La1hJA4JWK5IfB9Q. 'My unfamiliar fatherland': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTKGZZ5dh0U; 'Oh, fatherland, cold and sweet': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CY__Vo6f7QI

[32] Website on the Great Repatriation: http://hayrenadardz.org/en/

[33] The Six vilayets or Six provinces were the Armenian-populated vilayets (provinces) of the Ottoman Empire, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_vilayets. The Pre-1895 Censuses in Ottoman Empire, ANI Armenian Research Center: https://www.aniarc.am/2015/04/04/the-pre-1895-censuses-in-ottoman-empire/

[34] On repatriation, see also the short story 'Artiktuf' (in Armenian) by a genious architect Mikhayel Mazmanyan, himself a victim of purges, written down by my father, Alexander Ter-Gabrielyan: https://www.aravot.am/2014/07/14/479574/

[35] The Gulag Archipelago, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gulag_Archipelago

*the Soviet Union.* Because then you will understand that this *rhizome, or 'archipelago,' as a slavery economy, as a 'second economy' or 'black economy,' was the reason for the existence of the Soviet Union.*

*The real Soviet Union, behind the façade, was based on the work of slaves who were persecuted and were working in the camps—not only in Siberia but all over the Soviet Union.* If you go to this or that prison here in Armenia, if it was constructed by the Soviets, you can be certain that it used to be a part of the Gulag system. The camps are dismantled but the prisons are not, obviously. In them, the Gulag and *blatnoy* culture are still alive and well.[37]

So first, we had an *'archipelago*,' and now we have a *'rhizome'* and we want to instead establish a *'network.'*

The Gulag was a very important element in Soviet Armenian history. The good news, however, was what we call in Armenian *kaghakashinutyun*: the process of city and town building, the process of construction. All over Armenia, roads, bridges, towns, cities, buildings, and factories were built. Despite all these negative and tragic influences, a lot was constructed, of varying quality. It's also a matter of taste. People who are inclined to nostalgia for the Soviet Union refer to this construction only in positive terms. Indeed, a lot was constructed: Tamanyan's Yerevan, Mark Grigoryan's Yerevan as its next stage. Some of the buildings of the 1970s are considered great developments and get prizes in architectural contests for their design. Many of these buildings are very often in a dilapidated condition now in Armenia, many others have been destroyed after independence.

RG: In a short time, Armenia changed from an agricultural country to an industrial country. That's also thanks to the Soviet policies.

GTG: That's reversing now, in a way. Now they're saying, 'Let's do agriculture, it's the best thing that Armenians can do.' Others also dream about industrialization of the Soviet type, but it's a wrong idea, of course. Armenia's industrialization was a part of the Soviet Stalinist ideology and policy of industrialization.[38] On the one hand, it was good, on the other hand, it was ruining the environment and created our dependence on the Soviet industrial system, which collapsed when the USSR collapsed and the Karabakh conflict broke out. It was not a strategic industrialization to benefit Armenia. It was, unfortunately, an exploitative and extractive industrialization. Now Armenia is still in search of the next development paradigm. Shall it repeat the old path of extractive industries and chemical plants? Let's see what will happen. How strategic will the new Armenia be?

The Soviet type of industrialization was accompanied by severely *damaging the environment*, especially after the 1950s. The best example is the decision to diminish Lake Sevan's water,

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[36] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a Russian novelist, historian, and short story writer, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr_Solzhenitsyn

[37] In the summer 2019 the new Armenian government introduced a draft law prohibiting the *blatnoy* culture and the rule of "thieves-in-law." As of the time of writing (September 2019), the law has not yet been adopted.

[38] "Industrialization, Soviet." Encyclopedia of Russian History. Retrieved June 15, 2019 from Encyclopedia.com: https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/industrialization-soviet

which was made in the mid-1950s.[39] That process was the tipping point of when the environment in Armenia started to deteriorate. But the environment in Armenia was so robust; it is still quite robust today, despite the merciless mining which has been taking place for the last 50 years. Even if it's significantly damaged, the environment can be restored if there is political will to do so. That's something important that has to be done in the future. The leopards can be brought back. They, the mouflons, and all types of birds can be rejuvenated. You know that there are no more hares in Armenia. When I was a child, there were lots of hares. Now, they have all been hunted down, so that there are almost no wild rabbits left. There are very few turtles left, etc.

There was a very significant impact on the environment. It started in the 1950s, and it became very bad in 1970s, with the personal car economy and the chemical industry. The exploitation of the environment continues to this day.

For a brief moment, the environment started to recover after the Soviet Union collapsed and all the factories stopped. But now, with unlimited mining and a lack of attention to nature, it continues to decline. Also, hunting never stopped after the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the so-called 'cold and dark years' (early 1990s, after independence and during the Artsakh war), trees were cut down because there was no other way to heat your house; you had to use wood. That's why, in the early 1990s, Yerevan went bald, devoid of the forests which were surrounding it. Until now, many people in Armenia continue cutting down trees. It has become a negative reflex. It seems that when many local Armenians see a tree, the first thing they think about is, 'It should be removed.' That's a very strange phenomenon. At some point, we have to analyze it very seriously.

IS: In the previous discussion, you mentioned that we should learn about each other, and 'each other' is a keyword. I am sure that many people in the Diaspora, in the western Diaspora, know little about all of this. On the other hand, we don't know much about their perception of the Soviet Union and what the community papers in Lebanon, Los Angeles, Paris, or Marseilles were writing about the Soviet Union, or how it was presented. I am sure that, in various political circles, there were different newspapers, and the process was presented in a variety of different ways, as with Stalinism and the Gulag. There were Armenian communists in these communities who had their own perception of the events.

It is important to study how the Diaspora, which is not a monolithic group and is very diverse, perceived the Soviet Armenia. Did they have any clue of who Charents was? Did we have any clue about poets living in places like Istanbul? Only now, we are learning little by little about Zabel Yesayan,[40] who had this tragic life and experienced all the troubles of the 20th century. She was born in Istanbul and she witnessed the Adana massacres and then she fled the Genocide, ending up in Soviet Armenia. She died in the Gulag, somewhere on the way to Siberia, but we didn't know about her. We didn't study her in school. She used to teach at Yerevan State

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[39] 'Restoring the Fallen Blue Sky: Management Issues and Environmental Legislation For Lake Sevan, Armenia', Douglas Lind and Lusine Taslakyan, 2005, Pages 35-55: https://environs.law.ucdavis.edu/volumes/29/1/lind_taslakyan.pdf

[40] That voice had an impact. Judy Saryan about Zabel Yesayan, Talk-show, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeMMi2jeyLg.
'Zabel Yesayan and the obligation to voice', Seda Mavian, 2011: https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/inline-files/Seda_Mavian_zabel_yesayan_kam_bardzradzaynelu_partqy.pdf

University, but does anyone know anything about Zabel Yesayan? I believe that there are others that we do not know as well. Bridging this gap of knowledge is crucial for understanding.

GTG: I learned about Hakob Mndzuri thanks to the writings of Hrant Matevosyan and thanks to the fact that, in 1963, a book by Hakob Mndzuri was published. So out of maybe a hundred interesting writers who were from the *Spyurk* or otherwise outside Soviet Armenia (because Istanbul, you know, is not part of the *Spyurk*), we knew very few. Of course William Saroyan, Hakob Mndzuri, and Zabel Yesayan are more familiar names. Vahan Totovents was studied. Gurgen Mahari was studied to a certain extent, apart from his *Ayrvox Aygestanner*[41] (*Burning Gardens*), apart from the stuff that he wrote after he returned from the exile in Siberia. That part of his prose was almost hidden from the public discourse, even if it was partly published. There's a lot that we should learn about and from each other.

RG: Following the ideas by Isabella about the perception of the Soviet Union, I think it's also important to talk about the Karabakh issue and the history of the Karabakh conflict: how it started. In the Diaspora, it is not discussed sufficiently in depth. We should discuss the role of the Soviets in this conflict: the policy of the Soviets to interconnect the republics so that no republic could break away from the Soviet Union.

GTG: That is one of the major points that we should highlight on the agenda of this process of dialogue. At some point, we'll have one or more discussions on the issue of Nagorny Karabakh, about the history of the conflict, as well as what to do about it. If we are talking about reforms in Armenia, if we are talking about corruption, if we are talking about sustainability, we cannot avoid discussing the issue that we are in this unresolved war situation. This is one of the biggest issues on the agenda. Essentially no one in the Armenian nation, and probably nobody in the world, has a real vision on how to resolve this issue.

But let me come back to where I was. The 'square culture,' construction started, *kaghakashinutyun* started, city construction started. Tamanyan brought in the *square culture,* the culture of open spaces for (supposedly) free citizens of the Socialist republic: the Opera Square, which is Freedom Square today; Lenin Square, which is today's Republic Square, the main square in Yerevan. Many cities were designed with public squares. What is a square? It is public. It is publicly rooted. It is a forum and a tribune. It provides opportunities to gather there and discuss things. In recent years, among the people who are working on these issues, among sociologists and architects, several very interesting small-scale broadcasts or studies have been made on *the role of public spaces*[42] (including parks) for constituting the new independent Armenian nation. Society discusses their removal,[43] the struggle to keep them, how they have changed, and their modern-day functions.

Let's imagine Armenia after the Genocide: a mountain packed with uprooted people, refugees and orphans. Then let's imagine Armenia in the 1950s: cities and industries. Of course, the mountains were still there, but cities and public spaces multiplied. Although it was still prohibited to have public movements. We are still talking about Stalinist and post-Stalinist times.

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[41] 'Burning Orchards', Gurgen Mahari, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurgen_Mahari
[42] Encounter with Ruben Arevshatyan, published on Jan 1, 2012, Focus: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjcJxV6SnW4
[43] Article 27. Talk Show on Mashtots Park Issue (produced April 11, 2012). English version, EPF Armenia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYokc_alIuU

The public movement doesn't boil over until 1965, and this is a crucial year for modern Armenian history.

RG: 1965 is also remarkable in terms of the entire Soviet Union's logic of development because what happened then was not very common in the Soviet Union.

GTG: In the Soviet Union, the so-called '*Thaw* '[44] (when the political 'snow' started to melt) began in 1953 with the death of Stalin. It became irreversible in 1955-56, with the twentieth Communist Party Congress[45] when Khrushchev[46] read his text[47] about Stalin's crimes and about 'the cult of personality.'[48]

By 1965, the Thaw was ending because Khrushchev was removed from power in 1964. Even before he was removed, he started to become much more conservative and much less open. In 1962-63, we already saw new attacks against free arts and free speech.[49]

But in Armenia, a province on the outskirts, positive changes and reforms continued for a bit longer. They started later on. That is why the process was brewing and erupted in 1965.

I want to focus on these keywords now: *'vulgar,' 'adaptation,' 'criminal,'* and *blatnoy.* How do they relate to each other and to the *'square*?' 'Vulgar' and 'square' seem to contradict each other, right? When I say 'vulgar,' I do not necessarily mean it in a negative sense. As the fabric of society is constructed, as public spaces and city culture evolve, you also get the 'downtown culture.'

You get small 'pockets' or niches of subcultures. You have a city subculture. In different cities, you can have different subcultures. Despite the Iron Curtain, because of the repatriates and the *Spyurk*, because of relatives abroad who could send parcels from time to time, Armenia also had, for instance, a hippie subculture.[50]

One of the tendencies among these subcultures was the process of *vulgarization*. This is a typical thing for *subcultures, which are usually inclined to vulgarizing the mainstream hierarchical value systems.*

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[44] Khrushchev Thaw, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khrushchev_Thaw

[45] 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_Congress_of_the_Communist_Party_of_the_Soviet_Union

[46] Nikita Khrushchev, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita_Khrushchev

[47] "Khrushchev's Secret Speech, 'On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,' February 25, 1956; History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, From the Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 84th Congress, 2nd Session (May 22, 1956-June 11, 1956), C11, Part 7 (June 4, 1956), pp. 9389-9403. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115995

[48] On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Cult_of_Personality_and_Its_Consequences

[49] 'Khrushchev on Modern Art', Seventeen Moments in Soviet History: http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1961-2/khrushchev-on-the-arts/khrushchev-on-the-arts-texts/khrushchev-on-modern-art/

[50] 'Youth Subcultures of Soviet Armenia' (Խորհրդային Հայաստանի երիտասարդական ենթամշակույթները). [online, Armenian] Available at: http://sovarmsubcult.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html, [accessed 23 Oct. 2019].

We had, for instance, the phenomenon of *rabiz*[51] music.

I mention '*adaptation*,' because the *donos* culture and the subcultures of vulgarization were also a part of the adaptation process. People have to adapt to the society they live in. If a child goes to school, he or she has to adapt very significantly. We all know about that. Otherwise, they may be bullied.

Let me tell you a brief story about Perch Zeytuntsyan,[52] a friend of my mom and a great writer. He was one of the 1948 repatriates; he was a child when his parents brought him to Armenia. He went to school in the early 1950s. They probably repatriated from France, because he had a French beret. His mom would put a French beret on his head before he left the house to go to school. On the way, he was bullied by local children on the street for wearing a beret. Therefore, next time, he would refuse to wear the beret.

*Peer pressure* was and is a very important phenomenon among the children, among youth and adults too everywhere, including the entire Soviet Union. It was a very strong tendency. This peer pressure, which I call 'adaptation,' shepherded everybody into certain subcultures. One of these subcultures was *rabiz* music.

What was *rabiz* music? The history of that term is very telling. *Rabiz* comes from the Russian '*rabotnik iskusstva*,' which means 'art worker.' *Rabiz* was a vulgarized version of popular music. It started from official, sanctioned popular music in the 1930s and then it became associated with vulgarized and tasteless music, which many Armenians loved very much and still love today. As in any kind of popular culture, there are some good things in *rabiz* and often some tasteless stuff as well. It's an expression of folk creativity and it still exists today. In essence, by itself, there is nothing wrong in it. *Rabiz* is associated with *Mugham*, which is considered to be Azerbaijani, Turkish, Muslim or, in general, 'Oriental.' Specialists claim that Mugham is typical Muslim music because it denies polyphony, which was invented in the West. *Rabiz* does not deny polyphony but, as a music of 'low taste,' it is associated with *Mugham*.

Many Armenians will say: 'Sorry, this is how it is. We have a hierarchy of culture. We have high culture and low culture. We have classical music and folk music. We have educated taste and lower taste.' It is like arguing that the Beatles are 'lower' than Mozart. Western culture overcame this issue a long time ago. Genres of music are all legitimate. One can find some wonderful examples of talent and taste in *rabiz* music.

The most important phenomenon for us to pay attention to among these subcultures that people had to adapt to is the *blatnoy culture*. It's another key concept. '*Blatnoy*' means 'criminal' in Russian, but there is a difference in the contextual meaning of these two terms. Though the official term for criminal in Russian is the same word, *blatnoy* is the vulgarized word for the Russian-influenced criminal world. The word *criminal* is neutral. The word '*blatnoy*' is socially and emotionally colored. There is an even stronger word: *urka*. Interestingly, the word *blat*[53] comes from the German *blatt* and means 'paper,' 'order,' 'right.' It first appeared in Russia when Germans were invited in and given a 'paper,' which granted special privileges. The word has the

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[51] Rabiz (music genre), Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabiz_(music_genre)

[52] Perch Zeytuntsyan, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perch_Zeytuntsyan

[53] Blat (Блат), Wikipedia: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Блат

same meaning in Yiddish. In Odessa, one of the major Russian criminal centers during the Tsarist era, *blats* were being forged. After a while, the Odessa slang associated this word with being a criminal, i.e. having an unfair privilege or special privilege vis-à-vis the rest of society, having a 'right' not to follow the law. It can also mean 'having unfair access' or 'having a chance to choose (over the heads of others).'

As we know, criminals also have their own internal 'law.' There is this system of the *thieves in law*.[54] Being a *thief in law* means that one is inaugurated as a chief among all the other *blatnoys*. The *thief in law*, on the one hand, represents the law for the *blatnoy* world and makes the most important decisions. On the other hand, in some interpretations, he himself (it is almost always a 'he,' though, in rare cases, there are also women with that title) does not break the official 'human' law anymore after becoming a *thief in law*.

The meaning of the German word '*blat*' is traced to the Biblical '*balat*', meaning 'silently, secretly.' This word is related both to the concept of 'secret law,' as well as to the concept of 'against the overt public law.'

In Armenian, *blatnoy* translates to *goghakan* (*գողական*): related to thievery, thief culture.

The Gulag was, of course, an extremely cruel and hierarchical institution. Many people died; many were injured or suffered other health problems. Many suffered psychological problems, even if they were released from the Gulag without visible signs of physical consequences. In the Gulag, a part of the survival strategy was to adapt to the way the criminals, the thieves, the *goghakans* related to each other, because it is they who governed the inmates. This was the Soviet policy: the criminals were officially considered 'socially-close.' The Soviet ideology declared that it did not see much of a difference between a thief and a proletariat member because both were against private property. Also, according to this ideology, being a criminal was better than being an 'enemy of the people,' i.e. somebody who is regarded as opposing the Soviet system and ideology. In short, being a criminal was preferable to being a political enemy.

Under this official justification, the *blatnoys* acquired power over all other inmates in the Gulag. However, the essence of this policy was to subdue political prisoners in the harshest possible way by subjecting them to the persecution of the *blatnoys*. The cultivation of the *blatnoy* culture in the Gulag, a culture based on the harshest and cruelest practices and morals, also deprived the entire Soviet population of a chance to develop civilized relations and a sense of community. *Blatnoys* were outcasts and would cultivate the anti-human values in their own circles, among other prisoners of camps, and, after and if the prisoners were released, this subculture would be further cultivated in civilian community life.

The cruelty of *blatnoy* culture is very well demonstrated by Solzhenitsyn in the chapters where he speaks about *maloletki*, i.e. underage *blatnoy* children, who could have been homeless, sent to the camps for minor thievery, or even could have been born and raised in the camps. It is common consensus among the camp survivors that *maloletki* were the cruelest of them all. Since they easily adapted to the *blatnoy* culture, it became their only culture, and they did not have ethical brakes to stop them from practicing cruelty vis-a-vis those who they felt were weaker.

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[54] Thief in law, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thief_in_law

There was the code of behavior for *blatnoy* people, just like in the army, where you have the subculture of *hazing*.[55] We know that one of the ways to counter it, to resist it, when you are adapting to army conditions, is to become a hazer yourself. It is the same with bullying.

Sometimes merely as a *pseudo-* or a *carnivalesque*[56] way of behavior, as a *façade adaptation,* and sometimes in the entirety of their ugliness, the values and skewed morality of the *blatnoy* culture found their way into social norms as people returned from prisons and camps. They became a part of the national subculture, where they remain embedded to this day. We hope that their significance will decline, especially thanks to the 2018 revolution.

As it focuses on raw power relations, hierarchy, and violence while undermining virtues such as honesty, trust, and the regard for human dignity, this subculture aspires to become the dominant, governing culture in a society whose value system is still shaky. From time to time, it will rebel and try to take over, if it is not uprooted strategically via special long-term state cultural policies.

There is another important element to keep in mind about the makeup of the Soviet Armenian society of the 1960s. There was no overall convincing societal ideology. The communist ideology was no longer convincing; the majority of people didn't buy into it anymore.

If you get sent to a camp, or your relative gets sent to a camp, if you are hungry, if you have no rights, no matter how much propaganda is poured on you, you understand that communism, and socialism, and equality, and the fairy tales about people developing their talents are all just empty words. Your 'real life' is something totally different. So you adapt to that 'real life.' As the Russian saying goes, 'If you live among the wolves, you howl like a wolf.' (По-вольчи жить—по-вольчи выть.)

There was no other mainstream ideology promoted at that time, other than the communist ideology, which was defunct in the real life and existed only on the official façade level. The nationalist ideology was given some leeway to resurface during the Second World War and its aftermath but only a little bit. The latent fragments of nationalism that could not be erased were harnessed by Soviet ideologists and directed into patriotism for the USSR while it was under attack by foreign invaders.

After the war, nationalism continued to be allowed in a limited way, as sanctioned by the state. Anti-Turkey sentiment was tolerated to a small extent in Armenia as the USSR entered the Second World War, both in order not to alienate the population (because if one prohibited anti-Turkey sentiment, the population might become ungovernable), but also because the Soviet Union considered Turkey as a rival if not an enemy and having its population near its border with Turkey remain suspicious of it served the USSR's security interest.

Anti-Turkey sentiment was allowed, but it also served as a convenient excuse to prosecute those who expressed it, when needed. It was allowed in a limited way, but the commemoration of the Genocide was prohibited. It was allowed, but talking about the Genocide was prohibited, even in private. That is why, in many families, grandchildren did not know where their grandparents

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[55] Hazing, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazing
[56] Here the term 'carnival' is used according to Mikhail Bakhtin's "Rabelais and his world" work, see Bachtin, M. (2009). *Rabelais and his world*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

came from or the details of their family history. Grandparents were silent—I already mentioned that situation in the story about people secretly knowing the Turkish language.

Subcultures grew. The ones that won out were the ones that were crueler, could resist, could make people adapt in such a way that they survived the conditions that resulted from the Soviet system. These were the *blatnoy* subculture and the *tsekhavism* subculture, which we will discuss later on. Both were closely linked to the specific Soviet type of total corruption.

IS: In order to understand the Gulag, you might want to compare it with the Nazi concentration camps. Their structure is known. There were *capos*, recruited from the same Jewish prisoners who became more privileged. They did the 'dirtiest' work, and they were rewarded. The Nazi system is better known. There are the works of *Primo Levi,[57]* for example, that explain these mechanisms quite well.

When the Nazi system in Germany was defeated, all these criminals and their criminal behavior were publicly condemned. As Solzhenitsyn says in his book, '"They were guilty," was pronounced in the court 10,000 times.' As a result, this culture didn't go deep into the society. It was condemned, and there was significant work done to make repentance a winning value.

In the case of the Gulag, it was never publicly condemned, *there was no lustration until now, and now it's a backlash towards Stalinism in Russia, and Stalinization is rising* again.

GTG: Particularly in Russia, not so much in today's Armenia at this stage.

IS: Particularly in Russia, I was just speaking about general trends. But it was never condemned. And the people who did it, people who wrote a *donos*; people who were this *pakhan ('don,' 'big shot')* in the Gulag—these structures that we know also existed in other concentration camps in places like Cambodia and others—they were not condemned.

They returned to society. They still had this power of governing human and social relations that they achieved in the Gulag.

Maybe another parallel that will help people understand the concepts of *blatnoy* or *thief in law* is the Italian mafia. *Godfather*—both the book and the film[58]—provides a blueprint which can explain the essence of this subculture. People who belong to the *blatnoy* culture love this film; they consider it a portrait of their own subculture. And those who love this subculture, even if they do not belong to it, even if they only would like to belong to it, also love this film. These relations do exist even today in our society. They are replicated here, and even people of my generation directly witness them in their environment.

GTG: These are additional examples which help explain what we mean by the *blatnoy* subculture. Many people don't understand its depth, its roots, its survival instinct, its impact on them, unfortunately.

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[57] Primo Michele Levi, an Italian Jewish chemist, writer, and Holocaust survivor, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primo_Levi

[58] The Godfather, a 1972 American crime film directed by Francis Ford Coppola and produced by Albert S. Ruddy, based on Mario Puzo's best-selling novel of the same name, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Godfather

I already used the term '*carnivalesque,*' the word '*façade-like.*' The young generation often mimicked certain processes that they or their parents had experienced, having been immersed in this Gulag and *blatnoy* culture. Inadvertently, they were also absorbing its value system, which aligns with the Nazi camp model or the mafia model.

In order to understand this value system better, let me quote two important sayings from Solzhenitsyn's Gulag, sayings enshrined in the camp psychology and value system. One was: *If you are not being touched, don't make an appearance,* (I am using here a euphemistic version of this saying) meaning 'Mind your own business if somebody is being treated badly. Don't intervene, otherwise you too will be treated badly.' This value is still very much alive today, isn't it? It atomizes our society.

The second one is also very important for our present day. This adage from The Gulag *Archipelago* goes like this: *You die first and I die second.* As you can see, it is a perfect adage for uprooting, for atomizing the society.

The following three terms come from Johan Galtung:[59] *atomie*, *anomie* and *anemie.*

This is how this tendency of *atomizing*, of '*anomieizing*' worked: if people are *atomized*, they don't speak, don't communicate; they become mute. The words lose their meanings, their 'names,' so *anomie* means a lack of names and also therefore - a lack of (working public) laws. *Anemie* means a lack of energy, on both the individual and societal level. It is a lack of social capital, lack of capacity to make a step forward, to act, to do something.

This was what the Gulag culture was bringing to Armenian society, which was, despite all the misfortunes that befell it in the 20th century, still quite resistant and healthy. The society of the Republic of Armenia, as we know it today, took shape and was constructed throughout these tragedies. Even in the 1930s and 1940s, construction boomed and creativity bloomed, despite the prosecution of greats like Zabel Yesayan, Charents, Bakunts, Totovents, and many other writers, artists, architects, medical doctors, scientists, 'everyday people,' etc.

Stalin's death marked the start of the Thaw in the Soviet Union.


***The Post-Stalin Thaw***

During the Stalinist times, people were often killed via extrajudicial means. Of course, compared to those sent to camps, a relatively smaller number were killed directly. But many people also died in the camps. In any case, *throughout the late 1920s to early 1950s, there existed a real threat that the state could kill you.*

For instance, at some point in time, I think it was the late 1930s or early 1940s, there was a new law adopted that even condemned children under 14 years old to death by firing squad, if they stole a *bukhanka* (a loaf of bread, буханка in Russian).

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[59] Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist, mathematician, and the principal founder of the discipline of peace and conflict studies, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johan_Galtung

Hopefully no one in Armenia was killed due to that law. But in Armenia too many other nasty things, treacherous things, betrayals, many unfair and unfounded prosecutions, many *donoses* happened. But even during the worst times of Stalin's brutal rule, people in Armenia were trying to keep the worst impacts at bay. Not in many respects, but in some respects.

Then suddenly, Stalin was gone. The mass killings stopped, both the extrajudicial killings and the 'judicial' killings. Prosecution for political views continued, but to a lesser degree.

Armenians are very entrepreneurial, right? They like doing business, big and small.

Armenians are successful at business all over the world. They are hardworking and growth-oriented. They might start from a small artisanship, for example, and then grow it into a medium or large business.

It was the same in Soviet Armenia: the moment the fear of being killed was lifted, many tried to start their own business. But it was still prohibited, as the Soviet Union did not allow private property. Yet, many started illegal businesses. Under the reasoning: *Okay, I won't be killed. I may end up in prison, but at least my family can be well off.* It became a risk worth taking.

If you are not afraid of being killed outright, you can put up with being in prison for a few years. Or you may think: *I won't even end up in prison because I will be able to afford to pay the necessary bribe.* You start your hidden, secret, illegal business. It wasn't only in Armenia. This happened in many places, but especially the outskirts of the Soviet Union: the Baltic states, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Central Asia. This phenomenon led to a new subculture, that of the *tsekhaviks*.

IS: Oh, how are you going to explain that?

GTG: I'll explain it briefly. What is *tsekhavism*? It comes from the word *tsekh* (цех in Russian), meaning a department in a factory. If this department started to manufacture products over and above the state-assigned quota (the 'plan'), the head of the department facilitated selling the surplus on the black market. This is *tsekhavism*. The owner, the unofficial owner, and officially the head of that department, was called the *tsekhavik*. The black market started to flourish all over the Soviet Union, Armenia included.

Now, in order to understand how the 1965 uprising happened at the time of the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the uprising that took place in Yerevan, particularly in the two main squares, the Lenin Square and the Opera Square—and elsewhere in Armenia—let's bring together all that we discussed so far.

One stream of our discussion—and of the developments in Armenia—was the *square culture*.

The uprising took place at the Opera Square. It was prepared by other elements of the square culture: the Thaw made it possible to publish more freely, there was a cultural revival brewing, which was, obviously, building up a freer public discourse. The *atomie* and the *anomie* were retreating. Therefore, the *anemie* was also challenged.

In 1963, radio loudspeakers were put in the Opera Square. People gathered there to listen to Tigran Petrosyan play against Botvinnik in the World Chess Championship. Petrosyan won and

became the world chess champion. Officially, under Soviet sponsorship, the loudspeakers were installed, and people gathered there. Citizens learned that they can gather in the square not only for the parade on the anniversary of the revolution but also for other causes.

This was a sports gathering, but, because Tigran Petrosyan was Armenian, the gathering was very patriotically-charged. When the threat of being killed was subdued, nationalist ideology started to grow to a larger scale.

The repatriates who came back from Siberia bore a nationalist ideology; they were less affected by Soviet ideology. Even if they were communists or socialists during their life outside the Soviet Union and came back believing in the fairy tales told by the Soviet propaganda machine, they didn't experience the Bolshevik and Stalinist terror of the 1920s and 1930s. For the local population, this experience often resulted in being silent both externally and internally: forgetting one's own memories lest one may inadvertently get prosecuted for having 'wrong' memories. This was a cruel psychological effect, a reaction to the terror.

By contrast, the repatriates didn't have this deep level of indoctrinated fear, even despite the fact that they experienced terror themselves and were sent to Siberia. Upon their return, it turned out that, in many cases, rather than becoming silent, they had acquired a consistently negative attitude towards the Soviet system. They had experienced freedom during their time outside the USSR. For them, the Soviet system was a deviation from normalcy. Rather than becoming silent and obedient, experiencing exile in Siberia made them confident in their denial of the Soviet ideology. These experiences contributed to developing a consistently critical attitude towards the USSR. For them, it was no longer a socialist state, however poor, but a totalitarian anti-human system. Therefore, many of them looked for ways to leave the USSR. But, as long as they were here, they brought the memories which were blocked in the minds of the rest of the population: the memories of freedom, entrepreneurship, the national cause, and the Genocide.

Plus, there were some people who were becoming quite well off: the *tsekhaviks*. This was another stream which influenced the buildup towards 1965. The society was getting a bit richer, so there were resources available to be invested in an uprising.

Undoubtedly the *blatnoy* subculture was also present, but at that moment it was silent. Again, we don't have scientific evidence for why was it so, but we can theorize about the causes of such a situation.

As I mentioned in passing above, the *blatnoy* subculture is like a virus: it may lie silent and invisible for a while, and then suddenly lift its head and reassert its dominance in society. The period of 1953-1965 was when positive societal values were on the ascendant, supported from 'above,' from Moscow. Therefore, despite the fact that there were so many people who had been infected by the *blatnoy* virus, it was silenced because the societal direction was different. Of course, in Moscow, there were still very controversial and negative developments after 1962, when Khrushchev started his vulgar but dangerous and consequential criticism of modern art. However, in parallel, he was continuing his attack on Stalin; Solzhenitsyn's 'One day of Ivan Denisovich' was published.

In 1964, Khrushchev was removed. But Armenia was a distant province, and the negative trends introduced by Brezhnev's rule had not yet reached it by 1965. In Armenia, we had a small

cultural *renaissance* led by a new generation of artists: Minas, the *Armenfilm* studio's productions, the music of Aram Khachaturyan and Arno, the visit of Charles, etc.

Armenian society was experiencing a small revival. Despite all the tragedies of the past, the returnees from the camps and the exile, a bit more freedom of speech, and the dismantling of Stalin's image and heritage (including his statue atop Yerevan) had a positive effect on society, and there was an overwhelming festive spirit. Construction continued to boom. Perhaps, all this created conditions for the *blatnoy* subculture to stay subdued. However, underneath this thin layer of positive developments, both the *blatnoy* subculture, as well as *tsekhavism* with its intrinsic link to the Soviet type of corruption and cynicism, were growing. Though invisible, they were ready to strike at another opportune moment, which was yet to come.[60]

All that culminated in our Opera Square protest on April 22, 1965.

That was when the Armenian nation, for the first time in centuries, gathered in the square—because it was the center of the pseudo-statehood of Armenia—to make a statement, to say, '**We remember the Genocide**,' to say, '**We are a unit that requires sovereignty, that deserves sovereignty, and we can be sovereign.**'

As a final point: *Levon Ter-Petrosyan, a young student at that time, was arrested for a few days during the next year's April 24 commemorations. That's a very important point: the man who was to become the first President of Armenia had an encounter with politics, a clash with the Soviet power, while still a student, around 1965-1966.*

RG: I have a family story about that date, 1965. My grandfather was a Yerevan police chief back then and he was coordinating the police work when the demonstrators were gathering at Opera Square. He told me how the police officers—Armenians— didn't know what to do. On one hand, they served the Soviet state and they were required to stop what was happening, but on the other hand, they were Armenians and they wanted the Genocide to be recognized. He also told me how the Moscow Soviet rulers didn't trust the Armenian policemen. They appointed a Russian high-ranking policeman to come in and coordinate everything.

GTG: Yes, I also have a family story about my father's friend, who was in charge of the official events for the commemoration at the Opera building. When he saw that the population broke the doors and was moving into the Opera building, he panicked. He was so agitated that he told his aides to take the *brandspoits*… Water cannons were not yet known in the Soviet Union at that time, but he somehow invented them. They had fire hoses linked to the water pipe system on the walls of the theater, from which, if needed, pressurized water could flow. He said: *Direct this water against the population*. Afterwards, until the end of his life, he regretted that action.

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[60] Please see the Facebook group "Armenia Total(itar)is," which reflects the Great Terror and related issues in Armenia, in the Soviet Union, as well as the current attempts to rehabilitate Stalinism and Stalinists: https://web.facebook.com/groups/402824203170801/

## Chapter 3. The Dual Reality

Our context is major events, major occurrences that took place in recent times. We started these talks in late autumn 2016 and major events continued to play out around the world. In Armenia, a major news item is that a new political party is being founded. I don't know if it will become a serious contender and be officially registered or not.

It is a party led by a famous artist, a clown, and its name, *pup* in Armenian, translates to *excrement* (or an even stronger word). They are trying to demonstrate that no existing party's platform has satisfied them. In the first week or so, they had, as they claim, about 2,000 people signed up through their Facebook page.

The second major news item that I want to mention is a speech made by the first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, at the gathering of his Armenian National Congress party. At the event, he reiterated in a very forceful way the need to make peace with Azerbaijan over the Karabakh conflict, the need to compromise. He declared that his party will be campaigning in the next election with the slogan of peace, which will be a novelty in Armenian politics.

Of course, it generated a lot of discussion, both for and against. But when Ter-Petrosyan speaks, it is significant. He has a certain rhetorical style that is intellectually much stronger than any other politician's. I suggest that those interested in the Armenian political mindset should study the language and style of Ter-Petrosyan's speeches,[61] irrespective of whether they agree or disagree with what he says. Try to understand and interpret why he said such a thing at this point in time. Usually, you should not take his arguments at face value. It is politics; there is, probably, a political necessity, from his perspective, attached to such arguments.

In fact, our office, Eurasia Partnership Foundation,[62] participated in a research done by International Alert[63] several years ago, in which Mikayel Hovhannisyan, who is sitting right here, studied Levon Ter-Petrosyan's style.

Mikayel Hovhannisyan (MH): It was about the image of external enemies and friends in the public speeches of Ter-Petrosyan during his 2008 election campaign.

GTG: The point is that it makes sense to study Ter-Petrosyan's language if we want to understand the twenty-five-or-so years of independence and political thought in Armenia.

The third major news item is that it is awfully cold outside. Because of the widespread poverty in Armenia, many are suffering from this cold, which is worse than usual for an Armenian winter. We usually hope that winters will be mild, but this winter has started with quite severe weather. We'll see how it goes.

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[61] President Levon Ter-Petrosyan's official website: http://levonpresident.am/?catID=20&contID=0
[62] Eurasia Partnership Foundation official website: http://www.epfarmenia.am/en/
[63] The Use of Images of the External Friend and Enemy in Armenian Domestic Political Discourse: An Analysis of Speeches given by the First President Levon Ter-Petrosyan (September 2007 - May 2011), Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Myths and Conflict in South Caucasus, Volume 2, International Alert, 2013, 58-76 pages: http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/Caucasus_2013_Myths_Vol2_EN.pdf

The last chapter ended by discussing 1965. This chapter will review our 20th century timeline to refresh the concepts discussed. We didn't finish everything I wanted to say about Soviet Armenian history in the first half of the 20th century.

Let's present a general timeline. Obviously, it leaves out a lot but covers the basics.

1915: the Genocide

1917: the Bolshevik Revolution

1918: the first independent Armenian republic

1920: the end of the First Republic and the Sovietization of Armenia

1937: This is an interesting and special date that is etched in the minds of people like me, or people like my parents. We talked about that and will talk some more.

Then comes what is known in the West as the Second World War (1939-1945). In the Soviet Union, it was called the Great Patriotic War and it had a different timeframe: 1941-1945. This is the way this war was referred to in the Soviet Union and is still referred to in the former Soviet Union. It's the part of the Second World War visible from the Soviet perspective. The role of the USSR and Stalin's government in the 1939 partition of Central Europe and the Baltics, the USSR-Finland war[64] were totally absent from our narrative about the war. Many other elements of history were also absent, of course.

Then 1948: This is the year when the repatriates, who began arriving in 1944, and whose number was approaching 100,000, started to be exiled to Siberia. Only about a fifth of them were exiled; however, this was a deep shock from which their entire community never recovered. They never 'forgave' the Soviet system. The ones exiled were exiled summarily—men as 'family heads' and the rest of the family as 'family members.'

We talked about that. I mentioned that there is very little research into these events, apart from Hranush Kharatyan's and the Institute of Ethnography's work. There are also Tigran Paskevichyan's films[65] available, which I highly recommend. It is interesting that his daughter is here with us—Nane is helping us with the camera work.

1953: the year of Stalin's death.

1956: the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, when Khrushchev opened up the discourse about Stalin's crimes and the crimes during Stalin's reign.

1964: Khrushchev was ousted.

We arrived at 1965.

1966: Anton Kochinyan becomes the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia (the leader of the republic).

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[64] USSR-Finland war, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_War
[65] Museum of Repatriation: http://hayrenadardz.org/hy/

Some of these dates are very noteworthy. As I have already said, there was good news and bad news. There were positive events and negative events. The negative event was the uprooting of the population, and the positive event was the building of the Republic. The negative events were the Stalinist times and the repressions against the people. Among these negative developments, as a part of a culture of repression, we discussed the word *donos*. It is a funny word. It's not really translatable into English. We translated it as 'false allegations.' You can say this is 'denunciation,' but it isn't. Denunciation is a public allegation, and *donos* is a false and very often anonymous allegation. In Armenian, you often refer to the same meaning by saying *tught grel* (թուղթ գրել), *to write a paper, to write a message*, i.e. to write a notice to the KGB, to the security services, about the fact that somebody is behaving, supposedly, against Soviet rules. And that was how this culture emerged. Today, it is called *gortz tal* (գործ տալ), *to give business*. There is a widespread discussion whether or not one should let the authorities or anybody else know when they see something wrong, so as not to be considered a *snitch, gortz tvogh* (գործ տվող). Again, this is an expression of *blatnoy* culture, which permeates this society even today.

In fact, the Soviet system was repressive throughout its existence, but there were some historical points that I will emphasize. I will not discuss the beginning of the century. That is a topic for another time.

Let us start from 1933. 1933 is notorious in many ways. First of all Kirov—one of the Soviet leaders—was killed in Leningrad (formerly, and now once again, St. Petersburg). This gave Stalin a good pretext to take purges to a new level. Secondly, early in 1934, the Union of Writers was constituted, which means that the remnants of freedom of speech came to an end. Thirdly, 1933 was the apex of the Holodomor,[66] of collectivization, of the time when many millions of peasants all over the Soviet Union, particularly in Ukraine, were either killed or exiled to Siberia, or died from hunger. Of course, it was not only this year, but it was over these years, around these years.

Repressions took place throughout this period but 1937 stands out. That was the year when political leaders were prosecuted: the friends of the powerful, those who belonged to the socialist ideology, and also cultural figures, military leaders, ideological figures, writers, artists, thinkers. Particularly significant figures were 'cleansed' in 1937-1938.

1937 registers in the memory of Armenia inhabitants more than many other years. When one says 1937, many people, especially old generation, still associate it with the height of Stalin's repressions.[67] Though, in terms of quantity, it may not be the year where the most repressions took place.

It was people who could speak and who could think and who could express themselves that were prosecuted over that year. You remember that, in the last chapter, we used three interrelated terms, which come from Johan Galtung: *anomie*, *anemie* and *atomie*. Today, I will be talking a lot about these terms. How do they express themselves in Soviet Armenian history?

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[66] Holodomor, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodomor
[67] See my short story "1937" in Armenian: http://kayaranmag.am/2019/11/20/երեսունյոթ/

One of the reasons why 1937 is so notable is because *anomie*, the incapacity to talk about things, to think, to express oneself, to refer to the past, to explain the past, happened after 1937, when great cultural figures, writers, artists, etc. were prosecuted, and the rest of society fell silent in terror. From this time onwards, there was much less opportunity and capacity to mention the past, to express oneself freely and sincerely, and therefore also to understand what's happening with the society.

The years of the war are not reevaluated in Armenia, they are not evaluated from today's perspective. They have been studied within the confines of USSR socialist ideology but not properly reevaluated afterwards. Of course, there is still a lot to analyze while reevaluating these years. For instance, the large volumes of Hovhannes Baghramyan's[68] memoirs, one of the major marshals of the Soviet Union, have not been critically evaluated, as far as I know. They have not been analyzed as to what is true in them, what is false, and what really happened. Are they really worth studying, to analyze the historical material, to study what happened and what did not?

The following are some of the important points that are left out of the scope of the traditional study of the Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War with respect to Armenia:

- the partition of Central Europe between the USSR and Germany;
- the role of the Socialist International and Stalin in preparing the ground for Hitler's rise to power;
- the Hitler-Stalin pact (the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact) and the secret protocols;
- the USSR's involvement in the Finland-USSR war;
- the effect that Stalin's purges of the military had on the preparedness for war;
- the reasons why the USSR was so poorly prepared at the beginning;
- the cruel way the Soviet soldiers were sent to their deaths;
- the Leningrad blockade with all its horrors (It was avoidable for people there to be left so hungry so as to resume to cannibalism. It was not a physical blockade. The 'Life Road' was always functioning. It was more a political decision.);
- when the USSR entered Europe, its soldiers started a raping campaign all over Europe;
- the Western decision to return Soviet POWs back to Stalin, i.e. to send them to camps;
- the persecution of Jews and some other nationalities by the peoples of the Soviet Union, who supposedly should have been opposed to the anti-human Nazi ideology (this is a taboo topic).

In all this, the role of the Armenians is also not well-studied, with a couple exceptions: Njdeh's unsuccessful attempts to use Hitler to fight Soviet rule over Armenia, and the fact that many Armenians, particularly from the North Caucasus and Crimea, preferred Nazi rule and left the USSR with the retreating Nazis. One of Paskevichyan's films tells about this chapter in our history. Of course, Armenians were not alone in this. Many groups of the populations in the conquered territories were either forced to collaborate with the occupying Nazis or did it consciously, out of hate for the Soviet system. As a result, many guerilla fighters ('partisans') and civilians that survived the Nazi invasion would later become victims of Soviet persecution, as was also the case with Soviet POWs, who were returned to the USSR by the Allies.

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[68] Ivan Bagramyan, a Soviet military commander and Marshal of the Soviet Union of Armenian origin, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Bagramyan

If we take all these difficult points into account, a totally different image of the war will emerge, compared to the one that the USSR—and many of its allies, in fact—presented for many years.

Our aim is to find correct terms and concepts to explain the situation in the Armenia of the 20th century. We want to build a complex multidimensional model, even if it lacks some detail.

It is usually easier to diagnose the illness than to suggest how to cure it or predict how the patient's condition will evolve. We have to find some ground for us to be able to explain what is going on today in Armenia, based on our understanding of the last century. We are trying to find the points, from which we start looking at the events of today and the future. For that, we need certain terms and concepts, which are about the past of Soviet Armenia and which have explanatory power. These are concepts that we can use to explain things that are of consequence for today. Terms like Gulag, *blatnoy, donos,* and *anemie* are sometimes called *thick variables*.

Another *thick variable* that I want to add here is *negative selection* (first introduced by Pitirim Sorokin[69]). In this context, this is again referring to the *cultural genocide*, so to speak, that took place during Stalin's rule. There are two major elements that we have to focus our attention on, if we want to understand Stalin's period. One is *donos*, and we'll talk about that a bit more, and the other one is *negative selection*, or rather the fight between cultural build-up and the negative selection. Armenia's 20th century was a time of struggle. That fight continues to this day. That is what should be understood: it was and is a fight, yesterday and today.

What is this fight about and who is this fight between? It's between two major forces: the constructive forces, which built the very first Academy of Sciences, the University (set up during the First Republic), and established the entire centralized culture of the Soviet Armenia, which was a centralized culture for the entire Armenian nation, with a lot of deficiencies, of course. But that was that: the re-establishment of the cultural fabric after the Genocide, after the attempt to have an independent state, after losing that opportunity and having this quasi-independent state. A lot of building was taking place here.

And against that background, a lot of destruction was taking place here via negative selection, by removing people who could think, who could express themselves, who are creative. They were either killed, exiled, or repressed into silence. As a result, the intellectual and creative capacities of the next generations went into a downward spiral, and that is what negative selection is: **with every new generation, survivors were often people who either served the authorities or hid from active participation in life; as a result, society gradually lost its immunity against the infections of the *blatnoy* culture and corruption.**

These were the two major influences: *cultural construction* and *destruction*. We should understand the significance of both because cultural construction was extremely important. Armenia had never had an Academy of Sciences, it had never had serious science in the Ottoman Empire. As we know, in Ottoman Armenia, there was no higher educational institution founded by Armenians. Suddenly, we had a university and we had branches of the university, from which other higher education institutions were being born. We had, as I mentioned already, the Union of Writers. We built the Opera House. The Union of Writers was not the only union of cultural

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[69] Pitrim Sorokin, a Russian-born American sociologist and political activist, who contributed to the social cycle theory, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pitirim_Sorokin

creators; there was a Union of Artists, Union of Composers, etc. Every cultural group was given a chance to join in a union. And while these were ways for the Stalinist power to censor unsanctioned creative expression, at the same time, they were opportunities for people to become artists, painters, musicians, composers, writers, etc. and receive state support while they were doing their creative work. It was a very controversial process. Still, this movement was more or less significant, both for giving a chance to artists to survive but also for prosecuting those who were considered dangerous.

I have a broadcast, which I recommend, in Armenian about *negative selection,*[70] particularly referring to the Russian culture. It is transcribed as well.

Now, about *donos*. As you remember, we were saying last time that the positive developments in Soviet times were ways of rebuilding the fabric of society, weaving the fabric of society. But the way to atomize society, the way to destroy that fabric, to atomize people was the culture of *donos*.

Where does it come from, this culture of false allegations? There are several pieces of research on that concerning the entire Soviet and Russian history. It comes, in particular, from a certain cultural inclination because, as you know, Russian peasants were not free. They had slave (*serf*) status until 1861. So, that's one reason, that's one source according to the scholars. Peasants did not learn to behave as independent persons, particularly because they had almost no property. They had a habit of reporting their concerns to the 'master' to take care of them. This resulted in a particular type of behavior based on jealousy. If somebody had 'more' than another, this somebody could be reported and punished, so that whatever they had was distributed to others.

The other, related source is the Bolshevik ideology and socialist values. Socialism, collectivism and transparency were some of the major issues that were being discussed at that time, not only in Russia, but in the entire Christian civilization remit. They are still discussed now, by the way, particularly the issues of transparency versus privacy. Is *WikiLeaks* legitimate or not? But in Russia, at that time, these discussions were very consequential. Starting from abandoning the 'traditional family' in favor of 'family communes' and ending with Eisenstein's[71] idea of a 'glass house,' a 'panopticon,'[72] where nobody could hide anything from others. These ideas, coupled with technological advances, generated experiments that, as some scholars argue, resulted in the concentration camps both in the USSR, the Gulag, as well as in Nazi Germany.

There may be other sources of this intolerance towards the private rights of individuals. Armenians, after the Genocide, in a desolate condition, easily adapted to that culture. Perhaps, already traumatized and atomized because of the Genocide and all the evils that befell them in the beginning of the 20th century, they didn't have enough capacity to fully resist the Soviet practices. Perhaps they resisted but only partially. Again, it depends on how you measure and compare.

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[70] Բացասական ընտրություն և մշակույթ (Jam Session 8), (Negative Selection and Culture, Jam Session 8), EPF Armenia, 2016: https://epfarmenia.am/hy/video/Negative-Selection-and-culture-Gevorg-Ter-Gabrielyan
[71] Sergei Eisenstein, a Soviet film director and film theorist, a pioneer in the theory and practice of montage, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergei_Eisenstein
[72] Eisenstein, the Glass House and the Spherical Book, From the Comedy of the Eye to a Drama of Enlightenment, Oksana Bulgakowa, Rouge.com: http://www.rouge.com.au/7/eisenstein.html

But there is one particularly interesting element in all this: the case of *self-donos,* so to speak. This is the Soviet way of twisting people's wills and turning them into masochistic, self-accusing, self-flagellating figures, which is a very interesting phenomenon, not studied enough even when it comes to Russia and the Soviet Union. It is studied, perhaps, by Orwell in *1984*[73] and in other such works, but still insufficiently. Perhaps it is also linked to the Christian culture of repentance, but in the USSR it became a culture of *false repentance*.

What I can recommend to those who want to understand this culture is to read the transcripts,[74] the publications of the interrogations of people who were arrested at that time. Transcripts of many court sessions are available: the sessions were totally staged, but the people who were accused there were making speeches accepting their guilt. There are also transcripts of interrogations in the KGB, which was, at different times, called the *VeCheKa,* then *NKVD,* etc.

This is very interesting material also linguistically. The *donos* is a letter in which somebody is writing about somebody else, usually anonymously, accusing them of not adhering to Soviet ideology. The accused would be arrested and then publicly agree with the accusations. They would say: '*I was a spy of Japan and Turkey. I was planning to kill Aghasi Khanjyan*,' or something like that. (Aghasi Khanjyan[75] was killed. The official news was that he committed suicide, but in fact he was killed in 1935.) This acceptance of (nonexistent) guilt, only due to torture, was a very interesting element of the Soviet system. And, of course, those who were arrested, because of torture, implicated many others as well.

An important element of the situation to understand and remember is that this *donos* was often given for mercantile reasons. Somebody needed an apartment. He would write a *donos* about his friend, who owned an apartment. The friend would be removed with his entire family, and the author of the *donos* would have a chance to live, with his family, in that apartment. I know such apartments, where the entire library, fortepiano and everything else was preserved the way the previous owner had it, but it was transferred to the family that betrayed the previous owners and 'sold' them to the KGB.

The population in Armenia was very poor, and using the *donos* system to get somebody's house or belongings was, unfortunately, quite widespread. I have used that motive in my 'written film' *The Godless Movie Theater*.[76] Vardan Harutyunyan,[77] Hranush Kharatyan and other researchers who focus on those times have also identified several cases of this motive.

RG: It's important to talk about the ways the Soviet Union was encouraging people to write *donoses*. One of the reasons was the so-called *kommunalkas*: it was an apartment where a family was squeezed into each room. It was due to a housing shortage, but it was also a way for the regime to oversee and control what people were thinking, because it was easy for the KGB to

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[73] Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell, 1949, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen_Eighty-Four
[74] Please see one example: a former boss of NKVD, an author of purges, is himself subjected to the wide-spread practice of self-denunciation after arrest: https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furrg/research/ezhovinterrogs.html
There are many more such examples in Russian, though perhaps not often translated into English.
[75] Aghasi Khanjian, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aghasi_Khanjian
[76] The Godless Movie Theater, Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan, 2018: https://www.gtergab.com/en/news/prose/the-godless-movie-theater-collection/172/
[77] Vardan Harutyunyan, Armenian human rights activist, publicist, USSR political prisoner, Wikipedia: https://bit.ly/31Lzu2s

have 'ears' and control what people were talking about and thinking in such overcrowded apartments.

GTG: Concentration of people was one way of increasing control. There was a housing crisis, and any family would want to expand the number of cubic meters that they inhabited. So they would write a *donos* about their neighbors. We should understand that any place where people are concentrated—the Gulag camps themselves, the military garrisons, the factories—would limit people's privacy, limit their opportunity to be free. You couldn't make a joke—never mind political jokes, not even a simple innocent joke—because it could be interpreted politically. Reading in between of lines, reading more than was actually said was a major feature of those times; conspiracy theories[78] flourished.

It was a pretty nasty time. Of course, greed was not the only reason. The culture of bolshevism and Gulagism was the primary reason—the social culture that was being imposed from above. Children would learn in schools: *this is the way the socialist system works*. 'We are surrounded by enemies, and if you know somebody suspicious, including your mom or dad, it is your duty to report them to the authorities, not to become an accomplice.'

Among the triggers were greed, but also torture and blackmail; people would be threatened with harm to their family if they did not write a *donos*. There were all possible combinations of triggers: somebody would write a *donos* about their friend because they suspected that their friend might otherwise write one about them; or they knew that the friend had already written it. A woman could covet the child of another woman, so she would report her and get custody of the child. This is Svetlana Alexievich's[79] example. (See below for more detail.)

This is something that is very interesting to study. There is a huge need to study the Stalin period and the social psychology of the *donos* and the Gulag culture.

One more important and interesting example is the practice of special linguistic and style formulations during harsh interrogations, the linguistic style of prosecution bureaucracy. I hope interrogations are a bit less threatening today, but a similar style is still practiced in post-Soviet Armenia and the entire post-Soviet space. I have studied some of these examples in my book '*Hrant,*'[80] particularly talking about the case of author Arkadiy Belinkov,[81] whose interrogation transcript is freely available online[82].

Imagine a scene from an interrogation in the 1930s:

- Did you have any anti-Soviet conversations with the enemy of the people Ivan Ivanovich[83]?

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[78] Conspiracy Theory part 1. Jam Session 21 (in Armenian): https://epfarmenia.am/video/conspiracy-theory-part-1, as well as Conspiracy Theory Part 2. Jam Session 23 (in Armenian): https://epfarmenia.am/video/conspiracy-theory-part-2, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2017

[79] Svetlana Alexievich, a Belarusian investigative journalist, essayist and oral historian. She was awarded the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature "for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time." Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svetlana_Alexievich

[80] Hrant, Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan, 2018: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/42441099

[81] Arkadiy Belinkov, a Russian writer and literary critic: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arkadiy_Belinkov

[82] See the transcript here: https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?t=page&num=7577

[83] Ivan Ivanovich is an equivalent to John Doe.

- No I didn't.

- But you met him?

- I only met him once in passing, for no more than 5 minutes, at a friend's house. We were barely introduced.

This is reflected in the official transcript as follows:

- Did you have any anti-Soviet conversations with the enemy of the people Ivan Ivanovich?

- I did not have any anti-Soviet conversations with the enemy of the people Ivan Ivanovich, because there was no time for it when we met.'

Using a linguistic twist, the following aims are achieved: (a) now not only the interrogator, but also the accused implicitly confirms that Ivan Ivanovich is an enemy of the people (the accused has signed the interrogation protocol); (b) from the text transcribed it also follows that the accused has nothing against having anti-Soviet conversations, if only there were enough time, and probably he had several of them on other occasions and with other people.

After having to sign such a paper, many people would have no choice but to accept their 'guilt.'

Moreover, if the person was indeed critical of the Soviet system (and a large proportion of the population, if not the overwhelming majority was, in 1930s), often he or she could not help but feel very divided deep inside. How can one defend his or her innocence if they indeed see the absurdity of the system? It made the interrogator and the repressive machine, in a strange way, 'just' in identifying and fighting the 'enemies of the system,' even in the eyes of the innocent victims themselves. It reminds us of the Spanish Inquisition.

What Orwell and other dystopians presented in their writings, fell short of people's real-life experiences.

But let's now jump over this period. I already said in the previous chapter that, after Stalin's death, the killings stopped.

What flourished instead was stealing.

*Thou shall not kill, thou shall not steal*. So, if killing stops, then stealing flourishes in the absence of a society that upholds ethics. The Soviet system destroyed the ethical norms of the previous eras. While many people still followed them, many others did not have that guidance anymore. They did not have the basic moral impediments indoctrinated in them either by the family, the school, or religion.

Of course, the school would not directly and formally teach *thou shall steal*. But the Soviet system was so unique that it allowed people to overcome an aversion to thievery, even if it was taught in one's upbringing. While stealing from a private person could still be considered ethically wrong (except for the *blatnoy* thieves who were brewed within the Gulag system and had their origins in the population's overall poverty), *stealing from the state was considered stealing from nobody; public ownership was perceived as nobody's ownership.*

Perhaps it would have been different if public ownership in the Soviet Union was combined with other tenets of socialism, i.e. fairness, social security, etc. However, on one hand, people would see the totally unfair system of the Gulag in contrast to the rulers, or *nomenklatura*[84]—people with state positions, having enormous unchecked power—and on the other hand, they would hear the preaching about equality and fairness and public ownership. The result of this cognitive dissonance was that stealing from the state was not considered morally wrong.

There are two opinions on this issue among scholars. According to the first opinion, there was less corruption during the Stalinist era because people were afraid of repressions, which would crush them if they were caught stealing. According to the other opinion, corruption was just as rampant under Stalin's rule, with no fundamental change after his death.

The easing of worry about being killed was a factor that made corruption rampant. However, indeed, corruption was something upon which Stalin's Gulag system was also built.

There is a very famous word '*tufta*'[85] (imitation), which has the same root as the word '*tuf*', the stone used widely in buildings throughout Armenia. The root here denotes something which is soft and thick. '*Tufta*' comes from '*tafta*,' a kind of thick cloth that the tailors would put on the surface of the Singer sewing machine. *Tufta* would be placed on the hard metallic surface in order to save the needle from falling on a hard surface when there was no cloth to be sewn, but the needle still moved.

When there was no cloth to be sewn and the needle moved idly, it was referred to by the tailors from Odessa as 'sewing the *tufta*.' This expression became a reference for *doing a meaningless job*, or *behaving as if working*. In English, perhaps the expressions 'kicking your heels' or 'twiddling your thumbs' are close to this meaning, if they mean not only wasting time and being lazy, but also behaving as if one works very hard and actively but in fact doing nothing.

When the tailors from Odessa were sent to the first stations of the Gulag, particularly to Solovki, an island, in the early 1920s, they used the word *tufta* to denote one of the safest modes of behavior in the Gulag: behave as if one is working hard, but in fact only pretend; build a façade or a Potemkin village[86] instead of the real building.

Thus, *tufta* has deep roots in Russian and Soviet history. This is the key to understanding the essence of corruption in the Soviet Union. If one worked hard and tried to satisfy the official requirements, it was much more likely that one would not survive: it was impossible to meet the requirements. Therefore, most of the people had to do *tufta*. The bosses had to condone this practice for two reasons: first, they used the slave labor for building their dachas instead of implementing the state plan imposed from above; secondly, if they reported that the plan was not delivered, they themselves would suffer.

There was an unspoken consensus built that 'we (the *zeks* – the camp prisoners) pretend to work; and you (the *vertukhay*s – the guards) pretend that the work is done.' There was a specific kind of *blatnoy esprit de corps*, круговая порука in Russian, established which was the engine that

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[84] *Nomenklatura*, a category of people within the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries who held various key administrative positions in the bureaucracy. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomenklatura
[85] See: https://i-fakt.ru/chto-takoe-tufta/
[86] Potemkin village, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potemkin_village

built a low quality empire. That is what the Soviet Union became and what eventually led to its collapse. There is a truth that has been known for millennia: slave labor is not efficient; and *tufta* was a very clear expression of that. When the era of Stalin's Gulag ended and Khrushchev began the destalinization process, the culture of *tufta* remained. People would steal whatever they could from the state: free time, materials, quality of work, etc. This tradition survived the Soviet Union and is present in Armenia today.

Of course, there was some quality construction also done in the Soviet era. But as symbols of *tufta* I will present two cases: one at the beginning of the era and another one at the end of it. One of the first major Gulag construction projects was *Belomorkanal,*[87] a water channel. When it was first built by the *zek*s, it became clear that it was useless because it was so shallow that sea boats could not pass through it.

The next example is the buildings in Leninakan (Gyumri), which collapsed in the 1988 earthquake. They were not built according to the proper seismic specifications, and the cement intended for their walls was stolen by the builders, some of whom later received apartments in these very buildings and perished during the earthquake. Others built luxurious *dachas* elsewhere and were never held accountable.

If *Belomorkanal* was being built by slaves, the high-rises in Leninakan and Spitak were being built by relatively free and happy workers, engineers, architects, and party leaders of the late Soviet Union, who, unfortunately, lacked the moral constraint and foresight to build proper buildings. Instead, they stole whatever they could from these buildings. As a result, 25,000 people died. I wonder if those who were directly guilty for that tragedy took part in rescuing the victims. I wonder if they are still in Armenia or left long ago for Los Angeles or Russia. I wonder if you, the reader, may have encountered any of these folks in your lives.

I blame them but I also realize that the overwhelming social culture at the time was: *steal from the state because it does not belong to anybody*. The hatred and contempt that the population felt towards that state contributed to the loss of ethical and moral perspective, as well as the capacity to forecast the disaster that could follow from such a void in a society's values.

Thus, the fear of being killed was gone, and the *tufta* culture became even more widespread after Stalin's death. People would think: *I will get something now, either create my small business illegally, or steal something from the state. If I suffer, I will not be killed, I'll just go to prison, survive there, because I am rich, and come back eventually. But my family will be better off forever.*

For a while now, I have been building a thesaurus around the concept of *tufta*. Here is what I have come up with: *fuflo*, *khaltura*, in Armenian they also say '*farsh*' (meaning '*falsh,*' from *falsehood*, *falsity*), *fndkh* (a special type of nut, which, if broken, is often empty), *imitation*, *camouflage*, *adaptation*, *simulacrum,*[88] *fake*, *façade*, *Potemkin's village*. You can find the meanings of most of these concepts in dictionaries. Some of these words seem far away from *tufta*, however, they are all connected to lies, falsehood, and lack of truth for whatever reason. I

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[87] White Sea–Baltic Canal, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Sea%E2%80%93Baltic_Canal
[88] Simulacrum, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simulacrum

am sure there are other related concepts as well. Please find some and send them to us at info-epf@epfound.am.

The *tsekhavism*[89] movement was also about this. Private ownership of the *means of production*[90] was prohibited in the Soviet Union. This was a major tenet of the socialist ideology. Therefore, any private enterprise based on using other's work and/or machinery was illegal. However, a) this was against human nature, human beings are entrepreneurial and will expand their enterprise to further accumulate resources, given the opportunity; and b) there was no respect towards the state and its laws, as I explained above, due to their hypocrisy and the gap between what socialism preached and the Soviet reality.

Illegal production started all over the Soviet Union, including in Armenia. So, I am bringing back this word *tsekhavism*. And now, what is the *value target* of a *tsekhavik*? He was usually a good businessman, who would marry an educated wife with higher education, often working in the Academy of Sciences or a similar institution. He is less educated, but that's not the point; he is well-adapted to the Soviet reality, so he has adopted this thief language that we were talking about last time, the *blatnoy* language. But his value target is *I am working for my family and doing my business, and I don't give a damn about my state, the larger society, the future, and power.* These concepts are interrelated because, in the socialist ideology, the state and power were one and the same thing. They were alienated from the population and they were speaking in the name of society.

In a way, it was a clash of values. It was the alienation of this tripartite concept—state, power, and society—from the people. And not only was the *tsekhavik* building *the second reality, the second market, the black market*, not only were the people exchanging jokes and criticisms about Soviet power (now that the Stalin era was gone), but even an ordinary person wouldn't mind stealing from the state/society/power because they wouldn't see this triad as relating to their own life in any way. To the contrary: their own life was about them personally or their immediate family, full stop.

*Alienation* is another of the terms, of the thick variables that we should use to understand the Soviet system. By the way, as far as I understand, philosophically it dates back to Karl Marx's teaching about the *proletariat* that is *alienated from the means of production*. But we can have various types of alienation. What was taking place in the Soviet Union and in Soviet Armenia was the alienation of people, and not just ordinary people. You may be inside the state power system, a representative of the state, but at the same time you are still an outsider, full of cynicism towards that foreign state, which says one thing and does the opposite. So, it was alienation which was taking place in the minds of people. So, we can speak about something, the worst type of which is eventually *schizophrenia*. We can speak about some degrees of alienation: *alienation, cognitive dissonance* and eventually it leads to—if it becomes an illness, if it becomes totally irrational—it is actually *social schizophrenia: living with one official ideology, but according to another set of values, behavioral patterns and adaptation rules*.

MH: One of the basic factors that had influenced these processes was the liquidation of private property. People have been connected to this *dualistic situation, the existence of two parallel*

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[89] See Chapter 2. Uprooting and rooting.
[90] Means of production, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Means_of_production

*realities*[91] through the fact that officially people were not allowed to have any property, which meant that all the property they could have was illegal or was not their own. So, the further the Soviet Union developed, the wider the gap between these two realities increased. This led again to increasing the gap between the state, power, society and the people. So, this division and alienation, because of the liquidation of the concept of private property, was essentially characterizing both parts of the Soviet history as you have described here: the 'killing period,' as well as 'the stealing period.' It was increasing over time, obviously. At first there were people who had something and people who had nothing, but eventually, all of them became people who had nothing, because during this transition, the Revolution of 1917 and afterwards, those who had nothing started to kill those who had something.

But I wanted to add to this timeline quite an interesting and important period, which is the NEP[92] 'New Economic Policy' (Новая экономическая политика) period (approx. 1921-1927). It was, on one hand, an attempt to find a way out from the extremely difficult economic and social situation by allowing some types of private ownership; but, on the other hand, it resulted in the further identification of potential targets to be killed, deported, etc., starting the process of *negative selection*: removing active and visible, entrepreneurial individuals. This is another example of dualism, which characterized the Soviet system, the essence of which was the gap between human nature and an inhumane power system.

GTG: We think we know something about the Soviet Union. So everybody understands that it's quite a horrible power system. But we often don't know or we forget to mention some thick variables, which constituted that system. There was this prohibition of property. If we take the stereotype of Armenian national psychology, we can say that Armenians are very much against that. They don't like it. As opposed to Russians, who, as serfs, didn't own property until 1861, Armenians have a special attitude towards ownership and property. Removing the right to have any property was, of course, one of the building blocks of this socialist Soviet system, which resulted in that entire situation. You used the word *dualism,* which I wanted to mention, because *schizophrenia* is too strong a word, but on the way to schizophrenia one experiences *dualism*. And one facet of *dualism* is referred to in many studies as the *second society, black market, the second reality,* the entire complex of situations that we sometimes, in Armenian, refer to as *a system of unwritten rules, relations, institutions* (չգրված օրենքներ, կանոններ և այլն). And, of course, this system is extremely hypocritical. The West is also hypocritical, but there are differences between, say, the famous 'British hypocrisy' and Soviet hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy usually means the following: you say something, which means one thing on the surface and a different thing at the subtext level.

In Britain, for instance, the meaning of jokes or dialogue expressions is often based on the effect that the subtext meaning is the opposite of what is said. If somebody says 'it was my mistake' often they mean it was *your* mistake. So they mean something else, the opposite of what they

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[91] Иосиф Бродский: "Сталинизм - это прежде всего система мышления и только потом технология власти" (article in Russian entitled "Joseph Brodsky: 'Stalinism is first of all, a system of thinking and only then a technology of power'): https://philologist.livejournal.com/8623161.html
[92] New Economic Policy (NEP), an economic policy of Soviet Russia proposed by Vladimir Lenin in 1921. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Economic_Policy

say. Both British humor and hypocrisy are based on that rule, and sometimes they are indistinguishable.

The Soviet type of hypocrisy is different; I called it *schizophrenia* because there was this gap between one context and the other context. The two discourses—what is said officially and what is said unofficially—had no relation to each other. A significant volume of words that were pronounced in official situations had almost no meaning from the perspective of unofficial discourse, the discourse of 'real life situations.' And 'real life' discourse was absent in the official discourse. If a trace of it appeared there, it was a scandal and grounds for political persecution of the person who said publicly and officially what *could not be said*, like in the fairy tale about the emperor with no clothes.

The British humor and hypocrisy are based on the tenets of 'leaving the barking dogs alone' and 'leaving the skeletons in the closet,' but in a way simultaneously letting people know that I know and you know that dogs are barking and the skeletons are in the closet.

The hypocrisy of the Soviet official discourse denied the existence of dogs and skeletons. The unofficial discourse, which reflected the 'reality' was marginalized. As a marginalized discourse, it brewed lower styles, such as the *blatnoy* language, jargon, vulgarity and profanity and the corresponding styles of behavior (violence, bullying, hazing) and social values.

One of the most interesting areas to study was the places where these two styles collided.

One case was the media language, which had to be fully official. People had to learn the special skill of *reading between the lines* to get at least some 'real' information. The Sovietologists in the United States, looking at the order in which the members of the Politburo appeared on the stage at Red Square during the May 9 parade, made guesses as to their relative importance and power. Similarly, the ordinary Soviet newspaper reader was looking for almost invisible signs in between the lines to collect at least some information about the 'real' news.

An interesting case was when the official discourse became interwoven with the 'real' one. For instance, when the Politburo was discussing the need to intervene[93] in Afghanistan, the following type of text could appear (These are my words, to illustrate the point, but such examples are numerous in existing texts):

*The Soviet Union needs to keep Afghanistan under its influence. The entire Soviet population requires us to come to the help of their Afghan brethren.*

The first phrase is totally legitimate in that it reflects the 'reality.' From a geopolitical perspective, it is very understandable, however fair or unfair, that the USSR was not interested in allowing the West to build its presence in Afghanistan. The second phrase, however, being interwoven with the first, presents the specific Soviet blend of official texts where the 'real' meaning evaporates, being buried under the Soviet 'newspeak.' Plus, it justifies ruthless intervention, ruthless not only towards Afghanistan, but also towards one's own soldiers, the young generation who will perish in a meaningless war, which is predestined to end in defeat.

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[93] "Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan," March 17, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 89, per. 25 dok.1, ll. 1, 12-25.
http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113260

The sophisticated Soviet reader, similar to what we did above, would do a careful semantic analysis of the press to distinguish between the 'ideology' and the 'reality' and to infer what is going to happen.

The other case was the language of literature or other art production. In fiction, writers struggled to formulate their prose in such a way so as to reflect the 'reality' but not raise the worries of the censors. Red flags could be anywhere, and they were often missed. In the fantastic novel *Inhabited Island*[94] of the Strugatsky brothers, written in 1967 and published a bit later, the hero from the communist future who lands on another planet originally had a Russian name; in order for the work to be published, his name had to be changed to a foreign name. For some reason, it became German: Maxim Kammerer. It is unclear what the worry of the censor was in this case. A Russian communist youth fighting for justice on another planet seems more appropriate than a German communist youth. Why would one be scared to keep the guy's Russian name?

This decision could even be interpreted as denigrating the Russian global leadership in communism and depriving Russia of its rightful pride in being the first to fight for justice everywhere, including other planets. However, that was the decision of the censor; he or she felt safer if the young hero of the communist future was German rather than Russian. Doesn't this show the censor's lack of belief in a communist future, at least for Russia? Or does this reflect his wise caution not to refer to anything Russian, just in case, in a supposedly 'non-political' adventure science fiction novel about the distant future?[95] *Бережёного бог бережёт*, as the Russian saying goes: 'God helps those who help themselves' (as a continuation to the Gulag adage on 'neutrality': not intervening in anything if one is not 'touched' personally).

At the same time, the fact that the country on the foreign planet in the same novel is ruled by a junta, which keeps the entire population under hypnosis—a clear reference to the Soviet system—passed somewhat unnoticed through the censors' scissors. How? Was it intentional? Was the censor some kind of a secret dissident, or did he just miss the parallel? Perhaps he didn't dare recognize it.

The sophisticated Soviet literature reader could build the following hypothetical—and conspiratorial—version: perhaps the Strugatsky brothers kidded the censor by accepting the name change, to have a reason to claim that he had already made his changes, in case the big issue—the similarity of the Saraksh state to the Soviet Union—was pointed out after the book was out. They could then blame the censor in case something went wrong.

Or perhaps the censor was secretly on 'our' side, and he or she invented a minor issue to address, so that they could afterwards report that censorship was used, to let the big issue, the similarity of the Saraksh system with the USSR, remain intact?

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[94] Prisoners of Power, also known as Inhabited Island, a science fiction novel written by Soviet authors Arkady and Boris Strugatsky in 1969. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoners_of_Power
[95] See a series of Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan's talks on the Strugatsky brothers at Boon TV (in Armenian): https://boon.am/category/գիտաֆանտաստիկ-ժանրի-գրականություն/

# Chapter 4. Cultural Trends

We are trying to establish a vocabulary of *thick variables*, background terms and concepts to better understand today's Armenia. We talked a lot about the repressive Stalinist years. We also spoke a lot about the Genocide as a factor that defined and shaped Soviet Armenian society. There was a big difference between the Genocide and the Stalinist genocide, which was another type of genocide, which befell over the entire Soviet Union and very significantly affected the Armenian nation. The Stalinist g enocide was more sophisticated. It is easy to present the Ottoman Genocide as a black and white picture with well-defined perpetrators and victims – Turks and Kurds on one side, Armenians and Greeks on the other.

Of course, the 1915 Genocide should also be studied from the perspective of which Armenians suffered from the Genocide. There were definitely many people who had committed many mistakes in their lives, who were not very nice people, etc. Many of them fought back. Many of them were ruthless to the enemy. It is a strange fact that they are all now sanctified[96] by the Armenian Apostolic Church. But I think that was the right thing to do.

But during the Stalinist genocide, one can notice this controversial pattern of *perpetrators becoming victims at the next stage, or the saviors of some of the survivors actually being the perpetrators of genocide over the others* (this, probably, can be found in the case of the 1915 Genocide too). There are so many stories about all these complications. I already referred to the story about neighbors who were living in a *kommunalka*, where every family had one room. One of the families was persecuted: the father was killed, the wife was sent to the camps, one of the two children was sent to an orphanage, and the other child, the daughter, was taken by the woman who lived in the neighboring room.

When the mother of this daughter returned from the camps after twenty years, she was extremely grateful to this neighbor of hers for having raised the girl properly. The girl remembered her mother and knew about her mother. After ten more years went by, when the Thaw started during Khrushchev's time, the mother learned that the person who wrote the *donos* had been that same neighbor woman. We have a lot of stories like that. One of the books by recent Nobel Prize laureate Svetlana Aleksievich[97] is about these kinds of stories.

I have also emphasized the *cultural construction* that was taking place during the entire Soviet period. Names like architect Alexander Tamanyan, political leader Alexander Myasnikyan (I will refer to that name again), and others are associated with the revival of the nation. There were many others: historians, linguists, etc. They mostly adhered to the Soviet ideology, at least seemingly, on the surface; if they deviated overtly, they would suffer. But they built the institutions which were later inherited by independent Armenia. These institutions might have been controversial, such as the Union of Writers, but the entire global Armenian nation would have much less capacity and much less reason to rely on a unified culture without them.

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[96] Armenian Genocide Victims Canonized By Church, Azatutyun Radio (Radio Liberty), April 24, 2015: https://www.azatutyun.am/a/26975019.html

Now, let us talk a bit about the Thaw and discuss the 1960s and 1970s. The Thaw was temporary, it was half-done, but it was still a significant positive development for the people who were alienated and atomized.

In a way, one of the ways to rebuild the fabric of the society was *tsekhavism*. I have already said that it was a very controversial development, but it had a positive side because it was about human entrepreneurship, courage, and finding a way out of the impasse.

When human values are so deeply violated, when there is a genocide upon a Genocide, when almost all orientation in the value system is lost, the simple and deep human urge towards enterprise, despite all its negative sides in the particular circumstances, can be seen a positive development.

But, on the other hand, *tsekhavism* encouraged, cherished, and built up the *clan culture*. Because *one would care about one's family, one's nearest and dearest, and steal from rest of the society*; because of *alienation from the state*, one didn't care about the larger society, one didn't believe in its value. The official ideological language made people totally aloof to the fact that, while the ideology was false, there should still be another value system which does apply to the entire society.

One of the sayings from this time is very telling. Two people are talking, and one of them says, 'You know this guy, Armen? He is a horrible person. He is a *tsekhavik.* He is very rich. He is just trampling over the destinies of the other people around him, who are extremely poor.' The other guy replies, 'But *for his own family, he is a great guy.*' That was the *tsekhavism* value system: *for his own family*.

When Stalin's 'deviations' from the 'proper,' 'ideal' socialist system were disclosed by Khrushchev and *destalinization* was started, the population of Soviet Armenia, especially the new generation tried to bring back the truncated memory of the nation. Stories about Stalin's times started to circulate, particularly since people were returning from the Gulag, even if these memories were only partly tolerated and after a short while silenced again. Stories about the pre-Stalin times started to come back, too. Great figures, such as Charents, re-entered the public domain. Some discourse on the Genocide of 1915 was allowed, perhaps partly because it was impossible to silence it fully, and partly, as I said earlier, because it became the Soviet policy: to keep the feeling of enmity of Armenians towards Turkey alive. In other words, to brew *regulated nationalism*.

If one wants to understand the *cultural revival* that started to take place in the late 1950s, a good summary can be found in the history of the development of Armenian cinema, the creation of the *Hayfilm* (Armenfilm) studio, the first and essentially only Armenian movie production company. Of course, it was state-owned, but it came into existence for Armenians. The films were made by Armenians, and it was situated in Armenia. Created by Hamo Beknazaryan back in the 1920s, *Hayfilm* revived in the 1950s and started producing important films.

*Guys from the Army Band*[98] was one of the first films made by Henrik Malyan, and *Saroyan Brothers*[99], an extremely important film, was one of the first films made by Frunzik Dovlatyan.

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[98] 'Guys from the Army Band', 1960 Armenian comedy film directed by Henrik Malyan and Henrik Margaryan. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guys_from_the_Army_Band

These two films symbolically delineated *destalinization* in Soviet Armenia, not because they allude to the purges, but because they discuss the pre-Stalin times, even if from a fully Soviet perspective.

One way of understanding the 20th century is to watch these films and many others which appeared in the 60s and 70s. I don't know if they exist with English subtitles, but they are available in Armenian and very often also dubbed in Russian. *Saroyan Brothers* is one of the most well-known films. It is about two brothers, one a Bolshevik and the other a Dashnak, and how they have to fight each other during Sovietization. Of course, it was all done from the Soviet perspective, but it was still a very important film because it raised several crucial issues that the Armenian nation had been thinking about since the early 20th century.

Below, I will enumerate, in no particular order, some of these issues that came to the forefront of public attention, stayed there, and are still not fully addressed. Because of the specific methodological difficulties of discussing history, my formulations necessarily will be simplified.

Were the Armenian Bolshevik-socialists honest believers in Marxist socialism, or were they just the cronies of Moscow, Lenin and Stalin, ready to do whatever they were asked (and therefore traitors to their nation)? Or, perhaps, they just believed in the need for Armenia to stick to Russia in order to survive, and since Russia became Bolshevik, they followed the suit.

Depending on the answer, the fact that many of them suffered during Stalin's purges will have different coloring: were they innocent victims or did they, in a strange twist of destiny, reap their just reward?

Of course, these were different people with various views and values. It is wrong to unite and summarize them all in one category; however, this issue has not been sufficiently addressed to this day.

Now, let us turn to the Dashnaktsutyun political party. Many of the fighters for the Armenian national cause at the beginning of the 20th century, particularly the *fidayeens* and the *khmbapet*s, were extremely ruthless, not only towards the 'enemy,' including its civilian population, but also towards one's 'own' nation. There is a multitude of stories available about the fact that the moment this or that *khmbapet* (a leader of a small voluntary militia unit) would get upset for this or that reason, they would leave the ranks with their unit and go pillaging villages, regardless whether these were Turkish, Kurdish, or Armenian villages. The question is: why would people who preached national values and fought for national unity be so ruthless? Was it because of the level of their education? Because of the morale of their society at the time? Or because, after they learned to kill and maim 'the enemy,' they lost their human qualities and became indifferent to who they inflicted violence upon? Or perhaps, having seen a lot of cruelty, they became indiscriminately cruel themselves?

Or was it some other reason? In general, this value of ruthlessness towards one's own tribe, that was so typical for the 20th century, where did it come from? Both Charents' *Khmbapet Shavarsh,*[100] written in the 1920s, as well as, in a very different way, Mahari's[101] *The Burning*

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[99] Saroyan Brothers, film directed by Frunze Dovlatyan in 1969. Wikipedia: https://hy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Սարոյան_եղբայրներ

[100] Poem by Yeghishe Charents, 1928. Wikipedia: https://hy.wikisource.org/wiki/Խմբապետ_Շավարշ

*Gardens* about Van, written in the mid-1960s, address these questions. But more such ingenious pieces are required to provide satisfactory answers.

This ruthlessness was then inherited 'forward' by the society and demonstrated itself on many occasions. From the very beginning of the Bolshevik era, during the repressions that Bolsheviks carried out against the Dashnaktsutyun and previous government members, this ruthlessness was visible in the relations deep inside communities, for instance, between the villagers. We have examples of it demonstrated in the literature of the time, as well as in the later period, e.g. in the writings of Hrant Matevosyan.[102] Moreover, writers such as Levon Khechoyan[103] and Mher Israyelyan[104] demonstrated the same ruthlessness as a basis of the relations in the Armenian village of much later eras, up until the 2000s. Wasn't that ruthlessness, the acceptance of violence[105], a reason that thep Stalinist culture was so easily adopted by the Armenian society? Was that ruthlessness due to the overwhelming cultural influence surrounding Armenians, or were its roots elsewhere?

There are many questions like these. Of course, there are also more 'publicist'-quality questions, such as '*Would it be possible to preserve independence, if, for instance, rulers of the independent Armenia at the time would be better prepared, more talented, or more united?'* But I think these questions are secondary to the ones mentioned above.

In the 1960s, several important films appeared, which were formulating questions that hadn't been publicly asked in Soviet Armenia ever before.

*We and Our Mountains,[106]* based on the novel by Hrant Matevosyan and made by Henrik Malyan, and *Triangle,[107]* based on the novel by Aghasi Ayvazyan and made by the same director, were major hits. The third hit *Hello, it's me![108]* was made by Frunzik Dovlatyan.

These are amazingly significant art productions for many reasons. *Triangle* is about five blacksmiths in Leninakan, one of whom was persecuted during Stalin's times. At the time when the film was being made, it was impossible to tell that story fully. Instead of telling the story of persecution, the film shows a man entering an airplane and disappearing forever. The other people are very sad about his departure. The main hero, the little boy, whose voice is telling the story, says merely that their friend had to go, and that he disappeared forever. While the Stalinist

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[101] Gurgen Mahari, an Armenian writer and poet, 1903-1969.Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurgen_Mahari

[102] See, for instance, his 'Boar', his last unfinished novel, published in 2017.

[103] Levon Khechoyan, an Armenian writer and novelist, 1955–2014. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levon_Khechoyan

[104] Mher Israyelyan, Armenian writer, Granish: https://granish.org/tag/մհեր-իսրայելյան/

[105] Culture of Violence Part 1. Interview (in Armenian): https://epfarmenia.am/hy/news/Culture-of-Violence-Interview-with-Gevorg-Ter-Gabrielyan, Culture of Violence Part 2. Interview (in Armenian): https://epfarmenia.am/hy/news/culture-of-violence-interview-with-gevorg-ter-gabrielyan-part-2, Culture of Violence Part 3. Interview (in Armenian) https://epfarmenia.am/hy/news/culture-of-violence-interview-with-gevorg-ter-gabrielyan-part-3 Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2017

[106] We and Our Mountains, a 1969 Armenian comedy film directed by Henrik Malyan. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_and_Our_Mountains

[107] Triangle, a 1967 Armenian drama film directed by Henrik Malyan. Wikipedia: https://hy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Եռանկյունի_(ֆիլմ)

[108] Hello, It's Me!, a 1966 Armenian drama film directed by Frunze Dovlatyan. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hello,_That%27s_Me!

persecutions were not directly referred to, the public understood what the film was about. Censorship still existed; it was a bit weaker than in the previous era, then it came back very significantly.

The 1960s were very much *a time of two discourses*. I already mentioned the *second society* or *the second reality*. I also discussed in the previous part this *subtext reality*, the reading of the subtext of the cultural products, of newspapers, of everything, trying to understand what the subtext tells us. It seems that this sophisticated habit should have been inculcated, indoctrinated in the minds of the post-Soviet Armenian population. But, very often, I see that it has disappeared. People have started to take texts simply for their face value. They have forgotten their survival skill of the Soviet era. As a result, they often fall prey to the *post-truth* reality, of *fake news* and on-line *trolls*.

In one sense, it is good that people take texts for their face values. This means people generally believe in the institutions and in the worldview where falsehoods and lies are exceptions rather than the rule. But, on the other hand, we are far from a situation where the world and texts around us can be fully trusted. Therefore, it is crucially important to be able to read the subtexts of the texts around us, including speeches, rhetoric, videos, and news. Today, this is referred to as *media literacy* or *critical thinking* capacity. EPF often touches on the need for critical thinking[109] and media literacy.

Many people are inclined to naively take all texts at face value. One could consider this just an expression of naiveté, but, on the other hand, this may be a benefit of being an independent country, where one does not have to hide one's opinions too often. People here think that what is said is what is meant, i.e. the rules of constructive communication are in force. It is fortunate that freedom of speech is still present in Armenia today [in 2016] to a certain degree, despite the fact that many major media TV stations are owned by either the corrupt government or people associated with the government. The Internet is still free and flourishing. There is a lot more freedom and direct expression here today than ever before in the history of Armenia. But there are also dangers in this, the most widespread of which is the danger of manipulative communication, like fake news.

The less recognized danger, in this environment of boundless freedom of speech, is that the cruel attitude to one another in society is often visible, perhaps as the remnants of the past that I was telling about. When people are free to express themselves, there is often a lack of the responsibility to avoid hurting others, even in the media or public communication, which otherwise seem to be of a *bona fide* nature. The partial restrictions on the freedom of expression and this lack of journalistic and media responsibility and ethics are related. Because the Serzh Sargsyan government is weak, as compared to the global technological infrastructure, and incapable of imposing full control over the freedom of expression, it and its cronies instead brew a trolling and *post-truth* media culture, trying to bury the truth in a mountain of information noise. The practice dilutes the quality of *bona fide* media as well, as it is employed in a new *war*

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[109] Please see video lectures on critical thinking and media literacy produced by EPF during 2015-2018 under the umbrella of EPF's signature product Conflict Transformation and Critical Thinking Schools (Arm): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3AlwL6vrqQ&list=PLze7VHI5SyYhtiU5MpEGRbtOfOSQ2Mbse. Please also see the manual on critical thinking prepared by EPF in 2019: Critical Thinking. Logical Fallacies and Misleading Rhetorical Tricks (Arm): https://epfarmenia.am/hy/document/Logical-Fallacies-and-Misleading-Rhetorical-Tricks-Critical-Thinking

*of words*. Similarly, the extreme nationalist discourse of Azerbaijan contributes to the hardening of the discourse in Armenia.

Back to 1960s. Important culture products of the past, which had been prohibited, started to come back, along with a new culture, new writers, and emerging artists. Among the new generation of writers, I have already mentioned Perch Zeytuntsyan, Hrant Matevosyan, and Aghasi Ayvazyan. There were many other important writers. It looks like the 1960s were full of culture, but at the same time this period was still somehow 'truncated.' Why is that?

*Hayfilm* was one of the poorer film companies in the Soviet Union, an obviously provincial company, essentially supported by the central state budget. It could produce only three or four full-feature films per year. If we take the thirty years of the 'Golden Age' of Hayfilm, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, we have a bit over 100 films. I am sure that the Georgian film company produced more because Georgia enjoyed a more privileged position in the USSR. But also, unfortunately, this inherited *donos* culture resulted in a fight against those who would aim to produce something beneficial. Attempts to produce something new were met with huge resistance by people who seemingly wanted to continue on functioning as in Stalin's times, either due to cowardice or for career reasons, for mercantile reasons or just because they lacked talent. There was a huge resistance by this legion because when *atomie*, *anomie* and *anemie* reign, when this isolation reigns, when these laws of the jungle reign for a while, it is very difficult to come back to normal, cultured relations. It is difficult to become a well-developed human being with a humane value system in such an environment. Therefore, there was this clash between people who wanted to make something interesting and people who would resist it.

I'll just give two examples. As you know, Sergey Parajanov was put in jail for *homosexualit*y. At that time, it was a criminal offense in the Soviet Union. But everybody understood that the real reason was his talent and his unruliness, the fact that he wouldn't succumb to the Soviet realities. It was a direct example of what I said before: of *negative selection*.

This globally significant ingenious film maker's talent is equal to that of Fellini, Antonioni, Bergman, and Kurosava, the four directors who wrote a letter of support for him, addressed to Brezhnev. The letter was left unanswered. When Parajanov was released from prison, he wanted to come back to Armenia. But the Armenian government at that time – Karen Demirchyan was the First Secretary of the Communist Party – didn't allow him. Meanwhile Shevardnadze, who was the First Secretary in Georgia, allowed him to go to Georgia. As you know, Parajanov was born in Tbilisi and he had a house in Tbilisi, he was a *Tiflisahay* (Armenian from Tbilisi). Parajanov went to Tbilisi and made another ingenious film called *The Legend of the Suram Fortress*.[110] He didn't make any films in Armenia since *Sayat Nova*, which was his only film made in the Armenian studio, at *Hayfilm*. The film was also called *The Color of Pomegranates*.[111] That's just one example of the cowardice of the Armenian establishment of the time, of a lack of state thinking, of something that could have been done very differently.

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[110] The Legend of Suram Fortress, a 1985 drama film directed by Georgian SSR-born Soviet-Armenian director Sergei Parajanov and Georgian actor Dodo Abashidze. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Legend_of_Suram_Fortress. Please watch the film online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih4yG4fNBf0

[111] The Color of Pomegranates, a 1969 Soviet art film written and directed by Sergei Parajanov. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Color_of_Pomegranates

Parajanov wanted to make several films in Armenia: The Treasures of Echmiadzin, David of Sassoon. None of that happened.

Another example I found very recently is still circulating on the Internet. It's a story by Chingiz Guseynov, who is an Azerbaijani national that lived his entire life in Moscow. He is a representative of Russian culture, actually a writer and critic. He is very old today, and he was an important figure in the Union of Writers in the Soviet Union in Moscow during the 1960s. He was telling the story of how the late widow of Charents came to see him. The widow of Charents, Zabel, Izabella. It's an amazing and extremely tragic story of her destiny because she refused to declare that she had divorced *the enemy of the people*, as Charents had been declared. So, she was prosecuted as well, and her children were sent to an orphanage. She spent 15 or 20 years in exile, and upon her return, she couldn't *'prove'* that she was the widow of Charents (even though everybody knew that, of course). So, she didn't have the right to live anywhere, to have a passport, etc.

Chingiz Guseynov was surprised that the Armenians wouldn't help her in Armenia, and he arranged it so that she met with Anastas Mikoyan.[112] Mikoyan was an extremely controversial figure. As you know, he was one of the major figures in both Stalin's and Brezhnev's administrations, implicated in supporting Stalin's purges. But he actually helped Izabella.

Guseynov was mostly writing from an Azerbaijani perspective: *'Look! These Armenians in Armenia, they couldn't even help the widow of their national poet!'* It was not just a matter of allocating her an apartment in Armenia. She remarried when she was in exile, to a Buryat, a Turkic nationality. The so-called *intelligentsia nomenklatura* in Soviet Armenia said that she betrayed the memory of Charents by marrying this Buryat person, from whom she eventually divorced. Imagine that. So they didn't want her to come back, but because of pressure by Mikoyan, they found some nicer people in higher positions in Armenia who agreed to take care of Izabella; and then she died soon after. It's a very tragic story.

These are the examples that demonstrate the nature of the Soviet Armenian political system of the second half of the 20th century. It was only a *quasi-state*, a *pseudo-state*, but it wasn't the worst times in history. At least, the Stalinist genocide was no more. One should behave differently in such circumstances. But no! There were many examples when, instead of a statesman-like approach, you would see this very sad, cowardly approach to many issues. When one saw such examples of cowardice and betrayal to one's national culture by the very figures who preached cultural and national values (and I saw many of them since my childhood), one couldn't help but think that the soul of the nation was broken. Moreover, justifications for censorship and destruction were often based on the supposedly 'nationalist' values rather than on official socialist principles, like in the case of Charents' widow.

Many films that could have become cultural icons were simply prohibited and destroyed, or not even filmed in the first place. They didn't happen, or they were maimed. In the mildest case, a censor would say that a film which was three hours long should end up being only one hour long. Every interesting moment should be removed from it. Many people in the Union of Writers or Union of Cinematographers just stopped their attempts at being different, creating something

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[112] Anastas Mikoyan, a Soviet revolutionary, Old Bolshevik and statesman during the mandates of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anastas_Mikoyan

significant, because that was the culture which was being indoctrinated: be gray, insignificant, don't try saying or creating something valuable. *Negative selection* was in full force. On the contrary, betray your peers, serve the officialdom, and you will have a nice career.

It was a fight, a struggle, and we are very fortunate that we still have *Triangle*, we still have *Hello, It's Me*, which was, by the way, made via a Moscow studio. In Yerevan, it wouldn't be allowed. We have the writers. We have them despite it all. We have Paruyr Sevak. We have Minas Avetisyan, etc. They were fighters, strugglers and sufferers.

The other interesting characteristic of the situation was that great talents tended to collaborate with each other. Hrant Matevosyan's screenplay was the basis for Henrik Malyan's film. Aghasi Ayvazyan's story was used by Frunzik Dovlatyan. Parajanov in his *The Color of Pomegranates* collaborated with Minas Avetisyan.[113] People were building these amazing constellations, amazing talents were coming together to help each other, to push through this resistance, to create those great cultural values that today are being recognized as the highest achievements of the Armenian creative spirit of the second half of the 20th century.

### *Compartmentalization of discourses*

An important characteristic of 20th century Armenia was *niches*: there existed niches of knowledge and memory, but no unity between the stories, no common ground. *Compartmentalization* of discourses, of narratives, became a characteristic of the society, also because of a total lack of free and truthful media in the era with no Internet.

There was a joke circulating in Soviet times: a guy decides to become a member of the Communist Party. He is a vendor in the *shuka*, in the market. He has to pass the interview, and the interview panel asks him, showing a portrait on the wall: '*Do you know who that is?*' As you know, in Soviet times, the portraits of Marx, Engels, and Lenin were in every office room. So, they point at Marx and ask, '*Do you know who that guy is?*' He answers, '*No!*' They show Engels and say, '*Do you know who that guy is?*' He says, '*No!*' They say, '*You don't know any of our Founding Fathers, why did you come?*' He answers, '*But do you know tailor Sako? No! Do you know shoemaker Karpis? No! Well, you see, I have my company and you have your company.*'

Very similar to that situation, we have had a compartmentalization of knowledge, pieces of which were not being brought together into one picture, and this is still the case. Meanwhile, it is very important to have a more or less universal, united vision of the general 'trunk' of one's national history. This is a very complex problem. It is not only typical for the Armenian discourse. It's a part of a global crisis. We have *the global crisis which is adding to the post-Soviet crisis and adding to the Armenian national crisis.*[114] We can see that it will take some very significant methodological effort to bring together these *niche discourses* that are flourishing, into one picture.

People who suffered during the Stalinist times keep the stories about this suffering in their discourse. People who have not suffered, who benefited in Stalinist times, keep the positive stories about these times in their discourse. *There is no bridging discourse*. These two groups of

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[113] Minas Avetisyan, an Armenian painter, 1928-1975. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minas_Avetisyan
[114] See Chapter 9. What is a good project.

people exist in their niches, and they do not interact in such a way which would contribute to building a joint discourse.

The scholarship, even if there are some great studies, is not known because it is compartmentalized, too. The Academy of Sciences works mostly for its own interests and benefits. Even if it produces something worthwhile, which is an infrequent case, nobody reads the scholarly work anyway. Writers work in their own niche. That's why I decided to develop this text, trying to somehow set up the possibility for this joint discourse. The national mythology, the national ideology is not even referring to this entire period. It is only referring to the fact that, since 1965, people started to fight for the national cause. How did it happen? This was a very important positive step of people coming together and starting the public movement in Armenia, but what was the key for them to come together? What was this movement's *ideological basis*? The key is that it was *referring to the past*.

That was very important at the time because you had to reestablish the connection with the past, with the Genocide. But in the situation where so much *anomie*, *anemie* and *atomie* had taken place, only the national discourse, only the national mythology, directed to the past, and becoming the essence of the uniting ideology for people, was clearly insufficient. It was lacking something, *it was lacking a perspective for the future. It was lacking recognition of one's own identity* as it exists today. That was also very much connected with the *second reality* because *it was lacking the recognition of the second society* and the way its existence may impact the nation. It was lacking the recognition of many people who wrote *donoses*, as if that never happened. It was lacking any position vis-a-vis the issue of lustration. *It was lacking the desire to understand what really happened during Stalin's times, why did it happen and what were the negative effects of all these processes that took place in Armenia*, on the Armenian nation and its perspectives.

RG: Let us go back and stop for a moment on the question of what could have happened if Stalin approved the attack against Turkey around 1943. Some hoped that Armenia could have liberated its historical territories, if Stalin would approve the fight against Turkey which had a non-aggression pact with Germany during World War II. Some Soviet officials were even appointed in advance for Western Armenian districts. I don't think many people know about it, but that actually happened.

GTG: Indeed, the entire process of repatriation, with its associated propaganda of the USSR among the Armenian communities of the Diaspora, was also a preparation for this conquest of Eastern Turkey, presented to the Armenians as preparation for the return of Western Armenia. They were supposed to move to their 'homelands' when the Soviet Union eventually occupied Turkey. However, when repatriates started arriving, this political plan was already off the table. Some say that was the reason many of them ended up in Siberia later on: because Stalin's government didn't want a concentration of free-thinking Armenians in the Armenian SSR.

MH: The difference between Yerevan and Moscow is a difference between the periphery and the center of the Soviet Union. Armenia, Georgia, and the Baltic states were 'lucky' to be the periphery because they were given more 'opportunity' to live in a *second reality*. Even if it was marginalized, that was the 'real reality' of life, not the slogans that came from Moscow. That is why figures like Sergey Parajanov and Minas Avetisyan could evolve in Soviet Armenia, Soviet Georgia, or Soviet Ukraine. This is why they were able to exist and survive, at least for a while,

and they were given an opportunity to work and create their art. There were many things that made the peripheries distinct from the center, some good and some bad.

The second thing I wanted to mention is the evolution of ideological tenets. As time passed after the Stalinist repressions, the ideology was transforming more into rituals and tradition. Reference to Lenin's, Engels', and Marx's works in any kind of academic publication was obligatory up until the very end of the Soviet Union. Initially, it was obligatory because there was a need to ideologically connect intellectual products, but afterwards it gradually became simply a ritual. When it became merely a ritual, again, some freedom in composing thoughts appeared. If you complied with the established tradition, you were also free to say, to a certain extent, something extra, something contradicting the 'Founding Fathers.' But gradually, *since one started to put new content in a tradition, a content that was opposite to that tradition, it basically started to ruin that tradition from inside.* It 'ate' the ideological doctrine from inside.

That's, to some extent, also how and why the Soviet Union collapsed.

There was a growing incompliance of reality with the mythological picture. *The more it went, the less compliance there was between the mythological picture of what the Soviet Union was, as it was presented by the ideological doctrine, and the reality in which people were living*. Eventually, in 1985, *perestroika*[115] started. *Perestroika* was *renaming* everything once again. When one renames everything, it means that one reevaluates everything. When one does that, one understands that there's a significant gap between how it was named before and the reality it represented. I think we are doing something similar now: trying to name or rename and evaluate or reevaluate 20th century history.

GTG: On the ritualization of the Soviet doctrinal acts and behaviors in the 1960s-1970s, there is very good research. One that I now have in mind is Alexei Yurchak's work.[116] It studies the late Komsomol leaders' behavior in the Soviet Union, without reference to Armenia. It concerns again the Soviet Union as such, Moscow and St. Petersburg, first of all. That was a very important and interesting process, the deepening alienation between this ritual versus the reality.

But the methodological complexity is in that there was a reality, of course, and its distortion within the ideological doctrine and its offshoots. But *there was also the third part of this situation: the growing second mythology*. There was the official Soviet mythology and the other mythology which was being built, the *national mythology*. Plus, there was *the third, the non-mythologized and unnamed, the 'real' reality,* unspoken, which was the main basis for people's behavior outside the officialdom or the requirements of national ideology. It was determining, to a significant degree, the day-to-day 'real' behavior and values of people.

Putting national ideology into this picture is also very important because, for instance, many cultural products like films or literature works were being prohibited at the level of the national Communist Party with a diagnosis that '*it is not patriotic enough*.' That is exactly what happened with Izabella, the widow of Charents. She was not patriotic enough; she abandoned her widowhood of an Armenian national poet for a Buryat. This act was not nationalist enough for the Armenian national cause. The Communist Party ideologues, who were presiding over Soviet

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[115] Please see footnote # 21.

[116] Yurchak, Alexei. (2013). *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*: http://www.representations.org/alexei-yurchaks-everything-was-forever-nominated-for-russias-prosvetitel-prize/

Armenia since the 1960s, were using the Communist Party power to censor the discourse and even people's behavior, so that it would be more nationalistic, based on their understanding of what that means.

That's why, for instance, Karen Gevorkyan's[117] film *Farewell Beyond Border,* was prohibited.[118] It was never finished, and it was simply destroyed; whereas, films such as *Nahapet[119]* were allowed.

For some reason, referring to the national ideology became gradually considered—not only by the local Armenian Soviet power, but also by Moscow—to be beneficial for the aims of the Soviet power, perhaps for the kind of reasons that Rob mentioned. It was important for anti-Turkish sentiment to be deeply indoctrinated in Armenia because it bordered Turkey, which was a member of NATO.

Also, importantly, cultural products that were above the average level and were interesting, important, and significant, were often allowed in Armenia only after they were approved by Moscow. In Armenia, they would be prohibited, but sometimes Moscow would allow such products and let them go public.

In order to get their work published, people would go through Moscow. Reasons for this feature of the Soviet system could be numerous. Perhaps, the provincial locals were 'more Catholic than the Pope' in their attempts to serve the central power. Or the central power was demonstrating, via such infrequent gestures, *who the boss in town is*. Finally, this could also be due to the unpredictability of the censorship system, because the entire late Soviet system was based on arbitrariness.

Some of the literary works were first published in Russian, in Russian translation, in a Soviet-level publishing house. Only then was their publication in Armenian allowed. In particular, such was the story with the works of Hrant Matevosyan, who experienced significant difficulties trying to publish in Armenia. It was only thanks to the publication of the translations of his prose in Russian that his books were also published in their native language.

This was a very interesting case of juggling between the two levels of censorship for the survivors of the cultural front who wanted to break through the Soviet censorship system.

MH: Let us link this use of the nationalist theme to the existence of NATO member Turkey across the border. The reason nationalism was allowed in this way was probably not only NATO but also Turkey itself. After all, Turkey has been a traditional enemy of the Russian Empire. Also, Russia wanted to strengthen the understanding in Armenia that it is Armenia's savior and that the danger coming from the West, from Turkey, was not over for Armenia. In this case, it was convenient to unite Turkey with the West and to claim that, since Turkey is a NATO member, the West, which historically always 'abandoned' Armenians, will not come to their rescue again, if Russia is not there.

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[117] Karen Gevorkian, an Armenian Soviet-Russian film director and screenwriter. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karen_Gevorkian
[118] Karen Gevorgyan and the bittersweet joy of marching to one's own drumbeat, article by Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan, Armenian Reporter, December 2007: http://gtergab.com/en/news/publicism/karen-gevorgyan/28/
[119] Nahapet, a 1977 film directed by Henrik Malyan (on a peasant's 'rebirth' after the Genocide). Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nahapet

Also, since the mission of developing a *Homo Sovieticus[120]* had failed, sometimes it was very hard to translate from the national language to the official Russian. The 'hidden' language of what was being said in the vernacular was not being translated. Translations were superficial; they thus did not appear as dangerous as the original appeared to the local censors. Therefore, they were allowed to be published. The cultural difference between various cultures squeezed into the Soviet Union was not appreciated. Here again, the periphery-versus-center issue worked very significantly. The center didn't understand the 'second language,' the language of hints of the periphery, because of the cultural difference. That's how the cultural products of the periphery, after being approved by the 'center,' could go back to their own culture, be allowed to exist there, and survive.

GTG: This did not apply only to written texts. In some cases, it also included the destiny of visual arts, paintings, films, theater performances, dances, opera, etc. The Soviet Union was just too big to be governed universally from the moment the totalitarian rule was shaken. The talented people would find a 'hole,' an opportunity to express themselves, wherever they could. In Moscow, there were the Taganka Theatre[121] and Vysotsky.[122] In Kiev, Parajanov was able to make his film '*Shadows of forgotten ancestors.*'[123] In Yerevan, Igityan was able to open the Modern Art Museum.[124]

How did the Soviet Union function? It was a very complex thing. Of course, there are many books about that, but what comes to my mind is, for instance, Mark Saroyan's[125] work, *Beyond the Nation-State: Culture and Ethnic Politics in Soviet Transcaucasia.[126]* There are some other treatises on the analysis of the rebirth of nationalism in the Soviet culture. The story usually goes back to World War II, when Stalin allowed the Church, as well as national discourse, to come back, to a certain degree, to strengthen the capacity of people to resist Nazism. Since that time, religion and nationalism started to gain back the ground they had lost in the first 20 years of Soviet power.

Perhaps Stalin indeed had no choice but to ask for the help of the Church during WWII. However, it is quite obvious to me that, whatever freedom was allowed inside the Soviet realm, the calculus of the rulers was never about allowing people to follow their views and beliefs freely. It was usually for some inhuman purpose, just like how they allowed Armenian nationalism to reawaken in order to use it against Turkey.

As the center of an Empire, Moscow needed to sow manageable nationalism for two reasons. One was what we discussed: the need to keep animosity towards Turkey alive. In a similar vein,

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[120] Homo Sovieticus, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo_Sovieticus
[121] Taganka Theatre, the Drama and Comedy Theater was founded in 1946 in Moscow. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taganka_Theatre
[122] Vladimir Vysotsky, Poet and Singer, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Vysotsky
[123] Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors, a 1965 film by the Soviet filmmaker Sergei Parajanov based on the classic book by Ukrainian writer Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadows_of_Forgotten_Ancestors
[124] Modern Art Museum of Yerevan was founded in 1972, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Art_Museum_of_Yerevan
[125] Mark Saroyan, a professor of Islamic and Soviet studies, focusing on religion and ethnicity in Central Asia and the Caucasus, 1960-1993. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Saroyan
[126] Beyond the Nation-State: Culture and Ethnic Politics in Soviet Transcaucasia, Mark Saroyan, 1988: https://brill.com/view/journals/spsr/15/1/article-p219_14.xml?lang=en

tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis were being sowed. On the surface, there was the preaching of brotherhood. More deeply, however, nationalism was encouraged via policy actions of different dimensions. There were minor actions such as the distribution of pastures in a way that left the village inhabited by one nationality unhappy with the other. Some actions were more blatant, like condoning Azerbaijan's policies of isolating Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia. Similar policies were applied all over the Soviet Union. The result was mounting tensions between any two neighboring nations.

The second reason was the need to not allow the discontent to target the central government and the Soviet ideology. Therefore, it was somehow in the interest of the Soviet rulers to sow limited nationalism in such a way as to allow for the national dissident movements, which were on the rise, to address the national cause rather than focusing on the need for human rights, democracy, freedoms, etc. Although, of course, national aspirations could not avoid addressing these issues, but it was easier to persecute dissidents for their plans of independent statehood rather than for their work in favor of human rights and democracy. The former could be claimed to be directly targeting the security of the state, whereas the latter could be easily interpreted as pursuing the implementation of the very same principles, which were in fact proclaimed in the Soviet Constitution.

If you look at the dissident movement of Armenians, of course, almost none of them were similar to Russian or Soviet dissidents like Sakharov. Many of them weren't fighting for constitutional freedoms and rights; their fight was not for the democratization of the Soviet Union, but its collapse, for its disintegration and for Armenia's independence. Theirs was the national cause. They were fighting for Armenia's national independence, including Paruyr Hayrikyan[127] and many others who were prosecuted. Their stories are collected in two books by Vardan Harutyunyan.[128]

On one hand, limited nationalism was supported, even at the level of the government. That is why, for instance, eventually, as a result of the rebellion of 1965, the Genocide monument was erected. Limited nationalism was needed as a weapon against Turkey at the very least. '*Russians are our savior and we should be nationalist against Turks and, later on, against Azerbaijanis. Russia is our only supporter and savior, and, as its friends, we should also be nationalistic against the West.*' That was a part of that ideology, of course.

On the other hand, dissident nationalism went out of proportion. Hence, you had the cases of Hayrikyan and Stepan Zatikyan.[129]

There was this interplay between different intrigues but also possibilities and opportunities to navigate. One of the major events, of course, was the publication of some books after 1965 about the Genocide. A compendium of materials about the Genocide[130] were prepared by the Academy of Sciences and John Kirakosyan's books became available.[131] Scientific historical studies of

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[127] Paruyr Hayrikyan, an Armenian politician and former Soviet dissident. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paruyr_Hayrikyan

[128] Vardan Harutyunyan, an Armenian human rights activist and former Soviet dissident. Wikipedia: https://hy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Վարդան_Հարությունյան

[129] 1977 Moscow bombings, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1977_Moscow_bombings

[130] Please see: http://www.genocide.ru/lib/nersisyan/genocide.htm

[131] John Kirakosyan (1929–1985), Soviet Armenian historian and political scientist. He was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Armenian SSR during 1975-1985. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Kirakosyan

Ottoman Turkey and of the things that happened there became partly possible. It was, of course, all done with reference to Marxism, and with the approval of the Moscow censors. Of course, it was a very limited and distorted window of opportunity. Out of ten such ideas, only one was approved by Moscow. It was not possible to implement all ideas or at least many ideas, partly because Moscow wanted to govern, *to select and rule*, so to speak, and partly because there were not many worthwhile ideas. People weren't courageous enough to come up with ideas to study such things, after all the terror of the previous decades. Traditions were lost. Memories and schools of thought were also lost. If some of the best ideas were turned down (such as a film about David of Sassoun by Parajanov or about Mesrop Mashtots by Karen Gevorkyan), people immediately stopped generating new ideas because *for a traumatized and pragmatic Soviet Armenian mind, the effort was worthless if the likelihood of its being turned down was high. Let us understand it very clearly: the Gulag culture makes one into a survivalist. After the Gulag, survivors are traumatized deeply, and they are pragmatic to the level of survivalist. So, putting it short, slavery kills creativity.*

In the Soviet provinces, you had people like Parajanov or Minas Avetisyan. Well, in fact, if you look at the landscape of the Soviet Union, you had great people and unique singular geniuses born anywhere. Very often, the magnet of Soviet power would take them to Moscow or to St. Petersburg and they would either settle there or travel back and forth from their homeland. They were all singular cases. Many of them were prosecuted to different degrees but all in a cruel way, like Parajanov, Sinyavsky,[132] Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak,[133] Brodsky,[134] etc. I am talking about the second half of the 20th century because, in the first half, they were not merely prosecuted but killed outright in scores.

Still, Parajanov was able to exercise his talent to a certain degree. *Unfortunately, we should recognize that it was done in the background of resistance, rather than support, from the side of the Armenian government and significant groups of cultural nomenklatura of the time.* Sometimes, this false nationalist discourse, this Russian- or Soviet-sponsored nationalist discourse was also used as a justification. He was born in Tbilisi, made his career in Moldova and then in Kiev, came to Armenia, made his main film, *Sayat Nova*, returned to Kiev, was put in jail, and when he came out, the Armenian authorities of the time did not let him come and work here. So he went back to Tbilisi. The Soviet Georgian authorities of the time, it was Shevardnadze, allowed him to work there. There he made '*The Legend of the Suram Fortress*.'

Parajanov said once that he had made three films for the three great nations of the South Caucasus. For Georgians, it was *The Legend of the Suram Fortress*, for Armenians *Sayat Nova* or *The Color of Pomegranates*, and for Azerbaijanis *Ashik Kerib*.[135] This last film came to screens in Armenia in 1988, when the national movement was reigning full scale. No wonder that no response, no reaction to that film, could be registered in Armenian society at all. Until

[132] Andrei Sinyavsky (1925-1997), Russian writer, dissident, political prisoner. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrei_Sinyavsky

[133] Boris Pasternak (1890–1960), Russian poet, novelist, and literary translator. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Pasternak

[134] Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996), Russian and American poet and essayist. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky

[135] Ashik Kerib (film), a 1988 Soviet art film directed by Dodo Abashidze and Sergei Parajanov, based on the short story of the same name by Mikhail Lermontov. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashik_Kerib_(film)

today, this film is overlooked by most Armenians who speak and write about Parajanov and study his work.

I'll tell you a story about Parajanov to explain a bit about his character.

Around 1984, he came to Armenia to show one of his short films, done, again, in Georgia, about Pirosmani,[136] or Pirosmanishvili, a great primitivist artist from Tbilisi, an ethnic Armenian whose work became world-famous.

In the Cinema House of Yerevan, which has now become a big building and at the time was a very nice example of 1970s architecture, Parajanov introduces his film and says: '*This film was ordered, paid for, and sponsored by the Queen of England.*' I don't know if that's true or not. He continues, '*She called me up and said, "Seryozha, I want you to make the film about Pirosmani, so that I can finally understand whether he was Armenian or Georgian."*'

'*So*,' said Parajanov to the public in Yerevan, '*I did everything to prove that Pirosmani was Azerbaijani.*'

Obviously, that rubbed against this brewing nationalist discourse in Armenia at the time. Nothing in this film refers to Azerbaijanis. The message he was trying to give was that both he and Pirosmani are figures like Sayat Nova; they transcend ethnic culture. They are for and with all the cultures of the Caucasus and beyond. He believed that *it is foolish to build these compartmentalized nationalist discourses with such vigor*.


## Chapter 5. The Soviet Agonie

In the text above, I used concepts that have significant explanatory power for me, such as *atomie*, *anomie, anemie*, and some others. We discussed *atomie* and *anomie* to a certain extent.

The best explanation for why *anomie* eventually reigned is the *negative selection* during the Bolshevik and Stalinist purges of 1921-1953. Anybody and everybody who was different – intellectuals, creative people, scientists, scholars, academics, writers, artists, painters, i.e. the intelligentsia[137] – was exterminated. A group that was especially targeted were those who had differing political views. This means that, in addition to censorship, there was a big paucity when explanations for what happened were needed. If not for the purges, even within the censorship umbrella, the outstanding people would be capable of explaining and expressing outstanding ideas and providing some explanations for the situation.

After the Stalinist era, there were fewer such people left. Therefore, there were fewer such explanations. The culture of thinking, studying, explaining, teaching, researching, and creating deteriorated. New generations often did not have the appropriate schooling and suffered from the trauma of the preceding period.

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[136] Niko Pirosmani (1862–1918), Georgian naïve painter, ethnic Armenian. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niko_Pirosmani

[137] Negative Selection and Culture, Jam Session 8 (Original title in Armenian: Բացասական ընտրություն և մշակույթ (Jam Session 8)): https://epfarmenia.am/hy/video/Negative-Selection-and-culture-Gevorg-Ter-Gabrielyan

*Atomie,* in its turn, is the uprooting of the population, of the nation. It happened first with the Genocide and then under Bolshevism and Stalin. *Atomie* appears when people are pitched against each other. When communities are destroyed, when memory is destroyed or prohibited, when lie and falsehood reign, *atomie* becomes omnipresent.

For both illnesses to become a pandemic, the rooting of the *blatnoy* (anti)culture and the culture of *donos*, which is related to it, became another very important factor. I already referred to them several times. In one of the previous parts, I already mentioned that it is very educational to study the *false self-confessions* of the people who were arrested and tortured (or threatened with torture) or blackmailed with harm to their family if they did not confess.

The violent *blatnoy* (criminal) as well as *donos* (anti)cultures are not something confined only to the Soviet culture, but there are some important differences between the Soviet Union and other parts of the world. In the United States, I was taken to custody in 1995 because a woman, who was a volunteer police supporter, complained to the police that I was yelling at my children. I was screaming at my children, but the only reason for that was that *they* were screaming. I was trying to calm them down, though probably not in the right way. This woman reported me to the police and I was taken into custody. It was in Ohio. The police officer let me go very soon, he understood the story. He said that he himself sometimes yelled at his children and his grandchildren as well. He was very understanding. I hope he is alive and well today.

Every time this power of allegation is used unfairly, it shakes the entire system of values on which liberal democracy is built. The Soviet system declared adherence to many of the same advanced, liberal values, at least on the surface. Some of the laws that were adopted during the first period of the Soviet system were quite positive and liberal. Some of them were even radically liberal, like the abandonment of the institution of marriage for a while.[138]

But the entire system, from the very beginning, being based on the Bolshevik and Cheka terror against the population, degenerated quickly. It deteriorated into this violent culture of false allegations, of torturing people, of killing people, of extrajudicial killings, and the Gulag camps. The laws that existed in the Gulag camps were simple, as Solzhenitsyn describes them: *you die first and I die second; if you are not being touched, don't make an appearance*; etc. Simply put: *homo homini lupus est*. After those who survived the camps returned, they brought these laws into their communities. Very often, these were people who were in charge of executing the terror, the camp guards, etc. These groups survived and proliferated. They brought the same rules into their life outside the Gulag system, and their successors continued to be guided by these rules, even if they didn't recognize it themselves. The executioners and those who were able to adapt via this or that compromise were naturally more numerous and healthier than the victims. Therefore, today, many more people live on the territory of the former USSR whose ancestors were perpetrators than those whose ancestors were victims. No wonder that a significant number of Russian citizens consider Stalin to be a national hero and approve of the policies of Mr. Putin. This is what I call *negative selection*.

This is how *atomie* comes into being. Wives had to abandon their husbands and sign a statement that their husband was an 'enemy of the people,' or vice versa. Children had to abandon and

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[138] The Russian Effort to Abolish Marriage, The Atlantic, July 1926:
https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1926/07/the-russian-effort-to-abolish-marriage/306295/

denounce their parents, declaring that they agree that their parents were 'enemies of the people.' Children were taken to orphanages, their names changed.

This calamity was atomizing the society. I said that Khrushchev's reign was less harsh. Some positive developments happened then.

Positive events happened all the time, even during the worst times of terror. But during Stalin's time, they were the exception to the rule, a result of the ruthless struggle of those who wanted to accomplish something worthwhile against the system and its supporters. After Stalin's death, killings mostly stopped, and many things became easier. The period of Thaw introduced liberalization.

In relation to the Thaw and to the 1960s, I mentioned two thick variables – one of them is '*cultural and intellectual construction,*' in addition to, of course, '*industrial construction*' and all kinds of construction.

The other was the *tsekhaviks*, who actually contributed to rebuilding the societal fabric in a certain way, including by strengthening family and clan ties.

*Tsekhaviks,* by nature of their activism, had to come up with a set of rules to function successfully in the Soviet system. In the Soviet system, because of atomie and urbanization, the number of immediate nuclear families or incomplete families increased quite significantly. The *tsekhavik* movement went against that trend, encouraging traditional, larger-scale family ties. They could afford that because they were richer than average. Also, they needed family members' trust and interdependency in order to be successful in their business, which was officially illegal. Trust and business success could not be based on the legal system. Finally, the clan system allowed centralized management by the head of the family, which was, again, beneficial from the perspective of the effectiveness of the *tsekhavik*'s operation.

As a result, one of the cultural principles of *tsekhavism* became an emphasis on the clan. *Clanization* was typical for the traditional rural family type all over the peripheries of the Soviet Union. Nations with strong 'Eastern' traditions, such as those in the Caucasus and Central Asia, were able to keep the clan system despite the waves of repressions, resettlements, and urbanization.

Via emphasis on personal and clan enrichment (while the Soviet system declared significant personal property and capital illegal) and by reverting to a larger family type, *tsekhavism*, being a new development in the Soviet system, was turning the system backwards, encouraging 'anti-modern' patterns of social life. *Tsekhavism was preaching not just conservative but also retrograde values.*

*The essence of retrograde values is that they are not just conservative and looking backwards. They claim that values were 'like this' in the past, but in fact values were not 'like this' in the past. A system of retrograde values is based on mythologizing history and producing simulacra, i.e. value assumptions about the past presented as true, although they are merely imagined.*

Obviously, *tsekhavism* was another development that was undermining the Soviet socialist system. It became possible in the context of the collapse of societal values that resulted from the terror of Bolshevism and Stalinism. Social and community values were totally ruined (*atomie*). As a result, when the ruthless period of Soviet history ended, family ties and extended family

practices strengthened in the place of social, state, or community values. Stealing from the state was not considered morally wrong because state property did not belong to anybody. From the perspective of the *tsekhavism* movement, it was even considered chivalry and social success. Gradually, this became an almost universal consensus in most of the USSR as well as Armenia.

Today, such ties are often called *horizontal ties*. In the book entitled *At the Crossroads*, Ruben Vardanyan and Nune Alekyan[139] discuss how a similar system functioned in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the stateless Armenian community of Nor Jugha created its network of trade all over Eurasia.

If we jump to today, we see that, in the context of dysfunctional state institutions, these horizontal ties again become important. They help people survive. I experienced that just yesterday, when the gas heater in my apartment broke down. I called three places: the state institution; a very expensive private business built for *Spyurkahays* (Diaspora Armenians) and foreigners who agree to pay a lot of money; and somebody whose telephone number had been given to me by Mikayel, who is sitting here. So that is the horizontal tie, the horizontal connection. Out of these three, only the third one was ready to come on the same day rather than put me on a waiting list and allow my mother to catch a cold because the apartment couldn't be heated. Horizontal ties are crucial when the rest doesn't work. Even if it does, even in the best functioning system, horizontal ties are of a great value. If you are looking for a doctor, you better ask your network, your friends and family, which doctor or medical institution you can trust and visit immediately.

This is very important; it exists in every society. But if you only have horizontal ties, or if you only have a clan, that means that your society and community have a huge gap, which cannot be entirely filled in by the clan. Essentially, it is another type of statelessness. In the Ottoman, Russian, and Persian Empires, Armenians were stateless. Community heads, church, and intelligentsia (teachers, if any), were the only reference points apart from the family head. In the final years of the Soviet Union, the state was so alienated from the population, that again in many respects, only the family head remained as an authority. Teachers and another public authorities were not assumed to have the population's best interests in mind. The Armenian Apostolic Church was also not in the best condition. First, it was not modernized. Second, it was only recuperating from the assault by the Soviet system during the 1920s-1950s. Third, in order to survive, it had made too many compromises with the rulers, losing its authority in the eyes of the public as a result. However, the moment the public realized that the new Catholicos, Vazgen I, was a significant authority, he was embraced by intellectuals and public figures. He improved the image of the church, which had been tarnished by rumors of collaboration abroad with the KGB and other instances of falling from its 'throne.' The church started rebuilding and reconstructing its significance in society, however, unfortunately again, without modernizing and re-evaluating its philosophy.

The *cultural construction* continued. Increased tolerance toward associating with the church—at least culturally—was another example of that. A few church buildings and monasteries were renovated and started functioning again. Others were renovated as architectural and cultural monuments.

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[139] At the Crossroads, Ruben Vardanyan, Nune Akelyan, 2018: https://armenia2041.com/books/At_the_Crossroads_ENG.pdf

All cultural construction happened in the form of a fight between 'positive' and 'negative' forces, between progressive forces and regressive forces. *But, as I said, these regressive forces, in their turn, could now be divided into two streams: the Soviet ideology and false nationalism, which propagated retrograde values in the name of national identity. Of course, these two streams were interconnected and also interwoven with human nature, the nature of the Homo Sovieticus Armeniacus. Both of these streams cultivated and strengthened the negative traits in human beings: envy, inclination to betrayal, cowardice, violence, etc.*

Something very significant was lacking to counterbalance these tendencies, the regressive forces. If cultural and industrial construction takes place but the culture of *donos* is still deeply rooted, if there has not been any serious and drastic reevaluation of the Stalinist times, no lustration happens; you have a problem with building the society.

There was a big gap between the two sides. On the one hand, there was *the official society*, *power* and *the state* that formed a unity. The state and power were united, and the official society within the state ideology was united with them as well. On the other hand, there was the rest of this atomized society, essentially left out of the official society, and connected to this official society only via family ties or horizontal ties.

The situation was even more complex: if many people were outside the official society, many others, most of the members of the society, were both *inside* and *outside*. They couldn't avoid being part of the official rituals and behaving according to the rules, adapting to the requirements of power. At the same time, they were *outside*: they did not share the values and did not approve of the practices, 'deep inside' they did not belong. Vardan Jaloyan, following Bakhtin, calls this phenomenon 'вненаходимость'[140] – 'positioning oneself beyond' or something like that.

This created the *schizophrenia* of the Soviet system. We already mentioned the issue of *dual society* earlier on.

What is lacking here? What should be the connection between the atomized citizens, state, and society? Of course, the connection is the *community*, the concept of *community*. The concept of community the way I use it here entered social science in early 20th century, particularly thanks to Max Weber.[141] He distinguished between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft*[142] (society). *Community* was the biggest casualty of the Soviet system, even though it is the community upon which functional societies should be built. Societies, in an ideal sense, should be built on the participation of individuals in their communities, as a result of which, eventually, the interconnected communities become the fabric of society. *An atomized society, plus a clan, plus blatnoy culture, plus some ideological, intellectual, creative input, which sometimes won even despite the resistance of power, was insufficient for the development of a functional lifeworld.*

If we look at the literature of the 19th century, we can see how the community, because of its adages, because of its values and traditions, voluntarily mistreats the individual, like in the cases of Gikor, Maro, Anush, etc. If we look at post-Soviet Armenian literature, we can see the same

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[140] The Dialogic Imagination: chronotope and heteroglossia, Mikhail Bakhtin. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Bakhtin
[141] Max Weber (1864–1920), German sociologist, philosopher, jurist, and political economist. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Weber
[142] Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gemeinschaft_and_Gesellschaft

tendency. When people are writing about their childhood and Soviet times, about peasant life in the villages, you can see the same situation: the community persecuting the individual because of traditions and adages. You can see that plot running throughout the literature, from Tumanyan's *Maro* and *Anush* via Bakunts to Hrant Matevosyan and Levon Khechoyan.

We know that this pattern was a universal issue, typical for all human cultures. We know that not only their heroes but the writers themselves were subject to victimization. William Faulkner[143] suffered harassment in his community for his writings. Sherwood Anderson[144] was oppressed in his community, Henry Miller was villainized all over America for his writing. We had the same situation in Russia historically. Censorship was not just state policy, it was also the small community's reaction to the 'breaking' of its tight rules, the values that it followed.

Such a community is as alienated from an extraordinary individual as the entire society is from the state and power. State-society of the Soviet type, and not only, is often perceived as a kind of foreign, alien power which is imposed on human beings. The community tends to unite through the society's practice of violence, even if it is a 'soft' violence: disallowing some practices, behaviors, thoughts, words, and texts; mistreating its members for 'deviations' from the rules. If these deviations are of a criminal nature, there is no problem. If the deviations are challenging old traditional practices for the advancement of humankind, in the name of human rights and humanistic values, we have what we have: a clampdown by society and the state.

If the state-society is perceived as particularly strongly alienated from the individual, and the community also does not provide shelter, then the societal fabric tends to collapse and societies develop backwards.

If the state-society is alienated, the community, trying to resist its pressure, becomes even more draconian in its own rules imposed on individuals. A well-functioning state can shield individuals from unfair treatment by the community; but not this type of society. Here both entities—the state-society and the community—put pressure on the individual from two sides.

The deepest problem is not the suffering of an extraordinary individual. Of course, that is a problem as well. Like Faulkner or Henry Miller, strong individuals will eventually overcome it if they are strong personalities. However, many will suffer, their talent will perish, and they will succumb to pressure.

This is similar to the problems a child experiences at school, where, even if there is no significant direct bullying in the form of physical violence, there may be peer pressure, which can be just as psychologically damaging. People go through that and they somehow survive it. The problem is that, as a result, less people become significant talented leaders in their future lives.

If we take the concept or the ideal of a functioning non-violent community as our unit of reference, the biggest problem in Soviet Armenia, subject to these societal illnesses, was the lack of capacity for *collective action for common good*.

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[143] William Faulkner (1897–1962), an American writer and Nobel Prize laureate. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Faulkner

[144] Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941), an American novelist and short story writer. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherwood_Anderson

This is a very well-known thesis from *neo-institutional theory*, political science and the social sciences – the issue of collective action, to which the inclination to free ride is opposed. The incapacity to organize and implement collective action is being studied extensively.[145] In a system like that in the Soviet Union, there are expensive, almost insurmountable *transaction costs*[146] for each separate individual organizing or participating in a collective action. The cost is perceived by an individual as more significant than the share of the end result, the benefits, and positive effects expected from the collective action.

In post-Soviet times, we saw that problem grow even deepener. That is the problem that we experience: a classical case, studied extensively in social science.

It is present in my personal experience as well. I live in an apartment building where people are incapable of coming together to pay the elevator electricity costs. This is a small common good, shared by all the people who live in three apartments per floor. There are nine floors, so twenty-seven families have to unite and cover the electricity bill for the elevator, which serves them all.

However, those who live on the first floor say, '*We don't need the elevator.*' Those who live on other floors say, '*Well, if the first floor is not paying, then we disagree to pay for a share of 24.*'

I say, '*Okay, let me pay for everybody.*' But they disagree with that as well because they say, '*It is unfair. You cannot do that. We don't want to feel indebted to you.*'

This phenomenon is laughable. It took us ages to overcome this trap. We found a way. We managed to find the way because it was a very important need for the people who live on the upper floors to have a working elevator. However, we also want to install a lock with a code on the building door that prevents non-residents from entering and using the building stairwell as a bathroom. We still have not been able to do that.

If the community is incapable of collective action, of uniting to do something together, then it is not a community. Only joint, collective action for a public good makes the community a self-conscious and powerful entity. Collective action is difficult because there are high transaction costs and overheads for that, including the fact that you need a leader who spends time and resources on organizing these people. Let me mention that it is preferred to have leaders from the inside because a leader from outside, imposed by an upper structure, disempowers these people. If the leader is born from within the community, the community may become better capable of collective action.

It is important to understand that, consciously or unconsciously, people behave based on a rational calculus. 'Rational' here means their own rationality, what they themselves believe to be rational. It is, of course, very much influenced by their value system. Therefore, *if one wants to have collective action after the community experienced the Soviet system for ages, one needs to change the value system of the community*.

High transaction costs exist, of course, because of the value system. If there are no other such communities around, and if the state-society does not support this approach to action, then transaction costs are indeed higher. They are higher when there are no previous examples to

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[145] The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and he Theory of Groups, by Mancur Olson: https://www.amazon.com/Logic-Collective-Action-Printing-Appendix/dp/0674537513
[146] Transaction cost, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transaction_cost

work off. Once the trail is blazed, one can establish a system, an algorithm, a tool, an instrument, a technology, a way of action which reduces transaction costs.

Transaction costs are higher for a positive, creative action and lower for a negative, destructive action. They are higher for a building action and lower for a denying action, for a rebellion against something. We can see the first case illustrated by the relative ease with which people establish groups for implementing a negative act, such as a criminal act, and the second case in the pattern of rebellions that take place in Armenia periodically since 1988: uniting for something negative, such as removing the current power *nomenklatura,* the *rhizome*, seems easier for Armenians (and, of course, this also applies to non-Armenians) than for something positive. Destroying something, regardless of whether it is morally right or wrong to do so, is easier than building.

Similarly, ousting Azerbaijanis from Armenia as a response to the ousting of Armenians from Azerbaijan was easier than going to fight in Nagorny Karabakh. In the case of the Karabakh war, the issue itself was ambivalent: it was negative in the sense that it required violence and readiness to kill people; and it was positive since it was a liberation war. This is why both the Karabakh war's consequences, as well as the trauma that it left in the souls of those who took part in it, are so ambivalent to this day. The problem here is, obviously, that the trauma left by the war has not been addressed seriously by specialists. Many people experienced not only violence against the enemy, which they had to conduct willy-nilly since it was a war, not only trauma from people killed and wounded around them, not only direct trauma from their own wounds, physical or psychological; they saw both the cases where the enemy behaved appallingly, but also cases where their own side did not behave according to accepted conventions of warfare. They experienced instances of marauding, not only by the enemy but also by their own folk. All of this stays unaddressed by trauma specialists and deeply affects the psychology of the nation, not only those who took part in combat directly, and not only those who conducted unlawful acts themselves, but also their families, successors, communities and environment, because such issues tend to radiate and include more people around them, affecting the psyche of large parts of the society.

All of this increases transaction costs for positive collective action even more significantly. I define positive collective action as an action that brings good to everybody who participates in it and also even to a larger group, sometimes the entire society, similar to the *lighthouse effect*.[147] Finally, it can have a reasonably long-term effect. All these dimensions allow for at least heuristic[148] evaluation of the perceived transaction costs.

The perceived level of transaction costs in social science is associated with the value of *trust*.[149] Simply put, they are higher in low-trust societies and lower in high-trust societies. The peculiar type of community that evolved in the Soviet system could not entertain high levels of trust. To the contrary, the entire Soviet Union was a typical low-trust society. In Armenia, lack of trust was and still is rampant. Lack of trust increases transaction costs exponentially. It affects the

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[147] Boeri, Tito and Garibaldi, Pietro and Ribeiro, Marta, The Lighthouse Effect and Beyond (May 1, 2011). Review of Income and Wealth, Vol. 57, pp. S54-S78, 2011. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=1837196 or http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4991.2011.00455.x
[148] Heuristic, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heuristic
[149] Francis Fukuyama, 1995, Trust: The Social Virtue and the Creation of Prosperity, Free Press: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_trust_and_low_trust_societies

long-term vision of the members of the society: their long-term vision becomes extremely limited. If long-term vision is limited, people do not make plans with the future in mind. This means the society is unstable. There is no stability because nothing depends on the members of the society. The arbitrary power of the alienated state may intervene at any moment and change the rules of the game. Therefore, the members of society do not feel any obligations vis-à-vis the state. There is no social contract. This also affects the attitude of members of society vis-à-vis their environment; they cease feeling obligations vis-à-vis their community, their neighbors, their town, etc. As a result, the environment deteriorates. Within it, one may have several separate 'castle-like' domains of particular individuals or clans, since the clan is the only value reference point left for such atomized individuals.

Given the circumstances, it is actually surprising that at least partial public mobilization became possible quite fast, relatively speaking, to defend Karabakh. I call it partial because many people avoided going to war, and many people left Armenia in order to avoid the war and hardship.

However, at least partial and overall relatively successful mobilization to defend Karabakh became possible. Perhaps this was because, given the lack of a positive communal and societal value system, where only the clan value system prevails, the next value system that people tend to refer to is the national or other mythological value system. Nation, as an imagined community,[150] substitutes for real communities and for the society as a value. National mobilization becomes easier around a national cause rather than any other.

This is a very simplified picture, but while trying to understand Armenia, we have to keep in mind the *thick variables*, such as *transaction costs*, *trust*, *collective action*, *imagined community*, *community,* etc.

To sum up the discussion on the *rationality* of a Soviet citizen, as one was subject to violence by the state power, depending on the relative weigh of the issue, they agreed or disagreed to comply. As long as they felt that they could deviate, they deviated. If they felt that they had to comply, they complied. But mostly they did not acquire the capacity to build a social fabric capable of positive collective action.

In the worst cases, this relative 'rationality,' rather than corresponding to the values of enlightened self-interest,[151] deteriorated into 'the Gulag pragmatism,' with its tenets that I already mentioned: *you die you first and I die second*, all of which can be summed up in *homo homini lupus est*. Lack of long-term vision, which resulted from this picture, contributed to the appearance of such a typically Soviet Armenian value as '*naghd*' (նաղդ). *Naghd* means preferring the easier gratification that can be received 'here and now,' even if it is short-lived and followed by ruin, to effort or action that can provide gratification in the unknown future but potentially for a much longer term and much larger group in the community. The psychology of *naghd* results, for instance, in the proliferation of extractive industries instead of environmental consciousness.

Psychological dependence on imagined community-related concepts is also very well known in our life. Take, for example, Tigranes the Great and the Armenia of his time. There is very little

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[150] Imagined community, a concept developed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book Imagined Communities Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imagined_community
[151] Enlightened self-interest, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightened_self-interest

known about the times of Tigranes the Great; however, many Armenians feel comfortable referring to him and his times as an essential part of their own identity. In contrast, Armenia's Soviet history is not seen this way. It cannot be avoided, because we live in cities and villages designed and built during that time, we use roads constructed at that time, we go to theaters and the Opera which were built at that time, but we do not realize that this is our primary history rather than the Bagratunis or the Arshakunis.

The mythologized version of our ancient and medieval history is deeply ingrained in our thinking and culture, including, unfortunately, our scholarship and even international scholarship. Speaking and writing about the medieval kingdoms, we don't know which of their inhabitants were Armenians, and we don't even ask ourselves the question of what it meant to be and feel 'Armenian' then.

Recently, a foreign friend of mine asked me for a book which would present the history of Armenia in a succinct but fair way. I myself have been looking for such a book for ages. In my opinion, it does not exist despite the numerous books written in the last two hundred years on the topic. However, trying to help my friend out and looking through my library, I happened to come upon a recently published book that I thought would do the trick. I opened it and on one of the first pages I read this sentence: *Because most of the Urartian stone cuneiform scripts are written in the Urartian language, we come to a conclusion that the rulers of the Urartian state were Urartians, whereas the population was Armenian*.

This reminded me of a joke that I read many years ago, back in 1993, in an article by Tom Nairn[152] about the archeological battles in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijanis were digging the soil and almost twenty meters deep in the ground found a piece of wire. A great Azerbaijani academician immediately writes a treatise stating '*This finding demonstrates that Azerbaijanis had telephone connections in the 20th century BC*'. The Armenians got very jealous and they started vigorously digging but could not find anything, even down at forty meters. Therefore, a famous Armenian academician published an article stating '*This finding demonstrates that the Armenians had wireless phone connections in the 30th century BC*'.

This is a different issue, outside the scope of our discussion, but it would be very interesting to trace how and why, after the collapse of the USSR, many nations, including Russians, Ossetians, Karachay, Uzbek, and many others, started to reinvent their imagined ancient histories. The question is: do we, the Armenians, have a critical history of Armenia available at all, a book that would correspond to the criteria of fair modern scholarship?

Another very well-known phenomenon is the patriotic rhetoric of those who emigrated from Armenia; while they emigrated to avoid hardship and thereby to a certain extent, at the personal level, declared their break with their community, they are often some of the staunchest nationalists in their public statements on Facebook. Similarly, many of those emigrants who reside in the US, who went there with difficulty, acquired the right to stay, sometimes even illegally, are ardent supporters of Putin and his policies, if one were to take their public statements seriously. Similarly, but somewhat more understandably, a majority of the community of over two million Armenians residing in Russia, acquire a Russian identity very quickly. They stop reading and writing in Armenian and also acquire a set of values that support Putin's

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[152] Tom Nairn, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Nairn

policies to an amazingly deep degree. But this does not stop them from propagating the very same imagined community of ancient Armenia.

Many things that I said above may generate negative reactions from a variety of corners. It is comfortable for one to stay in the cozy world of an imagined community. For many years now, since independence in particular, this imagined community has been constructed by the Armenian independent state power, and the Diaspora communities have had a use for it for a very long time. Since their appearance, they needed at least some value system to resist assimilation, and the real values of being an Armenian came to them via texts and practices which included a lot of imagined entities that I consider being simulacra.

Questioning this simplified *primordial*[153], *parochial*[154]*, 'ruritanian*[155]*,' essentialist*[156] and *nominalist*[157] view on Armenia's and Armenians' history has been mainly taboo, as is questioning the simplified heroic legend about the Karabakh war. However, the events of April 2016, for instance, brought back to the forefront all those issues about the war that I mention above, about the fairness of one's own military's behavior. Finally, these issues started to come out in the media and social media, no longer confined to narrow personal discussions. This is a situation where patriotism, wrongly understood, disallows freedom of discourse which will be very valuable in making the society healthy and allowing it to address its shortcomings. Such 'patriots' who disallow these debates are of the two types: those who are robbing society and want to hide behind the smokescreen of simplified nationalism; and those who are just naïve, do not have critical thinking skills, and essentially become a chorus for the first group. Recently, these have been referred to as 'useful idiots.'[158]

There is also another argument which says that Armenia has suffered too much. Therefore, there is no need to be critical toward its nationalist ideology, which has been persecuted alongside with its bearers over a substantial part of its history, first in the Ottoman Empire, then under communism.

However, a sober and scientifically valid modern approach to the analysis of these issues, and a more realistic estimate of the strengths and weaknesses of the Armenian nation, will allow it to become stronger. The capacity of a nation for valid and enlightened self-criticism is a sign of its health and strength, rather than of defeatism and 'betrayal' of the national cause.

The high cost of positive collective action is one of the key issues which defines Armenia today; and not just Armenia, this is a very typical situation for post-Soviet states. Many reforms try to address this issue, many reform projects target setting up this capacity for collective action, work on establishing these systems for collective action, building real communities. However, success is still far away, this route is not straightforward and easy.

RG: How was this issue tackled in Soviet times?

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[153] Primordialism, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primordialism
[154] Parochialism, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parochialism
[155] Ruritania, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruritania
[156] Essentialism, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essentialism
[157] Nominalism, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nominalism
[158] Useful idiot, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Useful_idiot

GTG: As I said, there was no need for that. The power of community was ruined in Soviet times at every possible level and in every possible sense of community. You had clans and family community, which is not really a community because it is based on blood ties first of all. You might have a mafia, which is again a deteriorated version of a community. You might have an imagined community. But you didn't have a real community. In the school, you would go to work on Saturday, the so-called *Subbotnik*[159] (շաբաթօրյակ in Armenian). It was a requirement imposed from above: an additional work for the community, a kind of substitute for philanthropic participation in the community affairs. You would go if you were forced to, otherwise you wouldn't go. This feeling of what was described in the early Soviet years in Arkadiy Gaydar's[160] work, for instance, in *Timur and his Squad,*[161] when young people would go to do something nice for others, to help the community and its members, and this entire *pioneer*[162] movement that was built on that idea – the Soviet Union's version of the 'scout' movement - all of this was absent in real terms. There might have been some accidental communities, but as a culture, this was absent. In fact, this means that *civil society* was absent. So it was usually either an order coming from an alienated structure, or it happened through a clan or, for that matter, a mafia. Populations were dislocated. To remove their attachment to the land, family members and work colleagues were pitched against each other, and the individual was reduced to an atomized entity. In the 'pockets' – provincial areas beyond the reach of the Soviet 'hand' because they were either hidden or because there was no significance given to them – some community feeling and consciousness remained. Such was the case with Artsakh, for instance. Even in such instances, however, the community concept was twisted.

In the cultural or scientific institutions, one might find some teams as a random occurrence. If the leader was good, then there was a good team there for a while. When the leader left and another leader came, it all collapsed. There was no continuation. My mother experienced it very well. She used to work at the *Hayfilm* studio. The editorial department had different heads. In the 1960s and 1970s, she managed tolerable relations with the bosses; then came the 1980s. One of her very good friends and close colleagues got a promotion and became the head of that department. He immediately started to behave differently than before, in a more cowardly way. The entire department collapsed. Since then, this department has never really functioned properly. Many people left and new people came. But it was already the end of the Soviet Union, and *Hayfilm* was on the brink of collapse. So the story ended there.

We have many such examples, like the development of the Physics Institute[163] by Artem Alikhanyan.[164] Most of the successes, or the identifiable elements of successes at the Physics Institute took place after the death of Stalin: their inventions, the culture of physicists, their relations, the famous *Cheryomushki* (the Ajapnyak district),[165] their culture and cinema house

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[159] Subbotnik, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subbotnik

[160] Arkady Gaidar (1904-1941), Russian Soviet writer and a Red Army commander, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arkady_Gaidar

[161] Timur and His Squad, a short novel by Arkady Gaidar in 1940, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timur_and_His_Squad

[162] Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin_All-Union_Pioneer_Organization

[163] Yerevan Physics Institute, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yerevan_Physics_Institute

[164] Artem Alikhanyan, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artem_Alikhanian

[165] Ajapnyak District, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajapnyak_District

where otherwise inaccessible foreign films were being screened, Soviet dissidents and cultural figures perceived as infringing on Soviet taboos, like Vysotski or Brodsky, arriving there for meetings and concerts. Once Alikhanyan was gone, the Institute plodded on, but this leadership was no more. By the way, he is the prototype for Dovlatyan-Aghababov's film,[166] the main hero of the *Hello, it's me* film, played by Dzhigarkhanyan.[167] It is symbolic that TUMO[168] was built in the same district more recently.

The situation was totally dependent on the individual leader, whether he was skilled management-wise, strong and nice or not. The connections between different institutions with *ad hoc* good leadership couldn't be established. Quantity wouldn't usually translate into quality, and it was not becoming a qualitative leap for the society. There was no institutional memory of achievement; there was, though, institutional memory of bureaucratization. Every time the leader changed, the achievements and the network of an institution would be forgotten. Connections were absent. Every institution was like an island, so you just experienced the feeling of pessimism that yet another structure that existed had now collapsed because of a change in leadership. It would be infrequent for a good leader to be replaced by another good leader, and then to be followed by another good leader. The culture was not like that; the culture was mainly about *negative selection*. Good leaders were usually a rare case. In the 1960s, when the political atmosphere was good thanks to destalinization, there were many good leaders and initiatives. In the 1970s, when *stagnation* started, they mostly disappeared.

One could say that it is the same all over the world. However, there is a difference because of the community feeling, which is, for instance, so typical of the United States and Canada. So far, there has been a community feeling there. I don't know what will happen next. At least it has been encouraged by the society. Participation in community action, being in a net of a variety of voluntary and community activism is an important part of that culture. So far, we see and we know that people in the communities in these cultures gather to resolve issues. You can have different shapes and types of community – a professional community, a territorial community, a bureaucratic community – but they are either capable of a positive collective action or they are not.

There is this feeling of community. In this culture of the Soviet Union, it was totally lost. The repatriates of the 1940s brought it with themselves perhaps, but then many of them were sent to Siberia, and it collapsed again.

I said earlier that writers, when pressured from above, were not supported by their peers, nor by editors, nor by translators in Armenia itself. They often tried to work directly with Moscow to circumvent the local censors and, in a way, acquire power through legitimation by the Soviet system. If they were published in Russian, after that they could publish their work in Armenia. That way, they would somehow bypass the obstacles created by their own peers, community, society, the local political power of the Soviet Republic of Armenia. It was the same with almost every area of activism and profession.

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[166] Arnold Aghababov, srcipt writer, film director, Wikipedia (in Arm.): https://hy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Առնոլդ_Աղաբաբով
[167] Armen Dzhigarkhanyan, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armen_Dzhigarkhanyan
[168] Tumo, Center for Creative Technologies: https://tumo.org/

The Soviet Union collapsed, Armenia became independent, and these tendencies were inherited. I mentioned two types of competing ideologies. One was this tripartite concept of *society, power and state*, a totally formal one. The other, also a similarly mythologized ideology, was the national ideology. The latter was closer to the people's hearts, in part because it opposed the official socialist ideology. On one hand, there was a clash between the socialist and nationalist ideologies to some extent, but sometimes they went hand-in-hand. I already explained their complicated interrelationship. The national ideology started to become used extensively by free thinkers, intellectuals and others, as much as possible, to promote and advance their anti-official ideology. The analysis of today's literature textbooks, done within one of our projects,[169] demonstrates how nationalism filled the poems of the 1960s-1970s. They are great poems which continue to be taught today, continuing the indoctrination of nationalism in the minds of new generations.

So we had two *false consciousnesses*.[170] One was the national ideology, less so but still quite false, because it was very much past-oriented and mythologized history-oriented, without much knowledge of real history, and without the methods to study this real history.

Some work was done by historians. Even now, when we are looking for a good publication about the Genocide, for instance, we may refer to the work by Nersisyan and Sahakyan,[171] published in 1983. It is a compendium of documents rather than merely a rhetoric of the historian who is telling more or less plausible stories. This is just an example. To sum up: some worthwhile work was being done within the realm of national ideology, but essentially most of the time there were two *false consciousnesses* against the reality.

The one thing that happened as a result of this was a *lack of real stories, narratives, and memories*. This was another indication of *anomie*. We had and still have a lack of real stories about that part of history, about the 20th century, as well as a lack of real stories about the rest of our history. We have gaps in real stories. There were still many stories produced. So one problem is that they haven't really been studied, but the other problem is that there were fewer produced at that time, and fewer produced about that time afterwards. We have a lack of stories about the 20th century, and we have a scarcity of stories about the next period, after 1988, as we all know. With the advent of the Internet and IT technologies, we now have more and more documentary materials easily available. However, we still lack the analytical approach to the time period from early 20th century to today.

In that situation, some of the significant art products of that time were mythologized and acquired more significance, and rightly so. This was a kind of forced landing—when stories are scarce the infrequent good ones acquire special significance. The time of Sovietization is

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[169] The article titled "Manifestations of tolerance and intolerance in Kh. Abovyan's folkloric work," Mher Kumunts and Lusine Nersisyan, 65-106 pages (Original title in Armenian: Հանդուրժողականության և անհանդուրժողականության դրսևորումները Խ. Աբովյանի բանահյուսական ակունք ունեցող ստեղծագործություններում) included in the Research Book. Manifestations of Tolerance and Intolerance in Armenian Literature, EPF Armenia, 2017: https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Tolerance_Intolerance_in_Armenian_Literature_book_2017.pdf
[170] False consciousness, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_consciousness
[171] The Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Collection of documents and materials (original title in Russian: Геноцид армян в Османской Империи: Сборник документов и материалов) http://www.genocide.ru/lib/nersisyan/genocide.htm

expressed in a film that I already mentioned, by Frunze Dovlatyan – *Myasnikyan*, produced in the 1970s. It is a wonderful film; I recommend it to everybody. It tells us about Alexander Myasnikyan[172] coming to newly-Sovietized Armenia and dealing with all of the crises that Myasnikyan inherited after independence was crushed. Of course, it's made from a Soviet perspective. There is nothing to compare it to; there is nothing one can put next to it and say, '*We are challenging this point of view*.' Neither in the Diaspora, by the Dashnaktsutyun Party, nor in the post-Soviet times has anybody produced such a significant video mythology about the time of Sovietization. There has been very little evidence available to Armenian society about that time. It is increasing now, thanks to the Internet, but it is still not well-studied and well-presented. The work of the scholars who studied that issue in Soviet times and from the Soviet perspective is not very valuable because it was written from a profoundly ideological perspective. So it has to be studied, reevaluated, reexamined today.

MH**:** One component, I think, is missing from the picture. If we are talking about two fake identities or ideologies. One is based on the essence of what the Soviet state is as it is, and the other one is the nationalist ideology. The basis for both is quite clear – in one case the whole Soviet system, power, state, etc. while in the other case it is the family, the clan, family memories and so on. However, there were also individuals, subcultures, and marginalized entities, which were basically the prototype for the liberal identity. I think this addition would complete the picture of different kinds of segmented identities.

GTG: Correct. We touched upon it a bit earlier.[173] We now have to summarize and bring this element back into the picture. We talked about subcultures, and we mentioned *rabiz*, we mentioned hippie subculture, we mentioned a lot of such cases, among which *tsekhavism* was a subculture, the *blatnoy* culture was a (anti)subculture. Indeed, the very ubiquity, variety, and number of these growing, small scale subcultures, like the *stilyagi*[174] movement, were already an indication of democratizing the public space. That wave was coming to somehow counterbalance this heritage of atomized society. Indeed, one could say these were the seeds, or the embryos, of establishing a well-connected public space.

Why was it happening? Because from the end of the 1950s, Armenia and the Soviet Union were, to a certain extent, opening up to the external world. The information space was being penetrated by information flows. Last time, we also mentioned the difference between the provinces and the center. The sheer scale of the Empire made it possible for some localities to be transparent for outside influences. In the provinces, sometimes the information space was more penetrable. In the case of Armenia, because of the Diaspora, because of the repatriates, because of the families that were abroad, some people were able to travel back and forth and bring *blue jeans* with them or vinyl discs of *the Beatles* and all that stuff. But I have also seen it in other parts of the Soviet Union. I have seen it, for instance, in Ajaria, in Batumi. I have seen it in the Baltic states, in states on the seashore or those with a port, like Odessa. This happened for obvious reasons: ships would come and bring some elements of the external world.

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[172] Alexander Miasnikian, an Armenian Bolshevik revolutionary and official, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Miasnikian
[173] See Chapter 3. The dual reality.
[174] Stilyagi, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stilyagi

- *Fartsovshchiks.*[175]

- Exactly, but *spekulatsia* takes us in a bit different direction. It is connected to the concept of *second society* – when blue jeans were being sold for 200 rubles, which was a full high level monthly salary. Many people with foreign relatives, would bring clothes from the west and sell them at a high price. They would be called *spekulant*—from the word 'speculate.' This would bring them a lot of money so they could leave off it. However, *spekulatsia* also bore an element of a negative value, just like *tsekhavism*, because *conscience*, especially for a community and society that was Christian in origin, is still important. If you are illegally selling something which costs 20 dollars for 200 rubles (over 200 dollars), even if you are working against this *false legality*, so to speak, you cannot feel comfortable with yourself. This affects the quality of your life, every aspect of it, including the quality of your art, if you are, for instance, an artist for whom this is a way of making money to survive. One compromise leads to another. For instance, if you are caught by the authorities, instead of prosecuting you, they may demand you become a KGB informant, and you may end up in a trap.

*Spekulatsia* and *fartsovka*[176] became widespread due to *defitsit*[177] (deficit), shortages of goods, another typical Soviet feature of the stagnation period. But the result was, again, further rooting of the *dual society* and *schizophrenization* of the population. A totally normal human inclination to have goods that are needed to make one's life more comfortable was an officially illegal action—with all its negative psychological results, typical of *tsekhavism*. It is wrong to think that people could just disregard its negative effects. However much the state was disliked, it was still the overarching system which provided values. People might think that there was nothing wrong with *spekulatsia*, that it was even, in a way, a courageous act, since one could be caught and could suffer, or that it was even a specific act of resistance and expression of *dissident* approach. However, some people would still disagree, either because they were devoted rule-followers or because they considered it immoral to ask for a higher price than a good would normally cost, and sell it in a clandestine way, even if that good was otherwise unattainable. Thus, there was no consensus in the society, either on the issue of *spekulants* or that of *tsekhaviks*. As a result, the moral gap in everybody's mind was deepening and expanding, contributing to the crisis typical for a *dual society*.

The consequences were that the individual became *cynical* in both cases, regardless of whether they accepted this *black* or *second reality* as fully legitimate or they decided not to join it. In either case, they could not, therefore, full-heartedly join in building opportunities for collective action, or could do this only with difficulty. If they would go for that, in order to become proactive leaders, they had to first accept the compromise that they had 'sinned,' so to speak, and somehow cleanse their conscience. One way of cleansing one's conscience was to enter the world of the imagined community and to declare that one does not accept the Soviet rules, either legal or moral, because they contradict the national interests of Armenians. Becoming a

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[175] Fartsovka, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fartsovka

[176] From the word 'fart' (luck, the same root as 'fortune'), probably coming from Yiddish and being used in the *blatnoy* language. *Fartsovka* means the process of selling *defitsit* goods or goods illegally brought from other countries. The link to the word's root meaning is probably explainable by a reference to the fact that those who could buy such goods were lucky since they found what they needed, so *fartsovshchik* was the person who would bring luck to the customer. Compare with 'pofartit`' (Russian) – when one is lucky (say, in a card game).

[177] Товарный дефицит в СССР, Wikipedia (in Russian):
https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Товарный_дефицит_в_СССР

nationalist was therefore a convenient way of purifying one's conscience from the dirt which resulted from either adhering to or not adhering to the Soviet ideology. But if one false consciousness is substituted by another, this does not mean that the society is cured.

MH: I believe nationalism and the liberal ideology became somehow united when the collapse of the Soviet Union started. It is quite visible in all these movements that took place in the Baltic states, in the South Caucasus, etc., because those who led the national movements, the *freedom fighters* in the small province states of the Soviet Union were also the carriers of liberal ideology.

GTG: I would say then that, if that happened, that was because the liberal ideology that they thought they had was as false as nationalism or the Soviet ideology. They were not fully prepared for the liberal ideology in its entire complexity. Admiring the Western democracies because of blue jeans is quite a sophisticated understanding of the liberal ideology, isn't it? This became obvious when the Soviet system collapsed and hardship took root; many of those who were participants in these movements became staunch supporters of authoritarianism. This was more comfortable for them; they were in their comfort zone with a 'tzar.' Others became migrants. Yet others introduced their corrupt practices to the new system. Unfortunately, however understandably, they were quite successful at this.

It is a famous half-joke that many people said '*We will export Jermuk mineral water and thus our economy will flourish.*' When independence came, in all honesty, I think nobody knew how to run a state. It was all a process of trial and error. There were no people with education or experience in governance and political science of an independent state[178]. All of us were educated in the Soviet system, which did not teach these subjects apart from their Soviet versions, which were not viable and were based on false science. This became obvious long before the Soviet Union collapsed, but it affected all of us in a particularly acute way after it did. Even those specialists invited from the Diaspora who had such education, e.g. Raffi Hovhannisyan[179] or Gerard Libaridian,[180] could not help much when facing the particular Soviet and post-Soviet condition because they were specialists, if anything, in theoretical, Western type, stable and standard governance and politics. We all had to learn by doing.

MH: We didn't discuss the issue of generations – the issue of *fathers and children*. There was an ideological gap between the generations, and this understanding affects lots of issues that we try to interpret. There were parents who had seen World War II and the post-war period. They had a much stronger spiritual connection to the joint state, to the entirety of the Soviet Union, and a much more genuine feeling for the socialist ideology. Their children were often incomparably more cynical towards these values.

GTG: Yeah, let's focus on the word *cynicism*, another crucial thick variable. During the change of the generations—you remember we talked about that when discussing the change of the rulers' generations, from Zarubyan to Kochinyan to Demirchyan—the level of cynicism visibly increased. The worldview held by my father, who was born in 1925, was extremely anti-cynical.

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[178] See *Ter-Gabrielyan, Gevorg* (2018), 1988, available at https://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/1988
[179] Raffi Hovhannisian, an American-born Armenian politician, the first Foreign Minister of Armenia, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raffi_Hovhannisian
[180] Gerard Libaridian, an Armenian American historian and politician, adviser of the first president of RA, Levon Ter-Petrosyan during the 1990s, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerard_Libaridian

My mother's worldview was more relaxed. But my generation, and even those older than me whom I would encounter, held an extremely cynical worldview.

I entered university on September 1, 1980, after passing the entry exams. It was the Oriental Studies Department, an elite department, and, according to some rumors, also quite corrupt. At the same time, it was led by a famous person who I considered a senior friend and a leader, Mary Kochar, who herself wasn't corrupt at all. There were rumors about corruption being rampant in that department. We were 16 to 17-year-old boys. We went to the boys' toilet to smoke. We were standing in a circle smoking, getting to know each other, making each other's acquaintance in this new class. One of us, a big boy, said, '*Okay, now that it's just us, everybody tell me how much each of you paid to get into this department?*'

I hadn't paid anything. But you can say that I got through thanks to the fact that Mary Kochar was close to our family. I got my fair exam grades. The committee didn't lower my grades, even though my parents didn't pay bribes to them. The teachers behaved fairly toward me personally, perhaps because they knew that I was Mary's protégé.

I didn't mention all these details. I just said that I hadn't paid anything.

The guy who asked the question didn't believe me: '*Don't kid me. It cost my dad 35,000 rubles. It costs 40,000 rubles to get into medical university, the law department costs 30,000 rubles, and my father paid 35,000 rubles for oriental studies.*'

*Cynicism and the lack of a desire to hide it anymore, the lack of belief in anything like socialism and state ideology,* but also in anything like national ideology, was something that I felt was rampant in my generation, where the ideology of *tsekhavism* became the main game in town. The guy's father was a 'high-level' *tsekhavik*, the head of all of the petrol stations in Armenia. Before that, he was the head of a prison, so a state *nomenklatura* member. His son, by the way, also eventually became a prison head in post-Soviet Armenia. This has been one of the most lucrative jobs for a long time and probably still is. As you know, prisons are still breweries of violence, of the Gulag and *blatnoy* anti-culture today, as they were before.

Coming back to the issue of liberalism, I am reluctant to use the words 'liberal' or 'socialist,' also because real socialists often were outside this power system, while some of those who considered themselves liberal partly served those in power; they could also be *nomenklatura*. The *statists* were also partly in the power system and partly in the horizontal ties system, nationalists too. The views, personal ideologies, and value systems did not correspond to the social and political structure.

In my experience, one thing was quite clear: when a person with liberal views received a *nomenklatura* position, he often behaved in the most appalling way, far worse than those who did not consider themselves to be liberals, intellectuals, *intelligentsia* etc. The story about my mom's scandal with her new boss at the workplace that I told above is a case in point. Liberal intelligentsia were often spineless, and this is also a well-known phenomenon. Even Lenin mentioned it in his time. Today one can still find references to this phenomenon expressed by many people who notice that the so-called intelligentsia adapts to corrupt power to the level of being extremely sycophant.

Vardan Jaloyan distinguishes between *state racism* vs. *ethnic racism*.[181] Nationalistic—not just nationalist—ideology often leads to ethnic racism for state-building or other reasons. We can see it even in the nicest Baltic states. In some of them, there is a large Russian-speaking[182] population that is deprived of its rights. We can see it elsewhere as well. This is liberalism only for a select few. I think the hypocrisy of the western liberalism paradigm has always been that it is liberalism for the few, claiming that it is for all. Nationalist people, including people who promote xenophobia, can seem liberal toward each other, concerned with defending each other's rights, as long as the issue of other ethnicities is not raised. This paradox is something very important for us to register and consider for the future of Armenia.

Nationalism, whether state or ethnic nationalism, can have many different forms. It can often be disguised. For instance, we like claiming that Yezidis are fine in Armenia. Indeed, they are not persecuted and officially they have all the same rights as ethnic Armenians. They do not complain themselves. If they do, it is usually for an economic issue that can be taken care of. However, we do not push them to build their national media, their national theater, their national literature, music etc. It does not even pass our minds to give them more opportunities, to develop special projects for them, given that they are a nation which does not have an independent state and are a specific ethnic group of citizens of Armenia.

This approach is absent from our minds. In Soviet times, there were token examples of this, but it was mainly for ideological reasons. Kurds in Turkey still remember the Soviet-era broadcasts of Armenian radio in the Kurdish language. But today, thinking about doing more than giving equal rights to minorities is absent. Moreover, it is absent from the minds of Armenians and, unfortunately, most Yezidis, too. If you ask Armenians, or if you ask most Yezidis, they will say, '*Yeah, Yezidis are fine in this country*' and, in a sense, yes, they are fine, in this *atomized sense*. But nobody is thinking about what they really deserve in one of the only countries where they have a significant community and seem to be well-respected.

This unconscious and subconscious anti-liberalism, which is the companion of nationalism, nation-state nationalism, and nation-building nationalism, is something very important for us to keep in mind.

IS: It is difficult to speak in general terms because it depends on the time and context. Some people in Soviet Armenia, in the second half of the 20th century, felt that the Armenian language was under threat. Many intellectual and 'elite' families leaned toward Russian schools because it was perceived that Russian schools were of higher quality than Armenian schools, whose graduates were like 'second class citizens.' Of course, there was a small group of intelligentsia, a 'real' intelligentsia, that was deliberately sending kids to Armenian schools, but one could feel the opposite trend. Therefore, I think, some kind of leaning toward promoting the Armenian language, a movement toward having only Armenian schools, was an important imperative at the beginning of the statehood. Now, when this is maybe not an issue anymore, perhaps it is the time for thinking more broadly. Or perhaps it is still an issue, taking into account the russification of life here, which is still going on.

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[181] Biopolitics (Jam Session 19) (Original in Armenian: Կենսաքաղաքականություն (Jam Session 19): https://epfarmenia.am/hy/video/biopolitics-Jaloyan-Ter-Gabrielyan
[182] Russians in the Baltic states, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russians_in_the_Baltic_states

Of course, it is some kind of ethnic nationalism, or nation-building nationalism or whatever, but it is important in a certain context, in a certain situation. Perhaps in 20 years' time Armenia will have such a strong statehood that the same people who were advocating for the language law which prohibits foreign language elementary schools[183] will say, '*Yes, of course, we could have all kinds of schools.*'

Because the issue of statehood exists. We do not yet feel fully secure about our statehood. So, I think it depends on the situation. It is the same for ethnic nationalists, pure ethnic nationalists like the Dashnaks or Nzhdehakans, or this Republican Party back in the 90s, the proper one.[184] I think it's very important to look into all these issues in the right context. Otherwise, it will just be labeling, which is not very helpful.

GTG: Thank you. Indeed. I have two things to say here. One is that, indeed, the issues are intertwined. So, you can say that the anti-Russian sentiment was quite justified. But at the same time, it was trendy to go to Russian schools also because they were indeed of higher quality, merely because the Russian pedagogical community and the Russian society, of course, having many more resources, being the Empire holder nation, so to speak, would produce better algorithms for education, because they were much bigger and stronger. I went to an Armenian language school. My textbooks were like bad Xerox copies. They were bad copies of the books of my friends who were going to the Chekhov school and other Russian-language schools. My books were not in color, while their books were printed in color. So I was envious.

IS: It was a little bit of a chicken-and-egg situation. The staff and the quality of Russian-language schools were perhaps better, which is why people would send kids there. On the other hand, perhaps the quality of Armenian-language schools was lower because not enough people intended to send their kids there and push to make them better. I cannot swear on the Bible, but from what I have heard, the situation in Georgia was a bit different because the Georgians were fighting to have better-quality Georgian-language schools. The Georgian intelligentsia considered it a *faux pas* to send their kids to Russian schools. Those schools were for Russian kids, or minority kids like the Armenians.

In Armenia, the tendency was that very few *intelligentsia* or *nomenklatura* families that I know, like yours, would deliberately send their kids to Armenian-language schools. I know that one of the survival mechanisms for good Armenian schools was that some schools, like my school, the Charents school, received this English-language special education privilege. This somehow saved some Armenian-language schools from being second class. Sociologically, it's an interesting phenomenon that people who hardly spoke Russian at home would still try to put their kids in Russian-language school, not because of the opportunities or better books, but just to be like the others, just to be part of this trend.

GTG: These personal stories and perceptions are very important. I am going to give you a kind of different perspective on that.

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[183] Protest against foreign language schools, Radio Liberty, 2010 (retrieved October 19, 2019): https://www.azatutyun.am/a/2080225.html ;
Language and Loss: Russian schools in Armenia raise concerns, ArmeniaNow, 2010 (retrieved October 19, 2019): https://www.armenianow.com/society/49331/custom_union_russia_armenian_language
[184] For many the early Republican Party, established by Ashot Navasardyan, is considered 'the proper one', as different from what it became when it came to power during the leadership of Robert Kocharyan.

It was an adaptation movement. It was not a random occurrence that people were going to the Russian schools or being sent to the Russian schools. It was not just the intelligentsia; it was also the *tsekhaviks*, the newly-emerging bourgeoisie, the բարքեն (this word does not translate into English: the *Philistine bourgeoisie*), the people who moved to Yerevan from villages, etc.

Let us compare Armenia to Georgia. First of all, even if you take the two languages, Armenian and Georgian, in Georgian you have many more foreign roots, particularly coming from western languages. The Georgian language situation and language security are very different from those of Armenian. They made their language much more open historically, since the times of Ilia Chavchavadze.[185] You can talk with Arsen Kharatyan[186] about that. They are much more open to foreign influences, while keeping their alphabet, pronunciation, and some very important parts of the building blocks of the language. That makes it easier for them, in certain sense, not to worry too much. Their language is built so that it absorbs foreign influences much more easily than Armenian.

When Russia came to this region at the end of the 18th century, Georgia was deprived of statehood. Therefore the anti-Russian sentiment there has been historically stronger. Armenia has historically been saved by Russia. There wouldn't be an Armenia today if it were not for the Russian conquest of a part of the Persian Empire. This is a historical fact. Therefore, historically Russia and the Russian influence have not been perceived as negatively by Armenians as they have by Georgians.

The 1977 Constitution of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet Republics retained Armenian and Georgian as the state languages in Armenia and Georgia respectively. This was a unique achievement compared to many other Soviet Republics. So the level of struggle in the two Republics for preservation and strengthening of their cultural and national identity was quite similar, I would say.

It was well-known at the time I was in university that those who had graduated from a Russian-language school, such as the elite schools like the Chekhov School or Pushkin School, and wanted to study at Yerevan State University (YSU) had only two options: the Russian Philology Department, which was very small (25 people, mainly girls) or the Physics Department, which had a Russian-language section, which again consisted of about 25 people. The rest of the seventeen departments that existed at the time (if I remember correctly) all taught only in Armenian. There were very few other higher education institutions where education in Russian was available, compared to a large amount of institutes with Armenian language education.

Therefore, I think in terms of this nationalistic build-up and resistance to the Russian influence, Armenia was no less 'patriotic'—let's put it that way—than Georgia.

It is also interesting to track what happened to all these young girls and boys with Russian education who didn't want to attend, or couldn't be accepted to, the Russian Philology or Physics Departments of YSU, or to another institute where education in Russian was available. Obviously, they would go to other, Armenian-speaking departments. In order to pass the entrance exams, they had to know Armenian well enough. This meant that either their parents

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[185] Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), a Georgian writer, political figure, poet, and publisher. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilia_Chavchavadze
[186] Arsen Kharatyan, Armenian politician, journalist and activist: https://www.facebook.com/arsen.kharatyan

paid bribes, or they were extraordinarily talented, or they hired professors privately who prepared them for the exams. Any combination of these was also possible, of course. If they entered the institution without sufficient Armenian reading and writing skills, they often had to continue on corrupting the system, either by paying bribes for getting term exam grades or making private arrangements to pass them in Russian, which was illegal and which meant the quality of their knowledge was not at the needed level. Finally, they could also beg the teacher for grades; this was also possible.

The end result was generations of poorly-educated folks with higher education diplomas, specialists who were not in fact of the needed quality, who entered the job market year after year and filled a variety of positions not being fully qualified for them. They made the Soviet Armenia of the late 20th century what it became: a republic with huge structural problems, which quite suddenly became independent for historical reasons significantly beyond its control.

For the sake of fairness, let me not forget to mention that scores of talented Armenians with a Russian education eventually, did overcome this predicament after Independence by rebuilding their Armenian through personal studies and advancement. I wonder if they would have been as successful in learning Armenian if it were not for Independence.

Finally, let us also not forget the other problem: the lack of a wider 'universalistic' worldview by those who had received their education in Armenian. They not only lacked fluency in Russian or another foreign language (because foreign language education was often of an appalling quality), but they also lacked all the erudition that the fluent Russian readers had an opportunity to acquire. Because, of course, there were many more cultural products—native or translated—available in Russian than in Armenian. Therefore, these people were often perceived as provincial, which affected the attitudes towards them as well as their own self-esteem.

A story about my parents' friend is very telling in this respect: he had received a Russian education and sometimes felt an inferiority complex when interacting with the Armenian intelligentsia.[187] Once, he said about one such professor of Armenian history:

'Perhaps he knows what was published on the 3rd page of *Mshak*'s[188] 1898 April 28 issue. However, his underwear is dirty. I don't know what was published on the 3rd page of *Mshak*'s 1898 April 28 issue, but my underwear is clean.'

This parable, I think, explains quite succinctly the predicament of half-educated folks of Soviet Armenia, whether they received Russian- or Armenian-language education.

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[187] Intelligentsia, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligentsia
[188] Mshak, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mshak

# Chapter 6. Simplified and Mythologized History

We talked about the past and used several concepts. We tried to develop a conceptual map of how to understand the 20$^{th}$ century in Armenia's history.

What became obvious for me in that picture are *the voids: the fact that many things have not been studied; there is no unified discourse on many things that have happened.*

Now we are moving to the last chapter of Soviet history – the movement and the years of independence. We face the same issue here: there are big voids concerning many things. A lot has not been studied or collected. Much of it is not known or, if something has been studied, it is not widely shared.

We should understand, therefore, that in today's world of information oversaturation, with plentiful amounts of unnecessary, unneeded, distracting information, scholars have a new challenge and a new task: they have to, in addition to studying this or that aspect of the world, also make sure that the results of their studies reach those who need them. This means that the target audience of scholarship is very different from what it has been in earlier times. It is not merely other scholars who study the same subject. The target audience of scholarship is all those for whom it can be useful.

Perhaps there is a great scholarly article written about Armenia in the 1960s or Armenia in the 1900s. But if today's generations do not know where it is, if they do not know where to look for it, if they are not aware that it exists, it is the same as if it didn't exist at all. We need to make sure that all those who can benefit from our knowledge, be they hairdressers, artists, builders, taxi drivers, or whoever, have a fair chance of knowing that this knowledge exists and that it is available in this particular place, in the virtual world, and/or at the library. Many scholars have realized this already. They say, half-jokingly and half-pessimistically, that they feel like becoming publicists or journalists. Indeed, this is indicative of the current moment in history: one should not only uncover knowledge but also make sure that it has reached those who can benefit from it.

These texts are not academic. They are personal impressions and deliberations. But their aim is to focus the attention of the audience on the issues that are often overlooked, misinterpreted, or presented in a mundane way, though they are complex issues worthy of deep scholarly deliberations.

What we are presenting is not set in stone. We are presenting our impressions, our knowledge, and the results of our thinking. Perhaps this will help fill in at least some of the voids, if not fully then in a superficial and truncated way, to give a sign to the next student of Armenia that this is an important path to go down.

I used a very simple, perhaps unjustifiably simple, methodological trick. Along the timeline, I used this approach of *plus* versus *minus*, *positive events* versus *negative events,* or *positive side of events* versus *their negative side*. I pause on the events and qualities that, in my opinion, are important and valuable for Armenia's development, survival, or future; and events and issues which contributed to the problems and crises.

*Perestroika,* which started sometime after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, brought, for me, the first major noticeable difference with the previous time: the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the USSR was speaking on TV[189] as an independent, free person. He was alive!

That was unheard of in the previous 20 years. I hadn't seen anything like that since the year I started watching TV as a child. Secretary Generals Brezhnev,[190] Andropov,[191] and Chernenko[192] were all very old and ill. On TV, they seemed robotic. They were unable to do what I considered 'speaking.' In the best case, they would read prepared remarks. There were lots of jokes about *gerontocracy[193]* in the USSR: the fact that the rulers were old and ill people who could not really govern, who were just figureheads of the Soviet system.

Suddenly, in February 1986, I saw Gorbachev on TV speaking and using words freely. It was obvious that he wanted to change things. That was a very big change itself. Also, the behavior of the top brass depended on the leader. If he was active, they would also change their behavior and become more business-minded. During Brezhnev's time, his cronies copied his behavior – although they were not that old; they would move and speak like dead people. Under Gorbachev, they all started gradually speaking and expressing opinions. This resuscitation of the political situation in the Soviet Union was one of the most important visible elements in the first period of *Perestroika.*

In Armenia, nothing much changed. While in Russia, particularly in Moscow, you already had examples of free speech, *glasnost,[194]* such as the newspaper *Ogonyok* (Огонёк[195]) or *Moskovskie Novosti* (Московские Новости,[196] the *Moscow News[197]* newspaper), no *glasnost* was really visible in Armenia for a very long time. There were very few stories at the political level relevant to *perestroika*. It seemed like everything was still frozen in Armenia in 1985-86, even up to the second half of 1987.

One example of a story that happened during these years, 1986 if I remember correctly, was that the secretary of the Communist Party of the Hrazdan district, Hayk Kotanjyan, rebelled against the leader of the Communist Party of Armenia Karen Demirchyan, criticizing him publicly. He said that we needed *perestroika*, we needed change. That was important. It was a strange

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[189] XXVII Party Congress (1986), YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0ibiHlOLlM. Please also see Projector of Perestroika (1986), Seventeen Moments in Soviet History multi-media archive: http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1985-2/perestroika-and-glasnost/perestroika-and-glasnost-video/projector-of-perestroika-1986/

[190] Leonid Brezhnev, a Soviet politician, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the governing Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) between 1964-1982, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Brezhnev

[191] Yuri Andropov, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union between 1982-1984, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Andropov

[192] Konstantin Chernenko, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union between 1984-1985, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantin_Chernenko

[193] Gerontocracy, a form of oligarchical rule in which an entity is ruled by leaders who are significantly older than most of the adult population, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerontocracy

[194] Glasnost, a political slogan for increased government transparency in the Soviet Union, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasnost

[195] Ogoniok, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogoniok

[196] Moskovskiye Novosti, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moskovskiye_Novosti

[197] The Moscow News, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Moscow_News

occurrence in a situation where everything seemed to be frozen. Hayk Kotanjyan later became a military officer. He is now a General, and he established a research institute with the Ministry of Defense.[198]

A lot of texts excluded from public circulation during the 20th century started to emerge. These publications included pieces that were left on shelves by the writers who couldn't publish their work before, or by authors who were killed or prosecuted. This could have also been stuff written by those who only published abroad. These texts started to return gradually in Russia, in the center, in Moscow, in the Russian language. Solzhenitsyn's works were published, as well as many other works telling the story of the Gulag and all the suffering, injustice, and violence that took place in the Soviet Union in the 20th century.

Unfortunately, in Armenia, very few such texts became available at that time. People looked into their shelves and hidden cupboards, but they were mainly empty. The stuff that was scratched out included some of Gurgen Mahari's[199] works, most of Ler Kamsar's[200] work, and Zabel Yesayan, who still has not been fully published in Armenia even now.

Among the many persecuted Soviet Armenian writers, there were very few who wrote about their predicament. There were very few stories available about the Gulag written by Armenians. Solzhenitsyn, in his gigantic study *The Gulag Archipelago,* mentions Armenians very rarely, only once or twice, despite Armenians suffering in large numbers in the Gulag.

Why was that? Why this silence, why this absence of dissident texts? Perhaps Armenians are adaptable and pragmatic people. So they tried not to produce something which was not going to be published–that's the first reason. Secondly, they were not as enthusiastic about criticizing the Soviet Union as they were about rebuilding the national and nationalist discourse. As I said earlier on*,* there was this contradiction that nationalist discourse was prohibited, on one hand, and it was somehow, in a limited way, encouraged on the other.

After independence, it seemed for a long time that not much was being studied and published about the 20th century, and that there was not much left on the shelves to be published after the Soviet Union collapsed. However, gradually and very slowly, the works of diasporan writers began to be published in Armenia, or became accessible to Armenians living in Armenia, which had not been the case before. The stories from the end of the 19th century up to the 1920s, the entire volume of memories written down by a variety of people about the Ottoman purges and the Genocide, the First World War, the First Republic and its surrender, are scattered, often in manuscripts, all over the world. I cannot say, unfortunately, that after independence this material started to be collected, studied, digitized in a centralized manner, encouraged by the independent state. Whatever entered the public discourse was mainly the result of the interest and work of individuals.[201] But, gradually, this process started, albeit much slower than the process of publishing the Russian-language texts about Soviet history. They were numerous, ready to be published, lying on secret shelves or hidden in cupboards, waiting for their hour to arrive.

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[198] National Defense Research University, Ministry of Deference, RA: http://www.mil.am/en/pages/11
[199] Gurgen Mahari (1903-1969), an Armenian writer and poet, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurgen_Mahari
[200] Ler Kamsar (1888-1965), an Armenian writer, Wikipedia: https://hy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Լեռ_Կամսար
[201] ANI Armenian Research Center, headed by Tatul Hakobyan: http://www.aniarc.am/

We still don't have a comprehensive public discourse about several elements of Armenian history of the 20th century, particularly the contradictions. Let me give you a sketch of the issues and questions that are being left unanswered. I already mentioned some of these questions in Chapter 4. Let me expand on them, even risking repeating what has already been said. This seems worthwhile, given that we are now immersed deeper into the arguments that I have been trying to build throughout this text. Perhaps some of these questions should be answered not by scholarship but by art and literature. Society is hungry for more information and better understanding of these issues.

What were the relations between those among the Armenian intelligentsia who adhered to the nationalist ideology versus the socialist ideology at different times between 1895 and 1920? How did many personalities move from one ideology to the other, and for what reason?

What was the essence of the arguments between those who were representing the interests of Western Armenia and those who were focused on Eastern Armenia?

Were the Armenian Socialists and Bolsheviks sincere adherents to the Socialist and later Russian Bolshevik ideology, to Marxism as it was then defined, or were they merely following this ideology because they believed that Russia was the only power than could help Armenia; or that Russia was too strong and it was better not to resist it?

Regarding the Fedayin and Hayduk movements and 'khmbapets,' from many examples in memoirs, we know that their groups would often be as ruthless to their own kin as they were to the Turks, attacking and marauding Armenian settlements. Of course, this may be because these groups were often recruited from the most ruthless contingent of Armenian men, who were not well educated and lacked culture. However, what were the inner feelings of these folks when they abandoned the rules of war and behaved in a criminal way vis-à-vis civilians, including their own kin? Was this degeneration of humanity related to the overall impact of the ruthless First World War, or the cruelty of the Genocide and accompanying events, which made them forget their humanity? Or was there another cause, perhaps the lack of statehood for centuries impacted the value system of these men, making them incapable of distinguishing what could and should be done from what could not and should not? Does this contradict the impression that I get from studying Western Armenia in its relatively calmer times of the early 19th century, when the settlements seemed full of inner culture and the community was strong? How and why did this entire behavioral culture and these values evaporate during the war and the Genocide, even if people survived? Was it the impact of the ruthlessness of the Genocide, the trauma of the Genocide and of the global war that made people less human than before?

Regarding the defeats of the 1918-1920s, in many instances, people just refused to fight. What were the reasons: war-weariness, a lack of perspective, genocidal trauma, lack of organization? Often, the defeats are explained by a lack of will and the fatigue of the peasant population, but also by 'betrayals' to the national cause and the incompetence of those in charge. If this is studied and properly explained, then the cases of successful resistance, heroism, and victories will also become more understandable.

When the Bolsheviks came to power, they started the mass persecution of the Dashnaktsutyun and many others, with the pretext that these groups held nationalist, anti-Russian and anti-Bolshevik ideas. To what extent did the Armenian Bolsheviks try to minimize these

persecutions, ordered from Moscow? We know some cases where people were let go, but also many cases of unjust punishment. What did the Bolsheviks and their servants feel when punishing their erstwhile friends and colleagues? Why did they agree to it?

Later on, when their own persecution started, during the Stalinist terror, what did they feel about their previous behavior? Did they feel remorse?

What are some cases of resistance to the Stalinist terror - overt and covert? Have there been cases where people risked their well-being or even life and didn't agree to persecute innocent folks, which were to be subject to repression?

The culture of *donos* became a very substantial tool, almost the main tool, for implementing the Stalinist terror. Why did it take root in the Armenian society so fast? Was it the influence coming from the rest of the Soviet Union? Was it the impact of the Genocide and war, which had made people rootless and valueless? I already mentioned that many cases of repressions were motivated by mercantile considerations: getting this or that part of the 'property' of the victim, from a house or apartment to a wife, sister or child.

Take the famous stories about the behavior of figures like Nairi Zaryan, who, according to the circulating stories, played a role in the persecution of Charents. Were these 'young Bolsheviks' and supposed adherents to the ideology indeed sincere? Did they realize what kind of dirty game they were taking part in, and how history would remember them?

Can the Stalinist terror be perceived as history's revenge for the wrongdoings of Armenian Bolsheviks, particularly vis-à-vis their adversaries, the Dashnaksutyun and the previous government members of the Independent Republic, leaders, actors, and their kin?

These are just some of the questions that come to my mind over and over again. I asked them earlier on in a shorter version. They are not just left unanswered, they are not even fully formulated yet. My formulations are very rough and probably at the verge of inappropriate. Whereas, only by asking some of these questions and looking for historical evidence to form an opinion about the replies to them, can one start understanding the history of the first half of the 20th century.

I have a much better understanding of the second half of the 20th century because it took place in front of my own eyes. Whatever I didn't know because I was still too young to experience it myself, I have been told by my parents or others of their generation.

Of course, one may also say that we lack a full understanding of other parts of Armenia's history, before the 20th century. Indeed, some of the assumptions that helped me define the questions above are also applicable to other parts of Armenia's history. It all deserves to be revisited and, finally, restudied and reformulated.

Now, I come back to where we were: to Perestroika.

Eventually, as I said, a significant number of prohibited texts, texts which had not been known in Soviet Armenia, started to come back to Armenia. But this was not something that was produced and prohibited in Soviet times; these were mainly Western Armenian and diasporan Armenian texts.

Under the USSR, book and newspaper publishing, radio and TV, film and performance production all became well-institutionalized, widespread and flourished in Armenia. Despite this, one would still feel quite a significant lack of interesting and important original texts available in Armenian. Most of the texts that did appear in periodicals or books seemed useless because they were infected with Soviet lies. There were also texts with half-truths, but lies and hypocrisy choked their influence on the reader. Finally, even relatively good and interesting texts, being surrounded by the Soviet falsehood, would often not make any positive impression.

Recently, I found a copy of the *Pioneer* magazine («Պիոներ»), a monthly magazine for children. It was the last issue of 1979, number 12. There is a short fiction story published on pages 4 and 5, written by Anahit Parsamyan and entitled *The Thorn-Flower*. This is quite a good professional short fiction. However, I remember very clearly that, when I read it in 1979 (when I was 15), it seemed totally irrelevant to me. I don't think the only reason is that I have become more experienced in reading prose. The reason is, because most of that issue was full of unnecessary and uninteresting stuff, this short story also was affected by that impression of mine. I recently found that issue; I had set it aside because it contained my own short story; however, it was quite distorted by the editors. I don't know if the reason was censorship (it could be, since I had inadvertently mocked many elements of the Soviet times.) or the genuine – though mistaken – desire to make the narrative smoother. Whatever the case, I was very upset with that publication, since it seemed to me that the magazine had ruined my prose after keeping it on the shelf for two years and then suddenly publishing it in a shape that I could not accept. Even if I was only 15, this impression of mine affected my opinion about the entire issue.

There was also a lack of oral stories. I studied with children and youth of various backgrounds, coming from different parts of Yerevan and Armenia. Almost none of them, or their parents, when we met, which happened quite frequently at birthday parties or on other occasions, would tell stories about their families. I knew very little about the background of my peers. In my family, on the contrary, there were plenty of stories that my parents or grandmother would share, not only with me, but also with their friends.

Sometimes, I would even explicitly ask my friends from faraway villages to tell stories about their village, and I was often told that there was nothing interesting to tell.

This pattern has continued almost to this day: people who come from villages, when asked to tell a story that happened in their village or with their family, often dismiss this request, saying that there was nothing interesting and memorable in their previous life or in the lives of their parents.

One should note, however, that today such stories have become more valued, and many people do try to remember stories about their and their ancestor's past and share them, e.g. on social media.

How can one explain this specific lack of oral stories or the disregard of their significance? Several factors played a role, from more significant to less important ones. Perhaps, the trauma of violence, be it the Genocide or Stalinist violence, interrupted the storytelling tradition and made it inadvisable to share stories. This could be because of an unwillingness to remember the traumatic past, fear of suffering if one tells a story, or perhaps a desire to protect new generations from the negative mood, pessimism, and tragedy of the stories of the past, which were obviously

often about suffering and injustice. Perhaps many people, in their move from a village to a city dwelling, left behind their relatives, their villages, and forgot their past or wanted to forget it.

It could be that, because there were *two societies* – the *official-formal* one and the *second, black* one – telling stories would require opening up and giving out too much information about the reality of interactions between people, which might have been considered dangerous or just unnecessary.

This is another indication of the deep trauma in which the population of Armenia found itself. Since the trauma was left unaddressed, it also compounded under the Soviet rules, and we had a lack of narratives, which of course contributed to the decay of the society. At least jokes and anecdotes were flourishing, including political ones. They became a part of the popular folklore, which tried to make people laugh and cleanse the traumatic elements from daily life, giving at least some guidance to the real value system. No wonder that a lot of these jokes were cynical and many of them were full of profanities.

Now we move to 1988. As background material, we can mention Thomas De Waal's book *Black Garden,*[202] which gives quite a thorough timeline of the events, but from the perspective of the Karabakh conflict. Also, similarly, let us not forget Tatul Hakobyan's work,[203] which is also a timeline of the official discourse and documents relating to the Karabakh conflict. The most important thing about 1988 and its aftermath, for me, is that because the Karabakh war broke out, the movement for Armenia's independence started. The foundations for independence and sovereignty were being established.

There is not much written and studied from that perspective. There is no accessible summary or comprehensive account of the sequence of events that include, intertwined with the escalation of the Karabakh conflict, the thinking of the Karabakh movement and its leaders, who then became the *Armenian Pan-National Movement*[204] and came to power, setting up the structures of independent Armenia, its approaches, culture, and traditions.

None of this is well studied. I cannot find such a well-formed account. There may be some bits and pieces published. In Armenia, there used to be a journal called AIM (Armenian International Magazine[205]); some bits and pieces were published there, some in other places. You have the students' textbooks, which give a very sketchy and sometimes wrongly-tinged account of the events. So, 1988 and its aftermath present a big void when trying to understand not just how did the Karabakh conflict evolved and escalated, but also how the Armenian independent statehood, the Third Republic, was conceived and built.

The 1988 movement has been studied from the perspective of rituals, ethnology, anthropology and culturology, for example in the works of Levon Abrahamyan[206] and his school of thought, or

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[202] Thomas De Waal, 2013, Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War, NYU Press: https://carnegieeurope.eu/2013/07/08/black-garden-armenia-and-azerbaijan-through-peace-and-war-10th-year-anniversary-edition-pub-52688

[203] What happened in Khojaly: an excerpt from a book by Tatul Hakobyan "Karabakh diary: green and black," 2017: https://jam-news.net/?p=21679

[204] Armenian Pan-National Movement, Armeniapedia: http://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Pan-National_Movement

[205] The official website of Armenian International Magazine: http://armenianinternationalmagazine.com/

[206] Levon Abrahamian, Academia.edua: http://nas-ra-ae.academia.edu/LevonAbrahamian

by the group[207] of Hranush Kharatyan. However, it has not been sufficiently studied from many other perspectives.

We still have access to most of the people who were there and had leadership roles, or just lived through those times. So it would help to interview them even now, before it is too late. Many people are already gone. People forget things, as we know too well. But there have not been sufficient interviews, with a focus beyond just the Karabakh conflict but the evolution and re-establishment of statehood. What does exist is usually either reflecting on the struggle for power, political parties, or the Karabakh war.

A significant part of the 1988 movement and its aftermath was the rallies. Some claimed that up to one million people came to Opera Square at some point in time. But the attitude of those who disagreed with the rallies has not been studied. For instance, I personally had an ambivalent attitude toward them. It wasn't that I disagreed with the rallies: I didn't have enough of an educated or political opinion to agree or disagree. I was raised in the humanist paradigm, which means that nationalism seemed strange and inexplicable to me. Secondly, when I started going to these rallies, I felt something strange immediately. It was like being in a theater, where hundreds of thousands of people were standing day and night, not working, only waiting for news to come from the stage. On the stage, you had some leaders. You don't know who appointed them to be the leaders. They decided that on their own behalf. They were trying to guide you and lead you, but you were wasting your life and an opportunity to do something worthwhile by standing there for hours, days, and weeks.

I wasn't a participant in the movement. I was a part of the masses, of the body of the public, the body of the masses who had been requested to be there so that the leaders could legitimize their claim. The claim was in the name of the entire populace, but I did not feel personal agency. I felt disempowered. It seemed that the claim had a solid foundation because a large portion of the nation was present there. But for me, it was something quite strange – wasting time standing there and not working. The strikes started at that time. It was the process of dismantling the Soviet system in Armenia and all over the Soviet Union. In different ways, this was happening in parallel in various other parts of the Soviet Union.

Let us discuss, for a moment, the blockade which had been established by Azerbaijan and gradually hardened. The gradual collapse of the Soviet Union was taking place. Its industry was collapsing, production systems were sitting idle, the infrastructure, including transportation infrastructure, were becoming useless. The factories stopped because they couldn't receive raw material from elsewhere in the Soviet Union, and they couldn't send their products back to the rest of the Soviet Union. The infrastructural system of the Soviet Union was collapsing, and this was reinforced and accompanied by the blockade. So my question is: which came first? Was it the breakdown of the infrastructural system because of the economic collapse or did the blockade obstruct the infrastructural system from functioning? It all happened together in an entangled way. People did not go to work for many weeks; schools stopped operating. Obviously, the system started to slow down until it finally came to a halt.

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[207] Armenian Center for Ethnological Studies "Hazarashen" NGO:
http://www.armeniatotalitaris.am/?page_id=5966&lang=en

When standing there at the Opera, my thoughts were – *what's going on in their minds, how will the society continue to function if nobody is working?* Some people were thinking along similar lines. Some people tried to continue working, like people in the medical profession, the emergency services, etc. But essentially the entire society and the entire government structure came to a halt. The standoff continued for months and months. Afterwards, when the strikes and rallies ended, people went back to work, but there was no more work left to be done; the system was gone.

In the Soviet system, in many offices, people would reliably receive their salary—even if it was low—without any real checks on what they were doing. Often, they would do *tufta* at work, but in parallel they were living their own lives: reading, studying, teaching; or just having fun, just wasting time, sitting in cafes, and drinking coffee; or engaging in *spekulatsia* and *fartsovka*, making money by, for instance, selling goods sent by their relatives from abroad.

*The double reality or dual reality that we talked about, had already substantially undermined the effectiveness of work in the Soviet Union. Of course, this became possible because work was not based on the market.* A salary was a given if one had a job. Moreover, if you were a 'nice' boss, according to the Soviet values, you would not fire those who didn't really work; the reason could be, for instance, because you didn't like the Soviet Union anyway. Also, the boss wouldn't be held accountable for the idleness of his personnel. He wouldn't be responsible for that, his superiors would not ask him for effectiveness. His own job often did not depend on the performance of his team, but rather on his network of connections, relationship with his superiors, good standing vis-à-vis the *nomenklatura* system, and his capacity to be a sycophant; or his ability to steal, lie, and forge the numbers of the *state plan.*[208]

All this was undermining the effectiveness of the entire Soviet system. This ineffectiveness related to it severe inefficiency were important contributing factors to the bankruptcy and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

This inefficiency became absolute during the time of the rallies. If during earlier times at least some work could be done and had to be done, during the rallies, there was no reason to do any work whatsoever. On the contrary, there were a lot of reasons not to do any work. Some of these reasons were the Karabakh movement and its clash with the remnants of communist power; the escalation of the Karabakh conflict; the blockade, which created lots of difficulties for people, e.g. taking a simple shower or having a normal meal at home; and the earthquake. All that together created this emotional and psychological situation which affected the capacity to work.

At Yerevan State University, where I was working at the time, many instructors—including me—were thinking: What are we teaching? Why are we teaching that? Okay, I was teaching something that had a practical application of sorts and, in fact, the number of my students increased; as I said before, I taught Turkish language. But what could be taught in addition to everything that was being taught? What should have been taught instead of *scientific communism,*[209] a subject which disappeared with the collapse of the USSR? But even those who were teaching the history of the Armenian nation, they were teaching it based on Soviet approaches. Now the entire curriculum and the approach had to change. The emotional tension

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[208] Gosplan, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gosplan
[209] Scientific communism, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_communism

added to all of this. Some students had gone to war. There were strikes all the time, negotiations of sorts between students and teachers. The Soviet Union was collapsing. What to teach in these circumstances?

The society came to a halt. Its productivity tanked. Its objective of producing things for the future was put on the backburner. Those who were conscious of that, like my very good friend David Hovhannisyan[210] and people like him, would go to Opera Square, where students were participating in a sitting strike, and they would conduct their classes right there.

Of course, there was quite a lot of creativity expressed by people at that time as well. There were important elements of support, expressions of solidarity, genuine concern, attempts to do something important to help the historical moment and the nation. But essentially, the system came to a halt. There was this kind of thought: '*To hell with society, to hell with the former kind of life, to hell with the government system, to hell with the production system that existed; we are fed up with all that…*' Thus, the process of collapse evolved.

The next very important moment was the reformation of the leadership group. Again, it has not been studied very well. How did the Karabakh Committee[211] change? There was one group of people in the Karabakh Committee, and then some of them left and others were invited in. How did they start thinking about the next stages, how to build a state? In practical terms, almost nobody really thought at the time that the Soviet Union could collapse. Some people among the Karabakh Committee had that idea early on, but very few. Their ideas were not shared, especially by the public.

But when they came to become the leaders of the crowd, did they have a clear-cut plan, or skills to lead or manage? They mostly did not, because they had no experience, and such subjects were not studied in the Soviet Union. Situations of this kind were a total novelty. They had to be reactive and learn by doing, to take tactical rather than strategic decisions.

If you take the Baltic states or former Warsaw Pact countries like Poland, they had huge Diasporas in Canada, in the northern parts of the United States, some of which were political scientists, specialists in governance and management, who then started to help them design the new government structure. Moreover, Poland, for instance, was already an independent state, even though it was under socialist control and Soviet domination.

The Baltic states had been independent for twenty years, from 1918 to 1939-1940. That was sufficient background to give a boost to the *statesmanship thinking* of the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, whether or not they left the country or stayed. Those who stayed kept their European values. They were not as corrupt as the rest of the Soviet Union. Giving back change in the store was something that was almost non-existent in many parts of the Soviet Union. In Yerevan, if you bought a loaf of bread for 45 kopeks and gave 50 kopeks, you wouldn't expect to get 5 kopeks back. It was not given to you if you were in Armenia, Georgia, Central Asia, or many parts of Russia. But in the Baltic states, every kopek was given back.

Therefore, the Baltic states had that potential, thanks to their experience of independence in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and also thanks to the fact that their diasporas and their population

[210] David Hovhannisyan, Yerevan State University: http://www.ysu.am/persons/en/David-Hovhannisyan
[211] Karabakh Committee, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karabakh_Committee

kept the belief that they would be independent again at some point. Their annexation by the USSR had not been recognized by the UN or the US. Therefore, it was an issue that, one could conjecture, was going to be resolved at some point in time. For republics like Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, there was not much basis to believe that their independence might be restored because they were parts of the Soviet Union since after the First World War.

Indeed, as far as I understand, there was no clear-cut plan in Armenia on how to move to independence. I remember a rumor that, when Levon Ter-Petrosyan was in France for a while because of health issues, he was being trained there to become a leader. I don't know whether this is true or not. There was this rumor among the population that he was getting trained on how to lead an independent state, so that he could do this when he returned and Armenia achieved independence.

What I said above is a long way away from what people are taught today in schools, from what the mythology of the so-called 'Independence movement' has told the general public for many years now. For this or that reason, textbooks and common memory have accepted the simplified version of historic events. The only controversy hinges on whether the years immediately after independence were the years of the victorious Karabakh war or the years of 'Cold and Darkness,' supposedly inflicted on the population by Ter-Petrosyan's government. Even this controversy is not resolved because the proponents of either version do not accept the truth of the other side. The truth is somewhere in the middle. It was the time of a victorious war, which imposed a very heavy burden on the entire population. Because of the war, the tendencies of collapse, the lack of experience and competence, and the lack of some moral values, the society ended up in cold and darkness, and a significant part of the population left the country.

What I say here, while it is mainly my own reminiscence, may deeply irritate some sincere or not so sincere 'patriots,' who either for lack of intelligence or in order to hide the crimes committed during that time would like history to be flat and simplistic, while it was not so. In this case, as with the rest of the 20th century and essentially the entire Armenian history, we have a lack of accounts, narratives, studies, approaches, and theoretical frameworks. I envy those newer generations who will be studying these periods impartially and finding out more and more fascinating details about what really happened on Armenia's path to independence and sovereignty.

RG: When we talk about *perestroika* and *glasnost*, we should also have in mind that they eventually contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union because, as somebody put it, '*If oppressive regimes start to improve, they eventually collapse.*' This is what happened with the Soviet Union when Gorbachev gave rights to the republics, to the people, to express their opinions and to rally. This was the end, or the beginning of the end, for the Soviet Union. Also, I would agree, as paradoxical as it sounds, that the Soviet Union indeed contributed to the revival of Armenian nationalism because, at the end of the 1980s, the majority of Armenians had good, although not very good, living standards. When you have good living standards, you start to think about things not directly connected to survival, money, or your narrowly-defined well-being. Other things that you appreciate like freedom of thought and freedom of expression come to the forefront. People wanted more of that. So, they went to the streets; they started to protest, something that can hardly be imagined today (2017) because living conditions are now worse, but people don't go out and protest in such large masses as during the end of the Soviet Union.

GTG: Many causes contribute to this process of coming together. The rally was also due to the lack of other means of communication. Now you have the Internet, you have mobile phones. Back then, those weren't available. If people wanted to learn what happened, what Sumgait[212] was, what was the leadership thinking, and what to do, they had to physically come to Freedom Square to hear the news.

Moreover, the rally was used as a lever against the rule of the Communist Party. The leaders would say, '*Stay here, stay in the Square.*' We know that many rallies have taken place over the past 20 and more years of independence, despite the fact that there are now all these means of communication. The fact that they still have to rally, despite all these means, to achieve a change is one of the defining features of Armenian democracy movements, be it small scale or larger scale, successful or less successful, with social demands or with political demands.

The second thing that you mentioned was this connection between nationalism and progress, let's put it that way. This is a very complex connection because, in some aspects, nationalism is regressive, it looks backwards. Indeed nationalism, starting from the Second World War, was slightly encouraged in the Soviet system, if kept on a short leash. We talked about that. The desire for freedom of thought, freedom to rally, freedom of expression, to a very large extent, fueled nationalism. When *perestroika* started, the Karabakh issue became an element that glued the big crowd together. The Movement did not start with the Karabakh issue; it started with other kinds of demands – democratic demands, ecological demands, environmental demands. But then nationalism became a kind of a catalyst that united a very big crowd because that was the easiest common denominator, because there was a clear and immediate threat to Artsakh, and because it echoed and resonated with people's reawakened memory of the Genocide. When Sumgait happened, when clashes escalated, the population had a feeling that the attacks on Karabakh were a security threat for the well-being of the entire Armenian nation, and that another Genocide-like event could unfold if Karabakh was lost to Azerbaijan the way Nakhichevan had been lost over the course of the 20th century. There was a widespread fear that 'Turkic nations' would come in and renew ethnic cleansing all over Armenia.

The spiral of conflict escalation was also at work. You do something without knowing what the result will be. But then the adversary, the other party, does something as well in reply, moving you to another level of conflict. You react, and then the situation climbs to a new level of conflict, gradually, step by step, devolving into war. There is also the 'security dilemma': even before there is an immediate action against you, you feel it is imminent and choose to act first. The other side has no choice but to react, which is already perceived as a clear hostile action and thus retroactively justifies your initial action. Again, the conflict spirals out of control.

I will say a few more words about the war. At the time, I called it, half-jokingly, *a private war.[213]* Nationalist ideology was widespread, but it does not mean that large groups of people behaved according to its logic. Especially if it meant that you had to contribute by participating in the war. The Soviet tradition, the Soviet psychology was also quite deeply indoctrinated in the society. Therefore, I called it 'a private war,' because it was a war which was being faced by the

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[212] Sumgait 1988: The Armenian Pogroms: https://www.aniarc.am/2019/02/27/sumgait-1988-the-armenian-pogroms/
[213] See my short story in Armenian, *A Private War in the Times of Kendzaburo Oe*: https://gtergab.com/hy/news/prose/private-war-in-the-times-of-kenzaburo-oe/123/

people in Karabakh as well as the volunteers—before the appearance of the army—who would go there only if they wanted to. If ethnic Armenian soldiers from other parts of the Soviet Union were sent back to Armenia to finish their service (because the Soviet Union was collapsing and the united army was fast becoming nonfunctional), they could be asked—at that time I don't think it was mandatorily enforced—to go to Karabakh. Naturally, many people went to Karabakh to fight, from Armenia and other parts of the Soviet Union, as well as from the Diaspora, though these were few, like Monte Melkonian.[214] But still, there were significant groups of the population who did not take up the responsibility for the war. Moreover, they complained, saying that *it was like a war for the pleasure of those who wanted to make war.* The society was quite divided[215].

This has also not been studied because, after the war, the nationalist ideology became the only one reflected in textbooks. Only the nationalist mythologized account of recent history is being produced by the media and indoctrinated, particularly in the minds of the younger generations.

Today, it may seem quite difficult to imagine that history was complex and not simplistic. A few years ago, a small foundation called Social and Kultural Innovation Lab (SKIL) encouraged some writing on that issue. In the short story contest that was called '1988,' we received stories which had a variety of facts reflected, even if invented, but close to the realities of the 1980s and 1990s. For instance, a student could go to the war as a volunteer and, when he came back, would find that he was expelled from the university because he hadn't attended classes. I knew such cases myself. An employee went to war and he came back to find that he had been fired. He was now unemployed because of 'absenteeism.' Somebody obtained weapons from elsewhere to bring to Karabakh via Armenia. From the perspective of Soviet Armenian law, he was considered a criminal, but from the perspective of national ideology, he was a hero.[216]

It is very important to understand these contradictions, this divisiveness. I said that there was a kind of schizophrenic situation in Soviet times, a dual reality. Now this became the next stage – the schizophrenic situation during the Karabakh war, during the last Soviet years, during the collapse of the Soviet Union, and during the first years of independence.

War is a calamity which ruins the rule of law—in practice and in the minds of people who are engaged in it, both on the frontline and among the civilians away from the front line. War establishes its own rules, but many rules disappear. It is very easy for a soldier to cross the line of what is allowed during war and what is a violation of the rules of war, for instance by marauding, including one's own civilian villages, or torturing prisoners of war.

Often, there is no stoppage, no break for the soldier who has experienced violence and conducted violence himself, which would allow him to refrain from engaging in criminal activities. This applies even more to a soldier brought up in the Soviet system, with a weakened understanding of the rule of law in the first place. That is why such soldiers, their minds and value systems traumatized, promoted lawlessness and 'the right of the strongest' value system upon returning.

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[214] Monte Melkonian, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monte_Melkonian
[215] Please see a recent short story by Sate Hovakimyan ('The Children's Writer', in Arm.) which presents some of the above points and particularly the idea of a 'boys' unnecessary war-game' and the desire for one's children to avoid being sent to war: http://write.apricot-kernel.com/?p=1859
[216] Please see a very recent case with striking similarity to the past such cases (in Armenian): http://www.1in.am/2111857.html

They acquired properties illegally and promoted corruption, nepotism, and cronyism, all because of the confusion in their minds and value systems and because of their feeling of entitlement, after having done a service to the nation. The rest of the society, in its turn, didn't have the sufficient moral strength to resist them and was often engaged in lawless activism itself. The traumas of the war were not treated and became deeply internalized. They supported the wrong value system, wrong opinions, wrong types of thinking, and they remain so to this day.

I have said several times that there is very little research on these issues. One good example is the famous interview that Seda Mavian, the correspondent with *Nouvelles d'Armenie*, had with Ruben Hayrapetyan, the oligarch. In that long interview,[217] a very sincere talk with Ruben Hayrapetyan, one can find glimpses that explain some of the things that I am talking about.

I see this duality everywhere: on one hand, the Karabakh conflict required people to participate in it, to stop watching from the sidelines because Armenians were being threatened all over the Caucasus. It was the self-defense of the nation. On the other hand, however, it was also a way to demonstrate their muscle – the people who would go there were obviously the more nationalist ones, the fighter types.

On the 'third hand'—unfortunately, this is again something that has not been studied at all—for some, it was a way to make a living. I mentioned the cases of marauding.[218] This has not been studied either. There is widespread denial that such a thing occurred. Simultaneously, the war and collapse of the USSR were a 'perfect' opportunity for those who were not participating in the war to expropriate and steal whatever they could from the Soviet inheritance: factories, land, buildings, etc. Factory machinery was sold as scrap metal. Moreover, thieves would use patriotic rhetoric to justify their actions, claiming that they were supporting the war effort. There was a general situation of lawlessness, and we are lucky that, thanks to the efforts of the new government and of the discipline of the society, it didn't end up in a large-scale civil war, despite so many criminal activities taking place.

There were several cases of marauding, conflicts within groups of soldiers or fighters, etc. Some of the memoirs of Monte Melkonyan tell these stories.[219] But again, this is not enough. We don't have much material available, it has not been well studied, and it is not well understood.

How does one justify one's participation in fighting, apart from self-defense? If one justifies it by saying that they fight for Karabakh to become a part of Armenia, the international community will not accept it easily because Azerbaijan is already internationally recognized with its former borders. Only very naive people could believe that it was going to be easily accepted by the international community. These people had an archaic mindset; they essentially felt they were still in the 19th century, when the results of hot war became the *de facto* reality and there was no need for the '*de jure* reality,' because there were no—or very few—international rules and laws

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[217] Seda Mavian, August 11, 2012, Interview with Ruben Hayrapetyan, Nouvelles d'Armenie (in English): http://www.thetruthmustbetold.com/2012/09/14/nemets-rubo-interview/. Interview in Armenian: https://hetq.am/hy/article/18363

[218] An impressive description of this is presented in Mesrop Harutyunyan's novel *Abkay* (in Armenian, 2005). https://mesropharut.wordpress.com/2014/10/03/abcai/

[219] Markar Melkonian, 2008, My Brother's Road: An American's Fateful Journey to Armenia, I.B. Tauris: https://www.amazon.com/My-Brothers-Road-Americans-Fateful/dp/1845115309

which were upheld by many. I have talked about the archaic mindset at length in one of my Armenian broadcasts,[220] and also published about it in Russian.[221]

So, there is this duality in the final motive to fight and of the war more generally, which can be defined, in this case, the following way: Do you want the independence of Armenia with an independent Karabakh and/or with Karabakh united with Armenia (which will be resisted by Azerbaijan and a major part of the international community for a very long time), or do you want guaranteed security for Karabakh (which, as a concept, cannot be resisted by the international community, and, if achieved, even without an 'independent' Karabakh, may provide a chance to end the conflict and move to peaceful in the region)? Where is the fine line between independence and guaranteed security? How do you define that security in political terms, if not independence from Azerbaijan?

These questions were already clearly formulated then, and they are still relevant and unresolved today, because our thinking, unfortunately, has not moved forward much since those times. Would you want to remain a militarized society for God knows how many decades?

It is no wonder that so many people left Armenia, starting in the late 1980s. It was not only because of the so-called 'years of Cold and Darkness.' Many of them left because they didn't want to take part in this polarized situation. It is very taxing for people's psychology when you have to live with a feeling that you have an antagonistic enemy, who hates you and wants you dead, and you have to fight this enemy for an indefinite future with no prospect of a resolution. One has to be very strong to accept this predicament and continue building a society and a state successfully under such circumstances.

So, nationalism was, on one hand, a unifying force, that helped establish an independent state. On the other hand, it didn't provide a strategic perspective for the future. The versions of the future 'strategic' perspective that were presented by it, were either: '*Eventually, the international community will recognize Karabakh, and it will become an independent state.*', or '*We will unite with Karabakh and the international community will accept it.*' It was naïve, and many people could understand that it was naïve. There was this feeling that we are in a national struggle against the international system, that we are very much alone.

Yesterday, I was reading somebody's post on Facebook. The author had written that they were in a workshop where the participants included people from Pakistan, Israel, Ukraine, and a few other countries. He thought that these are the countries that do not like Armenia because of the Karabakh conflict. Pakistan, for instance, has not even established diplomatic relations with us. That person was conveying this feeling today: the feeling of being alone, the feeling of being isolated from the international community, from the international family of people. For instance, many Ukrainians, having suffered because of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Donbas war, are, of course, not very eager to learn the Armenian perspective on the Karabakh conflict.

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[220] Archaic Thinking. Part 2. Jam Session 33 (in Armenian), (Original title in Armenian: Արխայիկ մտածողություն. Մաս 2 (Jam Session 33): https://epfarmenia.am/hy/video/Archaic-thinking-part2

[221] Большой проект и его современный контекст: о законе, власти и архаическом сознании. Часть Вторая: https://gtergab.com/ru/news/essay/the-big-project-and-its-contemporary-context-part-two/124/

It is obvious that it was self-defense and that the escalation was outside the control of any one side. The Armenian side had no means to control the escalation of the Karabakh conflict. It is obvious that the security of the Karabakh people had to be assured. But it is also obvious that we didn't find the right perspective on how we would realistically find a way to resolve the Karabakh conflict. This duality very strongly affected the thinking of that time, the future of Armenia, and the independent Armenian state. The issue is still unresolved.

This duality has many facets: Artsakh declared an independent state, but Armenia didn't recognize it. Artsakh is connected with Armenia via numerous ties, but we don't declare unification with it officially because we don't want to be called 'aggressors' by the international community, the way Azerbaijani ideologues would like. We wanted to save Artsakh so that its population is not ousted, but it has decreased after the war instead of increasing. We want to keep Artsakh free, and we are too weak to make the world accept our position, but instead of strengthening our state and society, we created an extremely corrupt kleptocracy and are losing our own population.[222] We have a moral obligation to make Artsakh flourish, but instead our kleptocrats are robbing their own society and people.

Only when these issues are addressed, one by one, will we have a chance to come close to finding a way out of the predicament.

RG: We talked about the feeling that people had about Karabakh in the 90s. I realized that not much has changed in 2017 because we still have the problem of the security of Armenians in Karabakh. We still have the problem of the unknown future of Karabakh. Not much has changed, and this is very worrisome, in my opinion, because it shows that not enough steps have been taken, and not enough progress has been made.

GTG: Yes, but a good diagnosis is the first stage in preparing a plan for how to get out of the trap. If we manage to develop a good diagnosis, and we understand that nothing much has changed, and we know what has not changed and what the reason is for that lack of change, we will set up the grounds for taking the next step. This is what hasn't been understood well enough because of the overwhelming flaw of the predominantly nationalist ideology.

For many years, when there was not much fighting on the line of contact, many people, including those who live in Karabakh, would say '*The conflict is over. We are independent.*' The April War woke up some people, including in Karabakh. They were saying, '*Why do we need dialogue with Azerbaijan? The conflict is over, we are independent from Azerbaijan, full stop.*' There are many people in the Diaspora who uncritically say, '*Yes, Karabakh is ours.*' There are even people who say, '*Let's get the recognition of the Genocide and then reparations from Turkey and maybe our lands back from Turkey.*' This naive and romantic nationalist discourse still exists. At its core, it not only denies the fact that Armenians are not strong enough to do that, but it also denies the moral obligation to make the available Armenian societies stronger, happier, better educated, better governed, at least slightly more affluent. Not to mention that this irredentist approach also clearly neglects the rights of other people.

This nationalistic discourse is extremely unhealthy. It is xenophobic. Building the image of the enemy, the reproduction and magnification of the image of the enemy, indoctrination of the

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[222] Fortunately and obviously, this has changed after the April 2018 revolution.

image of the enemy in the entire nation, particularly in its younger generations – these are all the elements of this diagnosis. Instead of working on building Armenia's real security and defense capabilities, these people are engaged in rhetorical nationalism, which is actually weakening the nation and misleading it.

We should understand this diagnosis well enough. Without denying the need for security and while doing something about that, we need to ensure time works in our favor without affecting the rights of others.

One more justification for nationalist discourse is that if we do not attack verbally with the full set of our demands, Azerbaijan and also Turkey will attack us physically. There may be a slight reason in this argument because the security threat that Armenia and Artsakh find themselves in is very real. However, when these demands are not coupled with building one's own state and society, and, instead, are misused by people who are known to be extremely corrupt, it only increases the apathy of the nation and its lack of trust.

A lot of work has to be done for changing this situation, and without a correct diagnosis one cannot do this work. Those, including yours truly, who say these very obvious things, well-known to everybody, are often attacked by paid trolls from various origins, accompanied by naïve romantic nationalists who often do not even realize the inappropriateness of their views and values. We are being called 'traitors of the national cause.' This is another feature of a backward and archaic part of the society, the *retrogrades*, as well as those disguised forces that would like the society to stay archaic and backwards forever because it makes it easier to exploit it without worrying about retribution: to blame the doctor for the illness and, if possible, punish him, as if that will take the illness away. It will not take the illness away, but it certainly will take, for a while at least, the attention away from the symptoms and causes of the illness. That is exactly what the criminal forces need to continue their robbery undisturbed.

## Chapter 7. Corruption Schemes

Let's continue talking about independent Armenia and the first years of independence. I mentioned some of the voids, some of the gaps that exist in our understanding of *perestroika,* of the Karabakh movement, of 1988 and the events that followed. Some of these gaps exist because the big picture is not being studied; it is not even being conceptualized. One of the basic characteristics of this big picture, as I mentioned, is the concept of *duality.*

This duality had many facets. I mentioned some of them. Because of this duality, the Karabakh conflict, for instance, and the Armenians' participation in the Karabakh war, were not 'legal' from the Soviet perspective, when the Soviet legal framework still existed, although it was breathing its 'last breath.

Another facet of this duality was that it required an everlasting enemy. Hating an entire nation, or even more than one nation, is not normal for a human being. Armenian society was more or less normal; they didn't want to jump into this hatred paradigm headlong, but there were forces that were and still are moving them in that direction.

The way the Soviet Union's political economy was conducted was collapsing, and people were used to not doing much at their workplaces anyway. This was compounded by the blockade, the war, and the political collapse of the Soviet Union. A lot of structures and institutions collapsed; those that didn't collapse became ineffective or less effective than they were before. This process of collapse became intertwined with the war, and this was another facet of that duality.

Large scale change was needed. As I said, another thing that has not been studied is the state-building process. Some of its elements included the production of laws, the new system of government, a new parliament, the new governance and legal framework that was being established step by step, the new Constitution, etc.

I haven't studied this, but it is my impression that, at the beginning, there were quite a few good laws passed, laws which were necessary at that time. They were moving the society, the country, the newly-independent state in the direction of the liberal market economy. They were also, in a way, a 'forced landing.' For instance, the *kolkhoz* [223] and *sovkhoz*[224] systems were dismantled. They were collapsing anyway. A law declared that land can be distributed to and owned by the population in the communities.

The law on local government created hundreds of local government entities, large and small. Each settlement received the right to establish an independent local government. Nine hundred such units were established. Now, we are facing the need to consolidate them because many of them are dysfunctional and cannot survive – they are depopulated, they don't have enough resources to maintain themselves as local government units. Currently, several settlements are being merged into one community governed by its local government.

The situation was not allowing the newly-formed government to take care of the needs of the population: the economy had collapsed, there could have been hunger, which, fortunately, was avoided, the war was escalating, people were leaving, there was no electricity. In that situation these laws were, of course, a 'forced landing,' but helpful. They were taking Armenia toward liberalism and they were allowing the population to survive.

Afterwards, the negative side of these policies became obvious. Some of the settlements could not be properly governed because of a lack of funds. Small private farms were sold to richer people for very little money, farmers were left without land and a means of survival, and monopolies on farming appeared.

This, however, happened at the next stage. When one starts a game, particularly a complex game like building a newly independent state from scratch, in a war situation, things are bound to go in unexpected directions. The government was not very skilled and sophisticated. We had old Soviet professionals. Among them, there were some good managers, like Vladimir Movsisyan,[225] who died recently. He was a figure known as a good old Soviet-type manager, who inherited his charisma from Soviet times, who had worked in many different positions. Essentially, irrespective of whether or not the units he managed worked well, he was this positive case of old Soviet-style management.

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[223] Kolkhoz, a form of collective farm in the Soviet Union, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolkhoz
[224] Sovkhoz, a state-owned farm in the Soviet Union, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovkhoz
[225] Vladimir Movsisyan (1933-2014), an Armenian politician, Wikipedia:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Movsisyan

We had diasporans coming in to take up management positions, such as Raffi Hovhannisian, Gerard Liparidian, Vartan Oskanian,[226] and others. At least they had good Western education. But they didn't really have any governance experience before they came to Armenia, particularly the experience of working in the unique environment of a state gaining independence in the midst of war. I think the crisis situation somehow edited their ambition and 'swallowed' their desire to achieve something of a very significant scale. Perhaps this was because of the absence of a clear-cut perspective on where this society was going, given the war and this naive, romantic idea that we may eventually get the Karabakh issue quickly and easily resolved in our favor. A clear vision was missing and difficult to develop due to economic hardship and emergency conditions. However, at the beginning of the game, immediately when Armenia became independent, it seems to me there was more sophistication than in the following years.

It is easy to say, '*Let's recognize Nagorno Karabakh*,' or '*Let's unite it with Armenia*.' Such speculative statements abound since the times of the Karabakh war. But the first Armenian government had to play a very different and complex game. It was, of course, not easy for the larger population and for the international community to understand this game. One of the first aims of the negotiations became making Karabakh a side in the negotiations. We regarded Karabakh, on the one hand, as a part of Azerbaijan that had been separated from it; so they had to discuss their future with Baku. In that respect, Armenia was only a supporting side, a side interested in ending the conflict based on a consensus, where at least some major demands of the Karabakhtsis would be satisfied. On the other hand, because of the special relationship that existed between Karabakh and Armenia, we strengthened the Karabakhtsis' voice because Armenia now had an independent state and was represented in the international arena.

This was a very complex policy to institutionalize. In a way, we were more advanced than, for instance, Azerbaijan at that time, in our thinking along these lines. This required the same *duality* that I was talking about; here it was put to good use. In the case of hate versus humanism, there was the *duality* as a negative, weakening value. Keeping Soviet-style corruption while desiring a good nation-state was a case of a negative *duality*. Making Karabakh a party to the negotiations without recognizing the Nagorno Karabakh Republic was a very sophisticated and very positive, dynamic *duality*. It allowed Armenia to stay within international law, at least *de jure*, and at the same time to provide Artsakh with as much support as possible. Unfortunately, this was sacrificed, as we know, at some point in time, when Robert Kocharyan[227] came to power. He said, '*I am from Karabakh myself, so I'll cover both positions myself*,' which was a very wrong thing to do.

But if you look at it from Azerbaijan's perspective, you can see also several reasons for having Karabakh as a side in the negotiations too, if Azerbaijan truly wished to end the conflict. If it's Karabakh which separated from Azerbaijan, then, of course, Azerbaijan should negotiate with Karabakh; Armenia was only a supporting side. When Kocharyan introduced his new approach, Azerbaijan's claims that Armenia is occupying Karabakh and additional territories, too, started to sound more 'likely' and easier to grasp for many people who don't get into the details of the conflict.

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[226] Vartan Oskanian, the former Foreign Minister of Armenia (1998–2008), Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vartan_Oskanian
[227] Robert Kocharyan, an Armenian politician who served as the second President of Armenia between 1998-2008, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Kocharyan

So, this *duality* that I have talked so much about, they tried to make it into something positive, and it is complex. But working within this complex framework becomes difficult. One needs a special stamina for that. A more populist and nationalistic approach was easier: since Kocharyan was from Artsakh, he would represent both Artsakh and Armenia, thereby depriving the direct representatives of Artsakh their own seat at the table. When this approach was taken, some advantages that characterized the early period of newly-independent Armenia's governance were later lost.

Let's come back to the issue of the laws of independent Armenia. I have noticed that, similar to the laws that I already mentioned, there were some other laws which were adopted at that time, which were positive: the law on media and, for instance, the law on higher education. They were giving a lot of freedom to the media and to the higher education institutions. Afterwards, if we look at the legislative practice of independent Armenia, we can see how laws became less advanced in the next legislative generation, or were superseded by the next generation laws.

For instance, in the case of the law on higher education, it is very obvious. The independence of universities was proclaimed by the first law, and then there was another law which turned universities into non-profit state organizations under the management of the Ministry of Education. Universities then came under the direct management of the Ministry of Education just like, for instance, museums came under the management of the Ministry of Culture.

About five years ago, when a rector of a university was fired, he went to court and said that '*Universities are independent entities, so I cannot be fired by the Minister*.' But the court said, '*Sorry! That's true according to the first law, but according to the second law, all entities like yours have come under the management of the Minister. Therefore you can be fired by him*.' This is a clear example of how the laws deteriorated.

Another example for me is the law on trial by jury. The first Constitution provided for the opportunity of a trial by jury. I don't know whether or not it has ever been used, maybe not. It was removed in the constitutional reforms of 2005 because it was declared that, in Armenia, where everybody knows everybody, it would be very easy to bribe jury members, and that implied juries would not be making decisions independently.

This is funny because it demonstrates an illogical approach to things, typical of the kleptocratic corrupt and leg(al)istic[228] regime that developed in Armenia. This justification for removing the right to trial by jury actually tries to claim that bribing five, six, or twelve jury members is more likely than bribing one judge.

Again, it was done as a reform, but in fact it made judges even less accountable to the public. It was not done out of a desire to make them independent, but because it made it easier for them to be fully susceptible to the pressures of the executive power.

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[228] In recent times terms 'legism' or 'legalism' are being used meaning a regime which covers its wrongdoings by false legal justifications like with a fig leaf, and undertakes illegal actions that 'on paper' seem fine. These terms characterize such regimes as Putin's in Russia or the 20 years of Kocharyan-Sargsyan governments in Armenia (1998-2018). Russian political scientist Yekateria Shulman uses these terms.

In that respect, the recent story about Donald Trump's decision[229] to halt migration from some Muslim countries was very telling. When the judge made a decision that this does not correspond to the American legal system, Donald Trump decided to rework the law and make it better.

What would happen, for instance, in Russia in that case? Imagine if a judge made a decision contradicting the order of today's President of Russia. The following morning, the police would knock on the door of the judge's apartment, and of his office. They would start searching the apartment and the office, and they would find a bag full of drugs and heroin brought from Afghanistan, one of the countries that was on Trump's black list. They would easily prove that this judge was actually a part of a drug ring from Afghanistan and that he or she had a personal interest in making this decision. The judge would end up in court cases for eternity and sit in jail. All other judges would refrain forever from making any decision that goes against the interests of the President.

This is the difference: the approaches to corruption and the ways of working in the former Soviet Union space are incomprehensible to people who have not gone through Soviet times. These people don't know how many different shapes corruption can take, in how many ways one can manipulate the law, and how shrewd one can be when making the situation work in one's interest.

The liberal democracies in the West, in my opinion, are based on naiveté. It is easy to dismantle them. Some of the Armenians who left for the United States immediately engaged with criminal rings, abusing the 'socialist elements' of the American system, such as Medicare.[230] Some of them were caught and ended up in prison or prosecuted. Why did they do that? They were used to the idea that the best way to improve one's situation is to abuse the socialist system, the state, its social security system. This was a very common type of abuse and corruption in Soviet socialist times. Milking the state still remains the main corruption vector in Armenia,[231] Russia and elsewhere.

As I said, nobody in the USSR during the times of *stagnation* believed in the state anymore. Nobody considered state property to have an actual owner. Since then, the concept that paying taxes makes government employees your service providers is not well understood in Armenia. It is very much a top down feeling here today. The state and power are not _us_, but _them_. The state and power have rights over our lives. Unfortunately, the 'statespeople' and power holders themselves believed deeply in that and abused their positions (and that is why they lost power in April 2018).

So, the laws of independent Armenia were passed. First they were not bad, Armenia was moving along the path of a recognized independent country, but then gradually the laws started venturing into absurdity, and a regime of kleptocracy,[232] or state capture,[233] started to institutionalize.

[229] Trump's immigration ban sends shockwaves, January 30, 2017, CNN.com: https://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/28/politics/donald-trump-executive-order-immigration-reaction/
[230] 2010 Medicaid fraud, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Medicaid_fraud
[231] Let us hope that after April 2018 Revolution, it will change in Armenia.
[232] Kleptocracy, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kleptocracy
[233] State capture, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_capture

Outmigration, as I said, took place on an enormous scale. The economic situation was bad, and the quality of education became worse. If on one side of the picture the new statehood was built and the hot war was won, on the other side of the picture you can put education, migration, and all of the unfortunate tendencies that started to take root in Armenia: poverty, rampant corruption, and corruption schemes.

There was also another very important development, which opposed the kleptocracy and state capture. I am talking about the appearance of institutionalized civil society along the way, in the form of NGOs, and also the entry of international development assistance. These were interrelated developments.

The earthquake of 1988 became one of the catalysts for both the NGO movement and international development assistance. Those among the local population who knew English or any other foreign language, independently of their other specializations, were immediately engaged during the aftermath of the cataclysm as translators, brokers, and aids for the international community who had arrived to help Armenia. Afterwards, many of them ended up working in the NGO sector or international development. Embassies and international development institutions that came to Armenia immediately after independence concluded agreements with the state of independent Armenia and started to provide development assistance.

These people, merely because they knew English well enough, often English language teachers themselves, indeed became catalysts for the development of the NGO movement and of international development strategies in Armenia.

There was also a negative side to this. These people didn't really have any education in international development or NGO work. Typically, they still had a Soviet mentality, which created good conditions for corrupting these processes as well.

We can see how the Soviet mentality still works in post-Soviet Armenia, and how it is linked to corruption. I can see at least three areas of linkage.

I already explained the first one with the example of Medicare abuse in the US. Armenians in the United States would rarely ever rob a bank, but abusing Medicare was a common scenario. The reason was that the victim was the state. Therefore, in the framework of the 'Soviet mindset,' it seemed free and easier to plunder, not belonging to anybody. It was perceived as a bureaucratic system, and there was nothing wrong with milking it for one's own personal benefit. The fact that it was based on citizens' taxes was not understood by the Soviet mindset, because this 'input-output' system of state taxation was thoroughly distorted in the Soviet Union. The state was alienated from the citizen and would spend incalculable sums, irrespective of the level of taxation. Using, abusing, appropriating, and robbing state assets for personal enrichment was not seen as morally wrong in the Soviet Union because the state was a faceless and even a hostile entity. Instead of a feeling of ownership, the citizenry was totally alienated from it. This approach remained in place in post-Soviet Armenia: abuse and manipulation of the state budget became the main way to set up corruption schemes.

Let us take book publishing as an example. The state allocates money for publishing books. The print house or publishing house publishes only 2000 copies whereas the state procured, say, 5000 copies. The rest of the print run is absent. These 2000 copies are distributed to libraries and any

other required destination. The rest of the money is appropriated. The writer is happy because at least his or her book has seen the light of day, and the state is happy because everything seems to be fine – here are the books. Most importantly, the print house is also happy because it appropriated a part of the funding for the publication. Most likely, there is a kickback from the print company to the state officials so that they do not inquire about the rest of the print run. If, however, they do, the answer will be that it is already sold, that is why it is absent from the bookstores. There are very few bookstores left in the country. If the books were sold, there should be some VAT paid. However, the Ministry of Culture is not the department checking if the taxes have been paid. Such schemes and many others became widespread.

One of the most lucrative corruption schemes is tampering with state tenders for goods or services. Tenders are designed in a way that gives an unfair advantage to some bidders over others. Interestingly, most of the laws, including, most likely, rules for tendering, have passed the scrutiny of the international community. The international community closely follows the fight against corruption in this country, as well as in many such countries which, until recently, were referred to as 'countries undergoing transition'. But these rules are abused in a very sophisticated way, a way peculiar to the post-Soviet corrupt mind. We know many, many scandals around tenders, which, unfortunately, do not usually end in criminal prosecution.

Let's take, for instance, the case of destroying the historical buildings in the center of Yerevan. Suddenly, a company appears that has received the right to demolish such a building. If one looks at the documents, it turns out there was a tender declared for that job, and this company seems to have won. Apparently, there was a board that decided the fate of the building. The Mayor's office sold the right to build there to somebody, again, apparently according to the 'rules.' According to the documents, there has even been a public consultation on all this. The 'specialists' have been consulted and approved the project because the building, supposedly, is not of historical significance or is in bad condition. Guy Ritchie's *RocknRolla* proves that this is not only an Armenian problem. The 'specialists' are, again, the cronies of the system. Sometimes, the buildings are removed and their façades are kept and incorporated into the design of the skyscrapers that replace them. Obviously, this ruins the city landscape, and such games often end up in launching ugly architecture, which is lip service to, but in reality has nothing to do with, really preserving architectural heritage.

But the public did not know about these 'supposed' consultations. The media did not let the public know. It is not reported who decided, and with what reason, that a beautiful building should be destroyed. This is just one type of the thousand sophisticated or not-so-sophisticated corruption schemes at the disposal of the governmental *nomenklatura*. These cases can be grouped under the heading *milking the state budget or abusing state power for personal enrichment.* This is the most obvious corruption project, and it is 'hard' corruption: you do something illegal or twist the rules and get rich as a result, causing irreparable damage to the society and state.

A less obvious type of corruption is what I call *mental corruption*. One case of this is *designing projects, or activities, or structures, or institutions in ways that are worse than otherwise available options, with or without realizing it.* One may participate in this type of corruption or lead it because of one's lack of education and understanding. However, most of the time, it is obvious that the adopted process is worse than it could have been, if it were designed for the public's benefit. For instance, the tender has been declared with only a 3 day deadline, making it

impossible for those who didn't have insider information to apply in time. Perhaps this happened because of the sloppiness of the bureaucracy, but it is obviously in the interest of some. Therefore, it is more likely that this was done consciously. The problem is that the rule on tenders is not defining clearly how much time should be given to the bidders.

In between these two types, we have many other types of corruption. Mental corruption just makes the work ineffective, even if there is no direct financial benefit for those who perpetrate it. Many Armenian institutions are designed in a way that is worse than other available options. Let us return for a moment to the case of the university. The law is being degraded under the pretext that it is progress to have a new law on universities. Obviously, it is being done for the consolidation of power. There is an obvious negative intent behind that change.

We can speak about negative intent also in connection with the recent constitutional changes.[234] It has been a long conversation—since the beginning of Armenia's independence—whether we want to have a parliamentary system or presidential system. Suddenly, the ruling party opted for a parliamentary system at seemingly arbitrary point in time. Beforehand, they had done everything to empty the space for other ideas. Mental corruption also means that the public discourse is intentionally impoverished in order not to allow sufficient constructive criticism and more sound ideas to be formulated. It means the intentional hollowing out of the educational system and the intentional building of structures and a type of economy which keep people poor, fully dependent on those in power and therefore incapable of political activism. This government used mental corruption to the fullest to make the most of the political parties' weaknesses and helplessness. They organized several crooked elections, not free and fair. After this, when the crisis deepens and the Karabakh war resurfaces, they suddenly decide to go for a parliamentary system saying that a council is better than a single person. Which is indeed true, theoretically speaking, and I myself have always been in favor of the parliamentary system. It is slower but it involves more consultation. But in the current circumstances, this is just a way to make the *rhizome* even more expansive, to incorporate more segments of the population which had not been included into the *rhizome* beforehand. It was a way to keep the power in the hands of the group which has already captured the state.

*Mental corruption* can be almost invisible. It can be based on bureaucratic rules which seem legitimate at the surface. But the Armenian post-Soviet statehood bureaucracy has inherited the Soviet way of working (mostly making *tufta*) and has added specific post-Soviet tricks, which are essentially about moving from an organic scale of work to a micro-scale: from being corrupt for only major lucrative opportunities (and keeping some kind of conscience in other cases) to being corrupt throughout, fishing for a penny and not just for a pound, so to speak.

One of these almost invisible ways of mental corruption is the *No* mantra: '*It is impossible.*' You want to change something, you have a good idea: '*It is impossible to implement.*' Can we do that? – '*No!*' A version of this is: '*This is not under my jurisdiction.*' If the office worker, in addition to this mantra, replies saying '*This is the responsibility of the next office, please go there,*' this is at least a sign of expressing a nice attitude. The other sign of mental corruption is withholding information, intimately related to rudeness, bullying, and the *blatnoy* culture, because information is power, and withholding information is an unjust exercise of power. This

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[234] 2015 Armenian constitutional referendum, Wikipedia:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_constitutional_referendum,_2015

has been widespread in Armenia; all strata of society, from government figures to medical doctors, participated in this anti-democratic culture of withholding information. There was no culture of openness.

A change-maker has to fight against these attitudes, when in the name of the 'state values' and rules, bureaucracy just shakes away any positive and creative idea. Change-making in such circumstances means breaking through the huge institutional obstacles sanctified by the mantra of respect towards statehood and its rules, or traditions and adages. This is a style of state-building, state-functioning, and organizational culture in general. No rule prohibits the bureaucrat to knock on the door of his or her colleague and ask them to take care of an issue that is not under his or her direct responsibility. Nevertheless, it rarely happens. It is very important for a medical patient to learn about potential risks associated with a surgical operation and its chances of success. However, the surgeon is not used to sharing this information. He is a charismatic doctor, whose judgment should be trusted blindly. The patient is just a subject, who should be obedient and not ask 'stupid questions.' If one has cancer, the local tradition has been to not tell them about it, so that they won't worry.

Another expression of corruption culture is the misappropriation of international development funds, which is also done in a variety of ways. The most obvious way is, of course, combining all the above-mentioned and other well-known vested traditions of corruption – nepotism, lack of competition, presenting a façade, making *tufta* instead of good work. The result is that often everything seems fine on paper, but in fact the work has not been done and the money has disappeared. All these means have been used to make the funding that was coming from international development sources disappear in the insatiable muzzle of corruption. This was, of course, also deeply affected by and combined with mental corruption. The misappropriation of international development funds was done via, for instance, designing projects of a lower quality in the first place than they could have been; or working in a way which, on the face of it, presented as if everything was being done according to the rules, but in fact it was not and it was not producing the expected results. The asphalt was laid but, two months later, it is already ruined. The bridge over the highway is constructed but it is lower than the maximum height of a truck, so it has to be destroyed and built anew. Water has to be brought from the upper part of a village to the lower part, passing the highway in-between. There is a water pipe in the upper part of the village which goes parallel to the highway. Instead of connecting it to one large new pipe that will pass under the highway and supply another pipe in the lower village, several narrower pipes are built connecting to the upper pipe at 20 or more different points, crossing the highway in 20 or more places. The highway stays ruined for ages; when it is repaired, bumps remain. Obviously, more material is used and the result is less effective. The bonus is that it is more lucrative to repair the highway in 20 or 30 places than at only one crossing. The fact that this is the main highway connecting Armenia to Georgia is immaterial, of course.

Talking about road construction, here is another example: we all know that asphalt in most of Armenia is repaired every year after winter instead of redoing the entire road so that it survives several winters. Patches are put on the areas where the asphalt has deteriorated. Such a thin layer is used that it is already gone the next winter, so that there is a continuous need to repair it. This is, again, a case of corruption. When you see that it happens all over Armenia over and over again, every year, you realize that this is endemic corruption and that this has become a way of functioning for the local political economy. '*Let's provide jobs and some money to the road*

*pavers*.' The head of the unit for road paving is, of course, appropriating a lot of money because he is being paid to lay a serious layer of asphalt, but it is in bad shape again by the next year. If you look at places asphalt has been put in properly, you can see that it stays more or less intact for many years. It only starts deteriorating after several years. But after it does, there is often no capital project to redo it again: the system switches to the patches instead. Of course, road pavers need jobs. This is the trap Armenia finds itself in: a corruption system which condones poverty and creates a dependency on the corruption scheme for the workers. The social need to care for the jobs, in the absence of a serious development strategy (because it is in the interest of the *rhizome* not to have one and keep the situation as it is), encourages corruption schemes.

It is very interesting to study the international donor cheating schemes: their use requires certain sophistication and a good knowledge of international funding procedures. In some cases, this has been done via setting up so-called gongos, or 'governmental NGOs.' It should be understood that the main recipient of international assistance has been the Armenian state rather than NGOs. Therefore, all accusations of NGOs supposedly working for 'Western agendas' are unfounded. On the contrary, people having state and political power have set up several NGOs whose main aim was to appropriate international funding. Several other types of organizations, such as 'project implementation units' (PIU), have been set up for the same purpose, often manned by the cronies of state-associated figures. Moreover, whereas the state salaries are very low, the salaries in these organizations correspond to international standards; obviously their employees have to pay kickbacks to their 'bosses' who are sitting on very low wages. Imagine how a hierarchical relationship works if the 'boss,' an employee in the ministry responsible for the work of a certain unit receives ten times less salary than the head of that unit. Finally, the funniest thing is that when the international project and funding end, these PIUs continue their existence, at the same level of pay, now paid directly from the state budget, i.e. from the taxpayer's pocket.

The usual state salaries are such that almost nobody can survive on them alone. Therefore, the main reason for an individual to agree to such employment is mostly the chance to enrich oneself via corruption schemes. In addition, the '*black*' salary system flourished: on top of their official salaries, many employees would receive additional money in envelopes. One can imagine the existence of a very significant '*black*' budget in Armenia.

Of course, corruption schemes which used international donor assistance could not be very successful unless they had participants from inside these institutions. Very infrequently, such schemes were discovered and criminal prosecution took place. I know perhaps three or four such cases over the last 20 years. In some cases, when the scheme is exposed, the international office does not request opening a criminal case; they try to put an end to the abuse and control the damage, but criminal prosecution does not take place, often because the office shies away from the negative publicity associated with a criminal case implicating its employees. Therefore, the offices which did not hesitate to make corruption cases public and submitted them for official investigation and prosecution have to be praised.

There is no impunity in the West. It may be delayed, it may be late or even too late, but there is no impunity. In Armenia, there is impunity. I remember a case connected to somebody who was working with a US institution. The person was prosecuted 10 or 15 years after he had committed the crimes while he was in Armenia. He had left, he was living in the States, somewhere in California, if I am not mistaken, and suddenly he was taken, arrested, prosecuted and put in jail.

So, at the end of the day, the system in the West works; maybe not in a perfect way, but it does work. However, what we have in Armenia, unfortunately, is that in about 90 percent of cases, impunity reigns. Even if some people are eventually prosecuted, it is usually not the main perpetrators or ringleaders; only the lower-level pawns are caught, in the best case scenario.

There is also the widespread scheme of *blackmailing an investor*. Since the times of the very first Armenian government, the message to the external investor, to the Diaspora, has been: please come in and invest. However, I know many stories about how diasporan and other foreign investors would come in, start investing, having very clear prospects, making official agreements with the state on paper: '*We invest and we pay taxes, and we will have this business going.*' Then a state official asks them for an unofficial down payment, to his own pocket, of course. The investor just goes away. They lose money, but more importantly, they lose interest in Armenia forever. It may be a state official, it may be a relative of a state official, or just local crooks; we know many such stories. I don't want to give concrete examples because these stories constitute potential criminal cases, for which I don't have any proof right now, apart from the stories I've heard from the victims. However, in some cases, they are reflected in the media. Take, for instance, the story with longtime benefactor and investor Gerard Cafesjian.[235] After years of large-scale humanitarian investment, he could no longer tolerate the corruption and stopped his support to Armenia. I wonder how long the hole between the finished part of the Cascade and the observation deck will stay unfinished. Armenians, like many others in the post-Soviet space, are good at building this façade reality. Cascade seems fine—if only one forgets about the big hole at the top, which may never be completed.

Armenians are outspoken. They are rhetorically advanced, and they are good at sophistry. The analytical skills and mental capacities of this talented people can be put to good use or bad use. Inviting Karabakh as a side to the negotiations required a very significant capacity to think analytically and in different directions simultaneously. Similarly, building a 'viable' corruption scheme requires one to think analytically, and be able to argue on the surface '*Look what a great job we have done,*' while building, behind that façade, a *second reality* devoted to the skillful misappropriation of funds.

Scheming specialists are very knowledgeable in international development. The international staff of these institutions rotates. Often, there are no technological means to preserve institutional memory so that it can be easily retrieved. With a change in personnel or the closeout of a project, institutional memory is often lost forever. New leadership arrives; they don't know the country, they don't know the shrewdness of the population here. Their main advisors are the local staff, who have worked at the institution for a long time. If the local staff is corrupt, internationals may end up condoning the corruption schemes, even if they personally had no intention of becoming corrupt. They get into a kind of clash with the 'local values;' they often don't even realize how they happened to end up in the trap of corruption.

Immersing the society in endemic corruption is a feature not only of post-Soviet Armenia but also many other post-Soviet countries. A textbook on post-Soviet corruption can be developed in this part of the world. The patterns here are often very different from the types of corruption in first or third world countries. Indeed, this is *the second world corruption*, very distinctly. Its

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[235] Gerard Cafesjian, a businessman and philanthropist of Armenian descent, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerard_Cafesjian

foundations date back to the Soviet system and are deeply ingrained in the Soviet mentality, which was the foundation for the post-Soviet mentality.

If you remember, we talked about how, in the Soviet times, during the Gulag era, *tufta* was the main means of survival, as well as adopting the *blatnoy* culture. After Stalin, *tsekhavism* came to 'power' quite significantly. In both these periods, the state was alienated from the individual, cheating on the state or stealing from the state was not considered wrongdoing in the common social psychology. This is inherited by the post-Soviet states.

In fact, this dates back to pre-Soviet times: the Russian Empire conquered large areas in the Caucasus and Central Asia and imposed the Russian state's rules over the local population. These rules were never fully accepted by the people, who were very different from the Russian culture, particularly Muslim and mountainous people. Therefore, they kept their own pre-Russian rules in many respects, such as keeping the so-called *common law,* which was their internal law system. Alternatively, they kept elements of *sharia*, the traditional law system of Islamic cultures. The *common law* ended up in a very unique interplay with the Russian Empire's official law. In 1999, we held a conference to discuss this interplay.[236] In the common law, for instance, blood revenge existed. According to the Russian law, it was prohibited, but it did not disappear. The Russian justice system was not seen as fair to those who were conquered. Therefore, they did not abandon their local habits, traditions, and norms. This was the core of the *second society*, which acquired a new shape after Soviet rule was established.

*Bahsheesh,[237]* or what we call *magharich,[238]* a 'gift' to the power holder for being nice and delivering a service as requested, fed into the Russian corruption system. This was a typical service delivery fee in the archaic cultures, where many state representatives were not paid. They were left to collect their fee from the population. We can see this form of state functioning throughout history. In many medieval states, state positions were bought and sold 'officially.' As we know from the Bible, St. Matthew was a taxman who threw his money on the ground to follow Christ. While being a taxman, he was rich; obviously his possessions did not come from the Emperor's paycheck, but were a portion of what he collected as a taxman.

This archaic tradition, where a state position has been officially perceived as a path to enrichment at the expense of the population, was inherited by the Russian Empire in the form of corruption and was passed to the Soviet system. In Tsarist Russia, it was already officially illegal, of course. However, there was almost no prosecution of state employees for taking bribes, kickbacks, etc. In Soviet times, this tradition was shaken during the ruthless times of the civil war, Bolshevik and then Stalinist terror. The Soviet system officially encouraged being frugal (бессребренник), and there are many stories about Lenin's and Stalin's lack of interest in private possessions and money. But as we know from the history of Gulag, the Soviet bosses used to behave as typical pre-Soviet *pomeshchiki* (landlords). They used slave labor for personal enrichment. Others accumulated property, even though that was officially prohibited. Lawlessness, the lack of rule of law, the arbitrary decision-making power given to authorities, all

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[236] Caucasus Forum of non-governmental organizations, 2001, Traditions of Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus and the methods of civil society, Yerevan.

[237] Baksheesh, charitable giving, and certain forms of political corruption and bribery in the Middle East and South Asia, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baksheesh

[238] Magharich (article in Russian), Wikipedia: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Магарыч

this contributed to the archaic traditions from the conquered territories becoming the Soviet and then post-Soviet traditions of corruption. The 'Eastern' tradition of 'beyism' (where the 'bey', or 'lord,' has the right to do whatever he wants) were incorporated into the Russian Empire culture and, afterwards, Soviet culture from the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The fact that it comes from the East, for me, is proven by the following observation: in Soviet times, most of the fake dissertations for the candidate or doctor of science[239] degrees (two layers of the Soviet Ph.D.) were produced by the East, by the Caucasus and Central Asia 'beys.' They would hire people who would write the dissertation for them, and they would bribe the boards of the Moscow- or Leningrad-based (or other) scientific institutions and higher education establishments to receive an academic degree. This was much less common in the rest of the Soviet Union. Armenia was somewhere in the middle of the corruption scale, if we use dissertations as an indicator. There were less fake dissertations coming from Armenia than from Georgia, Azerbaijan, or Central Asia; but there were more from Armenia than from the Russian mainland or from the Baltic states.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, 'cooking' fake dissertations became widespread all over the post-Soviet states. We know how widespread it is in Armenia (remember the case of Yerevan Mayor and Serzh Sargsyan crony – Taron Margaryan).[240] In Russia, there is this famous project *dissernet*,[241] which exposes the cases of fake or plagiarized dissertations among the current Russian 'beys.' In Armenia, there is no *dissernet* project, but everybody knows that the provision of academic degrees to criminals and those who hold political and economic power has become such a widespread business that it has ruined Armenia's academic system and the respect towards its degree-granting institutions. Criminals have always dreamed about acquiring acceptance for their intellectual capacities; this is a well-known trend. Again, it can be traced back to the Gulag, where, for instance, a famous novel 'The heir from Calcutta,'[242] written by Robert Shtilmark in the Gulag, was sponsored by a thief-in-law who was taking care of Shtilmark, not letting him die or suffer from hunger, so that Shtilmark writes a novel to be published under the name of the thief and make the thief famous. The thief's plan was to get noticed by Stalin and get a chance to be freed from prison. It was a very sophisticated plan indeed. Unfortunately, Stalin didn't notice the novel. Afterwards, for many years, Shtilmark had to prove that he was the author of that best-selling novel.

Earlier on I tried to demonstrate how the Gulag culture came to Armenia in the form of the *blatnoy* value system. Similarly, we can see how the 'Eastern' archaic traditions, finding fertile ground first in the Tsarist Empire and afterwards in the Soviet Union, were reinforced in post-Soviet times.

I said above that the post-Soviet type of corruption cannot be compared to the corruption in many other states, either in the West or in the South. This is due to its peculiar cultural overtones, and I already discussed some of them. But this is also because of the deep devaluation

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[239] Candidate of Sciences, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidate_of_Sciences
[240] Gegham Vardayan, "Who Blocked Journalists' Entry to Yerevan Mayor Taron Margaryan's Doctoral Thesis Defense," 2013: https://media.am/en/who-blocked-journalists-entry-to-yerevan-mayor-taron-margaryans-doctoral-thesis-defense/
[241] Dissernet, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissernet
[242] Heir from Calcutta, Wikipedia: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Наследник_из_Калькутты

of the post-Soviet value system of governance, a devaluation hidden behind the rhetoric of democracy. To illustrate this fact, let us compare Putin's Russia with Erdogan's Turkey. Both states are moving toward authoritarianism. Erdogan's Turkey is perhaps, in some cases, more ruthless than Putin's Russia. However, one cannot imagine the ruling power losing a local election in a large city in Putin's Russia, or the court ruling against the ruling power when it tries to declare the results invalid. This happened in Turkey. This obviously means that, despite the authoritarian regime established by Erdogan, Turkey has still not concentrated power to the same extent as Russia. In Turkey, judges may be politicized, they may be corrupt, but they are still independent of the political regime to a very significant degree. Similarly in the US, a local judge may overrule Trump's executive order. This is impossible to imagine in Russia, where one sees full power concentration in a super-presidential system. When the system of checks and balances does not exist in a country, it is a very visible sign of an unprecedented degree of systemic corruption. Because corruption can be defined not only as twisting or abusing rules for one's benefit, but also as arbitrary decision-making, where no rules hold. This is an ideal system of corruption.

One cannot live a decent life in today's Armenia on 200 dollars a month. If that is all the bread winner for the family brings home, then this leads to extreme poverty. So, as long as any state employee receives less money than needed for a more or less decent standard of life with a full-time job, no reform will lead to a serious result. It is just impossible to imagine. The first reform that should happen is the reform of the state system, so that people receive enough money for the job that they are doing such that they do not need to seek additional funding. The next element is rights and opportunities for small and medium entrepreneurship. If wages in the public sector are increased, there will be less people working there. For those who are let go, you need training programs and education so that they can acquire the necessary skills to work in the private sector.

The culture of this country is steeped in mistrust. Trust, as we know, is a key to having a progressive economy. Not only did this country start as a low-trust society, it continues to go deeper in that direction, instead of trying to get out of that trap. When I say that wages have to be increased, the usual answer that I hear is: '*It will not curb corruption because a dishonest person will continue taking bribes, etc. We need to hire honest people instead of dishonest ones. Honest people will not give in to corruption, even if they receive a low salary. We need to prosecute those who are corrupt and then the corruption will stop.*'

This answer demonstrates many things. For instance, that people who want to fight corruption are ready to fight against symptoms and only in a reactive way. They agree to prosecute but not to fundamentally reform the system. Obviously, the reactive strategy of prosecution will never be enough to address the systemic corruption of the state.

This answer also demonstrates the totally mistaken archaic assumptions behind our understanding of human nature. First, it assumes that people are generically honest or dishonest, i.e. it denies the role of the environment, social values, and the adaptability of human beings. Second, it is an irrational answer, and it also denies rationality to the state employees. Surely, corruption will not fully disappear if wages are increased. But, if one does not have to be a crook in order to make a living, less people would be willing to take part in corruption. Add in new functional systems of control and prosecution for corruption, and the scale of the issue will improve dramatically.

Such answers also demonstrate the distortion of the relative weight of various values in one's mind, i.e. the incapacity to make rational conclusions. State wages have been low since the collapse of the Soviet ruble. This was a major factor in bringing about the rampant corruption of the state and its capture by the *rhizome*'s oligarchic regime. This understanding would make a rational person conclude that the situation has to change and reform is needed. If somebody disagrees with this thinking, then they are not rational; their rationality is distorted. They may disagree because they have a vested interest in preserving the system as it is. But in all other cases, they just demonstrate their incapacity to think rationally. If something has not worked, it has to change. This is argument number one. But the second argument is even simpler: one cannot require somebody to work for nothing. Therefore, either we assume that the '*black*' payment and corruption system is fine, or we have to increase wages of the state employees.

There are many similar examples. I gave one earlier on: that the jury system was discontinued because the assumption was, supposedly, that the jury members could become corrupt; i.e. the assumption was that it is easier to corrupt 12 citizens than one judge. When one encounters such counterarguments to logical proposals, one cannot help but assume that the ones who disagree are either corrupt or just irrational to the level of illiteracy in the simplest rules of logic, in the capacity to distinguish cause and effect and to compare a bigger number with a smaller one.

In a similar vein, once a person who supposedly works on anticorruption projects suggested that hiring for state positions should become totally 'impersonalized,' i.e. department heads should be prohibited from participating in recruitment because they usually bring in their relatives. This is, again, turning logic upside-down: if one inherits a team which one has not recruited personally, how can we talk about the need for leadership and teamwork? In some cases, it may be fine for a manager to inherit a team, but the leader should personally participate in the recruitment of new personnel. So, in the supposed fight against corruption, this suggestion was in fact against leadership, in favor of those who would like state departmental units to be manned by people who do not know each other, do not trust each other, and therefore will almost never become a successful, cohesive team. Again, this is either a case of deep illiteracy in the ABCs of management or just sophistry serving only to facilitate the functioning of a corrupt state.

Ani Tovmasyan (AT): These problems mainly arise from the fact that Armenia did not have statehood for a long time, and that we also lack some kind of positive nationalism in our country, not the nationalism as interpreted by the ruling party, but the nationalism that people associate with their success and the success of their state. If you do not associate yourself with the state and its opportunities for development, you easily agree to milk the state budget and squeeze the country's resources for personal benefit.

## Chapter 8. Positive and Negative Values

I want to try and 'draw' the type of society that we have today. It is going to be a very rough drawing, as usual. But the way I imagine it, it could be presented like this flying saucer, or whatever it is. This is the way I see the *rhizome*.
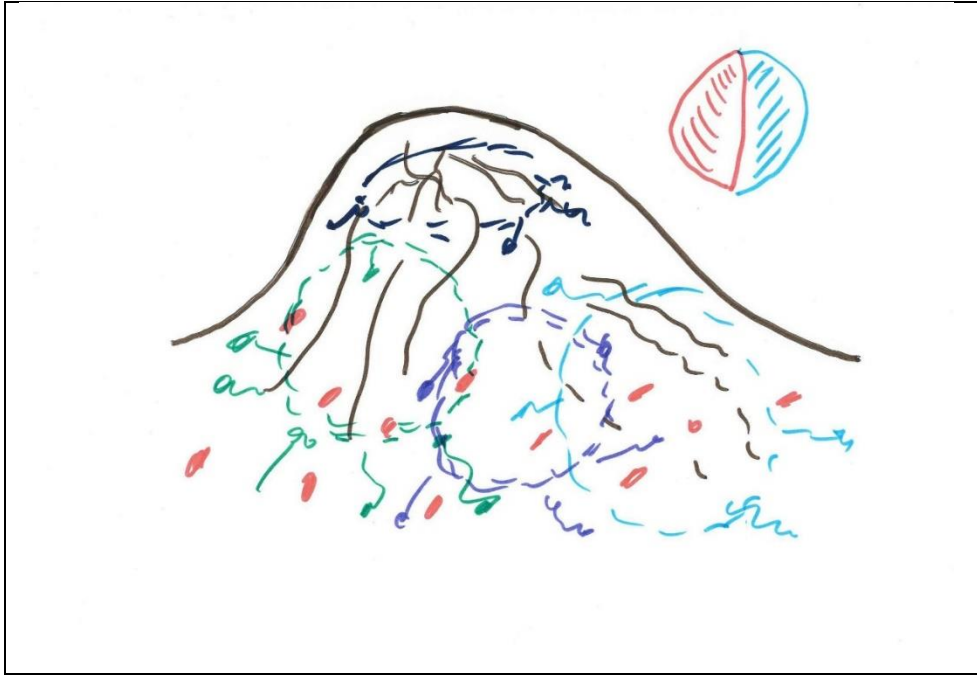


Figure 1. The *rhizome*

People are interconnected here, via their allegiance to this or that structure, which is associated with the governance system. We immediately come up with a question: whether or not this *chapeau* is the right top for the society, or whether there should be other tops.

We can see some rings within the *rhizome*. One of them can be presented as the police ring. The other one can be the church-associated ring. The third one can be the military-associated ring. These rings are particularly strong structures within the rhizome. People who gain employment with the police service, Armenian Apostolic Church, or military service also become participants in the political economy of the country via the ways and means typical for these rings. They become, so to say, if we borrow a word from mafia vocabulary, the *connected guys*.

There are not enough jobs, not many opportunities to make an independent living, but these rings absorb people relatively easily. This is one way to make one's life more or less sustainable. At least two of the structures are paid by the state, and the Church also provides opportunities for people to survive. One can somehow make ends meet, even if barely, by engaging in one of these structures. A lot of opportunities are derived from the fact that you participate in this rhizome. You might be permitted to run a small business, take a cut in the extraction of money from

somebody, receive a 'gratitude dividend' during election campaigns, or just be able to advocate for your family and friends thanks to the fact that you are a *connected guy*.

There are some other rings as well, such as medical doctors, journalists, etc. But to me these three rings seem fundamental to surviving today in Armenia. Many small businesses belong to people who are either in the Church, or in the police, or in the military. Perhaps the education system[243] can be imagined as another ring, though with much lesser power. On top, we have *the most important ring*, which consists of the richest oligarchs and powerholders and their interrelationships.

The ordinary people are these red dots in the picture. They are everywhere, but if they are not *connected*, they have difficulties surviving and living in Armenia. I have talked at length about the *duality* of the soul of a typical Armenian citizen, be it in the 20th century or in the 21st century. I am going to draw a coffee bean to represent this duality. It is one way of imagining it.

On one hand, you have to participate in something unfair, in something which is either legally or ethically incorrect; on the other hand, you try to be a nice person within the limits that are available to you. This is the issue. If it becomes extreme, it leads to what I call *social schizophrenia*. In another situation, it may disturb one in a milder way or not at all, if one has adapted to it. In fact, the duality should not be presented as a coffee bean, but rather something where the 'good' and the 'bad' are mixed. It is not half-and-half, it is more like a *yin yang*. You have the capacity to do both 'good' things and 'bad' things inside the same person. These two qualities, the two 'selves' have to be kept separate. You are a teacher and you are corrupt because, during elections, you are leading an electoral precinct and forging votes; but in the class you have to teach 'nice' values to the children.[244] You don't want to kill people, you are a nice person; but you hate Azerbaijanis and, if you are in the army at a war situation, you have to shoot at Azerbaijanis. You are a humanist in your soul, but you think that many people in the world are not human, including Azerbaijanis and Turks. Some people in Armenia think the same about Muslims in general, despite historic experience to the contrary, residing alongside Muslims of different nationalities. This is a kind of irreconcilable set of a duality of attitudes, of two sets of values inside one's soul. Let us remember the *tsekhavik* times, the Soviet times. It is the same today: you are extorting money from others, you are taking bribes, you are giving bribes; but *for your family you are a nice man, or woman*, and you want your children to be nice people and you even consider yourself a *patriot*. The red dots are the ones who may or may not be infected by this controversy, or affected to a higher or lower degree.

In this situation, we have elections coming up.[245] We have nine parties and party alliances, some of which are almost indistinguishable from each other. The 'chain' of their interrelationship looks like overlapping circles. There is one party alliance which is slightly further, there is

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[243] Educational Issues of 21st Century. Part 2. Jam Session 36 (in Armenian), (Original title: Կրթության խնդիրները 21-րդ դարում, Մաս 2-րդ (Jam Session 36)): https://epfarmenia.am/video/Education-Issues-in-21st-century-Part-2

[244] Daniel Ioannisyan, School headmasters called back and complained. Armenian hackers attacked on the site, Aravot.am (Original title of the article in Armenian: Դպրոցների տնօրեններին հետ են զանգել ու բողոքել, հայ հաքերները հարձակվել են կայքի վրա. Դանիել Իոաննիսյանը՝ սպառնալիքների մասին): https://www.aravot.am/2017/03/27/870829/

[245] 2017 Armenian parliamentary election, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Armenian_parliamentary_election

another one which is somewhat at the 'bottom' of this chain; the rest of them are pretty much linked to each other.

It becomes obvious that, from the perspective of the *rhizome*, these elections and the change of the governmental system to a parliamentary state are to strengthen the *rhizome* itself. I already mentioned that. If previously only one circle, the main one, was in charge of governing the *rhizome*, now it will be the entire chain of circles—the part of it that enters Parliament—which will be in charge of governing the *rhizome*. The *rhizome* will expand, strengthen itself, and become stronger. There will be even less niches for other kinds of people, the unattached dots, to survive in this society.

Therefore, the unattached ones should have a defense strategy. They should create alliances with each other. These alliances can consist of people or organizations connected to each other. Essentially, it is people or small groups of people, families, etc. They have to build alliances with each one, they have to build, let's say, *islands of not belonging to the rhizome*. That's the only way that they can resist this expansionist tendency of the omnivorous *rhizome* because the *rhizome* is spreading everywhere. It is capturing the state, the society, everything. It makes the dual morale the main game in town, from which there is seemingly no escape. It makes the society schizophrenic. It is very difficult to stay away from it. This is the challenge for the unattached ones. They have to build alliances in order to survive and resist. This is one of the sound strategies if one wants to survive in this situation without becoming a part of the *rhizome*, without sacrificing one's values; and if one wants to preserve some energy to continue working towards positive change. The eventual result of this strategy would be for other *tops* to appear thanks to the *unattached islands* uniting.

If there are more *tops*, if there are other recognized and united elite groups, the 'power elite' top will be less distinguished and less powerful.

But this strategy has not produced visible results to date because, in a situation of a collapse of trust and all positive values (which are shaken because of duality), the triangular or the pyramidal shape of society is a blueprint stuck in everybody's mind. People are disempowered and mostly do not believe in themselves, in the possibility of alternative power centers, or that they personally could be participants in such. Whoever has political power, the monopoly on violence, is considered to be on top.

There is also another element in this: the deeply engrained belief in the *tsar*. People want a good *tsar,* and they do not believe in united groups where teams are more important than persons. People do not believe in impersonal leadership. They believe in secret leadership, in conspiracies, but they do not understand that united networks can resist the *rhizome*. In that respect, the *rhizome* is very shrewd: on the one hand, it presents itself as an impersonalized system; on the other hand, it has a *tsar* on top, at least theoretically.

*Lack of trust* and *anti-development* are chicken-and-egg phenomena: the spiral of *anti-development* creates conditions where one is poor, badly educated, fully disempowered, and therefore fully dependent on the *rhizome*; in turn, transactions requiring *trust* become impossible. One's goal becomes mere survival or, at best, personal asset accumulation. This makes it impossible to plan for the future, to establish forward-looking and far-sighted new relationships, and to prefer tomorrow's large public gain to today's small personal one.

If we move toward a society with many tops, we can have a separate cultural elite, scientific elite, and other elites in their own spheres. Their status would be maintained by means other than violence or by building out the *rhizome* (the network that, ultimately, depends on violence), but can influence progress in society. But the *rhizome* does everything it can to prevent such a development.

The controversy between the people who have become prominent members of the *rhizome* and the *dots* that are outside has also created the so-called problem of *handshakeability* (рукопожатность, ձեռքսեղմելիություն).

I have already talked about this. After the Stalinist years, the *blatnoy* culture, in its superficial shape, became one of the 'respectful' types of behavior in the society. In Soviet times, it was still subdued because there were other respectful behavioral patterns that survived despite being attacked and mocked (for instance, the remnants of the *intelligentsia* culture or professional cultures). In post-Soviet times, the *blatnoy* culture flourished because the *intelligentsia* was mainly poor and defenseless, made up mostly from the previous generations, and disappeared quite fast in the cold and dark years. In the best case, the survivors from this group left the country. Professions and professionalism died out with the collapse of industry, except in some rare cases. Criminal morale climbed to top; it prevailed. The subcultures inherited from Soviet times either stayed the same, such as the *blatnoy* culture, or gave birth to their heir, the next generation, which was essentially the same culture in a modified form. For instance, the *rabiz*[246] culture gave birth to *qyartu* culture;[247] *tsekhavism* gave birth to oligarchic culture. The *blatnoy* culture itself acquired another shape in the army or in prisons in the form of *dedovshchina*[248] in Soviet times and in the newly-built, independent Armenian professional army in the form of so-called *informal relations*. All these cultures kept their association with *blatnoy* culture, as the one which unequivocally declared the power of the mighty and *bespredel*[249] as the main sources of legitimacy and respect.

We have talked at length about *donos*. It may seem a contradiction that the *blatnoy* culture does not accept the concept of *donos*. On the contrary, it denies the right of people to let others, especially the authorities, know about the wrongdoings of another, even if the allegation is true. The *blatnoy* culture encourages keeping everything inside. It encourages being devoted to one's circle, to one's mafia. It doesn't encourage one to speak out, to take the skeletons out of the closet, to let the dogs bark, to blow the whistle. The *blatnoy* culture has a habit of throwing people who don't conform to their norms into the lower caste: it may be for *donos* (betrayal, treachery), it may be for being from the *intelligentsia* (for instance, wearing glasses), it may be for sexual orientation, or for any other 'wrongdoing' from its perspective or just for being *different*. In the Armenian army, this lowest caste is called *garlakh*. People argue about the etymology of this word, which didn't exist in Soviet times. One version is that it comes from English 'girl', i.e. a (male) person made into a *girl*.

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[246] Rabiz, Wiktionary: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/rabiz

[247] Ashot Gabrielyan, Arkmenik Nikoghosyan, "The Kyartu Character as a Representation of Intolerance in Modern Armenian Prose," pages 201-224 (Original title in Armenian: Քյարթուի կերպարը որպես անհանդուրժողականության ներկայացման միջոց արդի հայ արձակում), In: Manifestations of Tolerance and Intolerance in Armenian Literature, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2017: https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Tolerance_Intolerance_in_Armenian_Literature_book_2017.pdf

[248] *Dedovshchina*, the informal practice of initiation (hazing) and constant bullying of junior conscripts during their service, formerly to the Soviet Armed Forces, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dedovshchina

[249] Bespredel, Wikipedia: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Беспредел

The *donos* culture almost fully disappeared from the surface of the society. It remains only in the cases where the security services secretly recruit people to tell them about internal political developments; otherwise, it is considered inappropriate and shameful. Secrecy and the lack of transparency are very much in the interest of the *rhizome* authorities. Many 'good deals' can be made in the dark. That is why the media are not free, even though this is offset by the development of the Internet. The *rhizome* also threatens and blackmails people into not discussing its wrongdoings publicly. Since the times of Dostoyevsky, it is well-known that one of the best ways to recruit somebody into the mafia or into the *rhizome* is to make that person an accomplice, to co-opt them thus assimilating them. By prohibiting transparency, the *rhizome* makes the entire population into an accomplice; individuals know about numerous wrongdoings but they are mostly silent because they are afraid of retaliation if they speak up. The patriotic rhetoric and threatening with shame is also used for this: '*Do not tell foreigners and outsiders the truth about our condition; we should all be united vis-à-vis the external enemy; I will exploit and denigrate you here inside, but to outsiders we should present a united nation, which is fighting for the recognition of Artsakh and the Genocide. I am a blatnoy criminal internally, but to the external world I and the one I am subjugating should be united. I did a lot of bad things to you, but now you should go to the front line and die in the name of the nation.*' This is a typical tactic and has parallels to hidden domestic violence or school bullying, for instance.

In the Soviet *Gulag,* the system itself was built on *donos*: people were beaten up and tortured until they accepted that they had committed crimes and gave the names of their acquaintances, friends, and relatives to feed the insatiable maw of the system, to bring as many people as possible into the Gulag forced labor and slavery system. *Donos* was encouraged by the authorities. Meanwhile, the *blatnoy* culture started off in opposition to the authorities, until it became the power itself. The highest rank of *blatnoy* in the *Gulag* system is *thief in law*, one who does not take orders from the Gulag system or the administration. He doesn't participate in public work. He is the holder of the *blatnoy* code, the rules that all *blatnoys* should follow. It was *zapadlo*, i.e. prohibited and dishonorable, to cooperate with the authorities. If such a case became known, the *thief-in-law* would immediately lose his crown.

The original *thief in law* should never cooperate with the authorities. Thieves that cooperate are called *pridurok* (can be translated as near-idiots); they are equated to the police and other authorities, the *vertukhays* (those who are looking after *zeks*). They have changed their skin. People who are not in the *blatnoy* system are called *Freier* (from the word 'free'), *lokh* or *terpila*(sufferer): these are the categories who can be mistreated in any possible way.

I already said that many of these terms come from the Yiddish language and from the Southern European areas of the Russian Empire, like Odessa. I already presented the word *tufta*. This is related to the *Pale of Settlement* for the Jewish community. Under the Russian Empire, Jews were not permitted to live east of that zone. They could not study in the universities until the beginning of the 20th century. However, many traditions, rules, and habits incorporated into the *blatnoy* culture come also from the Caucasus and Central Asia. These traditional cultures, hostile to the Moscow authorities, fed into the *blatnoy* culture with their emphasis on a peculiar understanding of the code of honor and deviations from it; with their fixation on conservatism, traditionalism, and archaism; with their denial of the Russian state system's right to dictate the rules; their ruthlessness and lack of appreciation for human life and dignity; and, for instance, with the worship of the concept of Mother. The adherence to the ancient tradition of

overemphasizing the sanctity of the concept of Mother is typical in the South and East (and, in general, any culture which has kept archaic elements in itself, including the criminal cultures worldwide).

The *blatnoy* culture has been in symbiotic relations with the Soviet *militsia* (police) system. In the Gulag, the *blatnoys* cooperated with *vertukhays* to keep down the political prisoners, those who were condemned under the political clauses of the criminal code. I mentioned that, at the beginning of the Soviet power, *blatnoys* were considered 'socially close' to the proletariat because it was surmised that theft and robbery represent a spontaneous, unconscious rebellion against the right to private property; and the denial of the right to private property was very close to the official Soviet ideology at its early stage, where expropriation of the property of the rich people and the church was the main policy.

The *blatnoy* culture may have easily entered Soviet civil life also because it had an element of resistance in it. It exemplified the Soviet citizen's contempt for the ruthless and alien state. In post-Soviet times, encouraged by those who came to power, the *blatnoy* culture rose to the top. It became the governing culture and speaking up was discouraged – it was likened to *donos*. But contempt for the state, a ruthless attitude to human life and dignity, and extreme and violent selfishness to the level of *bespredel* came with it as well. I already said that a part of the reason for this was in the behavior of those who fought in the Karabakh war: many of them carried elements of the *blatnoy* culture. In order to go to war voluntarily, one has to have a certain courage, ruthlessness, and readiness to kill human beings. After their victorious return, these people, some of whom had achieved the ranks of generals, required their share of the goodies of Armenia. In order to placate them, they were given these shares. Becoming powerful politically and economically, they played a decisive role in bringing the *blatnoy* culture into the mainstream of society.

Violence, bullying, and hazing became the main game in town. Naturally, speaking up remained taboo, just like in school. When one child beats up another child and this child reports the incident, his friends and schoolmates shame him and call him '*խաբարքդիկ*', *yabeda* in Russian ('ябеда'), a snitch. The *blatnoy* slang uses the word *stukach*. English does not have an exact equivalent for these concepts, but *snitch* comes quite close to *խաբարքդիկ*: somebody who is giving information about something that shouldn't have been known to the authorities, in this case teachers.

On one hand, we had a culture which was based on *donos* to a very profound degree. On the other hand, we acquired the *blatnoy* culture, which came to power and prohibited opening up, whistleblowing, voicing information and issues, because people around would say: '*You are a snitch,*' somebody who 'puts everything on fire' (վառել), as we say in Armenian, who takes the skeletons out of the closet. Obviously, this is in the interest of the *rhizome* culture because it means that you cannot really speak out, and that's why the public space in Armenia is not in good shape. That's why it is often said that there's no public opinion in Armenia. When one measures public opinion correctly, it gives a horrible picture: only 3% of people trust the president, the police, the media, the NGOs, the medical sphere, everything (until 2018). When, however, you are living in a situation where anybody can claim that they have done sociological research (because *tufta* is a widespread and accepted culture in research as well), and one can claim any statistics depending on one's taste and desire, nobody trusts any figures at all.

The other success of the *rhizome* is in how it tackled the Internet. While there are islands where freedom of speech is possible—like on Facebook, for instance—there's a growing gap in society between saying something and acting upon something. The *rhizome* uses the parts of freedom of speech that it cannot prohibit in order to let the steam out. No consequences to the investigations or allegations usually follow. The investigative journalism results that *Hetq* publishes, for instance—probably the only entity that has been strategically publishing investigative journalism results for many years—or any other kind of disclosures that take place in the public sphere, don't lead to any action. People who should be prosecuted for being corrupt are running for Parliament. The gap between speech and action grows, the influence of free speech and opening up issues for justice and decision-making are totally absent.

Thus, the *rhizome* adapts to changing circumstances: '*Since we cannot prohibit the Internet, let's let out the steam. In doing so, we can acquire as many media outlets as possible and develop our own army of trolls. We will drown the nation in fake news.*' The same goes for the *blatnoy* culture: if it was previously prohibited to cooperate with the authorities, now, since it *has become* the authorities, that restriction is lifted.

When almost everybody is in the *rhizome*, it becomes a '*populist criminocracy.*' There is no more need for the *donos* culture because the state is no longer alienated from the individual, as it was under the pyramid-like totalitarianism. The criminal state has sucked the individual into the *rhizome*. The *donos* culture played its role in demoralizing and weakening the individual. Now, he can be easily absorbed into the rhizome. He will feel happy that he is not left out and take the oath of loyalty not to snitch or let the outside world see its dirty laundry. This aligns with the traditional Eastern culture of *shame* (*sharam*[250] in Arabic, срам in Russian), common in small, traditional, non-industrial communities. Instead of *conscience*, *shame* becomes overemphasized. One should be afraid of ostracism for behaving differently than the environment (rather than remorse for wrongdoing): a very convenient context for connecting national pride with the rhizome. **If there is *shame*, there is no need for *conscience*: others have already decided the value system; and even if your environment is criminal, conforming to it becomes the socially-acceptable approach.**

Again, the only way to overcome this situation, in my opinion, is to establish more and more connections between these islands, the little networks of like-minded people who are outside the *rhizome* and have become connected, until these *alternative elite structures* become more capable of action.

The other way, complementing the build-up of interrelated anti-*rhizome* networks, dates back to the times when *honor* and *reputation* were a serious value, when the *intelligentsia* was still a respectful social stratum, and is known from Soviet times as well: it is the refusal to shake hands with some people. In Russian, people whose hand can be shaken are called *rukopozhatnyi* ('рукопожатный' – ձեռքսեղմելի in Armenian): *handshakeable.* In Armenia today, many people face the issue of being morally able to say 'hello' to one kind of people and not being able to say 'hello' to another kind. In this *blatnoy* culture, those who want to keep away from *blatnoys* and from being co-opted into the *rhizome* have to think about whether or not they are going to compromise by participating in any activity with people who are in the *rhizome* or who

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[250] See Salman Rushdie's novel 'Shame': https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shame_(Rushdie_novel), which explains the interrelationship between shame and conscience

are even only partly attached to the *rhizome* and deeply internally divided. I have to think about who I can work with on reform. Of those who live in the same neighborhood, who can I greet when we happen to pass each other?

*Handshakeability* is similar to putting one into the lowest caste, a *garlkah*, an *untouchable*, but in the name of the values of *honor* and *reputation,* opposite to the *blatnoy* values: the person becomes not *handshakeable* if he has behaved dishonestly, if he is a criminal, if he is corrupt or is a *fluger* (changing his political affiliations from cooperating with criminals to cooperating with the ones opposed to them), if his words and deeds do not coincide, if he preaches high values but is a criminal, if he preaches high values for the reasons of personal enrichment, etc. If there is a strong public opinion in society, losing *handshakeability* can become a good lesson for that person. But in Armenia, we don't have a strong institution of public opinion, and we do not have a good system of public memory: reputation is not a value which is highly respected.

On the contrary, all of the wrongdoings mentioned above are widespread. Even if people build their partial networks and small alliances between each other and support each other, when they end up meeting a non-handshakeable person, they very often have to compromise. This compromise may be the result of feeling one's social weakness and powerlessness: they may feel that they are too dependent on the person's approval.

At the same time, too many people are non-*handshakeable* in Armenia today, and one may end up very isolated and helpless if one adheres to this ancient way of demonstrating attitude towards the value of *honor*. I personally have negotiated a compromise with myself that looks like the following: I don't shake hands with people who are most likely either killers or have given orders to kill innocent people. I don't shake hands with people who have stolen an X amount of money from the society, or something which is equivalent to an X amount of money. I don't have an amount in my mind, but it's a large amount. If I have to shake the hand of somebody who has stolen around ten thousand dollars, particularly for a 'justifiable' cause (e.g. to pay for his child's hospital bill), I may have to swallow my pride and shake his or her hand. If it's somebody who has given bribes because they were forced to, I'll be tolerant toward these people, though I would prefer for them not to have done that. It is very difficult to live in this society and not be forced to give bribes. However, as compared to many compatriots of mine and guests, my levels of patience and tolerance toward the non-*handshakeable* people are very low.

When people from the Diaspora arrive in Armenia, they are often very happy because they are meeting with high-level people who are at the top of the *rhizome*'s pyramid. They feel very happy and acknowledged because they are invited to parties with these high-level people. It is a question mark whether or not they realize that very often they are shaking hands with people it would be better not to touch. I think in some cases they realize it, but when it's distant and it's not your own country, and you don't know it from the inside, you somehow overlook this, you are being easy on yourself. But I wouldn't be able to do that when it comes to these kinds of people, either in my country, or in any other country. In the case of European politicians, very often it's not a problem; these people have never really killed anybody or given orders to kill anybody. It is quite rare in European politics to have rulers who are responsible for direct criminal acts. Even if an army has been sent somewhere, it is usually legitimized by several considerations, though eventually it's not very good because it means that some people went somewhere and participated in the process of killing. It is slightly different in America, where we

saw Guantanamo[251] and all that. Of course, we should take into account that this was after 9/11 and, in general, the United States is quite specific in terms of political violence.

But in our part of the world, it is very rare to find somebody who, either in Armenia, or in any other post-Soviet state—or even not necessarily in a post-Soviet state but in a neighborhood state—is at the top of the *rhizome*'s pyramid and has not participated in committing gross human rights violations, gross crimes, be they 'legal,' 'legitimate,' according to their legislation, or illegitimate. This is something that one should take into account when dealing with many politicians from around the world.

The healthy part of our society has been squeezed off; a major chunk of it has left its own country. Of course, not only the healthy part left the country, but society is getting smaller, it is shrinking. This makes it even more difficult to build alternative networks.

There is also another value that I want to mention in relation to the *blatnoy* culture. One was the prohibition of speaking out or whistleblowing; the other was the concept of *handshakeability*. Yet the third one, very much connected to them, is *ktsel* (*pg&l*): *to let someone down* via reneging on one's commitments. Again, this is intimately connected with the value of *trust*. As I mentioned, there is a collapse of the institution of trust, dating back to the 20th century, at least. Here we have a chicken-and-egg relationship again: because people are let down, trust collapses even more; because there is no trust, people are being let down. The last sentence has two corollaries: a) there is no trust, therefore if I don't let down my game partner, he will do it first, so I should beat him to it lest I be the victim; and b) the value institution of trust is non-existent, trust is not something valuable, so I should let him down in any case, even if he is not planning to do that to me. Those who know game theory understand all the possible versions of reasoning along these lines.

When the institution of trust has collapsed, most accords and agreements are likely to collapse; nobody trusts anybody, people are ready to renege on any agreement. There is no system which can reinforce agreements apart from brute force, and even that is not sufficient. Imagine if someone took your money and ran away; you can catch him and kill him, but your money is already spent. Therefore, you don't have the best possible outcome; you took your revenge, but the situation did not return to the *status quo ante*. This makes letting people down even more attractive: if you cannot get back to the *status quo ante* anyway, perhaps you will also hesitate to impose a very harsh punishment, for instance, hoping that at some point at least part of your money will be recoverable, if the guy has a chance to continue on living and working.

This reasoning demonstrates the unique key value of mutually upholding commitments: as a result, something happens, which would not have happened in any other case. The world becomes more orderly than it previously was; this is like a violation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Moreover, it also becomes immediately clear that every case when trust is upheld can be considered a miracle, especially in our society, where there are so many determinants whispering in one's ear that breaking trust is more profitable and lucrative.

Here's an example from a situation I faced the day before yesterday. A neighbor was doing renovation work above my apartment. I asked him, '*Please don't throw the construction garbage*

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[251] Guantanamo Bay detention camp, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guantanamo_Bay_detention_camp

*out of the window into the truck, because the dust ends up in our apartment*.' He said, '*Yes, sure. I will use the other window, in that case the dust won't bother you*.' Ten minutes later, he brought the truck right underneath my main window and did the exact thing he had promised not to do. He avoided looking into my eyes and saying a word to me, while doing it. He was probably getting perverse pleasure from reneging on his promise.

Reneging on an accord also means violating the *dignity* of one's partner. This is another element in the *blatnoy* culture and can even be seen as *violence* against the other human being because *self-esteem* relies on one's *dignity* remaining intact. If one's *self-esteem* is challenged, one's *integrity* suffers, impacting their holistic well-being. This is widespread in our society. As a consolation, I can only mention that this problem seems to me even more incurable in some other post-Soviet societies.

It is wrong to model large societies as a united place. Russia, for instance, can have very different types of behavior in different parts of the country. But I have seen such enormous cases of the same inclination of letting each other down for pleasure in Russia that it seems to me that we still have a better situation in Armenia. Perhaps this is because Armenia is a smaller society and people are not alien to each other. They may be interconnected with each other. Sometimes it makes sense speaking up and explaining why it might have been in somebody's interest to uphold the agreement: '*Today, you didn't honor our agreement that you will not let dust into my apartment. Tomorrow, you may have to ask me for something, for instance, to teach your children Armenian literature. And then I'll do the same to you: I'll teach them Turkish literature instead and claim that it was Armenian.*' (Joke) When you explain this, the situation often changes immediately, before one's very eyes. It seems that people either did not previously consider this possibility, or they needed the assurance that you understand that both of you can behave strategically, i.e. they discounted your rationality.

Here is an example from my very recent experience, which demonstrates the strength of words in today's Armenia. I needed one meter of electric wire. I went to the market where there were all types of wires being sold. I was asking every vendor to sell me one meter of wire. There were seven or so vendors lined up one after the other. None of them would sell me one meter. Everyone would say, '*We have this entire bundle (which is 50 meters), if we agree to cut it we should get something significant in return, we cannot cut only one meter, which costs a pittance, and ruin the 50 meter standard length, which may be needed to another customer*.'

I walked along the stalls: one, two, three, four, five, six – everybody refused to sell me one meter of wire. The seventh one refused me, too. I said, '*Look, what is the minimum length you would consider selling?*' He said, '*Ten meters.*' I said, '*Okay, give me ten meters. I'll give you nine back as a gift. It's not a lot of money, and all I need is one meter.*' He said, '*I don't need a gift.*' Then I said, '*Okay, you don't need a gift, but if I were you I would just give that one meter to me as a gift and say, "You are welcome to it, please take this one meter and go."*' At that moment, the guy said, '*Okay, I'll give you that one meter.*' And he did that.

Right before our eyes—there were other people present as well—the guy suddenly realized his pettiness in refusing to express a normal welcoming attitude toward the customer, or just to another Armenian, or to another human being, and he changed his mind.

I am sure if I had acted similarly with the six previous vendors, three or four of them would have probably done the same thing that this guy did. It just happened that I didn't think of asking the first ones this way. I thought that I would manage to buy a meter anyway, not expecting such resistance.

I expressed the value of being generous. The vendor might have perceived this in a dual way: on one hand, I was taking himself and myself out of the game that he thought we were playing; on the other hand, by me doing so, he might have felt a slight denigration. His pride was affected. I don't know, if the mantra '*we are both Armenians*' would have played the trick, not necessarily; I even think it is unlikely. I had to express my power of having money and being able to throw it around (even if it was a very minor sum) for him to become impressed and want to reciprocate my magnanimity. He refused to take money for the one meter of wire that he measured and cut for me from the 50-meter-long bundle.

It is important to note the value of words in today's Armenia. In many other circumstances too, I found that expressing oneself in a logical way makes people start thinking and changing their behavior. This is because the official communication, originated by the *rhizome*, has ossified and is full of stereotypes and ritualistic statements which people frequently repeat without actually stopping to examine what they are saying. Usual daily communication, on the other hand, is caught in another type of stereotyping, based on algorithms of common practices and, again, does not generate any thinking. Communication devoid of stereotypes, sharp and witty, is almost absent from the public discourse and from personal communication. It may take place in restricted close circles, or may be hidden in the pages of literature, but neither school, nor the media teach people how to communicate creatively. Therefore, a thoughtful statement, devoid of stereotypes, often shocks people and makes them rethink their reactions. Stereotypes in this context can be used as well, but for the purposes of their deconstruction. For instance, I could have said to the vendor, indeed, '*Shame on you that you refuse one meter of wire to a fellow Armenian; and then you will say that we Armenians are one nation and should support each other.*' This might have done the trick as well. In some other circumstances, I have chosen this way of arguing. But the bottom line is that some types of communication are able to affect the interlocutor and change the game. This is important information to carry forward. *Anomie* should be counterbalanced by communication and narratives, and then it may affect *atomie* as well; and if a network of connections grows into communities instead of *atomie*, *anemie* may be tackled as well, and people will become capable of collective action.

MH: The problem with creating these new *anti-rhizomes* is that it is a structure which requires resources. The problem is that, in the *rhizome*, the subjects at the bottom are obliged to feed the top. In order to create a new structure, people need to find additional resources from somewhere. In the case of Armenia, this is quite a significant problem. Lots of new structures are not being created because most of the resources are being sucked off by the *rhizome*.

I agree that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, *blatnoy* came to the top of the rhizome, but it degenerated. This made the situation even worse, completely destroyed the whole logic of building relations, making decisions, etc. The *thief in law* rules that also had some elements of twisted justice within them were completely destroyed because they were filled in a totally different form, not the Soviet system anymore. This new form didn't have the Soviet rules of the game, the Soviet justice system, even if twisted.

GTG: In the *blatnoy* culture, there is the theatricalized reality, the façade that we mentioned, the *Potemkin villages*: we talked about the *dual reality*, when one thing is presented instead of another thing. When that culture won over in Armenia, it became, indeed, something like a *parody* of the *blatnoy* culture in many respects. And this is a culture that *parodies* itself even when it is supposedly serious.

Parody and farce are less violent than their 'real' predecessor, but the problem with the *blatnoy* culture is that it is based on *non-predictability*, as any unchecked power: on the arbitrary behavior of its adherer. That is why no *thief law*, no *poniatia* (պանյատներ, from Russian 'concepts' – the principles upon which the *thief law* is supposedly based) and no *thief authorities* can be trusted, because they can twist the *poniatia* the way they want, the way it suits them here and now, the way which is the most profitable and lucrative for them. The unpredictable way of interpreting the *thief law* is the source of their power. In fact, it is not a *law*, it is a *fake law*, as fake as anything else in the *blatnoy* culture.

Underneath the *rhizome*, therefore, we have an even worse situation of *bespredel* today than we had in the Soviet Union. This specific type of *lawlessness* of the *blatnoy* culture is another one of its important characteristics: a situation where there are no rules or taboos for those at the top. Everything is permitted for them.

As for resources, the only method for resource acquisition and accumulation is building alliances, islands of change, and islands of alternatives. The more people join the resistance network, the more resources are freed up. In general, that is the direction, and it is a never-ending game. It is not so effective, of course. It always seems much more effective to destroy something than to build something. It seems more effective to be violent than not to be violent. This is not a very effective road, but still, if it is chosen and is pursued, resources start accumulating gradually. Because when we are talking about these *islands*, we are also talking about many small-scale businesses and business people who don't want to engage in the *rhizome*. They are trying to find a way to stay away from the *rhizome* as much as possible. They are in a compromised situation, but they still have this positive value and capacity.

IS: In Armenia, numbers matter. In Russia or Belarus, people may be leaving the country, but these are still big societies. There are a million people who have left Armenia, where we have, let's say, 3 million people. Those who are leaving, as you said, quite often are the independent-minded people. Therefore, it becomes even more difficult to generate solidarity.

I feel that it is a deliberate strategy, the elimination of these unattached people. It does not just happen because it happens. The top of the *rhizome* is deliberately working to eliminate the elements that are not a part of it. So, the numbers matter, and there is also a big risk that one can be absorbed by a bigger *rhizome* coming, I don't know, from the north, or from the east, from wherever. It just might absorb you if you don't have enough people. It is not just about resources, but physical people, who either leave or become part of the *rhizome* in one way or another, or they just get demoralized, i.e. people who simply have no moral resources to resist any more, which I think is even worse than leaving or joining the *rhizome*.

RG: In the past 25 years, the *blatnoy* elite behavior has become combined with the national, traditional behavioral patterns of Armenians. It is now a mix of sorts of the *blatnoy* part and these national, traditional, 'patriotic' behavioral patterns. Also, I would argue that the *blatnoy*

part is decreasing and the other part is increasing. For example, take the role of women: in the pure traditional *blatnoy* culture, the role of women is much bigger: women are free, much freer than in today's Armenian *blatnoy* and traditional behavioral pattern mix.

GTG: This is a very interesting observation. I don't know the percentage of which one prevails when and where. The *blatnoy* culture is a very important topic in social sciences, but it is not being studied enough, especially in its relation to Armenia. I already said that you have to look at its origins in Tsarist Russia. I have seen numbers about 10-15 years ago that the largest number of prison wardens and camp wardens—the *vertukhay*s[252]—in the North Caucasus were people of Ossetian nationality. Ossetians are partly Christian and, in the North Caucasus, they have historically been among the most pro-Russian nationalities. Other nationalities—Chechens, Kabardinians, Ingush, etc.—have an issue with Ossetians because of this, because they were the ones who were ousted or put in camps, and the wardens were often Ossetians. North Caucasians combined their national tradition of surviving as nations and communities without statehood, with having rules which could be considered alternatives to state structures, including the *blatnoy* culture and the *thief in law* psychology. You have specific ethics, traditions, rules of behavior, but you don't participate in the big picture, you don't relate to the authorities. The value systems of *zeks* or *vertukhays* are both based on violence to a very significant degree, be that violence as a means to stopping violence, but still violence. Violence is present in the Caucasian traditional cultures, like blood revenge, and in the *blatnoy* culture, where the strongest one is the leader.

If I were a historian, I would study the history of violence in the part of the world dominated by the Russian Empire. There has been this influx of *blatnoy* culture in the Soviet system, also promoted by Stalin, who himself was Georgian/Ossetian, and his cronies like Beria.[253] And there has been this influx of the Caucasian and Central Asian traditions in the *blatnoy* culture. In addition, the façade or fake reality, as I said, also comes to a significant degree from the East, from Central Asia and the Caucasus. What happens today in Russia, and very often with Russians themselves, is something that was inherited from Soviet times, when it was more typical for the Eastern nationalities, because the bureaucratic system of the Soviet Union or of Russia did not correspond to their internal value systems. In a situation where power was installed upon them from above, without their agreement, they tried to install their rules on the society, and if *baksheesh* was their tradition, it became rampant corruption covering the entire post-Soviet space. One can say that, **as revenge for their conquest, these cultures spoiled and corrupted their conquerors.**

We already talked about that as well: about the common practice in the criminal world of creating an *esprit de corps*, or collective responsibility (круговая порука) to cover up crimes via recruiting 'unattached' people in criminal rings and behavior, absorbing them into the rhizome, immersing, 'initiating' them in crime and then blackmailing them so they become as guilty and as 'dirty' as the others, and therefore cannot denounce the crime. We mentioned that this practice—engaging people in something, often against their will, the engagement which defines the change in their social position and makes the latter irreversible—has parallels with degrading

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[252] Vertukhay (in Russian): prison guard (prison and thief slang). See in: https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/838718
[253] Lavrentiy Beria (1899-1953), Soviet politician, chief of the Soviet security and secret police apparatus, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavrentiy_Beria

and humiliating people ('putting them down', կզգնել, опускать), a practice which has been common and is still common in closed male environments—prisons, Gulag camps, and the army.

Unfortunately, this culture spreads also by infecting younger generations. In today's Armenia, there is no systematic resistance to it. As I said, on the contrary, it seems that the *rhizome* is interested in spreading further. The young people see that, from the perspective of certain groups, such behavior is not morally wrong. It may be legally wrong but, if they see that nobody is punished, they cease taking the abstract law seriously. They realize that the law is only powerful as a means in the hands of those who are on top, that it is not about justice but is a weapon for rulers, for power-holders. They therefore think: if such behavior is not morally wrong for powerful people, and also for other groups of authorities who do not stand up against it, then this is the correct way to behave. This is how it is spread.

As a result, we have quite a bleak picture. Thank God, we are a global nation. Therefore, I suggest to those who are abroad to become participants in today's Armenia. They can relocate or come and go. Relocating here is the right choice for the Diaspora if they want to help Armenia. Just visiting is not enough, relocating is the right choice. It should be understood that Armenia needs people who are not affected by the Soviet criminal culture. They should be strong personalities; they should refuse the rules of the game which are being imposed on them by the *rhizome*. They should also be people who think clearly: one cannot expect lucrative investment opportunities in this country. This is more about help and commitment than about making big money. The Eldorado was in Russia 20 years ago: many tricksters and adventurers went there. In Armenia, today, there are not many opportunities for adventure, only hard work to help the society get out of its predicament. I encourage people with a clean conscience to relocate to Armenia, or at least establish stronger ties, carefully choosing their interlocutors, connections, and partners. This is going to be needed: even if the Diaspora cannot change the situation quickly, it is time to learn about the real Armenia. In the long run, the Diaspora's engagement will be very important and beneficial both for Armenia and for the Diaspora.

## Chapter 9. What is a Good Project?

We are approaching a watershed. If beforehand most of what I talked about was related to diagnosing the situation, now I am coming to some conclusions on what has to be done and what can be done in the current situation. I will try to formulate at least some methodological suggestions and sum up some of the ideas that I discussed in the previous chapters.

Armenia 3.0 focused on 20th-century Armenia, but in the last chapters we have moved into the 21st century and talked about some aspects of the situation in post-Soviet Armenia. The main idea has been trying to understand how the negative tendencies that are becoming more and more obvious today came to establish themselves. Where did these tendencies come from? This text is a rough overview of my personal observations and thinking; it is not intended to be a scholarly scientific account. The aim is to propose some methodological guidance on how one could approach the situation, to pose hypotheses which need further study, and to help with orientating

in the current situation. This account demonstrates that there are a lot of voids, social issues that have not been studied well enough, that there exist big gaps in our understanding of Armenia. I am trying to draw attention to these gaps. If the society is in such a deep crisis, then, of course, public opinion is in crisis too. And if public opinion is in crisis, then research, knowledge, expertise do not become public knowledge, because they are challenged by fake research, fake knowledge, fake expertise and 'opinions'. They are not shared widely and cannot contribute to improving the situation. They stay in small niches; in the best case scenario, they are only shared among like-minded specialists. That is why I consider it important to offer this picture of the crisis in Armenia, in order to a) inform those who would like to be informed outside my usual echo chamber; and b) generate discussion and debate; even strong disagreement may help bring the discussion of these issues to the forefront of public attention.
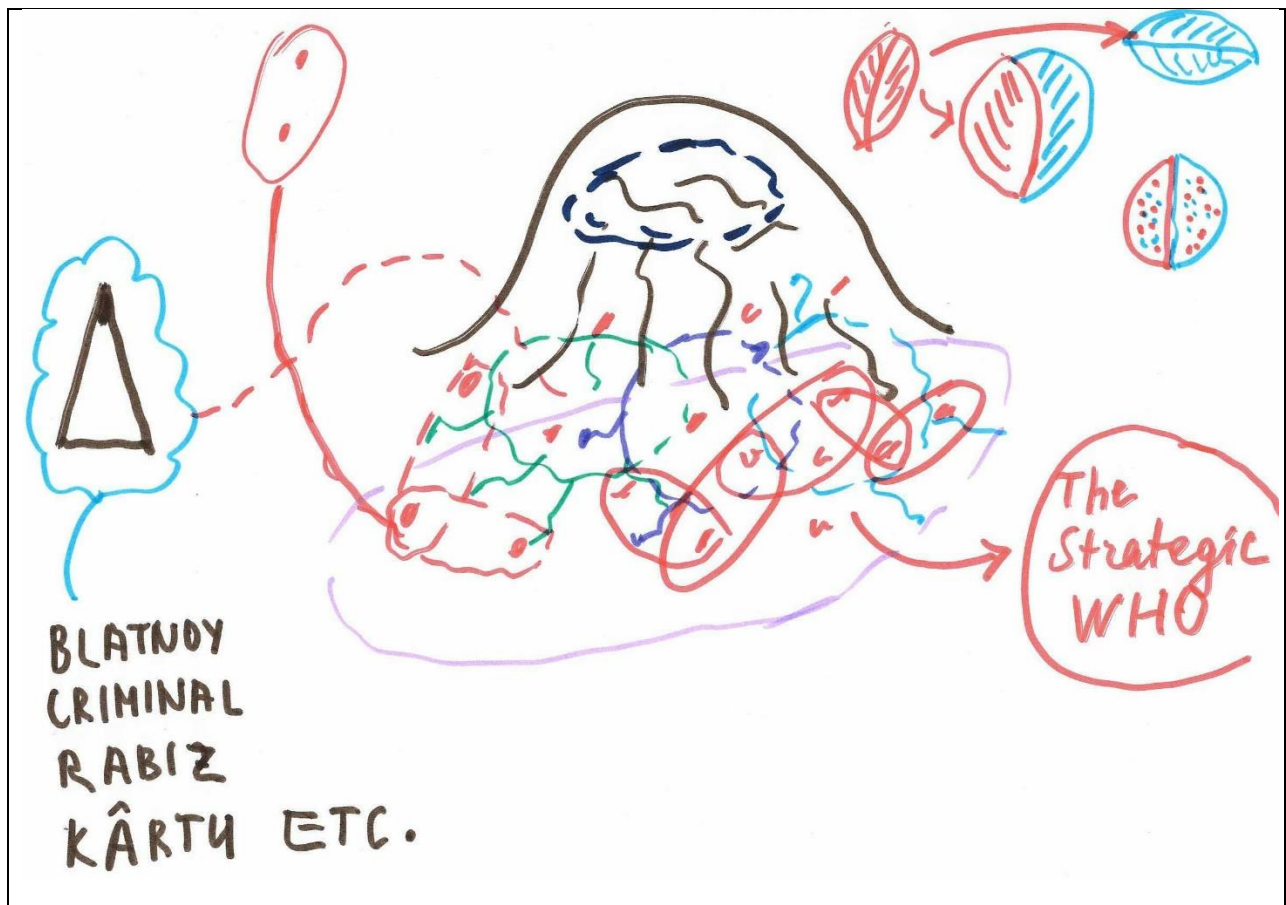


Figure 2. Networks of Trust

One world-known scientist recently said that his scientific efforts can only be understood by four people in the world. If he does not change his usual practices, he feels that people will have doubts about his credentials because they don't understand what he does. He sees the way out of

that trap in being active as a popular scientist, writing in mass media, using plain words, about what he has done. I think that this is one of the problems with the global Armenian nation understanding Armenia: deep discourses are either absent or hidden in niches. This text aims at bringing them out a bit.

We talked about the origins of the situation. I tried to bring together several elements. It may seem that I presented quite a disconcerting picture of today's Armenia. But if we read the novel *Ragtime*[254] by Doctorow,[255] which is based on a true story and set in the 1930s, or *All the King's Men,*[256] another famous novel, by Robert Penn Warren,[257] we can see that the situation in the US in the 1930s was not much different from what it is in today's Armenia. Armenia is small, which makes it vulnerable, but it also makes it easier to manage successfully. It makes it easier to overcome the problems. At least that should be the assumption. Instead of regarding this situation as a tragedy, we should regard it as the starting conditions for change.

When it comes to the discussions of how to bring about change, it makes sense to distinguish between the tactical approach and the strategic approach. Often, the wrong tactic kills the right strategy. At other times, the tactic is chosen to correspond with the strategy, but in fact it does not. It may ruin or significantly impede the big-picture strategy.

Take the example of the Diaspora deciding to come to Armenia as election observers. This is a tactical step within the larger strategy of fighting for free and fair elections. If the elections are fair—even in a situation where we don't have good political programs and reliable parties—the overall situation will become better. If they are not fair, monitoring by neutral people from outside is still very important. However, this is only a tactical step. If it is not accompanied by strategic engagement in the longer term, this action by the Diaspora can be perceived as another campaign and die out with no significant consequences.

Strategically, I have said it already: the problem with corruption is that it is not going to wither away as long as state employees receive salaries which are not sufficient for them to survive. People need to receive decent wages that will allow them to make ends meet, at least modestly, without necessarily engaging in corrupt schemes. I said that this situation of shameful levels of pay to state employees appeared in 1989-1990, when the Soviet ruble started to collapse, and it has stayed thus since then. In the calmer Soviet times, the situation was different in that, in many positions, people were paid survival-level wages but had nothing to do. Tigran Paskevichyan tells us that he was paid, as a journalist with a factory newspaper, sufficiently to live for the month, but his work was to write two pages for the newspaper weekly, which he did easily. This disconnect between input and output was one of the reasons why the USSR collapsed. However, since the ruble collapsed, public sector wages in Armenia withered to almost nothing and unfortunately stayed that way, with very little improvement, for decades. This is not related to the supposed 'poverty' of the state: it has sufficient money to squander and launder, to enrich several people illegally and make them into oligarchs. This is related more to the poverty of imagination and professionalism among experts, and of course the motivation of the *rhizome* to keep the situation as it is.

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254 Ragtime (novel), Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ragtime_(novel)
255 Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, a writer, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._L._Doctorow
256 All the King's Men (novel), Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_the_King%27s_Men
257 Robert Penn Warren, a writer, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Penn_Warren

As long as state officials are not being paid well enough, we will not have a breakthrough in the fight against corruption because people, as a general rule, are mostly rational. If one is not being paid enough, one starts doing things entrepreneurially, inventing opportunities. Perhaps instead of dedicating oneself to work, one starts a business on the side. Moreover, one can use their administrative capacities to facilitate that enterprise; and when one starts using administrative capacities for one's own personal gain, that is when corruption takes root. This is a very typical trap; it is faced by many poor societies. If, however, one is not very entrepreneurial, they may just end up asking for petty bribes to accomplish their duties vis-à-vis the citizen. Or they may be required to take bribes and pay a percentage up the chain of command, which is common practice for the *rhizome*.

When Saakashvili[258] came to power in Georgia, he tackled this problem in a determined way, although probably not fully and sustainably. George Soros and some other donors started to pay the salaries of effective state employees. That gave him an opportunity to get rid of many ineffective ones. Reforming the police, he fired all the road police officers and recruited a new cadre, based on a new type of exam, and offered them decent wages. It is similar to the police reform[259] that happened in the United States in the 1950s. Some from the old police force are hired back, some new people are recruited, the rest are retrained and move on to live their lives doing another type of work.

Just to remind you, such reform means reforming three interrelated circles: business (small and medium enterprises), education, and the state. If people from the state offices are let go, they should be given an opportunity to receive special education and re-train. They should get new opportunities to enter private business. The business environment has to be conducive to absorbing new groups. People who stay in the state structures become more responsible, better educated, receive better wages, and do more work. This is one way of overcoming this trap of bureaucratic, byzantine procedures, the Kafkaesque "Castle"-style post-Soviet state system.

This is one 'zoomed out' picture of the reform that has to take place if we want to change the situation. This brings us back to the issue of education, the issue of culture. We have to tackle the *blatnoy* culture, reform the entire education system, build the institutions of public opinion and transparency, get the accumulated knowledge out of the niches, and bring it to larger networks, to the larger society. We should rebuild the institution of *trust*. We should sit down and think how we can redraw the state structure, the organogram of the state: which positions to keep, which positions to drop. The *rhizome* has a tendency to expand. For instance, Armenia ranks among the states with the highest number of police per capita.[260] Not only because the state wants to be a police state, but also because becoming a policeman somehow means being able to make ends meet. I already spoke about that.

The second methodological element that I want to mention relates, once again, to the interrelationship of tactics versus strategy.

I have already mentioned that, every time we attempt a reform, we face three levels that affect the situation: (1) the global issues, approaches, or elements; (2) the post-Soviet ones; and (3) the

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[258] Mikheil Saakashvili, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikheil_Saakashvili
[259] Police reform in the United States, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_reform_in_the_United_States
[260] 'What is their job? There are 8850 police officers in Armenia', article in Armenian published on the Armenian Times daily, November 3, 2017: http://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/96498

national ones. A major part of this text has been devoted to the post-Soviet issues because the global and the national issues seem to be better known to the general public. I was talking about the *blatnoy* culture, and Rob was talking about the merger or intertwining of the national and post-Soviet tradition, and Mikayel was talking about that as well. This is all because, so far, we have lacked a clear understanding of the post-Soviet element in this triad.

Let's take human rights strategy: the area of reform related to equality between men and women, equality in gender issues, and domestic violence. We now have a situation where we have to tackle domestic violence. A law on domestic violence[261] is being discussed right now. The state wants to pass it because they want to adhere to European standards, at least superficially (another *Potemkin village*), and continue receiving funding from the West. They decided to pass this law somehow, even though it goes against their own official conservative ideology (of the Republican Party). It may be perceived as 'westernizing' by Russia and pro-Russian Armenian circles. It may be attacked by purely traditionalist and conservative Armenian circles, including the Church. Suddenly, the state itself publishes amazingly daunting statistics,[262] which demonstrate that…

IS: Eighteen percent of all murders are domestic violence cases. That means each sixth killing.

GTG: Every sixth murder in Armenia stems from domestic violence. This comes from statistics that have been published by the state itself. We may assume that the numbers are even higher in reality, unless the state decided to present such a daunting picture with a speculative interest, i.e. to make this law likely to pass.

We have this problem, which is a national-level problem, very much intertwined with the post-Soviet value system. Look how things have changed: we are talking about gender, human rights, etc. We are discussing issues relevant at the global level. But we see that the post-Soviet in us, in the Armenian society, claims that having such a law is against family values. It seems like national rhetoric but it is actually the post-Soviet element which claims that: '*It's against our national values. It is going to ruin our family. It's going to cause a situation where kids are taken into foster care, away from their parents,*' etc. These are the same arguments that Russia recently used to decriminalize some elements of domestic violence.[263] This is not coming from a pure national heart of a conservative and archaic Armenian traditionalist; this is orchestrated by the forces which are fed either from Russia or directly by the state itself. The state feeds these trolls in order to demonstrate to the West how difficult it is to travel the road towards 'Westernization' and satisfy the demands of European Union and other donors, in order to have a better bargaining position, whereby the EU requires less from Armenia for more (the EU mantra has been 'more for more'). Simultaneously, the state is also demonstrating to Russia that the population's value system is very much in tune with the Russian trajectory, and that adopting the laws required by the West is, in fact, a formality and takes place with huge difficulties: that the population does not support 'Westernization,' modernization of the 'Western' type. In Russia,

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[261] Armenian Weekly, December 8, 2017, Armenia Adopts Law against Domestic Violence at Last: https://armenianweekly.com/2017/12/08/armenia-adopts-law-domestic-violence-last/

[262] EVN Report, November 15, 2018, Domestic Violence: An Imperfect Law and Enduring Stereotypes: https://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/domestic-violence-an-imperfect-law-and-enduring-stereotypes

[263] Meduza (Article in Russian), January 11, 2017: https://meduza.io/news/2017/01/11/zakonoproekt-o-dekriminalizatsii-poboev-v-semie-prinyali-v-pervom-chtenii

too, this was not a genuine national traditionalist outcry but a political step against the West, simultaneously aimed at fortifying its own *rhizome* via the rally-around-the-flag effect.

If we don't understand this typical post-Soviet intrigue, we may select the wrong strategy for helping advance the law on domestic violence. We may inadvertently ruin the chance to adopt it, or we may even have a backlash, a situation where domestic violence will be decriminalized, as happened in Russia.

For every kind of reform, we have this situation. If we are only 'zooming in' on this issue, this is a tactical approach, and it may happen to be wrong. We should 'zoom out' and take into account the larger picture, the interplay between these three layers of global, national, and post-Soviet influences. Only in that case will we become strategic. If success is registered then, it will be more sustainable.

Thus, we see intrigues no less sophisticated than in the American novels. If we try to convert the trolls, we will have chosen the wrong tactic. They create a whirlwind in which 'innocent' people also get caught up, those who believe that this law will 'ruin the traditional family,' those who become indoctrinated in the connection that since this is a requirement coming from the 'West' and since it is supported by NGOs funded by the 'West,' therefore the 'West,' e.g. Europe, is plotting against Armenia. Here, one has to choose whether or not to try to change the minds of these 'innocent' people who are just 'mistaken.' But they may be motivated, again, not by sincere belief but by the chance to make oneself important by arguing for a national cause. If they are indeed 'innocent,' i.e. they are not trolls and not part of the *rhizome*, they probably have very few opportunities for self-assertion. A better tactic is, then, instead of wasting time trying to change their minds via arguments, to build opportunities for self-realization, educational and work opportunities, which will create conditions for them to change their minds via practice rather than theoretically. Moreover, any argument that follows the line of debate advanced by the trolls is in fact feeding their discourse. Therefore, the critical thinking and analytic faculties have to be used here in order to select the correct and victorious strategy for advocating that law.

The other example is the fight against corruption. Armenia has signed several agreements with international structures that it will fight corruption. Because of corruption, we have this huge level of mistrust; the post-Soviet in us, in the Armenians, helps build the façade of the reality, when we say one thing and do another. Every time an anti-corruption project starts, we somehow 'suck off' the positive edge out of it and build a façade, pretending that we are fighting corruption. People see one thing said while another thing is done. As a result, mistrust increases, and it increases particularly toward anti-corruption activities, and eventually includes in its whirlwind everything that comes from the international community and global values. Corruption, in its generic sense, becomes even stronger thanks to our fight against corruption. Once, I was at an anti-corruption conference with a lot of high-level representatives of the *rhizome*. The conference was broadcast on TV. Afterwards, one of my friends said: '*That was an anti-corruption conference where all the main corrupted ones were sitting in the first row*.'

There may be some good and successful specific anti-corruption projects, but many of them are fake. Therefore, an anti-corruption project which is indeed worthwhile should 'zoom out' from its particular aims and address all three levels in their interrelationships, so that it fights the façade reality, rather than strengthens it, and does not increase mistrust in global values. Often

our projects have not been like that; that is why we have actually gone backward vis-à-vis corruption in the last 20 or more years, rather than registered a positive development.

I already mentioned that whistleblowing, or giving information about something negative, some criminal act, has become unfashionable in Armenia, despite the fact that the *donos* culture was so prominent. At the global level, we are talking about the need for transparency, which, of course, presupposes that if one sees something wrong or illegal, one has to report it: that is one's duty as a citizen. Obviously, at the national level, it would mean cultivating the culture of whistleblowing, including providing security for those who speak out, and encouraging whistleblowing. But because of the post-Soviet condition, we have a negative attitude to that culture.

If we want to make the value stronger, we have to 'zoom out' and think about building a culture of whistleblowing in such a way that it keeps the authority and integrity of the individual who is whistleblowing, so that the positive results of whistleblowing are much bigger than the negative results, and people are not blamed for baselessly writing complaints because of the remnants of the *donos* culture in our society. As I said before, most of the time, accusations of corruption are not answered; moreover, often those who raise the issues are prosecuted. This also means changing the media culture so that the public knows that the media report fairly, without just attacking somebody because they are allowed to do so. This is, in fact, much more difficult to do than simply implementing one or more anti-corruption projects. Building a strategic project against corruption requires some deep thinking in its planning stages.

The situation is even more complicated because of the global information onslaught: our society receives a lot of examples of media being irresponsible globally. How, then, can we make sure that the media in our small Armenia are professional and follow the rules of media ethics? Probably, with the so-called 'information age,' we will have a situation where we are bombarded with much more unreliable rather than reliable information. This creates the necessity to educate people in media literacy. A part of this should be the skill of orientating in the global information world, including the media world. Just like in the case of human *handshakeability*, members of our society should become capable of critically determining which media are *handshakeable* and which are not.

In this respect, knowing the historical trajectories of persons or organizations, including media, is a value. The medium that published fake news should be regarded with suspicion. A person who has changed his or her political or ethical position several times should be regarded with suspicion. For that, one needs to accumulate the 'dossiers' on personalities and the media. Memory of past behavior becomes one of the key determinants of trustworthiness. It is ironic that, in the society where the institutional value of trust is ruined, those who want it to be built back have to start by mistrusting. However, there does not seem to be a way around that. Just like with *handshakeability*, mistrusting the media which deserve mistrust, because they have ruined the social contract of reporting fairly and ethically, and expressing one's mistrust is, in fact, a way to build trust. In game theory, it is known as the *tit-for-tat*[264] tactics. If repeated several times and consistently, it is one of the best ways of coming back to a sustainable cooperation pattern.

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[264] Tit for tat, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tit_for_tat

It is noteworthy that those who are corrupt tend to go for anti-corruption projects, those who censor and curtail freedom of expression are often very much inclined to work on its promotion, etc. Freedom of expression is intimately linked to what I was saying above. The problem, as I have already mentioned, is that even if it is possible to say whatever one thinks, at least on the Internet, this stays inconsequential. The dogs bark, but the caravan does not pay attention. Combined with the noise of fake news, the result is that people lose faith in the value of the freedom of expression. One of the results of this is that electoral bribes are not resisted by the population because nobody is usually caught for their distribution. It has become a habit, a tradition that before elections people will receive gifts, big or small, usually very small.

If people in their right mind, even if they are not well-educated, agree to take 10,000 drams and vote for somebody, that means they are being paid five lumas per day for the next 5 years. This is, they rationally calculate, the value they have as citizens. That means there is no trust whatsoever that the person who is being elected to power would participate in governance seriously, according to the rules of power distribution and division, and react to the needs of the society, expressed via freedom of expression. There is this saying in Russian: С паршивой овцы хоть шерсти клок; *From a lousy sheep, at least a scrap of wool*.

If we want to do a project on freedom of expression, therefore, we shouldn't just promote freedom of expression, because if it increases without adjustment, without any connection with action, then there is no sense in that: words become cheap and useless. That is why political parties today use many different words, but most of them don't use any convincing words. There are no more convincing words left in the *rhizome*'s polity.

MH: I wanted to mention the same issue as it applies to the decentralization reform. Decentralization aims at distributing power more evenly and giving it to the local levels. On the post-Soviet thought level, it is associated with this old Soviet *sovkhoz* and *kolkhoz*, which doesn't have anything to do with local self-government. Plus, the party system comes on top of that, which means that local government's power is basically equal to that of the local branch of the ruling party in an almost single party system, because the ruling party has held a majority for a long period of time. It doesn't need any other political force's support.

On the national level, it comes again to dualist thinking: you introduce A which is not A as if it is a real A. You introduce a process which doesn't have anything to do with decentralization; it is in fact about removing smaller entities of the local government and consolidating communities under one management. The assumption is that, as a result, these entities will become more powerful, will have more decision-making capacity, and therefore they will acquire more independence from central authorities. In reality, however, the *rhizome* is planning to use this reform in order to concentrate power: it is easier to buy off one community head than five or seven. On the practical level, this is illustrated by the dissemination of resources. The state-level keeps all the resources. It doesn't give any significant chance to the local level to collect resources for and by itself, and keeps the local level in a state of dependence. The overwhelming part of the local budget is comprised of 'donations' (subsidies from the state) from the central budget. The entire decentralization reform, which on paper looks logical, is designed from top to bottom using this post-Soviet mentality. Now we and our partners have to fight to make it at least slightly correspond to what it claims its aims are.

Artak Ayunts (AA): If the situation is as you describe, I am having difficulty understanding what we are trying to achieve. We are talking about global human and universal values at the top level, and all of a sudden on the national level, we practice something that looks contrary to global human values: freedom of speech, freedom of expression, anti-discrimination, etc. I am having difficulty accepting that, at the national level, it is all the complete opposite to what we preach. If we want to change something, bring a more positive change, how can we not trust what we are doing? If decentralization means, in fact, more centralization, why do we participate in that reform? If people sell their right to govern this country for 10 lumas a day, what is the sense in trying to make sure that there are no violations on election day? If the word of the media is inconsequential, why do we struggle to make sure that they are fair and ethical? If the perceptions of people are based on a post-Soviet mentality, how can we aim at introducing globally acceptable international values?

I think that we are missing a link here: we should try understanding a) what the global perspectives are, and b) how the post-Soviet level influences our national understanding and perception of these reforms in the name of global values. The practice seems to be defying our purpose: all the power is being delegated to these corrupt criminal *blatnoys*. Expecting civil society organizations to implement some projects that will eventually have a strategic impact seems, on that background, unrealistic because of the sheer existence of the facts that we witness. I am sorry. Perhaps I couldn't define well enough what I wanted to express. But to me, we are sort of missing some important element of understanding: what should be done in strategy rather than tactics, to bring the desired change? Maybe I made it even more complicated, but I just want to understand how I should do my own part of the job. That is why I wanted to share these thoughts before going into the exercise of discussing how my own work and my current projects are tactical and strategic.

I need to make the picture simpler, at least for my own understanding. Would it be correct to name the global level the Western level, and the post-Soviet level the current Russian level? I mean, are these the influences of these sides, the Western values clashing with the post-Soviet, or current Russian, or Putinist?

These simplifications sometimes help. If it is acceptable, on the national level, we try to understand how to integrate with the Western value system without compromises, particularly security compromises, which threaten us from the 'Russian' level. Everything that we were talking about today is very relevant to this picture, apart from one very important detail: we probably underestimate the security condition and the situation of the unresolved conflicts, or don't take into much consideration how they affect the perceptions of people trying to implement reforms or achieve changes in our society.

MH: As I see the logic of this picture, where the interplay of tactics and strategy is being presented, basically both post-Soviet and global levels are 'above' the national level. They contradict each other. Due to the extreme adaptive capacity of Armenian society and of the Armenian nation, this *dualism* of values and behaviors immediately appears because one wants to 'please' both poles at the same time. One *imitates* the global level, but one does not do anything to tackle the post-Soviet element, to weaken and remove it. That is what causes a problem at the national level. That is what creates the imitative process of implementation of any reform in Armenia: this clash of two upper-level tendencies.

From this, if we are coming to the tactics and strategy, I think what is strategic here is to separate the real processes from the fake processes. To try to make the real processes stronger and irreversible, and avoid putting people and the reforms in general under the influence of these fake processes. That, I think, is what our strategy should look like. Tactically—it may sound strange here—in this context, education is the main part of the tactics.

GTG: Education is also a strategic aim.

MH: It is a part of this bigger strategy. Education is a tactical process of approaching the bigger strategy.

IS: Perhaps I will make the picture even more complicated now, but I think everything that has been said, I mean all these reforms—whether or not they come from a Western, Russian, or whatever push—they are, to a certain extent, simulacra. I mean that, to some extent, they are all empty forms. Also because, as you said, there is no public opinion, and there are no recent reforms that have worked well. I don't think we know the society well. I don't think that we understand people well. This is also because of this bipolarity, if I may say so, meaning both the West-Russia divide as well as the concept of dualism. But also because, if we look into elections, we all have this perception that people are taking bribes, that people are demoralized, that people are going to vote or not vote for all these fake or whatever parties. But the reality is that the government first of all, the ruling elites, are very much afraid of the society. That is why they do all these falsifications and fraud. If they were certain that people are totally demoralized and that they are already totally succumbed to slavery, that this *rhizome* fully works, then they wouldn't need all this machinery of falsification.

People, at the end of the day, come to the polling stations and they vote the way they vote. I think that makes the situation even more complicated. I am not sure that people fail to understand that anticorruption measures should be taken. They do understand it well, even when they are part of the *rhizome* and part of the corruption system. I don't think that there is such a clear-cut distinction between Western values, local values, and Soviet values. To me, the missing link is a good understanding of the society in which we live. The society is changing all the time. Of course, security constraints affect it. But there are many, many patterns, including a lack of trust in general and also toward the interviewer, a lack of trust toward sociology, as a result of which we cannot rely on social research results; we don't know our society well enough. We don't know, at the end of the day, how people who get into the precinct and into the voting booth will really vote because we have never seen any clean results in the last twenty years.

What we know for sure is that, in the precincts where there were trustworthy observers who could somehow safeguard the votes, these *rhizome* elites have never won. We know that for sure, from the last referendum at least, and from many previous voting cycles. That is the only hard data that we can look into: in the polling stations where there was good control, people were voting against the government. That's the only indicator that we have. All the rest are just assumptions.

I think this is the starting point we should look into. I agree that we kill the purpose of reforms if and when we delegate *blatnoys* to implement these reforms. This is a bit of a strange thing. But we should understand the situation better. These Armenia 3.0 series texts give us a larger

understanding, presenting our history and our society from different and unusual perspectives, and that is their value.

The message also goes to the Diaspora. Since they are going to observe the elections, it would also be good for them to understand where they are arriving and what the added value of their prospective presence will be. Because if you are in a precinct and you have no clue of where you are, who these people are, what their party program is, how they behaved previously, etc. - all that 'dossier' knowledge - even if it seems OK tactically because you only have to follow that the votes are cast in a fair and calm environment, it might do more harm than good if you don't know what you should look for in this particular environment, given this whole *rhizome* concept. That's why I appreciate these talks, also from this very particular perspective of election observation needs.

But going back to Artak's opinion, I understand it makes things more complicated, but to me, we don't know. We don't know whether these people are *blatnoy*, or if it is a *hybrid*, or these people are totally demoralized, or these people are *true believers*. Who are these people? We have no clue about our society because we simply don't know.

MH: Just coming back to the juxtaposition of the West and Russia. Why do I think that 'global' and 'post-Soviet' are more correct terms to describe the issue? Because 'global' means integrative; it has the power of integration in the concept itself, while 'West' is a geographic and simplified political direction. In the case of 'post-Soviet,' it is disintegrative because it is based on a collapsed identity. That's why I think these versions for these two terms reflect a more correct approach.

GTG: Thank you for so many interesting comments. What I am going to do now, as the last part of this chapter, is to draw a table, to relate to the comments. Not to reply, not to argue against or in favor but just to relate to the comments.

We have three levels and we have project ideas: project idea 1, project idea 2, project idea 3, etc. Then, we look at the three dimensions: global, post-Soviet, and national, and we evaluate each project idea. What will its impact be, or its relation, what will result from it, if we look at it from the perspective of the global, post-Soviet, and national dimensions?

When I say 'global,' I mean values like human rights, like something which is obviously, at least in my perspective, the foundation for the development of humankind. If we continue on thinking along these lines, we have to ask ourselves complex and 'damned' philosophical questions: what is the sense of my life, is there any meaning in my life, or in the life of humankind in general? Here, I jump over the entire argument and declare: yes, there is a meaning in life. It is for humankind to develop as an all-human society on the entire earth, to become better and better, to continue on learning what the universe is about, to make our lives even more comfortable and happier and purposeful.

From that perspective, the values of human rights, anticorruption, etc. all contribute to progress. Progress contributes to health. Health contributes to happiness. Happiness contributes to more creativity. I'm making all these big jumps, but this is a kind of a worldview, this is not anything scientific. The 'post-Soviet' dimension is, indeed, about all of the inherited cultural stuff that we talked about at length.

But who is doing these projects? It is the guy or the girl or the team that I call *the strategic who*. Who is this *strategic who*? The *strategic who*, in the best case, is a conglomerate, an archipelago of these *islands*, of the web of connections between the 'uninfected' *red dots*, individuals who are not 'sucked' into the *rhizome*. It is either one network, or a few networks, or a larger network of networks. This is the *strategic who*. What does this *strategic who* do? He or she or they have a very special education, which is our enigma, right? What kind of education do we need to make it all work? This *strategic who* knows what they know and what they don't. They can act upon what they know. That means they have reflective capacities, they have thinking capacities. That's what they get from education. They have learned to think, which almost nobody ever learns. There are no explicit studies for learning thinking, apart from the way we do it now. They have reflection – they reflect on things, they self-reflect.

It is not necessary to have reliable sociological research to be able to act correctly. You don't have to trust sociological research. You trust your own knowledge about all the previous sociological research that you have seen and what you have observed yourself, things you know about, things you have discussed with others, things you have analyzed, and eventually you make a pragmatic choice: to trust your knowledge more or less and to make the result of your reflection a basis for your action. This is all more inside the person than about the objectively existing knowledge. I should say 'the person' or 'the institution' because *the strategic who* may, of course, be an institution as well.

So this *strategic who* takes a project idea and says: well, at the *global* level, it sounds hypocritical not to allow the jokes that Armenians like so much about different nationalities. At the *post-Soviet* level, at some point during the Soviet times, all these jokes were helpful for dealing with reality. But they were very often politically incorrect. Sometimes it was called 'dissident' earlier on. It was called 'politically dangerous,' not just incorrect, because you could be prosecuted for them. At the *national* level, it is the humor that the Armenian nation has, which is a value. Not only the Armenian nation: we know that there are different types of humor, right? So, what kind of projects should we do to address these three tendencies, three value systems in the most positive way? We think approximately in such a direction. We choose the project, put it in this table, look at it, and if we have a situation where it is plus, plus, plus—it is contributing to the global reform, takes care of the post-Soviet effects, and is not affected by them, and also develops the nation—then it's a good project. You can now evaluate all the possible versions here, right? It can be like plus-plus-minus, or plus-minus-minus, or all minuses, etc.

**Addressing/not addressing**

| Project | Global level | Post-Soviet level | National level |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. A successful project | + | + | + |
| 2. Partly successful project, with deficiencies, but good to acquire lessons learned | + | + | – |
| 3. Nonsensical project | + | – | – |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4. A failed or dangerously detrimental project | _ | _ | _ |
| 5. Unsuccessful, perhaps even harmful project | _ | _ | + |
| 6. A serious project even though, if the global level is not addressed, eventually it will be worthless | _ | + | + |
| 7. A necessary project, which builds a minority (an island) which can then start more serious projects | _ | + | _ |
| 8. If the post-Soviet factor is no longer relevant and applicable, this will be a successful project | + | _ | + |

Figure 3. Types of successful and not successful projects, based on the 3 dimensions to be addressed.

As you can see, one can evaluate projects based on cases identified in this table. For instance, plus-plus-plus is obviously a positive project, it's definitely worth doing. If it is not addressing these two, the post-Soviet and national dimensions, it is a global issue which is being addressed. For instance, there are, sometimes, international organizations which support work against HIV/AIDS in a society where there is almost no HIV/AIDS and priorities should be very different because resources are limited. Such a project may not touch on any national issues. It may not touch on post-Soviet issues. It may make sense from a global perspective, but because of its irrelevance to the post-Soviet or national levels, it is not going to have any significant impact, even in the best case. And it becomes quite likely that such a project will perpetuate corruption.

If, however, it goes deep into the patterns of sexuality inherited from the Soviet times and typical for the nation, if it evolves into discussing this most difficult issue, and also the fate of the LGBTI community, another very difficult issue, then it becomes very relevant both to our national value system, because we need to learn about our own sexuality, as well as for fighting the post-Soviet onslaught of misogyny, xenophobia, etc., which are often dressed up as '*national values.*' Challenges to this way of thinking are viewed as 'ruining family values,' 'spoiling children with discussions about sex,' etc.

When you have a project that addresses the global and national issues without touching on the post-Soviet level, this is very often a case of a façade-only project. If the post-Soviet level is not being addressed, even if it is seemingly a very good project for the nation, most likely it will not

work. It is globally correct, but if you don't address the post-Soviet level, it becomes fake, a façade. Even if it is not a façade, it may be missing a significant part of its relevance. For instance, the fight for the recognition of the Genocide as a national issue, combined with the fight for preventing genocides globally, is such a project. If it avoids discussing the Bolshevik and Stalinist purges, the *holodomor*, the '*donos*' culture, the recent Chechen war, the intentional increase of the amount of victims during the Second World War from the Soviet side, for instance via putting Leningrad into a blockade[265]; and all the other cases of self-inflicted genocidal actions, it loses a very significant part of its relevance. It is relatively easy to argue against one nation or ethnic group killing and wiping out another one; here the victim and the villain are clearly defined, even if only abstractly. It is much more difficult to discuss cases of self-inflicted genocide, and it is also more relevant for us because the *rhizome* is an inheritance of this Soviet-era pattern of self-inflicted violence. So, discussing the so-called 'pure' cases of genocide may be used by the *rhizome*, again, to divert our attention away from the violence it commits and its roots in our own society today. The disconnect between the fight for global recognition of the Genocide and indifference toward the daily violence in our society is, in fact, an insult to the rationality of the Armenian citizen. Participating in the former while avoiding discussions on the latter is a pure case of the rhizome hypocrisy.

And vice versa: if the project addresses only a global and a post-Soviet issue, it may be very relevant to Armenia, for instance, the fight against fake news.

MH: When the minus is in the third column, that project is difficult to adapt to the Armenian situation. I think the third column, the national value system, relates to adaptation in general.

GTG: Well, okay, but you can make this into a plus, you have to think about how to adjust such a project for the Armenian reality. In our experience, we do it very often. We engage in international projects making the Armenian part of it very special, to adjust it to the Armenian realities.

The other case is if you address the post-Soviet and national levels and there is seemingly no global relevance. This is either going to be a bad project, or it should be easy to find the global relevance to it.

Finally, we may have the case when it's only good for the national level. To me this is quite a hilarious case, like 'sea to sea Armenia' (*tsovits tsov Hayastan* or 'ծովից ծով Հայաստան'), glorifying the kingdom of Tigranes, etc. I usually avoid such projects because most of the time they feed the national mythology with no positive consequence either for global or the post-Soviet dimension. In fact, the impact on these dimensions may be negative because they may be cultivating national pride and wasting resources, which could be spent on something much more

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[265] "Over the years, however, historians have discovered evidence indicating that Stalin's government could have done more to help the besieged Leningraders, and thereby lower the death toll. There are also shocking records of Communist bosses in the city enjoying regular meals, even delicacies, while the ration of the ordinary residents was reduced to a hundred and twenty-five grams of ersatz bread a day. The cost in human lives was never an issue for Stalin, in peacetime or on the battlefield. Ignoring the death toll helped him to defeat Hitler's military machine. There is an argument, too, that Stalin's refusal to spare the lives of his own citizens allowed the leaders of the other Allied Nations to get through the war with fewer casualties": https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/asking-the-wrong-question-on-russian-tv

worthwhile. They are usually promoted and supported by the *rhizome* because, again, they divert the public's attention from the real issues and from the *rhizome* itself.

This draft table may be a tool for guidance. To make it usable, however, we should keep in mind the need for the *strategic who*, the correct implementer, and take into account the *rhizome* and the need in the *islands of change* and their networks.

We are close to the end of our deliberations. In our change strategies over these years, we have paid a lot of attention to addressing the phenomenon of *power* – direct or indirect, visible or latent, straightforward or sophisticated, fair or violent types of power manifestations: influence, soft power, direct violence, agenda-setting, framing etc. But we have paid much less attention— in all our reform strategies, in all our considerations, in the flood of media publications, in the flow of people's thinking—to education and culture. They are regarded as something secondary to power. In the traditional order, and in political party programs, first comes politics, then economy and society, last is culture, science, etc.

I think the biggest amount of effort should go into discussing what kind of education we provide, how to change the education system, and what kind of culture and science we are building. These areas are very much interrelated. Academia, science, and creativity are all very much parts of this. If we pay more attention to this, I believe, we will have a better situation.

Finally, as it is clear from the entirety of this text, when I say 'culture' I am not only referring to cultural products, the artifacts. I do not mean books and pictures and music; I mean the behavioral culture, the everyday culture prevalent in the society, which is the ultimate source of cultural products and implicitly embeds itself in them.

## Abstract

This book is based on nine video lectures delivered between December 2016 and March 2017. Its purpose is to provide a picture of how Armenia's 20th century history has left its legacy on today's society. It discusses many controversial developments that took place in Soviet Armenia and their resultant social problems: construction, industrial and cultural developments, Bolshevik and Stalinist purges, and the indelible traces they left on further historical events. The author exposes details about the Gulag and criminal subculture, the culture of self-inflicted violence, the decay of the society's value system, and the consequent rooting of several types of false consciousness, inherited by Independent Armenia. Various types of corruption have their roots in these social traumas. The main problem which hinders successful reforms, in this context, is the atomization of the society, infected by a few types of false consciousness. *Corruption of minds* resulted in the incapacity to make rational choices and implement successful positive collective action.

By the end of the discussion, a method is proposed which, if followed, will help initiatives to bring about change and development become more effective. The book is intended for the Armenian Diaspora in the West, all those who study and want to understand Armenia and other post-Soviet states, and, more generally, the English-language reader. The book is also useful to

the citizens and residents of Armenia, particularly the young generation, who want to understand the roots of the problems the country faces today.

The text was written before the April 2018 revolution and Armenia has a new reformist government today with an understanding of these issues. Further developments demonstrate, however, that the societal illnesses may yet reappear or may not be fully cured; therefore, this discussion is more important than ever. During the thirty years of independence, the issues raised in this book have rarely been discussed and reflected in the public discourse. Instead, a sanitized version of the past has been presented to newer generations through textbooks, the media, academia and the general public discourse, contributing to further rooting of false consciousness. The author hopes that the discussion around the issues raised in the book will also help the diaspora and residents of Armenia to better understand each other and the situation they find themselves in. With a more complete understanding, they will, in turn, be able to act in a more concerted and productive way.

## Համառոտագիր

«Արմենիա 3.0. հասկանալ 20-րդ դարի Հայաստանը» գիրքը հիմնված է ինը վիդեո դասախոսությունների վրա, որոնք թողարկվել են 2016-ի դեկտեմբեր - 2017-ի մարտ ժամանակահատվածում: Գրքի նպատակն է ցույց տալ, թե ինչ հետք է թողել Հայաստանի 20-րդ դարի պատմություննն արդի հասարակության վրա: Գրքում քննարկվում են Խորհրդային Հայաստանում տեղի ունեցած բազմաթիվ հակասական զարգացումները և ի արդյունք դրանց առաջացած սոցիալական խնդիրները. քաղաքաշինական, արդյունաբերական և մշակութային զարգացումներ, բոլշևիկյան և ստալինյան ժամանակների բռնությունններ, որոնք անջնջելի հետք են թողել հետագա իրադարձությունների վրա:

Հեղինակը բացահայտում է Գուլագի և հանցավոր ենթամշակույթի, «ինքնացեղասպանության» և բռնության, արժեհամակարգի անկման մանրամասներ և դրանց արդյունքում արմատացած կեղծ գիտակցության մի շարք արտահայտումներ: Կոռուպցիայի տարբեր ձևերի արմատները սոցիալական այս տրավմաների մեջ են թաքնված: Այս համատեքստում հաջող ռեֆորմների ցլխավոր խոչընդոտը տարաբնույթ կեղծ գիտակցության տարբեր արտահայտումներով վարակված հասարակության ատոմիզացիան է: *Մտքի կոռուպցիան* հանգեցնում է ռացիոնալ ընտրություն կատարելու և հաջող դրական կոլեկտիվ գործողություն իրականացնելու անկարողությանը: Քննարկման վերջում առաջարկվում է մի մեթոդ, որին եթե հետևել, այն կոզնի հասնել փոփոխությունների, իսկ զարգացումն էլ՝ ավելի արդյունավետ կդառնա:

Գիրքը նախատեսված է արևմուտքի հայկական սփյուռքի համար, բոլոր նրանց, ովքեր ուսումնասիրում են և ուզում են հասկանալ Հայաստանը և հետխորհրդային մյուս հանրապետությունները, ինչպես նաև, առհասարակ, անգլալեզու ընթերցողի համար: Գիրքը նաև օգտակար կլինի Հայաստանի քաղաքացիներին և բնակիչներին, մասնավորապես երիտասարդներին, որոնք ցանկանում են հասկանալ արմատներն այն խնդիրների, որոնց հետ մեր երկիրն այսօր առերեսվում է:

Տեքստը ստեղծվել է 2018 թվականի ապրիլյան հեղափոխությունից առաջ, և Հայաստանն այսօր ունի այս հարցերին ընմբռնումով մոտեցող ռեֆորմիստ նոր կառավարություն: Հետագա զարգացումները, սակայն, ցույց են տալիս, որ հասարակական ախտերը դեռ կարող են վերադառնալ կամ լիովին բուժված չեն: Հետևաբար, այս քննարկումը կարևոր է առավել քան երբեք: Գրքում բարձրացված հարցերն անկախության 30 տարվա ընթացքում հազվադեպ են հնչել և արտացոլվել հանրային դիսկուրսում: Փոխարենը անցյալի սրբագրված տարբերակն է նոր սերունդներին ներկայացվել դասագրքերի, մեդիաների, գիտության և հասարակական դիսկուրսի կողմից, նպաստելով կեղծ գիտակցության հետագա արմատավորմանը: Հեղինակը հույս ունի, որ գրքում բարձրացված հիմնախնդիրների շուրջ քննարկումը կօգնի նաև սփյուռքին և Հայաստանի բնակիչներին ավելի լավ հասկանալ մինչանց և այն իրավիճակը, որում հայտնվել են: Ամբողջական պատկերացում ունենալու դեպքում նրանք կկարողանան գործել ավելի համերաշխ և արդյունավետ:

## Keywords

*Armenia, USSR, Russia, donos (false allegation, renunciation), street authorities, Genocide, Gulag, nationalism, public movements, Soviet Union, Stalinism, square culture, repatriation, society, network, ecology, blatnoy, vulgar, adaptation, Rabiz, thief culture, thief in law, carnivalesque culture, atomie, anomie, anemie, tsekhavizm, negative selection, repressions, alienation, dualism, dual reality, duality, schizophrenia, second society, black market, second reality, thaw, compartmentalization, cultural construction, culture, nationalism, Stalin genocide, state-building, nation-building, Soviet Armenia, cultural revival, subtext, media literacy, critical thinking, ethnic nationalism, false legality, legalism, liberalism, national ideology, industrial construction, horizontal ties, community, cynicism, glasnost, perestroika, independence, bribe, bureaucracy, conflict, education, criminal law, humanism, independence, law, conflict, reforms, salary, state system, kolkhoz system, sovkhoz system, rhizome, corruption, collapse, cultural elites, government, system, power, elites, electoral fraud, violence, qyartu, handshakability, decentralization, post-Soviet, public, knowledge, public opinion, society, state structures, strategy, values, voids, polarity, stukach, false consciousness, shame, conscience, vertukhay, snitch, cheka, NKVD, KGB*

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## «ԵՀՀ համալսարան» խորագրի ներքո պատրաստված այլ հրապարակումներ

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Այս գրքում արտահայտված կարծիքները պատկանում են հեղինակներին և պարտադիր չէ, որ համընկնեն Եվրասիա համագործակցություն հիմնադրամի պաշտոնական տեսակետներին:

## Արմենիա 3.0. հասկանալ 20-րդ դարի Հայաստանը / Գևորգ Տեր-Գաբրիելյան, Եվրասիա համագործակցություն հիմնադրամ, 2020 թ. -142 էջ

Գիրքը հիմնված է ինը վիդեո դասախոսությունների վրա, որոնք թողարկվել են 2016-ի դեկտեմբեր - 2017-ի մարտ ժամանակահատվածում: Գրքի նպատակն է ցույց տալ, թե ինչ հետք է թողել Հայաստանի 20-րդ դարի պատմությունն արդի հասարակության վրա:

*Եվրասիա համագործակցություն հիմնադրամի (ԵՀՀ)* տեսլականն է նպաստել նրան, որ Հարավային Կովկասը կայանա որպես խաղաղ, հակամարտություններից զերծ և համագործակցող տարածաշրջան, և ազգի ընկնի քաղաքացիների ներգրավման բարձր մակարդակով, սոցիալապես պատասխանատու ձեռներեցությամբ ու կայուն, պատասխանատու և արդյունավետ հասարակությամբ: ԵՀՀ-ն տարիներ շարունակ աշխատում է քննադատական մտածողության և այլընտրանքային կրթության մեթոդների ասպարեզում իր մի շարք ծրագրերում, ինչպես, օրինակ, մարդու իրավունքների, կոնֆլիկտների տրանսֆորմացիայի և խաղաղարարության, քաղաքացիական հասարակության հզորացման և այլն: Այն համախմբում է քաղաքացիական հասարակության բարձրակարգ առաջնորդների և հասարակական ոլորտի գործիչների, որոնք իրենց ամենօրյա գործունեության մեջ կոտրում են կարծրատիպերը, պայքարում են մեդիա քարոզչության դեմ և նպաստում հայաստանյան հասարակության համար զարգացման ճիշտ ուղիներ մշակելուն: Որպես «մտագործող» («think and do tank») կառույց, որն աշխատում է քաղաքականությունների մշակումից մինչև դրանց իրագործում, և որի առաքելությունն ու գործունեությունը ծածկում է քաղաքացիական հասարակության և հայկական մեդիաների շատ կարևոր հատվածը, ԵՀՀ-ն լավ դիրքավորված է հասարակության մեջ քննադատական մտածողության օրակարգը խթանելու համար:

Սույն հոդվածների ժողովածուն մաս է կազմում «ԵՀՀ համալսարան» խորագրի ներքո հրապարակվող ձեռնարկների շարքի՝ «Կրթություն, պատմության մեթոդաբանություն, մշակույթ և արժեքներ» (ԿՊՄՄԱ) թեմայով: Շարքն ընդգրկում է զրույցներ չորս ծավալուն թեմաների վերաբերյալ.

- Քննադատական մտածողություն (ՔՄ)
- Պատերազմ և խաղաղություն (ՊԽ)
- Քաղաքացիական հասարակություն (ՔՀ)
- Կրթություն, պատմության մեթոդաբանություն, մշակույթ և արժեքներ (ԿՊՄՄԱ)