

Making Meaning of A Film: The Case of *Mer Bak* and *The Promise*

by  
Merry Artinian

Presented to the  
Department of English & Communications  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia

Yerevan, Armenia

May 23, 2019

## Table of Contents:

Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Research Questions.....	12
Methodology.....	12
Research Findings and Analysis.....	14
Limitations and Avenues for Future Research.....	19
Conclusion.....	20
References.....	22
Appendices.....	25

## Abstract

This capstone looks into how an audience interprets movies when their social background is involved. In other words, how they feel about a movie that speaks to their social and cultural circumstances. Two movies are considered *Mer Bak* (1997) and *The Promise* (2016). A set of interviews and focus groups were conducted to better understand the relation of meaning-making and social backgrounds and give a deeper insight into Armenian communities globally. This capstone examines other literary studies about film depiction, making meaning through the aesthetics of a film, human rights issues, and Soviet Armenian film analysis. The paper concludes by showing that social background is quite important for an audience to connect to a movie that is more relatable to their childhood stories and memories.

## Introduction

Armenians, apart from the ones living in their homeland, are dispersed worldwide forming a diaspora community mainly because of the Armenian genocide in 1915. According to the *Genocide Convention* (1948) adopted by the United Nations, genocide is the act of violence with the intent of eliminating an ethnic, racial, national, or religious group. The Armenian genocide, at the beginning of World War I, led to a drop of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire. The two million population turned to a number less than 400,000 by 1922, according to John Kifner in *Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview* (2007). “There were executions into mass graves, and death marches of men, women, and children across the Syrian desert to concentration camps with many dying along the way of exhaustion, exposure and starvation” (Kifner, J. 2007), which killed about 1.5 million of the Armenian people. Those that survived the death marches fled to all corners of the world, with some changing surnames and changing religion to hide from the Ottoman soldiers.

The survivors of the genocide settled and integrated into the host communities of the countries they sought refuge at. Generations later, they still remember the Armenian genocide. The Armenians who stayed in Armenia however, after the collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, became part of the Soviet Union from 1922 until independence was declared in 1991 (BBC, 2012).

These events greatly inspired the literature, arts, and visuals within Armenian communities worldwide. There has been a vast overflow of arts on the topic of genocide appearing in most art works. Mark Crispin Miller in *A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture:*

*Seeing Through Movies* (1990) argues that directors put themselves into their movies. Given the Soviet Union era and its influence, the Russian language has also been incorporated into a lot of the arts that have been produced by local Armenians within the republic of Armenia. Some examples of these are films like *Mayrig* (1991) and *Armenia, My Love* (2016), a story about a shattered childhood after the 1915 Armenian Genocide, and *Mer Bak* (1997) that takes place in Yerevan after the collapse of the Soviet Union and includes a lot of the Russian language and jokes.

In this project, two films are considered that incorporate the cultures of the diasporan and local Armenian communities in Armenia, in their films, *Mer Bak* (1997) and *The Promise* (2016). When looking into these two films and comparing them, most Armenians (Diaspora and non-diasporic) relate more to the movie *The Promise*, that barely resembles the lives of Armenians now, than the movie *Mer Bak*, that talks about the life of local modern Armenians. *Mer Bak* is a local Armenian comedy musical, showcasing the lives of Armenians after the collapse of the Soviet Union, produced by Sharm Holding, premiered in 1997. *The Promise* is an American movie set in the Ottoman Empire, showcasing the beginning of the Armenian genocide, produced by Babieka, Survival Pictures, and Wonderful Films in 2016.

## Literature Review

There are four studies used to consider how meaning is made through aesthetics. *Aesthetics Theory* by Theodor Adorno (1970), *The Measurement of Meaning* by Osgood, Tannenbaum, and Suci (1978), *The Reflexive Function of Bergman's "Persona"* by Paul Newell Campbell (1979), and *Aesthetics Making Meaning* by Olivia Gude (2008).

Campbell's *The Reflexive Function of Bergman's "Persona"* and Gude's *Aesthetics Making Meaning* use Adorno's aesthetic theory to analyze part of their study on how aesthetics, meaning, and social backgrounds impact films and arts. The aesthetic theory argues how aesthetics finds truth-content not in how a subject is perceived but on the art object itself. However, Adorno also argues that the truth-content is inspired by the artists' self-awareness of his/her work after isolating themselves from society. This, says Adorno, is what makes art be born, isolation and self-awareness are in part what influenced modern art. Truth-content is eventually a relation between several analytical and logical interactions that materialize from the art's position and the audience and their culture (1970, pg 64).

Gude uses this theory to explain how meaning-making is a social construct. Gude argues that looking into aesthetics, the meaning that the artist intends is usually (more often than not) overlooked and interpreted differently because of the audience's social background (2008, pg 72). Campbell shows the way aesthetics theory works in films like *Persona* to explain the reflexive structure in the film.

However, Osgood, Tannenbaum, and Suci in *The Measurement of Meaning* (1978) do not base their entire research on the aesthetics theory to explain meaning-making and society. They use a different set of categories to explain how people perceive and make meaning out of things. One specific category, sensitivity, include the theory of aesthetics and how images can make an organism experience meaning. With this, they also explain how some meaning or reactions are made on reflex while others are not. Their weakness is that they provide no conclusions on the research.

The directors' role is considered important regarding the message they put into the works they produce. In *A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture: Seeing Through Movies* Miller (1990) provides an article about how a director can affect a work of art.

Miller's book is a collection of six articles from Todd Gitlin, Douglas Gomery, Pat Aufderheide, Peter Biskind, Stuart Klawans, as well as Miller's own article; all compare "oldie" and recent (70s till 80s) films. Gitlin talks about how television has replaced movies as the main point, Gomery talks about how people watch a movie for entertainment or tired of shopping instead of going to a theater just to watch a movie. Peter Biskind, whose article is titled "Blockbuster: The Last Crusade," talks mainly of the film *The Last Crusade* and one of its co-directors George Lucas. The main idea is that directors put themselves into their movies. *The Last Crusade's* directors (both Lucas and Spielberg) and the protagonist of the film are "children of the sixties" (Biskind, 1990, 45). He argues that even though the director (Lucas) has never been in the same situations as Luke (the protagonist), they are the same person because Lucas's movies, "despite their slick, formulaic sheen, are surprisingly personal (it's no accident that Lucas's hero is named Luke) and so permeated by countercultural values" (Biskind, 1990, 102).

Looking into more of the Armenian perspectives, it is important to note the history of the local Armenian community and take into consideration what films they have been exposed to during the Soviet era. The works contemplated are *Parajanov's Playful Poetics: On The 'Director's Cut' Of The Color Of Pomegranates* by James Steffen (1995) and *Soviet Armenian Identity and Cultural Representation* by Hrach Bayadayan as part of the book *Representations on*

*the margins of Europe: Politics and identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States* by Tsypylma Darieva, and Wolfgang Kaschuba (2008).

Steffen looks closely into the two versions of Parajanov's film *The Color of Pomegranate* and the "Director's Cut." Both films are originally from Parajanov, but one is heavily edited by Sergei Yutkevitch and the other left as an original version by Parajanov himself. However, the article's main point is to try and figure out why the Soviet Union had declined the original version of Parajanov, *The Director's Cut* and accepted Yutkevitch's version to be seen in Soviet Armenia. The article talks about aesthetics, nationalistic scenes, and historical background of previous Parajanov movies that detail his specific style in cinematography. It also mentions that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yutkevitch's version was no longer screened and instead the original Parajanov's version was screened.

Bayadyan however, doesn't focus on film to discuss Armenian fine arts rather he focuses on artists and drawings. He dedicates only one chapter to examine Armenian cinema and how the Soviet Union influence affected the Armenian identity representation in films. He pays attention to the 1960s, where a policy change during the Soviet Union hugely changed the way artists viewed art.

Despite all the gruesome and touching themes of Armenian movies, no one ever talks about how ethical it is to portray such things. However, Sonia Tascon does talk about human rights and the ethicality of these themes in "Considering Human Rights Films, Representation, and Ethics: Whose Face?" in *Human Rights Quarterly* (2012) examines the use of films for human rights purposes and human rights education. Tascon studies different works from Gayatri



Spivak, bell hooks, and Emmanuel Lévinas and looks deeper into the debates in “media, visual, and film disciplines in relation to representation, politics, and ethics” (2012, 864). By doing this, she explains how human rights have started to impact films and how more and more festivals have started to emerge for the purpose of educating the audience about human rights.

According to Tascon, “the emergence and increase in popularity of these festivals appears to herald both the acceptance of visual culture as an important part of modern communication framework” (2012, p. 865). This also shows the potential films have in raising understanding and tolerance in the world of others.

However, despite all the events that Armenians have gone through (genocide and Soviet Union), comedy is still present within their culture and in movies like *Mer Bak* (1997). *The Comic Mind; Comedy and Movies* by Gerald Mast (1979) discusses the different types of comedy in film. It talks about the different comedy categories present in a film, the eight most used comedy plots, the atmosphere comedy presents in films, and how people view comedic films. It also analyzes different comedy stars, like Charlie Chaplin, Keaton, and Harold Lloyd to see the differences and similarities in comic style. According to Mast (1979), “A film is truly funny when the audience is not conscious that it intends to be funny. As soon as one becomes aware of artifice and fakery, comedy disintegrates into banal and obnoxious posturing” (p. 26).

To prepare for the primary research and the capstone creative project, it is crucial to understand what is needed to prepare to shoot a documentary. *The Documentary Film* by Willard Van Dyke (1950), *Pre-Planning The Documentary Film* by Edward Freed (1957), and *Visual Storytelling: The Digital Video Documentary* by Nancy Kalow (2011) all speak about the

importance of documentary films in society, give an overview on what is required to shoot a documentary in terms of techniques, and cover the basics of pre-planning the shooting. All three authors agree that documentary films are different than a journalistic report because they are more personal that conveys a message or story through emotions.

Van Dyke's *The Documentary Film* is a historical overview of how documentaries were made through the 1920s all the way to the 1950s. He mentions there were three phases that shape a documentary. The most critical one is the third phase where films are focused on a certain problem, and the answers lay within reactions and emotions of the audience.

Kalow's *Visual Storytelling: The Digital Video Documentary* is a guide book on how to shoot a documentary film. She lists the techniques that are important to know when to keep the camera stable, when to move it, how to shoot the audio, how to use different angles for different scenes, and so on. She notes that the director and the cameraman (it is a lucky situation if they happen to be the same person) should "shoot-to-edit" because the editing process is one of the most crucial parts of making a film. The editor (usually the director) should have enough scenes with different angles to have a selection of shots to work with and pick the best one. Therefore, the pre-planning stage is of utmost importance (2011, p 120).

Freed agrees with Kalow on the fact that the pre-planning stage is the most crucial part of making a documentary. In *Pre-Planning The Documentary Film*, he gives a guide on how to pre-plan for a shooting. He notes that the director needs to have a clear idea on what they want the film to be like. However, the director should not be persistent on his/her idea because the film does not always turn out to be the way they want it to be. Freed also comments that for a

documentary to be powerful, it is important to depict real emotions using real situations coming from real people (1957, p 85).

This collection of literature gave a chance to understand how the audience connects to a movie, what aspects of the movie make the audience relate, how to shoot something that is emotional. The pre-planning a documentary books gave a head start for me to imagine what I would like my own documentary to be.

## Research Questions

This capstone aims to answer one main question: How does social background affect making meaning of and connecting to a film? There are two sub-questions considered to strengthen the research conducted on the main question: How do Armenians make meaning through the films *Mer Bak* and *The Promise*? And why do both the Diaspora and the local communities in Armenia, relate more to the movie *The Promise* rather than with *Mer Bak*?

## Methodology

For the purpose of this research, two focus groups were organized. The purpose of these focus groups was to have a group of Armenians (both Diaspora and local in Armenia) and hear how they would feel about the movies while hearing other Armenians speaking about their feelings and thoughts too. These focus groups took place at the American University of Armenia on two consecutive days in February 2019. There was a call for participants through an online Google Forms application stating the purpose, procedure, and logistics (date, time, venue) of the focus groups. The focus groups included movie screenings followed by question and discussion

sessions. On Friday, February 15th, the participants watched the movie *Mer Bak* and on Saturday, February, 16th, they watched the movie *The Promise*. Each focus group lasted about three hours, with the movie screenings taking up to two hours, then a 15-minute coffee break, followed by the discussions.

Only five participants signed up through the Google Forms. On the first day of the focus group, even after two reminders, only two people showed up. The rest were unavailable to any phone calls and unresponsive to any emails that were sent. It is unclear what the reasons were for not being present. The crew that was there to assist in the screenings volunteered to be participants in the focus groups. And so there were five participants for the first day. On the second day of the focus group, three of the previous participants from the first day cancelled for personal reasons. However, when the remaining participants were told of this issue, they volunteered to bring in participants from their group of friends. This way, on the second day of the focus groups, five participants were present as well.

Thus, there were ten participants in total. On the first day two out of the five participants were local Armenians aged 20 and 21, one Syrian Armenian aged 18 who has lived in Armenia for the past 11 years, one Syrian Armenian aged 18 who has lived in Armenia for three years, and one Jordanian Armenian aged 20 who has lived in Armenia for only a year. On the second day, out of five participants, no local Armenians were present. There was one Syrian Armenian and one Jordanian Armenian (the same participants from the previous day), two Kuwaiti Armenians both aged 18 who have been living in Armenia for the past year, and one Lebanese Armenian aged 24.

Considering the fact that during the entire process of the focus groups only three local Armenians were present, it was decided to include several one-on-one interviews with local Armenians to have a balance of opinions and thoughts. The interviewees were selected based on them watching the two movies. An inquiry about who has seen both movies was posted on Facebook and one of the commentators agreed to do the interview. An interview took place at the Green Bean Cafe on Amiryar street, with a local Armenian aged 24. The time of the interview was decided based on the availability of the interviewee. (See Appendices for the focus group and interview guidelines.) With this, I was able to understand what each thinks of each movie and how each group perceived the movies. The focus groups and interview are included in the documentary based on the responses of the participants. The documentary is mainly segments of both the focus groups and interview.

The documentary is in Armenian (both Western and Eastern Armenian) with English subtitles or in the case of the participants speaking in English, Armenian subtitles is provided. The documentary is in both dialects of the Armenian language because the participants of the focus groups and interviewees are both diasporans residing in Armenia and local Armenians.

The main focus of the documentary is to highlight how members of various Armenian communities perceive the screened movies, given that Dyke (1950), Freed (1957), and Kalow (2011) all argue a documentary is powerful only when it tells a story of people and not disastrous historical events.

## **Research Findings and Analysis**

The first part of the research were the two focus groups conducted. During the first focus group. The one thing that stood out to the audience from the film *Mer Bak* were the neighbors.

Out of the five participants, four commented on how they either had bad or good neighbors. One local Armenian, commented on how she never had good neighbors, even though she was living in Armenia and she never felt the connection of neighbors that was portrayed in the film. The Jordanian Armenian, commented that even though he has not lived in Armenia, however, his Armenian neighbors back in Jordan were the exact same way the film had portrayed. “We also had this experience [in Jordan]. The neighbors were not always so close and were fighting most of the time. However, when a problem occurred, they supported each other the same way they did in the film” (G. Baghsarian, 2019).

The participants seemed to share one common idea: Armenia is no longer the same way it was portrayed in the film. Albeit rightfully so, the film was to show how life in Armenia was back in 1997 and things have changed since then. The local Armenians and the Syrian Armenian who has been living in Armenia for the past 11 years, said they miss the days that are shown in the film. “When we [the participant and his family] first came to Armenia, that was how life was. Everyone was always in the courtyard (*bak*) all day long. Watching this, I remembered the old days and I got emotional” (H. Artinian, 2019). However, the Diasporans who have moved to Armenia in the past three years, commented that *Mer Bak* is the only place where they have seen a *bak* (courtyard) where everyone is gathered. One local Armenian mentioned that Armenia has changed a lot, “before, after 8pm, people would be outdoors. Now after 8pm, they are all inside” (K. Gevorgian, 2019).

The Local Armenians and the Syrian Armenian who has lived in Armenia for 11 years, agreed that *Mer Bak* is a movie that only people who grew up and lived in Armenia in the past 10 years would relate to. And so it seemed. The idea of the *bak*, the old men playing *nardi*

(backgammon) in the *bisedka* (benches with a small roof in the courtyard), the one person who knows about everyone and what they are doing, and the kids playing in their small yard, seemed like too much of a foreign concept for them to be able to participate much in the conversation about that part of local Armenian culture. One local Armenian commented that she feels very lucky to have lived in the time when playing in the yard was still something children did (C. Hakobyan, 2019).

The second focus group was a less diverse group, because of the lack of local Armenians. However, the five participants were Armenians from different places. One was from Syria, one from Jordan, two from Kuwait, and one from Lebanon. The movie discussed at this focus group was *The Promise*. The first thing that was revealed was that it was very emotional for the participants to watch it. Two of the Kuwaiti girls said that they had watched it a couple times before the focus group and each time they ended up crying: “everytime you watch the movie, you discover something new, and it gets to you in a different way each time you see the film” (H. Artinian, 2019).

The language of the film *The Promise* also played a huge role for the group of diasporans. For the first-time watchers, they revealed they were disturbed when a movie about the Armenian genocide started in English or was made in English, despite the fact that they realize the movie was made for others (non-Armenians) to learn about the genocide. “The movie was able to get some parts of the Armenian culture and the genocide correctly. But the truth of the matter remains that this film is more of an international film than it is an Armenian film” (N. Najarian, 2019). Another participant mentioned that this is “our story” and watching it in another

language feels a bit foreign and rude at first but it takes time to get used to the language (L. Hovsepian, 2019).

The aspects of the film that felt Armenian to the participants were the church related scenes, Gomidas (Soghomon Soghomonian, Armenian priest and composer, known as the father of Armenian national music) singing, helping each other (being a good Christian) – one participant recalled the scene where Michael and Ana, the main protagonists of the film, were running away and saw an Armenian on the ground asking for help, and instead of turning their backs on him, despite how hard their own situation was, they helped him. In contrast there were scenes depicting the “greed” and “jealousy” of Turkish people. One participant mentioned of the scene at the beginning of the movie, where the genocide had not yet started, and the character of a Turkish merchant says, “this Armenian dog is stealing my customers” (The Promise, 2016). According to the participant, the film with this scene showed that “the Turkish people are always jealous of the Armenian people. It showed that the Armenians are always better than the Turks. This part of the film was completely Armenian” (H. Artinian, 2019).

*The Promise* was an easy-to-watch, more bearable, and less gory Armenian genocide movie. According to Nareg Najarian, this movie was for the general public, since compared to other Armenian genocide movies this was easier to watch and easier to grasp. It was not a documentary “there was a story mixed with it” (H. Artinian, 2019). The story was about this one person and his village life, his city life, his professional life, and his life during the genocide. It was not about the entire Armenian people which made things easier to swallow.



One thing in *The Promise* that was similar to *Mer Bak* was the Armenian community's affection, love, and care towards each other. They all felt that the portrayals of the church environment, the close community of helping each other, and being so affectionate to each other, are all dying out. Even though one participant mentioned that people only come together when there is a crisis, the others disagreed that with Armenians that was not the case until the past few years. One participant from Syria mentioned that now Armenians are not as close as they were and only come together during a problem, "during the war in Syria, Armenians were always ready to help fellow Armenians. Whenever they heard an Armenian was injured or was dead, they tried helping that person or their family the best they could" (H. Artinian, 2019).

The participants all agreed that the film included only a snippet of what the Armenian genocide entailed. As mentioned earlier, it was about this one man's story. It felt that the film only gave an idea of what the genocide was. One participant mentioned that this was a good thing. With this film, it can be shown to other people who are not Armenian and have them know a little about the Armenian history and make foreigners curious about the Armenians. However, some participants disagreed about showing this film to foreigners to learn about Armenians. "I don't like others to watch this and pity us" (H. Artinian, 2019).

After the focus groups, interviews were conducted. Sona Hakobyan, a 24-year-old local Armenian, was interviewed. She expressed that she and her friends still use some of the terms and phrases from the film *Mer Bak*. She mentioned that she did not have the *bak* experience however, because the movie was and still is such a popular one, the jokes and the phrases are used in day to day life. However, she stated that not many things have changed from the movie, "yes, generations have changed since then, everything has become more modern, and so on but

the Yerevanian culture and community is still the same, people still joke with each other the same way, people still talk to each other the same way” (S. Hakobyan, 2019).

Ms. Hakobyan does not believe this is a good movie to show to non-Armenians to learn about Armenia. She explains that it would be very hard for foreigners to understand the culture that is portrayed within the film (the jokes, the Niva cars, and the *bak* in general).

Ms. Hakobyan believes that *The Promise* is an Armenian movie despite it being produced in the USA and most of the actors are American. She felt the need to mention that Kirk Kerkorian was one of the people who financed the movie. She also mentioned that it is not important where the movie was shot, where it was edited, and who the cast was. For Ms. Hakobyan, what was important was the story. Ms. Hakobyan also mentioned that *The Promise* despite having some Armenian details within the film (the clothes, the churches etc), it still lacked to portray a full description of the Armenian culture.

## **Limitations and Avenues for Future Research**

The proposal for this capstone included interviews from directors to understand how they think the audience make meaning and what do they do, as directors, to make a movie as such to have a strong relatedness to its audience. The Armenian directors, who were contacted were either not able to allocate time or were unreachable to speak with. For further research, it would be valuable to have the insight of Armenian directors’ opinions on the connection of social background and meaning making.

For upcoming further research, it would be good to speak with more people with a larger age group. The current age group were of young adults aged 18-24. This age group is a small one and limits the results of the study. To speak with people with a bigger age group, say 18-40, the research would be much more comprehensive.

## Conclusion

The two films both made an impact on the participants of the focus groups and the interviewees. However, from the reactions mainly from the focus group participants, it was clear that the thesis is disproved. After the discussions, it became clear that the participants related more to the film that their childhood related to most. The local Armenians and the one Syrian Armenian that lived in Armenia for 11 years since the age of six, related more to the film *Mer Bak*. This is because it reminds them of something they hold dear, something that they enjoyed as little kids, and something that no longer exists as often as it did back then. For the Diasporans, *Mer Bak* was merely something that they watched. They were unable to understand most of the jokes, they were unable to engage in the conversation about the idea of a *bak*, hence, they were unable to relate to the movie at all. The age group of the local Armenians and one diasporan spoken with for this research, all grew up in a society that made the same jokes and used the same phrases as the characters in the movies.

In case of *The Promise*, the diasporan Armenians related more to this movie than did the local Armenians. The diasporan Armenians were brought up in a society that was concentrated more on the genocide and its stories. For the diasporans, this is the movie that spoke more to

their childhood and to the stories they grew up with. Compared to *Mer Bak*, *The Promise* had a more emotional response from the diasporans than from the local Armenians.

## References

- Adorno, T. W. (1970). *Aesthetic Theory*. Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp.
- Bayadayan, H. (2008). *Soviet Armenian Identity and Cultural Representation*. In Darieva, T., & Kaschuba, W., *Representations on the margins of Europe: Politics and identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian states*, (pp.198-212). Frankfurt: Campus.
- Campbell, P. (1979). The Reflexive Function of Bergman's "Persona". *Cinema Journal*, 19(1), 71-85. doi:10.2307/1225421
- Catsoulis, J. (2017, April 20). Review: 'The Promise' Finds a Love Triangle in Constantinople. Retrieved April 23, 2019, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/movies/the-promise-review-oscar-isaac.html>
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December. (1951). United Nations.*
- Freed, E., (1957). Pre-Planning The Documentary Film. *Journal of the University Film Producers Association*, 9 (3), (pp. 8-10). Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20686458>
- Gude, O. (2008). Aesthetics Making Meaning. *Studies in Art Education*, 50(1), 98-103. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25475889>
- Ide, W. (2017, April 30). The Promise review – sugaring the savage story of the Armenian genocide. Retrieved April 23, 2019, from

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/apr/30/the-promise-sickly-romance-armenian-genocide-story>

Kalow, N., (2011) *Visual Storytelling The Digital Video Documentary*. The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. Durham, North Carolina Retrieved on Nov. 8, 2016 from

[https://documentarystudies.duke.edu/uploads/media\\_items/visual-storytelling-the-digital-video-documentary.original.pdf](https://documentarystudies.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/visual-storytelling-the-digital-video-documentary.original.pdf)

Kifner, J. (2007, December 07). *Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview*. Retrieved November 23, 2018, from

[https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics\\_armeniangenocide.html?mcubz=0](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics_armeniangenocide.html?mcubz=0)

Mast, G. (1979). *The Comic Mind; Comedy And Movies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Miller, M. C. (Ed.). (1990). *Seeing through movies*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Osgood, C. E., Tannenbaum, P. H., & Suci, G. J. (1978). *The measurement of meaning*. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press.

Steffen, J. (1995). Parajanov's Playful Poetics: On The 'Director's Cut' Of The Color Of Pomegranates. ]*Journal of Film and Video*, 47(4), 17-32. Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688079>

Tascon, S. (2012). Considering Human Rights Films, Representation, and Ethics: Whose Face? *Human Rights Quarterly*, 34(3), 864-883. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23254649>

*Timeline: Armenia*. (2012, January 24). Retrieved November 24, 2018, from

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1108274.stm>

Van Dyke, W. (1950). The Documentary Film. *ALA Bulletin*, 44 (4), (pp.123-124). Retrieved on

Nov. 8, 2016 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25693374>

## Appendices

### Appendix I:

#### Documentary:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZcTmWfwnKs&feature=youtu.be>

### Appendix II:

#### Focus group questions about the movie *Mer Bak* – English

##### *To both locals and diasporans:*

- How do you feel after watching the movie?
- Is this film in any form familiar to the way you lived or similar to the stories your parents or friends told you of the way life in Armenia used to be?
- Do you connect on a personal level with film? And why?
- How do you think this film portrays the Armenian culture?
- What do you think makes this film more “Armenian”? (The songs, the jokes, the setting, etc)
- What stood out the most to you?
- What do you think is the most important part of this film?
- Do you think this film should be what foreigners watch to learn about Armenians?

##### *Extra question to diasporans:*

- Does this film in any form have a familiarity with the life you lived where you are from?



### **Focus group questions about the movie *Mer Bak* – Armenian**

- Ինչպե՞ս եք Ձեզ զգում ֆիլմը դիտելուց հետո:
- Արդյո՞ք այս ֆիլմը ինչ-որ ձևով նման էր ձեր ապրելակերպին կամ նման այն պատմություններին, որ ձեր ծնողներն ու ընկերները պատմել են, թե ինչպիսին է եղել կյանքը Հայաստանում:
- Արդյո՞ք անձնապես կարողանում եք կապվել ֆիլմին, եթե այո, ապա ինչպե՞ս
- Ըստ ձեզ ֆիլմը ինչպե՞ս է ներկայացնում հայկական մշակույթը:
- Եր կարծիքով ի՞նչն է ֆիլմը հայեցի դարձնում (երկգերը, կատակները, վայլը և այլն)
- Ի՞նչ էր ավելի տարբերվող ձեզ համար:
- Ձեր կարծիքով ֆիլմի ո՞ր մասն է ամենակարևորը:
- Արդյո՞ք կարող են օտարերկրացիները նայել այս ֆիլմը հայերի մասին սովորելու համար:

#### ***Extra question to diasporans:***

- Արդյո՞ք ֆիլմը ինչ-որ ձևով նման է այն ապրելակերպին, որին դուք հետևել եք այնտեղ որտեղից սերում եք:

### **Appendix III:**

#### **Focus group questions about the movie *The Promise* – English**

##### ***To both local and diasporans:***

- How do you feel after watching this film?
- Do you consider this an Armenian film even though it was produced in America?
- If answered yes to the previous question, what makes this film Armenian?

- If answered yes to the second question, is any Armenian culture or tradition portrayed in this film?
- Do you relate more to this film or *Mer Bak*?
- Do you think this film depicts the history of the beginning of the Genocide correctly?
- What do you think is the most important part of this film?
- Do you think this film should be what foreigners watch to learn about Armenians?

**Focus group questions about the movie *The Promise* – Armenian**

- Ինչպե՞ս եք Ձեզ զգում ֆիլմը դիտելուց հետո:
- Արդյո՞ք համարում եք սա հայկական ֆիլմ չնայած, որ նկարահանվել է Ամերիկայում:
- Եթե նախորդ հարցին պատասխանել եք այո, ապա ասեք, թե ի՞նչն է ֆիլմը դարձնում հայեցի:
- Եթե պատասխանել եք այո երկրորդ հարցին, ներկայացված է արդյո՞ք հայկական մշակույթը կամ ավանդույթները ֆիլմում:
- Ո՞ր ֆիլմն է ձեզ համար ավելի հոգեհարազատ, ա՞յս ֆիլմը, թե՞ <<Մեր բակը>>:
- Արդյո՞ք այս ֆիլմը ճիշտ է ներկայացնում Հայոց Ցեղասպանության պատմական սկիզբը:
- Ըստ ձեզ, ո՞րք է ֆիլմի ամենակարևոր հատվածը:
- Արդյո՞ք սա պետք է լինի այն ֆիլմը, որ օտարերկրացիները դիտում են հայերի մասին սովորելու համար:

**Appendix IV:**

**Consent Form for Focus Groups – English**

Consent to participate in a capstone project conducted at the American University of Armenia (AUA). This is to state that I agree to participate in the capstone project conducted by **Merry Artinian**. The capstone director is Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

**PURPOSE:** I have been informed that the purpose of the project is to give a deeper insight into the Armenian community, and how the meaning-making process is changed when a social background is involved. Within the bigger context of the project, the focus group conducted by Merry Artinian is meant to shed light on Armenians (both Diaspora and non-diasporic) and their connection to the films *Mer Bak* and *The Promise* and how they make meaning from films related to their social backgrounds.

**PROCEDURES:** I understand that the focus group will be conducted at the AUA and recorded on video. As a participant, I will be asked to explore how the films made me feel, how I connect to the films, to what extent do I relate to them and why, and how the films portray the Armenian culture. The focus groups will take place after watching the films and will last approximately an hour and a half, however, the participants are free to stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the project at any given point. I understand that if I wish to extend the focus group for more than an hour and a half, I will be provided that opportunity.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** I understand that this focus group involves the sharing of my personal views and opinions, which will be treated with the utmost care and consideration. I have been informed that I am free to stop, take a break or discontinue at any time. There are no risks involved in partaking in this focus group.

**CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:**

As a participant, I will have access to all the recorded material for verification purposes. Throughout the project, if and when the material produced is in Armenian, I will have the opportunity to review and verify the English translations.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the data from this project may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes.

In terms of **identification and reproduction** of my participation:

I agree to **disclose my identity**. I understand that my identity may be revealed in any publications or presentations that may result from this focus group. **I understand that I may mask the identities of other persons appearing in my narratives if I so choose.**

I agree to the reproduction of sound and images from this focus group by any method and in any media for academic purposes, which will include documentary clips.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.  
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

FOCUS GROUP ORGANIZER:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a capstone project participant, please contact Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

## Consent Form for Focus Groups – Armenian

### Համաձայնության հավաստագիր

Համաձայնագիր մասնակցելու դիպլոմային ծրագրի իրականացման Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանում: Համաձայնագիրն առ այն, որ ես համաձայն եմ մասնակցելու դիպլոմային ծրագրի իրականացմանը Մերի Արթինեանի կողմից: Դիպլոմային աշխատանքի ղեկավարը Հուրիկ Ադարեանն է ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների քոլեջից (հեռ. 060 612769, էլ. հասցե: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)):

### Նախագծի նպատակը

Ես տեղեկացվել եմ, որ ծրագրի նպատակը հայկական համայնքի մասին խորը պատկերացումներ տալն է և ներկայացնելը, թե ինչպես է պատկերացում կազմելու գործընթացը փոխվում, երբ հասարակական նախադրյալները ևս ներառված են: Ծրագրի ավելի լայն համատեքստում, Մերի Արթինեանի կազմակերպած ֆոկուս խումբը նպատակ ունի լուսավորել հայերի (և՛ հայաստանաբնակ, և՛ սփյուռքահայ) և նրանց «Մեր բակը» և «Խոստումը» ֆիլմերի կապի մասին, ինչպես նաև, թե ինչպես են նրանք ֆիլմերն իմաստավորում կախված իրենց հասարակական հայացքներից:

### Ընթացակարգը

Ես հասկանում եմ, որ ֆոկուս խումբը կիրականացվի ՀԱՀ-ում և կտեսագրվի: Որպես մասնակից, ես կկիսեմ, թե ի՞նչ զգացի ֆիլմերը դիտելուց, ինչպե՞ս կապվեցի ֆիլմերին, ի՞նչ աստիճանի և ինչու՞, և ինչպես են ֆիլմերը ներկայացնում հայկական մշակույթը: Ֆոկուս խումբը կսկսվի ֆիլմերը նայելուց անմիջապես հետո և կտևի մոտավորապես մեկուկես ժամ, բայց մասնակիցները ազատ են դադարելու ցանկացած պահի, հրաժարվելու պատասխանել ցանկացած հարցի կամ լքելու քննարկման սենյակը ցանկացած պահի: Ես հասկանում եմ, որ ինձ կտրվի հնարավորություն ֆոկուս խումբը երկարեցնել մեկուկես ժամից ավելի, եթե ցանկանամ:

### Ռիսկեր և օգուտներ

Ես հասկանում եմ, որ այս հարցազրույցը իր մեջ ներառում է իմ անձնական արժեքների և կարծիքի կիսում, որին կվերաբերվեն առավելագույն խնամքով և հոգատարությամբ: Ինձ տեղյակ են պահել, որ ես ազատ եմ կանգնելու, դադար տալու և չչարունակելու ցանկացած պահի: Ֆոկուս խմբին մասնակցելը չի ներառում որևէ ռիսկեր:

### Մասնակցության պայմանները

Որպես մասնակից, ինձ հասանելի կլինեն բոլոր ծայնագրությունները հաստատման նպատակով: Ծրագրի ընթացքում, եթե և երբ նյութեր լինեն հայերենով, ես կունենամ հնարավորություն վերանայելու և հաստատելու Անգլերեն թարգմանությունները:

— հասկանում եմ, որ ազատ եմ հրաժարվելու համաձայնագրից և չչարունակելու իմ մասնակցությունը ցանկացած պահի, առանց որևէ բացասական հետևանքների:

— հասկանում եմ, որ այս ծրագրի տվյալները կարող են հրապարակվել տպված կամ թվային տարբերակով՝ ակադեմիական նպատակներով:

Իմ հարցազրույցի ինքնության բացահայտման և վերարտադրման առումով,

— համաձայն եմ բացահայտելու իմ ինքնությունը: Ես հասկանում եմ, որ իմ ինքնությունը կարող է բացահայտվել ցանկացած հրապարակման կամ ներկայացման մեջ, որոնք կլինեն ֆոկուս խմբի արդյունքը:

— Համաձայն եմ գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով այս ֆոկուս խմբի նկարների ու ձայնագրությունների վերարտադրմանը որևէ հաղորդամիջոցով (վեբ կայքեր, վավերագրական ֆիլմեր և այլն):

ՈՒՇԱԴԻՐ ԿԱՐԴԱՑԵԼ ԵՄ ՎԵՐԸ ՇԱՐԱԴՐՎԱԾԸ և ՀԱՍԿԱՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ԱՅՍ ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆԱԳՐԻ ԿԵՏԵՐԸ: ՀՈԺԱՐԱԿԱՍ ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ՄԱՍՆԱԿՑԵԼ ԱՅՍ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅԱՆԸ:

ՖՈԿՈՒՄ ԽՄԲԻ ՄԱՍՆԱԿԻՑ

ԱՆՈՒՆ /ԽՆԴՐՈՒՄ ԵՆՔ ԳՐԵԼ ՏՊԱՏԱՌ/ \_\_\_\_\_

ՍՏՈՐԱԳՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ \_\_\_\_\_ ԱՄՍԱԹԻՎ \_\_\_\_\_

ՖՈԿՈՒՄ ԽՄԲԻ ԿԱԶՄԱԿԵՐՊԻՉ

ԱՆՈՒՆ \_\_\_\_\_

ՍՏՈՐԱԳՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ \_\_\_\_\_ ԱՄՍԱԹԻՎ \_\_\_\_\_

Եթե ցանկացած պահի հարցեր կունենաք ձեր իրավունքների մասին, որպես դիպլոմային ծրագրի մասնակից, խնդրում ենք կապվել Դր. Հուրիկ Ադդարեանի հետ, ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների քոլեջից (հեռ. 060 612769, էլ. հասցե:

[hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)):

#### **Appendix IV:**

#### **Consent Forms for One on One Interviews – English**

Consent to participate in a capstone project conducted at the American University of Armenia (AUA). This is to state that I agree to participate in the capstone project conducted by **Merry Artinian**. The capstone director is Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

**PURPOSE:** I have been informed that the purpose of the project is to give a deeper insight into the Armenian community, and how the meaning-making process is changed when a social background is involved. Within the bigger context of the project, the focus group conducted by Merry Artinian is meant to shed light on Armenians (both Diaspora and non-diasporic) and their connection to the films *Mer Bak* and *The Promise* and how they make meaning from films related to their social backgrounds.

**PROCEDURES:** I understand that the interview will be conducted at my convenience and recorded on video. As an interviewee, I will be asked to explore how the films made me feel, how I connect to the films, to what extent do I relate to them and why, and how the films portray the Armenian culture. The interview will last approximately half an hour, however, the interviewees are free to stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the project at any given point. I understand that if I wish to extend the interview for more than half an hour, I will be provided that opportunity.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** I understand that this interview involves the sharing of my personal views and opinions, which will be treated with the utmost care and consideration. I have been informed that I am free to stop, take a break or discontinue at any time. There are no risks involved in partaking in this interview.

#### **CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:**

As an interviewee, I will have access to all the recorded material for verification purposes. Throughout the project, if and when the material produced is in Armenian, I will have the opportunity to review and verify the English translations.

\_\_\_ I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the data from this project may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes.

In terms of **identification and reproduction** of my participation:

I agree to **disclose my identity**. I understand that my identity may be revealed in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview. **I understand that I may mask the identities of other persons appearing in my narratives if I so choose.**

I agree to the reproduction of sound and images from this interview by any method and in any media for academic purposes, which will include documentary clips.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.  
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.  
INTERVIEWEE:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEW ORGANIZER:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a capstone project participant, please contact Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

## Consent Form for One on One Interviews – Armenian

### Համաձայնության հավաստագիր

Համաձայնագիր մասնակցելու դիպլոմային ծրագրի իրականացման Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանում: Համաձայնագիրն առ այն, որ ես համաձայն եմ մասնակցելու դիպլոմային ծրագրի իրականացմանը Մերի Արթինեանի կողմից: Դիպլոմային աշխատանքի ղեկավարը Հուրիկ Ադդարեանն է ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների քոլեջից (հեռ. 060 612769, էլ. հասցե: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)):

### Նախագծի նպատակը

Ես տեղեկացվել եմ, որ ծրագրի նպատակը հայկական համայնքի մասին խորը պատկերացումներ տալն է և ներկայացնելը, թե ինչպես է պատկերացում կազմելու գործընթացը փոխվում, երբ հասարակական նախադրյալները ևս ներառված են: Ծրագրի ավելի լայն համատեքստում, Մերի Արթինեանի կազմակերպած հարցազրույցը նպատակ ունի լուսավորել հայերի (և՛ հայաստանաբնակ, և՛ սփյուռքահայ) և նրանց «Մեր բակը» և «Խոստումը» ֆիլմերի կապի մասին, ինչպես նաև, թե ինչպես են նրանք ֆիլմերն իմաստավորում կախված իրենց հասարակական հայացքներից:

### Ընթացակարգը

Ես հասկանում եմ, որ հարցազրույց տալը և տեսանկարահանելը կախված կլինի իմ ցանկությունից: Որպես հարցազրույց տվող, ինձ կխնդրեն ներկայացնել, թե ինչպես է ֆիլմը ինձ ստիպել զգալ, ինչպես եմ կապվել ֆիլմերին և ինչպես եմ ֆիլմերը ներկայացնում հայկական մշակույթը: հարցազրույթը կտևի մոտավորապես 30 րոպե, բայց մասնակիցները կարող են կանգնեցնել հարցազրույցը ցանկացած պահի, հրաժարվել պատասխանել ցանկացած հարցի կամ ծրագրից դուրս գալ ցանկացած կետում: Ես հասկանում եմ, որ ունեմ հնարավորություն երկարաձգելու հարցազրույցի ժամանակը 30 րոպեից ավելի:

### Ռիսկեր և օգուտներ

Ես հասկանում եմ, որ այս հարցազրույցը իր մեջ ներառում է իմ անձնական արժեքների և կարծիքի կիսում, որին կվերաբերվեն առավելագույն խնամքով և հոգատարությամբ: Ինձ տեղյակ են պահել, որ ես ազատ եմ կանգնելու, դադար տալու և չչարունակելու ցանկացած պահի: հարցազրույցին մասնակցելը չի ներառում որևէ ռիսկեր:

**Մասնակցության պայմանները**

Որպես մասնակից, ինձ հասանելի կլինեն բոլոր ծայնագրությունները հաստատման նպատակով: Ծրագրի ընթացքում, եթե և երբ նյութեր լինեն հայերենով, ես կունենամ հնարավորություն վերանայելու և հաստատելու Անգլերեն թարգմանությունները:

— հասկանում եմ, որ ազատ եմ հրաժարվելու համաձայնագրից և չչարունակելու իմ մասնակցությունը ցանկացած պահի, առանց որևէ բացասական հետևանքների:

— հասկանում եմ, որ այս ծրագրի տվյալները կարող են հրապարակվել տպված կամ թվային տարբերակով՝ ակադեմիական նպատակներով:

Իմ հարցազրույցի ինքնության բացահայտման և վերարտադրման առումով,

— համաձայն եմ բացահայտելու իմ ինքնությունը: Ես հասկանում եմ, որ իմ ինքնությունը կարող է բացահայտվել ցանկացած հրապարակման կամ ներկայացման մեջ, որոնք կլինեն հարցազրույցի արդյունքը:

— Համաձայն եմ գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով այս հարցազրույցի նկարների ու ձայնագրությունների վերարտադրմանը որևէ հաղորդամիջոցով (վեբ կայքեր, վավերագրական ֆիլմեր և այլն):

ՈՒՇԱԴԻՐ ԿԱՐԴԱՑԵԼ ԵՄ ՎԵՐԸ ՇԱՐԱԴՐՎԱԾԸ և ՀԱՍԿԱՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ԱՅՍ ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆԱԳՐԻ ԿԵՏԵՐԸ: ՀՈԺԱՐԱԿԱՄ ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ՄԱՍՆԱԿՑԵԼ ԱՅՍ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅԱՆԸ:

ՀԱՐՑԱՋՐԻՈՅՑԻ ՄԱՍՆԱԿԻՑ

ԱՆՈՒՆ /ԽՆԴՐՈՒՄ ԵՆՔ ԳՐԵԼ ՏՊԱՏԱՈՒ / \_\_\_\_\_

ՍՏՈՐԱԳՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ \_\_\_\_\_ ԱՄՍԱԹԻՎ \_\_\_\_\_

ՀԱՐՑԱՋՐԻՈՅՑԻ ԿԱԶՄԱԿԵՐՊԻՉ

ԱՆՈՒՆ \_\_\_\_\_

ՍՏՈՐԱԳՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ \_\_\_\_\_ ԱՄՍԱԹԻՎ \_\_\_\_\_

Եթե ցանկացած պահի հարցեր կունենաք ձեր իրավունքների մասին, որպես դիպլոմային ծրագրի մասնակից, խնդրում ենք կապվել Դր. Հուրիկ Ադդարեանի հետ, ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների քոլեջից (հեռ. 060 612769, էլ. հասցե:

[hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)):