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**The Ties That Bind: Reimagining Memory in Armenian Identity
Formation**

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**The Ties That Bind: Reimagining Memory in Armenian Identity
Formation**

by

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Abstract

The Ties That Bind: Reimagining Memory in Armenian Identity Formation

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Understanding Armenian identity, what shapes it and why, is necessary for understanding the Republic of Armenia. For it is this identity and its preservation that motivates the Republic of Armenia to create certain policies that agitate for measures that ultimately either improve or threaten stability within the Southern Caucasus as well as Armenian relations with the international community. This thesis utilizes the lens of memory to trace the evolution of Armenian identity through the Russian Imperialist, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods of Armenian history, seeking new ways to analyze and understand the factors that influence the formation of national narratives and to what end. It will explore the expansion of Russia into Armenian life, society, and culture and how this affected the ways in which Armenians were perceived and treated by the Empire. Imperialist perceptions, policies, and actions impacted Armenians' understanding of themselves in the pre-Soviet era and ultimately created an environment that gave rise to an Armenian nationalism and its quest for nationhood. Furthermore, Armenian life in the Soviet Union and the influence of lingering memories of communism and the Soviet

experience on the formation of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian identity, as well as the post-Soviet resurgence and re-appropriation of historic memories and the reconstruction of a national identity grounded in ideals of historic exceptionalism, reunification, and self-determination, will be discussed.

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Introduction

How has identity shifted and evolved over the course of the last two hundred years for Armenians residing in Russia and the territory of modern-day Armenia? More to the point, what role has individual, social, and collective memory had in the development of contemporary Armenian identity? Due to the long-standing fragmentation of the Armenian people and their dispersal throughout the world over the course of their history, attempting to classify and distinguish a unique form of identity for this group would indeed be a difficult task. Commonalities are clearly discernable, such as a shared collective identity of an ancient past, language, religion, and a deep connection to the tragic events surrounding what is considered by many to be a genocide of the Armenian people in Eastern Anatolia at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, ‘Armenian identity’ is in actuality as fragmented as the Armenian people. It is evident that a distinguishable split exists between what is considered the eastern diaspora—those communities in Russia, Iran, and Armenia proper—and what is considered the western diaspora—those communities in Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas. This disjunction is based on differences of linguistic dialects, religious leadership, politics, and geography. Due to the vast scope inherent in synthesizing such diverse characteristics, this study will focus exclusively on Armenian communities of Russia and modern-day Armenia. By tracing the development and evolution of memory and identity through three critical periods—the Russian Imperial period, the Soviet era, and the post-Soviet period—I will illustrate how eastern Armenian identity contributes to the ongoing geopolitical relationship between the Republic of Armenia and Russia.

Karl W. Deutsch defines three phases of nationalism, or ethnic mobilization, through a lens of communication.¹ The first level is the formation of a people united by language, culture, geography, and goals. The second level is the creation of a nationality by which a people seek “to acquire a measure of effective control over the behavior of its members...to equip itself with power...to make the enforcement of its commands sufficiently probable to aid in the spread of habits of voluntary compliance with them.”² Thus, people begin to develop a national consciousness that leads to the emergence of nationalism. The third level is the creation of a fully operational and healthy nation or nation-state, which is typically the goal of nationalism. This path of ethnic mobilization can be clearly seen in the Armenian quest for independence over the past few centuries.

Following Deutsch’s model, Chapter 1 will focus on the expansion of Russia into Armenian life, society, and culture; the ways in which Armenians were perceived and treated by the Empire; and how those perceptions, policies, and actions impacted Armenians’ understanding of themselves in the pre-Soviet era in order to understand the formation of the Armenians as a people, rise of Armenian nationalism, and the quest for Armenian nationhood. Specifically, this chapter will discuss their socioeconomic standing within the Russian Empire through shifting lenses of ethnicity, roles and functions, and mobility or ‘freedom.’ More importantly, the perception of this standing in relation to that under previous empires will help to shed light on the production, evolution, and promulgation of various narratives affecting historical memory and its impact on identity. We will also see the beginnings of an attempt to unify scattered Armenian groups by the creation and promotion of a national identity that crosses

¹ Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of*

² *Ibid*, 78.

territorial borders and uses anti-Turkish sentiment and victimhood, largely based in memories of genocide, as symbolic tools of memory.

Chapter 2 will examine Armenian life in the Soviet Union and the influence of lingering memories of communism and the Soviet experience on the formation of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian identity. This period had a distinct impact on those living under communism, contributing to the furthering fissure of Armenian identity along eastern and western lines—corresponding to the initial split of the Armenian people between the Persian and Ottoman Empires respectively—and bolstering of socioeconomic and geopolitical bonds between Russia and Armenia. By understanding the motives, methods, and level of acceptance of competing narratives and Soviet assimilation, we will better understand the implications this process had on Armenian identity.

Lastly, Chapter 3 will explore the post-Soviet resurgence and re-appropriation of historic, pre-Soviet memories and the construction (or reconstruction) of a new national identity grounded in ideals of historic exceptionalism, reunification, and self-determination. This section will analyze the impetuses for renewed nationalism and the utilization and exploitation of a triumphalist past to shape the Armenian future. By deconstructing memories of victimhood, internalization of pre-Soviet and Soviet memories, and various narratives existing in tension in the immediate years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, I will attempt to elucidate post-Soviet identity through the lens of Memory Studies.

THEMES AND CONCEPTS

Individual memory and collective memory are inseparable sides of the same memory coin. Both private individual memory and public collective memory combine to

make up what we might call living memory, or one's lived experiences. Likewise, memory and history cannot be separated if one wishes to comprehensively understand those lived experiences of an individual, group, or people. The existing scholarship on memory and history is extensive and constantly evolving. New voices from all fields of academia are contributing to these concepts and changing the way we think about the role of memory in history. This field of history and memory is quite large and spans many disciplines, hence the necessity to synthesize differing concepts and definitions. Following will be an overview of some of the major contributions to this field and how they relate to the role of memory and history in the shaping of Armenian identity over time.

Beginning with a discussion of basic theories and themes, a close look at various articles that have appeared in academic journals over the past decade or two offers some definitions and debates in this thought-provoking field of History and Memory Studies.³ First of all, it is important to make the distinction between history and memory. Memories are the events that happened while history is subjective and based on the importance that historians place upon it.⁴ Pierre Nora makes a compelling argument for the use of what he calls *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory, by claiming that the state actually creates sites of memory—for example statues, memorials, symbols, etc.—as a way to impose memory on its citizenry, thus arguing that memory does not occur naturally but springs forth from subjective history. Adding to Nora's work, Richard Roberts encompasses the theme of statist as well as anti-statist intervention in the

³ In their article "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins reconstruct some working definitions relating to social memory in order to synthesize the multi-disciplinary scholarship that has contributed to this field.

⁴ See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 7-24.

production of history and memory.⁵ Namely, national projects reproduce statist, hegemonic forms of productions of history while they affect an alternative position. These concepts of competing narratives that exist within tension to one another are important to keep in mind when analyzing various memories and histories and how their internalization into the minds of the Armenian diaspora have changed over time. It is also necessary to distinguish social memory from collective memory. Social memory is a tool used to understand the intersection of social identity and historical memory. Whereas collective memory groups together a number of social groups; social memory evokes the social frameworks within which individuals and societies form group identity and negotiate competing recollections of the past.⁶ These memories exist within the larger collective, thus a collective narrative can often dismiss or exclude narratives of some social groups while emphasizing others. When referring to certain groups within the larger Armenian collective, I will be referring to social memory in order to make the distinction that not all groups within the collective or nation carry the same memories. The late 1970s led to an interpretive form of narrative and marks the beginning of a focus on broader social and collective forces placed in a cultural context rather than on individual remembrances.⁷ Extrapolating from this theory, viewing collective memory in a cultural context aids in understanding the motives behind the appropriation of certain individual histories as national myths. Thus, perhaps 'cultural memory' is an appropriate lens through which to view the appropriation and use of certain Armenian memories.⁸

⁵ See Richard Roberts, "History, Memory, and the Power of Statist Narratives," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 3 (2000): 513-522.

⁶ Scot A. French, "What is Social Memory?" *Southern Cultures* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1995): 9-18.

⁷ Anna Green's article, "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates," traces the epistemological course of historians.

⁸ Another group of scholars that have contributed heavily to defining the concepts of history and memory can be traced back to two journals, the twenty-sixth special issue of *Representations* in 1989 and the

Another important component to Memory Studies involves the role of nostalgia in the creation, diffusion, and use of memories. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo argues that colonial nostalgia is not benevolent but stems from an imperial past reminiscent of domination and subordination.⁹ Colonial narratives tend to lump together all individual and social memories into one single narrative. This ultimately contributes to the forgetting and silencing of some memories while disseminating only one. Thus, nostalgia becomes dangerous when failing to recognize those ‘lost’ memories, as it denies the past of certain groups of society. Rosaldo argues that it is important to consider ethnographic writings in relation to imperialism and colonization so as not to discount these silenced memories. But how does a past of imperialism result in nostalgia among an Armenian diaspora? I would argue that there are various manifestations of ‘imperialist nostalgia’ not only for the Russian Empire, but also for the Soviet Union. Additionally, it is necessary to view these nostalgias in terms of ‘victimhood,’ but also collaboration. Thus a question arises as to how the lingering consciousness of victimhood and subjugation result in a desire to claim a triumphalist past in order to create a triumphalist future? Furthermore, how does nostalgia differ between diaspora communities in Russia from those who remained in traditional Armenian territory?

Experience is crucial to distinguishing between collective memory—lived experiences—and historical memory—the preservation of lived experiences. Historical memory is the “lived experience of recalling and remembering the past in the living, active present.”¹⁰ This follows Nora in stating that the preservation of historical memory

December 1997 issue of *American Historical Review*. The former of these feature Pierre Nora, Renato Rosaldo, and Steven Knapp, while the latter feature Susan A. Crane and Alon Confino.

⁹ See Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia.” *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 107-122.

¹⁰ Susan A. Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (Dec. 1997): 1373.

inevitable corrupts the memory of lived experiences. Taking this into consideration, how then does the forced preservation of certain historical memories—for example the Armenian Genocide—and their subsequent imbedding into the national narrative by the state change or skew individual memories? The emphasis on selective ‘sites of memory’ and rituals designed to evoke or strengthen ‘historical’ memories lead to selective forgetting and exploitation of lived experiences. In order to resuscitate collective memory, it is necessary to relocate “the collective back into the individual who articulates it”¹¹ and pay attention to how individuals experience themselves as historical figures. Thus, it is also necessary to view collective memories through those of the individual in order to mitigate a skewed perspective. To that end, this study will use individual memories of select figures to analyze how statist narratives have influenced those memories and how these figures themselves (and individual memory) have become imbedded in a national narrative.

Social, political, and economic forces contribute heavily to the production of history.¹² Thus, how do disparate and shifting political, economic, and social or cultural pressures contribute to the rise of certain statist and counter-narratives? Furthermore, what are the motives and usages behind what is remembered and what is forgotten? Ritual performances convey and maintain images of the past.¹³ Thus, acts of memory become acts of various performances, both consciously and unconsciously performed at various levels, and are connected to ideas of race, gender, class, and the power of

¹¹ Ibid, p.1379-1380.

¹² David William Cohen's *The Combing of History* examines the conventions and paradigms that govern historical knowledge and historical texts.

¹³ Another important contribution to the scholarship of memory, and useful for this study, arises from Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith. Their article “Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction” uses Paul Connerton’s definition of cultural memory as an ‘act of transfer.’ Connerton’s *How Societies Remember* concentrates on understanding memory, especially cultural memory, as an ‘act of transfer.’

authoritative institutions to choose what to remember and what to forget.¹⁴ For this reason, an in-depth analysis of rituals of remembrance and performances of memory and forgetting, as well as their connection to concepts of participation and agency, will be a significant focus of this thesis.

In his book *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs asserts that human memory cannot be divorced from a collective context. Disparate groups of people have distinctive collective memories. Thus, varying modes of behavior rise out of these different memories. The individual cannot exist outside of some kind of collective, therefore individual memory does not exist outside of the collective. Another approach to the relationship between history and memory that should be considered derives from Paul Ricoeur. He approaches memory from a phenomenological perspective, focusing on how a memory of the present can be an abstract of something from the past.¹⁵ Memory must be grounded in a particular context or place, thus it is necessary to historicize it to understand what is forgotten and what is remembered. In order to examine the role and influence of both individual and collective memory on the formulation of Armenian identity, I will explore how statist, religious, and alternative narratives of national myths and histories have changed over time. It will be important to contextualize these memories in the larger historical narrative of Armenian history as well as to delineate collective memory from historical memory. To examine how Armenians' past inhabit their present memories, remembrances, and lived experiences, the notion of chronosophy is important to keep in mind as it refers to viewing time as relative. A chronosophical perspective treats the past as inhabiting the present through the use of memory. Thus,

¹⁴ Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction." *Signs*, Special Issue 28, 1, *Gender and Cultural Memory* (Autumn 2002): 1-19.

¹⁵ See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

when an individual ‘relives’ the past through remembering, that event lives on in the present. This notion rejects a chronological paradigm and refuses to view events and memories of those events through linear space. Specifically, how do individual, social, and collective memories of the past continue to lived on and color the present?

Ultimately, the importance of documents, place, and time when contextualizing and analyzing memory are themes that must be considered when conducting memory work.¹⁶ In discussing the role of narratives, I found Richard Roberts extremely helpful in understanding the roles and differences of statist and alternative narratives. Paying due attention to whom a narrative benefits is a key component that must be considered when looking at Russian, Ottoman, and Armenian archives maintained by their respective states since archives can be manipulated or even fabricated to maintain the legitimacy and narrative of the state or power structure.¹⁷ Taking this into consideration, it will be necessary to look at those archival documents with a critical eye. In addition, examining memoirs and travelogues through a Halbwachs-ian lens will help to distinguish the varying memories that arise from different groups—for example those Armenians living in Russia, those living in present-day Armenia, and those living in the Ottoman Empire—with an eye to how they have changed over time.

¹⁶ Helena Pohlandt-McCormick questions the veracity of testimonies and archives in “Controlling Woman: Winnie Mandela and the 1976 Soweto Uprising.” She argues that the state creates archives and corrupts the original evidence; therefore those documents become untrustworthy. She also examines the role of the audience, stating that since it can change, testimonies could be made with that audience in mind. Thus, tainted history becomes tainted memory. Additionally, Ruramisai Charumbira offers a much-needed discussion on the importance of language in interacting with original source material and effectively presenting history as a trustworthy figure in her article “Nehanda and Gender Victimhood in the Central Mashonaland 1896-97 Rebellions: Revisiting the Evidence.” The role of agency is another important theme when discussing concepts of ‘victimhood.’ For that, an application of Ricoeur, Charumbira, and Pohlandt-McCormick to the memoirs and travelogues will be invaluable.

¹⁷ See Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, “Controlling Woman,” “Controlling Woman: Winnie Mandela and the 1976 Soweto Uprising.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, 3 (2000): 585-614.

The term ‘nationalism’ as used today is a relatively modern phrase used to express the formation of a nation, sentiments belonging exclusively to that nation, a nation’s language or associated symbols, a sociopolitical movement on behalf of that nation, or an ideology seen as belonging to or associated with that nation.¹⁸ All of these instances have one thing in common: the nation is of prime importance. Thus, a useful definition would classify nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation.’”¹⁹ When considering Armenian nationalism and its effect upon Armenian identity, it is important to take into consideration nationalism as it developed in the Caucasus as a whole. In general, this can be described as classically postcolonial since it takes much of its character from the creation of distinct national categories in censuses, the demographic manufacturing of empire builders, and even the rise of old imperial and clerical languages. In addition, alternative poles of allegiance in the north Caucasus have long had a history of competing with the nation for the hearts and minds of its people.²⁰ However in Georgia, nationalism emerged from reworking established heritages with a focus on gathering lands that once belonged to an older state. Ecclesiastical tradition and literary language, a unique writing system, an ancient royal house, and the willingness of conquering empires to reinforce noble privileges rather than supplant them meant that basic questions of identity, community, and territory were settled much earlier in Georgia than in other areas of the Caucasus. In contrast, Azerbaijani intellectuals generally looked to national ideas as a

¹⁸ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* 2 ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 5-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

²⁰ Islam and pan-Islamist movements, and pan-Turkism for example

way of pulling their populations into modernity instead of searching for past glory days like the Georgians.

Armenian nationalism is in part unique to this region in its use of both of these elements.²¹ It was part modernizing and part revivalist, reflecting the environment in which it arose. For much of their history, the lands that would constitute the Armenian republic were Muslim, overseen by Muslim khans, and inhabited by Turkic-speaking Muslim nomads and some settled farmers. The historic areas of Armenian life were in Eastern Anatolia. The ancient city of Ani was a major site of Armenian learning and ecclesiastical governance before its destruction by an earthquake in the fourteenth century. In addition, the highly mobile nature of Armenian populations and their connections with international commerce dates back to the Middle Ages and caused Armenian communities to thrive in places like Venice, Krakow, Istanbul, Jerusalem, and even Calcutta.²² Because of various territorial shifts, an inability to function as an independent nation, and a global dispersal of Armenians at such an early time, a competing image of what and where Armenia was developed within these Diaspora communities.

The English-language scholarship on Armenian identity is not vast. While several scholars such as Ronald Grigor Suny, Aram Arkun, and Razmik Panossian have grappled with classifying Armenian identity and the creation of the Armenian nation, they tend to reinforce a national narrative of exceptionalism by overemphasizing national myths of triumphalism and uniqueness. I have yet to find any English-language studies that directly link the role of memory to the creation of distinct narratives that ultimately form one's 'Armenian-ness.' It is important to note that the Armenian people have been

²¹ Armenian nationalism here is used to refer to what would arise in the Armenian nation-state.

²² Movement into Cilicia in 11th century

geographically dispersed for centuries. This in turn has naturally led to the absence of conformity in ‘Armenian’ identity. For that reason this study will deal almost exclusively with ‘Eastern Armenians’—those who inhabit the current physical space of the Republic of Armenia and their closest diaspora in Russia. Armenian communities within Iran are also considered part of this eastern diaspora group. However, they did not experience communism as members of the Soviet Union, thus forming a unique identity based on divergent experiences. Therefore they will not be prominently discussed for the purposes of this paper.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ARMENIAN DIASPORA

Both modern-day and ancient Armenian homelands have long been located at the crossroads of East and West interests. Making up a land bridge between the Caspian and Black Seas, the Caucasus region has played an important strategic role in the ambitions of many ancient powers by serving as a “funnel through which traders, travelers, and entire peoples moved.”²³ Lying among Turkey to the West, Iran to the South, Azerbaijan to the East, and Georgia to the North, modern-day Armenia traces a rich and long history far back into antiquity. The Kingdom of Armenia was first founded in 600 BC under the Orontid Dynasty and became one of the most powerful kingdoms in the region between 95 and 66 BC. Its geographic position between East and West lent itself to a natural highway through which many different peoples traveled. This has meant invasion by the Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Mongols, Persians, Ottoman Turks, and the Russians. Each of these empires left an impression upon Armenia and its culture that lasts to this day since “the migrants’ identities, ranging from religion to language and

²³ Croissant, Michael P. *The Armenian-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 1.

culture, were adopted to varying degrees by the indigenous peoples of Transcaucasia.”²⁴ This translates to an ethnically and culturally diverse environment. The Caucasus region as a whole continues to hold strategic value for both the East and West.²⁵ Because of this a diverse range of cultures, religions, languages, and ethnicities have consistently collided, often erupting into tense battles pitting one people against another. In the case of the Armenians, this mixture combusted quite fatefully during the twentieth century due to various pressures on social and political tensions.

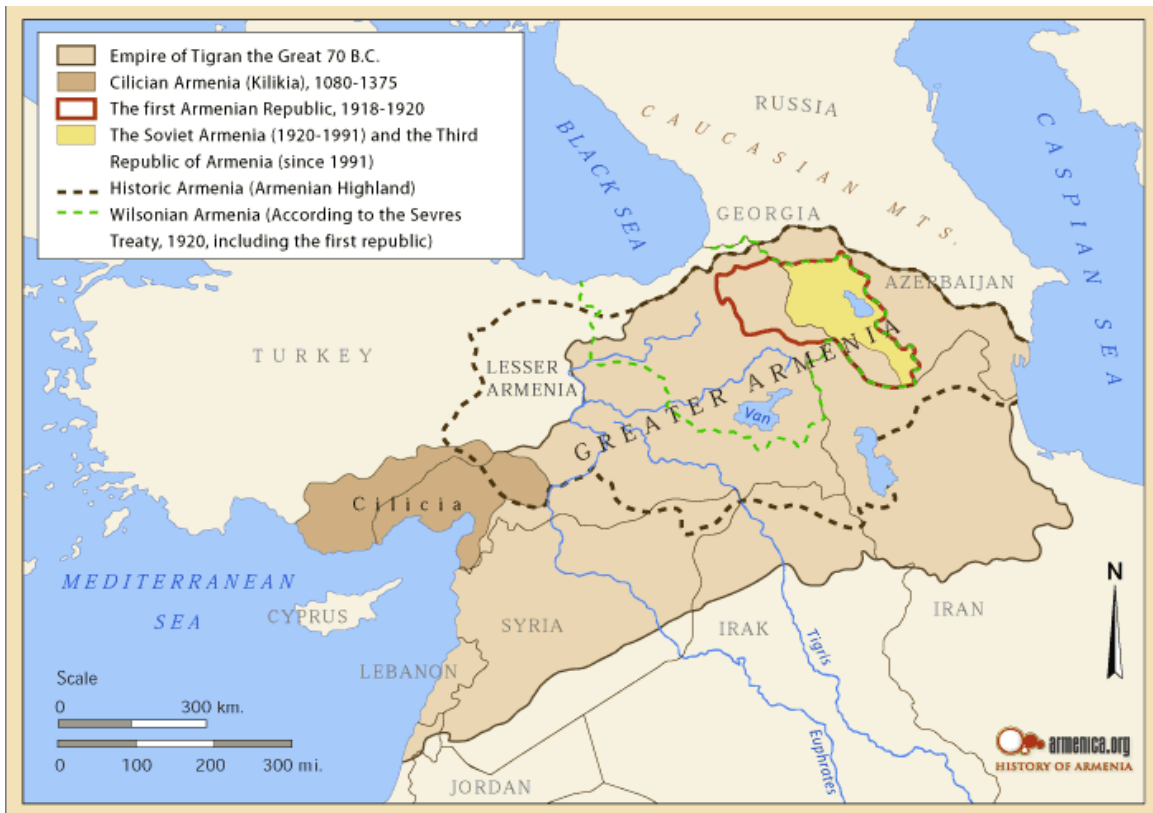


Figure 1: Map of shifting Armenian territories²⁶

²⁴ Ibid, 2.

²⁵ The use of the term “East” here primarily symbolizes Russia, while the “West” denotes Europe and the United States. The value the Caucasus region holds today for these powers lies mainly in natural resources (e.g. oil and natural gas), its presence as a buffer zone between Russia and both Europe (Turkey) and Iran, as well as a strategic military launching site against opponents in the Middle East, to name a few.

²⁶ Map from armenica.org.

Ancient Armenia stretched across vast, shifting territories [see figure 1]. At its greatest extent between 95 BC and 66 BC, the Armenian Kingdom extended from the Caspian to Mediterranean Sea.²⁷ Beginning in the fourteenth century, Armenians fell under Ottoman rule and, according to Ottoman administrative practices, were able to enjoy a certain amount of religious, social, and governmental autonomy. Under the *millet* system, ethnic communities were allowed to rule themselves, to a certain degree, by their own procedures underneath the authority of an appointed church leader. Thus, these religious communities were given semi-autonomous administrative power. The first such leader of all Armenian subjects in the Ottoman Empire was appointed in 1461. The patriarchate of Constantinople represented the Armenian *millet* in the Empire and assumed certain administrative responsibilities in their communities. In 1563, a treaty between France and the Ottoman Empire established broader commercial relations with the West. It also introduced an agreement by the Muslim nation to grant all Christian powers the right to conduct their own business within the Ottoman Empire. This ultimately set in motion the economic and social development of much of the Armenian diaspora within their host countries. However, this would change drastically by the end of the Ottoman era with the Tanzimat Reforms of 1839 to 1876, by which these traditionally semi-autonomous peoples became legally protected religious minority groups.

Under both the Ottoman and Persian Empires, minority communities like the Armenians were permitted a level of autonomy and could live by their own ethnic laws, traditions, and sometimes administrative policies. Due to its strategic location between Europe and Asia, the historic Armenian homeland was ideally situated for trade and a

²⁷ For further history on Armenia, see Simon Payaslian, *The History of Armenia* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

natural breeding ground for merchants. Armenians have enjoyed a history as commercial traders throughout the world.²⁸ This history of trade naturally lent itself to the establishment of trading diaspora communities throughout the world. Not only were Armenians heavily involved with overland trade in the Caucasus region, but they had also established a presence along many other routes across Eurasia as well as in maritime trade off the east coast of Africa, in the Indian Ocean, and in the Philippines.²⁹ This allowed for the construction of a diasporic-trading infrastructure that would play a large role in the explosion of Armenian diffusion after the genocidal pogroms of Turkey in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.

Between 1502 and 1783, the Safavid Empire in Iran emerged and began threatening Ottoman rule in the region. While the Ottoman Empire consolidated its power in western Armenian lands, the Safavids expanded across the Caucasus and conquered much of Eastern Armenia. The Treaty of Zuhab between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires granted a large part of historic Armenia to the Ottomans, while giving a smaller portion to the Persians. The large territory of the Armenian Plateau encompassing the regions of Lake Van, Bayazid, Kars, and Ardahan became solely Ottoman, while the areas around Erevan, Karabagh, Nakichivan, and Zangezur were ruled by Persia. This helped to establish the beginning of a divide in Armenian development and loyalty that can still be seen today.

So while this governance by foreign powers resulted in the fragmentation and stagnation of Armenian society and culture, Armenian trading practices were not overly

²⁸ H.A. Mandandian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, trans. N.G. Garsoian (Lisbon, 1965) examines international trade routes across Armenia from 6th century BC to 15th century AD.

²⁹ Vahe Baladouni and Margaret Makepeace, "Armenian Merchants of the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: English East India Company Sources," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 88/5 (1998): i-xxxvii+1-294.

stymied. Due in part to religious law of the Islamic empires of Turkey and Persia, Armenians remained in control of much of the commerce during these eras. The Armenian communities in Julfa and along the Araxes River particularly were perceived as “brokers and representatives of European commercial firms and interests in the silk and cloth trades.”³⁰ These Armenians garnered such a large reputation that Shah Abbas of the Safavid Empire forcibly deported these communities to Persia—peasants driven to silk-growing provinces while others were settled outside of Isfahan in present-day New Julfa, Nakichivan—in order to contribute to the development of trade and commerce in Persia. With the help of their ready-made connections abroad, these Armenian merchants were a significant factor in transforming Isfahan into a modern trading center by aiding in the development of a raw silk trade, the creation of new markets and products, and expanding the scope of Persian trade routes.³¹ Additionally, Armenians were often called on to represent both the Ottoman and Persian Empires due to their role as international merchants, allowing them greater cross-border mobility, economic and political influence, and the ability to represent the Armenian peoples abroad. Some were even given the title of *khoja*, a sign of respect in Islamic culture.³²

³⁰ Ibid, xx.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *Khoja* is term that is derived from an ancient Persian honorific title—*khawaja* or *khwaja*—closely translating to *master* or *lord*.

Chapter 1: Belonging and Otherness: Armenian Identity in Imperialist Russia and the Rise of a Nationalist Narrative

The late eighteenth century witnessed the birth of nationalism in Europe and the beginning of an articulation of national awareness as a political idea. Much like other regions of the world at this time, members of the Armenian community throughout the globe were attempting to understand themselves as a people and their place within the context of a larger international community. Due to a long history of international trade and trans-border movement, the Armenian diaspora had already been established throughout Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East by this time. But the introduction of the Russian Empire into the Caucasus in the seventeenth century, and their subsequent consolidation of power in the region by the first half of the nineteenth century, ultimately gave Armenian intellectual elites an opportunity to develop ideals of nationalism and national identity, which they attempted to trust upon the displaced and scattered Armenian communities by appealing to collective memories of a shared past steeped in both triumph and victimhood. Acceptance of this narrative was not guaranteed, nor was it universal. While some sectors of society did integrate it into their evolving identity, others were prone to resist a narrative that failed to acknowledge memories that failed to uphold its ‘message.’

The long-standing dispersal of the Armenian community had resulted in the lack of a coherent national identity. But with the evolution of Europe-based nationalist sentiment around the world and its influence on Armenian merchants and intellectuals, a compulsion to unify this fractured society on more than religious grounds began to intensify and take shape by the mid-1800s. The formation of a unified ‘national’ identity based on the concept of a common Armenian past and culture was coupled with a desire

to free Armenians and historically Armenian lands from Muslim domination. However, this notion was not whole-heartedly embraced, nor was this desire new; it had long been fermenting within and evolving from various sectors of society from the grassroots level to the intellectual elite.³³ The attempt to unify Diaspora identity could be considered the creation of an imagined community and the first phase in Karl W. Deutsch's ethnic mobilization process—the creation of a unified people.³⁴ This consciousness of nationhood and attempts at liberation amongst Armenians can be seen as early as the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries.³⁵ Residing primarily in Eastern, Persian-controlled Armenia and dependent upon foreign support, early Armenian elites aspired to create an Armenian space by selling a unified narrative abroad to the diaspora and a narrative based on religious persecution to foreign powers. However, this accusation of persecution fails to recognize the self-autonomy enjoyed under the *millet* system within the Ottoman Empire as well as a socioeconomic upward mobility experienced within the Persian Empire.³⁶ In its determination to create a pro-independence collective, the narrative of an intelligent, noble, and ancient people suffering at the hands of their Islamic neighbors fails to acknowledge individual and social memories of prosperity and freedom enjoyed under both the Ottoman and Persian Empires.

When Russian imperialist forces finally gained control of Eastern Armenia from Persia in the late eighteenth century, not all Armenians experienced a liberated life as promised under the new Christian rulers. Now subordinates of Russia, Armenians and

³³ Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London, UK: Hurst and Company, 2006), 110.

³⁴ For more information on imagined communities, see: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 1983). For more information on nationalism and ethnic mobilization, see: Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*.

³⁵ Panossian, *The Armenians*.

³⁶ The Ottoman *millet* system allowed for religious freedom and self-government under an Armenian leader for ethnic Armenian communities throughout the empire.

other Caucasians in the new territory were subject to shifting Imperialist policies and interests in the region. Continual conflicts and warring disrupted life and delayed the utopian-attempt of unifying Armenian communities under one national ethnic identity. Furthermore, Russification resulted in another division amongst these Eastern communities. While many Armenians assimilated enthusiastically into Russian society and culture, others resented the de-valuation of Armenian traditions and sought to fight against it. It is important to remember, however, that those Armenians who successfully adapted to Russian rule and were adopted into its society never forgot their ‘Armenian-ness,’ a theme that would continue into the Soviet period. An Armenian elite grew out of Saint Petersburg and, employing Western ideals of independence and self-determination, aided their compatriots’ nationalist movement in the Caucasus to create the first Armenian Republic in 1918.

THE SEARCH FOR INDEPENDENCE

In the late seventeenth century, influential Armenians actively sought support from Europe to free Eastern Armenia from Persian rule. One of these individuals, Israel Ori, was a son of a local chieftain in the Zangezur region of the Persian Empire, southern region of modern-day Armenia. Partly due to their geographic location in the mountains, this stronghold was ruled by Armenian principalities led by the last surviving members of a dying Armenian aristocracy who held roles as secular leaders in mountainous autonomous regions within the Persian Empire. Travelling extensively throughout Italy, France, and Germany, Ori actively sought European military support to free eastern Armenia from Persian rule, but it soon became apparent that the successful liberation and creation of an independent Armenian state would depend on Russian involvement, not European. To that end he met with Peter the Great in 1701, resulting in a Russian

delegation to Etchmiazdin to explore the possibility of a move against the Ottoman and Persian empires.³⁷ Unfortunately for Ori, Russia was already engaged in war against Sweden, thus could not devote any resources to the Caucasus at that time. ³⁸ He died before his goal of an Armenia free from Muslim rule would come to fruition, but his legacy lives on in Armenian memory as one so dedicated to freeing his people that he travelled the world with the help of a Diaspora already stationed throughout Europe.

Another hero for the liberation cause was Davit Bek, who led a force against Persia in 1722 at the request of local Armenian chieftains. By this time Russia was making advances into the Caucasus. Worried by this expanding enemy and wanting to take advantage of a weak Persia, the Ottoman Empire began moving into Georgia and Persian-held Armenia. Using guerilla tactics in the mountainous regions of the Caucasus, Davit Bek and his forces were able to successfully defend the autonomous areas controlled by Armenian chieftains and aid Russia in its bid for Caucasian territory. Unfortunately, Russian military aid never came to the Caucasus until much later and soon these local leaders were absorbed into Georgian and Russian aristocracies. But Davit Bek and his resistance fighters were successful in maintaining the autonomy of these mountainous areas, which never fully integrated into or fell to Ottoman rule.

Another liberation hero that lives on in the Armenian national memory is Joseph Emin. His history is an excellent example of an early Diaspora Armenian who fought for Armenian liberation through diplomatic means. Active in the second-half of the eighteenth century, Emin recognized that in order to be successful in fighting against Ottoman and Persian rule, Armenians would need to learn modern western fighting techniques. Therefore he sought European and Russian help to create an Armenia that

³⁷ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 112

³⁸ Great Northern War 1700-1721

would exist under Russian protection. Spending a considerable amount of time in England and Prussia, he set his mind to learning modern warfare, building personal relationships, and garnering support from influential Europeans by appealing to their shared Christian background. When they proved unable to help him in his quest for Armenian freedom from Muslim rule, he travelled to Russia to gain support from the Tsar and even appealed to the King of Georgia to form a united front against those (Muslims) who had reduced Armenians and other Christians to ‘slavery.’³⁹ His attempts to instill a sense of unity and need for freedom amongst the Armenian communities ultimately failed due in large part to the resistance he received from the Armenian church, which was loath to upset the balance of power in the region. Other communities, mostly those in rural areas, were complacent with their lives under Muslim rule and unconcerned with this resistance movement. Thus, the beginnings of competing narratives of the church versus a nationalistic liberation movement can be seen within the Armenian community.

While attempts to inculcate a unified collective identity based upon ideals of an autonomous Armenian nation free from Muslim rule failed in the eighteenth century, they did lay the groundwork for later successful endeavors of the same kind. However, these ‘rebellions’ all focused on the need for outside (European or Russian) intervention, a need that is still in evidence today. So while various individuals did demonstrate a sense of agency in their attempts to break away from imperialist rule, it could be claimed that this deep-seated belief in the necessity of foreign intervention for the survival of the Armenian people has created a sense of dependency in the Armenian psyche, a memory that is not consciously held on to but exists in various narratives nonetheless. A recurring

³⁹ Joseph Emin, *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, 1726-1809* (London, UK: The Baptist Mission Press, 1918).

theme in small-nation mentalities, a counter-narrative of dependency and victimhood arises by invoking the power of the Russian empire to maintain the security of its borders.

One memory that is often silenced by the national narrative is one of relative peace and prosperity enjoyed under the ‘Muslim yoke’ within the *millet* system. Political and economic stability in the Ottoman Empire by the late sixteenth century led to the emergence of a new middle-class as well the laying of groundwork for the Armenian *amira* class (also known as business barons) and guilds of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These Armenians in the Lake Van area became especially economically and culturally vibrant according to the Armenian historian Payaslian.⁴⁰ The Armenian communities here prospered during these years, which led Armenian leaders to revive a sense of nationhood and instill ideals of an Armenian people liberated from Muslim rule. However, this apparent prosperity as international merchants and business leaders often resulted in a stratification of Armenian and Turkish society along economic lines and contributing to cultural isolation. Thus, the roots of the nationalistic drive for Armenian independence began long before the emergence of the Dashnak party—an ultra-nationalist group that arose at the end of the nineteenth century.

During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Armenians were very active in business and trade. However, by the late nineteenth century the Empire began to suffer political instability, economic downturns, and increasing ethnic tensions throughout its vast territories. This helped to contribute to the emigration of a large portion of the Armenian population into Europe, America, and the Middle East. Moreover, the advance of the Russian Empire south into the Caucasus resulted in Russian dominion over Armenians living in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Eastern Armenia. The Russo-Persian Wars of 1804 to

⁴⁰ Payaslian, *The History of Armenia*, 107.

1813 and 1826 to 1828, and their treaties of Golestan (1813) and Torkmanchai (1828), led to Russia absorbing the territories of Karabagh, Zangezur, Yerevan, and Nakhichevan. Another conflict, the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1806 to 1812 (Treaty of Bucharest 1812) and 1828-1829 (Treaty of Adrianople 1829) added the territories of Akhalkalak and Akhaltskha to Russia. The Crimean War of 1853 to 1856 did not result in Russia gaining any new territories, but it occurred on historically Armenian lands and often involved Armenians in varying roles. Lastly, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 to 1878 and the 1878 Treaty of Berlin resulted in Kars, Ardahan, and Batumi falling under Russian rule.

While Russian incursion into the Caucasus occurred over a long period of time, by 1828 the Arax River officially became dividing line between Russia and Persia.⁴¹ Both Peter the Great and Catherine the Great attempted to wrest control of eastern Armenia from Persia. However, it was not until 1828 that the Russian Empire was successful in its attempts to push back the Persian Empire. It seems, though, that Armenians generally welcomed Russian occupation. While many were hesitant to blatantly revolt against their Islamic rulers, once Russian presence was established in the region, and it did not seem as if the Slavs would abandon them, Armenians tended to lend both moral and military support to their Christian brothers.⁴²

THE CREATION OF A NARRATIVE OF VICTIMHOOD

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Russian Empire's expansion into the Caucasus was largely complete. It successfully wrested control of Persian Armenia from the Persian Empire and established the Yerevan and Kars provinces [see figure 2]. Here,

⁴¹ Treaty of Turkmanchai

⁴² For more information, see George A. Bournoutian, trans., *Russia and the Armenians of Transcaucasia, 1797-1889: A Documentary Record* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1998).

Russia was able to launch attacks against the Ottoman Empire with the help of local guerilla fighters, among who many Armenians were included. For these local Armenians, as well as for many within the Ottoman Empire, Russia represented a liberating force that could be used to free the Armenian people from Ottoman rule and reestablish their former glory as an independent nation. However, establishing an autonomous ethnic nation would not be so easy, even with external aid.



Figure 2: Armenian Territories in the late 18th to late 19th centuries

Ottoman Christians and Muslims often interacted closely with one another throughout the history of the empire. While violence between these groups did occur, they generally coexisted. The Caucasus's long history of tribal-centric traditions and

intragroup conflict had often led to feuds, but they were not ethnic or religious-based until much later in the nineteenth century when ideals of nationalism based on religion and ethnicity were taking root in the region. When conflict did erupt prior to this change, socioeconomic divisions typically divided wealthier Christians from their poorer Islamic neighbors. Such divisions were ripe for their use by the Ottoman government to punish perceived disloyalty and, consequently, a series of Muslim pogroms against Armenians and other Christians in the mid 1880s commenced.⁴³ Between 1892 and 1915, conflict between Armenians and Turks intensified. A nationalistic movement was growing in large Armenian communities within the declining Empire, and there were many instances of Armenians helping Russia in her conflicts against the Ottoman Empire in the multiple Russo-Turkish wars, especially those in the later part of the nineteenth century. However, much of this Armenian support came from those closer to the conflict zones, such as along the Russian-Turkish Armenian border around Yerevan. Armenian guerilla fighters here played a large part in Russian victory against the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. Consequently, Russia's use of local power increased suspicion of all Armenians throughout the Ottoman's declining empire. Even those in Istanbul, far removed from the fighting, became perceived as untrustworthy. This ultimately led to increased ethnic tensions exacerbated by government pogroms aimed against Armenians in an attempt to curtail their rebelliousness and strengthen Ottoman sovereignty.

Armenian involvement in these skirmishes was varied. On one hand, many Armenians did not dramatically oppose Ottoman or Persian rule in the early nineteenth century. Having lived for centuries under foreign rule, Armenian communities had

⁴³ Around this time, a nationalist group called the Young Turks emerged and began opposing the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. They eventually wrested power from the Ottoman monarchy and ruled the Empire from 1908 to 1918, when the victorious Allied Powers partitioned out the defeated Ottoman Empire.

learned to live within the strictures of the dominating society. For those living within the Ottoman Empire, Armenians enjoyed a level of autonomy within their isolated communities in Eastern Anatolia due to the *millet* system. Even those residing in Istanbul were able to rule their communities and enjoy a certain amount of religious freedom. Since many living in the capital enjoyed a higher standard of living through their roles as traders, merchants, and various other white-collar professions, an Armenian intellectual society developed in Turkey with the aid of a long tradition of cross-cultural communication and movement between historic Armenia and the Diaspora community throughout the globe. However, it was not until the late nineteenth century when Armenians began to unite against Ottoman rule.

One accusation of the Ottoman Empire for the targeting of Armenians was that they were traitors to the Empire during the Crimean and Russo-Turkish wars. While it is true that some Armenians, mainly those in the mountainous regions of the Caucasus, aided the Russian military and served as guerilla fighters against Ottoman forces, there is no evidence proving that all Armenians felt this way. There is evidence showing a growing nationalist movement among Armenian intellectuals in Istanbul, the members of which were ultimately the targets of the pogroms (along with other Christians) committed by the Young Turks around the turn of the twentieth century in Turkey.

In a campaign during World War I in 1915, Ottoman troops attempted to infiltrate the Russian held South Caucasus but were thwarted in large part due to small bands of local guerrilla fighters mobilized by the Russian army.⁴⁴ From such victories against the Ottomans, it became apparent to the Russian military that using locals who knew how to fight in the topography of eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus mountains would be more

⁴⁴ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 155.

effective than using Russian soldiers unfamiliar with the mountainous terrain. Many Armenians, particularly those in the Russian-held province of Yerevan, were quickly recruited for further such use by appealing to the emerging desire for Armenian independence and nationhood. Due to the most recent wave of nationalism sweeping Armenian communities both abroad and in Anatolia, support for these ‘freedom fighters’ and the country ‘aiding’ them—Russia—was widespread. However, the ongoing support of local guerrillas exacerbated tensions between Muslim and Armenian populations and led to a very real belief of possible Armenian insurrection. Armenian villagers were seen as dangerous tools in the hands of the Russian enemy, while Armenian intellectuals in large urban centers like Istanbul were suspected of fomenting rebellion. This was the impetus for their resettlement and targeting by the Ottomans, a policy which soon escalated to an all-out war against its own people.

Between 1914 and 1923, the Ottoman policy of relocating and resettling suspect elements of the population—primarily Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian Christians—resulted in large-scale violence and systematic ethnic cleansing of Christians, the prosecution of minority leaders, and the forced deportation under deplorable conditions of entire communities. However, this was not a consequence of a single explicit order or an ancient religious quarrel between Muslims and Christians. Rather, it was a consequence of communal fear, ethnic reprisals, government paranoia, and experimentation with using targeted killing as a tool of modern statecraft.⁴⁵ And while popular Armenian memory has come to remember this genocide as a single event—the incarceration and murder of Armenian community leaders in Constantinople on April 24, 1915—in reality, it more closely resembled an ebb and flow of violence over a period of

⁴⁵ Ibid, 157-158.

time that swept across eastern Anatolia, pushing refugees into Yerevan and modern-day Syria and Iraq.

An estimated 800,000 to 1.5 million Armenians were killed or died under the harsh conditions of deportation, while other Christians continued to perish well after the 1918 armistice. Those who survived the Genocide fled to Russian-controlled areas of the Caucasus, Europe, America, and the Middle East. A very small number remained in Turkey, mainly in large urban centers like Istanbul. However, many of those who stayed had previously converted to Islam and underwent “Turkification” and “Kurdification” programs. The majority of survivors fled to Northern Syria and other areas of the Middle East. Some temporarily returned to their homelands during the French Mandate, during which France controlled Southeastern Turkey and all of Cilicia under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was enacted in 1916.⁴⁶ But a Turkish war of independence between 1919 and 1923 after the Ottoman dissolution resulted in another bout of deportation and targeting of Armenians when nationalist Turkish groups rebelled against the Allies who had controlled the former Ottoman lands at the end of the First World War. Thus by the end of the 1920’s, only a handful of scattered Armenians remained in Turkey. Though an Armenian *millet* still exists within Turkey today, as well as a patriarchate in Istanbul, it does not enjoy the same powers as it once did under the Ottoman Empire. It now resembles more of an ethnic community in which Armenians are able to practice their own religion and have their own cultural, social, and educational institutions as well as their own distinct media and newspapers rather than a self-governing community.

The various instances of what Armenian memory deems ethnic cleansing by the Ottoman government helped to transform Eastern Anatolia into a more homogenous

⁴⁶ “The Sykes-Picot Agreement: 1916,” accessed from *The Avalon Project*, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/sykes.asp.

region while shaping Turkey into a national state rather than a multi-ethnic religious empire. And whereas before the genocide it was possible to be both an Armenian and an Ottoman, now it was impossible to be both an Armenian and a Turk.⁴⁷ This event became a fundamental component of the modern history and identity of Armenians by changing the demographic structure of the southern provinces. The Genocide of the Armenians and their persecution at the hands of the Turks has since dominated the Armenian national narrative, seeping into individual consciousness as the paramount event in the history of the Armenian people. Much like the Holocaust for the Jewish people, the trauma of the early twentieth century has come to dominate much of Armenian life and has resulted in a forgetting of other, less-traumatic experiences of the past, especially for those who comprise the modern-day Western Diaspora in Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas. Interestingly, the memories and identity of those who remained in Armenian territory and comprise the Eastern Diaspora in Russia and Iran are less likely to be over-shadowed by the Genocide. While it remains an important component of the national narrative of Armenia and the diaspora in Russia, these groups are more likely to recall other instances of oppression and trauma, especially in regards to Azerbaijan.

In what is today Azerbaijan, tensions between Armenians and Azeris were fraught at the turn of the century, much like today. Baku, modern-day Azerbaijan's capital and largest city, consisted of roughly 12% ethnic Armenians in the 1897 census, compared to about 35% Azeri Muslims and 25% Russians. When peasant insurrections and labor unrest erupted here at the beginning of the twentieth century, social tensions ignited as labor and communal issues merged. Muslim rioters targeted Armenian communities and burned down the properties of Armenian shopkeepers.⁴⁸ This was partially due to a

⁴⁷ King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 159.

⁴⁸ Armenian-Tatar War of 1905, Massacre of Armenians in Baku, etc.

mutual fear that the Armenians were planning to eliminate Muslims and that Muslims were repeating the anti-Armenian pogroms of the Ottomans. And while this city had long enjoyed a sense of diversity, religiously grouped citizens typically occupied their own areas where they lived separate lives. Unrest reached a tipping point in August of 1905 when local Azeri destroyed entire Armenian areas, spurring these people to flee to Yerevan or abroad. It is important to note that most Armenians consider the people of Azerbaijan to be Turks. So when conflict erupts between the two people, it serves as a reminder of a history of trauma suffered under the Ottomans. Thus, Armenian rejection of Azerbaijan could be considered a rejection of a past that continually places Armenians in the vulnerable role of victim.

ETHNICITY IN THE EMPIRE

The concept of ethnicity and otherness in the Russian Empire was a significant factor in the formation of pre-Soviet Armenian Identity. The perception of Armenians throughout the empire and their treatment affected how they perceived themselves individually as Armenians and collectively as a minority group from the Caucasus. At the same time, notions of Russia and the Russians influenced the development of Armenian ethnic consciousness. Russian policy regarding Armenians and other ethnic groups within the Empire altered widely from administration to administration and influenced the degree with which the rest of the Empire perceived these groups. For Armenians, these shifts in attitudes depended largely on Russia's geopolitical interests in the Caucasus region, internal politics of the Empire, and changes within the Armenian community. Three general categorizations of Armenians existed; they were represented as either Christian brothers, as businessmen, or as conspirators.

The first two images held relatively positive connotations. Their shared Christian culture spoke to Russia's messianic drive to free its lands of Muslim influence and established a bond based on religion that still exists today. Russians also thought that Armenians "without any doubt take first place among the inhabitants of the Transcaucasus for their ability, industriousness and effort to educate themselves" and were regarded as "the most industrious workers of the East."⁴⁹ They were also considered "peaceable, gentle, cautious, calculating, diligent, tied to their families, industrious, delicate, quiet, obedient, trying to act in compliance with the law..."⁵⁰ Furthermore, their loyalty was at one point seen as "devoted to the Russian government," Armenians "could not betray us."⁵¹

As businessmen, Armenians were seen as useful for advancing Russia's success on the quickly developing economic world stage. However, their role in business and trade gave rise to labels such as "Jews of the Caucasus," which indicates a level of contempt among Russians towards this ethnic group. As discussed earlier, Armenians have often played the role of merchants or made up the middle class in many countries outside of their homeland, especially in Georgia. Here, Armenians stood out in the economic and administrative life of the capital city of Tiflis, modern-day Tbilisi. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Armenians made up about 75% of the city's population. This percentage dropped down to little more than 33% by the beginning of the twentieth century, but they remained the single largest cultural group and were largely responsible for financing construction and municipal administration within Tiflis.⁵² This,

⁴⁹ Jury Gagemejster, *Zakavkazskie ocherki* (St. Petersburg, Russia: 1845), 14–15.

⁵⁰ *Kavkazskiy calendar na 1854 god* (Tbilisi, Georgia: 1853), 360.

⁵¹ Said in 1845 by Captain Pruzhanovsky, who was in Shusha, Karabakh as a representative of the Russian colonial administration. This was quoted from *Kolonialnaya politika Rossijskogo tsarizma v Azerbayjane v 20-60ie gody XIX v.*, Vol 2, (Moscow, Russia: 1936), 21-23.

⁵² King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 148.

however, contributed to persecution and discrimination against the Armenians. Much like Jewish populations in Russia and elsewhere, they were often seen as greedy merchants who took advantage of the common folk. Oliver Wardrop, the first British high commissioner in the Caucasus, said of the Armenians in Tiflis in the 1880s: “Only those who have lived the life of the people in Trans-Caucasia know what a terrible curse the money-lending community are. A local proverb says, ‘A Greek will cheat three Jews, but an Armenian will cheat three Greeks,’ and the Georgian, straightforward, honest fellow, is but too often cruelly swindled by the artful children of the Haïk.”⁵³ This view was picked up by many visitors to Tiflis from intellectuals and administrators jealous of the influence Armenians wielded in its financial and commercial sectors. This prejudice is further evident in an exhibit of the new Russian-built Caucasus Museum in 1867 that featured the natural and cultural diversity of the city. While some exhibits featured flora and fauna of the region, others “were filled with mannequins dressed in ethnic costumes and placed against painted scenes of appropriate habitats.” Here Armenians were featured along with Jews, stereotyped as “engaged in some transaction.”⁵⁴ This unflattering view led to a feeling of ‘otherness’ and contributed to a desire to feel exceptional in their uniqueness amongst other Caucasians, a theme evident in their developing national narrative of the time.

Likewise, the image of the conspirator reflected an opposition to the rise of Armenian nationalism and rebellion. For those diaspora communities living abroad in Europe and Russia, an emerging Armenian intelligentsia became increasingly exposed to

⁵³ In Armenian, Armenia is called “Hayastani” and Armenians are known as “Hay” after the legendary founder of Armenia, Haik (or Hayk) Nahapet. Quote from: Oliver Wardrop, *The Kingdom of Georgia: Notes of Travel in a Land of Women, Wine, and Song* (London, UK: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888).

⁵⁴ King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 143.

various intellectual movements.⁵⁵ The more radical individuals began to challenge traditional institutions like the Church while conservatives upheld traditions and the notion of strengthening communities by revitalizing long-standing culture. Thus, it could be argued that a struggle between modernity and tradition—urban and rural, secular and religious—was at the root of ongoing divisions. However, both groups had the same ultimate objective: to revive Armenian national identity across diaspora communities. One of the most important vehicles for establishing a unique national Armenian identity was through religious affiliation. Even under Muslim rule, the Armenian Apostolic Church remained an important vehicle for retaining and promoting a sense of cultural identity among Armenian farmers and traders.⁵⁶ However, the church’s ancient seat at Echmiadzin had long competed with both cultural and political sources of authority. The problem of who speaks for the Armenians—those within Armenia or the diaspora communities—is still a point of contention.⁵⁷ The perceived turn of the Armenian elite towards rebellion shifted Russian attitudes towards Armenians as a whole. They became to be thought of as a dangerous “nation of revolutionaries and conspirators...any Armenian in the Caucasus is regarded as a revolutionary just for being Armenian.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, many Armenians were generally resistant to the Russification process that the empire had enacted in the Caucasus since the late 1800’s, and Russian attitude towards their ‘little brothers’ in the Caucasus was generally condescending.

In the Ottoman Empire, Armenians were able to acquire a certain level of status, position, and wealth. However, they were never able to rise above second-class citizenship since they were always considered fundamentally different from the dominant

⁵⁵ Payaslian, *The History of Armenia*, 113

⁵⁶ King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 11.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ *Russkoe slovo*, (February 1905).

Muslim society.⁵⁹ The categories used by the first Russian Imperial Census of the Caucasus, conducted in 1897, illustrate the general trend at the time for defining one's identity: social category, religion, and language. At the turn of the twentieth century, the category of ethnicity or nationality did not yet have the all-powerful sense that it would acquire under the Soviets.⁶⁰ Thus, identity at this time was based primarily on religious and linguistic characteristics. According to Panossian, "Russian policy was not consistent and oscillated between repressive measures to Russify the population and a more tolerant attitude of giving the Armenians...some autonomy over cultural, educational and religious institutions."⁶¹ In the 1820's General Yermolov, also referred to as the 'owner of the Caucasus,' was charged with insuring Russian domination of the Caucasus by introducing Russian military policies that earned him a reputation for brutality.⁶² Later, in 1836, Russia enacted *polozhenie*, which reduced the Armenian Church's political powers and ensured that the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin had to be elected by religious and non-religious dignitaries, an election in which the Tsar would ultimately decide the victor. However, the Church was still allowed to open schools and establish newspapers.⁶³ Under Alexander III in the late 1800s, Armenians and other ethnic minorities endured a strict Russification process. Beginning in 1885, all Armenian schools were closed and replaced with Russian schools, which incited a radicalized Armenian intelligentsia to

⁵⁹ Margaret J. Wyszomirski, "Communal Violence: The Armenians and the Copts as Case Studies." *World Politics* 27, no. 3 (April 1975): 430-455.

⁶⁰ King, Charles, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 144

⁶¹ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 121.

⁶² For more information see Moshe Gammer, "'Proconsul of the Caucasus': A Re-examination of Yermolov," *Social Evolution and History*, 2/1 (March 2003), 177-197.

⁶³ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Eastern Armenians under Tsarist Rule," *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*. ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 115.

resist and establish secret schools.⁶⁴ The schools were reopened a year later, but the damage had already been done.

Shifting Imperial policies regarding Armenians ultimately helped to create a sense of otherness and alienation while attempting to create a sense of belonging. After all, the goal of assimilation policies was to incorporate minority groups into the Russian Empire. However, their inconsistency insured that while these groups were part of the Empire, they were held on the fringes of Russian society and were able to retain their traditions and drive for nationhood much like under the Ottoman Empire. However increasingly concerned with their security in the region, Armenians ultimately continued to consider Russia their protector, a role Russia would pick up and use when it suited its interests. Furthermore, the bond with Russia tended to grow stronger as relations with their Muslim neighbors worsened. While sharing a cultural background of Christianity helped build and strengthen ties between Russia and Armenia, they were not the only ones persecuted on the basis of religion. As a result of ongoing persecution by both the Ottomans and Persians, many Armenians chose to flee to Russian-protected territories, thus repopulating Eastern Armenia and causing regions like Yerevan to once again have an Armenian majority. This influx of Christian Armenians also resulted in massive emigration of Muslim populations who had inhabited these areas since the rule of the Persian Empire. This shifting of ethnic and religious populations led to a concentration of Armenians within Russian-held Armenia and ultimately allowed for the unification and consolidation of a national Armenian identity within the future nation-state.

⁶⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking toward Ararat Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 45.

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

In the nineteenth Century the percentage of Armenians in relation to Muslims in Russian-held Armenia had begun to increase due to immigration of Muslims to Ottoman lands. These Islamic migrants began to expel Armenians from their ancient homeland in Eastern Anatolia and forced them to migrate to areas around Yerevan. It was not until the early 1830s that Armenians formed a majority of the population there. According to an 1897 census, Armenians constituted 53% of the Yerevan district and Muslims about 42%, while the city of Yerevan itself retained a majority Muslim population until the First World War and the Genocide, which resulted in Armenians flooding across the border into Russian-occupied Armenia and pushing out Muslims into mainly Azerbaijan and Iran.⁶⁵ Consequently, Russian Armenia became a safe haven for Armenians while its centuries-old Muslim population became increasingly unwelcome. As of the most recent census, modern-day Armenia is now composed of 97.9% ethnic Armenians, with 98.7% identifying themselves as Christian.⁶⁶ This helps to illustrate the drastic consequences the Ottoman and Turkish cleansing pogroms had on not only the Armenians, but also the entire Muslim population of the Anatolian and Southern Caucasus region. Furthermore, it concentrated Armenian communities in the Caucasus, which aided in their movement throughout the Russian Empire in various roles and functions in some cases similar to those they held under both the Ottoman and Persian empires.

Similar to their roles within Islamic society of the Ottoman and Persian Empires, one of the most important functions that Armenians held in the Russian Empire was as merchants. Ivan Lazarevich Lazarov, christened Hovannes Lazarian, was born to the

⁶⁵ For demographics, see: http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp_lan_97_uezd.php?reg=566

⁶⁶ National statistical service of the Republic of Armenia and the CIA Factbook, which states 94.7% Armenian Apostolic, 4% other Christian, and 1.3% Yezidi.

Armenian community in Persian New Julfa in 1735. About thirty years later after establishing himself within the business community, he moved to Saint Petersburg to become one of the richest men in Catherine the Great's Empire. His support of Armenian immigration through the establishment of educational and charitable organizations had an enormous impact on the growth of the early Armenian diaspora in Russia. While he successfully integrated into Russian society as a well-known jeweler, he never lost his Armenian memories or his Armenian identity, instead merging them with new ones as a subject of the Russian Empire. Lazarov is an example of the role Armenians played in trade and business within the empire, rising in stature at Catherine the Great's court and establishing himself in the mythology of Armenian exceptionalism.

In addition to functioning as business and trading elites, some Armenians assimilated into the Russian aristocracy and military. Valerian Madatov is an example of the dying class of the Armenian nobility that immigrated to Georgia and Russia, where they were often absorbed into the to the existing upper classes of society and political power. He was born Rostom Madatyan, in what is today Nagorno-Karabakh, to a minor Armenian noble family. There, he served as *melik* before migrating to Russia in order to request aid from Catherine the Great in freeing Armenians from Persian rule. Madatov gained experience commanding and fighting in Russia's military during the Russo-Turkish war of 1801-1812, against Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, the Russo-Persian War of 1826-1828, the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, and generally serving in the Caucasus as commander-in-chief of several former Persian khanates during his lifetime. Another notable figure from this class of Russian-Armenians is Mikhail Loris-Melikov. Born to a noble Armenian family who once owned the Lori province of modern-day Armenia, he is another example of an Armenian aristocrat who assimilated into the Russian Empire's military and nobility. Interestingly, he resigned from Minister

of the Interior, a position he held under Tsar Alexander II, when the new Tsar Alexander III began reversing the reforms of his father.

Many Armenian immigrants also integrated into the artistic and intellectual circles of the Empire. Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky was born Hovannes Aivazian to an Armenian family in current-day Crimea in 1817. He is considered one of Russia's great romantic painters and hailed for his depictions of seascapes. His personal history effortlessly exemplifies the diaspora Armenian of the nineteenth century. His family emigrated from Ottoman Armenia in the eighteenth century. His father, an Armenian merchant from Polish Galicia, settled in the Crimean port of Feodosia where Ivan was born, thus offering the future painter an opportunity to fall in love with the sea. Many Armenian themes can be seen in his early paintings, thus suggesting an internalization of Armenian memories and history that helped form his own Identity as an Armenian-Russian. After finally visiting Russian-held Armenia around the age of fifty, Ivan Aivazovsky became the first Armenian to paint Mount Ararat, a theme he would revisit throughout the rest of his life. Along with Mount Ararat and the story of Noah, he painted scenes from Armenia's ancient past as well as portraits of prominent Armenians including Mikhail Loris-Melikov. His paintings have been sold in recent years for millions of dollars and continue to be held in esteem. Thus, Ivan Aivazovsky was both influenced by collective Armenian memories of an ancient past and helped to reinforce and propagate those memories by creating sites of memory with his artwork to which the Armenian narrative can refer.

Lastly, Armenians created for themselves roles within the literary and media sectors of the Russian Empire that catered to the Armenian-speaking sections of Tsarist society. Under Tsarist rule influential Armenian elites, particularly in Saint Petersburg, were able to establish their own newspapers. This press was directly responsible for

formulating, articulating, and popularizing the language, culture, and national identity of Eastern Armenia within Russia and throughout the Caucasus.⁶⁷ A main concern for nineteenth century Eastern Armenian literature was to explain the reasons for the worldwide diaspora, discourage further fragmentation, and transform a diverse understanding of ethnic identity into a standardized nationality.⁶⁸ They were primarily concerned with uniting a dispersed people and constructing a formal sense of national identity and nationality. Russian Imperialism gave scattered Armenian communities the opportunity to form a basis for a modern nationalizing movement. Diaspora intellectuals stopped perceiving themselves as a disenfranchised, fractured, stateless religious community and began to think in terms of a unified nation based on historic Armenia.⁶⁹ This fixated dispersion and migration as a unique collective narrative.

CONCLUSION: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE FIRST ARMENIAN NATION-STATE

The arrival of the ‘Armenian Question’ at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 officially politicized within European diplomacy the debate for a separate Armenian nation-state. In order to retain its legitimacy over the region, Russia incorporated this ideal into its foreign policy agenda with the urging of a growing number of Armenian intellectuals in St. Petersburg. However for the Tsarist Empire, this Armenian nation-state could only exist as a subject of Russian rule to the consternation of those who presented at the Congress. Officially, Russia was to intercede in order to protect Christians from Muslim subjugation. This narrative of Christian brotherhood appears

⁶⁷ See Russian-Armenian Journals from 1858-1901: Hyusisap’ayl (Northern Lights, 1858-1865), Mshak (Cultivator/Tiller, 1872-1921), P’ordz (Effort, 1876,1881), and Murch (Hammer, 1889-1907).

⁶⁸ Lisa Khatchaturian, *Cultivating Nationhood in Imperial Russia: The Periodical Press And The Formation Of A Modern Armenian Identity* (New Brunswick , NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 2.

⁶⁹ Khachig Tololyan, “Diaspora Studies: Past, Present and Promise,” *IMI Working Papers Series 55* (April 2012).

again and again in Armenian-Russian interactions, often used as a means for Armenia to request aid from Russia or for Russia to interfere in Armenian affairs. The Armenian intellectual and clerical elite generally welcomed Russian expansion into their territories, seeing them as cultural and religious liberators. While the church was generally reluctant to overtly rebel against their Islamic overlords for fear of vicious reprisals, they embraced their Russian brothers in Christ when it was evident that Persian influence in the eastern region was at an end.

Rather than simply playing the role of victim to the interests of Persian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires, Armenians actively sought to establish for themselves a national identity, a sense of belonging, and a unified history that would lend itself to an independent state run by and for their own people. Their standing in Russian society as tradesman, businessmen, artists, military leaders, and intellectual elites helped to establish and engender a sense of belonging and connection with Russia at the same time it fermented a drive towards nationhood. According to Aram Arkun, “Tsarist oppressions and Ottoman massacres at the end of the nineteenth century gave way to a series of revolutionary movements, and Armenians gained hope for the achievement of political liberty and security within radically transformed imperial societies.”⁷⁰ This led to an increased awareness of commonality among various Armenian groups as well as alienation from imperialist rulers. Armenian communities in Russian-held territory reconciled their newly formed national identity within an often-hostile Empire by upholding their ‘otherness,’ uniqueness, and exceptionalism as a unified Christian collective persecuted by their Islamic neighbors. However, this narrative often stresses

⁷⁰ Aram Arkun, “Into the Modern Age, 1800-1913,” in *The Armenians: Past and Present in the Making of National Identity*, eds. Herzig, Edmund and Marina Kurkchian (New York, NY: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 65.

memories of Genocide at the expense of alternative memories of trauma, such as the 1905 Armenian-Tatar war as well as counter-memories of prosperity and peace.

In 1918, Azerbaijan declared independence and established the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on May 28th, just two days after Georgia's own declaration. Armenia, too, founded its republic on the same day as Azerbaijan and its borders were likewise based on preexisting imperial boundaries. The Yerevan and Kars districts combined to create this new independent Armenian state. Armenian intellectuals and professionals from across Russia and the West flooded into the city and organized a provisional parliament led by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation—also known as the Dashnaks. By June of 1919, this group dominated the new parliament and essentially created a one-party state controlling key personnel appointments. This further alienated the local Muslim population and gave Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Bolsheviks fuel to influence the country through this growingly dissatisfied minority.⁷¹ In May of 1920, Bolshevik agents fomented an uprising that quickly spread across the entire republic. Rebels were joined by discontented units of the Armenian army as well as by leaders of some Muslim areas. The ruling Dashnak party quickly squashed this rebellion, and then proceeded to empty Muslim villages and expel its citizens to Turkey or Azerbaijan while replacing them with Armenian settlers. Both Turkey and Russia exploited this chaos and began moving into the new Republic, Turkey from the West and Russia from the East via Azerbaijan. Faced with a choice between Turkey and Russia, Yerevan submitted to the Bolsheviks and officially came under Russian power in December of 1920, thus suppressing the notion of a greater Armenia. At this time there still existed a significant population of Muslims, which were represented in the Parliament. However, by 1926,

⁷¹ Full-scale Muslim insurgency in the Arax River valley erupted that summer and clashes with Azerbaijan over disputed borders flared up later that year.

the Armenian population would rise to 84.6%, pushing out other groups and establishing a homogenized base of society towards which to aim statist narratives.⁷²

⁷² The Demographic Institute of the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Russia).

Chapter 2: Remembering Communism: The Impact of the Soviet Experience on Identity Formation

In a picturesque corner of Armenia in 1895, the small village of Sanain was situated among ploughed fields, forest-covered mountains, and pastures of abundant wildflowers.⁷³ Out of this serene setting would rise one of the most influential Armenians for not only the Soviet Union, but also for a people struggling to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing world. As an elite member of the Soviet regime in Moscow who served from Lenin to Brezhnev without incident, Anastas Mikoyan became embedded in an Armenian national myth as a figure of Armenian triumph and exceptionalism, ideals greatly needed to combat a collective identity often steeped in trauma and victimhood. “I have only a few memories of my early childhood, and these are fragmentary.... I clearly recall my native village of Sanain, situated in one of the picturesque corners of Armenia...there rose forest-covered mountains, and beyond the mountains alpine pastures abounding in wildflowers extended as far as the eye could see....During my childhood years Sanain was one of the many backward villages on the outlying borders of Tsarist Russia. Its people were downtrodden, lawless, and uneducated.”⁷⁴ For Mikoyan and other Soviet Armenian contemporaries, Armenia represented a point of nostalgic remembrance that inhabited the idyllic and the backward, a sentimental past in need of a communist future. This narrative would come to dominate life in Soviet Armenia, but would ultimately fail to eradicate traditional Armenian culture and what it meant to be Armenian devoid of communist influence. Differing levels of participation in the Soviet experiment are evident throughout the life of the Armenian Soviet Republic. Incidents of

⁷³ Anastas Mikoyan, *Memoirs of Anastas Mikoyan, Vol. 1, The Path of Struggle* (Madison, Connecticut: Sphinx Press, Inc., 1988), 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

dissent and nationalist expression among the citizenry, as well as instances of negotiation and concession by the communist party, led to a society still firmly entrenched in its ethnic identity. In order to examine individual, social, and collective memory of the Soviet experience and its impact on this identity, it is necessary to examine memories of lived experiences and levels of participation, negotiation, and dissent; the intersections and roles of statist narratives; and the tools those narratives used to imbed themselves in both individual and collective Armenian identity.

PARTICIPATION AND DISSENT

Participation in the Soviet system was seldom black or white, but rather occupied an in-between grey space of mutual negotiation and compromise amongst all echelons of society. This was especially true for the citizens of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia. As the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new Young Turk administration came to power in Anatolia, and soon a systematic targeting of Christians followed. This attack was largely in response to a suspected alliance with Russian and Western forces during World War I. As the largest Christian population, Armenians suffered a devastating loss to their communities living under Young Turk rule. At the same time, Russia was experiencing its own turmoil in the form of internal rebellions against Tsarist policies. The ousting of Tsar Nicolas II and subsequent Bolshevik Revolution allowed the Russian-controlled Armenian territory east of Turkey to declare independence in 1918. During the Republic of Armenia's first attempt at independent rule from 1918 to 1920, politicians in Yerevan could not agree on how to successfully combat the issues threatening the new country. The aftermath of the First World War and the Ottoman pogroms against Armenians resulted in a stream of refugees flooding into the province of Yerevan. In addition to a growing refugee

problem, recent years of warfare and migration had resulted in social turmoil, an increasingly disgruntled Muslim minority, and ethnic and political violence from hostile Bolshevik, Azerbaijani, and Georgian interests. “Armed bands roamed the countryside, establishing their own rule at gunpoint. Internal order was hampered by the activities of large numbers of demobilized soldiers and simple thugs who had learned to subscribe outside the bounds of legality.”⁷⁵ As a result, the new republic was divided over how to deal with the lawlessness and a growing opposition of Muslims who had long resided in the area prior to Armenians moving in from Eastern Anatolia. Both Turkey and the new communist power in Russia saw this as an opportunity to wrest control away from the seemingly inept Armenian state and began to encroach upon the republic’s territory, Turkey from the west and Russia from the east via Azerbaijan. For the majority of Armenians, Turkey posed the greatest threat to Armenian nationalism and the survival of the Armenian people due to the atrocities suffered under the Ottoman Empire. Thus, a large majority felt that joining the Russian Soviets would allow for the continuation of Armenia even under the flag of communism. Faced with a choice between Turkey and Russia, leaders of the Republic in Yerevan decided to back the lesser of two evils and officially joined the Soviet Union in December of 1920. But was this new Soviet administrative unit the legitimate successor of the national movement of 1918, or a cheap perversion of the national ideal? Where did legitimacy lie? Was it on the ground in Yerevan or with the ultra-nationalists who continued to fight for Armenian statehood? These questions were debated in the dueling narratives of the communist state and the oppositional nationalists, the memories they evoked, their level of participation and dissent, and their answers to what it meant to be Armenian.

⁷⁵ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 169.

When Armenia was proclaimed an independent socialist republic on December 2, 1920, Armenian society was in a state of ‘demodernization’ due to war, genocide, revolution, and strife since 1914.⁷⁶ In order to save the many Armenian refugees from starvation and to stabilize economic and political sectors, socialist Armenians and intellectual nationalists threw support behind the Soviet Union and communist ideology in hopes it would modernize the people and the nation, which in turn would aid in the fruition of nationalist goals for a unified Armenian people. In the 1920s the nationalist Dashnak party still held the majority of support in the small republic while a relatively strong but growing number of intelligentsia supported the communists. Soviet Armenians like Anastas Mikoyan, future apparatchik, and Stepan Shaumian, early Bolshevik, made names for themselves in Azerbaijan and Russia by helping to ‘build communism.’ This group is the most obvious source for willing participation in the Soviet system. They also show significant agency in the construction and dissemination of Soviet culture.

As the fate of socialism in Russia was being determined by a struggle for power amongst the socialist revolutionaries who successfully ousted Tsar Nicolas II in 1917, so too was the fate of the Caucasus being determined by loyal Armenian soviets. The changing of power in Russia after the revolution resulted in unstable Russian control over the Caucasus. This, in addition to the deteriorating power of the Ottoman Empire at the same time, left the region vulnerable to foreign interference. Not only were Russia and Turkey involved in the region, but Britain also threw its hat into the ring for Caucasian resources, the most lucrative being oil, when this opportunity presented itself. Thus in order to maintain control, Lenin sent a leader of the communist movement—Stepan

⁷⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol 2 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 348.

Shaumian—to impose Soviet rule in Baku.⁷⁷ Dubbed the ‘Caucasian Lenin,’ Shaumian became chairman of this Baku commune, which also included Mikoyan and other local agitators for the Bolshevik cause who would become known as the twenty-six Baku commissars.⁷⁸ Unfortunately for this group, anti-Bolshevik Socialist Revolutionaries in Russia executed everyone except Mikoyan in 1918 while fleeing an invading force of Turks entering Baku. Thus, these figures, especially Shaumian, became martyrs for the Soviet cause and featured heavily in the communist statist narrative. However, the reality of this participation in the Soviet government was hardly utopian.

For Mikoyan, his loyalty to Moscow was often tested by his willingness to act against his fellow Armenians. He had proven in Baku that he would not shy away from enforcing Soviet rule, once threatening a subordinate: “You should keep in mind whom you’re dealing with, and know that there’s a bullet in this gun for you!”⁷⁹ However, he was tested in 1937 when Joseph Stalin sent him to Armenia with a list of about three hundred Party members to purge. Seeing a friend on the list, Mikoyan crossed off his name before signing the order of arrest. However, this man was arrested anyway along with seven out of nine Armenian Politburo members. In total, roughly one thousand people were arrested on this trip to Yerevan under ‘his’ orders.⁸⁰ But this would not be the last time that Mikoyan would willingly carry out the commands of his Soviet superiors at the expense of his own conscience. In 1962 Khrushchev wanted to send Mikoyan as an emissary to Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis, however his wife

⁷⁷ Stephen Kinzer, “The Fallen Commissars of 1998, Now Fallen Idols,” *The New York Times*, September 9, 1997.

⁷⁸ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 211. For more information on the 26 Baku Commissars, see: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972).

⁷⁹ Mikoyan, *Memoirs*, 144.

⁸⁰ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2005), 251.

Ashken was dying and he was reluctant to leave her. The Soviet leader eventually convinced Mikoyan to go by promising that “if the worst comes to pass, we’ll take care of everything.”⁸¹ Ashken did pass away while her husband was in Cuba, but Mikoyan never confronted Krushchev about the incident. So while there were many instances where Soviet Armenians participated in the communist regime, there were also many times when opposition members sought to distance Armenia from Moscow.

According to Ronald Grigor Suny, one of the most prolific scholars of Armenian History, there was no resistance to the introduction of Soviet rule, as the Armenians were a nation of victims: downtrodden, hungry, sick, and politically apathetic.⁸² But surely this is too simplistic a conclusion. While it is true that the Soviets were seen by many as a preferable option to the encroachment of Turkey, some segments of the Armenian population refused to participate in communism and chose to emigrate from their traditional homeland in opposition to the Soviet administration. The Dashnak party, leaders of the first independent Armenian Republic, had tried to persecute and suppress growing Bolshevik sentiment during their rule. Thus, they were no supporters of the communist regime. Many of their more radical members either left Armenia to fight for nationhood externally—contributing to the growth of the Armenian Diaspora and its increasing anti-Soviet narrative—or remained to establish violent opposition organizations against both Turkey and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it soon became apparent that Moscow had no desire to remove Turkish authority from traditional Armenian homelands in Eastern Anatolia. Since Turkish nationalists were considered allies by the Soviets against Western imperialism, the Bolsheviks were willing to cede territory to maintain peace in the region. This and other Soviet policies led to dissent

⁸¹ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (London: The Free Press, 2003), 580.

⁸² Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 348.

primarily among the Dashnaks, who established a stronghold in the Karabakh Mountains to fight the communists. With the Red Army occupied elsewhere, civil war erupted between Soviet and non-Soviet Armenians in the early years of the Soviet Republic. This history is often forgotten in the retelling of Armenian memories, since it sheds an unflattering light on the narrative of Armenian unity that was so rampant in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The territories of the Soviet Caucasus underwent much change in the 1930s, eventually transforming into present-day border configurations. During this restructuring the Nagorno-Karabakh region located within modern-day Azerbaijan was given status as an autonomous region of the newly minted Azerbaijan Republic, as was Nakhichevan even though it was, and still is, separated from Azerbaijan by a strip of Armenian territory. And while Armenia was made a single republic without administrative subdivisions, most of its richest farmland and historically significant sites were now across the border in Turkey.⁸³ These two Azerbaijani areas are great examples of Stalin's policy of divide and rule. Nagorno-Karabakh had, and still has, an Armenian majority while Nakhichevan is primarily Muslim. It was in the mountains of Karabakh where the dwindling Armenian nobility created strongholds against Persian rule in the eighteenth century. This history of rebellion has followed the region and helps to shape its memory in the collective as an independent Armenian region. However, much of the reason for Nakhichevan's territory is due to a desire to placate Turkey over the fate of Muslim minorities in the South Caucasus. Since the Ottomans had taken up the mantle of Muslim protector by the latter years of their reign in much the same way that Russia had taken up the mantle of protector of Eastern-Orthodoxy earlier, the Bolsheviks agreed to special

⁸³ The ancient royal city of Ani, Lake Van region, and Mount Ararat—the central symbol of Armenian identity—were situated within the borders of Turkey.

treatment for the Muslim areas of Achara and Nakhichevan in order to appease Turkey and neutralize it as a threat before the Red Army units had marched into Georgia and Azerbaijan in the 1920's.⁸⁴ This was most likely a purely politically motivated move on behalf of the recently empowered Bolsheviks. At this time, they were more interested in consolidating power within Russia and her territories rather than continuing the external wars of the previous Imperial regime.

Following years of purges under Stalin's regime, the 1950s and 1960s saw a relaxing of Soviet policies toward ethnic nationalism within the Armenian SR. In order to appeal to the masses, the Party began to make concessions to traditional culture and sought to use it as a means to further communism rather than viewing it as a roadblock. Some pre-Soviet works of Armenian literature and folklore began to re-circulate at the official level. However, a resurgence of ethnic nationalism was not much of a presence until the mid 1960s. These expressions of Armenian-ness were neither anti-Soviet nor Anti-Russian, but largely anti-Turk. On April 24, 1965, thousands of Armenians gathered in downtown Yerevan to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of what they consider the Armenian Genocide.⁸⁵ Unofficial demonstrations and commemorations were held in Yerevan, which were surprisingly tolerated by the Soviet government. This eventually led to the opening of a Genocide memorial in Yerevan in 1967, a nationalist and anti-Turk site of memory that would reinforce a national narrative of victimhood particularly after communist rule.

⁸⁴ The Soviet Union designated many ethnic republics and territories during their reign, most of which enjoyed special status and some level of autonomy, even now. Chechnya is a great example of this in the Northern Caucasus. Under the terms of the treaties of Moscow and Kars in 1921, Soviet Russia and Turkey settled their border in the south Caucasus and agreed on the administrative status of these areas even though they lay inside what would become the Soviet Union. They remain a rare instance in international law in which the internal administrative structure of one country has been secured by a treaty with another.

⁸⁵ Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 186.

STATIST NARRATIVES AND ACTS OF SILENCING

Both Tsarist and Soviet governments considered some ethnic groups loyal and cooperative while others suspicious, thus resulting in inconsistent policies and narratives. During the nineteenth century, religious identity was often used as a tool by Russia to determine the potential trustworthiness of non-Russian groups. Due to this policy, Russia adopted the Orthodox Georgian and Armenian populations and assumed the mantle of protector of Christianity within the Caucasus. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire used Islam to link itself with Muslims in the region. Eastern Anatolia, a melting pot of both Christian and Muslim populations, became the intersection of these strategies for control. These competing narratives resulted in political divisions in Yerevan as it fought to establish itself as the center of an independent Armenian nation and defender of Armenian culture. Parties within these Armenian communities disagreed over how to build the new country and cope with international tensions like border disputes. Thus, multiple narratives arose to reinforce competing opinions on the future of the Armenian nation. This was further complicated by the introduction of Soviet ideology into this developing nation-state and its impact on evolving Armenian national identity.

It is important to note that the rise of ethnic nationalism within the Soviet Union in the last half of its existence was in no way limited to the Armenian Soviet Republic. The de-Stalinization process begun in the Khrushchev era from 1953 to 1964, as well as various concessions to ethnic nationalism under subsequent leaders, led to increasing awareness of one's identity and nationality divorced from Soviet ideology. It is possible to distinguish two unique forms of nationalism within the Union: official nationalism and dissident nationalism. Official nationalism allowed Republic elites to foster support for the Soviet regime by conceding to ethnic feelings of the majority within certain limits,

thus allowing for the existence of national pride, patriotic sentiments, and the use of national history and myths to further the Soviet cause and the construction of communism.⁸⁶ Dissident nationalism, however, occurred when the expression of these sentiments exceeded the bounds of government limits. Unlike other nationalist narratives at the time, Armenian sentiments were decidedly anti-Turk rather than anti-Soviet or anti-Russian. This allowed for leniency when handling Armenian nationalism since it did not represent a direct threat to Soviet rule and often reinforced the ‘little brother’ narrative of Russian protection that had been advanced since Russian interference in the Caucasus region beginning in the seventeenth century. However, this would change in 1988 with the outbreak of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Over the course of Armenian history, different competing notions of Armenia emerged as a result of the dispersal of Armenians throughout the world. The existence of a growing diaspora community located far from historic Armenia led to ecclesiastical, dialectical, and cultural differences between the ‘Western Diaspora’—those who left—and the ‘Eastern Diaspora’—those who stayed. However, it is clear that Armenian memory for both those who remained in the region and those who left largely centers on memories of Eastern Anatolia and Ottoman persecution. For those Armenians who dispersed throughout the Western diaspora, these memories of genocide dominate their identity and narrative. However for those in the Eastern diaspora, experiences of communism and a post-Soviet war with Azerbaijan prevent the collective memory of genocide from overshadowing their national narrative. Thus the challenge that this narrative faced was in creating new memories divorced from those in Turkey and existing outside of the new Armenian state.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 185-186.

Linguistic differences also contributed to the growth of divergent notions of the nation. Two variants of the Armenian language, a branch of the Indo-European linguistic family, have developed over time. The western variation is spoken in the Turkish, American, European, and Levantine Diasporas. It significantly differs from the eastern variation spoken in the Armenian Republic, Iran, Russia, and among the populations originating in these areas but is still mutually understandable. It should be noted that the Armenian language and alphabet is generally considered a source of pride for nearly all Armenians, thus another tool to be used to influence the entrenching of certain memories into the national narrative. The statist narrative up until the Soviet experience stressed a unification of Armenian identity along lines of nationalism and a shared Armenian history. However, the fractured Armenian nation meant the existence of multiple individual and social memories that were difficult to synthesize into one larger collective narrative. The genocide offered a shared point of reference around which to build this fabled, or imagined, collective narrative. Thus, memories of trauma and victimhood at Muslim hands were emphasized at the expense of other memories in order to advance Armenian nationalism and self-rule.

For much of Armenian society, especially the peasantry, the Armenian Church dictated traditional Armenian culture and was thus the source of one influential narrative. While the Church retained much influence over the Armenian people throughout the communist period, much of its political and social power had already been reduced by the rise of nationalist groups like the Dashnaks at the beginning of the 1920s. The intelligentsia, a largely secularized group, had been hostile toward the Church. Nicknamed *Anastvats* (Armenian for ‘atheist’) while in seminary school due to his questioning of religious tenants, Anastas Mikoyan often opposed traditional narratives of Armenian society: “Our social customs were as archaic as our economy.... According to

ancient custom a married woman did not have the right to speak to a man or woman older than she...but in those days tradition was tradition.”⁸⁷ However, the majority of the population still looked to the Church for guidance. Due to the overwhelming loyalty of the Armenia peasantry, the Soviets were initially cautious in their condemnation and purging of the Church to a certain extent, choosing to ease into the denunciation and vilification of Armenian religion where before they would have come in swinging. However, the new government eventually appropriated property and traditional functions of the Church while especially anti-communist religious leaders were persecuted. This, along with the indoctrination of Armenian youth through a Soviet education system, severely weakened the Church narrative of an Armenian identity based on religion and traditional culture within the Armenian Republic.

One counter-narrative to the Church originated from the intelligentsia who used nationalism as a tool to reform traditional society.⁸⁸ Incited and encouraged by memories of the genocide and Turkish pogroms, which were still fresh in the minds of nearly all Armenians in the twenties and thirties, communism allowed the nationalist narrative to maintain a strong anti-Turk narrative in Soviet Armenia. Musicians singing of the tragedy that had befallen their beloved land were welcomed not only in villages but also by Party and Komsomol members. Literature also played a large role in the continuation of these memories. For Anastas Mikoyan, these nationalist writers figure largely in the memories of his formative years:

“The story of the Armenian nation’s struggle against foreign oppressors fascinated me, and the historical novels of the Armenian writer Raffi—*David-Bek*, *Samuel*, and others—made a deep impression on me. Shaumian has called

⁸⁷ Mikoyan, *Memoirs*, 19.

⁸⁸ Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1962), 78.

Raffi one of the most beloved of Armenian novelists. I also delved enthusiastically into the works of one of the classic Armenian writers, Hovanes Tumanian...He was a great artist whose words vividly depicted the life of the peasants and the landscape of his native land. I was especially drawn to his descriptions of the people and places of my own native region of Lori and I liked his use of the many words and expressions in our Lori dialect which, rather than spoiling the Armenian literary language, enriched it.”⁸⁹

Thus, collective memories of Armenian nationalist heroes like David Bek became ingrained in individual memory, helping to shape individual identities like Mikoyan’s. At the same time, those memories and identities provided a basis for the nationalist narrative, which in turn emphasized Armenian independence, heroism, and victimhood.

In the late nineteenth century, political differences further complicated the national narrative. Two major political parties—the Social Democratic Hunchak Party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or Dashnaks—were founded in Geneva in 1887 and in Tiflis (now Tbilisi) in 1890, respectively.⁹⁰ Both of these parties were members of the larger progressive movement that was developing in Russia and Western Europe at this time that typically combined ideas of social justice and class-consciousness with the power of national revival. While they had the common goal to establish Armenian independence from Ottoman rule, these two Armenian parties differed on cooperation with non-socialist parties, the relationship between national and class struggles, and the tactics to be pursued in resolving the political status of Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire and Russia. By the time of the Russian revolution, the Dashnaks had become the dominant party in Armenian communities. Their authority over guerrilla groups in Eastern Anatolia was facilitated by battlefield victories during the early twentieth century against the Ottomans. Therefore, they assumed the mantle of defender of the Armenian national idea and became the leading voice in first Republic of

⁸⁹ Mikoyan, *Memoirs*, 25.

⁹⁰ King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 180.

Armenia in 1918. When the Bolsheviks took over in 1920, it was a huge blow to those Armenians whose personal histories had been tied to the Dashnak party. Other communities and political leaders like the Hunchaks continued to support Armenians wherever they resided and made peace with the new political rulers, focusing instead on the existence of an Armenian republic, even a Soviet one, as essential to the survival of Armenian identity. The Dashnaks, on the other hand, saw Soviet rule as a catastrophe for the entire Armenian nation and to the survival and prosperity of Armenian national identity. Thus two opposing narratives clearly existed in tension with each other: an ultra-nationalist version opposed to Soviet rule (promoted by the Dashnaks) and a more moderate version accepting of the new communist reality. However, the primary statist narratives came from three sides: the Church, which held political power before the Soviet regime; the nationalists, whose rhetoric dominated Armenian politics and society during the first Armenian Republic from 1918-1920 before becoming an opposition voice under communism; and finally the Soviets, including those living in Russia as well as in the Republic who were masters at disseminating and imbedding their narrative through directed propaganda.

Arguably the most vital narrative in existence during the Soviet period originated from the Soviets themselves. In order to transform society into a communist utopia, this narrative sought to instill communist ideology amongst Armenians in order to legitimize its mission. The Soviet statist narrative stressed the necessity of introducing modernity and Soviet ideals to the backward villages, for their evolutionary progress was held captive by bonds of religion, family, and village loyalty which could only be liberated by Soviet modernity, education, and gender equality. According to Soviet mindset, “communism is a greater good than the freedom of any small group called a nationality.

Communism solves not only the economic but also the nationality problem.”⁹¹ To that end all mass communication in the Armenian Soviet Republic—radio, cinema, press, theater, and schools—was centralized in the Commissariat of Education and controlled by the Party, thus becoming major tools of Soviet propaganda.⁹² Interestingly, rather than fighting against Armenian culture, the Soviets used it to propagate their own agenda especially in the realms of language and the arts by encouraging diaspora Armenians to immigrate to Soviet Armenia. Famous Armenian composers such as Aram Khachaturian aided the Soviet cause in such a way. His ballets *Spartacus* and *Gayane* are perhaps his most well known along with the score “The Sabre Dance” from *Gayane*. Another famous Soviet-Armenian was Alexander Tumanian, the architect responsible for the city planning of Yerevan and its transformation into a modern city. Asked, “if nationality is not important...why is it that all the leaders of the Armenian Republic are without exception Armenians?” the Commissar of Education of the Armenian SSR said: “Because they are of the people and know the customs and the language and the mentality of the people...The international outlook is the future ideal, not the immediate one...There is no reason why one group should impose its culture on another. If Russia was to impose its culture on Armenia I would be the first to fight it.”⁹³

This Armenian Soviet official illustrates that for him and those like him it was possible to be both Soviet and Armenian, but one’s Armenian-ness often trumped one’s Soviet-ness. Or rather, one’s ethnicity was never supplanted by a decidedly Russian culture. Before his 1959 visit to the United States, the “Soviet Union’s shrewd trader” Anastas Mikoyan was credited in an American newspaper as a “‘talented...energetic

⁹¹ A.Y. Yeghenian, *The Red Flag at Ararat* (New York. 1932), 119-120.

⁹² Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia*, 78.

⁹³ Yeghenian, *The Red Flag at Ararat*, 120.

Armenian” and “a powerful force in guiding the Russian economy” who was proud of his mercantile ancestry and often toasted with fellow Caucasian Joseph Stalin, “to hell with these bloody Russians.”⁹⁴ So while the Soviet narrative was undoubtedly strong during this era, it was unable to completely eliminate deeply ingrained memories of traditional Armenian society, culture, and history. These elements of Armenian identity were maintained and would rise to the fore again near the end of the communist regime. As long as the Soviet narrative did not infringe too much on this sense of identity, many Armenians were content to live within the system. In fact, when Russia did begin to impose its culture on Armenia most notably by attempting to remove Armenian as the sole official language in the Republic in 1978, Armenians took to the streets in opposition of Soviet power and successfully guaranteed that the sovereignty of their language would be left untouched.⁹⁵ Interestingly, Armenia along with Georgia and Azerbaijan were the only Soviet Republics allowed to retain the language articles in its 1978 constitution. Thus, language can be treated as an important site of memory used to reinforce whatever statist narrative in power at a specific time.

As a primary means of communication, language in the form of rhetoric and labels is often used as a tool of propaganda whether intentional or not. “I should say...that my father was not in fact a peasant, but a laborer-carpenter. In those days, however, people were classified on official documents in terms of one of the three estates: noble class, inhabitants of cities and towns, or peasantry, rather than according to class and occupation. Since my grandfather had been a serf and my father lived in the

⁹⁴ “Mikoyan: Soviet Union’s Shrewd Trader,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 23, 1958, 7.

⁹⁵ The republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan enjoyed a unique position within the Soviet Union as the only republics where the ethnic or national language was the only official language. The Soviet Constitution of 1977 (Brezhnev Constitution) encouraged the creation of Republic constitutions in which a clause would be added that made Russian an official language. Protests erupted in Georgia and Armenia and the Soviets decided to leave the issue alone.

country, he usually listed himself as peasant.”⁹⁶ Mikoyan’s remembrances of class stratification in pre-Soviet Armenia demonstrate the role that labels and rhetoric can have on the acts of remembering and self-classification. The immediate post-World War II period saw a flurry of renaming due in large part to migration and repatriation of diaspora Armenians beginning in 1945. Between 1946 and 1948, nearly 90,000 Armenians from the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas immigrated to Soviet Armenia.⁹⁷ In addition to the massive influx of Armenian immigrants, a process of emigration was occurring for Azerbaijanis residing within Armenian borders. In another example of Stalin’s divide and rule policy, Azerbaijanis who had lived in Armenian lands for generations were ‘voluntarily’ moved to the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. Another bout of renaming emerged in 1967, most likely connected to a surge in Armenian nationalism incited by the 1965 Yerevan demonstrates in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide⁹⁸.

CONCLUSION: RESURGENCE OF ARMENIAN NATIONALISM

Considered the “Vicar of Bray of Soviet politics,” Anastas Mikoyan was one of the most successful Armenians within the Soviet Union. A Russian saying referring to his position within the upper echelons of the Soviet regime goes: “From Illich [Lenin] to Illich [Brezhnev] without accident or stroke.” His ability to avoid the purges endemic within the Politburo prompted one official to describe him as able to “walk through Red Square on a rainy day without an umbrella [and] without getting wet. He could dodge the

⁹⁶ Mikoyan, *Memoirs*, 14.

⁹⁷ Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, “Population redistribution and the Ethnic Balance in Transcaucasia,” ed. Ronald G. Suny, *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change; Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 488.

⁹⁸ Arseny Saparov, “The Alteration of Place-Names and the Construction of National Identity in Soviet Armenia,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 44, no.1 (2003): 188.

raindrops.”⁹⁹ Mikoyan finally succumbed to illness in 1978. While he did not witness the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union or Armenia’s shift toward independent statehood in 1990, he was able to witness the initial reemergence of Armenian nationalism in the late 70s and 80s that would eventually foster a rejection of communism in the final years of the great Socialist experiment. This development was a counter-movement against Soviet efforts to control and shape Armenian identity by selectively reinforcing certain narratives and forgetting others. It was also due in large part to the breakout of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which in 1989 declared its intent to rejoin the Armenian Republic. After many years of assimilation into Soviet society, the general Armenian community in Russia was not overly concerned with establishing independence, but it did support the Republic’s split from the Union in 1990 and its war against Azerbaijan.

Before the Soviet Union fell in 1991, Armenia declared independence on the 23rd of August in 1990 by a parliament largely controlled by the anti-Communist opposition. The new president, Levon Ter-Petrosian, was a former literary historian and leader of the Karabakh Committee—a dissident movement that arose in the late 1980’s against the Soviet leaders and which was committed to reunifying Nagorno-Karabakh with the larger Armenian Republic. However, this new president followed a more moderate line than other, more radical opposition groups at the time. Because of this he was considered weak by nationalist groups like the Dashnaks, who had managed to survive throughout the Communist regime by relocating outside the borders of Soviet-controlled Armenia. In 1991, massive protests erupted in Yerevan calling for his resignation, and the newly restored state experienced one of the considerable issues splitting larger Armenian

⁹⁹ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 83.

identity and the fate of the new republic: the split between Soviet Armenians and diaspora returnees, especially those who sympathized with the nationalist party.

Throughout the Soviet period of Armenia's history, collective memories of a past steeped in tradition, exceptionalism, trauma, and victimhood were continually evoked in order to remain imbedded in the heart of Armenian identity. While a strong Soviet statist narrative attempted to usurp traditional and nationalistic counter-narratives, it failed to completely eradicate pre-Soviet memories devoid of communist ideology. However, the soviet experience did ultimately impact Eastern Armenian identity formation by contributing Soviet heroes to Armenia's evolving triumphalist national mythology.

Chapter 3: Reclaiming the Past and Shaping Post-Soviet Identity

On August 23, 1990, the Supreme Council of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic submitted a Declaration of Independence:

Expressing the united will of the Armenian people; Aware of its historic responsibility for the destiny of the Armenian people engaged in the realization of the aspirations of all Armenians and the restoration of historical justice;...Exercising the right of nations to free self-determination; Based on the December 1, 1989, joint decision of the Armenian SSR Supreme Council and the Artsakh National Council on the "Reunification of the Armenian SSR and the Mountainous Region of Karabakh;" Developing the democratic traditions of the independent Republic of Armenia established on May 28, 1918."¹⁰⁰

Armenia's official secession from the Soviet Union in 1990 did not result in an ideological or cultural vacuum amongst its citizenry, but rather the rejection of communism was a result of a reclaiming and reinvention of an identity based on ideals that were able to survive throughout the Soviet regime that began in Armenia in 1920. This reinvented identity is largely based upon an amalgamation of narratives that had been allowed to develop near the end of Soviet rule due to an intensification of ethnic nationalism and the contribution of various sites of memory that worked to emphasize and disseminate narratives of a glorious Armenian past. The increased importance placed upon this past—their literature, music, myths, and heritage—reflects a desire for independence, autonomy, and self-determination as well as a renewed effort to forget or reimagine a history of 'victimhood.' Collective memories of Armenia's past for the majority of those living in Russia differs very little from those living in the recently emancipated Republic of Armenia in the years directly following the breakup of the

¹⁰⁰ The Government of the Republic of Armenia. "Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Armenia."

Soviet Union. As time passed, though, the bond between the identities of these two groups would widen and stretch but never completely sever.

In the socio-political vacuum that once was communism, a multi-faceted national narrative rooted in a triumphant past, trauma, and nationalism once again established a strong presence in the Armenian state by relying on a revival of traditional values of religion and culture while invoking a sense of victimhood from past regimes and a desire for self-rule. As flocks of Armenians converged on the new Republic from diaspora communities across the world, the Dashnaks set themselves up to grasp the political reigns with the help of international funds.¹⁰¹ They built media outlets, businesses, and began to invest Western funds into this economically struggling post-Soviet country. Furthermore, the money they brought with them and their promotion of political candidates set them up to wield considerable power. However, this worried those who had been living under the Soviet regime. The communist experience had instilled in those Armenians within the Soviet Union a different idea of what Armenia and Armenians should be. Nurtured in soviet ideology from a young age, there still existed a large population not entirely opposed to communism. Furthermore, the opposition members who remained in Soviet Armenia felt they had more claim on the their country's future than those who left. Their memories had been altered by the Soviet experience and new ones introduced that were absent from the social memories of the Western diaspora. This created a distinct, post-Soviet identity to which the Diaspora could not relate. The social memories of those who emigrated or grew up outside of Armenia dwelt in nostalgia for a past that would never be again, while those nurtured

¹⁰¹ The Dasnaks were an ultra-nationalist group who held power during the first Republic of Armenia from 1918-1919 and maintained a very influential presence abroad during the Soviet period. For more information, see:

under the Soviet Union accepted that concessions and negotiation were necessary for the future survival of the Armenian state as a bastion of Armenian identity

RESURGENCE AND RISE OF ETHNIC NATIONALISM

In 1970 ethnic Armenians made up 88.6% of the Soviet Republic of Armenia, with Azerbaijanis constituting 5.9% of the population and Russians another 2.7%. By 1989 these numbers had changed to 93.3%, 2.6%, and 1.6% respectively.¹⁰² The concentration of ethnic Armenians within this Republic, along with increasingly sympathetic Soviet policies, contributed to a growing sense of ethnic nationalism in the later years of the communist regime. However, there was also a disproportionately larger population of Armenians outside the borders of the Republic. The largest of this group was situated in Russia. The resurgence of nationalism amongst Armenians both in Russia and at home contributed to a post-Soviet identity at once shaped by memories of a glorious Armenian history and mired in memories of trauma and dependence. The abundance of historic images, myths, and heroes in Armenian literature, music, and popular culture of this time period speaks to a sense of nostalgia for a triumphalist past.

The ability to claim ancient heritage in the region serves as a tool to legitimize Armenian statehood while encouraging national myths of past glory and triumph. At its greatest extent, the ancient Kingdom of Armenia stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean between 95 and 66 BC. The history of the Armenian people is said to trace back even further to the ancient Urartu Kingdom situated around the Armenian territories of Lake Van and Lake Sevan from 860 to about 590 BC. These memories of Armenian greatness and the heroes of the past have become ingrained in this national

¹⁰² Institute of Demography at the Higher School of Economics National Research University, "All Union Population Census of 1970" and "All Union Population Census of 1989," *Demoscope Weekly*.

myth, which is reinforced by the state through museums, national dance companies, and plays and operas that repeat these narratives. At the same time a vein of vulnerability runs through Armenian identity. Because of the strategic geographic location of the Caucasus as an intersection of East and West interests, many empires have striven to exert influence in this area: Greek, Roman, Persian, Ottoman, Arab, Russian, and most recently American.¹⁰³ These various influences have left an indelible mark on the psyche of the modern Armenian nation by engendering feelings of victimhood and dependence. This is most apparent in the anti-Turk nationalist narratives of the Soviet and post-Soviet era.

Remembrances of Turkish pogroms against Armenians have been handed down generation to generation since their occurrence beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. This has resulted in a ‘chronosophical’ paradigm wherein these memories inhabit the collective’s consciousness by transcending the past to live in the present.¹⁰⁴ A Young Turk policy of relocating and purging suspect elements of the Turkish population resulted in the deaths of roughly 1.5 million Armenians between 1914 and 1924. This period, also known as the Armenian Genocide, is arguably the most significant event that has occurred in the history of the Armenian people and has come to dominate Armenian politics in the region due to Turkey’s refusal to recognize the event as ‘genocide’ rather than ‘consequences of war.’ It is so important that the second to last point of the 1990 *Armenian Declaration of Independence* declares that “the Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.”¹⁰⁵ However, this traumatic event often

¹⁰³ For a discussion of Armenian history, see: Simon Payasilian. *The History of Armenia* and George A. Bournoutian, *A Concise History of the Armenian People*.

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of chronology vs. chronosophy, see: Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

¹⁰⁵ "Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Armenia."

overshadows other memories of life under Ottoman rule as well as other assaults on the Armenian way of life and, in turn, often silences them.

In post-Soviet Armenia, memories of prosperity under Muslim rule are often not spoken, as they fail to coincide with the dominant narrative that colors Turkey as evil. For the majority of Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire, life until the mid-1800s was generally self-governed and incident-free. Their roles as merchants and businessmen allowed for a trans-border movement, interaction with foreign cultures, and the accumulation of wealth. In addition, Ottoman policy generally allowed ethnic minorities like the Armenians a level of autonomy and the ability to practice their own religion and culture. This level of freedom and prosperity is often forgotten in the anti-Turk rhetoric of the national narrative. In addition to these silenced memories of relative peace, non-Genocide reminiscences of persecution that reinforce memories of trauma are often overlooked. For example, other instances of persecution by late Ottoman policies, a 1905 massacre in Baku, instances of purges and assault under Soviet rule, and other traumatic events are often overshadowed by emphasized memories of the genocide and typically lumped together as an amalgamated point of reference for an identity based on victimhood. In a post-Soviet reality in which Armenia is often vulnerable to economic and security concerns, memories that evoke a narrative of victimhood are often suppressed unless they serve political interests or are forced to be remembered by an external diaspora that does not usually experience those same concerns.

The discussion of ‘victimhood’ at the hands of the former Ottoman Empire naturally leads to a discussion of Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh question. Determined to create a strong state and a secure future, the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh separatist region of Azerbaijan adds another dimension to the rise of nationalism and belief in self-determination. While those in Armenia proper participated

the most in the fighting against Azerbaijani forces and suffered the most under wartime conditions in the early years of the 1990s, the Diaspora community in Russia was by no means unaffected. Their brothers, sons, and cousins fought as well, thus their memories both of victimhood and valor encouraged a sense of Armenian pride and fraternity.

On February 20, 1988, the largely ethnic-Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan voted to officially reunite with Armenia, thus igniting open conflict in the Southern Caucasus that ultimately resulted in an ongoing, unresolved dispute between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. The eruption of armed confrontation between the mostly ethnic Armenian Karabakh region and Azerbaijan was one of the primary factors for Armenia's devastated economy after the fall of the Soviet regime. Since its landlocked position meant that about 85% of Armenia's cargo and goods arrived via rail, Azerbaijan's and Turkey's railway and air blockade against Armenia practically crippled the economy quite early in this conflict. "The blockade had a significant negative effect on the already fragile economy of Armenia, since Armenia imported 80 percent of its fuel from the USSR, of which 82 percent was produced by Azerbaijan. Furthermore, Azerbaijan also cut the deliveries of oil and gas from Russia and Kazakhstan."¹⁰⁶ In 1993, Turkey joined Azerbaijan and initiated its own blockade against Armenia in support for their Turkish-speaking brothers in Azerbaijan, thus closing its shared border with Armenia and cutting off access to traditional Armenian territories and sites of memory in Eastern Anatolia. Russia managed to broker a cease-fire in 1994, but Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to clash over the largely unresolved issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. The borders with both Turkey and Azerbaijan remain closed after more than a decade. This continues to be a contentious issue for the region today. But more importantly, this

¹⁰⁶ Armenica. "History of Armenia." Accessed October 10, 2011. <http://www.armenica.org/cgi-bin/armenica.cgi?932293477002532=1=1=0=999=nada=1=3=A>, 509.

conflict reignited memories of trauma and resulted in a desire to overcome a psyche of victimhood and dependence. Therefore, memories of an historic Armenian past full of glory and triumph were evoked on a national level in order to increase Armenian nationalism and hope for a peaceful, secure future.

NARRATIVES IN TENSION

The pre-Soviet era had witnessed the rise of a distinctly nationalist narrative that promoted the unification and consolidation of a fractured Armenian identity based upon memories of a shared Armenian religion, language, and culture. The goal of this narrative, largely promoted by a growing intellectual class, was to establish statehood for the Armenian people in the ‘traditional’ or ‘historic’ Armenian homeland. This nationalist group experienced brief success with the formation of the first Republic of Armenia in 1918.¹⁰⁷ However, while this narrative still existed in some form in 1990, experiences of the collapse of communism and war over Nagorno-Karabakh significantly affected the original national narrative and shifted its purpose from a unifying and state-building tool to one focused on survival and prosperity.

The dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh continues to color relations in the region. However, Armenia was not without allies.¹⁰⁸ Largely due to the efforts of its widely dispersed and influential global diaspora community, many nations have backed Armenia in its quest for two primary goals: the resolving of the Nagorno-Karabakh question and the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The largest of these Diaspora communities—

¹⁰⁷ This republic only lasted about a year until it voted to join the Soviet Union, which officially occurred on December 2, 1920. For more detailed information on the first Republic, see: Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: Volume I, The First Year, 1918-1919* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1971).

¹⁰⁸ Christopher J. Walker, ed. *Armenia and Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity* (London, UK: Minority Rights Publications, 1991).

located throughout Russia—has not been as vocal as other groups from Europe or America in its denunciation of Turkey. This is in large part due to its closer ties with the community in Armenia and their shared communist past. The conventional, widely accepted, state-supported post-Soviet narrative claims that due to their religious similarities, geographical nearness, shared communist past, and the geopolitical realities of the region, Russia and Armenia have historically enjoyed a close, mutually beneficial relationship. However, alternative narratives exist that depict Russia as an overbearing, abusive big brother smothering Armenian progress. In an effort to reestablish legitimacy for self-rule and secure a future for a people with a long history of victimhood, there existed in the final hours of the Soviet Union a necessity to reclaim a triumphant past. Not only was communism losing its ideological grip on the Armenian people, but rising trouble with Azerbaijan also largely affected Armenian-ness by causing memories of insecurity and fear to resurface.

While genocide recognition and memories of that trauma still inhabited the minds of those in Russia and Armenia, interestingly they were more willing to negotiate with Turkey in order to normalize relations in the region and open the borders between the two countries. Since these communities live under economic and geopolitical hardships due to their isolationist state and inability to easily access foreign markets, a statist narrative promoted by the Armenian government calling for economic prosperity through stabilization with Turkey began to circulate. This narrative also includes the condemnation of an overdependence on Russia for Armenia's future survival as well as a sense that the real threat lies to the East in Azerbaijan rather than from Turkey. The supplanting of memories of the Armenian-Azerbaijan War, and the 'Dark Nights' that followed, in the minds of 'eastern' Armenians resulted from lived experiences to which other social groups within the larger Armenian community could not relate. This speaks

to the existence of different priorities of the state and its need to promote a national narrative that does not depend on the Western Diaspora for its survival.

Another narrative that existed in Armenia and was shared with those communities in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union was one promoted largely by the Armenian Church and adopted by the state to order to promote ‘traditional’ culture devoid of communist influence. This Church narrative centers on the importance of the Armenian-Apostolic religion and its status as the first state religion of Christianity in 301. This is an extremely important source of pride for nearly all Armenians throughout the world and places prominently in Armenian identity. In addition, the Armenian alphabet has likewise been venerated as an example of Armenian literary and artistic heritage. Created in approximately 405 by Mesrop Mashtots—an early Armenian religious figure and eventual saint in the Church—the history and significance of the Armenian alphabet has become an indelible factor in what it means to be Armenian. Children are taught that each letter has a specific religious meaning attached to it, thus promoting the continuation of the Church in the national narrative.

The juxtaposition of official statist and religious narratives at the time of the late Ottoman period with those of the immediate post-Soviet period illuminates how the collective memory of Armenia has changed over time. During the Soviet period, the Church was largely silenced by a statist narrative that promoted religious tradition as harmful to a nation in need of modernization that only communism could provide. However, this narrative was ultimately unsuccessful in eradicating traditional Armenian memories and identity. Whereas the pre-Soviet national narrative stressed an Armenian statehood based on the unification of fractured Armenian communities under the umbrella of the traditional memories, the immediate post-Soviet national narrative largely

focused on the survival of Armenian sovereignty and the right of self-determination through the use of anti-Turk, anti-Azerbaijani, and pro-Russian memories.

SITES OF MEMORY AND THE USE OF LANGUAGE

The use of sites such as memorials, monuments, statues, and other significant indicators of an historic event or person are often used as a tool by the state to evoke memories within the collective that support the statist narrative.¹⁰⁹ The Armenian Church has typically used architectural structures and religious iconography to evoke memories of its legitimacy and to reinforce its narrative. One of the most arresting sites in the capital city of Yerevan is the modern-looking Saint Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral. Its construction was begun after end of Soviet rule and stood (and remains) as a symbol of the 1700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the State Religion in Armenia.” In addition to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of historic medieval Churches throughout Armenia, the dotting of khachkars—or stone crosses—across Armenia’s landscape serves as a reminder its Christian heritage. Furthermore, the existence of alphabet ‘yards’ that illustrate the Armenian alphabet serve as sites of memories of Armenia’s literary tradition. Other sources of memory can be found at the Genocide Memorial and Museum, Matenadaran (an institute dedicated to the preservation of ancient Armenian manuscripts), statues of Armenian literary and historical figures, and the renaming of place-names to honor historic Armenian figures and events serve to reinforce nationalism in the statist narrative. It is also important to note that the Russian language is still widely spoken and seen everywhere in Armenia as a result of its inclusion into the Soviet Union.

Another important tool used by the statist and alternative narratives to evoke and

¹⁰⁹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.”

foster the remembering of strategically significant memories centers on the use of language and rhetoric. In effect, language acts as a uniting agent can be used to manipulate acts of remembering; specifically, what is encouraged to be remembered and what is encouraged to be forgotten.¹¹⁰ The prolific renaming of roads, parks, and buildings after the end of communism illustrates how various groups actively sought to reclaim sites of memory and associate them with a narrative focused on a past free of oppression. The Soviet modernization of the eastern dialect of the Armenian language and the act of renaming under the communist regime was used as a tool of selective forgetting for the purpose of asserting Soviet power and to reinforce statist narratives. The use of Russian as an official language is also important to understand to what extent Armenians adapted and assimilated into Russian-Soviet culture. The changing of place names and the construction of soviet *lieux de memoire* (place names) had an impact on the formation of Armenian identity through strategic use of social and collective memory.¹¹¹

The use of national place-names ensures historical continuity and the preservation of cultural traditions while holding special meaning for small stateless nations since it alone identifies their national territory.¹¹² “The conscious use of place-names by a state can be seen as an instrument to preserve the unity and uniqueness of the nation; to enforce in the national consciousness its moral right to inhabit a particular territory; to protect its land from the territorial claims of its neighbors; or to justify its own territorial

¹¹⁰ In *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o argues that Africa’s colonial past produced a level of collective amnesia and split identities amongst Africans. He argues for an African Renaissance with “the central idea of rebirth and the spring of a new vision of being” and a citizenry that uses its native language as the medium of memory.

¹¹¹ See Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.”

¹¹² E.M. Pospelov, “Natsional’naia politika SSSR i toponimiia,” in *Toponimika i mezhnatsional’nye otnosheniia* (Moscow: AN SSSR, Moskovskii filial Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR, 1992): 3.

claims.”¹¹³ Arguably the most significant motivation for the alteration of place-names in Soviet Armenia was connected to the Soviet Union’s need to erase backwardness by introducing modernity and changing the cultural landscape of its empire. Pre-revolutionary toponymies were often reflections of religious, imperial, or bourgeois culture. In Armenia especially, these place-names evoked memories of Armenian religious figures, heroes, monarchs, historical territories, and culture. Such naming was “alien to the Soviet consciousness, and (moreover) some [had] unstable and even derogative meaning.”¹¹⁴ For example, the common suffix *-vank* is Armenian for ‘church.’ Since religious symbols were especially singled out by the Soviet regime, these were some of the first place-names to be changed. Thus, *Kodukhvank* became *Koturvan*. Soviet re-designation of these *lieux de memoire* often followed a typical pattern.¹¹⁵ Tradition religious names were often replaced by the new religion of the Soviet Union (Marxist-Leninism), Soviet figures often replaced those leaders and heroes of the former culture, and officially celebrated individuals replaced the names of historical territories that typically carried the name of a noble or land-owning family.¹¹⁶ The renaming and naming process in the Soviet Republic of Armenia was tightly controlled by Moscow. First, the new name would have to be approved by The Geographic Commission of the Armenian Academy of Science. It was then passed on to the Presidium of the Armenian Academy of Science before moving on the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR. The final stage of this process was the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.¹¹⁷ Thus the location and meaning of such sources of memory were used by the

¹¹³ Saporov, “The Alteration of Place Names,” 180.

¹¹⁴ *Kommunist* (May 1, 1935), 5.

¹¹⁵ For detailed information on Soviet renaming of place-names, see Charles B. Peterson’s article “The Nature of Soviet Place-Names,” *Names* 25, no. 1 (March 1977): 15-24.

¹¹⁶ Peterson, “The Nature of Soviet Place-Names,” 16.

¹¹⁷ Saporov, “The Alteration of Place Names,” 186.

regime as a tool of propaganda. However, this method for propagating a specific narrative was not limited to the use of the state. Larger social groups often changed place-names to reflect present socio-cultural realities.

It is important to keep in mind that these place-name alterations did not only result in new Russian or Soviet names. Many toponyms with Turkic roots were replaced by their Armenian equivalency in response to growing anti-Turk sentiment after the genocide. For example, *-gell-göl* (Turkish for ‘lake’) was often changed to *-lich*, its equivalent in the Armenian language.¹¹⁸ In fact, the majority of the alterations were surprisingly changed to Armenian rather than Soviet to reflect the population of the era. However, these new Armenian names were exclusively neutral, Soviet-Armenian names and never had religious connotations. As mentioned previously, geographic distinctions such as ‘lake’ were often changed from a Turkic root to an Armenian root. On the other hand, respected and well-known Soviet-Armenians (as well as Soviet-Russians) were honored in similar fashion. Anastas Mikoyan and Stepan Shaumian—two well-known Armenian Bolsheviks—lent their names to places such as *Anastasavan* and *Stepanavan*; latter was known as *Jalaloghlu* (Turkic for ‘son of Jalal’) until 1923.¹¹⁹ From 1837 to 1924, the modern-day northern Armenian town of *Gyumri* was known as *Alexandropol*, but was changed to *Leninakan* in commemoration of Lenin during Soviet rule from 1924 to 1990. Thus, renaming in effect relocated collective memory in accordance with whatever narrative was proclaimed at the time. The changing of Soviet and Russian place-names to Armenian names was likewise a tool employed by the newly independent state to re-appropriate ‘Armenian-ness’ and to reinforce the statist narrative. Many place

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 194.

¹¹⁹ Brady Kiesling, *Rediscovering Armenia: An Archaeological/Touristic Gazetteer and Map Set for the Historical Monuments of Armenia* (Yerevan, Armenia: Tigran Mets, 2001), 43.

names with obvious Soviet connotation were changed to reflect Armenian nationalism. However, sites bearing the names of prominent Soviet Armenians such as the Marshall of the Red Army and hero of World War II (Bagramyan), the famous Soviet-Armenian architect responsible for the modernization of central Yerevan (Tumanian), and the famous Soviet-Armenian composer Khatchaturian were left unchanged. In addition, Russian-neutral names like ‘Moscow’ and ‘Pushkin’ likewise remained.

CONCLUSION

As flocks of Armenians converged on the new Republic from diaspora communities across the world after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, an ultra-nationalist narrative set themselves up to grasp the political reigns with the help of international funds. They built media outlets, businesses, and began to invest Western funds into this economically struggling country in order to further their narrative for the future of Armenian statehood. The money these diaspora groups, primarily from the West, brought with them and their promotion of political candidates set them up to wield considerable power in the struggling state. However, these members of the larger Armenian collective also brought with them new memories from their host countries that did not necessarily support the narratives of those who had remained in the region. The presence of these Western ideals worried those who had been living under the Soviet regime. The communist experience had instilled a different idea of what Armenia and Armenians should be. Nurtured in soviet ideology from a young age, there still existed in Armenia a large population not entirely opposed to communist ideology as long as it did not interfere with the continuation of Armenian culture. Furthermore, the opposition members who remained in Soviet Armenia felt they had more claim on its future than those who left. This created a distinct, post-Soviet identity to which the Diaspora could

not relate. The social memories of those who emigrated or grew up outside Armenia dwelt in nostalgia for a kingdom that would never be again. Thus, there was a real fear that “western” Armenians would seize control of the new republic and lead it in an extremely foreign direction.

Interestingly, it was the appointment of Robert Kocharian, former president of Nagorno-Karabakh, as Prime Minister that signaled the domination of the state not by the Western Diaspora, but by the Eastern one. Instead of Westernized businesses and political leaders directing the future of the Armenian legacy, politicians, businessmen, and war veterans from controversial region of Nagorno-Karabakh would decide the fate of the nation.¹²⁰ This has resulted in post-Soviet foreign and domestic policies that are unwilling to negotiate the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan on any terms other than their own. When Levon Ter-Petrosian—Kocharian’s predecessor and first president of the new Republic of Armenia—was forced from his position because his willingness to negotiate a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh question with Azerbaijan deemed him unacceptable in the eyes of the controlling members of the state, Kocharian came to power and replaced him as president in 1998. The ability of Armenia’s competing narratives to find common ground has resulted in the continuation of collective memories of an historic past and a multi-faced collective identity based not only on religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions, but also one seeking to remove itself from a cycle of victimhood and dependence.

¹²⁰ King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 222.

Conclusion

Understanding eastern Armenian's identity—how they perceive themselves and what is most important to them—is necessary to understand the geopolitical culture of the Southern Caucasus region as a whole. For it is this identity and its preservation that motivates the Republic of Armenia to make certain policies that agitate for measures that will either improve or threaten the stability of this region. The fall of the Soviet Union greatly altered the geopolitics of the Southern Caucasus by allowing previously subjugated ethnic peoples to emerge as independent nations on the international stage. However, regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, and Russia still try to assert their own influence into the region, and now America has joined the fray. For Russia, its interests lie in the potential threats to the security and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, as well as an area in which to forward its own strategic economic and geopolitical goals.¹²¹

Narratives based on memories of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Armenian Genocide have come to dominate Armenian identity in both the Diaspora and in Armenia-proper. And while there does exist a disparity among different social groups within the larger collective concerning which events and memories are recalled most often or most vividly, these two topics are central to the Armenian people as a whole and the Republic of Armenia, which claims to represent them, when interacting with both Russia and the West. Today, Armenia could be considered Russia's strongest ally in the Southern Caucasus. Because Armenia has such poor relations with its neighbors Turkey and Azerbaijan, it continues to look to Russia for security and economic stability. Russia

¹²¹ Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenian-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 62

is even allowed to maintain a military base in Armenia, supposedly as a deterrent to Turkey, and has extended its lease until 2044. Due to its geographic location and conflicts with Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia relies heavily on Iran and Russia for its energy supplies. The country also relies on a large diaspora to bolster its economy through remittances in the form of donations, the construction of infrastructure, the rebuilding of churches, and foreign investment. This translates to a heavy dependence on external powers for economic and energy survival. Most of Armenia's energy is produced from fuel (mainly gas and nuclear fuel) imported from Russia. Because Armenia depends on external sources for materials and supplies of energy, the unresolved issue of Nagorno-Karabakh and the effects of ongoing conflict with Turkey and Azerbaijan have devastated Armenia's economy. However, economic reform and the introduction of new sectors, such as information and communication technology, have resulted in steady economic growth for Armenia since 1995. Though, it is still one of the worst economies in the world according to *Forbes*.¹²²

This seemingly necessary dependence on Russian support makes up a large portion of Armenia's modern-day national, statist narrative and is used by the state to justify Russian interference in Armenian affairs. However, a large counter-narrative exists which claims that Armenia's dependence on Russia and Russian domination in Armenia's affairs hampers its independence. One reason for Armenia's pro-Russian leaning could be due to decades of Armenian-Russian relations. Another reason could be that the Soviet Union's rule transformed relations between the two states into one of servant and master, disfiguring the self-consciousness of Armenian identity. A third

¹²² Daniel Fisher, "The World's Worst Economies," *Forbes*, July 05, 2011 and "Best Countries for Business #89 Armenia." *Forbes*, 2011.

school of thought claims that without Russia's protection, both historically and presently, Armenian would not exist.

According to one source, Armenia's ties with Russia represent large financial opportunities that are largely responsible for the steady growth of Armenia's economy.¹²³ Under former president Robert Kocharian, Armenia has been largely loyal to Russia. This might have something to do with the large numbers of Armenians living there. However, there is also a large Armenian Diaspora across the globe. While Russia is home to the largest Armenian population outside the Republic of Armenia, estimated to be around 1,130,500¹²⁴, the United States hosts the second largest population of immigrant Armenians, which is estimated to be 484,840.¹²⁵ This gives Armenia another avenue to pursue in its search for economic growth and regional security. In a relatively recent article, Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan is claimed to have said that "there are 1400 enterprises with Russian capital operating in Armenia with US\$3 billion investment portfolio, which tends to increase."¹²⁶ Furthermore, both Armenia and Russia have implemented many joint programs in economic and humanitarian fields; especially important is the negotiation on the construction of a new energy unit of the Armenian Nuclear Power Plant. Russia's influence in this region may not be as strong as it once was, but its strategic and economic interests have not waned.

¹²³ Tony Halpin and John Hughes, "Living with Big Brother: Armenia-Russia relations are based on language, culture and, lately, economics," *Armenia Now*. May 19, 2006. Accessed September 28, 2011. www.armenianow.com/print/6391.

¹²⁴ Federal State Statistic Service, "National Census of 2002."

¹²⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, "2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates," Accessed November 10, 2011. http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=ACS_2009_1YR_G00_&-_lang=en&-mt_name=ACS_2009_1YR_G2000_B04003&-format=&-CONTEXT=dt.

¹²⁶ Victoria Araratyan, "Armenia, Russia deepening economic ties," *PanARMENIAN*, April 23, 2011. accessed October 10, 2011, <http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/economy/details/68110/>.

Then again, some critics claim that Russia has hijacked Armenia through its “equities for debt” policy.¹²⁷ In 2002 Armenia and Russia signed an agreement that forgave Armenia its \$98 million debt to Russia in exchange for a controlling stake in at least four Armenian enterprises.¹²⁸ In a separate exchange, Armenia handed over state owned enterprises to Russia in order to pay off debts on Russian state credit.¹²⁹ This has led to Russian control of about 80 percent of Armenia’s energy sector and twenty-five years of management rights to the new Iran-Armenia gas pipeline. Some think this makes Armenia too dependent on Russia. For Russia this is a huge advantage for its interests in the Southern Caucasus, as it allows for continued influence in Armenia. This is especially important since Russia angered Azerbaijan by selling arms to Armenia in 2008.¹³⁰

As Armenia looks for ways to boost its economy and strengthen its security within the region, the question of European Union membership is bound to arise. There is a lot of interest among Armenian politicians and the general public about eventual membership. And though former President Robert Kocharyan kept Armenia tied to Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (an alliance between Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia), future leaders might lean towards the West and the European Union in the future. In fact, the framework for EU membership already exists in Armenia with seemingly much public support, particularly among an increasingly civic-minded, educated youth.

¹²⁷ Halpin and Hughes, "Living with Big Brother."

¹²⁸ Asbarez Armenian News, "Armenia Russia Finalized Equities for Debt Deal," *Asbarez*, July 17, 2002, accessed November 10, 2011, <http://asbarez.com/76186/armenia-russia-finalized-equities-for-debt-deal>.

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ Fariz Ismailzade, "Russian Arms to Armenia Could Change Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Orientation," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, January 28, 2009, accessed October 10, 2011, www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5021.

Armenian identity has changed and evolved over the course the history of the Armenian people, and it will continue to alter as Armenians are confronted with new experiences and paradigms. Seeds of ethnic nationalism aimed primarily against an Islamic authority existed among certain populations of the Armenian community long before Europe is considered to have birthed nationalism in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. However these seeds, sown predominantly by an intellectual and noble elite, and the nationhood they sought would not come to fruition until almost a century later. Delayed by decades of Soviet rule and the introduction of communist memories, this nationalistic narrative that seeks the continuation of Armenian culture and society reemerged in the waning years of the Soviet Union. With the help of memories founded on an historic past of triumph and exceptionalism, post-Soviet narratives ultimately attempt to re-appropriate a past in order to counteract other memories and narratives steeped in victimhood and trauma, thus endeavoring to forge a new self-determining path for the Armenian people.

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