

Armenia 3.0 Understanding 20th Century

Part 2

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[Video material](#)

Okay, hi, so we are starting our second broadcast within the Armenia 3.0 concept. It is a direct continuation of the [first broadcast](#) and by now those of you who watched the first one know more or less how do we behave within this broadcast.

It may seem that we have only like, you know, different chains of associations when we move from one topic to another, but at the same time we also have the mainstream issue which is the dialogue between Western Armenians and Eastern Armenians, between Spyurq and Armenians who live here. So, we are gonna approach many different issues from the prospective of this dialogue, and, as I have already said, we apologize to you: we are not professionals in both good sense of that word and bad sense of that word. In good sense of the word we are not professionals in making this kind of broadcast, so we go long, we make 40 minutes or one hour long broadcasts. In bad sense is in the sense that, although we have pretty professional camera people, but we are not professional media people, we are more users of the media rather than makers of the media. We are making a media which is of interest to people like us, and those of you who were following the first broadcast could have already noticed that I said that, for instance, sociologically speaking there is no ideal nation. There was never this ideal nation in the past, any time, which then started to deteriorate or change; that it is always an ideal of something. Now I should tell you that very recently a very smart person commented on something that I said on Facebook saying exactly the opposite. Who was that person? Of course, he or she was somebody from the Western Hemisphere, Armenian. And they said that our nation is great and since we all belong to the same nation we understand each other perfectly well. Now we all know that it is not like: that we are very different flocks in this nation. Some of us, even many of us even look differently. Now if you look at Isabella, you can think she is what, from North of the world? Like Scandinavian or something?

Isabella –Am I? (*Laughing*)

Gevorg – You can see people who look like, I don't know, Africans, Middle Eastern, even Chinese, Roma, any kind of even externally very different; we cannot be similar internally. The national mythology on which our idea that we are all Armenians is built is pretty thin. But there are some things that unite us really as Armenians, but I am not going to discuss this because we are going to move to this gradually step by step.

We finished our last conversation on the 20th century, Soviet times. We also said that there were good things and bad things. This is a very simplistic division which I usually don't like myself, because this is stereotyping. Because they are all interwoven, all the things that happened then. But I am going to use this approach and draw another picture, gradually giving a certain vision of sociology of the 20th century as applied to Armenia; of social theory more rather than of sociology of the 20th century as applied to Armenia. Let's photograph this at this stage, please. And before we do that I'll just continue on speaking. So what should be the major, maybe, keywords for us to try to understand the 20th century history? Some of them already sounded in the previous broadcast: 'fabricated allegations', which in Russian it is called 'donos', which means literally like 'delivery'.

Isabella – I found the word but I couldn't read it in English.

Gevorg – Really.

Isabella – I think it is French.

Gevorg – 'Street authorities'. This is all very much interconnected. Are we done? I am going to remove very important keywords here like 'network state', etc. Let's keep this for a while, maybe it won't hinder. Now I am starting to draw this picture which is, we could say, my own mythology. Though, I think people, who are here will pretty much agree to that. I mean it's not a rocket science to draw this picture.

So, Genocide. I would say that a certain version of Armenian history starts at this point: we were reborn after that. But what I mean here is that a lot of people, huge amount of people run from Western Armenia, from the places where they were genocided to Eastern Armenia; we know that. The science claims different figures, so it's difficult for me to say what, but I think one of the biggest figures I have heard is 700.000 people.

But then the other thing was happening. First Armenian statehood of 1918 and then sovietization. It doesn't fit the 'good or bad' thing (concept), but it is kind of too different dynamics which were coming together to this moment of the survival of the life of the Armenian nation. What does this produce... If you have watched the film [Myasnikyan](#), which is a very interesting film, though very much within the Soviet discourse, made in around maybe 1975-1978... I recommend you to watch it, if you understand Armenian or Russian, I don't know if the English language dubbing exists or not. But the main point here was, sociologically speaking: it is atomized society, it is orphans, it is people who have suffered huge psychological stress, it is posttraumatic stress disorder, it is uprooting. I'll put this word: 'uprooting'.

People come who have been uprooted. They start their life anew. And when you are talking about the sovietization, of course, it is rooting. Because it is thanks to Russian or Bolshevik power or whatever reason, but (it means) **building the society**, the community, the 'pseudo-state', the republic from whatever we can. All these Bolshevik leaders - they may be doing some

nasty things, e.g. to the Dashnak counterparts who left the power, and later on writing ‘donos’ etc. But they were also building, building and building. If this (post-Genocide stream of refugees) is the tendency of uprooted people who arrived there; this, the opposite (the Soviet power and construction), was this tendency of rooting people in this territory, those who were here beforehand and those who arrived anew.

Then you have the arrival of **Stalinism**. This is a very unclear term, because we don’t know when did it arrive. Also, because the Bolshevik power wasn’t nice before Stalinism, so it has been since 1917, when October Revolution happened, wars and displacements and uprooting and Genocide. It was always bad, but it somehow crystalized during the Stalinism times. So since 1925-26 it started to crystalize and then it became a certain system, a very nasty system.

Do we have some good news? At least some? Yes, we have also some good news, which can be also tragic: it’s the **repatriation**. And you know that we had several waves of repatriation: very early in 1920’s when people like Tamanyan or Avetik Isahakyan or Martiros Saryan or Spendiarov, etc., arrived.

Then you had the next wave of repatriation which started some time in 1944, still during the Second World War, at least a preparation to it, then it continued on until 1948-49. Major part of people who came during that time were then ousted to Siberia. I don’t have time now to discuss much why they came, why were they ousted, but you have some wonderful stuff to learn more about that in Tigran Paskevichyan’s [films](#)¹. Tigran did this film, a series of films, it’s two films already; and maybe there will be a third film; and a [website](#) on the destiny of this repatriates. But this was crucially important moment, when these people came.

Probably it makes sense to go into details in why did they come. I really can’t spend much time on that, but essentially there was an assumption that Stalin is going to start a war with Turkey. Stalin wanted to start a war in Turkey, because he was winning the World War II against the Nazi Germany. So he had an assumption that he will take within the Soviet Union the old Armenian territories in the territory of Turkey: Kars, Ardahan, Artvin, Erzurum. Etc., the ‘five vilayets’, and more, and then he will need to repopulate them. That’s the way I know it. Maybe some scholars will start arguing against my opinion, but that’s why they started to prepare the repatriation of Armenians, as far as I know. But then this thing didn’t happen, because in Tehran or wherever they met, the world leaders, Roosevelt and Churchill said to Stalin “no, you are not going to do that”. So he didn’t do that. But these people started to arrive, and they had a very mythologized understanding on where are they coming to. And then they were sent to Siberia in big numbers.

¹ [Hayrenadardz Project](#)
[My unfamiliar fatherland](#)
[Repatriation 1946-1949](#) (Հայրենասարձություն 1946-1949)
[Oh, fatherland, cold and sweet](#)
[Օ, Հայրենիք, սառն ու սնուշ](#)

And why, again? Not because they couldn't fit in Armenia, but because they were bringing with them different culture, which was deviating from Stalinism culture, which was established in the Soviet Armenia. Even despite this exile process, and beforehand, in 1920-30s, the killings, the extra judicial killings which took away such big names as Yeghishe Charents, Aksel Bakunts, Vahan Totovents and others, thanks to these repatriation waves it was again a part of rooting process. Because Armenians from all over the world were coming here, starting to participate in the life and trying to rebuild a societal fabric.

Of course **Stalinism and Gulag are inseparable, and those of you who haven't read [The Gulag Archipelago](#) of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, that's the first thing, probably, to read about Soviet Union.** Because then you will understand that this **rhizome, as a slavery economy, as a 'second economy', 'black economy', slavery, was the reason for the existence of the Soviet Union.**

The real Soviet Union, behind the façade of the Soviet Union, was based on the work of slaves who were prosecuted in the camps. And not only in Siberia, but all over the Soviet Union. And if you are going to this or that prison here in Armenia, very often you can meet a place which was a part of the gulag camp. For instance, the Zod prison, okay?

So, there were prisons, but there were also camps and, of course, the worst ones were in the inhabited territories of Siberia. But Gulag, that's why Solzhenitsyn calls his work Archipelago, because it was an Archipelago, it's a group of islands, which are in fact belonging to one and the same political economy, though apparently they may not be interconnected with each other.

See, it's a good addition to the terminology of '**rhizome**' and '**network**': '**archipelago**'.

Gulag, very important element in that story. The good news was though what we call in Armenian '**քաղաքաշինություն**': the process of building, the process of construction. All over Armenia the process of construction was extremely important, construction which happened in the soviet times: roads, bridges, towns, cities, buildings, factories. A lot has been constructed.

Despite all these negative influences, all these tragic influences, a lot has been constructed, good and bad. It's also a matter of taste, what you like. People who are inclined to be nostalgic about the Soviet Union refer to this construction only as a good stuff. And indeed there has been a lot of good stuff constructed. **Tamanyan's Yerevan. Mark Grigoryan's Yerevan** as a next stage. Even the buildings of 1970s, some of which are considered some great developments and are getting prizes in the architectural contests for their design, and they are very often in a dilapidated condition in Armenia now. Yes, Rob, please take the mic.

Robert - Let's also not to forget that in short time Armenia from an agricultural country became an industrial country and that's also thanks to Soviet policies.

Gevorg -That's now, in a way, reversing. Now they say 'let's do the agriculture, it's the best thing that the Armenian can do', And, of course, it was a part of industrialization, was a part of

the Soviet Stalinist ideology. I wouldn't say it is good or it is bad. It was just a process which was happening.

That process was accompanied by **ruining the ecology** very significantly. Though I should say the ecology started to be ruined especially significantly since 1950s. You can take the decision to start using Sevan Lake's water, to diminish Sevan Lake's water, which was in mid-1950s, I think. That process became the tipping point when the environment in Armenia started to go down. But it was so robust. It is so robust that until now, despite this mining which takes place for the last 20 years, even if it's very significantly ruined, this environment can 'easily' be built back.

And that's something important for the future stuff that has to be done. These leopards can be brought back, and they can be rejuvenated, and mouflons, and all the type of birds. You know that there are no more wild rabbits in Armenia. That's very funny. When I was a child there were lots of wild rabbits. Now they are all hunted down, so there are almost no wild rabbits left. There are very few tortoise, turtles left, etc.

So there was very significant impact on the environment. Starting from 1950s, it became very bad in 1970s, with personal car economy, when it came to Armenia, with chemical industry, and it continued.

For one moment it started to rejuvenate after the Soviet Union collapsed and all the factories just stopped. The environment started to come back, but now with mining, and lack of attention to that, it continues to go down. And also hunting never stopped after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And also trees were removed, because there was no way to heat your house, or you had to use wood. And that's why Yerevan is today, not only... but that's why in early 1990s Yerevan became bald, devoid of the forests which were surrounding it; and until now many people in Armenia like cutting down trees, it has become a negative reflex kind of thing.

When a local Armenian sees a tree the first thing he thinks about is: "It should be removed". That's a very strange phenomenon, we have to talk about that later on. Isabella, you want to say something.

Isabella – Actually I wanted to come back to the story of Soviet Union. In the previous discussion you have mentioned that we should learn about each other and 'each other' is a keyword. Because I am sure that many people in diaspora, in western diaspora know little about this. But on the other hand we don't know much about their perception of Soviet Union. What the community papers, let's say, in Lebanon or community papers in Los Angeles or Paris or Marseille were writing about Soviet Union, and how it was presented. I am sure that in different political circles there were different newspapers, and the process was presented differently, the same for Stalinism and Gulag. I don't know if there were communists, Armenian communists who had a different version of events, but there were also others and there were so different groups.

So I think this may be a topic for another discussion, another lecture, but just to see how the Diaspora, which is not a monolithic group, and very diverse, had this perception of Armenia, of Soviet Armenia, and if they have any clue of Charents, and if we have any clue of poets living in places like Istanbul. Now, we are learning little by little about [Zabel Yesayan](#), for example, wonderful Armenian writer, who had this tragic (life), who experienced all the troubles of this 20th century. Because she was born in Istanbul and she witnessed Adana massacres and then she “quit” the Genocide and she ended up in Soviet Armenia. And she died in Gulag, somewhere, on the way to Siberia. But we didn’t know about that. And she was teaching in Yerevan State University. But anyone knows anything about Zabel Yesayan? And I believe that there are others that we do not know as well. And bridging this gap of knowledge is crucial for understanding.

Gevorg – It should be two ways, exactly, exactly. In the first series of this broadcast we already mentioned that we need a dialogue which goes two ways. We’ll be presenting, of course, the Eastern Armenian perspective on these events. As I said in the first part, not necessarily all Eastern Armenians share this perspective. We are trying to be fair on saying both about good and bad stuff. And then hopefully we can have this kind of broadcasts for everybody who wants to watch, but particularly having the target audience, as the Eastern Armenians, the Western Armenians.

And I tell you I agree with you wholeheartedly. Because I learned about Hakob Mndzuri thanks to the writings of Hrant Matevosyan and thanks to the fact that in 1963 a book of Hakob Mndzuri was published. So out of, I don’t know, maybe hundred or more interesting writers who were “Spyurq” or outside Soviet Armenia... and yeah, Istanbul, it’s not “Spyurq”... We knew very few, of course: William Saroyan, Hakob Mndzuri, Zabel Yesayan though she was already a part of the Soviet literature, history, but she wasn’t indeed studied at all. Though Vahan Totovents was studied and Gurgen Mahari, to a certain extent, apart from his [‘Ayrvox Aygestanner’](#), his **‘Burning Gardens’**. There’s a huge stuff that we should learn mutually, should learn about each other.

Robert – Can I also add something? Following the ideas by Isabella about the perception of Soviet Union, I think it’s also important to talk about the Karabakh issue and history of Karabakh conflict. How it started. Because in the diaspora it is discussed very much and the role of Soviets in this conflict, and the policy of Soviets to interconnect the republics, so no republic could flee away from the Soviet Union. So I think there are also issues that should be discussed later.

Gevorg – Absolutely, and, Robert, I should say that that is one of the major highlight points that we should put on the agenda of this process of dialogue and broadcast. And we’ll have one or more discussions on the issue of Nagorny Karabakh. About history, as well as what to do about it. Because if we are talking about the reform of Armenia; if we are talking about corruption; if we are talking about anything to be done; any sustainability of Armenia; we cannot avoid the issue that we are in this unresolved war situation. This is one of the biggest issues on the agenda.

And essentially none in the Armenian nation, and probably nobody in the world, has a real vision on how to resolve this issue.

So, we have to discuss it, very importantly. But I am coming back to my gradual move to more recent times. And I put here a few more keywords. ‘Vulgar’, ‘adaptation’ and ‘criminal’ in Russian: it is **the word ‘blatnoy’ - criminal culture**. Yes, it’s not exactly criminal, it’s ‘blatnoy’ culture. So I am going to try to explain what I mean.

These are also, maybe, less positive words, but there is one very nice word among these words, and I’ll put it here as well: ‘square’ meaning a public square. The ‘square culture’, construction started, “քաղաքաշինություն” started, city construction started. Tamanyan brought in the square culture: the Opera Square, the former Lenin Square, which is today’s Republic Square, the main square in Yerevan. Squares in other cities. What is a square? It’s public, it is publicity rooted; society’s opportunities to discuss things. And we have in Armenia in recent years, among people who are working on these issues, among sociologists and architects, several very interesting small scale broadcasts or studies on [the role of public spaces](#) for constituting the new independent Armenian nation. Their removal, the struggle for them to be kept, their change, their functioning as of today.

But that is very important. The vision after Genocide: Armenia is a mountain filled with people who are uprooted, filled with orphans. The vision for the 1950s Armenia: it is cities. Of course, mountains are still there, but it’s cities and public places, public spaces. Though it is yet prohibited to have public movements there, because of the Stalinism times or post Stalinism times. It’s only brewing, the public movement is only brewing; it’s going to come out very strongly, for the first time, in 1965, and this is a crucial year. And by the way I was born in 1964, I mean it’s pretty close to myself. This is a crucial year for Armenian history, for modern Armenian history. We’ll be talking a lot about this 1965.

Robert -1965 is also remarkable in terms of the Soviet Union because what happened then was not very common in the Soviet Union.

Gevorg – Well, in the Soviet Union the so-called ‘thaw’ when the ‘snow’ started melting, started in 1953, with the death of Stalin; more in 55-56 with the twentieth communist party Conference Congress, when Khrushchev read his text about Stalin’s crimes and about what is called cult of personality.

By 1965 it was ending, because Khrushchev was removed in 64. And even before he was removed he started to become much more conservative and much less open. In 62-63 you had already these attacks against free arts, free speech.

But in Armenia, which was a province, which was far away, this kind of direction of positive changes, reforms continued. Also because a new communist party leader came to power in Armenia, Kochinyan.

And in 1965 the explosion happened.

But we'll come back to that, because we have to understand these words: 'vulgar', 'adaptation', 'criminal', 'blatnoy', and related to the 'square'. 'Vulgar' and 'square'. And when I say 'vulgar', though it is in this column, it is not necessarily bad. With constructing the fabric of society; with public spaces appearing; with city culture appearing you get also the 'downtown culture'.

You get small or smaller than the mainstream culture 'pockets', if you wish, niches of the subcultures. So you have a city subculture; and in different cities you can have different subcultures. And even though there was the Iron Curtain, but because also of the repatriates; and because of the Spyurq; and because of having relatives abroad, who could send parcels from times to times, Armenia also had, for instance, the subculture of hippies.

But among all these subcultures there was a subculture of vulgarization. Which is a typical thing for subcultures, which are usually inclined to vulgarizing the mainstream hierarchical value systems.

So you had for instance such a concept as 'rabiz' music. Right? **Rabiz.**

Why I put here the word 'adaptation', because the 'donos' culture and the subcultures of vulgarization were also a part of adaptation.

Because when you have public space, people have to adapt. So if a child goes to school, he or she has to adapt very significantly. We all know about that. Otherwise they may be... not hazing but the other word: they may be bullied.

A nice story about Perch Zeytuntsyan, a friend of my mom, a great writer. He is from these 1948 repatriates generation, as a child he was there. And in early 1950s he goes to school, and they repatriated probably from France, because he says "I had a French beret". His mom would put on his head a French beret for him to go to school. Well, he was prosecuted by local street children and by his classmates for having a beret on. He would refuse to wear this beret.

So, this peer pressure was very important element among the children, among the youth, among the entire society in the Soviet Union. It was a very strong tendency. So this peer pressure, which I call 'adaptation', was adapting everybody into certain subcultures. And one of these subcultures was this 'rabiz' music.

And what was 'rabiz' music? That's very interesting. That was again a vulgarized version of the popular music. It started from a very official and legit popular music and then it moved into being associated with vulgarized and tasteless music. Which today a lot of Armenians love very much. But as any kind of popular culture element there are some good things there, there are some bad things there, so it's a process, it's a cultural creativity process which continues on. In essence by itself there is nothing wrong in it.

Many people in Armenia or not in Armenia will say: “Sorry, this is, we have a hierarchy”, but it is like arguing that the Beatles are worse than Mozart. The Western culture has overcome that problem a long time ago. Genres of music per se have nothing to do, it is just something you like, something you don’t like, and something that is associated with people who have, so-called, ‘lower taste’ in a hierarchical society. But you can have some wonderful examples of rabiz, also in the rabiz music.

But that was another element. And the most important element for us at this adaptation process was the ‘blatnoy’ culture. It’s in another key concept, from the translation of the word ‘criminal’ in Russian. I mean, it’s the word ‘criminal’ in Russian, but there’s a difference there (with the English word ‘criminal’) which I am not going to explain, I am not going to go into etymology. But in Armenian it sounds ‘գողախան’, so it’s from the word ‘thief’, a ‘thief culture’, if you wish.

What is it about? Gulag was a very, of course, cruel and hierarchical place, where a lot of people would die, a lot of people would have health problems, a lot of people would have psychological problems even if they were left out of Gulag afterwards. So a part of the adaptation process was to adapt to the way the criminals, the thieves, the ‘goxakans’ related to each other. And there were the codex of behavior for blatnoy people, just like in the army you have hazing. So one of the ways to counter it, when you are adapting to the army conditions, is to become a hazer oneself.

Similarly, as a pseudo-, as a carnivalesque way of behavior, as a facade adaptation, the moral of the blatnoy culture with people returning from the prisons, from the camps, became a part of the city subculture.

So that’s another element in the constituting of this Soviet Armenian society of 1960s.

And in the absence of the convincing overall societal ideology, because the communist ideology was no more convincing, it wasn’t anymore believed honestly into...

Because if you go to the camp, or your relative goes to the camp, you understand about communism, and socialism, and equality, and about people developing their talents, and ‘blah-blah-blah’... that it’s all ‘blah-blah-blah’, if not to say worse.

... And there’s no other mainstream ideology, and the national ideology is suppressed, because it’s considered nationalistic, and particularly for that people have been being sent to the camps.

So subcultures grow. And the ones who win are the ones who are more cruel, who can resist, can make people adapted in such a way that they survive the conditions, the circumstances.

Isabella – Maybe it will be useful just to draw parallels. In order to understand Gulag you might think about (Nazi) concentration camps. And their structure is known. That there were kapos out,

of the same Jewish prisoners, who became more privileged, and they did the ‘dirtiest’ work, but then they were rewarded. So it’s more known, and there are works of [Primo Levi](#), for example, who explains these mechanisms pretty well.

But what was the thing, because the process happened in Germany, all those criminals and this criminal behavior was publicly condemned. And as Solzhenitsyn says in his book, “**10.000 times ‘they were guilty’ was pronounced in the court**”. And then this culture didn’t go deep, and it was condemned, and it was part of (repentance?).

In the case of Gulag, because it was never publicly condemned, **there was no lustration until now, and now it’s a backlash towards the Stalinism, and Stalinization is rising** (back)...

Gevorg – Particularly in Russia, not so much in today’s Armenia at this stage.

Isabella – Particularly in Russia, I was just speaking about the general things (trends). But it was never condemned. And people who did it, people who wrote ‘donos’; people who were this ‘**pakhan**’ (‘**don**’, ‘**big shot**’) in Gulag; these structures that we know from other concentration camps, most probably places like Cambodia; or other places; they were not condemned.

And they were back to a society. They still had this power that they got in the Gulag.

Maybe another parallel that will be understandable for people might be the Italian mafia a little bit, in order to understand this ‘blatnoy’ and ‘**thief in law**’ terms. For many people I know in those circles ‘Godfather’ the book and the film is kind of a blueprint.

Because those relations they do exist, they are replicated also in this society, and even people of my generation witness that in their surroundings.

Gevorg – Thank you Bella. We have to move to the last section. We are going to end on this today. We won’t be able to go any further.

But beforehand... You are absolutely correct, you made additions for people who are not from here to understand what we mean by this. Many people who are from here also don’t understand.

But there are two things I wanted to say.

One is that I already used the word ‘**carnivalesque**’, I already used the word ‘**as if**’, the word ‘**façade-like**’ because in the young generations this Gulag and ‘blatnoy’ culture was very much just mimicking certain processes that they or their parents have experienced. But, of course, there was also the real part, which was very much similar to mafia structures.

Two important sayings from Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag, sayings within the camps. One was: “**you are not being touched, don’t make an appearance**”, meaning: ‘keep to your business if somebody is treated badly, don’t intervene, otherwise you will be treated badly’.

And the second one, very important for our today, for the elections... The word 'elections' has to come back here, we already touched it upon.

... Very important for our understanding of the elections, and of all the stuff connected to it, the other saying, the other adage from 'Archipelago Gulag' is: "**die you first and I second**".

As you can see this is a perfect adage for uprooting, for atomizing society.

You know these three words that Johan Galtung is using: '**atomie**', '**anomie**' and '**anemie**'.

So the tendency of atomizing, 'anomiemizing'... Meaning if people don't speak, don't communicate, they become mute. The words lose their names, so 'anomie' means lack of names; and 'anemie' meaning lack of energy, capacity to make a step forward, to do something.

This was the Gulag culture bringing to the Armenian society, which was, despite that, was quite healthy. And throughout these tragedies it constituted, constructed. Even in 1930s, 1940s, all the construction it kept. Throughout the prosecution of great Zabel Yesayan, and many other writers, and many other people in different areas of culture. And it came to the times of thaw in the Soviet Union.

Where can I write it so that it is visible somewhere? I don't know it's "u" here or "w".

The times of thaw: post-Stalin times.

And then the next thing happened and that's the last point in our today's discussion. During the Stalin times people are very often killed via extra judicial means, of course, a lesser amount of people was killed than was sent to the camps, a lesser amount was killed directly. Many people died in the camps, and many people survived in the camps, however, the threat that you'll be killed was very much there. For instance, at some point in time, I think in late 1930s or early 1940s, there was a new law made, that even children, adolescents before they are 17 years old, if they steal "буханка", a loaf of bread, 'буханка' in Russian, they can be condemned to the squad, no, not 'real sentence', to the what is it called 'расстрел', to the death squad.

Robert –It was 14.

Gevorg – Yes, 14 years old, starting from 14 until 17 and further they could be killed by a death squad for stealing a loaf of bread. That's also from Solzhenitsyn, but that's a known thing.

Hopefully in Armenia that didn't happen. In Armenia many other nasty things, many treacherous things, many betrayals, many unfair, unfounded prosecutions, many 'donoses' happened. But even during the worst of the Soviet Stalinist impact on Armenia, people who were in Armenia were trying to keep it somehow at least a little bit farther away from the society. Not in many respects, but in some respects.

Stalin is gone, killings stop, extra judicial killings stop and judicial killings stop. Much fewer killings, especially if it's not a criminal, really criminal case, it's a political case, or if it's something else. So if beforehand...

And Armenians are very entrepreneurial, right? I mean they like making small business.

Armenians are so successful in so many countries, because they start from a small business; they are very work devoted, they like working, we like working, right? And they start from small and then they go big. They start from a small, I don't know, artisanship and then it becomes a business, a medium business or a big business.

In Armenia it was the same: the moment you wouldn't be killed, you try to start your business. But it is prohibited because in the Soviet Union there was no private property. So you start an illegal business. Because you think this way: **“Okay, I won't be killed. I may end up in prison, but at least my family can be well off”**.

So if you are not killed your survival limits are larger, because you can somehow make it up for being in prison for a few years. Or you may think 'I can give a bribe and not even end up in prison'.

So you start your business.

And it wasn't only in Armenia. It was in many places, particularly not so much in mainland Russian cities like Tver or Ryazan but more in the outskirts: in Baltic states, in Ukraine, in Georgia, in Armenia, in Central Asia.

And this process we call the appearance of 'tsekhaviks'. There's no place here anymore so, I'm going to write it somewhere here. **'Tsekhavizm'**.

Isabella – Oh, how are you going to explain this?

Gevorg – I'll explain it briefly and we'll end here. 'Tsekhavizm', what is 'tsekhavizm'?

It is a word 'tsekh' (цех): department in a factory.

So if this department with its head started to produce products and sell it in the black market that was about that.

So the owner, unofficial owner (and officially the head of that department) was called 'tsekhavik'.

So the **black market** started to evolve all over Soviet Union and in particular in Armenia as well.

Now, sociologically speaking, for the uprisal of the 1965 or the Genocide recognition, the 50th anniversary of the Genocide that took place in Yerevan, you can have these streams to understand.

One stream was the **square culture**, because the square was there.

The uprisal took place in the Opera Square. And it was prepared by other elements of square culture via the thaw.

Because, for instance in 1963 radio loudspeakers were put in that square, people gathered there to listen to Tigran Petrosyan play in the World Chess Championship with, who was that?, no, it was before Fischer, Botvinnik I think or somebody.

Tigran Petrosyan won and he became the world chess champion.

So, officially, under the Soviet patronage the loudspeakers were put out, and people gathered there.

So they learned that they can gather in the square not only for the parade of the anniversary of the revolution, but also for other cases. And the parade gatherings weren't happening in the Opera Square.

This was a Tigran Petrosyan gathering which was very much patriotically linked.

National ideology was growing, the repatriates who came back from Siberia were less affected by the Soviet ideology, and were more remembering the Genocide, the threat was less.

And there were some people who were getting quite well off, the 'tsekhaviks'.

And people who were working for them.

And all the 'blatnoy' culture was also there, but it was silenced for this moment.

All that ended up in this square in 1965, was it April 22? I remember approximately, that's not so important.

That was when for the first time Armenian nation, historically for the first time, probably for centuries, because it was the center, the pseudo-statehood of Armenia, historically for the first time for centuries Armenian nation gathered in the square to make a statement, to say: we remember Genocide, to say: we are something that is quite sovereign, that requires sovereignty, that deserves sovereignty, and we can be sovereign.

That's where I end. The last point: **Levon Ter-Petrosyan, a young student at that time, was for a few days arrested during these rallies in the square. That's a very interesting point, because then he became the first president of Armenia.**

I'm done. Robert you wanted to add something?

Robert –Yeah, I have a family story that I want to put here 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 in the Opera Square. And he was telling me how the police, Armenians, the police officers didn't know what to do, because on one hand they served the Soviet state and they needed to stop what was happening, but on the other hand they were Armenians and they wanted Genocide to be recognized. And he was also telling me how the Soviets didn't trust the Armenian policemen and they appointed the Russian policeman to come and to coordinate everything, so it was very interesting time.

Gevorg –Yes, I also have a family story about my father's friend, who was in charge of the official events in the Opera building, for the commemoration, and when he saw that the population broke the doors and is moving into the Opera building, he got so agitated, and he said to the fire people... what it is called? The 'брендспойт'... there were no water cannons at that time. They had the fire extinguishers connected to these pipes to the wall. From which, you know, water would come out under pressure. He said: "Direct this water against the population". And afterwards, until the end of his life, he was feeling remorse for that action of his.

That's a very interesting story. We end here and we'll continue here about many things that happened during these times. Thank you for your attention so far.

Transcribed by Ani Babayan

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Additional reference

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.