

Armenia 3.0 Understanding 20th Century

Part 4

December 20, 2016

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan

[Video material](#)

Gevorg- This is going to be our fourth broadcast in [Armenia 3.0 series](#) and we just continue on what we were discussing beforehand. We are trying to establish a system of background ‘thick variables’, background terms and concepts to understand better today’s Armenia, and we talked a lot about the times of repression, the Stalinist times.

Well, now, this is a topic which is never ending, because there is a lot to talk about that. The first thing that comes to my mind, is that we have talked so much about the Genocide, and rightfully so. However, there was a big difference between the Genocide and the Stalinist times genocide, which was another type of genocide concerning the entire Soviet Union, but also very significantly the Armenian nation. And what is that difference: because Stalinist times genocide was more sophisticated. It is easier to explain the Ottoman Genocide via black and white explanations: Turks, Kurds, and Armenians, and Greeks one against the other, the perpetrators and the victims.

Of course, that genocide should also be studied from the perspective of who were those Armenians, who suffered, and definitely there were many people who in their life had committed a lot of mistakes, who were not very nice people etc., and they are all now sanctified in fact. And rightfully so, I think.

But during the Stalinist times genocide you can see this pattern of controversy, when **the perpetrators become victims at the next stage, where the saviors of some of the survivors are actually the perpetrators**. All these complications, there are so many stories about that. We just remembered today a story about neighbors who were living in this tenement, compartment

apartment system, where every room has one family. And one of the family is repressed, the father is killed, the wife is sent to the camps, and two children, one of them is sent to the orphanage and the other child, the daughter is taken by the woman who lived in the neighboring room.

And when the mother of this daughter returns from the camps after twenty years, she is extremely grateful to this neighbor of hers, because the neighbor woman raised that girl in a proper way, and the girl remembered her mother and knew about her mother. And ten years past, and then suddenly, already during Khrushchev times, when thaw started, the mother learns that the person who wrote the ‘donos’ was that neighbor woman. And we have a lot of stories like that.

The other thing that probably we should say before we go on is also the significance, again, the significance of the **cultural construction** that was taking place. And in some of the previous broadcasts we have already mentioned such names as Alexander Tamanyan, the architect, Alexander Myasnikyan, the political leader, and I’ll refer to that name again. There were many others: in history studies, in language studies, etc. There were all either within the Soviet ideology, or, if they deviated, they suffered, but they were all building the institutions which then became inherited by the independent Armenia. For better or for worse, in fact.

Where do we go from here? We are now, we should talk about the thaw and the 1960s and 1970s. The thaw was temporary, it was half made, but it was enough for these people, who were alienated, atomized. The only way for them to build back the fabric of the society, not the only way, but one of the ways was this ‘**tsekhavizm**’. And it was bringing about the **clan culture**, because **you were caring about your family, and your nearest and dearest, and stealing from the rest of the society**, because of the alienation, so you wouldn’t care about the society. And one of the sayings, adages of that time is very telling for that. For instance, two people are speaking, and one says: “You know this guy Armen, he is a horrible person, he is a tsekhavik, he is very rich, he is just walking over the destinies of other people around, who are extremely poor”, and the reply would be: “But **for his own family, he is a great guy**”. So, that was the approach, ‘for his own family’.

The second way of participating, in a positive way, in rebuilding the fabric of the society, of course, was this cultural construction. And when the thaw started, when Stalin's deviations from the proper 'ideal' socialist system were made overt by Khrushchev, our population of the Soviet Armenia, especially new generations tried to bring back this truncated memory. But first of all not the Stalin's times, of course, because there were still prohibited, or then became again fully prohibited from analysis, but the pre-Stalin's times, and that's why the rebellion of 1965 happened, which we have already mentioned.

But we should mention some of the important elements of this **cultural revival** which started to take place in late 1950s to mid-1960s. And it's easy to mention them while referring to the production of **Hayfilm** (Armenfilm): the only movie, cinema production company that existed for Armenians, made by Armenians, in Armenia. Created by Hamo Beknazaryan still in 1920s, but in 1950s they started to produce such films as '[Karine](#)', very important film for many reasons, the musical. And then '[The Boys of The Musical Band](#)' (*Guys from the Army Band*) almost the first film by Henrik Malyan and the '[Saroyan Brothers](#)' an extremely important film made by Frunzik Dovlatyan, almost the first film by Frunzik Dovlatyan.

One way of understanding the 20th century is to watch these films and many others which came in 60s and 70s. If they exist with English dubbing, I don't know, they exist in Armenian. Very often in Russian dubbing. The 'Saroyan Brothers' is one of the most well-known films, because it was about this story applied to the sovietization times, the story about two brothers, one of whom is Bolshevik and the other is Dashnaktsutyun member and how they have to fight each other and what happens then. Of course, it was all done from the Soviet perspective, but still. And then it's 1960s and another very important group of films appears. One was the '[We and Our Mountains](#)' based on the novel by Hrant Matevosyan, again done by Henrik Malyan, and the other was the '[Triangle](#)' based on the novel by Aghasi Ayvazyan and done by Frunzik Dovlatyan; and the third one also done by Frunzik Dovlatyan was '[Hello, it's me!](#)'.

These are amazingly significant art productions of the early 1960s. For many reasons, and we can go deeper and deeper into discussing why and how. Just one example. The 'Triangle' is about seven or so people, one of whom, at least one of whom is prosecuted during Stalin's times. At that time it was impossible to tell that story. So instead of the story of prosecution, the guy goes to the war, but people are so sad about the guy's leaving, that this, you know, not direct,

indirect message what was this about, was explainable, would come, was accessible for the public, so the public would understand what's going on in that film.

So, that was the time when censorship still existed, it was weak a little bit, then it came back very significantly, but it was the time of two discourses. Just like we were mentioning here '**second society, second reality**', there was also this **subtext reality**, the reading of the subtext of the cultural products, of newspapers, of everything. Trying to understand what does the subtext tell us. Now the funny thing is that, that it seems that this habit should have been inculcated, indoctrinated in the minds of the post-Soviet Armenian population. But very often I see it has disappeared. So, people started to simply take the texts for their face value very often.

In one way, in one sense, it is nice. These people believe institutions in the text, but on the other hand they don't live in the circumstances that this is enough. So, to read the subtexts of the texts around us, the speeches, the rhetoric, the texts, the videos, the news is crucially important. Today it is referred to as **media literacy** or **critical thinking** capacity, habit, and it's very important. So, [Eurasia Partnership Foundation](#) is doing a lot on critical thinking¹, on [media literacy](#). And what we see, is that a lot of people are inclined to naively take all of the texts for their face value. Which you could consider a naiveté, but, on the other hand, a benefit of being an independent country, where you don't have to hide your opinions. And in fact, freedom of speech still is here, despite the fact that many major media TV stations are owned by either the government or people associated with the government, but the internet is still free. So, there's a lot more freedom and direct expression; that is possible. And again you don't know if it's good or if it's bad. Because the cruel attitude to each other is very often expressed in this situation of freedom of speech and lack of necessity to somehow formulate your opinions differently.

So, as I said, there were two major ways of positively participating, and one was the 'tsekhavizm' or 'secondness', building this **second level of reality**, and the other was cultural construction, and we started to see. We saw how important culture products started to come back, and new writers and new generation of writers. I've already mentioned Perch Zeytuntsyan at some point in time, Hrant Matevosyan, Aghasi Ayvazyan and others came. And so 1960s was quite full culturally, but at the same time it was again very truncated. Why is that?

¹ [Conflict Transformation School 2015 \(Arm\)](#)
[Conflict Transformation School 2016 \(Arm\)](#)

Look! Armenfilm was one of the poor film companies in the Soviet Union, obviously provincial company essentially supported by the central state budget. It could produce only three or four films a year. So, if we take twenty or thirty years of the great times of Armenfilm from mid-50s to mid-60-70, 80s what is it? Four films 30 times, you can calculate how many it is. I am sure that the Georgian film company produced many more, because Georgia had a more privileged situation. But also, strangely enough this 'donos' culture resulted in the situation, in that, the fights for producing something good, the attempts for producing something good were being met with huge resistance by people who, as if, wanted to continue on being functioning in the Stalin's times, either for cowardice reasons or for career reasons or for mercantile reasons. But there was a huge resistance, because when this 'atomie', 'anomie' and 'anemie' reigns, when this isolation reigns, when these 'wolf's laws' reign for a while, then it's very difficult to come back to the normal, cultured relations between each other. It is difficult to become well-developed human being with the value system.

So, you had this, you know, a clash between people who wanted to make something interesting and people who would resist to that. I'll just give two examples. As you know Sergey Parajanov was put in jail for homosexuality. At that time it was a criminal offense in the Soviet Union. But everybody understood that the reason was just for talent. It was another element that was written here before: '[negative selection](#)'. When he was out of the jail, the globally significant genius figure of a film maker, equal to Fellini, Antonioni and Bergman... When he was out of the jail, he wanted to come back to Armenia.

But the Armenian government at that time, which was already the times of Demirchyan, when he was the First Secretary of the Communist Party, didn't allow him. To the contrary, Shevardnadze, who was the First Secretary in Georgia, allowed him to go back to Georgia. As you know he was born in Tbilisi and he had the house in Tbilisi, so he was *Tiflisahay (Georgian-Armenian from Tbilisi)*. So, Parajanov went to Tbilisi and he made another film, another genius film '[The Legend of the Suram Fortress](#)'. And he didn't make any film in Armenia since the '[Sayat Nova](#)', since his only film, which was made in Armenian studio, in Armenfilm, since '[The Color of Pomegranate](#)' (another title for the 'Sayat Nova' film). That's just one example of a cowardice, which could be done differently, of lack of state thinking.

Another example I found very recently, which was circulating, is still circulating in the Internet. It's a story by Chingiz Guseynov, who is an Azerbaijani national, but lived his entire life in Moscow. He is a representative of Russian culture, actually a writer, critic, and he is very old today, and he was an important figure in the Union of Writers in Soviet Union in Moscow in 1960s. And he is telling the story of how the late wife, the widow of Charents came to 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 divorces 'the enemy of the people', the way Charents was declared. So, she was prosecuted as well, and her children were also sent to the orphanage, and she spent 20 years or 15 years or so in the exile, and then she couldn't prove that she was a widow of Charents. So, she didn't have any rights to live somewhere, to have a passport, etc.

And Chingiz Guseynov was surprised that Armenians wouldn't help her in Armenia, and he made it so that she met with Mikoyan. And Mikoyan, who is an extremely controversial figure, as you know, one of the major figures of Stalin's times and Brezhnev's times in the Soviet power, he actually helped her.

So, he is writing from pretty much an Azerbaijani perspective: 'Look! These Armenians in Armenia, they couldn't even help, because it was not just a matter of apartment, but she was also married when she was in exile, she married a Buryat, which is a Turkic nation representative'. They said, imagine, that. She who decided that she didn't accept the divorce with Charents. They said, people in Armenia, in Soviet Armenia that she has betrayed the memory of Charents, if she became married to this Buryat person, with whom she divorced after all. Imagine that. So they wouldn't want her to come back, but because of the pressure of Mikoyan then they found some nicer people in higher position in Armenia who agreed to take care of Izabella somehow; and then she died very early.

It's a very tragic story, but these are the examples where, you could imagine, that if it was a quasi-state, if it's a pseudo-state, and it's not the worst times, it's no more the genocide of Stalinist times, you should behave differently. But, no! There were many, many examples when instead of a statesman's level of approach you would see this very, very sad approach to many issues. The same way with films. Many films which were going to be the best, were prohibited, didn't happen, were maimed, because censorship would say that the film which is three hours long, and it's great, should become one hour long. Every interesting moment should be removed

from that. Many people in the Union of Writers or among the filmmakers, Union of Cinematographers, they just stopped making an attempt to be different, to create something significant, because that was the culture which was being indoctrinated.

So, it was a fight, it was a struggle, and we are very fortunate that we still have the 'Triangle', we still have the 'Hello, it's me', which was, by the way, made via Moscow Studio, as well. We have the writers, we have, whatever happened, we have Paruyr Sevak, we have Minas Avetisyan.

And the other element, important element was that the great people tended to cooperate with each other. Again, look: Hrant Matevosyan's scenario - Henrik Malyan's film; Aghasi Ayvazyan's scenario - Frunzik Dovlatyan's film; Parajanov and his 'The Color of Pomegranate' - cooperated with Minas Avetisyan. So, people were trying to build these amazing constellations, amazing talents to help each other out somehow, to push through this resistance, to create that great cultural value that today seems the highest achievement of Armenian culture of the 20th century. Also because we didn't know much what was created in the diaspora at that time, or in other places of Armenian residence.

Because the other element of this entire element... Why I am referring to this trunk, which is no more on the table, but I'll draw this again, this is a trunk of the tree, okay? The 20th century trunk of Armenia... The other element in this situation is niches, becoming niches of knowledge, having stories, no unification between the stories, no common ground, and **compartmentalization** of discourses, of narratives, if you want a very sophisticated term. So, it's like the joke which was circulating in the Soviet times, when somebody goes to become a member of Communist Party and he is a trader in the 'shuka', in the market. And they say: 'Do you know who is that?' And if you know in the Soviet times Marx, Engels and Lenin and their portraits were in every office room. So, they show Marx and say 'you know who is that guy?' And he says, no! And they show Engels and say, 'do you know who this guy is?' He says, no! And then he says: but do you know who is Saqo. No! Do you know who is Karpis? No! 'Well, you see, I have my own company of market traders and you have your own company.'

So, very similar to that situation, we have a compartmentalization of knowledge, which is not being brought together to one picture, which is very important. But this is a very complex problem, because it is not only happening, it is not only referable to the Armenian discourse. It's

a global, it's an element of global crisis. So, we have **the global crisis which is adding to the post-Soviet crisis and adding to the Armenian national crisis**. And we see that it will take some very significant methodological efforts to bring together these niche discourses.

And what is a niche discourse? Again, if we refer to that joke I just was telling about. People who have suffered from the Stalinist times, they keep in their discourse the stories about these sufferings. People who haven't suffered, who have benefited in the Stalinist times, they keep in their discourse the positive stories about these times. And **there is no bridging discourse**, and these people exist in their niches and they never interact, and they never interact in such a way which contributes to building a joint discourse.

The scholarship, even if there are some great studies, is not known, because it is compartmentalized. Academy of Sciences works for its own interest and benefit, writers for their own, nobody reads scholarly work. And that's why we are making this broadcast essentially, trying to somehow, in a sketchy way, to set up the possibility for this joint discourse. The national mythology, the national ideology is not even referring to these entire stories. It is only referring to the fact that since 1965 people started to fight for national cause. And what was this fight? Even though this was very important, positive step of people coming together and starting the public movements in Armenia, essentially, but what was the key for them to come? What was the **ideological basis**? It was **referring to the past**.

At that time it was very important, because you had to re-establish the connection with the past, with the Genocide. But in the situation where so much 'anomie', 'anemie' and 'atomie' has taken place, only the national discourse, only the national mythology, directed to the past, is becoming the essence of the uniting ideology for people. 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. And that was also very much connected with this (second reality), because **it was lacking the recognition of the second society**, it was lacking the recognition of many people who made 'donoses'. It was lacking, you know, the attitude towards lustration. **It was lacking the desire to understand what was really happening, why did it happen and what is the real negative effect of all these processes that took place in Armenia**, on the Armenian nation and its perspectives.

Well, I think I have been, I have set up this part. Now, again, what is the important lesson to be drawn from that all?

Any, any thoughts about that? Anybody wants to say something? Please!

Robert – I have a short comment. In my opinion when we talk about the history of Armenia, Armenians in 20th century, it's important to also talk about World War II and how they call it in Soviet Union 'Великая Отечественная Война', Great Patriotic War, and the difference between those two wars. Because, as we know, in the Soviet Union people celebrated not the victory in the World War II, but the victory in the Great Patriotic War. There are also some interesting issues connected with that, and it is also connected with history of Armenia, and what could have happened if Stalin approved the aggression against Turkey. Because, it was also talked about, during the Soviet Union, that we could have, Armenia could have liberated its historical territories, if Stalin would approve and take against Turkey who was allied with Germany during the World War II. And how some districts were, some officials even were appointed in Western Armenian districts, Soviet officials. I think not many people know about it, but it actually happened. Yes, that was it.

Mikayel – There are several things I just wanted to talk about, to mention. One thing I would like to add is, again in order to understand, for example, the difference between Yerevan and Moscow, Yerevan and Kiev. It is the difference between the center and the periphery, to some extent, in Soviet Union. And in this respect Armenia, Georgia, Baltic states, to some extent, were lucky to be a periphery, because they were given much more chances to have, to be more focused on the second reality, let's say, to put more content into that second reality. So, and this is why Sergey Parajanov, Minas Avetisyan existed in Soviet Armenia, Soviet Georgia, etc. This is why they were able and they were given an opportunity to work and produce.

The second thing I wanted to mention is basically the compliance to the tradition, as the times passed after the Stalin repressions, the demand gradually transformed into tradition. I'll give one example to explain more clearly what I mean. For example, reference to Lenin's, Engels', Marx's works in any kind of publication was obligatory up till the end of the Soviet Union. But initially it was obligatory because there was a need to connect ideologically whatever intellectual product is produced, but afterwards it gradually became simply a ritual. And when it became a

ritual, again, some freedom in composing thoughts appeared, if you would comply with the existing established tradition. But gradually, **since you basically started to put content in a tradition, a content that was opposite to that tradition, it basically started to ruin that tradition from inside**. That's, that's to some extent also how Soviet Union collapsed.

And finally the last thing I wanted to say, is the incoherence, incoherence of the reality with the methodological picture, because, again, that is another reason why the Soviet Union collapsed. **The more it went, the less coherence there was between the mythological picture of what Soviet Union is and the reality in which people were living**. And eventually in 1980, when the 'perestroika' started actually, because it, what was '[perestroika](#)'? 'Perestroika' was **renaming** everything once again. So, when you rename everything, it means that you reevaluate everything. And when you do that, you understand that there's a significant incoherence between how it was named before and the reality it represented. So, that is another process, basically which was described to some extent during this talk, as well.

Gevorg – Yeah, very true, on this ritualization of the Soviet discourse in the 1960s, there is a very good research, in fact, not one, but one that I now have in mind. I don't remember the name of the author, but will provide the link to that in the transcript². It is studying the Komsomol, 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. But that was very important and interesting thing again, was the deepening alienation between this ritual versus the reality.

Now, but the methodological complexity is that there was a reality, of course, but **the third part of this situation was growing, it was the *second mythology***. So, there was the official Soviet mythology, and the other mythology which was being built, and it was the **national mythology**. And there was **the third, the non-mythologized and not named, the 'real' reality**, which was the basis, not described, the basis for people to behave. Which was, of course, determining the real behavior of people. This national ideology is very important also because, for instance, many cultural products like films or literature works were being prohibited at the level of national Communist Party with diagnosis, you know, with the line which said 'it is not patriotic enough'. It was not nationalist enough for Armenian national cause. Very interesting kind of. So

² <http://www.representations.org/alexei-yurchaks-everything-was-forever-nominated-for-russias-prosvetitel-prize/>

the Communist Party ideologues, who were residing over the Soviet Armenia starting from 1960s, were using the Communist Party power to censor the discourse, so that it is more nationalistic.

That's why, for instance, [Karen Gevorgyan](#)'s film 'Farewell Beyond Border', or something like that, has been prohibited³, it never was finished, and it was just destroyed. Whereas, such films as '[Nahapet](#)' were allowed to come in. So, in a simplistic way, referring to the nationalist ideology, now was considered, by not only the local Armenian Soviet power, but also in Moscow, beneficial. Particularly maybe for the reasons, for a kind of the reasons that you were mentioning: because it was important for anti-Turkish sentiment to be indoctrinated in Armenia, because it was bordering Turkey, NATO. So for the Soviet Union, it was very, kind of, beneficial to have this anti-Turkey emotion, sentiment grown and fully ready in Armenia. Just in case. Though the first time it didn't happen, but who knows how it can be used afterwards.

Just a moment, so I don't forget the way I was leading this argument to. Yeah. So many times, like the works of Hrant Matevosyan, or in many other cases, when stuff, which was, strangely enough, outside the average level, was interesting, important, significant, was able to come to the scene in Armenia, thanks to the fact that it was approved by Moscow. So, people would go via Moscow. Some of the literary works were first published in Russian, in Russian translation, in a Soviet level print house and only then their publication in Armenian was allowed. Very interesting juggling between the two levels of censorship for the cultural survivors who wanted to make their work known. Please, Mikayel.

Mikayel – Just in continuation of what you were saying about this using the national, nationalist thematic, because of the existence of NATO member Turkey on the border. In addition to that it was also accompanied by the opposing of Russians with Turks, and Russia's role for Armenians as saviors in the danger that was coming from the West, from Turkey. But generally speaking also from the West. So this was one thing. And another thing, coming back to this allowing / not allowing of certain texts, of certain hidden texts to exist. It was also, in my opinion, to some extent, technical, because their mission of [Homo Sovieticus](#) was failed. Sometimes it was very hard to translate from the national second language to the official language, to understand that there's a hidden language, because there was significant cultural difference. And here again this

³ <http://gtergab.com/en/news/publicism/karen-gevorgyan/28/>

periphery and center issue worked very significantly. So, the center didn't understand the second language of the periphery because of the cultural difference, and that's how it existed and could survive.

Gevorg –Thank you, Mikayel. Though I should add to that, because it is very complex thing, how did the Soviet Union function? And what comes to my mind. Of course there are many books about that, but particularly what comes to my mind is, for instance, [Mark Saroyan](#)'s work (Mark Saroyan, *Beyond the Nation-State: Culture and Ethnic Politics in Soviet Transcaucasia*), which exists in English and has been conceived in English. There are some other treatises on the analysis of the historical appearance of reborn, rebirth of nationalism in the Soviet culture, usually referred to the World War II, when Stalin allowed church to come back and allowed national discourse to come back to strengthen the capacity of people to resist. And since then it was coming back, when it comes to. However, one element of this mechanism, as you say, there were capable of reading behind the lines when it was translated into Russian. But there was also even more sophisticated approach, which is again very pertinent to understand as a mechanism for today. Because *in Moscow they had that interest in having this or that kind of, if not political opposition, which was prohibited, but an opposition discourse*. And if you look at the dissident movement of Armenians, of course, they were all, almost none of them were like Russian or Soviet dissidents. Because they weren't fighting for their primary cause, their fight was not the democratization of the Soviet Union, but was the national course, they were fighting for Armenian national independence essentially, like Paruyr Hayrikyan. But they were prosecuted.

Well, there was this discourse, which was very nationalistic in Armenia, exemplified by highest levels in the government, which was referring to the nationalist cause. But it was condoned or supported from Moscow, because it was, as you said, it was about the fact that '*Russians are our saviors, so we should be nationalistic against Turks and, later on, against Azerbaijanis*'. But '*Russia is the only supporter and savior, and we should also be nationalistic against the West*', that was a part of that ideology, of course.

So, there is also all this interplay between different possibilities and opportunities. One of the major events, of course, was publication of some books after 1965 about the Genocide. The

compendium of materials about the Genocide⁴, done by the Academy of Sciences; [John Kirakosyan](#)'s books, one or two, or three. The opening up of the discourse of the scientific, historical study of the Ottoman Turkey and all of the stuff that happened there. And it was, of course, all done with reference to Marxism, etc., and with approval of the Moscow censorship. Now, how was it? Out of ten such ideas, one was approved by Moscow. So it would be materialized. No more than that. Partly because Moscow wanted to govern, *to select and rule*, so to speak, and partly because there were not many ideas. Because people were, as I said, people weren't courageous enough to come up with ideas to study such things.

But the most important thing that I want to finish this broadcast with. It's quite a sad thing, but it's important to know, to understand the future of the nation; which is, again, referring to something that Mikayel was saying. He was saying that in the 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 the Soviet power would take them to Moscow or to St. Petersburg and they would either start living there or travelling back and forth. They were all singular cases, many of them were extremely, cruelly prosecuted like poet Brodsky, etc. But still the fact that Parajanov was able to materialize his talent, to implement his talent, even to the level that he did. Unfortunately, we should recognize, that it was done in the resistance vis-à-vis the Armenian, a major part of Armenian power holders, and this false nationalist discourse, this Russia or Soviet sponsored nationalist discourse. It was thanks to his energy, a person who was born in Tiflis, who made his career in Moldova and then in Kiev and then in Armenia, and then was put in jail, and then in Tbilisi, and then made the last film, which was made in Azerbaijan, and was about Azerbaijani legend '[Ashik Kerib](#)', which is very interesting story to tell, to finish today's broadcast.

Parajanov said once that 'I have made three films for three great nations of South Caucasus, for Georgians the 'The Legend of the Suram Fortress', for Armenians 'The Color of Pomegranate', and for Azerbaijanis 'Ashik Kerib''; which came to the screens in 1988, when it was already the times of the movement in Armenia. In Armenia it came to the screens in 1988, and no echo, no reaction to that film took place in the Armenian society at all.

⁴ <http://www.genocide.ru/lib/nersisyan/genocide.htm>

But I'll tell you another story that I have heard with my own ears, told by Parajanov, because he was a great joker, as we all know. So when he came to show his film, a small film, a short film, done again in Georgia, about Pirosmeni, Pirosmenishvili. He was a Georgian primitivist artist, a great artist, who was by origin he was Armenian. And Parajanov, in his cavalier-like style, tells this story, this way, he says... It's 1987ish, the cinema house of Yerevan, which is now, has become a big building, and at the time very nice, interesting structure of 1970s architecture. He says 'this film was ordered, was paid for, was sponsored by the British Queen'. I don't know how true is that, by the way. Maybe. So (he says): 'She called me up and said: "Seryozha, I want you to make the film about Pirosmeni, so that eventually I understand he was Armenian or Georgian". And Parajanov (jokingly) replies: 'I made everything to demonstrate to her that Pirosmeni was Azerbaijani'.

Well, that was very much contrary to this brewing, growing nationalist discourse in Armenia at that time. And by the way there's nothing in this film referring to Azerbaijanis, but I think the message he was trying to make is that he is a figure like Sayat Nova, who transcends cultures, who is for all of the cultures, who is with the cultures of South Caucasus; and that it is stupid to build this compartmentalized nationalist discourses.

Anyway, thank you very much, we will go on for other broadcasts soon.

Transcribed by Ani Babayan

Transcription completed on January 23, 2017