Soviet Armenian Identity and Cultural Representation

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This article attempts to observe the issue of the Armenian identity in the Soviet Union in general terms; more precisely, give answers to the following questions: How can the Soviet Armenian identity and its different dimensions be characterized? What factors, forces and circumstances have mostly affected the shaping of the Soviet Armenian identity? We believe that Soviet nationalities policy and the ways of maintaining the rule over the Soviet nations and formation of the united Soviet people had peculiarities, which could be characterized as Russian-Soviet Orientalism. The main thesis this article will advance concerns the pressure that was exercised over national identity through restraining cultural representation in the SU. First of all this relates to the sphere of visual representation – cinema. To this end I will focus on the 1960s. Those were the years we consider as turning point in terms of the changes that the Soviet nationalities policy and the perception of the national identity underwent. The main arguments of the study of this issue are derived from the novel »Hangover« written by the Soviet Armenian Hrant Matevosyan.

I would start with two quotations. Manuel Castells, the author of the three-volume work »Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture«, depicts the post-Soviet situation in the following way:

> When the obvious enemy (Soviet Communism) disintegrated [...] [it turned out that] the ex-Soviet people didn't have any collective project, beyond the fact of being ›ex‹.

Then he goes on:

> The most enduring legacy of Soviet statism will be the destruction of civil society after decades of systematic negation of its existence. Reduced to networks of primarily identity and individual survival, Russian people, and the people of the ex-Soviet societies, will have to muddle through the reconstruction of their collective identity, in the midst of a world where the flows of power and money are trying to render piecemeal the emerging economic and social institutions before they come into being, in order to swallow (in) their global networks. Nowhere is the ongoing struggle between global economic flows and cultural identity more important than in the

Figure 0.1.: The monument to »Mother Armenia« that replaced the monument to Stalin in 1962 symbolizes a hybrid nature of the Soviet Armenian identity.

> wasteland created by the collapse of the Soviet statism of the historical edge of the information society[1].

Philosopher Boris Groys thinks that:

> . . . the contemporary Western cultural market, as well as cultural studies, require the Russians, Ukrainians, etc., to rediscover, to redefine, and to manifest their alleged cultural identity. To demonstrate, for example, their specific Russianness or Ukrainness, which as I have tried to show, these postcommunist subjects do not have, because even if such cultural identities ever really existed, were already completely erased by the universally Soviet social experiment[2].

1 Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, vol. 3: End of Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 68.

2 Boris Groys, »Beyond Diversity: Cultural Studies and Its Postcommunist Other«, in: *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta11 Plattform*, ed. by Okwui Enwezor (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), pp. 303-19, in particular p. 304.

He defines the communist project as the ultimate denial of the past history, as a fundamental and absolute split from any kind of distinct cultural identity and diversity.

The considerations of different scholars such as Castells and Groys partly confirm and partly complement each other. To sum up briefly, it can be concluded that the absence or the crisis of post-Soviet national cultural identities is a consequence of the Soviet modernization project. Even if we assume that there had been some national identities before the establishment of the Soviet Power, according to the authors referred to, they have disappeared. Whereas the elimination of national identities has not been replaced by the shaping of a new Soviet identity. Addressing the issue of the failure of the Soviet attempt to shape a new individual (*sovetskii chelovek*) and a new community (*sovetskii narod*), Castells writes: »Communities may be imagined but not necessarily believed«[3].

Another, a closer look is useful for the advancement of our observations, which complements and to a certain extent balances the afore-mentioned views. Ugo Vlaisavljevic, a Balkan researcher, notes that the discourse on Yugoslavian communism refers to the ethnic tradition of making sense of the reality. What was happening was a fusion of two discourses and dictionaries, when, for example, »communist revolution« coincides with the »national liberation war«. He then goes on:

> A hypothesis might be advanced that in all Eastern Europe, the adoption of communism after the Second World War bore a strong ethnic mark. The majority of people warmly welcomed the idea of revolution, at least in the beginning, not only because of the strong ideological pressure of the lure of industrialization and electrification, but also because of the collective »ethnic experience« of the replacement of cultural paradigms through war. These two revolutions – industrial and cultural – ensured the exterior of the »social-proletarian« revolution. [...] Long time communism successfully protected from big effects of modernization – individualization, disenchantment and the power of instrumental thinking. To that extent, at least in this part of the world, communism can be described as a modern strategy against modernization; a strategy in the foundation of which »*ethnic resistance*« can be detected[4].

Perhaps the ethnic dimension of Soviet republics and their opportunities for

3 Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, vol. 2: The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), p. 39.

4 Ugo Vlaisavljevic, »The South Slav Identity and the Ultimate War-Reality«, in: *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. by Dusan I. Bjelic & Obrad Savic (Cambrigde, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 191-207, in particular p. 203.

»ethnic resistance« were not as significant as those in Eastern European countries. However, Soviet Armenia was basically perceived as a restored Armenian state, by the Armenians (after a long break). It is true that Soviet Armenia was not a national state in the strict sense, though it allowed shaping some attributes of a modern nation (establishment of some state institutions, development of the literary Eastern Armenian language, dissemination of literacy – all characterized by unavoidable ambiguities intrinsic to the Soviet reality).

Therefore, thinking over the »Soviet Armenian identity« we should give an account to ourselves that the years of the Soviet power and the Soviet order became a historical era and a way of rapid modernization for Eastern Armenians. This means in particular, adoption of the modern ideas of development and progress; self-definition through renarration of one's own history; foreseeing the future and self-reflection onto a certain perspective, as well as shaping some notions of culture, nation and national identity. Thus, the »Soviet Armenian« – the bearer of the modernized Armenian identity, is a hybrid constitution, where »the Soviet« and »the Armenian« seem to be inseparable from each other. In this sense it is impossible to imagine any »pure Armenianness« free from Soviet mixtures the same way as it is difficult to imagine a Soviet nation, Soviet community free from ethnic/national attributes.

At this point, before moving on to the consideration of national identity, it would be relevant to refer to the correlated issues of modernity and nation. With respect to Russia and later the USSR researchers often speak of imperfect or incomplete modernization. It is clear that if we define modernity »as the emergence of nation-states, the establishment of parliamentary democracy, and the spread of industrial capitalism in Western Europe«, we will then have to ascertain that »Clearly none of these aspects of modern political and economic systems pertained in the Imperial Russian and Soviet cases«[5]. On the other hand, if we are guided by such definitions which ear-mark a number of characteristic aspects of transformation, namely industrialization, urbanization, secularization, universal literacy, etc. we will see that many aspects of modernization were fully incorporated into the objectives of the Soviet power. In the meantime the Soviet society was characterized by aspects of the Enlightenment such as the belief in progress, the faith in reason and science. The Soviet universalism project is comparable to »a mode of historical consciousness, a manner of situating oneself in time. Modernity, in this sense, manifests itself as an awareness of the disjuncture between present and past and the impermanence of present-day reality as history

5 David Lloyd Hoffmann, »European Modernity and Soviet Socialism«, in: *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practice*, ed. by David L. Hoffmann & Ianni Kotsonis (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 245-260, in particular p. 246.

moves along a clearly discernible path of development«[6]. Eventually, the idea of socialism was the product of Western modernity.

Thus, if we elaborate on the concept of modernity we can speak of the Soviet modernization or the Soviet version of modernization. However, the issue of modernization of Soviet nations is more complicated and ambiguous. On the one hand it would not be correct to insist that the paths of modernization were closed for the Soviet national republics, but at the same time it was clear that the newly built society was a socialist one; that the modern identity was reserved to the newly shaped Soviet society or the people rather than individual nations. In order to perceive the Soviet model of the settlement of the relationship of national and all-union socialist identities within the Soviet program of modernization as well as the means of its implementation it is necessary to at least slightly revert to the Soviet nationalities policy.

According to researchers two opposite trends were paradoxically combined in the Soviet nationalities policy. On the one hand there was attention given towards Soviet nations and support for the development of national identities and cultures, on the other hand there was the process of the merging of Soviet nations and shaping of the Soviet people.

Some researchers believe that this ambiguous policy was one of the reasons of the collapse of the Soviet Union. One can find different interpretations of the Soviet nationalities policy. Let us refer to two of them, which complement each other.

The first explanation is based on the »depoliticization« and overcoming of the Soviet national identities, and the idea of the formation of united Soviet people – the bearer of a common Soviet high culture which implied the guidance of the Soviet power.[7] The second interpretation is based on the logic of the Soviet geopolitical strategy for disseminating communism throughout the world.[8] In conformity with the first interpretation embodying Stalin's principle »national in form, socialist in content«:

> Soviet policy sought to decouple high culture and national identity. [...] Socialism would provide the basis for a new Soviet high culture; a statewide cultural idiom inculcated through a universal, standardized, and yet multilingual, system of education and propaganda. Socialism, not nationalism, would be the state's unifying

6 Nathaniel Knight, »Ethnicity, Nationality and the Masses: *Narodnost'* and Modernity in Imperial Russia« in: *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practice*, ed. by David L. Hoffmann & Ianni Kotsonis (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 42-64, in particular pp. 41-42.

7 Terrry Martin, »Modernization or Neotraditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism«, in: *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practice*, ed. by David L. Hoffmann & Ianni Kotsonis (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 161-82.

8 A. M. Salmin, *SNG: Sostoyanie I perspektivy razvitiya* (Moscow: Gorbachev Fund, 1992).

> principle. National identity was accepted, and indeed propagated, by the Soviet state in order to avoid the emergence of a defensive nationalism. National identity was systematically promoted at the sub-state level in the form of national republics, with their own national elites, languages and cultures. Of course, these national cultures had to accommodate the new Soviet high culture, but not a common national identity. According to Gellner's theory, in modern world, such an outcome was impossible[9].

Irrespectively of the extent to which this goal was feasible even if it was viewed as a long-term prospect, it seems that this explanation completely ignores the external vector of the Soviet nationalities policy that makes up the core of the second approach.

The second explanation is guided by the Soviet logic of on-going enlargement to reach the ultimate goal – world communism. With the aim of involving new nations into the communist camp it was necessary to pursue a proper nationalities policy, have respect and pay proper attention to national identity in a world in which nationalism was such a decisive factor, which was impossible not to take into account. Based on this model by Salmin, Castells arrives at the following conclusion: »This constant tension between the a-historical, class-based universalism of communist utopia and the geopolitical interest of supporting ethnic/national identities as potential territorial allies determined the schizophrenia of Soviet policy toward the national question«[10].

The arguments and observations in Terry Martin's article are interesting from the angle of the main thesis of this article. However, it is not possible to agree with the provision of separating high culture and national identity from each other, even if it was one of the basic targets of the nationalities policy of the Soviet Power. Did this mean that the literature, which deserved to be called »high culture«, was being created solely in Russian or were there no national high cultures, which were produced in national languages. Hrant Matevosyan's work written in the last period of Soviet Power is a good example. It is true that some of his works were first published in Russian translation in Moscow, and only after that they were published in Armenian in Yerevan. Another truth is that Matevosyan's books printed in Russian were read throughout the entire Soviet Union. He was awarded the State Prize – the highest Soviet literary prize. However, Matevosyan's works first of all make part of the Soviet Armenian high culture.

Generally speaking, the idea of separating the form and the content from each other is not convincing either. It is difficult to imagine how it is feasible to allow

9 Martin, »Modernization or Neotraditionalism?«, op.cit. (note 7), p. 167.
10 Castells, *The Information Age: End of Millennium*, op.cit. (note 1), p. 42.

»purely national forms« and demand »purely socialist contents«. This was truly an unsolvable task. During the Soviet nation-building socialist nations came forth: Soviet modernization was sovietization of nations. And with the failure of the nations merging project, national units came forth which were, perhaps similar to each other, but also different and the difference was not only in the form.

It seems as if it would be more correct to seek the forms of binding, restricting, and in the future »transcending« or marginalizing the national features in other places, including the modes by which, according to Benedict Anderson, the communities are imagined: »Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/ genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined«[11].

The article aims to show that in the SU the availability of some means of cultural representation, which made the modern forms or »styles« of imagination possible, were restricted for the national cultural production.

Russian-Soviet Orientalism?

Needless to say that by pushing the Anderson criterion of the nation-ness and nationalism as »cultural artifacts of a particular kind« and by attaching importance to the means and forms of representation, »the place of ethnicity in the national imaginary«[12] should not be neglected. Eventually, the researchers explaining the consequences of the Soviet nationalities policy as well as of the Soviet modernization project basically do not differentiate between Soviet nations being guided by the principle »the Russians and the other nations« which could be called a Russian-centric approach, which, in its turn, seems to be a consequence of Eurocentrism. This is the reason why the explanation often remains abstract and general, and the nations are perceived as a single mass: both, those having ancient history, and those which acquired name and history only during the Soviet years.

Referring to the 1960s, let us recall that those were the years of Khrushchev reforms: »A new outward-oriented and competitive nationalism, forward- rather than backward-looking, replaced the blinkered chauvinism of Stalin's last days«.[13]

11 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

12 Seteney Shami, »Circassian Encounters: The Self as Other and the Production of the Homeland in the North Caucasus«, in: *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure*, ed. by Birgit Meyer & Peter Geschiere (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp 17-46, in particular p. 19.

13 Catriona Kelly, »The Retreat from Dogmatism: Populism under Khrushchev and Brezhnev« in:

The expression of global competitive ambitions was combined with the new wave of industrialization of national republics, in particular Armenia. Perhaps this was a response to the western initiative for the Third World's development, which had started after World War II. This was also a period of shifting attention towards national cultures and supporting their development, and the emergence of nationalistic moods: »Apart from human rights generally, intellectuals in republican capitals (particularly in the Caucasus, the Ukraine, and the Baltic States) were active from the 1960s onwards in the cause of national liberation from central control«.[14]

However, on the other hand it was also an era of consolidation of the Soviet people and extending the shaping of the Soviet identity. The declared competition with the West was also an appeal and an incentive for the Soviet people. Some of Khrushchev's initiatives such as the space race and the virgin-land campaign had the same ideological significance – the consolidation of the Soviet people around unprecedented and ambitious projects and self-identification with those »great achievements«. The Great Patriotic War became the central symbol of the identity of the Soviet people, in which the messianic role and mission of the SU was once again revealed. The Victory Day, The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Eternal Fire, etc. were among the mythologized attributes and rituals of the war.[15]

Those were the years of undisguised efforts of Russification, even if we admit that before that the Soviet authorities were consciously avoiding such policy. Yet, it was implemented in various forms: by restricting use of national languages in favor of Russian and by transforming the Russian language into the second native language, which was easy to do since the system of education and the media were under strict control, by promoting the growth of the role of Soviet realities in education and culture, by increasing the proportions of the native elite co-opted into the ruling Party, etc..[16]

Following all these issues it is appropriate to ask the question: How can the status of the former colony of the Russian Empire, later a Soviet republic, Soviet Armenia and its relationship with the Centre be characterized? Obviously there was something from colonialism something can be qualified without reservation

Russian Cultural Studies: an Introduction, ed. by Catriona Kelly & Shepherd David (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 249-73, in particular p. 256.

14 Kelly, »Retreat from Dogmatism«, op.cit. (note 13), p. 252.

15 Kelly, »Retreat from Dogmatism«, op.cit. (note 13), p. 262.

16 John L. H. Keep, *Last of the Empires: A History of the Soviet Union 1945-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

by the word Orientalism[17], Russian or Soviet Orientalism – for the time being without attempting to go into the details.

However, it is worth referring to some of the characterizations and observations by researchers clarifying a number of characteristic features and aspects of the Russian Empire and colonialism providing room for thinking over the Russian and Soviet Orientalism. Discussing the theoretical and practical issues of the literary and cultural translation of the 19^{th} century imperial Russia Andrew Whachtel underlines, that unlike »the elites of other imperializing nations, whose explicit or implicit assumptions of cultural superiority caused them to view their own values as universal and as something to be imposed on others, members of the Russian cultural elite proposed a model that emphasized their nation's sponge like ability to absorb the best that other people had to offer as the basis for a universal, inclusive national culture«[18]. Such an approach »while compensating for the perceived cultural inferiority vis-à-vis West European powers, also propagated an image of Russia as a mediating civilization between East and West and of Moscow as »the third Rome«, the fabled instance of a culture of translation«[19].

In her work, dedicated to the relationship of Russian literature and colonialism, Ewa Thompson resisting to the West-East bipolar model, from which the Russian Empire actually is left out, writes: »The world has never been divided into two neat compartments, West and non-West. The bilateral vision disregards the fact that Russia engaged in a massive effort to manufacture a history, one that stands in partial opposition to the history created by the West on the one hand, and on the other to the history sustained by the efforts of those whom Russia had colonized. In doing so, Russia has successfully superimposed portions of its own narrative on the Western one, either blending the two or including its own voice as a kind of universally acknowledged commentary or footnote. Entering

17 Edward Said argues that »Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. [...] My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.« Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 3.

18 Andrew Whachtel, »Translation, Imperialism, and National Self-Definition in Russia«, in: *Alternative Modernities*, ed. by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 45-67, in particular p. 52.

19 Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, »On Alternative Modernities«, in: *Alternative Modernities*, ed. by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 1-23, in particular p. 20.

Western discourse through a side door, as it were, reinforced Russia's invisibility as a third voice«[20].

The »translation« mission of introducing the Western modernity into the East actually was one of the aspects of Russian modernity allowing the Russian Empire to shape and export to colonized nations the Russian modern world picture and to establish its cultural hegemony over them. Elements of Orientalism are evident in this attitude of the empire towards the colonies, and later towards the Soviet nations, in ways of dominating over them and maintaining power. The entirety of these elements can tentatively be called »translated« or »second hand« or simply Russian-Soviet Orientalism.

If we recall that in the first half of the 19^{th} century most people linked the only possibility of the liberation of Eastern Armenians from the Persian rule and coming into contact with the Western modernization process to Russia, one can come to the conclusion that the idea of modernization of Eastern Armenia at the outset was born and embodied within the framework provided by the Russian mediatory mission, first as a Russian Armenian, later as a Soviet Armenian project.[21]

In this respect, for post-Soviet researchers, the research project relating to the Balkan region which with its goals and committed approach relates to the areas of colonial discourse studies and post-colonial cultural studies could be very helpful.[22] Here the relationship between the West and the East of Europe by analogy with Orientalism is called Balkanism, consistently revealing the existing similarities and important differences between Orientalism and Balkanism. Thus the comparison between Orientalism and Balkanism could be beneficial for the discussion of Russian-Soviet Orientalism.

The issue of national identity in »Hangover«

Hrant Matevosyan was certainly linked to the Soviet literary orientation called »village prose« which appeared in the 1960s. The works of Russian writers such as Valentin Rasputin, Vasily Belov and Victor Astafiev, addressing the traditional natural and human values, were of anti-modern orientation: »During the 1960s and 1970s, the nostalgic portrait of the Russian village on the brink of extinction

20 Ewa M. Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 23.

21 Suffice it to recall the novel »Wound of Armenia« by Khachatur Abovyan, the first work of the modern Eastern Armenian literature.

22 Dusan I. Bjelic & Obrad Savic (eds.), *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambrigde, MA: The MIT Press, 2002).

in Siberia or in the Russian North was received as progressive, sometimes even as dissident, relative to the official Soviet cultural 'monolith'«[23].

However, admitting the similarities between Matevosyan and Russian rural writers one cannot identify him with this movement. He was a national writer, to be more correct, a Soviet Armenian writer. Avoiding the label of »dissident« in his case it would be correct to speak about a cultural resistance against the Soviet imperial ideology. Matevosyan was not a party member: publishing his first writings required efforts as they often underwent censorship. Besides we can find resistance not only in the writer's behavior but also in his works, not only in the fact of bringing »undesirable« topics into literature, but also in discourse strategies.

The summary of Hrant Matevosyan's novel is as follows: people from all national republics, basically writers were to take the two-year Advanced Courses for Scriptwriters organized at the Moscow Cinema House. The novel describes one day of the life of the attendees of the courses; the conversations of the narrator, Armenian writer Mnatsakanyan, with different people; reminiscences of rural life, etc. Each and every participant in those courses was to write a scenario giving the base on which a film could be shot. Mnatsakanyan writes a scenario on the problems of an Armenian village: industrialization, modernization, a devastated rural community, etc. The head of the courses, Vaksberg, suggests introducing changes into the scenario – a long conversation, in the end almost an argument – but Mnatsakanyan refuses to do it. Most probably he could be kicked out of the courses. The events of the novel take place in 1965. This is an autobiographical novel based on the personal experience of the author.

Many Russian and Soviet writers have traveled to Armenia, and there are many texts on Armenia written by Russian and Soviet writers. Andrei Belyi, Osip Mandelshtam, Vasilii Grossman and Andrei Bitov are among the most famous authors on Armenia. We could start the enumeration by Aleksandr Pushkin's work, »Journey to Arzrum«. Ewa Thompson examines the colonialist and orientalist aspects of this text. I do not know similar readings of texts by Soviet authors, and in Armenia the writings of the afore-mentioned authors on Armenia as a rule are perceived in the context of the »centuries-old friendship between the Russian and Armenian peoples«. Here, I do not intend to discuss this issue, but it is at least appropriate to quote a few lines from the article of a Soviet critic on O. Mandelshtam's writing, »Journey to Armenia«. The work was first published in 1933, in the magazine »Zvezda«. »Mandelshtam's images smell old, rotten great-power chauvinist who, paying compliments to Armenia, praises its

23 Thomas Lahusen, »The Ethnicization of Nations: Russia, the Soviet Union, and the People«, in: *Nations, Identities, Cultures*, ed. by V.Y. Mudimbe (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 121-42, in particular p. 123.

exoticism, its slavish past, since Mandelshtam has not written anything on its present«.[24] If we leave aside the accusations in Mandelshtam's address about »not understanding what proletarian literature is«, not seeing »Armenia that is blossoming and building socialism with rejoicing« then »great-power chauvinism« and »exoticism« do not seem to be unsubstantiated characteristics, even if this vocabulary was part of the arsenal of the Soviet criticism in the first half of 1930s.

In this regard it would be particularly interesting to read Bitov's book »The Lessons of Armenia«, and in particular for the reasons that Bitov like Mandelshtam was not at all a champion of Soviet ideology and did not belong to the mainstream of Soviet literature.[25]

It's true that Matevosyan's novel differs from the book by both Bitov and those of the afore-mentioned authors. It differs also from the texts of Western authors (Gide, Benjamin, Steinbeck) written as a result of their trips to Russia. This creation is exclusive by the fact that it presents the look of a person from the province of the empire at the centre.

I shall present in brief the aspects of national situations reflected in the novel, which allow not only to describe the crisis of identity but also to address it. Firstly, in the routine of the Soviet modernization as a result of industrialization the rural community is destroyed – the forms of pre-modern social organization, which, according to Matevosyan, had been part and parcel of the Armenian national existence for millenniums.

Secondly, the Armenian culture is marginalized and national cultural heritage is involved into the tourist industry. The Armenian history and culture are identified with tradition and museum.[26] Hence, there are different national cultures, but there is one modern Soviet civilization. The national tradition is exotic, and the Soviet tradition is a norm. Eventually modernization means sovietization. Hence, it is understandable why modernization is perceived as violence, forceful elimination of the pre-modern.

Thirdly, again in a very brief and simplified way, pressure on national intellectuals to be involved into the Soviet intellectual elite was quite obvious. The novel shows very well the process of the building of the Soviet intellectual's identity through the establishment of the intellectual elite of various nations, and the representation of the Soviet people as an imagined community: »They are my

24 Pavel Nerler »Notes«, in: *Works. Volume 2*, Mandelstam, Osip (Moscow. Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1990), pp. 378-461, in particular p. 421.

25 I wish to stress that Bitov and Matevosyan not only knew each other but also were good friends, and Bitov has written some essays about Matevosyan.

26 In the essay »Metsamor« Matevosyan recalls the well-known expression in the meantime underlying that this qualification is attributed from the outside: »The foreigners call our country a museum under the sky.«

friends – in their presence for me a warm climate of safety is being knitted: it is pleasant to feel their existence from Yerevan to Moldavia, Tbilisi, Leningrad«[27].

The following observation of Frederic Jameson, American philosopher and cultural critic, is, without reservations, applicable to »Hangover«:

> All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. [...] The story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society[28].

These are genuine rites of passages, a transition from the »national« to the »Soviet« through building the Soviet identity of the subject. If he/she wishes to set aside »anachronistic« and »out of date« national issues and engage in all human, global issues, have a real career, success, wealth and fame. Meanwhile, according to Jamesone's statements, this transformation of the national intellectuals into Soviet ones symbolizes an implied national perspective.

Identity and visual representation

Since the first years of the Soviet power the famous statement of the Party leader V. I. Lenin is well-known: »of all the arts for us the most important is cinema«. Here is the People's Commissioner of Enlightenment Lunacharsky's comment: »the main task of cinema in both its scientific and feature divisions is that of propaganda«. Subsequently, Stalin also argues: »Cinema is the most important means of mass agitation. Our task is to take it into our hands«.

Generally speaking, as Walter Benjamin witnesses in his Moscow diary, the more popular the culture is, the stricter the Communist Party control is. Till the last years of the Soviet empire the cinema was an all-union enterprise, which was actually the monopoly of the centre: education and personnel preparation, structures and technologies of film production, norms and standards and, eventually, censorship.

In this respect, the Russian philosopher Mikhail Ryklin's comment on Soviet culture of the Stalin era is interesting. A comment that we can take also as a

27 Hrant Matevosyan, *Tsarere* (Yerevan: Sovetakan Grogh, 1978), p. 128.

28 Fredric Jameson, »Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism«, in: *Social Text* 15 (1986), pp. 65-88, in particular p. 69.

description of dominate regimes of visual representation. Given that the Russian cultural tradition was oriented toward the word and was non-visual by its nature, Russian philosophers characterized the cultural process during Stalin era as a total verbalization of culture, as elimination of visual aspects of human experience and replacing them with so called »speech vision of collective bodies«. The influence of this tendency on Soviet cinema was devastating. Then it is not surprising that critic Mikhail Yampolsky describes the Soviet cinema as »cinema without cinema«[29]. In terms of regimes of representation this strive for total verbalization can be understood as censorship for visual expression. So, within dominating regimes of visual representation not only the cultural expression was subject to distortion, but also the visual expression was essentially restricted.

One can feel the refreshing spirit of the 1960's and the comparatively free situation in the novel. Matevosyan's work became possible due to that period. However, the limits of the allowed freedom were also clear: the attendees of the courses could watch Antonioni and Bergman, freely discussing films, but while writing their own scripts they encountered tough restrictions.

Let me sum up the Vaksberg-Mnatsakanyan long argument on the topic »what requirements should the Soviet (national) film meet?«. Narrow national topics: the problems of an Armenian village, national-liberation movement, the Armenian genocide, cannot become a basis for a good film, since they cannot interest the Soviet and, moreover, the foreign audience, they lack all-human significance, they do not relate to modern urgent issues, which are addressed by the world, in particular they do not play the required role in the fight to the death between the SU and the capitalist world: the cinema should serve this struggle both in the commercial and in the ideological sense. And eventually if one wishes to shoot a film about shepherds, a young girl, love story, etc. should be added so that the film »is saved from boredom«, i.e. the national element is either fully withdrawn from the cinema or is orientalized.

Hence, there is no way to be both national and modern at the same time. It is impossible to enter the modern times without being Soviet. The Soviet is in the real world, thus it is modern and actual, and the national is »outside the world«. It is in the traditions and in museums, and is condemned to oblivion. In order to be modern, to master the cultural capacities of new technologies, to work and to create the national intellectual was obliged to separate himself/herself from the »national« and to move on to the »Soviet«, become »Soviet«.

Here is a remark of Stuart Hall on Caribbean »black movie« from his article »Cultural Identity and Diaspora« written in the early 1990s. A remark that is instructive in emphasizing the crucial role of representation and the means of representation in constituting new identities:

29 Mikhail Ryklin, *Terrorologiques* (Eidos, 1992), p. 19.

> We have been trying to theorize identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as the form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak. Communities, Benedict Anderson argues in »Imagined Communities«, are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. This is the vocation of modern black cinemas: by allowing us to see and recognize the different parts and histories of ourselves, to construct those points of identification, those positionalities we call in retrospect our ›cultural identities‹. [30]

As I have tried to demonstrate the new and the most powerful cultural means were made to serve the Soviet ideology and the »universalist project«, the building of the Soviet individual and the identity of the Soviet people. Thus, I assume, the regimes of visual representation being dominant within the Soviet culture served to the highest degree of the implementation of cultural power and functioned as means of normalizing and homogenizing the cultural expression against the so called Soviet nationalities cultures.

Consequently, the contemporary means of representation, i.e. cinema, later also the TV, by and large were inaccessible for national cultures. If we agree with Hall's statement that identities are not only inherited but also constructed and they are constructed in and through representation, then we can conclude that in the Soviet Empire through cultural representation strict restrictions and limitations were established on national cultures. These limitations marginalized national cultures and cultural identities.

30 Stuart Hall, »Cultural Identity and Diaspora« in: *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-37, in particular p. 235.