

Title: Sergei Parajanov: Brushes with Cultural Autonomy and Political Risk
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In Sergei Parajanov's films of the post-thaw era, he appeals to the Soviet perception of exoticism as a means to empower certain minority groups. In *Shadows of our Forgotten Ancestors* and *The Color of Pomegranates* Parajanov presents symbols saturated with historic, religious, literary and even geographic significance to the exotic subject. In doing so, he abandons the socialist realist portrayal of a contently assimilated minority, and opposes the government-proscribed, universal Russo-centric culture. Indeed, the exotic atmosphere Parajanov poses suggests cultural, and even political autonomy for these groups. In turn, his fixation on cultural distinction serves to empower - not marginalize - these minorities during a time of political vulnerability for the Kremlin. Distinguishing minorities from the Soviet norm evoked a fearful – not dismissive – sentiment from authorities towards these “outside” cultures. This is especially notable in *The Color of Pomegranates* which celebrates the cultural identity of Armenia – a nation with a robust, historical tradition, which includes rebelling against imperial powers.

I aim to analyze how Parajanov's symbols and motifs conjure ideas of cultural autonomy in Soviet republics. The history of the republics, geopolitical events and details of Parajanov's life will be critical aspects of this analysis, as they will more fully illuminate the director's ideology expressed through film and the political climate in which it emerged.

Considering the intrigue surrounding Parajanov and the increasingly mixed relationship between U.S.S.R republics and the Kremlin during the most active time of Parajanov's career, it is important to understand what political implications he presents in his films. This sort of political and historical analysis is also important because the cinematic eccentricity of Parajanov's films is so demonstrable that it easily consumes the viewer and critic's attention – leaving Parajanov's ideological messages less recognized.