

## **Armenia 3.0. Understanding 20th Century.**

### **Part 5**

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#### **Video material**

**Gevorg** – Hello again. This is going to be our fifth broadcast in the series of [Armenia 3.0](#). And, however it may sound boring, but I am going to continue on what I was talking about the first time. Meaning: a mixture of telling stories about the 20<sup>th</sup> century Armenia and setting up some conceptual framework to understand the next stage of Armenia. And we have, in our audience, more or less the same people, who will intervene as usual, whenever they feel like they can add something. And maybe some newer people as well, and we'll see how it goes.

The reason why I want to continue from last time is because there were some issues that we didn't discuss fully. As you remember, I used some concepts, which have quite significant explanatory power for me. Such as 'atomie', 'anomie' and 'anemie' and some others. But we discussed to a certain extent 'atomie' and 'anomie'. The best illustration of 'anomie', for me, is the wiping out, the extermination of anybody and everybody who was different from the average, from the ordinary – intellectuals, creative people, scientists, scholars, academics, writers, artists, painters, etc.: intelligentsia. Which means there was a big poverty in explaining things, even if the censorship existed. But within the censorship chapeau, within the censorship umbrella people who were more outstanding, could be capable of explaining or expressing more outstanding ideas, explanations of the situation.

So there were less such people left, so there were less such explanations because of Stalin's times. For 'atomie' again, uprooting, the Genocide first and then the Stalin's times comes when people are pitched against each other. In both cases very important has been the culture of 'donos', which I already referred to. I may say a few more words about this because this is the most amazing thing. And in one of my previous broadcasts I was already saying that it is very interesting to study the self-confessions, the confessions, the false confessions of people who were taken to custody or during the trial times.

But also I want to say that I have experienced this personally, for instance, in the United States. So this is not something only confined to the Soviet culture but there are some important differences. In the United States I was taken to custody because a woman, who was a volunteer police supporter, it was 1995, she complained to police that I was yelling, screaming at my children. And I was screaming at my children, but the reason, the only reason was that they were screaming, so I was trying to calm them down, and probably not in the right way. But so this woman reported to the police and I was taken to the police. It was Ohio, and the police officer very soon let me out, he understood the story. He said that he himself sometimes yelled at his children, and at his grandchildren as well, so he was very understanding. And probably he recently, I hope he is alive and well, he is probably one of those who voted for Donald Trump, I would assume.

I think this is important because every time when this power of allegation is used unfairly, I think it contributes to the shaking of the entire system of values on which liberal western democracy is being built. And, of course, the Soviet system, at least on the surface, in the way it was written down, interpreted by nice humanistic, humanitarian people, humanistically inclined people, the Soviet system had a lot of these liberal values. And we even know that some of the laws that were adopted during the first period of the Soviet system were pretty positive and pretty liberal. But at the same time they may be even radically liberal, like this abandoning of the marriage institution for a while, which took place, etc. But very often it degenerated, deteriorated into this culture of false allegations, of torturing people, of killing people, extrajudicial killings and the Gulag camps. So of course that contributes to 'atomie'. Women, wives had to abandon their husbands, had to give a notice that they agree that their husband is 'the enemy of the people', or vice versa. Children had to abandon their parents, denounce their parents, declare that they agree that their parents were 'enemies of the people'. Children were taken to orphanages.

So this was atomizing everything. And when I was talking about this, and when I said that Khrushchev's times were somehow nicer and there were some positive elements, that existed all the time, but also became even very important during the **thaw** and the 1960s. It was, I mentioned two thick variables, one of them was kind of a '**cultural and intellectual construction**', in addition to also, of course, '**industrial construction**' and all kinds of construction. But the other was the movement of '**tsekhaviks**', which actually contributed to rebuilding of the societal fabric, in a certain way, via the strengthening of family and clan ties. And this is very important, because from family, from immediate small family, which

was quite small because of the atomized society, it somehow reverted to a more ancient archetype, which existed in many Soviet nations, among Armenians as well, to clan. And I even referred to the adage, which says “for his family he is a nice man”.

So, and very often these ties are called ‘**horizontal ties**’. And if we jump now to today, we are saying that in the situation of many dysfunctional state institutions these horizontal ties are very important, which help people to survive. I just had experienced that yesterday, my Baxi, which is the gas thing, what is it called, the mechanism, which provides gas heating in the apartment, collapsed. I called three instances: the state institution; a very expensive business, which is built for Spyrqahays (diaspora Armenians), for foreigners who agree to pay very big money; and somebody, whose number, whose telephone number was provided to me by Mikayel here. So it is the horizontal tie, the horizontal connection. Out of these three, only the third one was ready to come the same day rather than to put me in a queue and let my mother get cold because the apartment couldn’t be heated. So, horizontal ties are considered something crucial. If you are looking for a doctor, you better ask around, among your friends and family, who can be that trusted doctor who to go to, or medical institution.

This is very important, this exists in every society. But if you are having only that, if you are having only horizontal ties, if you are having only clan... And in this **cultural construction** there is a lot of this fight between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ forces, between kind of progressive forces and regressive forces, about which we were again talking last time a lot... Something is lacking to counterbalance these tendencies. If in this cultural construction the culture of ‘donos’ is very much rooted, then you have a problem in building the society.

What is this problem? Last time, again, I said that there was this big gap between, on one hand, society, power and state: a unity. State and power were united, and society within the state ideology was united with them as well. And on the other hand, in between is the rest of this atomized society or this society connected only via the family ties, via the horizontal ties.

So what is lacking here? What should be the connection? Of course, the connection is the **community**, the concept of **community**. This concept of community, you know, from Weber’s times, ‘Gemeinschaft’ (*community*) and ‘Gesellschaft’ (*society*). So this is ‘Gesellschaft’, I put here the letter Z, and this is a ‘Gemeinschaft’ (*writing the letter M on the whiteboard*). So, this was the biggest sufferer, and this is something upon which the real societies should be built. Societies, in an ideal sense, should be built on participation of individuals in their communities as a result of which eventually they become the society. So,

that is why **atomized society, plus clan, plus some of the ideological, intellectual, creative input was not enough**. That's why there was a big gap seen at this level.

And if we are looking at Armenian literature, for instance, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we can see the situation where the community voluntarily, because of its adages, because of its traditions, is persecuting the individual. And if we are looking at the post-Soviet Armenian literature, we can see the same tendency when people are writing about their childhood, about the Soviet times, about particularly the peasants' life, life of the villages. You can see the same situation, when the community is persecuting the individual because of the traditions and adages. Levon Khechoyan, for instance, Hrant Matevosyan, and we know that this is kind of, again, general issue, universal issue, all over the Earth. We know that William Faulkner was persecuted in his community for his writings. Sherwood Anderson was persecuted, Henry Miller was persecuted, and in Russia we had the same situation.

What does it mean? That means that this community is as alienated from an extraordinary individual, as this entire society with its state, power; society is kind of this foreign, alien power which is being imposed on human beings. So community, kind of, tends to unite with this. And what we have then. What is the biggest problem? What is the real problem? It's not the suffering of the extraordinary individual, which is a problem as well. But it is pretty similar to the fate of Faulkner or Henry Miller, meaning that they will eventually overcome if they are strong personalities. Or if it is similar to the problems a child experiences in a school class if there is no very significant bullying there, but there is this peer pressure. People go through that and they survive it. But **what was the biggest problem, was the incapacity for collective action**, if we are taking the community as our unit of reference.

This is a very famous, again, thesis, from neo-institutional theory, from political science and social sciences. The issue, the problem of collective action, the desire for a free ride, the incapacity to organize the collective action. The fact that **transaction costs for organizing collective action cost more; are perceived, are regarded as more significant than the end result of this organizing, the positive effects expected from this organizing**.

So that was the problem, and in the post-Soviet times we saw that problem just overwhelmingly covering everything. That is the problem, the classical cases that we experience. And again it is my personal experience. I live in such a tenement building, an apartment building where people are incapable of uniting to pay for the lift's electricity. So this is a small common good relevant for all the people, who live in three apartments per

floor. And it is nine floors, so only for twenty one (should be seven) families, they have to unite for the electricity bill, for the lift, which serves them all.

But they cannot. Why? Because those who live on the first floor say “we don’t need the lift” and those who live on the ninth floor say “well, we will pay only the part that the lift comes to our floor, if the 1<sup>st</sup> floor is not paying, we disagree to pay a fair share divided to eight at all”. So, and I am saying, “Okay, let me pay for everybody”, you know, and they disagree with that as well because they say “it is unfair, you cannot pay, we don’t want us to feel indebted to you.”

So, a very funny phenomenon. It took ages for us to overcome that. We found a way. But in that case we did find the way because it was a very important need for the people who live on the upper floors to have the lift functioning. But in the case of, for instance, installing the, what is it called, the numerical code on the entrance door, not to allow anybody to enter, and, you know, use it as a toilet, we are still not able to do that.

So this is the problem, **the problem of collective action of a community**. How to unite to do something together, because of the transaction costs and the overheads for that. The fact that you need a leader who spends much more time on organizing these people. And **better if it is the leader from inside, because the leader from outside, imposed by the upper structure, disempowers these people. (In such a case) they behave based on a rational calculus, either agreeing or disagreeing to comply. As long as they feel that they can deviate, they deviate. If they feel that they have to comply, they comply. But they do not acquire the capacity for building this fabric of people capable of collective action.**

So I think this is one of the key issues, which is defining Armenia today, and not only (Armenia). Again, as I said, it is very well-known from many sociological, social research materials. But essentially, this is a kind of very typical situation for post-Soviet states, and also for Armenia. And a lot of reforms are meeting this issue, a lot of reforms, reform projects are devoted to setting up this capacity for collective action, to establishing these systems for collective action. And it is not going well enough, and it is not a very straightforward route. Please, Rob, you want to say something.

**Rob** – I have a question. How this issue was being solved in the Soviet times?

**Gevorg** – As I said... that is an easy answer, because, as I said, there was no need in that. That was ruined, the power of community in the Soviet times was ruined at every possible

level and in every possible sense of the community. You had clans and family community, which is not really a community because it is based on the blood ties first of all. You might have mafia, which is again the deteriorated version, the degenerated version of a community. But you didn't have the real community. In the school class, to go to the Saturday work, so called Subbotnik (շաբաթօրյակ), it was a requirement imposed from above. So you would go if you were forced to, otherwise you wouldn't go. This feeling of, you know, what was described in the early Soviet years in [Gaydar](#)'s work, for instance, 'Timur and his team'. When young people are going out to make something nice, and on that this entire 'pioneer' movement was built, the scout's version, the boy scout, the girl scout version of the Soviet Union: this was all absent in real terms. There might be some accidental communities, but as a culture, this was absent. So it was usually either coming, the order coming from an alienated structure, or organization as a clan, or organization as a mafia, for instance.

Now in these cultural institutions you had, by accident, teams: in cultural, scientific institutions. If the leader is good, then for a while there is this good team here. When the leader goes, the leader is gone, another leader comes, and it all collapses. My mother experienced it very well. She was working in the Armenfilm studio. They had different heads of the editors' department. So in 1960s it was fine, in 1970s it was fine, it came 1980s, one of her very well-advanced, pretty well-known colleagues became the head... he got an advance in career, became the head of that department. He behaved differently, in a more cowardly way, and the entire department collapsed. And since then this department never really properly functioned: many people left, new people came, but it was already the end of the Soviet Union, so the Armenfilm was going to collapse.

And I have many such examples, like, I don't know, [Fadey Tachatich Sargsyan](#) working as the head of the Physics Institute. At that time he was extremely positive and most of the successes, or the identifiable elements of successes of the Physics Institute, the culture of physicists, their relations, the famous 'Cheryomushki', the [Ajapnyak](#), the culture, the cinema house where the (foreign) films were being demonstrated, etc., it all was set up during that time. He was gone - it continued on, as if, but there was no more this leadership.

So it was very much individual leader dependent. And because these connections (between different institutions with accidentally, ad hoc good leadership) couldn't be established, it wasn't becoming a cultural difference. Every time when the leader changed, this (the institution and its network) is out of the picture. Connections are absent, so you are just

experiencing the feeling of, you know, pessimism, that again one structure, which existed, collapsed. And it would be infrequent for a good leader to be replaced by another good leader, and to be replaced by another good leader. It was, the culture was not like that. It was not really happening, good leaders were usually an exclusive case.

You could say that it is the same, again, all over the world. But there is this difference because this community feeling, which is, for instance, so typical for the western hemisphere, northwestern part, like America, United States and Canada. So far. I don't know what will happen next. But so far we know that people in the community gather, they resolve issues, and you can have different shapes and types of this community: professional community, territorial community, that type of community, the other type of community.

But there is this **feeling of community. In this culture of the Soviet Union, it was very significantly absent.** And other examples that we have already used over this time also illustrate that. For instance, the fact that writers, obviously, were not supported by their peers, and by the editors, and by the translators of Armenia itself. So they often had to apply to Moscow to pass the (local) censorship and, kind of, to acquire power to be legitimized by the Soviet system. After which they could be, they could publish their work in Armenia, etc., kind of passing through obstacles created by their own peers, so to speak. Same with almost every area of activism. So there was this issue, very significant. If we are done with that part, I'll move to the next part.

So now, very roughly put, what happens next: Soviet Union collapses, Armenia becomes independent, it is all inherited more or less. Of course, last time we talked about the national ideology. We mentioned two types of ideology starting to compete, one this (tripartite concept: society, power and state) – totally formal, the other, another (also) quite mythologized ideology: national ideology. Which was perhaps slightly closer to people, also because it could oppose the official socialist ideology. So, if there was a clash here (between socialist and nationalist ideologies), more or less, so sometimes they would get into each other; but it (the national ideology) was used by free thinkers, intellectuals, etc., to promote, to advance their anti-official ideology.

So we had **two false consciousnesses**, if you wish – one (the national ideology) less false but still quite false, because very much past-oriented and history-oriented, without much knowledge of real history, and without having methods to study this real history.

But still some work was done by historians, even now, when we are looking for a good publication about the Genocide, for instance, we usually refer to the work which was published in 1983 by [Nersisyan and Sahakyan](#), because it is a compendium of documents rather than a rhetoric of the historian who is telling the stories. Just as an example. So some work was being done there, but there were two false consciousnesses against one reality.

And now, what happens as a result of that? Of course, the one thing that happens is a lack of real stories. So we have a lack of real stories about that part of the history, of history, as well as lack of real stories about the rest of history, of course. We have gaps in real stories, but there is still quite a lot of stories produced. So one problem is that they haven't been studied, but the other problem is that there were less of them produced at that time, and less of them produced about that time afterwards. So we have lack of stories and we have even bigger lack of stories about the next period, since 1988, as we all know. In that situation... Mikayel, I'll give you a chance to speak.

In that situation some of the significant products of that time become again mythologized and acquire more significance (and rightly so) than otherwise. For instance, the sovietization time is expressed in a film by Frunze Dovlatyan, '[Myasnikyan](#)', produced in 1970s. A wonderful film, I suggest everybody to watch it. It exists in Armenian and Russian, I don't know if it exists in English or not. Which tells about Alexander Myasnikyan coming to the Soviet, newly Sovietized Armenia, and dealing with all of the crises that we talked about. Of course, it's done from the Soviet perspective, but it's a wonderful work by Frunze Dovlatyan. And there is nothing to compare, there is nothing to put next to it, to say "Okay, we are challenging it." Neither the Diaspora in Spyurq, the Dashnaktsutyun Party, nor in the post-Soviet times anybody has produced such a significant video myth, video mythology about that time of sovietization. There is almost no evidence about that time. The scholars who are studying that issue maybe have written quite a lot, especially in the Soviet times and from the Soviet perspective. But their work is not very worthwhile, because it was written in heavily, from heavily ideological perspective. So it has to be studied, reevaluated, restudied today or over the last 25 years, which is almost not being done. Very little stuff is being studied about that time. Please, Mikayel.

**Mikayel** – I just wanted to add one more component that I think is missing from here, because we are basically talking about, you mentioned 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.



And basically the basis for both are quite clear, in one case it is family, clan, etc., and the other case it is the whole Soviet system, the power, state, etc.

But we also have here the individuals, subcultures and marginalized entities, which basically is the prototype for the liberal, again yet fake at that period of time, identity. So I think that addition would complete this whole picture of different kinds of segmented identities.

**Gevorg** – Absolutely, you are absolutely correct. And I think it was even our first or second broadcast, when you weren't here, that we talked about that; we now have to summarize and bring it back to the picture. We talked about subcultures, and we mentioned 'rabiz', we mentioned hippie subculture, we mentioned a lot of such appearances, among which also 'tsekhavizm' as a subculture. So, indeed, the very ubiquity, the very variety, the very amount of this growing, small scale subcultures, like also '[stilyaga](#)' movement, etc., was already an indication of democratizing the public space. Indeed, that is very true.

So that was coming to somehow counterbalance this heritage of atomized society. And indeed these were the seeds, or the embryos, of establishing a well-connected public space.

Why was it happening? I just want to say, why was it happening? Because Armenia and Soviet Union were, to a certain extent, opening up to the external world, information space was being transpierced by information flows. And last time we also mentioned the difference about the provinces and the mainland. And I should say that this is very important, because in the provinces information space was more transpierceable. Why? In the case of Armenia - because of the Diaspora, because of the repatriates, because of the families that were there, some people were able to travel back and forth, and bring blue jeans with them, or the Beatles vinyl discs and all that stuff. But I have seen it also in other places of the Soviet Union. I have seen it, for instance, in Ajaria, in Batumi. I have seen it in the Baltic states. In the country on the seashore, in the country which has a port, Odessa, this was more happening for obvious reason, because ships would come and bring some elements from the external world.

- [Fartsovshchiks](#).

- Exactly, but 'speculation' (see below) is a different thing, again very much connected with the second society and stuff, when blue jeans was sold for 200 rubles, which was an extremely high, high level full salary, yes. And, you know, many artists, who had connections with the external world, had relatives there, would bring clothes from the west and sell them for a big price, and they would be called 'speculant' from the word 'speculate', and they

would make a lot of money to survive, to do their art work, but that was bad. Why? That had a very negative element in it, because **'conscience'**, especially for a Christian by origin community and society, is something important. So if you are selling something which costs 20 dollars for 200 rubles, which meant 200+ dollars, in fact; illegally, even if illegality is against this **false legality**, so to speak, - you cannot feel comfortable yourself. So you cannot be straightforward, so that affects the quality of your art, if you are an artist who is that way making money to then survive. You wanted to add something.

**Mikayel** – And just one more thing. Since we're approaching 80s and the movement, etc. (About) the one of these three entities or identities we talked about. Since the dominant was the power, state, socialist, etc., based on the opposition, these two – the nationalist and the liberal – and the wave of the collapse of the Soviet Union, to some extent united, and it is very much visible in all these movements that took place in Baltic states, in South Caucasus, etc. Because those who were the national movement freedom fighters in small province states of the Soviet Union, were also the liberal ideology carriers, and it is basically happening in all these first parts that separated from the Soviet Union.

And another thing that is not, to that extent, connected to what we have talked about, is also the issue that existed between the generations – the issue of 'fathers and children', parents and children, because there was also some gap in that terms. The ideological gap, which is connected with lots of things. First of all, there was these parents who have seen the war or post-war period, and they have much stronger connection to this joint state and much more genuine feeling of the ideology, etc., and the children who are much more cynical in that respect. So there is also, the more it went, the bigger that gap between these two generations happened. And probably that is also a fertile soil for these seeds of other identities to develop, and basically it also contributed to this whole process of collapse of the Soviet Union.

**Gevorg** – Yeah, I just want to coin, write down the word **'cynicism'**, so that we don't forget. Because what was very visible, and also in the change of the generations, you remember we talked about that in the change of rulers' generations, from what was it, from Zarubyan, to Kochinyan, to Demirchyan, the level of cynicism would increase. For instance, my father's worldview, who was born in 1925, was extremely anti-cynical, my mother's worldview was more relaxed, but still my generation, or even older than me people's generation worldview, whom I was encountering, was extremely cynical.

Now I will give you an example. When we entered the university, it is 1980, September 1, after passing the entry exams. It is the Oriental Studies Department, an elite department, and, according to some rumors, also quite corrupt, but at the same time led by a famous, for me, leader, Mary Kochar, who herself wasn't at all corrupt. So, there were rumors about it. And September 1, we are 16-17-year-old boys, and we go to the boys' toilet to smoke. And we are standing in such a circle, and smoking, and we are getting to know each other, we are starting to acquaint with each other in this new class. And one of us who looked like a big boy says: "Okay, now we are ourselves, tell us, tell me, please, everybody, who paid how much to get to this department?" I hadn't paid anything. But you can say that I get through thanks to the fact that Mary Kochar was a very close person to our family. I got my grades to get in the University based on a fair exam, they didn't lower my grades, so they didn't attack me personally because they knew that I was Mary's protégé. And some people said different things, but this guy who asked the question, he says, "Well, don't kid me. It costs 35.000 rubles. In Medical University it costs 40.000 rubles, in Iravabanakan (in Law Department) it costs 30.000 rubles, and for Oriental Studies 35.000 rubles, my father paid".

**Cynicism and lack of desire to hide it anymore, lack of belief in anything like this (socialism, state ideology)**, but also lack of belief in anything like this (national ideology) was something that you could experience in these 'tsekhavik' relations. Of course, the guy's father was a very famous, very high-level 'tsekhavik', the head of all of the oil stations in Armenia, okay? So that was very visible already in 1980s, in my generation. Extremely unpleasant.

But before cynicism, your previous point was what? I had a comment on that as well.

**Mikayel** – It was about the liberals and nationalists, uniting against socialism, let's say.

**Gevorg** – Well, I wouldn't say... I agreed to draw this picture about subcultures. But you know it is not fitting nicely, so I am somehow reluctant to use the words 'liberal' or 'socialist', because socialists were not in this power (system), liberals were partly also those who served the power and partly who didn't. Statists were also partly here (in the power system) and partly there (in the community or 'horizontal ties), and partly among the nationalists, so this is not well-divided.

But there is a scholarly debate, and it is a very difficult issue that nationalization... We were talking with [Vardan Jaloyan](#) in the previous session, and he was using the terms 'state racism' vs 'ethnic racism'. So the nationalization ideology, nationalistic, not just nationalist, but

nationalistic ideology very often leads to ethnic racism for state-building reasons, or for whatever reasons. We can see it even in the nicest Baltic states, for instance, in the relations with some of them, in some of them there is this big amount of Russian language population who are deprived of rights. And we can see it everywhere. So (this is a) **liberalism only for selected, for a few. I think the hypocrisy of western liberalism paradigm has always been that, that it is always a liberalism for few. In a circle of closed nationalist people, people who promote xenophobia, etc., they can be liberal towards each other.** This paradox is something very important for us to register, to think about the future of Armenia.

I'll give another example from today. When we are talking about the rights of minorities, for instance, Yazidis, or religious minorities, or whoever, **I'll take the example of Yazidis. They may say "we have issues," they may say "we are fine", but they don't even imagine what kind of culture and cultural build-up they would deserve in a really liberal society: theaters, newspapers, magazines, schools, etc.**

This is all absent. And in the Soviet times you had token examples of this, but it was for ideology reasons mainly. Though it was indeed supported, a little bit, the community of minorities. But even the thinking about that, you know (was absent). If you ask Armenians, or if you ask most of Yazidis, they will say, "Yeah, Yazidis are fine in this country" and in a sense, yes, they are fine, in this **atomized sense**. But nobody is thinking what they really deserve, as in one of the only countries where there is their quite significant community, which is respected, in fact.

So this **unconscious and subconscious anti-liberalism, which is the accompaniment of nationalism, nation-state nationalism, and nation-building nationalism**, is something very important for us to keep in mind. I think this is the point. Okay, Bella says something, then we will move to the end.

**Bella** – I agree that it is difficult to speak in general terms, because it depends when and in which context, what are the challenges, etc., let's say. When people, let's say, in Armenia, are feeling that Armenian language is under threat, that is another issue of discussion, that so many intellectual, elite families were intended towards Russian schools, because it was a trend that Russian schools have good quality, and Armenian schools are for the second class. Of course, there was small intelligentsia, real intelligentsia, right, I think, that were deliberately sending kids to Armenian language schools, but as a trend you could feel it. So I think some kind of movement toward Armenian schools and Armenian language was an

important imperative in the beginning of the statehood, when now maybe this is not an issue, or maybe it is an issue, taking into account the ‘Rusification’ of life.

Of course, it is some kind of ethnic nationalism, or nation-building nationalism or whatever, but it’s important in a certain context, in a certain situation. When maybe in 20 years’ time Armenia is such a strong statehood, so people would say, the same people who were advocating for language law without opportunities for other language basic schools, they would say, “Yes, of course, we could have all kind of schools.”

Because the statehood issue is there. So, I think, it depends on situation. Same for ethnic nationalists, just pure ethnic nationalists, like Dashnaks or Nzhdehakers, or this Republican Party back to 80s, the proper ones. So, I think, it’s very important to look into all these notions in the context, otherwise it will be a bit labeling, and not very helpful.

**Gevorg** – Thank you. Indeed. Two things I have to say here. One is that, indeed, they come intertwined. So, you can say that, of course, the anti-Russian sentiment was quite justified among some, which existed. But at the same time what I was trying to say was that there was, and what you were mentioning, that there was this trend: trendy trend to Russian schools because they were indeed of higher quality, merely because **the Russian pedagogical community and society was producing better algorithms for education. Because they were much bigger.** No, sorry, there was. I mean, I went to the Armenian language school, so my textbooks were like xerox copies, bad copies of the Russian language schools, of my friends who were going to the Chekhov school, of their books. My books were not color-printed, the books of the children who were going to the Russian-language schools were color-printed. So I was envying.

**Bella** – Well, I think it was a little bit chicken and egg. I mean the people, the quality was better, that is why people were sending there, but also the quality was not good, because no one was intending of sending (kids there) or making it (good). I cannot swear on the Bible, but what I have heard that in Georgia the situation was a bit different, because Georgians were fighting to have better-quality language Georgian schools. And for intelligentsia, for Georgian intelligentsia it was a mauvais ton to send their kids to Russian schools, it was for Russian kids, or minority kids, or Armenian kids.

When in Armenia the trend was, like very few families, like yours or others, that I know, that very deliberately were sending kids to Armenian-language schools. And I know that one of survival mechanisms for good Armenian schools was that some schools, like my school, the

Charents School, they got this English-language special education, that somehow saved some Armenian-language schools from being second class. But it also had the social, how to say... Also sociologically, that's an interesting phenomenon that people who hardly speak Russian at home, would still try to put their kids to the Russian-language school, not because of the opportunities or better books, or whatever, but just to be like others, just to be in this trendy trend, as you said.

**Gevorg** – Bella jan, I sat down, because it is a nice debate. I think these personal stories and perceptions are very important. So I am going to give you kind of a different perspective on that.

First of all, I think it was an adaptation movement, and I think it was not for no reason, people going to the Russian schools, or being sent to the Russian schools. It was not intelligentsia mainly, but it was the 'tsekhaviks', it was the newly-emerging bourgeoisie, people who moved from the village to Yerevan, etc.

Secondly, comparing Armenia to Georgia. First of all, even if you take the two languages, the Armenian and Georgian, you know that in Georgian you have many more foreign, particularly coming from western languages, roots. So, it is very different, the Georgian language situation, language security. They have made their language much more open historically, since the times of [Ilia Chavchavadze](#). You can talk with [Arsen Kharatyan](#) about that. Much more open to the foreign influences, keeping their alphabet and pronunciation, and some very important parts of the skeleton. That makes it easier for them, in certain ways, to, kind of, not to worry about. Their language is built so that it is much more easily absorbing foreign influences.

Now, in the case of the next thing, again, Georgia historically has been deprived of statehood, and therefore the anti-Russian sentiment there historically has been stronger. Armenia historically has been saved by Russia, and it is a fact, in a way. So historically Russia and Russian influence hasn't been perceived as totally negative by Armenians also for that reason. By Armenians. Armenia was saved by Russia, so there was less resistance.

The 1977 new Constitutions of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Republics both had Armenia and Georgia having the state language as Armenian and Georgian, which was a unique case as compared to many other Republics. So the level of struggle was quite similar. And I'll give you another example.

It was well-known, when I went to the university, that if you are a Russian speaker, if you ended, finished a very high-level elite Chekhov School or Pushkin School, if you want to go to study in the Yerevan State University, you have only two options – you can either go to the Russian Philology Department, which is very small – 25 people, girls mainly, or to the Physics Department, which had the Russian language section, again 25 people also. The rest of all the seventeen, I think, departments, which existed at that time, were all only Armenian-language speaking departments. So in terms of this nationalistic build-up and resistance to the Russian influence and inflow, Armenia was no less ‘patriotic’, let’s put it like that, than Georgia, I would say. So it is more complex. These issues, why was it happening, how was it happening, etc.

But I think we should end here, because it is already time. Thank you very much.

*Transcribed by Ani Babayan*

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