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RICE UNIVERSITY

INCH KA CHKA AND OTHER PARADOXICAL CLUES INTO SOVIET ARMENIAN SOCIETY

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Inch Ka Chka and Other Paradoxical
Clues into Soviet Armenian Society

By
Stella Grigorian

During the twentieth century, Soviet Armenian society has been witness to numerous situations in which national identity has become an expression of cultural paradox. From the 1940’s to the 1990’s, Armenia has been in a transitory state, oscillating between seemingly contradictory categories of East/West, capitalism/communism, traditional/modern, past/present and death/survival. Despite this state of flux, Armenian self-representations insistently point to a collective identity that defines itself as firmly rooted, fixed in space and enduring in understandings. This project explores stories and histories, especially anecdotes collected in the course of fieldwork in Soviet Armenia conducted over two extended periods from 1987 to 1992. What was sought were mechanisms that lend to culture the malleability to bend and twist without radical rupture, allowing culture to reinvent itself endlessly in the face of social pressures and to allow space for new cultural constructions of meaning.

I chart the deeply contradictory symbolic structure of Soviet Armenian society as an instrument by which these reworkings are achieved. In so doing, it becomes clear that contradiction does not lead to cultural paralysis. On the contrary, the articulation of contradiction within a narrative mode allows for mediation of difference in a manner that is non-divisive.

Further, I trace the modern history of Armenia to reveal the ways in which Armenians manage the affects of Sovietization, of the Diaspora and repatriation, and of
Armenian independence and emergence into a new geo-political matrix. Special attention is given to the Soviet Nationality Policy of the 1920's and 1940's and to the disastrous earthquake of 1988, both of which have led to a renewed sense of nationalism and of peoplehood among the Armenians. In tracing symbolic repertoires, I reveal the transitory character of meanings and their implicational associations as culture repositions itself and renegotiates contradictions in new settings.
Acknowledgements

Since the research for this project spanned close to six years, there are numerous individuals on two continents who deserve special acknowledgement. My initial stay in Soviet Armenia began in September of 1987. Thanks to the Soviet Armenian government and the Yerevan State University, I was given a student visa, which brought the need for finances to a bare minimum. More importantly, this visa gave me the legal right to stay in Armenia for an extended period of time. The Yerevan University provided free housing, a stipend and access to a ruble economy for over two and half years. The connection with the Yerevan University also provided me with the means to begin learning about Armenian history and language. I am especially grateful to Gohar Harutjian, to Dr. Asadourian, to Dr. Kourshoudian, Dr. Meliksetian, and Tigran Xmalian for their teaching and the extra time they set aside for my inquisitive remarks. I would also like to thank Mr. Matevosian and Mr. Ararat for placing me in the most optimal living quarters in downtown Yerevan, right in the middle of everything. One other section of the university deserves special recognition and that is the foreign department. The young men working in this department, especially Sasha, Ruben, Harout and Armen, made what would have been a frightening bureaucratic system of visas, rules and regulations much more manageable. Their assistance and friendship made for a much more pleasant encounter with a harsh, unfamiliar Soviet system.

Also during this first stage of research, I would like to thank the Yerevan Institute of Ethnography and Archeology, especially, Dr. Levon Abrahamian, Dr. Haroutiun Maroutian and Dr. Zaven Kharatian. I would often discuss anthropology and the events in Armenian with these three individuals. They were as curious about anthropology in the States as I was about anthropology in Armenia. Zaven was a very insightful scholar at the cutting edge of Armenian anthropology. His death in 1992 was truly untimely.
I will always remember those wonderful hours of chatting with him and Levon in Levon's house. Levon has since become the leading scholar on Armenian cultural identity as he teaches and lectures in both Armenia and the United States.

The second part of my stay in Armenia was financially supported by the work I did for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) which is a non-profit development and relief organization headquartered in New York. I will forever be grateful to Aryeh Cooperstock who headed the International Development Projects department of the JDC. He not only offered me the job as JDC's Armenia Project Manager, but also, constantly encouraged me to continue with my research. This position with the JDC opened up a whole new world for me in Armenia. I am always saddened when I think of Aryeh not being with us any more. He had tremendous vision and a special theatrical expertise to know what kind of development projects were needed and how to go about getting them done. I have only fond memories of him and of his encouragement when I was the most frustrated. I would also like to thank Henryka Manes and Sami Roth, both also from the JDC. They made the work seem easier and left me the time to also do my research. I am grateful to the JDC not only for the job but also for connecting me with a project that to this day remains close to my heart.

I cannot even begin to thank all of those in Armenia who supported, comforted and made me think and laugh during the numerous years. The majority of them became close friends who worried and cared about me. A few became very dear to me as we shared and grew from the turmoil that surrounded us. I must thank the following who gave of themselves, gave me families and homes: Seiran and Svetlana Avakian, Jude and Roozan Galstaun, Haik and Nuneh Matevosian, Rafael and Jasmine Khatchaturian, Hakob and Irina Gregorian, Mrs. Gohar Mansurian, Nuneh Hovanissian, Aram Melkonian. Much thanks to Aram Hakobian, Mkrtich Mouradian, Victor Haroutunian as well as Aram Melkonian for introducing me to the natural beauty of Armenia.
Through them and our countless hikes in the mountains and the forests, as we managed to walk from one end of Armenia to the other, I learned to appreciate the meaning of belonging to a land. And finally, I would like to thank Sylvia Avakian who was my first repatriate. She gave me so many wonderful stories. Her smiling face and enthusiasm were truly unique. I spent many hours in her house, enjoying her stories and her dolmas. She was eagerly waiting for me to finish this project and return to Armenia. Unfortunately, she was misdiagnosed and died just a few months ago. May she live on in the stories that she taught to her grandson and recounted for me. I will miss her.

In the Ministry of Health, I am grateful to Dr. V. Demirchian who helped me in hours of need. I am especially grateful to the Ministry’s foreign department which was a collection of young professionals truly loving their jobs and hoping for reforms, and providing me with a haven in which to relax and enjoy many things "Armenian." For various reasons, my sincerest gratitude goes to Dr. Sevak Avakian who headed this department. As for the JDC’s local rehabilitation project, there were thirty medical professionals and more than forty construction people working with me. They each made me feel welcomed and special. I would like especially to point out Dr. M. Poghosian, the director or the Center, Lianna Vanoyan, my assistant, and Marina Bazaeva, our translator. As to our expatriate staff, I would like to thank the following individuals for having the stamina and the will to work in Armenia during the most harshest of conditions and for being great housemates as well as great listeners to my monologues: Orit Palmon, Lewis Brown, Yael Szendro, Lisa Montague, Yami Berg and Rita Dandrow. Special mention also needs to be given to the American Armenian students with whom I shared a great deal, among them were Tanya Kevorkian, Cristina Sarkissian, Robert Krikorian, Linda Bedeian and Matthew Manuelian. This is by no means a complete list and by no means will the limited words of praise do justice to all of those who over the years made Armenia an absolutely
special place for me.

From the very inception of this project, I had the support and guidance of Michael Fischer. Even when he left Rice University and became faculty at MIT, he continued to encourage and to give insightful advice up to the very final stages of writing. I am forever grateful to him for this and for all that he has taught me. I look forward to learning even more from him. Many other people have offered advice and support on this project, as well as reading early drafts of my writings. I would most like to thank George Marcus, my director, as well as the other members of my committee: Steven Tyler, James Faubion and Hamid Naficy. They were all truly instrumental in shaping the text of the project. I am also grateful to Bruce Grant who read one of the chapters. To Bruce Grant, Melissa Cefkin, Diana Hill and Pam Smart, I am thankful for all the wonderful years of being fellow graduate students, and for the chance to deal with accomplishments and frustrations together. But especially, I would like to thank Pam Smart for being with me at the end and encouraging me not to give up. Her critical advice and editing in the last days worked wonders.

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Note on Transliteration

The Armenian words transliterated in the text are based on Eastern Armenian and, as such, the full range of sounds of the Armenian 38 letter alphabet are used. Two areas need to be mentioned: one, is the use of diphthongs, and, second, is the use of letters and sounds that do correspond to English.

In the first situation, the diphthongs of "iu," "ui," "ya," "ay" are used.

In the second situation, the sound clusters of "ts," "tz," "dz," "kh," "gh," "th" are used.

The transliteration of place names and proper names pose another problem. First, the plural of a word is left in Armenian rather than made into English. For example, the plural of "Azeri" is "Azeri" and not "Azeris." Because of differences between Eastern Armenian, Western Armenian, Russian and English are great, at times, the same word may have different spellings and pronunciations. For example, "Kharabagh," based on Eastern Armenian and the transliteration above, should be "Gharabagh." However, the same name is often transliterated as "Karabagh." Kharabagh is also known either by its English, "Mountainous Kharabagh," or its Russian, "Nagorno-Kharabagh," or its Armenian, "Lehrnain Kharabagh."
Chapter One / Introduction

THE BEGINNING OF THE MIDDLE

In my search to find cultural constructions of meaning, I found Armenian stories. In Armenia, stories are bountiful. Usually in the form of anecdotes, these stories tell of people and places and are full of inherent meanings. It seems that everyone can tell stories, some better than others, yet all with a degree of sophistication, with the use of flowery language and multivalent words. It is evident that the art of story-telling is a learned process. As toddlers, they learn to recite poetry. As adults, they hold great reverence for national writers of prose and verse. And all through their lives, they are exposed to a masterful reiterations and reinforcements by the spoken word of "matters of importance" in their ritualized toasting, articulations of which are never written down.

My purpose here is to trace these words as they constitute "stories of histories" and "histories of stories," and to explore them as a body of expressions that together can be understood to form "histories of a people" and that establish a sense of peoplehood.

In the Armenian language, as in many others, the word "pathmutiun" means both "story" and "history," though the intended referent is seldom confused. Indeed, this ambiguity reflects the shifting character of representations as both histories and stories and as a strategic mobilization of one meaning or another in response to circumstantial imperatives. At one moment any particular representation may be characterized as merely a "story," in order to comfortably accommodate differing interpretations, while in the next instance it may be invoked as "history," as ground for legitimating a contested account. If legitimation is sought, then the story is a "hayots pathmutiun," incorporating Herzfeld’s (1987) idea of "eternal verities" about the Armenian people. At other times, the stories can be just that, fictitious narrations as in "haykakan pathmutiun," offered in
the interests of pleasure perhaps, or as a call to action.

This dissertation is a collection of stories told by Armenians about Armenians. It is a collection of stories about self-knowledge and about self-representation by a group of people whose experiences of the last fifty years have been to a great extent shared. But far from being just an accumulation of narratives, the main object of the dissertation is to search amongst these stories and histories in order to find mechanisms that lend to culture the malleability to bend and twist without radical rupture, allowing culture to rework itself endlessly in the face of social pressures and allow the space for new cultural constructions of significance. The premise that cultures are dynamic in their responses to historical sensitivities and other contingencies is no longer a source of debate in anthropological research; it is the assumption underlying this dissertation. What does require attention, however, is the means by which these changes are achieved and the transitory affects of meanings and the implicational associations as culture repositions itself in new settings and with a changed set of criteria.

Armenian time unlike geological time does not span millennia, yet it encompasses enough time that discussions about the last fifty years seem microscopic. However, viewing Soviet Armenian society at the end of the twentieth century numerous social conditions can be evaluated and re-evaluated.¹

There is an epochal quality to Armenian stories. Thousands of years ago, Armenians inhabited the Urartian plain. Thousands of years before that, Noah landed on Mount Ararat, which rests at the heart of the Armenian lands. Dynasties ruled Armenian kingdoms for centuries. After the invention of the Armenian alphabet in the fourth century, Armenians were witness to a golden age of literature when, during the span of the fifth century, the Bible and other classical texts were translated and histories

¹See the "Fin de Siecle" series edited by George Marcus. The first publication is Perilous States.
of the Armenian people were written. Armenians were the first to adopt Christianity as an official politically sanctioned religion of a people. That happened in 301 A.D. Armenians experienced the first of major tragedies in the twentieth century by becoming victims of genocide. That was in 1915. Armenians were the first in the Soviet sphere to collectively speak out against Soviet powers and to demonstrate in undemonstrable spaces. That happened in 1988. Armenian stories tell of greatness, of a former kingdom that stretched from sea to sea, from the Caspian to Mediterranean. It seems to be irrelevant that the last of such kingdoms was 1500 years ago. The stories tell of tragedy and loss, manmade massacres and deportations at the turn of the twentieth century and of natural cataclysm and death at the end of the same century. Interwoven in all of these stories is the theme of "survival," survival of a people when so many other "such peoples" have long since vanished.

This dissertation is a project in representing a culture that is in a particularly transitory state, ever changing and ever fluid. It is an attempt to decipher the mechanisms and the directions of this change while at the same time recognizing that Armenian culture, and for the most part the collective cultural identity that it represents, insistently defines itself as firmly rooted, fixed in space and enduring in understandings. In the span of just fifty years, from the 1940s to 1990, the Armenians have oscillated between seemingly contradictory categories of East and West, capitalism and communism, cosmopolitanism and nationalism, the traditional and the modern, past and present, and death and survival.

In the same span of time, the people on this small piece of territory have became

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2For a concise history of ancient Armenia, see Bournoutian.

3For good accounts of the Genocide of 1915, see Bardakjian, Bliss, Hovannisian (1967).
players in one of the most significant experiments of the century. The rise of Sovietization and its sudden demise were powerful forces around which new understandings took shape often on top of older structures. During the same span of time, Soviet Armenia felt the greatest push and pull from the forces of the Armenian Diaspora which was itself, and continues to be, a growing entity constituted by the one-third of the world’s Armenian population living outside the borders of Soviet Union and functioning under distinctive stresses and sociocultural structures. And finally, these fifty years culminate with the greatest push of Westernization as Armenia emerges from a devastating natural disaster, the earthquake of 1988, as total Soviet constraints and control are loosened. It emerges into a newly created nation-state with a new sense of peoplehood. These are the times when the old is replaced by the new, when the Russian is replaced by the American, when notions of dependency are replaced by notions of independence.

Sovietization, diasporization, westernization are all reoccurring themes in Armenian stories of the present and are therefore reoccurring themes in the narration of this dissertation. In search of the "modern Armenia," Soviet Armenians constantly superimpose points of familiarity derived from the past with the unfamiliar new strands of society. In such volatile situations of cultural change - through revolution, mass

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4The population of the Diaspora is much larger if the "internal diaspora" is also considered. The internal diaspora refers to those Armenians who lived within the Soviet Union yet outside of Soviet Armenia. In Soviet understandings, they could not be officially part of the Diaspora. With the inclusion of these people, the population in the Diaspora amounts to approximately three million people, half of the world’s Armenian population.

5Armenia actually had independence in 1918. However, this independence was short-lived and full of debates of legitimacy not only for the Armenians, but also for the Soviets and the world powers. At that time, Armenia was caught between WWI and Sovietization. Whatever form this independence took, it was nonetheless, essential for the reinvention of peoplehood in the late 1980’s. For an excellent account of the period of independence between 1918 and 1921, see Hovannisian (1967) and Suny (1993).
movements, world ideologies, massive disasters, and nation building - these Armenians reposition themselves and recreate meaningful cultural artifacts within their "cosmos."

I search for the mechanisms which lend themselves to facilitate or orient these cultural renegotiations and balance the system such that artifacts regain significance in the light of the new.

In the Armenian case, an idiomatic tool is found that sustains the interplay of past and present. It is precisely this repositioning between the past and the present and between other seemingly contradictory constructs that acts as a strategic mechanism for renegotiating and working through fundamental cultural hybridity and multiplicity. It is in this process that stories become important for they are stories about self-characterizations, told with a distinctive cultural style, this is whimsical, at times cynical and often told with a taste for the paradox. These stories relate to a changing construction of peoplehood, of Armenian peoplehood.

As an example of narrative mediations of cultural contradictions, I turn to an everyday phrase which is often woven into stories and as such repetitively invokes themes of paradox and contradiction. "Inch ka chka" is a general form of greeting which serves here to illustrate these mediations of contradiction. No one knows when it entered into the Armenian language. But for matters at hand, suffice it to say that throughout the fifty year period that concerns this dissertation, it is indeed a very common expression. It is often the phrase that follows the question "inch pes es?" meaning "how are you?" The immediate thought in translating would be that the phrase is comparable to the English "what is happening?" In some ways it is, however it's translation is far more complicated. Quite literally, the phrase is translated as "what is there, what is there not?" The existence of some thing rather than some action, as in the English, is at the same time both acknowledged and negated. Uttering this phrase numerous times during the day in a way desensitizes one to its contradictions, but at the
same time, it is a powerful tool that give shape to everyday perceptions of paradox.

Armenians are very well aware of the complexities of the greeting, as is indicated by the following anecdote which is as likely to be told by an educated government official as by a small town factory worker:

so the Japanese come up with the world’s newest and best computer. It can answer any question posed of it. The American goes in and asks some incredible scientific question and comes out amazed that the computer has answered it. The Frenchman goes in and asks some thought provoking question and is flabbergasted by the fabulous answer. And so several others pose questions and are amazed at the technological feat. Finally, it is the turn of the Armenian. He goes in and asks a simple question and the computer starts blowing smoke and is completely destroyed. In asking the Armenian what kind of unfathomable question he could have asked to do this, the Armenian replies quite bewildered, "man, all I asked it was 'incho ka chka'"

The Armenian teller of this anecdote obviously derives a good deal of pleasure from playing with such contradictions, as well, as reveling in the internal confusion that the anecdote, and the speaker for that matter, represents, and which in turn the speaker recreates for himself and the listener. On an external level, the same Armenian teller of this anecdote uses this simple Armenian phrase of "incho ka chka" to compete successfully with and get the upper hand on world orders and world technologies. Simply, the Armenian teller manages to outwit everyone. I propose the following questions. How else might they manage the intractable paradoxes that increasingly pervade their daily experiences as the former Soviet Armenia enters the global "more modern" world? How else might they reconcile their sense of themselves as supremely capable, while they labor in a context in which nothing seems to work properly?

An elaboration of this same anecdote, which also circulates widely, continues …

the Japanese come up with a new computer. As before different nationalities ask it questions and are dumbfounded by the accurate answers. Then comes the Armenian. Once again the Armenian comes out and the computer is totally destroyed. In recounting what had lead to the demise of the computer this time, the Armenian, quite matter of factly says, 'man, it asked me "incho ka chka" and I answered "nothing, just life itself (votchin, jan sakhouitun)"'
Here we have a deeper level of cultural paradox. The notion that "nothingness" and all that entails "life" can be put together in one quick brush of words without creating confusion is indicative of the extent to which apparent contradiction can be tolerated.

These conceptual contradictions serve both to reflect and to mediate underlying social paradox. As stated before, Armenians are very well aware of the contradictory circumstances in which they find themselves. However, clearly, Armenians do not find such contradictions paralyzing, precisely because of their rich reservoir of symbols that inform their experiences and responses. Being able to readily articulate contradictions in the form of anecdotes allows the possibility of the mediation of difference in a manner that is non-divisive. In this particular Armenian mode, one not only copes with but is allowed the means to actively reformulate cultural difference.

Literary and scholarly representations of Armenians tend to characterize them as thoroughly burdened and overwhelmed by their circumstances. Here, however, we find in the form of anecdotes a lively and active engagement with the circumstances in which Armenians find themselves, such that far from being debilitated by events, they are able to imbue events with new meaning. And in so doing, their own positions can be reimagined and managed. Another example of how paradoxical tensions are rhetorically maintained and as such reformulated can be found in Fischer’s (1990) study of Iranian culture. In a method of negating alternative arguments, an illusion is created that the positive argument being made through this negation is actually a correction or a reworking of histories and logic rather a an alternative construction of similar validity.

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6Often, this anecdote would be recounted when seemingly contradictory or ironic events were being described in conversation, i.e., the goodness of people versus the evil attributes, the having/having not of consumer goods, etc.

7See Mbembe for his study of Cameroonian society and how they seem to be overpowered by the incoherence, inconsistency and flux of their society.

8Fischer (1990), p.190.
While anecdotes may serve as mediations of deeply paradoxical situations, certain tensions prove more intransigent than others.⁹ Among the circle of Armenians I knew well (largely intellectuals living in one or another of the two main cities, Yerevan and Leninakan, though also including some factory workers), considerable anxiety and frustration circulated around growing desire and expectation for consumer goods and western ideas.

Throughout the Soviet period, the state insisted that Armenians had it all, and that which they did not have quite simply was not worth having. For the most part, people in Armenia were convinced by this. Now, in the light of harsh economic realities, they recount nostalgically the days of old, the Soviet days when "everything was abundant" and they "never had to stand in line" and at the very least, they had "meat, electricity and heat." The new "modern" world of the Armenian as they step out of the Soviet world into the global world is caught between the paradox of having and not having. It is just as full of expectations as it is barren. At the height of social unrest in 1989, Arthur Gregorian, a popular Armenian jazz singer, wrote the following lyrics describing a customer trying to buy parts in an auto parts store, the melody of which could be heard being hummed in the streets:

Customer: please, it is very important that you change these
"svelchanereh" (the Russian term for spark plug)
Salesman: "tsavok" ("painfully," "regrettably") we do not have any, there aren't any
Customer: the "klapannereh" (Russian for pistons) are damaged
Salesman: "pakanner" (Armenian for pistons) there are none, we do not have any
Customer: please tell me, how much do tires cost?
Salesman: we do not have any, there aren't any

⁹Even anxieties can have a mediating force. See Fischer (1986) were he looks at ethnic anxiety. By the method of transference, Fischer argues that ethnicity is actually re-invented as it members try to work through this anxiety. He uses transference in its propensity for avoidance-approach to a situation that is larger than the self but is recognized as defining of one's identity even though it does not seem to come from one's own experiences.
Customer: then who is to help in this situation?
Salesman: I am telling you in Armenian, we do not have does parts, there
are not any
Customer: then what do stores have
Salesman: there aren’t any, we do not have them we do not have them,
there aren’t any
Customer: I want to complain, give me your
complaint book
Salesman: we do not have any, there aren’t any ...

Once upon a time, "having something" made sense and now in the new world order
sense needed to be made of "not having." The auto shop is a metaphor for the
frustrations facing Armenian society in light of cultural flux and the re-positionings of
a people between having and not having. But while these paradoxes are nevertheless at
times troubling to Armenians, there are those nuances of tension and frustration in their
style that are deeply perplexing to the outsider--and all the more so to the outside
ethnographer seeking to understand the processes by which such apparently intractable
contradictions are rendered tolerable. This is a theme that will emerge repeatedly
throughout this account.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF A NATION?

For reasons that will be further explored in this introduction and in subsequent
chapters, I often refer to "the Armenians." In so doing, I open up two very significant
arguments. One, is whether I can claim that I am doing an ethnography of a people, that
is, of a nation as opposed to mere segments of a culture. And the second, is whether I
am relying on or supporting essentialist notions by characterizing a culture or a nation
as a singular entity.

In the first respect, to talk of the Armenians is of course to talk of constructs
because Armenian society is not homogeneous. But it is not a construct of my own
making, but the construction of "the Armenian" is vigorously pursued by the Armenians
themselves precisely to unify the disparate character of its constituent members.
I refer to Borneman’s study of German selfhood during the Cold War. In his *Belonging to Two Berlins*, Borneman uses narratives of lifecourses of German citizens and superimposes them on master narratives presented by the state. Although the purpose of Borneman’s book is to study how symbols are reproduced and maintained within a culture, while my own study deals with the ways in which symbols are strategically invoked, his methodology can nevertheless be useful here. Borneman uses biographical periodization and officially inscribed categories of the self as devices to structure a coherent narrative of poly-vocal and dissimilar experiences. My own account borrows from him the idea of periodization and of categories rendered in cultural rather than biographical terms. A narrative, to follow Borneman, is sufficient to achieve a sense of a collective identity within a highly fluid cultural setting. Collectively, Borneman invokes narratives as experiential tropes which are used repetitively to give single meaning to diverse experiences. Borneman argues that the "employment" of these tropes over a long period of time and with constant appeals to some master narratives that are provided by the state, a single frame of reference is achieved. In the German case, the master narrative is provided by the state. It remains unclear what the source of this unifying narrative is within the Armenian setting. In any case, the resulting single frame of reference leads to what Borneman calls a "shared history of a nation" and in so doing he sets the stage for an ethnography of a nation.10

Although rejecting the use of life histories in the way that Borneman uses them, Abu-Lughod, in *Writing Women’s Worlds*, nonetheless finds merit in the use of narrative. She invokes narrative as part of a grander scheme which she describes as "tactical humanism." In her terms, tactical humanism is a writing approach that may be used to work through or around the idea that cultural difference, "which is both the

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10 Borneman, p. 37.
ground and product of anthropological discourse, is a problematic construction."\textsuperscript{11} Abu-Lughod argues that in writing about difference, anthropology is instrumental in creating or maintaining that difference as well as maintaining the power which are contingent on such markers of difference. In an attempt to avoid complicity in such a project, she invokes tactical humanism as a method by which to "write against culture," thereby, write against difference. She is aware of the shortcomings of the philosophy of humanism, especially in its failure to see that its "essential human" has culturally and socially specific characteristics and in fact excludes most humans."\textsuperscript{12} And such essentialist thought, she argues, has no place in this philosophy and nor should it have a place in studies of culture. Her revised version of humanism includes narratives of herself and of those she is representing thereby encouraging familiarity rather than distance, similarity rather than difference.

It is this very notion of essentialist discourse that often nags anthropological writing. In representing a people or an "ethnography of a nation," one can easily fall into a trap of cultural portraiture that is devoid of socio-historical contingencies. In identifying central or master categories, one must be fully aware of the danger of this process leading to an overly simplistic characterization of a culture. For my own study, Armenia as a nation is read through repetitive use of a repertoire of symbols and categories that point to cultural significance and are employed in the creation of meaning within a highly historically sensitive process.

More importantly, this question of essentialism typified in discourses of national character tends to be highly fixated, failing to address nations in the context of a fluid and dynamic world with very specific historical contingencies. In order to avoid

\textsuperscript{11}Abu-Lughod, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid, p. 29.
essentializing, however, one need not restrict oneself to analysis only on the level of reporting characterizations offered by individual citizens.

In this respect, it is critically important to differentiate between cultural self-representation and self-characterization and the representations which are the function of the anthropological endeavor. In this study, there is a play between cultural self-characterizations and those representations that are provided by me, the ethnographer. While an Armenian may represent himself by saying, "We, Armenians are clever and good people," I, the ethnographer, would wish to trace the particular meanings that "clever" and "good" have within a specific context and which in turn have meaning only insofar as they are mediated by a historical perspective. Selecting specific repetitive threads as a means of characterizing the particular situation from which people derive collective meaning may have essentialist overtones. To circumvent such a reading, Abu-Lughod’s tactical humanism, with its emphasis on self-reflexivity, minimalization of difference and the use of narration, seems a useful strategy.

As Virginia Dominquez stated in People as Subject, People as Object, the anthropological endeavor should be

about collective identities as objectifications in need of semiotic exploration, and about the objectification of collective identities by both insiders and outsiders as simultaneously semiotic and political. Much like the present day Armenian, the Israeli Jews, Dominquez argues, are in a continual process of objectifying a collective identity rather than portraying a sense of fragmentation and difference. The fact that they are continuing to recreate and legitimize a sense of peoplehood, is an intriguing and relevant process. Of interest to this

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13See Hamalian and Hovannisian (1981) for Armenian images or stereotyping within both Armenian and non-Armenian literature. Some of these images, although mainly limited to work in the Diaspora, are used in the reformulations of self-characterizations among the Armenians in Soviet Armenia.

14Dominquez, p.12.
dissertation is how the Israelis portray a collective self when they are at the same time struggling with blurred definitions and limitation of what such a collective self entails since this is the paradox that faces the contemporary Armenian as well.

POSSIBLE SIMILAR WORLDS - Master categories

Among numerous cultural others, Armenians seem to find a particular sense of compatriotism with Jews, the Iranians and the Greeks. As seen through the mindset of Armenians, the similar cultural constructs that are shared with the Jews include the formation and sustaining of a diaspora over centuries, the victimization of genocide and the struggle for centuries to establish a nation. The Armenian connection with the Iranians is a bit more direct. As part of the three great empires that have controlled Armenian lands for centuries - the Ottoman, the Russian and the Persian - the Persians have had the longest contact with, and as a result, have left deep marks on Armenian culture. Long before the Seljuk Turks entered the worlds of Armenians, Armenian kingdoms were being ruled by kings and princes from Persian dynasties. There is even the possibility that Gregory the Illuminator, the man who brought Christianity to Armenia in the late third century was of Persian descent. The greatest of battles for Armenians which is commemorated to this day is the Battle of Avarayr fought in 451 A.D. between a small group of Armenians headed by Vartan Mamikonian and the massive Zoroastrian Persian army. From a military standpoint, the battle itself was a defeat for the Armenians. However, they won the spiritual war and kept Armenian Christian. Centuries later the Persians were to take control of the eastern Armenian principalities which they ruled until 1828 when the lands which include the present day capital of Armenia was won over by the Russian empire.¹⁵ Among many cultural borrowings

¹⁵See Bournoutian (1982) for a study of Armenia under the Persian Empire.
from the Persians, the socio-linguistic exchanges were most noteworthy. In the language of modern Armenian there are close to 2000 words in daily usage which are traced to middle Farsi. This is the greatest of borrowings from any another language. Turkish and Arabic words number in the low hundreds and Russian borrowings are even less. And the final comparative point for the purposes of this dissertation is the connection that Armenians feel towards the Greeks. The main connective force is in relation to perceived similar attitudes towards and affects of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Key terms here are deportations, massacres, war, denial, refugees, usurpation of lands as they relate to events that date back centuries but which climaxed during WWI. Many of these issues continue to remain unresolved for both Armenians and Greeks.

It is with the above inter-connections in mind that references to Jewish, Persian and Greek experiences will be made. These references are not meant to exhaust the connective threads. They are quite simply sprinkled in enough places to point to the existence of other worlds which are culturally significant for Armenians and from which Armenians derive meaning. In reference to the cultural worlds of Persians and Greeks, I would like to refer here to the works of William Beeman and his study of language and of James Faubion and his study of history and modernity. These prevalent themes are also evident in the narratives told by the Armenians in this dissertation and are significant in creatively establishing culturally significant categories.

Persian Connections

In Language, Status and Power in Iran, Beeman focuses on how interpersonal behavior and social interaction is mediated through the use of words. Beeman argues that in understanding the dynamics of this communicative process one can understand the nuances of Iranian social and political constructions. Therefore, language is not just a
reflection of interactions and reality but can also be used "strategically to shape the nature and definition of that reality."\textsuperscript{16} In a cognitive context, linguistic stylistic materials are used depending on context and desired affect and in this manner, messages are managed. Therefore,

variants are seen to contribute not to the literal message of the utterance, but to the performative aspect of the utterance. This is to say, they contribute little in determining what is being said but quite a bit to what is being done by what is said.\textsuperscript{17}

And as such, linguistic usage by Iranians is reflective of all kinds of cultural symbolisms and provides meaning for a variety of meaningful constructs that Beeman calls "things Iranian."\textsuperscript{18} The use of words such as "zerangi" and "taroef" are all indicative of extra-linguistic situations and of a greater web of social logic. Beeman refers to language as a form of "magic":

Iranians are masters of their own communication magic to a great degree. In knowing how to use the resources of their own language in conjunction with their knowledge of society and its dynamics, they are able to negotiate and even transform an uncertain world with skill and grace. Though all men are able to do the same in their own tongues, it may be a particular Iranian skill to be able to carry out this magic with an elevated sense that raises the enterprise above mere pedestrian communication and into the realm of art.\textsuperscript{19}

The reference to an artful use of a highly interpretive language can be advantages in looking at the use of the Armenian language in extra-linguistic situations. Similarities abound between the Iranian and Armenian speaker when through the use of interpersonal communication and word usage, they both create maps of territories that have cultural meaning and then use the maps "to sort from an infinitude of phenomena that are

\textsuperscript{16}Beeman, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid, p. 20.
culturally significant".\textsuperscript{20} As such, one must be careful not to make essentialist statements pertaining to Iranian character as the only culture predisposed to such linguistic strategizing. Beeman, on several occasions writes of "an Iranian style," the "particular Iranian way," or a "uniquely Iranian way." Despite these statements, Beeman’s work is relevant to the way Armenians also use linguistic strategizing to gain control of orientational frames of significance in their cultural worlds. And for the Armenians, linguistic strategizing in the telling of paradoxical narratives is a way to orient their contradictory situations.

\textbf{Greek Connections}

In \textit{Modern Greek Lessons}, James Faubion explores how a particular group of Greek cultural players see themselves as constructing a modern Greece that is dependent on historical referencing. In this context, modernity is not just a technological advancement or industrial development but is a "property of praxis."\textsuperscript{21} He defines in non-evolutionist terms the modern as being a particular form of society with systems that are institutionally and ideologically distinct from the very past that is being resurrected. Therefore, history, in Faubion’s terms, is the concreta, all of the artifacts, of both past and present. It is this play with history that creates the "modern Greek." In this study, the synthesizing of history is achieved by the use of two distinct modes. One is called cultural classicism and is the modality of Greece’s "nationalist essentialists" who have undertaken to restore or uphold... a corpus of 'traditions'... they have searched for their traditions in the local historical past, whether distant or more recent. They have always treated the past as a domain not of contingencies but rather of what Herzfeld has called 'eternal verities' of customs and chronological exemplars and collective identities written in

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{21}Faubion, xii.
However, Faubion's main focus is on what he calls historical constructivism which stands in opposition to cultural classicism and which is the domain of the group of reformers that he studies. The synthesizing and the re-creating of history, the absorption of it into the present are prevalent processes for both, yet while the goal of one is to restore, the goal of the other is to reform. Much as in the Greek case, the Armenians of modern Armenia are also absorbing the past into the present, however, it is still unclear from the representation in this dissertation whether the final purpose is to restore or to reform. Although there is the hint of conservatism, the politics surrounding the Armenian situations are yet to be explored.

Faubion argues that in Greece, most Athenians, share a collective identity of sorts in their common "awareness" of historical worlds, "even if they do not share either the same experience of it or the same response to the problems that it poses." Just as in Beeman's Iran, Faubion points to commonly shared cultural "traits" of a Greek collectivity. However, he expands this thought further by saying that the "webs of significance within which they act and exist are never the less plural. Within this collective culture, historical constructivism and cultural classicism both act as meta-culture for they both define culture as an object.

They both make and remake sense of culture and from culture. Both have their master ends and master tropes. Both have their teleological and poetical discipline. Both have their own practical norms, but practitioners of both characteristically act within and through a similar institutional framework. Organizationally, both [act as] regimes for production and reproduction of signification.

In much the same way, different Armenians players with possibly different political ends

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22Ibid, xviii.

23Ibid.

24Ibid.
are producing and reproducing significant worlds of the modern by synthesizing the
concreta of past and present.

Herzfeld’s Disemia and Nationalism

As a transition point between significances of history, language, contradictions
and polarities and that of nationalism (the next theme that will be considered), it is quite
stimulating to look at the work of Michael Herzfeld and his exploration of disemia in
Greek culture. Herzfeld’s disemia is a model that conveys the multiplicity of sign
systems also include language.

Disemia is the expressive play of opposition that subsists in all the varied
codes through which collective self-display and self-recognition can be
balanced against each other.25

First, Herzfeld maintains that Greek identity is caught between two extreme poles, "each
derived from the image of a conquering Other."26 In ways quite applicable to the
Armenian case, Herzfeld traces the tensions between a double image of Greek cultural
origins as the tensions lead to cultural paradoxes of meaning. On one side, Greek origins
is merged with the classical past as it plays with paganism, and on the other side, with
the Christian present that also recognizes Turkish and Islamic contributions. This
dichotomy is established with Hellenism on one hand and Romiossini (relating to Rome
and the later the Byzantine Empire) on the other. Both use historical images as flexible
tools rather than absolute facts to create social ideals of the self and culture and their
articulation in a dual worlds of self-display and self-knowledge, or in other words in an
articulation of tension between external and internal images. The Greek language and
its usage was made the primary focus of this dual natured cultural debate, yet the debate

25Herzfeld, p.112.

26Ibid, p. 111.
goes beyond language and is codified in other areas of everyday life.

rather than posing a real-ideal dichotomy, ... [Herzfeld suggests] a polarity between two ideal types that are constantly and dialectically parlayed into virtually the entire range of social life. Both are ideals in that both are stereotypes; but, by the same token, what gives both experiential reality is their use in the day-to-day rhetoric of morality. That rhetoric constitutes their reality.27

Two idealized versions of the past play hand in hand in what Herzfeld calls the architectonics of Greek identity.28 These double images which take the present back to respective origins and beginnings of the Greek political nation-state are the everyday discourse of nationalism amongst both popular and official usage. However, Herzfeld points out that these tensions in modern Greek culture did not arise with nationalism; rather, nationalism exacerbated them and gave them a form suited to the larger ideological context into which the emergent nation-state had been thrust.29

And so too, the rise of nationalism in Armenia in the late 1980’s, gave a particular form to already existing paradoxical worlds of significance and presented an idiom of cultural contradiction within which cultural nationalistic discourse proceeded. As Herzfeld is correct in pointing out, this type of nationalistic discourse while making use of histories after the fact, actually attempts to do the impossible and that is to dehistoricize its own past and decontextualize the present. As will be seen in the following chapters, this argument remains very relevant for the national movement that began in Soviet Armenia in 1988. During this time, double images, contradictions in social discourse, language, historical referencing were attempting to dehistoricize and decontextualize the legitimation for the movement.

27Ibid, p. 113.

28Ibid, p. 119.

29Ibid, p. 103.
Armenian Nations and Armenian Nationalism

Nations and nationalism are both prevalent concepts for Soviet Armenians. These concepts are as full of the paradox and contradiction just as the Armenian experiences. Not being a collective political entity since the fourth century when the last of the kingdoms disintegrated, Armenians cling fast to the notion of having an everlasting nation that was created centuries before. For the Armenians, a sense of nationhood is equivalent to sense of peoplehood. The twentieth century concept of nation, as in a country, occurred very briefly right after WWI. However, after just a couple of years, this Armenian Republic as well as the hopes of several other peoples for a nation fell through the cracks as world powers divided people and places based on their own Western power understandings.30 Very soon after that, Armenia became a Soviet republic.31

It was during this time that the paradox of nation and nationalism grew exponentially. For during the Soviet period, Armenia was officially allowed to be national in form only as long as it met the criteria of the proletarian revolution and only as long as it remained socialist in content. At long last, Armenians had a nation, or at least some version of it. The Armenian people had reified and established their nationality or had it? The debate continues to this day and has actually taken on new dimensions with the end of the Cold War and the establishment of new countries from previously Soviet republics. In 1991, Armenia became independent. They were no longer just a people or a Soviet nationality, they were finally a country of their own. The Republic of Armenia began signing treaties of cooperation, joining world

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30See Hovannisian (1967, 1971) for a survey of the period of independence between 1918 and 1921.

31For a good review of the first few years of the Soviet period, refer to Matossian and to Suny (1983).
organizations and asking for world monies.

In this new nation, nationalism continued to re-created. Although theoretical literature on nationalism and nation building will be looked at next, what I present here is a symbolic force of the terms "nation" and "nationalism" rather than the process they instill. Nationalism within this symbolic world articulates the paradox of Soviet Armenian culture. It is a symbol that at times has called upon action as in the 1800's when Armenian the self-determination movement led to the rise of Armenian political parties in the Ottoman Empire.32 This was called "nationalist" by the Ottomans. A present day example of this symbolic force is the abrupt change that took place in the 1988 Kharabagh Movement when the protesting Armenians were labeled "nationalist" by Moscow. The pro-Soviet demonstrations turned immediately anti-Soviet.

At other times, nationalism works within a passive symbolic realm that orients cultural understandings. Many Armenians share the notion that they are the most cosmopolitan of peoples yet their republic has remained the most homogeneously ethnic in all of the fifteen Soviet republics. That is saying much when one considers that there are over 100 minorities within the territories of the former Soviet Union. But perhaps the dichotomy can be best expressed in the terms used in the early period of the Armenian Soviet Republic when its very popular president, Khanjian, was called a "nationalist communist."33 This seemingly contradictory label becomes more comprehensible as one looks at the Soviet nationality policy in the nascent days of the USSR. And so, nationalistic references in the period of the repatriates of the 1940's, in the period before and after the massive Armenian earthquake lead to other possible points through which modern Soviet Armenian society can be looked at. As a base to the

32See Nalbandian for a review of the Armenian revolutionary movement. And also Ter Minassian for a review of the nationalism and socialism in the ARF political party.

33See Matossian, p. 122-125.
narratives that are found in the following chapters, and as a means for positioning the new Armenian nation which gained independence in 1991, the following theoretical survey of nations and nationalism will be presented.

Theoretical Survey

Nations and nationalism are perplexing phenomena. Despite the massive volume of literature available on the topic, present world events are leading to newer approaches to the concepts. However, what is agreed upon is that nations, in the sense of countries and nationalities, are fairly recent constructs considering that neither nations nor states have existed at all times in history. More than half of the presently existing nations are less than forty years old and the rest have histories that date no more than two centuries.\(^{34}\) Hobsbawm and Gellner have written definitive works, tracing the history, methods of formation and the future directions of "nations" and "nationalism" in order to be able to establish a working definitions.

In *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner establishes that a nation is basically a political entity and therefore exists only when there is a state, a polity. Nationalism, in turn, becomes a "theory of legitimacy" making sure that ethnic boundaries do not cut across these political boundaries.\(^{35}\) Nations are neither a given nor a natural process of historical development. Rather, they are the assertion and articulation of new social realities resulting from the rise of capitalist relations. Although using "inheritances from the pre-nationalist world," nationalism is not "the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force," but a consequence of a new form of social organization.\(^{36}\) In *Nations and

\(^{34}\)Hobsbawm, p. 171.

\(^{35}\)Gellner, p. 1.

\(^{36}\)Ibid, pp. 48-49.
Nationalism Since 1780, Hobsbawm agrees with Gellner as to the political and recent nature of nations. Furthermore, he maintains that the "nation" is neither primary or unchanging.\textsuperscript{37} And as such, a nation is temporal and transitional.\textsuperscript{38}

The historical nature of "nation" is presented by Renan in his classic article, "What is a Nation?" written in Paris in 1882.\textsuperscript{39} Renan goes on to point out that a nation is neither a dynasty, nor a race, nor a people of common language, religion or geography, but rather a nation is

\begin{quote}
possession in common of a rich legacy of memories and present day consent … to have common glories in the past and to have common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

The question remains - what is a nation? Gellner answers that a nation forms when individuals share a common sense of culture. By referring to culture as just a system of ideas, signs, associations and ways of thinking and communicating, Gellner fails to give a satisfying definition of what else culture.\textsuperscript{41} Even so, he goes on to equate an understanding of a collective cultural identity as a single polity with a need to articulate some sort of nationalism.\textsuperscript{42} This cultural "need" for homogeneity leads to nationalism, which in turn engenders nations. Therefore, the nation becomes congruent to culture, if we follow Gellner's argument that culture becomes the "natural repository of political legitimation."\textsuperscript{43} And while nationalism claims to defend culture as conservative force,

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{37}]Hobsbawm, p. 9.
\item[\textsuperscript{38}]Bhabha, pp. 1-3.
\item[\textsuperscript{39}]This article is reprinted in Nations and Narration, edited by Homi Bhabha.
\item[\textsuperscript{40}]Renan, p. 11, 19.
\item[\textsuperscript{41}]Gellner, p. 7, 92-93.
\item[\textsuperscript{42}]Ibid, pp. 39-43.
\item[\textsuperscript{43}]Ibid, p. 55.
\end{itemize}
it actually either reinvents or modifies culture.\textsuperscript{44}

In \textit{Imagined Communities}, Anderson further explores the concept of culture in the same manner that kinship and religion are defined as cultural artefacts. Further, he warns that any working definition must take note of the following paradoxes:

1. objective modernity of nations to historians eyes versus subjective antiquity in eyes of nationalists
2. formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept
3. political power of nationalism versus its philosophical poverty or incoherence

Considering these paradoxes, Anderson proceeds to the main point of his argument, that a nation is an imagined political community. The nation is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. The nation is:

imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.\textsuperscript{45}

What Anderson calls "imagined," Gellner calls "invented." Anderson maintains that the nation is imagined on three levels: 1. imagined as limited because it has finite boundaries, 2. imagined as sovereign because it emerged at a time when the Enlightenment opposed the dominance of Church doctrine, 3. imagined as a community because of the "deep horizontal comradeship" uniting people.\textsuperscript{46} According to Anderson, the cultural roots of the imagined communities are based in concerns over death and immortality at a time when religious modes of thought were in decline in Europe. A secular transformation of these thoughts and especially coupled with the rise of print capitalism led to nationalism and the idea of nation.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{45}Anderson, pp. 14-15.

\textsuperscript{46}Anderson, p. 16.
The connection between the rise of nationalism and the printed word or rather literature as a whole and more specifically one form of literature, the novel, offers an interesting exploration. In *Nations and Narration*, edited by Homi Bhabha, the rise of nationalism is further looked at as it relates to the increased propensity in literature to write in the form of a novel. In this volume, Brennan maintains that the rise of modern nation-states in the late eighteenth century Europe is "inseparable" from forms and subjects of imaginative literature, such as the novel. The novel mimicked the structure of the nation, bringing together diverse styles, discourses and languages. The rise of the novel like the rise of nationalism involved the same mass ceremony. While one could read alone there was also the simultaneous knowledge that millions were also reading the same thing. Novel and nationalism became the real ground on which a democratic concept of society could emerge since it was to be a bridge to all. The literary language was seen as a common language and as a national language. Furthermore, the novel as a form of imaginative literature, like the nation, deals with imaginary constructs and cultural fictions and forms.\(^{47}\)

The understanding that a nation and nationalism are representations of social and cultural life rather than constructs of specific political ideologies has yet another consequence. As Renan wrote a century ago, so too, Bhabha reformulates, the thought that nations result from a people’s ability to forget, to forget language and events and understandings.\(^{48}\) Making homogeneous that which is heterogeneous, nations’ pull towards social cohesion obligates people to forget, so that the part can identify with the whole and the past can unite with the present. The obligation to forget is not a question of faulty historical memory but a necessary act for the construction of holistic national

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\(^{47}\)Brennan, pp. 47-50.

\(^{48}\)Renan, pp. 10-11; Bhabha, p. 310.
culture⁴⁹, with an "evolutionary narrative of historical continuity."⁵⁰

Armenian nationalism is replete with historical legitimation, holistic discourse, the struggle for homogeneity, the transcendence of time, totalizing essentialism and longing for establishment of a national culture. In Armenian, the word for "ethnicity" is "azg" and the word for "national," using the same root, is "azgain." The word meaning "last name" is "azganun," literally, "name of the people" rather than of a person. Armenians refer to themselves as an ancient "azg," thereby further blurring the distinction between a "people," a nationality and an ethnic group and the individual. This concept of "azg" is separate from the word for "state," "pethootyun" derived from the root "peth" which means "to lead." Therefore, Armenian nationalism is a call for the homogeneity of the "azg", the nation, rather than the establishment of a polity in a state, a "pethootyun."

Armenian nationalism offers an alternative scenario to Hobsbawm’s argument that in the late twentieth century, nationalist movements insistence on ethnicity, language and religion is essentially negative and vague. Armenian nationalism in the late 1980’s relied heavily on their sense of peoplehood in the form of Soviet nationality and the use of a national language and religion. However, through the use of these social constructs, Armenian nationalism was actually articulating a struggle against Soviet centralization and state bureaucracy.

The nationalism of pre-independent Armenia stands at odds with several other well argued points. The first is Bhabha’s description of the modern liberal nation as being a place for dissent, a place for difference, heterogeneous histories, in other words, a place for "dissemi-nation ... a liminal place for an emergent opposition

⁴⁹Bhabha, p. 311.
⁵⁰Ibid, 3.
culture." Bhabha concludes that totalizing boundaries are no longer feasible in modern times and that movements are directed towards non-national concerns and more towards a new transnational culture with international perspectives and international centers of transaction apart from state control. In the late 1980's, Armenia was far from becoming an inter-nation for it was still struggling to become a nation first. Although the international dimensions were rapidly growing, they were still very limited. It was still a period of "de-colonization" from the regime in Moscow, a period of turning inward to determine the prevailing sense of peoplehood within society. Images of the anti-government protest, images of ancient churches and manuscripts, of tragic faces within massive destruction were all being brought together in this nation building process. The attempt was to make real and tangible what was an imagined community.

The Discourse of Nationalism in the Kharabagh Movement

No study of modern Armenian society could be accomplished without some sort of focus on what became known as the Kharabagh Movement. I have decided not to deal with this matter in a chapter since it, in itself, is a complex study of cultural reinvention and nationalism. It is hoped that the following brief summary will suffice to make the reader at least superficially aware of events and terms that became part of the climactic

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51 Bhabha, p. 299.

52 Bhabha's arguments are relevant in light of independence and the political disintegration that has been taking place in the early 1990's.

53 Ibid, p. 4.

54 Hobsbawm, p. 173.
drama involving the break with the Soviet Union and Moscow and the creation of a new nation. The events of the Kharabagh Movement quickly evaded every aspect of Armenian social and cultural life to the point that most segments of society found some sort of appropriate idiom of articulation within the movement.\textsuperscript{55}

The Kharabagh Movement became organized under the Kharabagh Committee which consisted of ten teachers and professors. The Movement began in March of 1988 as a result of events taking place in the autonomous enclave of Mountainous Kharabagh which was situated in the neighboring Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.\textsuperscript{56} The Movement brought together an on-going ecology movement within Armenia opposing massive industrial development with the on-going struggles of the people of Kharabagh for social. The demonstrations that began in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, were a response to a referendum passed in Kharabagh demanding constitutional rights. These demonstrations were massive, at times involving one-third of the population of the Republic. They were also the first of their kind in the Soviet Union. Although, at first, they were not anti-Soviet, the situation quickly changed after an incident occurred in Sumgait near the capital of Azerbaijan which led to violence and murder. The people murdered were Armenians and the murderers were Azeri.

Sumgait was a catalyst for cultural worlds between and betwixt to rework meanings. For Armenians, the murders seemed in a way a natural since the culprits were seen as both the Soviets and the Turks.\textsuperscript{57} First the Soviets were to blame because they had for so long lied and forced the people into a state of artificial euphoria with the

\textsuperscript{55}In 1991, as a partial requirement for the Ph.D. degree, I wrote an unpublished paper, "An Anthropological Look at the Kharabagh Movement" which began to look at these issues.

\textsuperscript{56}Today, Mountainous Kharabagh, also known as Nagorno-Kharabagh or Lehrnain Kharabagh, is located in the independent Republic of Azerbaijan.

\textsuperscript{57}Chapter Four explores the culpability of the Soviets and the Turks further.
rhetoric of Soviet brotherhood. Furthermore, without the consent of the Armenians, the Soviets had given these Armenian lands to the Azeri, just as they had given the lands on which Mount Ararat rests to the Turks, during the same time. The Soviets were guilty since they themselves were not guaranteeing legal and just constitutional rights. And last among many other reasons, the Soviets were to blame because they were covering up the matter. On the other hand, the Azeri were culprits because they were "after all Turks." The Turks had committed genocide at the beginning of the century and now their compatriots, the Azeri, were continuing this same genocide.

Soon enough, the demonstrations were no longer just calling for constitutional rights. More and more, the force that engulfed practically every single person in Armenia gained its strength by incorporating culturally significant concerns over survival as a people and historical legitimacy. The conflict escalated to the point that in just a few months, a staggering 300,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan became refugees and flooded the Armenian republic. This was by November of 1988. Just a few weeks later, the devastating earthquake hit and left 250,000 homeless and 25,000 dead.

In Azerbaijan, itself, the conflict soon became a war between the Azeri army and partisan fighters in Kharabagh. Although, to date, Armenia is not officially involved in the war, there are accusations that the republic is supplying money and arms as well as fighters. As a result, Azerbaijan made an opportune move. In retaliation, Azerbaijan cut off the Armenia’s lifeline by blockading the primary rail, and for all practical purposes, the most crucial, line coming into Armenia. A landlocked country with the misfortune of being at the periphery of the Soviet realm coupled with having no natural resources, Armenia depended on the rail line for everything including fuel and food.

The blockade continues today. Armenia has survived six years of this blockade mainly relying on airlifts and clandestine private business deals. In general, the lack of fuel has led to a massive energy crisis in the nascent nation. With factories closed,
unemployment, homes with no heat or electricity facing harsh cold and dark winters, the social infrastructure of the new Armenian republic is often at the verge of chaos and collapse. Ironically, the Armenian republic remains the most stable both politically and socially of the new countries in the area. This is the reason given by many international organizations and by the American government as to why they have set up their main offices and headquarters in the Transcaucasian area in Armenia as opposed to the other countries.

The Kharabagh drama is still continuing and its implications in the re-figurings within the Armenian cosmos are very revealing of cultural codes. It is was movement that was instrumental in the emergence of Armenia as an independent nation. Furthermore, most of the members of the Kharabagh Committee became top government officials in the country. Unfortunately, little research has been done in this area.

Popular Memory

Since it is argued here that the narrative mode is used as a mediating device to negotiate and deal with cultural difference and contradiction, I would like to explore how stories of and about the past take on cultural significance and act as forces for action. Stories people recount based on what they perceive as being historical fact are very telling in themselves of how cultures frame their symbolic worlds. For Armenians, stories that tell histories and the role of the narrative itself are often derived from memories of histories as opposed to classical history texts.

58Ter Petrosian became President of the country. See the interview with him in Perilous States, written by Fischer and Grigorian. Galustian became mayor of the capital, Yerevan. Manachurian became head of internal security and affairs. Later Siradeghian headed this ministry. The others became government heads in parliament.

59See Kharabagh Files and Nora Dudwick's dissertation out of Penn State about the flow of information during the movement for brief glimpses of the beginnings of the Movement.
The Golden Age of Armenian literature was in the fifth century when historian/clerics wrote prolifically about Armenian history and translated the classics. Since the invention of the Armenian alphabet in 405 A.D., by the monk, Mesrob Mashtots, until the mid-1880's, the ability to write remained completely in the hands of the Church. As such, the oral tradition of passing on stories remained prevalent for centuries. Even the great national epic of Armenians, David of Sassoon, although centuries old, was not textualized until the late 1880's. For centuries, the "ashoughner," minstrels, would often weave tales of cultural significance as they sang ballads from village to village.

Certain aspects of recent histories have also remained within the realm of the oral tradition. Other than the studies of archival records of facts and figures, most of the socio-cultural aspects of the Genocide of 1915 and the formation of the Diaspora remain in non-written form. For decades, stories of deportations, massacres, loss of possessions and of homeland, and reminiscences have been passed down generationally in families in oral form. To this day, the vast majority of these stories have not been written down. In the eighties, several projects began (mainly out of the Zoryan Institute in Boston) to save these accounts as the realization began to set in that the number of Genocide survivors was rapidly diminishing. Even this effort to record stories was done in the oral tradition but with a modern technological twist. The oral history project is video taped rather than textualized.

In Fascism in Popular Memory, Passerini addresses the junctures between subjectivity and objectivity, between past and present by looking at worker's memories of fascism. She searches for what is called "mentalities" encoded in jokes, myths, self-representations and autobiographies. She argues that these mental representations are not

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60 There are a number of books published recently about personal accounts of the Genocide. For example, Burn After Reading.
only a part of reality but shape reality as well. Passerini engages classical historians in a debate over subjectivity by arguing that historical issues are culturally sensitive and are therefore subject to constant change. For example, she points to the literature available on Italian fascism and comments that historians failed to understand that the acceptance of the social order by various social groups was not the same as approval for the regime. Such an understanding, she continues, can be achieved once one conceptualizes the subjectivity and consciousness of the people. One of the ways for achieving this goal is through research on popular memory.\footnote{Passerini, p. 1-7.}

Passerini's concern is how culture is experienced daily by the analysis of the spoken word. Through narration and life-stories, one can decipher shared experiences and through that, cultural identity. The crucial phenomenon in oral histories is memory. Memory is both subjective and objective in that it "continuously adapts received traditions to present circumstances" leading to "an all-embracing relationship with a transcendent reality."\footnote{Ibid, p. 17.} In this manner, the past becomes linked with the present as the history or story is passed down from generation to generation and the memory involved in turn shapes our social and cultural history.

In \textit{Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method}, the Popular Memory Group of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies also explores this past-present link. First, the reproduction of a sense of the past in the present is done by both public representations or "dramas" and by private memory. Then, memory, being socially produced and manifesting itself in everyday life, in turn acts upon our sense of the past as well as the present. Therefore, popular memory is concerned with two relations: 1) that "between dominant memory and oppositional forms across the whole public (including academic)
field" and 2) that "between public discourses in their contemporary state of play and the more privatized sense of the past which is generated within a lived culture."63

First and foremost, popular memory is a political practice. Since memory instills within it an understanding of a past but within a present realm, history viewed from this angle is fraught with dominance and subordination of ideas and intellectual ideologies. History therefore becomes a constant struggle for hegemony.64 Oral histories, as one of the manifestations of popular memory, are believed to exemplify the point of conflict between historical and political aims. It is argued that the tension between these two aims can be summed up as a tension

between professional procedures and amateur enthusiasm, between oral history as recreation and as politics, between canons of objectivity and an interest, precisely, in subjectivity and in cultural forms.65

Therefore, the object of oral histories as cultural products is not the accumulation of abstract "historic," "scientific "facts," but rather, the collection of personal feelings and thoughts which shape and even construct cultural meanings which in turn construct what would be known as "social facts." Memory itself, whether in the form of oral or formal history, is influenced by experiences in the present and is constantly reconstructed. Therefore, the cultural meanings that are derived from memory and its understandings of a past are ever changing.

Although many histories would resist the idea, the Popular Memory Group argues that the object of history is in fact this past-present relationship and not just "the past."66 To achieve this goal, they propose approaching the same issues by the use of two

63Popular Memory, p. 211.
64Ibid, p. 213.
65Ibid, p. 216.
alternative readings of oral accounts. A structural reading of an account is interested in the conditions which the author of an account has appropriated ... [the] particular lived experience ... [it assumes that] the account has some real existence outside the text and is not wholly constituted in the writing itself.\textsuperscript{67}

And a cultural reading of the same account would be concerned with the products of thought, artifice, verbal and literary skills ... [these are] not simply the product of individual authorship; they draw on general cultural repertoires, features of language and codes of expression.\textsuperscript{68}

These two readings would supply the "scientific", "factual" and "source" based requirements that traditional historians have demanded of oral accounts.

Concerns over the static versus the dynamic nature of "memory" in popular memory and the hegemonic conditions of the "past" in present constructions are also addressed by Bommes and Wright in "'Charms of Residence': The Public and the Past." They analyze the discourses and images generated by the British National Heritage Act (1980). This Act illustrates how dominant public representations of the past are constructed. In order to create a single unified "national culture" that overrides social and political contradictions. Britain’s National Heritage Act created a display in which 'the past' enters everyday life, closing time down to the perpetual 'extension' of an immobilized but resonantly 'historical' national present... history is being frozen over, arrested and in this sense 'stopped'.\textsuperscript{69}

National Heritage is an attempt to produce a dehistoricized history which is imbued with one meaning by dominant forces. However, diversity in understandings of the past or in understandings of nationhood still remain. Therefore, National Heritage creates an

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid, p. 227.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid, p. 229.

\textsuperscript{69}Bommes and Wright, p. 264.
"imaginary Britain" as opposed to a "real, united Britain."  

Much like the push to make National Heritage a unifying mechanism in Britain, the images and representations of the earthquake and the Kharabagh Movement were presented as a unifying mechanisms for Armenian national solidarity by the media, by the intellectuals and subordinate political organizations, all of which in turn were struggling for hegemony in the new "open" Soviet society. Cultural meanings drawn from issues surrounding the earthquake were meant to override social contradictions and meant to unify the Armenians under the label "Armenian nation." Society was reworking meanings in order to reify that which may have been known as an "Imaginary Armenia."

THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA

The Armenian Diaspora is multi-faceted social construct the study of which is very much beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it needs to be noted that such a diaspora exits with its own history, its own memory, its own orientational frames and its own set of diverse multi-dimensional discourses. For all practical purposes, the Diaspora originated some four hundred years ago when the Persian king, Shah Abbas, relocated a large group of Armenians from the Armenian territories near Julfa. At the time, Julfa was on the Empire’s boarders. These Armenians were moved deep within the Persian Empire, and were mainly settled in the city of Isfahan. From there Armenian New Julfa (also known as Jughia) developed. Eventually, from this community in Iran, Armenians spread to India and to other Asian countries. However, the Diaspora as it is today is the direct result of the Ottoman Empire’s policy of deportations and genocide. Escaping atrocities, Armenians from the Ottoman Empire settled in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq,

70Ibid, p. 265.
Jordan, and Egypt. The already existing Israeli community grew in numbers. From these Middle Eastern locals, Armenians moved to France and to the United States. Presently, although figures vary, it is estimated that half of the world’s Armenian population does not live in Armenia. The vast majority are in former Soviet bloc republics and close to a third live in the United States.

The Diaspora is a problematic world for the Armenians of the former Soviet republic. Some of the issues and concerns will be dealt with in the following chapters. Here, suffice it to say that while Armenians self-represent themselves by means of a collective identity, the contradictions and the tensions and the mutually exclusive understandings, expectations, actions all lead to a different self-knowledge. Let me present one example of mutually exclusive understandings. The acceptance and rejection of what constituted the Armenian flag is an ideal example. For decades, under Soviet rule, the Soviet Armenian Republic had as its official flag, a bi-color red and blue. This flag stood in opposition to the tri-color that had been briefly used during the period of independence of 1918-1921. Until 1989, the tri-color was associated with the ousted political party, the ARF, as a sign of the bourgeoisie and of nationalism. Meanwhile, in the Diaspora, the flag as it was used by the ARF denoted not the party but the rightful symbol of a "true Armenia" for the Armenia that existed was considered a Soviet front by the ARF. The ARF was powerful in the West so its version of the national symbol was just as powerful for the numerous supporters. However, the Diaspora was split on this flag issue since the other powerful political party in the Diaspora supported Soviet Armenia and used the bi-color as a symbol of Armenian-ness.

This was a stable situation for decades. Each limiting its own meanings of the

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71 Armenians are one of the four religious groups within the old Jerusalem walls.

72 ARF is the acronym for the Armenian Revolutionary Federation which is also known as the Dashnaktsutiun.
flag. Each side knew the respective limited construct that this cultural artefact generated. However, everything turned upside-down when in the spring of 1989, the still Soviet Republic of Armenia dropped the bi-color and adopted the tri-color as its new national symbol. The Republic took this move to assert its sense of history and legitimacy and to differentiate itself from an all Soviet Armenia. The Diaspora was at a loss for explaining this move. Those who had been rivals did not quite understand if now they were friends. After all these years, was Soviet Armenia acknowledging the ARF as a powerful cultural force? No, this was not the case. Those who were friends now felt uncomfortable with the quick change in their symbolic configurations. Were they no longer friend and did they no longer espouse the same cultural values with the Armenia that they had for so long related to and supported? No, this was not the case either. The ensuing confusion showed how symbols are often renegotiated. It also pointed to Armenian multiplicity and the propensity for mediation between these differences, which are often contradictions.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING - Methodology

The research for this dissertation was begun in 1987, right before the Kharabagh Movement began. The research ended towards the last days of 1992, a year after Armenia declared itself independent and formed a new nation. First on a student visa and then on a humanitarian visa, I remained in Armenia for the better part of those five years. In the first half of my stay, I was mainly in Yerevan, the capital. In the second part of my stay, I was mainly in Leninakan, the second largest city which is only an hour and half’s drive from Yerevan. It is also the city that was totally devastated during the earthquake of 1988.

The five year span that this study covers is perhaps one of two most critical periods of time in the modern history of Armenia. The first would be in the years between 1915 and 1921 when the Armenians went from genocide to establishing a Soviet
republic. And now the second span from 1988 to 1992 when the Armenians created something new again, an independent nation emerging from the Soviet republic. All the while, the country was dealing with natural disaster of epic proportions and a clandestine war in the neighboring country the effects of which have all but crippled Armenia. It was an absolutely opportune time to be in Armenia and to witness the upheaval and the play of culturally significant understandings of themselves and the world. Sovietization, diasporization, and westernization, all reoccurring themes within the dissertation were beautifully played out during those years.

My interlocutors could be categorized as follows: there were several university students some of whom I followed into the work force, especially in foreign organizations, there were several factory workers who had not attended any higher educational institutions, there was a group of twenty repatriate families running the full gamut of the stages of repatriation (as presented in the following chapter), there was the group of young doctors, the city officials, there was the group of national government agency workers, and the two government ministers and the three vice-ministers. There were also the performers, and the artists. There were people from Yerevan, people from Leninakan, and those who eventually moved abroad, as well as those who have stayed. My closest friends were among the membership of each of these groups. In general, the quotes in the dissertation and the interpretations of situations come from informal conversations in informal settings. Most of the quotes are very short since they were written down after the fact, usually when I returned home. However, I am confident that my representations here do justice to the actual words spoken by my interlocutors.

Now, I will proceed with a multi-dimensional analysis of the frames of reference that are central to Armenians. In its transition from the Soviet Republic to national independence, Armenia experienced moments of transparency in which the constructions of culture were starkly revealed. Specifically, I will explore how particularities of social
contradictions and paradox acquire a repertoire of symbols that help the culture cope with these cultural shifts and cultural reproductions of meaningful worlds. The task is complicated enough especially when one thinks of Faubion's statement that "reality is not a single, but an infinite possibility thing." I do not even pretend to expose an infinite number of Armenian symbols, I do however try to trace out what I have come to regard as the master list of possible symbols of significance. This dissertation is an attempt at tracing out this repertoire.

Unlike the Nivkhi studied by Bruce Grant, one of the numerous Soviet minority groups who believed that they had no culture, the Armenians of this study believe that they have "deep culture" which meanders through multi-levels and can best be talked about in the manner that Geertz characterizes as "thick description." It is not the fear of a lack of culture but rather the complexity of a culture that is all to "real" to those living in it that shapes the dissertation. The complexity of uncountable threads uniting and blending together to form cultural understandings poses a difficult task for the ensuing "thick description," what to include, what to exclude. A list of these threads and a tracing of formulations will be presented in such a way and in hopes that the doors to other parallel interpretations will not be closed. In the four following chapters, an attempt will be made to flush out the fluid nature of culture as it negotiates pasts and presents in order to make sense of contradiction and paradox within East/West, cosmopolitan/national, traditional/ modern, death/survival cultural categories.

And on a final note, since this research is so ingrained in historicising and in blending ethnography with history, I would like to refer to the historian Hayden

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73 Faubion, p. 8.

74 See Bruce Grant's dissertation from Rice University, 1993, titled Memory and Forgetting: The Nivkhi of Sakhalin Island.
White.\textsuperscript{75} History writing, according to White, is a poetic venture since the historian pre-figures his field rather than the field pre-figuring the historical work. White argues that textual requirements such as narrative tropes, ideological purpose, rhetorical persuasion and other strategies of explanation and theoretical concepts are actually preceded by what he calls the modes of linguistics which are formalizations of poetic insights. It is this poetic insight that has shaped principles of historical consciousness.

No one poetic mode is more realistic, more accurate or more scientific than the other and the selection of one over the other is purely based on aesthetics. Such is the dilemma of the historian and the ethnographer at hand. While trying to leave space for interaction and diverse meanings and interpretation, I am, nonetheless presenting my aesthetic preference.

And so I begin my exploration into culturally meaningful space in the complex paradoxical world of Soviet Armenia in the same way as all Armenian fairy tales do:

\textit{linoumeh chilinoumeh ... there was and there was not ...}

\textsuperscript{75}See H. White’s \textit{Metahistory}. 
Chapter Two / The Anthropologist Among Us

The three following incidents occurred in different settings yet the message that I understood from them were very similar in nature:

1. A group of friends, some from Armenia and some not, and I were at a social event. As it often did, the conversation took a turn towards cultural concerns and social issues in the West especially in the United States. I in my usual flare began talking about what I knew. A woman near by who was unknown to me had slowly been drawn into our circle of dialogue. I noticed that she was listening with a sense of uneasiness, the reasons for which were unclear to me at first. Ten, fifteen minutes into the conversation, she exposed herself by saying, "shame on you (talking directly to me), shame on you for pretending to be someone you are not. You go away for a year or two and you forget that you are 'hayastantsi' (Soviet Armenian). Shame on you."

2. A close friend and I were drinking cognac late at night discussing, or rather satirizing the day's current events when he suddenly says to me:
   You know Stella, after all this time, I still can't figure out what you are doing here. I know that you are working in Leninakan... and that's great ... we need more people dedicated like you. I know that you are an unusual Diasporan Armenian ... [in that] you came and stayed. You want to learn about Armenians, and you did, perhaps more than I know about them myself, but then you stayed. What is it that keeps you here?

3. I had been buying my bread from the bread shop across the street for months already, always paying with a ruble note and receiving the change. The change was always different depending on the mood of the seller, therefore I never knew the exact cost of the loaf. On a particularly busy day, I found myself at the head of a long line with only a few kopeks in my hand. I made the apparently courageous step to ask what the price of the bread was. My question was met with the most perturbed of looks as the cashier began screaming at me as her eyebrows admonished me all by themselves, "OOOOOOOH, who do you think you are, are you from London that you don't know the price ..."

From the beginning to the very end of my fieldwork days, there was a constant changing interplay between me and those that I had come to study. During that time, I changed my status willingly sometimes and at times was given a new character without my having much control over the new persona. My role was between a constant flux of
the academic anthropologist, or the Armenian, or the diasporan Armenian, sometimes as the Westerner and sometimes as the local. As exemplified in the vignettes above, questions and confusion as to my identity were not articulations of any sense of paranoia (i.e., who is she and what does she want) on part of those in my study but rather articulations of the complex intricate tapestry of cultural identity which defines the Armenian of the late twentieth century. The reaction of Armenians that I interacted with was a natural response to this unintentional obfuscation on my part. At the time, unbeknownst to me, I was becoming a person who gave off contradictory signals, signals which were causing blurring of the lines between the us/them and "othar" worlds.¹

The decades old problematic of "us" verses "them" or the object of study as being the "other" was a reminder of issues at hand almost every single day. Unwittingly, my character was an ideal one for a seemingly deeper look inward while keeping the objective stance of being an outsider. But the question arises as to whether this was really the case: did I really find myself in situations that could lead me to a better understanding of Armenian cultural dynamics while being able to intellectually distance myself such that I could also analyze? I believe as Dorinne Kondo does in Crafting Selves, that the anthropologist as well as the subjects of study are constantly refiguring and reconstructing their selves and that a unitary "I" or "them is a false presupposition. On the contrary, she argues that there are multiple ways by which people present themselves each depending on situations. She writes that in a

plethora of "I's", you are not an "I" untouched by context, rather you are defined by context.²

At these times when the self can and does fragment, one is also able to craft one's self into desired identities. It is with this fragmentation that the "eye/I" of the anthropologist

¹See chapter 3 for definition of "othar."
²Kondo, p.29
turns toward the subject.

CREATION OF AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

A brief autobiography of the anthropologist at hand is necessary so that the multiple facets of the mixture of situations and dialogues presented could be better understood. I will concentrate on the formulation of an "I" that mainly deals with locations and languages.

Before fieldwork began, my lifecourse seemed simple enough and no different from that of millions of other immigrants to the United States. While born in Iran, I had barely attended my first year of schooling in Tehran's exclusive private Armenian school, Alishan, when my Mom, brother and I immigrated to the United States. I received my schooling in Houston eventually ended up in a graduate program in anthropology at Rice University. All the while, I kept in touch with family that remained in Iran.

While growing up, I participated directly in the cultural activities sponsored by the small Armenian community in Houston. These events usually centered around holidays and festive days, both Armenian and American. In the seventies and until the late eighties, Houston's Armenian community mainly consisted of older second generation American-Armenians and younger college aged Iranian-Armenians. The community was small but well organized around the Church and the Armenian Center where families and individuals would gather for all kinds of events.

Because of the demographics of the members of the Armenian community, this part of my world remained incongruent with the other part of my world which was made up of contemporaries and peers at school. Mine was a world separated into halves since the "Armenianness" and Armenian community events never intersected with the "Americaness" and the day to day general experience in school. Everyone at school knew that I was Armenian and could speak Armenian but they were never privy to that
world directly. For instance, even when I danced with an Armenian folk dance group at the official American Bicentennial Celebrations in Houston, school friends were not asked to attend. At school, out of the countless projects done by me over the years as class work, only two or three were Armenian oriented.

Therefore, my spatial relations were aligned along a simple axis: on one side, Iran (split between the Armenian community and the Iranian community), and on the other, the United States (split between the Armenian community and the American community). At no time did Soviet Armenia play a conscious role in this configuration. If anything at all, in my late undergraduate years, it was the "Soviet" that was of interest rather than the "Armenia" of that space called Soviet Armenia.

While growing up, I was part of a great mass movement and consolidation of Armenians world-wide. In the seventies and eighties, the Armenian world order was shifting from a mainly poly-local stance which had been spread throughout the world to one of polarity between the United States and the Soviet Union. Until the turn of the century, the Iranian-Armenian community was the largest and oldest Armenian diasporan community in the world. However, after the Genocide of 1915, the Middle Eastern communities increased in numbers and Beirut developed the strongest Armenian presence. In Europe, the French Armenian community was increasing more than any other. However, during the late twentieth century, all of the Armenian diasporan communities began to shrink as they experienced an exodus towards the United States. The greatest decrease was in the Middle Eastern communities.

These immigrants from the Middle East along with the new immigrants from Soviet Armenia have created an Armenian population in the United States that has become the largest single presence of Armenians anywhere outside of Soviet Armenia. Although there are still numerous other communities spread throughout the world (notably in Australia, Argentina, Uruguay, England, Germany), the community in the
States has quickly taken on a leading as well as a definitive role in Armenian cultural, political and religious affairs.³

With this background, I set out to do research in an area of the world that was for the most part alien to me. I had a very poor grasp of Armenian history if any at all and an even poorer understanding of the Soviet period. Although I spoke Eastern Armenian at home, my fluency in the language was limited since mine was a hybridized version of Farsi-English-Armenian sprinkled with grammar that I had not realized I had created myself. I also went with a knowledge of Russian which I had studied intensively since my original intention had been to research Soviet anthropology. This knowledge of Russian was also a decisive element. Equipped with the two most important communicative devices, Eastern Armenian and Russian, and a diffused knowledge of historical specifics and of course anthropological training, I set foot into the field.

³Depending on which statistics are used, the Armenian population in the United States ranges anywhere from 800,000 to 1 million. The next highest population figures are for Beirut, Iran and France, each being around 200,000. In the United States, there is a concentration of personal wealth which has spilled over to philanthropic endeavors. This money funds numerous private schools as well as cultural centers and programs. Since independence, Armenia has also become a recipient of some of these monies, i.e., the Manoogians via the Armenian General Benevolent Union, K. Kirkorian via the Lincy Foundation and United Armenian Fund, the Hovannians via the Armenian Assembly, several others via the Armenian Relief Society. There are several other non-aligned non-profit organizations which get generous donations and their main objects are to provide medical assistance, training or equipment to Armenia. All of the major political and cultural organizations are now either centered in the United States or have the largest membership in the States. For example, the Armenian Revolutionary Foundations, one of the oldest Armenian political parties started in the late 1800’s in the Ottoman Empire has for years operated from the Middle East. In recent years, it like the others, have shifted gears in its operations towards the United States. The Armenian Church in the States provides both money and direction to the Holy See of the church which is located in Armenia. The future leadership of the church may be in the hands of the former archbishop from New York. He is the leading candidate to become the next catholicos, spiritual leader of all Armenians. He is presently, acting catholicos. Numerous academic chairs have been established in colleges in the United States, notably those at Harvard, University of Michigan and UCLA. As a result, the number of advanced degrees in Armenian related fields has increased as have the number of academic conferences.
IN THE FIELD: BELONGING AND NOT BELONGING!

During the time that I was in Armenia, no matter how my official status changed for purposes of the visa (first a student visa and then a humanitarian and finally a business visa) allowing me to stay in a Soviet state, in my mindset at least, I was forever the "anthropologist" there to observe. Never hiding the fact that I was there to research various matters that had cultural significance, my trying to establish myself as an "outside" observer in this setting proved to be immensely difficult. It began from the first moment I opened my mouth at the Yerevan airport customs in 1987:

Customs Officer: (in Armenian) Passport and visa. Why are you coming to Armenia?
SG: (in Armenian) I am here to study Armenian at the university and to learn about Armenia. (my visa was a special student visa given by the university)
CO: when did you leave from here?
SG: (confused) leave? No, I am from the States.
CO: you are not a repatriate?
SG: no.
CO: did you bring anything to sell?
SG: no
CO: do you have any published materials?
SG: no

After the bags were hand searched, I was allowed to pass. It was months later that I realized that in the span of six questions I had been a party to a whole game of cultural identity which brought together the Soviet/West and repatriate-Diaspora/local dichotomies. First, from my initial greetings and answer, the customs official had immediately assumed that I was a repatriate since my birthplace was listed as Iran and I was speaking Eastern Armenian clearly. She also assumed that I had left Armenia to go to the States as had so many other repatriates. Second, to be a student meant that I would be a part of a foreign student community the majority of whom where Diasporan Armenians from Beirut or Syria as well as Iran. These students were a direct link to Western goods as they would bring with them mainly clothes and sell to the local Armenians in the black market. This was an illegal act but was tolerated as evidenced
by the fact that students were constantly getting away with doing this. In turn, the students would amass a great deal of money which would make their life very comfortable while in the Soviet Union since getting goods and money out was definitely not tolerated by the state. And the final question asked of me by the customs officer was not so much for the halt at the border of anti-Soviet publications or pornography but was much more directed towards diasporan political intentions to bring into Soviet Armenia publications deemed nationalistic and therefore illegal.\textsuperscript{4} These were all assumptions made on identities none of which seemed to fit me. Therefore, was the road clear for me to be the outsider studying the "other?" Time proved that this was not to be the case.

Confusion was not the sole result of what was uttered or what was written but also resulted from outward appearances as well. Until 1988, there were only a handful of students who came to Soviet Armenia from the Americas or Europe. In general, these students had more of a casual outward appearance versus the way the students from the Middle East dressed. Those students from Beirut or Syria tended to be more "dressed up" or used more make-up. They were also more vocal in public situations, for example if I could hear a conversation across the bus or at a shop, it would more often than not be Diasporan Armenian students. The Americans in their jeans seemed more inconspicuous in a crowd. The Americans were different from the Middle East students and in some ways blended in the crowd better. Yet, at times they too were easily differentiated by the locals. Although, the wearing of jeans was no longer a status symbol in Soviet terms since wearing them was common enough, the question of where one would wear them was a definite indicator of identity. For example, it would not be

\textsuperscript{4}Especially the works of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) political party which was ousted from power in Armenia in 1921 but which remained a powerful force in the Diaspora. It has continually remained anti-Soviet and in ways anti-Soviet Armenia. Presently, the party is at odds with the democratically elected government of Armenia.
worn in class at the university. "We dress in our best [lav shorer] when we go to class. We also do not sit on the floor or on the stairs waiting for a class to begin or for a professor to come," said one third year philology student. Such locally perceived uncommon behavior would identify the American as a person always "at ease" and "living without constraints." This group of American students were unconsciously making a fashion statement. Dress, mannerisms and even one's walk was under analysis by the locals. "We can spot ... [a foreign student] ... blocks away. It is just the way you all walk, at ease, looking around, walking faster. It is very easy to tell that you are not from here," said another student. Yet, another person added that they can tell us apart on the street because we have a tendency to chew gum or to be eating something as we walk. "It's shameful to have your mouth moving like that as you walk. We don't do that ... well, maybe for some ice cream ... but nothing else," she added.

However, no matter how much I portrayed the characteristics of the "American/foreign" category, I never managed to stay in that category. More often than not, locals thought I one of them, that I was from Soviet Armenia. One of my co-students from the States and I constantly found ourselves in contrasting categories. Ironical, she had to struggle to establish her "Armenianness" while I had to struggle to establish my "Americanness". She being lighter in complexion and having a Russian first name, often would shout out her very Armenian last name and then whisper her first name. If not an American, she was always mistaken for a Russian. And although after a few short months she became fluent in Armenian, people would address questions to her via me. Amazingly, when she would answer directly to the person in perfect Armenian, the interaction would still continue through me. I, unlike her, would spend most of the early part of the conversation restating several times that I too was from abroad.

Two more examples out of numerous others will suffice to illustrate the
frustration I was feeling at belonging, yet at times not wanting to belong. While at an art exhibit, an Uruguayan friend and I were talking in Armenian when a couple approached us. The woman addressing me said, "kour jan (sister dear), where is she from (indicating my friend)?" Although usually, my answer was polite, this time there was a definite tone of anger as I tersely and abruptly responded, "same place I am from." The answer was unexpected since I have never been to Uruguay in my life. Wanting to be a foreigner at times seemed to be a necessity rather than just a personal desire, especially in the Soviet system were certain doors were literally opened the second foreignness was established. The Soviet "intourist" system which was made up of the "best" (a very relative term) hotels and restaurants and the chain of dollar stores in which very few Western goods could be purchased were off limits to locals. Locals were not even allowed in let alone allowed to partake in the various services.\(^5\) The initial reaction that I received at one of these stores was indicative of the response I would get for months to come (until they finally got to "know" me). "It is not allowed for you to come in" was all that the woman said in the harshest of tones as I entered one of these stores. Apparently, in the official minds, the West, as symbolized by these stores and hotels, was supposedly off limits for the local Soviet man. Since it was illegal for a Soviet citizens to have dollars in their possession, they obviously had no buying power. But was the state also disallowing the citizen from just looking as well? Apparently, the entire "intourist" system was a game, since money or position would get you in. It was true that nothing in that store was of any secret to the man on the street. Often, one would find the same products in people’s homes. They would either get a foreigner to make the purchase or simply buy it on the thriving black market. The state illusion of separating themselves, the Soviet, from the Western dollars and goods was

\(^5\)For Armenians, this seemed more a symbolic set-up since they managed to make use of the services when needed.
kept very well by the people. I on the other hand, had to play a different game of illusions, often using a very fake heavy accent or pretending not to speak Armenian in order not to belong and by not belonging, be given access.

THE MYTHS OF THE ANTHROPOLOGIST

For practical purposes, the roles of foreigner/local that I was to play while doing field work, the fragmented "I's" were not meant to complicate matters but to simplify my goal of concentrating on the subject, the local Armenians. Initially, I was the student of Armenian language at the university and later on, I was the administrator of a development project in the earthquake zone. For the locals, the label of "anthropologist" was not one of the choices. Labeling myself as an anthropologist would also be a bit convoluted since the discipline of anthropology as we define and package it does not exist in Soviet nomenclature. Similar fields are those of an "anthropolog" from the Russian term meaning medical anthropologist and "ethnograph" from the Russian term or "azgagrageth" (one who studies nationalities) from the Armenian term meaning an ethnographer. Of course there were the "sotsiolog" or "hasarakageth" and the "historic" or "pathmaban," but there were no anthropologists. Therefore, I was content to be a student, "usanogh" and later a worker/administrator, "ashkhatogh/administrator."

These fragmentations of the self seemed to be simple enough yet what I had not counted on was a unusual twist to the anthropological study of myths. In the time that I had spent doing fieldwork, rather than being known by the labels that I had limited myself to, it became apparent that my interlocutors had their own list of categories from which they derived meanings for who I was and why I was in Armenia. In a reversal of Taylor's work on myths in Myths of Eva Peron, myths were being created for me, the anthropologist. While I saw myself as the student of Armenian language and history, I was also known as the "nationalist" and the "activist." While I was the worker in
Gyumri, I was also the "martyr" for Armenia and the Armenian people and the "arbitrator" ("meejnord") between cultures. And while I was Stella, I was also a woman (both in gender and sexuality), a "sister" and a "daughter." Depending on the type of relationship that I had with any one individual, one of these categories would stand as paramount in how I was understood.

Myth of the Activist

Playing an active role in the changing of lives or situations that one is studying brings about issues of ethical concern for the anthropologist. If one is meant to be studying manifestations in society as they are, does participation into the events, whether being there passively or taking an active role in the decision making, not change the particulars of an actual event to something else? To clarify this point, two separate situations will be described.

It was mid-February 1988 and the Kharabagh demonstrations had begun. All of Armenia was caught in the highly energized articulation of selfhood vis-a-vis their existence in the Soviet world. During this time, the general population’s fear of being too vociferous and as a result experiencing totalitarian police pressures went hand in hand. However, the confident attitude that they were doing nothing wrong and that the just would prevail was enough incentive for the demonstrations to proceed. The number of participants in this not so Soviet public display went from a few hundred to several hundreds of thousands in just less than ten days. In the beginning, Armenians had their reasons for fearing or being apprehensive about attending the demonstrations. But for me as well as other foreign nationals the reasons for not participating were clearly spelled out. It was still the time of the Soviets, a time of assumed secrets, a time of wondering who was KGB or not, a time when not all could be asked, said or done, a time when foreigners still could not travel beyond 40 kilometers of the capital without special
difficultly attained permission. For the foreigners, Armenia unlike much of the rest of the Soviet Union was far more open; yet, there was one law that we were all very well aware of: no involvement in internal issues especially, political and social unrest.

And there at the Opera square, just two streets down from where I lived, things were taking shape quickly. One did not have to have great intuition to know that all of the elements of something socially and culturally profound were coming together at heart-pounding pace. How could I stay away? Call it curiosity, call it intellectual endeavor, call it a breach of my acceptance of the vague non-political-participation "rule," call it whatever you wish, but I could not stay away. At first, I nonchalantly walked by as if I was on my way somewhere and happened to be innocently passing this atypical Soviet public gathering. I even did not talk about it at the university even though others mentioned a few things. A few days later, when it was apparent that this had become a significant process, I found myself in the crowd somewhere with tens of thousands of people listening to the unfolding drama from the podium. In just a few days, practically everyone was either directly participating in the demonstrations or was discussing it. The initial fear of being there had subsided until one day quite innocently I involved myself in something that would concern me for several months.

A week into the protests, I had moved up in the crowds and ended up on the side of the center podium. As I looked over the massive highly energized crowd waving banners, slogans and posters, somehow a poster was passed over to me. It must be noted that standing next to me was a South American Armenian student who was known by a group in the crowd. I held the poster for a moment and then passed it on. The moment was just enough time for a picture to be taken by someone in the crowd. This photo reached me two days later and in it I saw myself holding a poster that read "The Diaspora is with you." It was unclear who had this photo: whether the newspapers, the KGB, the university, any or all of them, but the existence of the photo was quite
unsettling. During those days, the government was accusing the Diaspora of undermining the Soviet powers by secretly supporting and fueling the demonstrations, a blatant act against Soviet law whose severity of punishment was unknown to me. I showed the photo to close friends to get advice. Their response was almost unanimous. "You are definitely an activist, but so is everyone else these days," said someone. The consensus was that before anything would be done to me, they would first have to do it to their own people first. Therefore, the sheer number of participants was in my favor. With concerns over personal safety aside, I realized that my actions had taken me from being a curious observer to an active participant in the minds of those around me. In the months that were to follow, even though I did nothing to change the scope of these events, often my investigation and inquiries about participation were seen as desired insights of an activist.

The second set of events were of no global significance, yet my involvement also led to an activism of sorts, "an activism for our rights," as one foreign student said. This "activism" eventually led to my being elected as the dorm foreign student representative. It all began because of my personal interests. However, it ended with the involvement of the higher administrative ranks of the university and the Ministry of Education. It brought together the foreign graduate student body of the university who lived in the dorm. It brought together the Armenians in the dorm. It brought together bureaucracy, power and control. "It" was an aerobics class that I began to teach at our dorm.

In the fall of 1988, after asking permission to use the student activities hall in the dorm which was on the third floor and almost always empty, I began to do aerobics with five women. After a few sessions when the number had grown to eleven, I was called into the dorm director's office and told that we could not continue. Pushing for a more plausible reason than the "I said so" given initially, I was told that by doing aerobics I
would be placing all of us in physical danger. No, the danger was not the pulling of a muscle but a far more drastic danger of "being raped" he said. Flabbergasted, I said, "Raped by whom?" "You know how men are, you know how Muslims are," he reasoned. "They will see you doing those moves and it may excite them," he continued, "anyway, these are serious times. Our compatriots are dying, people are demonstrating. What if they see you doing these things?" The final word was that I was not to conduct any more classes.

Apparently Armenian society was so involved in the kharabagh demonstrations and in the subsequent cultural constructions of identities that my aerobics class could not escape being a part of change and the articulation of on-going social processes. It was a time when the demonstrations were reaching a climax. Numerous hunger strikes were underway. Villages in Azerbaijan were being emptied by Azeri forces and hundreds of thousands of refugees were entering Armenia. The Turk, the Azeri, the Muslim were categories used interchangeably, each harking back to antagonisms and images of the Genocide, of killings, mutilations and rapes. The once pro-Soviet demonstrations had turned anti-Soviet with calls for change at the highest government positions. Power and control of society was shifting hands.

And so too, the aerobics dilemma was finding itself surrounded by the on going social drama and the rhetoric used to describe it was rhetoric found in the social process as well. The overriding reason that the classes were not allowed was an issue of power. Although the director knew nothing about what aerobics was, he had decided that no good could come of it. In standing in opposition to this decision, I and the entire aerobics group were challenging his authority. Such positions of Soviet hierarchy had rarely been challenged before and especially not by the foreigners who were guests there. He talked of Muslims and rapes which directly connected this event with what had been going on in Azerbaijan in the previous months and to the Genocide by the Turks at the
turn of the century. The only Muslims that he could possibly mean were the number of Syrian, Egyptian and Algerian students (one of the Algerians was doing aerobics with us) who lived in the dorm and with whom we were friends. The director reiterated that his concern came out of the fact that he thought himself as my father and was doing what any father would do. His justifications were numerous and obviously because of my opposition, we were not getting anywhere. I was pushed by the aerobics group to take the matter to the vice-rector of the university. In so doing, we were stepping up in the ranks and seeing how authority authorizes authority in the Soviet hierarchy.

In his arguments against the aerobics class, the vice-rector articulated other socially significant issues. His concern was what a "bearded young man" would think if he saw us. This was a direct reference to the Kharabagh demonstrations. Having beards had become an accepted sign of the activists. "In the past, only artists and eccentrics had beards," a person once commented. "Beards are dirty but acceptable on artists," another person had said.6 Now beards were common and to grow them meant in most cases activism. Ironically, here was a pillar of Soviet authority who was not only acknowledging and commending the demonstrations and the activism but was concerned that we were taking it too light-heartedly. If the first story in this section is considered, then the sudden shift of reasonings becomes clear. Only a few short months ago, we as foreigners were not even supposed to be in any way involved or connected with the demonstrations. And now, our very sense of nationalism was being questioned.

The vice-rector was in many ways a caricature of Soviet authority. He was overweight and had a potbelly (often wealthy factory department heads, the "tsekhavik," are depicted this way); he was a smoker (as almost every male was in Soviet Armenia); he had a gigantic office with his desk in one corner (as did most anybody in a position

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6Men who are in mourning also grow beards.
of authority); upon entering his office, one was faced with awkward lapses of time until he would look up from his desk and wait for a brief statement from the person (foreign students described him as being very rude, but this form of behavior was common throughout administrative offices); and in legitimizing his connection with foreign students, he several times over would mention his trips abroad (he had actually gone to Cuba a few times and that was all).

The vice-rector’s second set of arguments were an eerie foreboding of the earthquake just a few weeks away that would change Armenian society and its struggle for self-determination. He very seriously looked at our group and said that engineers would have to check the building to see whether the structural integrity of the building was sound. "We are concerned about you, so that all of the jumping around does not cause the building to shake," he said. One of the members of the group said in a determined emotional tone, "but Mr. Matevosian, we are not elephants." The humor of this statement was lost to a man so overweight. His patience was being tried. He had said what needed to be said and the meeting was over.

By this time, the issue had gone beyond aerobics and was incorporating the entire dorm. The other students saw this as an infringement of the right of students to have leisure activities of their choosing in the designated "red zone." The "red zone" had been set aside for this purpose and a breach of these rights indicated to the students a breach of all kinds of rights held by the dorm residents. Quite well timed, this was all taking place during the yearly election of dorm officers and representatives and that year’s top choice for president was me. The furore and participation by dorm residents led to united fronts in the dorm and led to my being elected dorm president. As president, my next move was to take matters to the Minister of Education.

However, before the meeting with the Minister took place, he had already been informed and had given everyone the order to allow the aerobics classes. The day the
vice-rector came to the dorm to acknowledge this order and to take other questions from the students was a momentous day. His power as a middle administrator. However, the power of the Minister had stayed in tact. And so too did the power shifts in society change.

That night was very climactic. The relative openness of Armenian society took a turn towards the old days of totalitarianism. The Soviet tanks rolled in for the first time; curfews were set; soldiers lined the streets; intimidation and fear were present again. Two weeks later, the Armenian earthquake devastated and crippled the entire country. After all of the "activism," the aerobics classes never continued.

Myth of the Martyr

In 1991, when I went back to Armenia for the second of my long stays, my new status as project manager of a development program in the city of Gyumri gave me insight into the process of work and bureaucracy. For me, being there was, as before, an intellectual endeavor of trying to decipher cultural codes. This time, I had an opportunity to look these codes from a fresh angle. I was no longer a student, wearing jeans and participating in demonstrations. I was now an "adult" who had major responsibilities, who had to administer a four person expatriate staff, over thirty local construction workers, twenty local medical students and negotiate terms of contract with high ranking local municipal and national government heads. The position paid well. Therefore, it was the best of all worlds: I was being paid to do work that I considered to be actually research in the very interesting field of development projects. With all of this in my favor, it hardly seemed as if I was in any way dedicated or was sacrificing any particular aspect of my life to be in Armenia. However, as time went on, people I knew began to understand my work in Armenia in terms of a greater cause than research for the dissertation. They saw my Armenian work as that done by a "martyr," having put
everything personal aside for the good of "my people." "What you are doing is martyrdom (zohaberoutuin)," was a remark made by a person who had known me for years as well as by a person who had been working with me in our project. It was a martyrdom for "my people" and therefore I was a "nationalist" and a "national heroine (azgain herosuhi)."

Now, how did I find myself in this predicament? At a time, when the category of "martyr" had lists of people who were fighting and literally dying for the Armenian cause in Kharabagh, how could I also be a part of this category? It was clear that I did not have to have killed somebody, or have been killed or have lost all of my worldly possessions to be considered a hero and even more, a martyr. It sufficed that I was in Armenia during a very tumultuous time, sharing the "worst of times" with the Armenians, leaving behind my comfort and family. The overriding factor in their reasoning was that unlike them, I did not have to be there and most definitely, I did not have to be there at these most difficult of times and for such a long period. The longer I stayed, the deeper I traveled into Armenian society. By going deeper, I would be seeing corruption and social ills. "Was I not getting disillusioned ("huisahathvats," losing hope)?" and if not, then I must truly be a "national hero" who was sacrificing my other life of comfort and "normalcy" in the United States as a true martyr would.

I would not call it a sacrifice; however, working in Armenia was nothing short of nerve wrecking frustration and immense obstacles. Part of the problem was that corruption is a fact of life and we hardly knew or wanted to know how to get around it. The other problem facing me was the different sort of work ethic that seems to prevail in Armenia. Furthermore, to compound matters, there was the energy crisis that was crippling the country. The simplest of tasks would end up being a logistics nightmare. I had the (mis)fortune of being headquartered in Gyumri where the training project and the construction of the rehabilitation center was progressing while at the same time, daily
physical contact with Yerevan was an absolute necessity.

Yerevan was only an hour-and-half drive from Leninakan, but it might as well have been in another world. Transportation was limited and inconvenient (until we managed to get our own car). In the winter the roads would be impassable and we would get cut off for several days. In all of the city there were only a handful of direct telephone lines to Yerevan. After much running around from office to office, I managed to get such a telephone line. Yet often, these lines would be down. I soon became wise to the fact that having Niko, the telephone repairman in the neighborhood, on my side was more than ideal. Being on my side meant that he was on a separate payroll of mine, where he was not getting "bribes (kashark)" but rather "a little something (me pokrik me ban)" to be on his toes in our telephone matters. When the phone would die, almost always at the most inopportune time, we could never call him on our local line, but would have to take time out from other business and track him down all over town.

Everyone knew Niko. We would leave messages at his work place, at home, with

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7The city of Gyumri has changed names several times. Leninakan is the name that it is most popularly known by these days even though officially the city has been renamed Gyumri. For detail of this story refer to Chapter Four.

8There has always been a "friendly" rivalry between the two cities of Gyumri and Yerevan. Refer to Chapter Four for details as to the differences. But also refer to Chapter Five for the continuation of this rivalry that was not so friendly after the earthquake. The main point of difference between feelings of those living in Leninakan was that the government and the people of Yerevan had forgotten that the earthquake had happened in Leninakan rather than in Yerevan. They cite the existence of many relief programs being centered in Yerevan rather than in Leninakan. The municipal government also believed that they had no control over the use of finances in their city and approval had to be gotten from people in Yerevan who were far removed from the earthquake zone and needs. Separation also came in economic terms. Leninakan was considered as a possible "free economic zone" and many feared that this would really tear it apart from Yerevan. Presently, while the rest of Armenia is dealing with the Armenian currency, the dram, in Leninakan, transactions are done in the Russian ruble.

9There was definitely a "machismo" of sorts when men talked about cars and driving, especially expressed in the pride of being able to transverse difficult road conditions. Often the stories were told by taxi drivers or by chauffeurs and one tried to out do the other.
the guys he normally hung out with. And most of these people knew me for they would tell Niko, "Stella wants to see you," even though I rarely left my name. I never knew any of their names, nor would I recognize them in the street. I would grind my teeth at the situation until Niko would show up only to tell me that the lines were down in Yerevan and therefore he could do nothing. The phone was literally our umbilical cord. Every single day we needed to know information from the ministries, all of which were centered in Yerevan, from the other USAID organizations, all of which were in Yerevan, from other rehabilitation projects, all of which were all in Yerevan, from the organization in Yerevan where we would get and send faxes to New York's home office, etc. Our project worked on several fronts: one in Leninakan, the other in Yerevan, and the third in New York. The first would not function were it not for the other two. And to connect these points was a daily struggle in creativity management of time and logistics. No phones, no electricity, no computer, no copy machine, most necessities of the job an hour-and-half away, all of which quite naturally hinder the smooth operation of a multi-million dollar project.

Because of the energy crisis resulting from a blockade by Azerbaijan of the rail lines, Armenia has gone through several years, especially winters, with the bare minimum of fuel. Translated to everyday life, this meant that factories closed down, electricity was given to homes one to four hours a day, usually in the middle of the night, and natural gas was cut off completely. Heating fuel could be bought in the streets for expensive prices and usually that would take care of heating one room in the house or office. Often, we did not have any heat.\textsuperscript{10} This usually meant wearing coats, hats and gloves not only while at work but at home as well. No place, not even top ministry offices, was excluded. Come spring, one of the vice-ministers of health jokingly referred

\textsuperscript{10}Several times, we drove around town so that we could be warmed by the heater in the car.
to his full head of hair as a surprise. He had forgotten he had hair since he had not taken his fur hat off since November. The mayor of Leninakan was constantly sick and the minister of construction in Yerevan had a four month long cold. Computers had become technological artifacts on people's desks. Having no electricity meant that one would do everything by hand.

No electricity and its consequences on one side, the work ethic in Armenia was another focal point of confusion and complexity for those who are not familiar with the way things are. Bureaucracy looms over much of everything where acquisitions, requests, information have to be signed and acknowledged by numerous individuals as well as numerous departments all of which has to be done in proper order. Practically no piece of paperwork that I had to do ever went through the maze of signatures without major stumbling blocks. People were often not found in their positions so that I could receive their signature which would indicate the green light for the paperwork to move to the next stage. A common belief was that you could find everyone at work at nine o'clock, when the work day began and at five o'clock when the work day ended. As for the time in between, it was anybody's guess. Secretaries were hardly ever informative so one would either have to give up on that day or plan strategies for another approach pattern.

Were these Armenians, therefore, as Diasporan Armenians so often referred to them, "lazy" and "not knowing what work is?" I would definitely argue that this was not the case. First and foremost, such comments are highly stereotypical with very shallow grounding. Then how would I explain the playing of computer games in offices rather than actual work during the minuscule allocation periods of electricity? Armenians would say that no one works as hard as they do. But where were they working if not in their office? In a society filled with shortages and incredibly low paying jobs, favors and acquaintances outside of the work environment are what add up to personal
achievements. In the grandest of worker's states, the Soviet Union had failed to instill a sense of pride, accomplishment and status within the confines of the office. Anyone's particular position was a means to either grant favors or to curry favors.

Deals for personal success were molded in other locales, for example, in the quiet and separated sections of restaurants. Much could be done by taking someone to a multi-houred lunch or creating a private space rather than the public one at work. All workers were at the same time by definition public servants. Yet, achievements were mainly valued in private settings. Whether it was the top official granting promotions after bribes were paid, or the college professor passing students in return for favors, or the meat factory worker who would sell "stolen" meat from the factory to his neighbors, or the jeweler who had set up a work shop in his backyard for extra money (illegal under Soviet law), they all worked and worked long hours, it just was not in the space called an office or the factory. "We are perhaps the hardest working people in the world," said one local municipal official, "just because we are not in our office, does not mean that society is not moving forward. If everyone was at work eight hours a day, then how could we feed our families and establish our homes?" Woman were notorious for leaving their positions. They would usually justify their absence from work by saying that household shopping needed to be done. Shortages of goods and fuel and difficulties of transportation made these absences a necessity. "We were not always late to work like we are today," said an elderly woman who had been given the state workers’ medal for "outstanding factory worker" decades earlier. "In Stalin's time, you wouldn't dare be late. Later on, being late once meant you were reprimanded, twice and they would fire you. It was not like it is now." Presently, money, position, personal advancement were achieved in spaces all very much away from the work environment and usually, such dealings unfolded around a table full of food.

On the one hand, there were people who used ingenuity and creativity in
establishing public and personal personae to get their jobs done and for society to function. On the other hand, there were people who were totally incompetent but who were holding positions that they were unqualified for. I came across this usually when observing secretaries of officials. Some could hardly answer the phone let alone type. In answer to my inquires as to why these people were not let go, I would get responses similar to the one given to me by the vice-mayor of Leninakan about one of his secretaries, "how can I let her go? Times are hard. She has three kids. How can I let her go?" It was simple as that. Knowing someone, whether personally or at work, meant that one had a sense of responsibility to care that outweighed work requirements, especially since salaries were being given by the state rather than by the director or the company. First and foremost on the minds of these officials was not how efficiently the job was done, but that they had created or maintained a state job for someone. "Despite her, we get things done, somehow or other," the vice-mayor concluded.

As I would recount, my daily acrobatics with bureaucracy to those around me, I would be faced with an all too familiar smile that seemed to say, "now you know what we have gone through all of our lives." They would also be quick to point out that my experiences were dwarfed by what they normally went through. As one observer commented on the contortionist positions taken by me for a particular set of day’s events, "just imagine, lots of doors open for you just because you are a foreigner. They open with much more difficulty. That is if they open for us at all."

Whether it was the harsh living conditions or the excruciating work environment, my being in Armenia at this particular time was seen as a unique endeavor on my part by those around me. In trying to understand it, they easily fell into an explanation which had nationalistic elements. They concluded that to do what I was doing meant I must be holding the good of "my people" as a paramount goal. For them, I was an Armenian who was sacrificing ("zohaberoom") a great deal, things that others would not let go of
so easily. "Eeskakan hay es do," "you are real Armenian," someone said once. I assume as opposed to a fake or an imagined Armenian. I just saw myself as a real anthropologist, perhaps I would like to go as far as a "hero of anthropology", but not as far as a "martyr for anthropology."

Myth of the Woman

By far the most intriguing of situations that I found myself in were when those who knew me tried to make gender related conclusions. In whatever role that was given to me, there was always the underlining understanding that my sex mattered. It was clear that in the majority of my interactions, sexuality and sensuality in the form of a lover or mistress or non-sensual relations in the form of sister or daughter were major constructive forces in the establishment of my identity.

As with many other things, the role that Armenian women play in society is full of paradox. Laws in Armenia as elsewhere in the Soviet Union holding fast to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism make women equal to men in all aspects of society.\(^{11}\) The Armenian take on this fundamental understanding within society puts tremendous pressure on women. Although, over 85% of women are in the work force, their responsibilities in the home as wife, mother and homemaker are no less diminished. Whether she is a top professional such as a doctor or a high ranking government official or holds jobs which have traditionally been mainly woman oriented such as teacher or secretary, she is still culturally inclined to raise a family, keep a sparkling house, entertain family and husband's friends and business associates while doing all of the

\(^{11}\)See Massell in The Surrogate Proletariate in which he outlines how the state understood that the revolution and Marxism-Leninism could best be spread through a fundamental base in society. Massell argues that the state believed, specially in Central Asia, if the role of women was changed and refigures, the revolution could much more easily be spread throughout society.
shopping and preparations herself.

In light of the lack of an abundance of goods, of convenient grocery stores and adequate electricity, cooking and heating fuels, this dual public and private nature of the average city dwelling Armenian woman is indeed complex. It was March 8, International Women’s Day, a day set aside to celebrate womanhood and is in many respects the Soviet version of both Mother’s Day and Valentine’s Day. On this day, women are congratulated and men buy women gifts. Usually the gift is flowers. Being a national holiday, it is a day when friends and family gather together and celebrate. It is the day of the woman and what does the woman do on this day? She graciously accepts the congratulations and the flowers and immediately proceeds to tend to her guests by presenting them with the feast that she has been preparing for days. Usually, one would only get a glimpse of the hostess when she would bring out another main dish or more hors d’oeuvres or the occasional peek from the corner of the kitchen acknowledging the toasts made in her honor. Women are mainly in the kitchen not because they are not allowed at the table but because they physically cannot be in both places at the same time. And hospitality and tending to one’s guests in the most lavish of ways is paramount obligation. Needless to say, most of the guests would be male for their female counterparts were at that very time accomplishing the same obligations in their own homes.

During one of these celebrations which lasted about four hours and during which my hostess only sat at the table for a total of only a half an hour, I kept inquiring, "when will you sit down?" The answer was always, "I’ll be right there, I am going to just refill this plate. Eat something, you haven’t eaten anything. Busy yourself (sbaghveer)." When I would ask the husband where she was, he would respond, "oh, she is in the kitchen, she will be right back." And so I witnessed this for years in peoples homes with all kinds of varied backgrounds. How could such a celebration of womanhood be so
male oriented? It seemed that the men were enjoying it more than the women. How did the women interpret their very tiring responsibilities of making sure that their guests were enjoying themselves, what I would call "slaving" over a stove?

According to the women asked, the answer was simple enough since they stated that enjoyment is a relative term as is the "slaving" ("thanjvel", "being tortured") over something. From those that I asked, I never heard a sense of resentment for this particular lot in life. Quite the contrary, they believed that the very fact that people took time to come to their house was "enjoyment" ("hachouik") for the women. The fact that they could entertain was "enjoyment." "What is wrong with it (inch vat a vor)," said one woman. "The house if full of people. My husband is happy and proud that he has an Armenian wife like me." Another added, "an Armenian woman is like this. Her family, her husband, her guest come before her even on a day like Women's Day." Her tone was calm and reassuring without the suggestion that she would want it any other way. "Of course I get tired, but let them enjoy themselves." She was just as puzzled by my questions as I was puzzled by her answers.

On Women's Day, just as any other time when I was given the opportunity to ask about women's roles and responsibilities, the word "woman" would often be qualified by the word "Armenian." The issue was not that they were just women but that they were Armenian women. Several times I posed the question directly, "would you be any less Armenian if you did not carry out the responsibilities of the home and hospitality, as is common?" Always, the answer to this question would come after a delay of sorts.

Well (deh), the Armenian woman will do this. We are used to it. Our bodies are strong (peenda). Russians are not like this. I have heard that in American one would be happy just to get a cup of coffee in someone's house. That is not right. An Armenian woman will not let that happen. She needs to take care of her family and her guests.

The accepted gender roles of the Armenian woman were not questioned perhaps because it was the "Armenian" versus other nationality differences that was important rather than
the male versus female differences. They were not just women, but Armenian women endowed with accepted gender and culture specific obligations. In a discussion with one of the leading members of parliament (there were only eight in 1991), she apologized for having to leave her office early:

Please be forgiving. By the time I get to the market ... and then get home and make something ... [it will be late]. The kids will be home soon and they will be hungry. Why don't you come over. You can bring your friends, anyone you want. We will sit around a table [full of food] and talk the Armenian way (haykakan dzevov).

I went knowing that in the "haykakan dzevov" I would talk more to her husband and others than with her, since she would be too busy preparing the meal.

How did I fit into this world of Armenian women? It seemed that women had an easier time understanding me as a woman even though I felt that I was so much unlike them. I never really had guests over, although this was one of the signs of a good "Armenian woman." I did manage to throw several gigantic parties which were nonetheless totally catered which meant that I did not "slave" over anything except the logistics. But that was alright and did not put into question my womanhood or my Armenianess in the least because I "was a guest" in the country.

Being a guest meant hat I should be looked after and taken care of. All of my closest women friends took it upon themselves to take care of me, "I know how difficult it is to be away from home, especially here where everything is difficult. Eat, eat some more ...," a friend once commented. For women in Armenia, I too was fulfilling my obligations as an Armenian woman: I was hospitable (in a different sort of way) and I was married (another important marker). The only point of ambiguity in their understanding of me was in the fact that I was not yet a mother. Often, the following line of questioning would occur by those who did not know me:

Armenian Woman: are you married?
SG: yes.
AW: do you have children?
SG: no.
AW: you must have just gotten married?
SG: no, twelve years ago.
AW: (after a brief pause and in a quieter tone) you know we have good
   doctors here. Go see them.

It was assumed that my not having children would only be because of physical constraints
rather than the result of a conscious decision. Even those who knew me had concerns.

   Well, we get married to have kids. If we do not have one right away, it’s
   not the same (oorish dzev a naivoum) … people will think something
different (oorish ban kmthatzen).

For Armenian women this was about the only point of vagueness in my character as a
woman. However, for men, my persona ran the gambit from an asexual sister/daughter
to a sensual mistress/lover. For men in Armenian society, I was an anomaly which
needed to be categorized in order to be understood.

   Here I was, a woman in Armenia doing things unlike the way other Armenian
women would do. First, I was married, yet I was away from my husband because of my
own choosing rather than as the result of some decision that he may have made. Second,
as an administrator involved within the construction environment, I was immersed in a
still very male-dominated field in Armenia. Third, I frequented restaurants and with men
at that. Until the early nineties, other than for foreigners who were obviously foreigners,
local restaurants were usually the domains of males, and if there were women, they
would be women of ill repute (as several wives described the scenes of what they thought
restaurants were for). In any case, it was a rare case for a husband or a male friend to
casually take their wives or girlfriends along for there was always the possibility of
fights.\textsuperscript{12}

   Fourth, I was driving a car. Although not unheard of, seeing a woman

\textsuperscript{12}Such fights could result from comments made to a woman by a man from another
table. These would be seen as an affront and cause enough for exchange of words or fists
among the men. In Yerevan, the situation changed somewhat after the earthquake. The
idea of restaurants and restaurant going changed after the needs of a growing expatriate
community were met by the opening of numerous new restaurants. These restaurants also
affected attitudes and behavior of local patrons. For more detail, see Chapter Five.
driving was still quite a sight. At the time, in Leninakan, there were only two other women drivers besides me. In Yerevan, I would tend to spot one or two here and there. However, none of the women that I knew or of anybody else that they knew, drove cars. What was even more surprising for locals was that I would drive solo to and from Leninakan and Yerevan. I had become acquainted with most of the police, "militzia," that lined the hour and half long drive between the cities. These policeman were notorious for stopping drivers without any just cause and demanding bribes. In my case, they would go out of their way to stop me, of all things, just to chat. The car was one of my accesses to the solely male world. It gave me access to car washes, to auto parts stores, mechanics, gasoline lines and parking lot attendants. I carried out whole conversations centered around automobiles. These dialogues were without exception always with men. For example, it was the wife of a close friend of mine who noticed that after a year of interacting with them, my and her husband's conversation always focused on cars. He responded by saying, "you are right, I would have never believed that I would be taking to a woman about such things." And finally, because of the car I would be out and about at all hours of the day. Women were usually home after nightfall or if out, they would be accompanied by a male companion. However, because of the nature of my work, on a regular basis, I was forced to go to the airport at all hours to meet incoming workers or incoming supplies. Through some strange twist of schedules, this always happened at around three o'clock in the morning.

Therefore, practical considerations had led me to driving and driving had led me into an aspect of the male world in Armenia. I was one of the boys, "thgherkeh." I seemed to solidify this position in society also by my ability to take in alcohol. Drinking large quantities of hard liqueur, specially cognac and vodka, strengthened my male role. Although women drink in Armenian society, it is rarely in the quantities consumed by
men. And usually, women drink cognac.\textsuperscript{13} The cognac is referred to as "damski khmeechkh", "women's drink." Men, when they mean business, drink vodka, "oghi." I too drank vodka and my liver seemed to allow large quantities of the stuff. One day, in response to his wife’s suggestion that I come look at something in the other room, an acquaintance of mine said, "no she can’t come. Us boys (thgherkeh) (showing all of the males at the table and including me in the category "boys") are drinking." He meant that his wife should not disturb the men when they were busy drinking.

The "positive" feature of my "unique" ability to drink vast quantities was that I would follow along word for word and stage by stage in the highly ritualized process of toast making. Drinking in Armenia is hardly ever drinking for the sake of drinking. Drinking is often a celebration of life. "Kenats," the word for "toast," just as in Hebrew, means "to life." The making of toasts is a means of reifying culturally significant meanings and strengthening relationships among the society.

In Armenia, toast making is a processual undertaking which is seriously adhered to in any gathering where alcohol is present. First, a "tamada," a master of ceremonies, is chosen. Usually the "tamada" is the host himself or someone else who is normally familiar with most of the people present. Then begins the system of toast making which sets a hierarchy of social relations and concepts. For example, the first toast is often made for the particular gathering, the opportunity which has brought that group of people together, a gathering that will never take place in exactly the same manner. This toasts the moment, "pahi kenatse." Then begins the entourage of toasts that may take several hours and numerous bottles to fully accomplish. There is the toast welcoming a visitor, or saying bon voyage. Then there are toasts to each individual guest during which time specific descriptions of some particular character that the guest has or a couple of words

\textsuperscript{13} Armenian cognac, produced in the Ararat Cognac Factory in Yerevan, is famous throughout the former Soviet Union and was often prized as a precious gift.
about what kind of relationship the guest and the host share are retold. Then a toast to
the host and hostess. Further on, a toast to friendship, then to women in general, then
on still more individual toasts for parents, then children, then other family members, still
further to the Armenian people and to Armenia, following this is usually the toast to the
victims of the earthquake and then the martyrs in Kharabagh, and so on.

Each toast is a story in itself. The telling of toasts is an art form sine you have
to be quite eloquent enough to describe such social situations. To forget one or the other
may be regarded as offensive and no host would want a situation like that. Although
women make toasts, they are usually made by males. Usually when a woman is
accompanied by a male, he is the one who will be making the required reciprocal toast
to the host. Being alone, I was always expected to reciprocate. Although I never was
as fully articulate as the men were, I got the job done as a good guest would and I drank
the glass of vodka to the last drop as all good men would.

In the situations dealing with cars and drinking, I was either "male" or I was an
anomaly, neither male or female, yet, articulating characteristics of both. However, I
was usually a women in most men’s understandings. First, to those closest to me, I was
a sister or daughter. I had several families who took it upon themselves to take care of
me as they would any family member, but especially a woman family member. A
particular family who has a very distant relation to my husband saw me as their daughter
and expected the obligations that a daughter would have. They often quizzed me on
where I was and gave me advice on what to do or not to do. The patriarchs reasoning
was as follows: "you are the daughter-in-law of my brother," and since you are his
daughter then you are mine as well." This lead to very frustrating situations. Usually
though, I was considered the strong willed sister more than anything else. "Koures a,"

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14 Cousins are usually referred to as siblings. In this case, however, the cousin was
a distant cousin.
"she is my sister," they would say in introducing me to others. And reciprocally, if I introduced them as "my friend," it would seem offensive, so often I would say, "egebors nehman a," "he is like a brother" which seemed to appease everyone. In general, addressing or describing people is usually done with familial orientations. "Kour jan," or "akhber jan," "sister dear" or "brother dear" is a common way of addressing people whom one may not even know and this form of address is meant to be endearing. Individuals often speak of their cousins as they were siblings and only after further questioning do they distinguish between "halal kour," "real sister," and "morkouri aghchik," "cousin" or actually "daughter of mother's sister."

My existence there could only make sense if I too was a part of a family, thereby a sister or a daughter. Almost all of my close male friends confided in me that whether they thought of me as a sister or not, one thing was quite clear from them. The insights that they were sharing with me about their male worlds they had rarely shared with other women. Once again my being a woman was sort of anomalous category. One friend finally said one day in the most matter of fact tone, "you a good friend, too bad you are a woman."

Contrary to my being seen as a family member was the understanding that I was a sexual being. Several factors fed into this particular view. First there was the notoriety of Armenian men in the Soviet Union as being womanizers. Then there was my particular situation of being on my own confounded by my being a foreigner. In the Soviet context, although, I am unaware of any studies on the topic, there was a common image of Armenian men as well as the other trans-Caucasian men as being constantly involved with women other than their wives and especially with Russian women. Armenians justified this image of their men as party-ers and big time spenders by saying that this type of action was seen as appealing to Russian women who were thought to lead less colorful lives. Armenian women described Armenian men as having charisma
and money and that is why Russian women would be attracted to them. Extra-martial affairs for Armenian men were thought to be common-place especially when they traveled in other republics. Having mistresses in Armenia was also thought to be common. In general, male or female, opinions usually were similar when talking about a divorced woman, a woman’s extramarital affair or a woman who was sleeping around. They agreed that these were highly unacceptable behaviors. Such a woman would be considered a "lirp," "easy," a "boz," "whore." For men, having affairs with these women would not be an issue; however, marrying them would.

In such an atmosphere, flirtation among the sexes is very widespread. My exposure to flirtatious behavior was almost always in public offices of officials and almost never in private homes. Usually, flirtation is subtle and involves both parties. When it is more direct, it is commonly instigated by the male to which the female could either not respond or respond to very meekly. Flirtation consisted of certain looks and gestures as well as speech. Surprisingly, I found that flirtatious behavior actually enhanced my working situation. Of course, in so doing I had to make sure that I did not cross the fine line between a "good, respectable" woman and an "easy," "lirp" woman. In my particular form of flirtation, I would keep my decorum constrained and serious, yet I would with gestures of the eyes and smiles and subtle laughter let my male counterpart continue with his flirtatious behavior. In flirtation, it was necessary to change the pitch of my voice as well. In addition, I would be part of the game to make several complements as to the look or the character of the male. Halfway through my stay in Armenia, I made the conscious decision to wear tighter clothes and shorter skirts. Originally, I had made the very opposite decision to wear looser, longer clothing. So often, in business meetings I would find the males glimpsing at my legs. My gestures would allow them to know that I knew fully well what they were doing while trying not to counteract it. This was the flirtation game. Often, this flirtation was harmless indeed
and I did not come across women who would find it offensive. "The Armenian man is like that. He thinks he is a big deal," said one woman who accepted flirting as a way of life for Armenian men.

Although it was harmless enough, the obvious extreme of flirtatious behavior was worrisome to say the least. Fueling this extreme behavior was Soviet Armenian beliefs of sexual mores in the West and specially in the United States. While it is true that sexual practices are a little more relaxed in the United States, most of what Armenians thought of American sexual mores came from Hollywood versions. In short, American women were seen as quite open sexually, ready to give and take from whomever, whenever. My "Armenianness" and my being a "sister" saved me from a great deal of this. I even took to wearing my wedding ring, a habit which I do not have in the States. Even so, explicit sexual advances occurred often enough and mainly among men who I was working with. In a couple of situations, I got away using actual physical force.

Although behavior like this is not in any way unique to Armenia, what I think made it memorable was the context in which sexual advances would be articulated. For example, the building of our rehabilitation center involved me in constant situations of negotiation with males who had to sign over limited resources to our projects. I was never told that my cause would be advance if I gave in to sexual favors. However, the pressure came in another manner. When the project would be given some sort of allocation, I would hear the qualifier, "I am giving it because you are there," or "I am giving it to you ... I spit on anything else (tkats em oorish bani vra)."

All of the above mentioned situations make sense in a society which functions on highly familial lines. Making someone familiar means making that person part of the family, whether that is being a sister, or a daughter or a mistress/wife. As discussed in
another section, the joke of needing "kh,ts,beh"\textsuperscript{15} which is an acronym for "in-law, acquaintance, relative" to get anywhere in Armenian society holds true. Business associates do not cut the bill: family members do. Everyone becomes family. "Koor jan (sister dear), I'll do it for you," is heard anywhere from the vegetable seller, to the office worker, to the head of construction, to one's closest friend.

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS SOCIAL ARBITRATOR

There was one other prominent role that I played in Armenia that was different than "observer anthropologist." Perhaps as a result of my being socially conscious or being socially elitist, while in the field, I often found myself in position to make cultural translations and representations. As such, I would be a bridge between the Armenians with who I worked and their American counterparts. By this I mean that I would either undertake extensive explanation of social issues in the West by concentrating on what I thought would made sense for the Armenian. Or I would deliberately interpret words or concepts used based on what I understood to be meaningful for the individual people at the negotiating table and as such translate the speech.

The first situation was common place from the very moment I set foot in Armenia. Armenians had images of American life that were a mixture of years of Sovietization and Hollywood. These images were confounded by glowing reports sent back by recent Armenian immigrants to the United States. In a sort of a reversal of the repatriate fortunes, now the descriptions of rosy streets and incredibly wonderful society devoid of any ills was no longer being told of Soviet Armenia but of Los Angeles (where the vast majority of Armenians immigrated). Most of the times I merely listened to these essentialized images: "everyone is happy in the States," "everyone is considered a

\textsuperscript{15}This is a word play on the acronym KGB.
person in society," "everyone who wants a job can have one," "I would live like a king on a 1000 dollars a month salary ... imagine, I only make 10 dollars here." The United States was some sort of fantasy land for the Armenians. "I cannot imagine for it is like a fairy tale," was a comment often heard.

Fueling such images was the obvious lack of knowledge as to the cost of things in the United States: the cost of living, of insurance and of mortgages, of health care costs, social vices and ills, of crime rates, of drug use and of social relations and family ties. After an initial silence, I found myself engaging in conversations about matters that I only had fleeting knowledge of. Yet, I felt that even the slightest of knowledge, however limited it was, was necessary to counteract the incredibly rosy picture they had of the United States. I justified my involvement in such conversation by saying first, that I was forced to do so in such situations because it was expected of me to talk about my society and second, by a moral reasoning of sorts. Such images of the States were affecting everyday life in Armenia. To immigrate or not immigrate, to resent one's life in Armenia or not to resent, to be satisfied with one's job or social standing, to criticize Armenian and Soviet society were all part of a daily ritual and were all influenced by perceived images of life in the United States. I could not help but often be vocal about my understandings or comparisons of life in Armenia versus the United States. I do not worry that this was culturally elitist for I would always qualify my statements and limit them to what I knew. What I worried about most was to what extent I made changes in what I was there to study. This is the crux of the ethical dilemma of the anthropologist in the field.

Perhaps making full use of my anthropological background also put me in delicate situations. Often I would be asked to act as a translator at meetings or negotiations between Americans and the Armenians. On several occasions, I found myself translating not verbatim but based on culturally significant categories, categories that were defined
by me. For example, if the American was a woman, I would often curtail the sexual innuendoes or the flirtation. In Armenian, I would often use culturally specific statements like "tsaveth thanem"\(^{16}\) or "akhpor pes ara," "do it like a brother." At a time when there was heightened tension in Armenian minds as to "Western arrogance,"\(^ {17}\) I would soften the American's harsh demanding and accusative tone. Therefore, I would translate based on interpretation and I would interpret based on culturally significant categories. Did that make me a good translator or a bad anthropologist directly involving myself in cultural images and changes in them?

CONCLUSION

I find the last question as not too worrisome or difficult to answer. I maintain that one of the major requirements of being an anthropologist to be highly culturally sensitive. To be a sensitive anthropologist takes not only a theoretical background but also takes means that the anthropologist must truly immerse him/herself within that which is called culture and society, in as many aspects or in as many situations or roles. Only in studying the fragmented "I's" or "selves" can an anthropologist begin to interpret how culture constructs itself in meaningfully significant ways. In trying to understand my numerous, often conflicting, "I's," I was able to view Armenian cultural paradoxes as they also emerged in my definitions.

The self-reflexivity of the preceding pages is not meant to be a narcissistic endeavor but an endeavor to show how not only the subject being studied is fluid but the person doing the research is moving through fluid constructions of personae. It is qualifying the subject matter in the fullest of ways. Both the anthropologist and the

\(^{16}\)See Chapter Four.

\(^{17}\)See Chapter Five.
subjects of study are involved totally in this interplay. In volatile environments, the anthropologist cannot help but be involved, to fully participate without fears that this will undermine the research, taint it or change it. As long as the anthropologist is aware of these situations, the study of these processes will prove to add worthwhile dimensions to one's work.
Chapter Three / Repatriates: Returning to Places Where One
Has Never Been Before

The following are three anecdotes among numerous others related to repatriates
who immigrated to Soviet Armenia from abroad and were faced with new forms of
contradictory meanings in their new lives with their compatriots:

The repatriate is asked why he wants to immigrate from Soviet Armenia.
He answers that he is afraid that the Soviet Union is about to fall apart.
That it cannot function in the way that it has and will soon disintegrate.
So the other person comments that if the Soviet Union will fall apart then
why does the repatriate not just stay. The repatriate answers that he is
afraid that the Soviet Union is very stable and it will never change its
way.

A repatriate is talking to a radio announcer, and says in a Western
Armenian dialect: It is the time of glasnost and perestroika and such.
Everyone is talking about their problems and things that have happened
to them. Can I not have some time to say what I have to say?
The radio announcer, a bit perturbed agrees and puts the repatriate on
radio. He introduces the repatriate's talk hour in the following way: Dear
audience will now present the "this is a government-this is not a
government," "this is a country-this is not a country" talk hour.

The following is a word play on the Eastern Armenian's pronouncing of
the word "drell" meaning "drill" and the Western Armenian's pronouncing
of the word "drell" meaning "to fart": A repatriate neighbor comes over
and asks in a Western dialect that he wants a "drell." His neighbor says,
well go ahead and "drell." The neighbor says that no, no, that he wants
a "drell" to stick in the wall socket. The neighbor says that that is a bit
strange but he can do it if he wants. The repatriate says that no, no, that
he wants a "drell" to put a whole in the wall. The local Armenian is
flabbergasted. "My goodness," he says, "I've been drelling all my life
and I cannot do that. Now you come and tell me that you can do it such
that you will put a whole in the wall?!?"

The impact of the events of the late 1940's was to prove later to be one of the
most influential in modern Armenian history. During the years of 1946 and 1948, there
was a massive influx of Armenians took place from various countries into the territory
of Soviet Armenia. Although immigration into Soviet Armenia is not limited only to this
time period, the three year span of events were unique for several reasons. First, by the
end of 1948, close to 90,000 individuals had made the move to Armenia. This figure was not only unprecedented for Armenia but also for all of the Soviet Union. Second, the demographics of the immigrants differed from those who had come before and those who were to follow. Third, the amount of thought and organization that went into this structured program of repatriation on part of the Soviet Armenia government attested to the changes and needs of Stalin’s Soviet system and the Soviet nationality policy. Immigration of this scale and for these purposes of non-Soviet individuals into the Soviet Union was indeed a unique event. Therefore, the repatriation program was to affect the shape of Soviet Armenian experience for decades to come. Furthermore, the repatriation program was also indicative of the directions that the great Soviet social experiment of the twentieth century was headed.

The influx of Armenians into Soviet Armenia had begun in the early 1920’s and was to continue well into the early 1980’s. The immigrants have always been referred to as the "repatriates" and the events of the late 1940’s as the "Great Repatriation." Webster defines the word "repatriation" as "returning to one’s own country." Similar parallels in definition are found in the etymology of the Armenian word "hairenadartsutian." "Hairenadartsutian" is literally the turning towards ("darnal," verb meaning "to turn") the fatherland ("hairenik," "hair" meaning "father"). To refer to the immigrants as "hairenadarts," "repatriate," as the Soviets did, was to already define and give meaning to a whole background for these particular individuals.

And yet, this was a background that virtually none of the immigrants had. They were not "returning" to a land that they had left behind for some reason, some time in the past. They were coming to a land that for the most part had been totally detached from them. The territory, delineated as Soviet Armenia, was only a fraction of the lands of historic Armenia. The last time that Armenia was united under one kingdom was centuries ago. Since then, there had been principalities, but mainly Armenians subject
peoples of great empires. The territory of Soviet Armenia had been for centuries under the Persian Empire. In 1836, a majority of these lands came under the Russian Empire. This area of Armenia has been known as Eastern Armenia. Western Armenia incorporated most of the lands of historic Armenia. This territory was invaded by the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century, and over the following centuries, by other Turkic peoples until eventually the Ottoman Empire was established. Before the Seljuks, Armenia was under the Byzantine Empire and parts were ruled by the Arabs. In the twentieth century, from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union, Eastern Armenia became the only territory within historic Armenia which remained Armenian. And the Armenians living on this land, along with Soviet support, invited others, in foreign lands who called themselves Armenian to join them.

The repatriates were to leave the diaspora of foreign places, foreign people, foreign languages and foreign traditions for those that were to be endearingly familiar. The word in Armenia which describes these "foreign-nesses" is "othar." They would not just leaving "different" people, they were leaving the "othar," the "other" (unlike oneself), the foreign. They were coming to where everything was to be "harazath," "familiar." "Harazath" is also a term used to denote a family member or used as a term of close relations as that with a very close friend. This exodus from foreign lands was paradoxically being termed a return. The return was obviously not a return to a physical space but a return to ideal and meaningful space. Otherness was relative for these new immigrants for they joining others who spoke a different, which are at times mutually incomprehensible, dialects of Armenian, others who had not personally gone through the Genocide, which was a significant event in the lives of most repatriates\(^1\) and others who

\(^1\)The majority of Iranian Armenians were not directly affected by the Genocide. However, without fail, the Armenians of other Middle Eastern countries, as well as those in Eastern Europe and France, were affected by the Genocide.
were already well into the third decade of one of the most incredible social experiments of Soviet cultural construction and transformation.

The idea that these people were repatriates and were returning was not only espoused by the Soviet organizers and the official Soviet propaganda but also by the immigrants themselves. They were all returning to the "homeland" which in Armenian is actually the "fatherland", "hairenik." Sovietization or more specifically Russification went one step further and made the process yet more familiar by exporting the Russianism "mat rodina"\(^2\) into Armenian. Soviet Armenia was no longer just the fatherland, "hairenik," but was "mair hairenik," the "mother fatherland." As such, the repatriates were to return to the family and to the most familiar of all family situations, that of the embrace of both parents. This originally Russian saying made sense to the Armenians because of their already existing cultural stress on family orientations as being very meaningful.\(^3\)

THE THREE PERIODS OF REPATRIATION

Repatriation to Soviet Armenia occurred in three distinctive periods. The first period was between 1921 and 1939, when over 42,000 Armenians came to the newly

\(^2\)"Mat rodina" is Russian for "homeland", but with a distinct use of the word "mat" meaning "mother," therefore, the actual translation is "motherland."

\(^3\)There are other imports into Armenia from Russian that point to the effects of Sovietization and more particularly Russification. Noteworthy is the Soviet Armenian way of addressing individuals. It is directly taken from the use of first name and patronymic by the Russian communists when addressing someone. Therefore, the use of last names, a common practice for Armenians, was changed to the use of patronymic. Sometimes, the patronymic would be Armenianized for example, Armenovich would be Armeni, which means "belonging to Armen." The Armenian word adopted for "comrade" was "unker" which is the same word for "friend." Another example is the adoption of the Russian "neechevo" which is a common response to "how are you?" It means "fine" but literally, it means "nothing." Armenians have adopted this term by the use of the Armenian "vochinch" also meaning "nothing" and use it to mean "fine." To non-Soviet Armenian speakers, this literally does mean nothing and is often a point of confusion and discussion.
formed Soviet republic. Half of that number arrived in Armenia between the years 1921 and 1925. The second period of repatriation also known as the "Great Repatriation," occurred between the years 1946 and 1949, with over 90,000 people arriving in Armenia by 1948. In 1949, the "Great Repatriation" and the Soviet organized propaganda for it officially came to an end. The third and final repatriation period spans twenty years. It started in 1962 and for all practical purposes ended in 1982. During this period, only about 32,000 people "returned" to the "mother fatherland."

In Soviet Armenian historiography, very little literature is devoted to the process of repatriation. With the exception of a couple of scholarly articles and a small section in the Soviet Armenia Encyclopedia, the only substantial work is that of historian H. Meliksetian in his book Hairenik-Spuirk Arenchutiunner ev Hairendartsutiu (Fatherland-Diaspora Relations and Repatriation), written in 1985. Meliksetian mainly reiterates facts and figures and other information found in Soviet archives. Half of the book is devoted to the very Soviet literary style of grandiose and verbose explanations of the selfless achievements of the Soviet government and the its very positive intentions and effects. It is only the other half which is a concise listing of figures and a wonderful source of short glimpses at statements by famous people or from periodicals of the time which enable the reader to see the mindsets of both the repatriates and the Soviets welcoming them.

For the purposes of this study and to explore how culture mediates contradictory difference, a fourth and most recent influential period also needs to be mentioned. This period spans the years 1988 to 1992 when as a direct result of the Kharabagh Movement and the war in Azerbaijan, hundreds of thousands of Armenians came to Armenia from Azerbaijan. These most recent of arrivals to Armenia straddle the period of the old

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4Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia, Volume 6, pp. 207-209.
Soviet society and the new emerging independent republic. They arrived at the end of the Soviet period when all Soviet peoples and the republics were living their last days of Soviet "harmony" and "brotherly love" and in the wake of both social and cultural strife between these same Soviet nationalities and the independence of the republics.

This latest group of immigrants are referred to as refugees rather than repatriates since their arrival is marked by the war. Their numbers reached over 300,000 in a two year period. Like those who had come before, for centuries, these Armenians had had their roots outside of Soviet Armenia albeit within the Soviet Union. They were a part of what was privately called and officially rejected as the "inner diaspora." Labeled as refugees who were escaping a modern war, these Armenians were to experience similarities with those who had been labeled repatriates decades earlier.

Nationality Policy in a Soviet State

The repatriation program of the late 1940's was an organized effort on the part of the Soviet Armenian government and was promoted by the government in Moscow. Why would Soviet planners deem the use of funds and the creation of a network of governmental agencies to promote a very nationalistic event as justifiable. After all, as it is common belief, the new Soviet society was working to shake off the "chains" and "evils" of nationalism. For the Soviets, "brotherhood among peoples" and the eventual disintegration of nationalistic tendencies was to lead to a better social system. However, the opposite was taking place in Armenia.

Ironically, the official Soviet line was not only accepting that Armenians were different but was also creating the means for these differences to be manifested, espoused

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5The "inner diaspora" is used to refer to those Armenians not living in Soviet Armenia, but living in other republics in the Union. Official Soviet propaganda refused to call this a diaspora since they were all living in the same country. By the late 1980's the inner diaspora consisted of close to three million Armenians.
and developed. Literally, hundreds of thousands of Armenians abroad were being told that they could remain Armenian under the new Soviet system. But furthermore, the implication was that the only salvation and future the Armenians could ever have as an "azg" (nationality or ethnicity) was within the borders of Soviet Armenia. If one looks at popular Western literature during the Cold War, the inherent contradiction in this support by the Soviet government becomes problematic. In these readings, Marxism-Leninism's tenants quite explicitly left little room for nationalist tendencies let alone full blown advocacy of nationalist ideas among one of its republics. How could this seemingly contradictory event be explained?

What was happening in Soviet Armenia most certainly cannot be explored without turning to the Soviet nationality policy in general. Unlike most previous scholarship, in the recent article "The USSR as Communal Apartment," Yuri Slezkine argues that Soviet nationality policy was in actuality nationalist in nature and served to differentiate rather than make similar Soviet nationalities. Slezkine's argument deserves mention at length since his is in many ways a fresh approach to Soviet nationality issues and serves as an appropriate background for the Armenian case. He begins his argument with the fact that in the Soviet Union institutionalized ethnoterritorial federalism categorized the population according to "their biological nationalities." Furthermore,

the 'Great Transformation' of 1928-1932 turned into the most extravagant celebration of ethnic diversity that any state had ever financed; the 'Great Retreat' of the mid-1930's reduced the field of 'blossoming nationalities' but called for an ever more intensive cultivation of those that bore fruit;

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<sup>7</sup> Also for comparisons to other institutionalized ethnoterritorial societies among the multi-ethnic empires, one can look at the millet system of the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid movement of the Persian Empire, perhaps even Austro-Hungarian federalism.
and the Great Patriotic War [WWII] was followed by an ex cathedra explanation that class was secondary to ethnicity and that support of nationalism in general ... was a sacred principle of marxism-leninism.\textsuperscript{8}

In this balance of socialism and nationalism, both Lenin and Stalin were engineering the Soviet Union to be "national in form" and in form only. There was no question that the content of the new Union was to be purely socialist. Form versus content was a way to avoid a contradiction in terms.

According to Slezkine, Lenin and Stalin believed that a society "socialist in content" could only be established if it was embarrassed within national traditions.\textsuperscript{9} They saw that this new world order had to adapt to the distinct local and national requirements if it were to take hold. In other words, it needed to be translated literally and figuratively for the native, the ethnic, the national within the Soviet boundaries to comprehend and to apply. For Lenin it was not only desirable but also a necessity that the form of the new Union be diverse and therefore national. National cultures were to be fostered. National autonomies, national schools, national languages and national cadres were to be created so that "the Bolsheviks would overcome national distrust and reach national audiences."\textsuperscript{10} There was a proliferation of ethnic (national) bureaucracies, local national party cells and governmental agencies, and other national institutions such as in academia or the arts.

Within the nationality policy a distinction was made between the oppressor-nation nationalism (i.e., pre-Revolutionary Russian empire and its use of "great-power chauvinism") and the oppressed-nation nationalism (that of the new Soviet Union,

\textsuperscript{8}Slezkine, p. 414.

\textsuperscript{9}See the references mentioned in Footnote 6. In addition, Massell, The Surrogate Proletariat, presents an interesting application of the nationality policy through changing women’s roles.

\textsuperscript{10}Slezkine, p. 420.
"legitimate" and "transitory"). In the formulation of the new Soviet state, the nationalism of tsarist Russia which condemned all "non-Great Russians" to a stateless, cultural-less, backward void had to be alleviated. Bringing the revolutionary society to these peoples was to be the goal of the party. "Backwardness" among the people which would lead to exploitation was to be replaced by cultural revival which would lead to a communist society. To reach these goals, the party was to:

a) develop and strengthen their own Soviet statehood in a form that would correspond to the national physiognomy of these peoples; b) introduce their own courts and agencies of government that would function in native languages and consist of local people familiar with the life and mentality of the local population; c) develop their own press, schools, theaters, local clubs and other cultural and educational institutions in native languages.\footnote{Ibid, p. 423.}

Lenin called for much more sensitivity to the peoples who had been oppressed by the Great Russians by giving them more autonomy and more concessions.

Language, left to the autonomy of the republics, had become the key motivating factor in the implementation of the Soviet nationality policy. By the use of the local national language to promulgate the tenants of the Soviet society, the previously oppressed peoples were to achieve a higher standard of economic, social and political life in a shorter span of time since the revolution would be presented in native idioms. To begin the massive task of defining over 100 different nationalities which made up almost fifty percent of the population,\footnote{See Horak for a listing of scholarly literature on the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union.} ethnographers of the time began to rely more and more on language markers. Other markers such as material culture, religion-as-culture, clan genealogies and topography were also considered in the final shape of the ethnoterritorial and administrative units of the Union.\footnote{Slezkine, p. 429.} Ethnographers began to tackle new terms such
as "ethnos (ethnic)," "narody (peoples)," "narodnosti (also peoples)," "natsionalnosti (nationalities)," "natsii (nations)" and "plemena (tribes)." Demarcations were made and the peoples within the demarcated borders were encouraged to fully develop autonomous cultures and, in particular, their native languages. National diversity and separateness were seen as a paradoxical means of achieving greater unity within the Union. The Soviets figured that diversity in such "non-essential" areas of language and culture, in other words diverse nationalities, would not stand in contradiction to the Sovietization of the Union.

By the end of the 1930's, the massive mosaic that had been formulated along the lines of diversity-leading-to-unity was getting out of hand. As a result, new policies led to drastic cutbacks of nationality units (local soviets, schools, etc.). However, at the same time, those nationalities and "ethnic groups that had their own republics and their own extensive bureaucracies were actually told to redouble their efforts at building distinct national cultures."

According to the new party line, all officially recognized Soviet nationalities, and in grandiose scale, the established republics were supposed to have their own nationally defined 'Great Traditions' that needed to be protected, perfected and, if need be, invented by specially trained professionals in specially designated institutions. Histories were written, national languages purified, national genealogies invented. From identity cards noting nationalities to ethnic quotas to the celebrations and festivals of 'great traditions' and great artisans and thinkers among the nationalities, the Soviet Union became a massive community of differentiation.

Under Lenin and later under Stalin, national aspirations were encouraged and

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14See the Great Soviet Encyclopedia for clear definitions and distinctions of these terms.

15Slezkin, p. 445.

16Ibid, p. 447.
endowed with financial and political support. Throughout the early decades of the Soviet Union, the effort was made to define, preserve and enhance national units. The established republics became the greatest benefactors of this policy. Specifically, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, which was at that time (and continues to this day) the most homogeneous of national units.

Armenia Enters the Soviet World

In the 1920's, when Armenia became a part of the Soviet Union, it became caught between Soviet modernization and nativization (korenizatsii, "rooting") policies. Armenia was not only in a dismal economic state, but it was also, in a peculiar demographic situation. In 1920, the Armenian population within the borders that were to become Soviet Armenia numbered only 720,000 with almost fifty percent starved and diseased refugees escaping the Genocide. Over ninety percent were peasants. Therefore, in Armenia, Soviet modernization meant urbanization and a full scale program was begun to develop cities and towns, in particular to plan the capital of the republic in Yerevan. At the time, Yerevan was a city of 30,000 and mainly constructed of adobe style mud homes. The much larger and more established city of Alexandrapol (later to be named Leninakan, and yet later, Gyumri), where there was already a core of Armenian intellectuals and which was one of the roots of the revolution, was passed over because of its close proximity to the Soviet border with Turkey. The Soviet Union was financially supporting this urban modernization. In general, Soviet control over this


18 See Lanne and Bliss for details on the Genocide and the historical events leading to it in 1915.

19 See Chapter Five for an explanation of these name changes.
territory was welcomed. It is common belief among Armenians that Armenia would not exist today if it had not become a part of the Soviet Union. The belief is that without Russian and Soviet defense, they would have been totally annihilated by the Turks. Sovietization was their salvation since it brought an end to the wars and to the possibility of continued Genocide.

Along with the economic advancement and urbanization, the Soviets provided for the Armenians a means of regrouping and renationalizing their territory. At that time, the vast majority of Armenians lived outside of the boundaries of the republic. More than half of the population in the Georgian capital of Tblisi was Armenian. As a result of the Genocide, hundreds of thousands of Armenians had been displaced from the Ottoman Empire to numerous countries. In addition to these other countries, Soviet Armenia became a refuge for those escaping Turkish troops. Furthermore, Armenian intellectuals from Tblisi and Baku came to settle in Soviet Armenia.

A new urban population was being formed in Armenia from very disparate elements. Speaking different dialects, bringing varied customs, foods, and historical experiences, these immigrants melded together to form the first generation of the new Soviet Armenian nation. In a real physical sense, this represented the renationalization of Armenia.20

As historian R. Suny describes, the twenties was a period of "cultural renaissance" which made "Armenia more Armenian." Re-nationalization became a complex blend of modernity and tradition, a culture creating its definition and boundaries while in constant social and economic flux.

Also during this time, education was a key for developing the new republic. Schools, universities and academies of science were opened and, for the first time since the middle ages, the Armenian language once again became a language of science. Armenian cultural institutions were established and the arts were promoted. Party and

20Suny, p. 146.
government leadership positions were almost exclusively held by Armenians.

The 1920's was a time of tremendous change a completely new economic, political and cultural infrastructures were created to meet the demands of this developing Armenian nation. At times, such modernization was articulate within a traditional idiom. For example, the modern capital of Armenia, Yerevan, was built along traditional lines. Yerevan was being completely designed by Tamanian and being built at a feverish pace. Yerevan was to eventually to have a population of 250,000; and was designed to be a monument to the greatness of the Armenian past while at the same time being a symbol of a revitalized future. In the Soviet tradition of grandeur (i.e., the bigger the better), Yerevan was to have a main massive square, which would be a place of gathering and celebrating greatness. From there, the rest of the city would radiate outward. The architectural design had ancient Armenian motifs and the indigenous tuf stone was used to give the city its unique "Armenian" feel. This was to be a grand modern Armenian city at the foot of the 2700 year old Yerebuni fortress, parts of which have survived to date. The opera and concert hall, numerous theaters, the academy of science were placed at the heart of the city. Tamanian encoded this new Yerevan with Armenian pasts. In his designs, each building is a testament to grand pasts since each building is full of reliefs that borrow from ancient manuscripts and 1000 year old churches. Tamanian's Yerevan was to be as Armenian as possible. And what better locale than on the edge of the Ararat valley with a magnificent view of Mount Ararat on one side and Mount Aragats on the other side. Ironically, Mount Ararat is situated just 40 kilometers

21However, over the next 50 years, the population of Yerevan was to swell to over 1,200,000. Yerevan spread in all directions and the newer buildings did not even come close to the vision and the character of Tamanian's Yerevan. Although the use of the distinctive tuf stone continued, these buildings became stark high-rises and products of a massive push to house people as quickly as possible. See also Chapter Five for more on the construction sector and the Soviet period.
west of the city within the Turkish border.  

The twenties were also witness to the state-organized formulation of the arts. The Opera opened; theaters produced the works of Armenian writers. It was a time of relative freedom in the creativity of the arts as the arts began to develop their own Armenian roots. Writers and artists were encouraged to create new canvases and new texts. Saryan, the painter, saw beauty and color in the Armenian landscape. H. Tumanian, the writer, found laughter and allegory in fairytales and fables with distinct Armenian flavors. Altounyan, the performance artist, elevated the simple steps of a village dance to grand choreographic productions with extravagant costumes that were to be danced on stages worldwide. As in the case of the State Dance Ensemble, many of the national re-productions were a combination of the old and new in society. Although its basic steps were taken from old Armenian dances in-the-round ("shrijpar" or "kochari"), the eventual presentations were blended with classical ballet. There had been no prior history of ballet in Armenia.

Also during the twenties, significant changes took place as to the role of the Armenian language. The Ararat valley dialect of Armenian, which in relative terms was spoken by most of the people in the territory, was formalized and became the official language of the new republic. And as such, Eastern Armenian was elevated to the level of national language. The use of this dialect of Armenian which is also known as Eastern Armenian posed very complicated and delicate tensions between Armenians of the Diaspora and of the Armenians in Soviet Armenia. The Armenian language became a defining marker for identity those outside as well as those within its boundaries. Eastern Armenian had become the official language of Armenia; however, all of the refugees and most of the repatriates spoke Western Armenian. With variations in

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\(^{22}\)See Chapter Five for an exploration of the paradoxical role that Mount Ararat plays.
pronunciation and vocabulary and with slight differences in grammar, these two dialects of Armenian can, at times, be mutually incomprehensible. Until that time, the only place that Eastern Armenian was spoken in the Diaspora was mainly in the Iranian communities. Until the Genocide, these communities comprised the largest concentration of Armenians outside of historic Armenia. Eastern Armenian was the language of the writer Abovian who in the mid-1880's for the first time put the vernacular into textual form. The vernacular was much simpler than classical Armenian ("grabar"), which was almost exclusively the preserve of the church. To promote literacy in Soviet Armenia, a group of experts developed a new orthography and a new way of pronouncing the 38 letter alphabet which is based on sound rather than names for the letters. Western Armenian, the language of the educated in Constantinople and later of the Middle Eastern diasporan communities, remained closer to classical Armenian and therefore relatively more difficult. Neither dialect was free of foreign influences. Eastern Armenian made use of Russian and Persian words in everyday speech as Western Armenian made use of Turkish and Arabic words. The debates as to which is the "true" Armenian language continue to this day. However, much of the debate is politically based on present day internal Armenian factionalism.

One factor that is beyond debate is the fact that Eastern Armenian as the official language of Soviet Armenia is also the language of schooling, literature, the arts, sciences and government. Since Sovietization, a prolific amount of literature has been produced in Eastern Armenian. And whether in Armenia or the Diaspora, a majority of Armenians speak Easter Armenian rather than Western. Not since the fifth century had the Armenian language been used so extensively to produce literature. At that time, the

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23 After much debate about this new orthography being impractical and too distant from its origins, a new orthography system was developed in the mid-1940's which was closer to classical orthography and it is still in use today. However, only Armenians in Soviet Armenia use this orthography.
language used was classical Armenian and now, Eastern Armenian became the new, revised, rejuvenated, re-nativized too for cultural reconstruction of identity.

By the early 1930's, drastic changes had to be made in the economy to accommodate Soviet modernization. In the early 1920's, only one-tenth of the Armenian population could be considered proletarian. Close to 90 percent were peasants. The political freedom within which most peasants farmed their lands in the twenties gave way to massive, controlled collectivization. By 1930, two-thirds of the peasant households were collectivized. Modernity also meant bringing electricity to the republic, several hydroelectric plants, canals and irrigation projects were begun. Manpower for these projects was needed and was found within the ranks of the refugees flooding into Armenia. On the other hand, these same refugees were placing a strain on the resources of a resourceless nascent republic since most of the refugees were starved, diseased and homeless. In any case, as the pre-revolutionary commercial bourgeoisie was being phased out, these refugees along with others were becoming a part of the new industrial working class.

Since the twenties, the Armenian government has been distinctly homogeneously run by Armenian officials. The revolution in the area was itself spearheaded by Armenian intellectuals in Tbilisi and Baku. Many of these revolutionary elite came to Armenia and took on party positions and became heads of government bodies. The newly educated and skilled refugee and peasant also joined the ranks of the political hierarchy. Therefore, very rapidly, a new Soviet-trained political and intellectual elite emerged in Armenia.

With this dramatic backdrop of the twenties, 43,000 refugees sought Soviet Armenia as a refuge and countless unrecorded others came from the various Soviet

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republics to make Armenia home. The rallying cry for the caravans of families flooding into Armenia was "depi thun, depi hairinik, depi Hayastan," "towards home, towards the motherland, towards Armenia" and also "depi averiats erkir," "towards devastated country." For the first time in the millennium long Armenian history, Armenians were moving en masse towards a physical locale which represented not merely a haven from persecution and Genocide, but more importantly, an Armenian haven that was no longer "othar," "different, foreign." In the years following the Genocide of 1915, Armenians who had been deported or had managed to escape the Ottoman Empire had scattered throughout the Middle East in territories including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Iraq and Egypt. Some came to Iran where the community was the oldest Armenian Diasporic community in the world, dating back four centuries to the time of Shah Abbas. A substantial number made their way to Bulgaria. Eastern Armenia, which was to become in part Soviet Armenia was still in the hands of the Russian empire. Following the Russian revolution, Armenia was forced to follow along the lines of its Transcaucasian neighbors, Georgia and Azerbaijan, and declare itself independence. Before independence, Armenians had been fighting on the borders with Kemalist troops and for the most part losing ground. Armenians escaping the battles were pouring into Yerevan which was also being threatened by Turkish troops. The decisive battle of Sardarabad in 1920 stopped the Turks right at the door of Yerevan and paved the way for independence.

Armenia lived through a tumultuous two year period of independence. There was bitter internal conflict between the ruling Dashnak party and the revolutionary elite.

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25 For a look at the period of independence, see Hovannisian, Armenia on the Road to Independence, also The Republic of Armenia. Volume I. For the Transcaucasian connections, see Transcaucasia, edited by Suny.

26 See Hovannisian (1967).
There was pressure from the Russian civil war. There was internal economic chaos. There was lack of support from the major powers. There were secret dealings and negotiations of concessions between the government and its staunch enemy, the Kemalist Turkish government. The situation imploded and an internationally unrecognized independence was lost. A Soviet state was declared in 1921. To say that the social, economic, political condition of this new Soviet territory was grave would be an understatement. Given this situation, one is left to wonder as to why people would leave the newly formed diasporan communities and come to Armenia and why the newly formed government would accept them.

The Russian revolution and Armenia's subsequent involvement in it had energized the Armenian intellectual elite. They romanticized and idealized the tenets of a new society while never losing sight that what they were fighting for was the very existence of the Armenian people and not just a revolutionary, cosmopolitan cause. Sovietization meant survival of the Armenian people. Caught between establishing a nation along socialist lines and strengthening it along nationalistic lines, the Armenian government could do nothing but accept these new citizens and offer refuge. On the other side, there was strength in numbers and Armenia needed a larger work force to take on the massive economic development necessary for survival. The new arrivals would provide such a work force. At a time of relative freedoms, idealistic supporters of the transformation wanted to share the fruits of their struggle with their compatriots, so that together, they would build an "Armenia for Armenians."

The official line in Soviet historiography is quite optimistic and positive about the role played by the new Soviet government in the lives of these refugees. As historian Meliksetian concludes:

The diasporan Armenians for all practical purposes ("gortsnakanoum") saw and agreed that the Soviet government and the communist party from the very first day on, despite the devastated and difficult situation of the
country, did all that they could to relieve (cure) in a short period of time the deep wounds that for years had been inflicted on the Armenian people [so that these wounds] would not turn into scars.\textsuperscript{27}

This new territory called Soviet Armenia carved out of Russian Armenia and having none of the Western Armenian territories in it was seen as the only salvation both by the Soviet government and by the refugees. This was specially the case since the events following the Lausanne Conference of 1922 dashed all hopes of any of the historical Armenian lands being returned to Western Armenians, in other words, to the refugees. Meliksetian, once again using typically grandiose Soviet prose style, writes that this was the time when:

the eyes of the Diasporan Armenian workers were opened to the true face of and the ongoing deception and the deep lies of the ‘self-proclaimed ‘friends’’ [by this he means foreign countries and powers]. This is why Armenians finally and decisively moved away from those false friends and set their sights ("hayatsk") towards the re-born Soviet Armenia.\textsuperscript{28}

And so instead of returning to their historic homes, the refugees formed caravans and started the journey towards Soviet Armenia. Somewhere along the journey, they were transformed from refugees into repatriates with their sights "depi erkir, depi khorhourdain Hayasten, depi drakhtavayr," "towards country, towards Soviet Armenia, towards paradise." these slogans are specially meaningful since in biblical scenarios, part of Armenia runs along the Arax river is thought to be where the garden of Eden was located. Such religious references, as in the case of Mount Ararat which is thought to be where Noah’s Ark rested, have very important secular national significance as well.

First Period of Repatriation

Officially, during the four years between 1921 to 1925, approximately 20,000

\textsuperscript{27}Meliksetian, p. 58.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid.
Armenians came to Soviet Armenia. In the next ten years, ending with Stalin's repression and the Great Purge of 1937, another 20,000 Armenians arrived. Most of these repatriates were farmers and artisans. As stated before, at the time of the revolution, thousands came from other Soviet areas, especially Azerbaijan and Georgia, and their figures are unaccounted for in the statistics for repatriates. Therefore, the term "repatriate" was selective and was not used to define those who were moving about within what was to be called the Soviet Union. Repatriates came those individuals who came from outside the Soviet borders.

Soviet powers took an active role in the lives of repatriates not only within Soviet Armenia but also in the Diasporan communities. One of the leading organizations, the Committee for Aid to Armenia, formed in 1921, was influential in most aspects of the repatriation process. The committee had been formed by some of the leading activists and intellectuals of that period, among them the still loved writer of children's works, Hovaness Tumanyan, and the patriarch of Armenian art, Martiros Saryan. The main goal of the Committee was to organize the dissemination of information about the new nation both at home and abroad. Their primary aim was to counteract anti-Soviet propaganda in the West and especially in the Diasporan communities. The main concern was that the ousted Dashnak party (also known as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation or ARF), which had been the ruling party during the brief period of independence and which had been defeated by the revolutionaries, was counteracting the desires of the people to immigrate to Soviet Armenia. To achieve this aim, the Committee actively concentrated its efforts on strengthening ties between the Diaspora and Soviet Armenia while at the same time seeing to the needs of those Western Armenians who had already immigrated. At that time, repatriation had taken on official status and was being aided by the Soviet government.

I was actually able to talk with only two individuals who were old enough to
remember repatriating in the 1920's. Most of the accounts gathered by me were from first generation Soviet Armenians who recounted stories told to them by their repatriate parents and grandparents. By far, the stories point to a tremendously harsh time when romanticism prevailed. Armen, a sixty year old man, speaks of his parents:

they were neither communists or really understood what the revolution was all about. They came because this was Armenia. This would be their salvation. They had lost so many of their family members. My mother came with a distant uncle and my father with his brother. Years later in Armenia, they met and got married. They would tell me stories of my grandparents and their lives as much as they could remember and of how they escaped the Turks. I haven’t told it much to my children, but my parents told the children when they were still alive. They [the parents] never regretted coming to Armenia.29

Armen’s account is typical of the experiences of the repatriates of the 1920’s. Their adjustment to their new surroundings was quick and not as complicated since they were establishing themselves as the country itself was being established. Everything that was new to them was new to everybody else and all felt that they were having an active hand in recreating their homeland, which was seen as a noble act inherently full of sacrifices.

For the very reasons mentioned above, the repatriates of the 1920’s, in relative terms, became much more rooted in Soviet Armenia and content with the course that their lives took. Entering the newly developed education system, the refugees quickly were able to acquire skills and move up in society as they worked to recreate it. Some joined the revolutionary party and some were soon even involved in governmental matters. Some became known in the arts, like H. Hacbian, Zeytouniants. But by far, the most well-known are the children of repatriate families who grew up within the Soviet system. Prominent names among the children of repatriates are Markaryants and Ter Petrosian.

Unlike those who would come in the 1940’s, once they immigrated to Armenia,

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29These and the following quotations in the dissertation are taken from field interviews conducted in Yerevan and Leninakan between 1989-1991.
these repatriates did not have substantial familial ties left behind in the countries from where they came. Either they had lost whole families in the Genocide, or all those who survived, came together to Armenia. This lack of a direct substantial link with the Diaspora is one of the leading factors influencing the greater contentment of the repatriates of the 1920's. At that time, language and the difference between Eastern and Western Armenian seemed not to be an issue since the overwhelming shared goal was to eradicate illiteracy. That meant quickly learning Eastern Armenian. The great majority of the children of these repatriates speak Eastern Armenian and can only recall individual words of Western Armenian spoken by their grandparents or parents. The scholarly and public debate fueled by political differences over the merits of Eastern and Western Armenian was not to develop for decades to come.

The new immigrants rooted their identities in the geography of the new homeland. While some settled in Yerevan and the other small cities, many repatriates settled in the countryside. In some cases, all the inhabitants of a particular village were from the same place in Western Armenia. Take for example the village of Tallin, in which people from Sassoon settled, and the villages of Haikavan and Langakhuour which were exclusively settled by people from Marash.

Perhaps the most famous of the resettlements is the village of Musa Lehr just outside of Yerevan. This village was settled by the inhabitants of Musa Lehr in Eastern Turkey. Their struggle against the Turks and their eventual abandonment by the French who were protecting them was recounted in Franz Werfel's Forty Days of Musa Dagh.\(^{30}\) In stories about the Genocide, people from Musa Lehr are considered to have fought a heroic struggle which has left their descendants with strong mind and strong body. The annual celebration of their struggle and perseverance has become one of the

\(^{30}\) "Lehr" is Armenian for "mountain" and "dagh" is Turkish for "mountain."
most loved of national festivals in Armenia. Each year, two days in September are set aside for the "Days of Musa Lehr." Thousands attend the festivities which are a ritual of permanence and continuity. The oldest members of the village are publicly honored as they do the dances of their fathers. There is non-stop traditional "zourna" music and dancing by the young and old Musa Lehrtsiz (people from Musa Lehr). There are speeches of new national pride and of old national struggles.

The two-day festival culminates in the highly ritualized cooking of the "harissa," a chicken and wheat porridge cooked in Western Armenia. The cooks are usually elders or younger people who have apprenticed under the more experienced cooks for several years. It is a sign of respect to be a cook of the "harissa" and it is a very serious job. The final recipe is a "secret," a secret cherished by most people of Musa Lehr. The porridge cooks for almost two days, all the while, the cooks give progress reports to the crowds of thousands and on a few occasions the cooks dance a special cook’s dance with their gigantic ladles. The anticipation grows in the crowd as these progress reports are given and the eating of the harissa comes closer. The massive black cauldrons are set in an enclosed area but within view of the crowds and are tended with extreme care by the cooks. Each year a new cauldron is added signifying the number of years that this festival has taken place. In the late 1980’s, there were 55 pots of bubbling "harissa."

The culmination of the event happens when the slowly cooking "harissa" is deemed ready to consume and is ladled into the thousands of waiting containers. There is a frenzied rush by the crowd to get to the cooks and the cauldrons. But amazingly enough, all of the thousands of people manage to get a taste of the "harissa" as well as take some home. The entire event is financed by the village itself. The festival of Musa Lehr brings together survivors of the Genocide and celebrates a continuing heritage of being Armenian. It reinforces the pride of the Musa Lehrtsiz in their ancestors while reinforcing the need to pass this pride to their descendants. At the same time, this festival
brings together Armenians of varied backgrounds and focuses their attention on the Genocide and on survival of a people.

The repatriates also played a substantial role in changing the way cities were known, for example in Yerevan. The newer areas of Yerevan were given distinct names signifying areas in Western Armenia. In Yerevan, the new sections of town were to become known as Zeitoun, Marash, Malatia, all towns in Turkey from which Armenians were forced to flee. These areas were on the outskirts of Yerevan. But over the years, as the new arrivals helped build the cities, the cities also grew larger than the original plans. Yerevan has grown so much that the original outskirts are in the center of the city.

The years of relative freedom of expression and creativity was to come to an abrupt end by the year 1936. It was in this year that official repatriation was stopped and all sights turned away from internal issues upward to the Soviet capital of Moscow and the top Communist leaders. Already, for a few years, Moscow had begun commenting on the dangers of local nationalism to socialist unity. The Russian language was slowly becoming the lingua franca and in 1938, the study of Russian was made compulsory for all Soviet students. During this time, a new people emerged, the "Soviet people." At times there was a confusion between "the Soviet people" and "the Russian people" since great Russian chauvinism began to influence Soviet policy. Although nationalism was denounced and Soviet patriotism accepted, it was obvious that the Soviet Union was being influenced by Russification. Intellectual freedom in the arts and sciences was attacked and state policy which trickled down to the individual republics limited national experimentation and expression.

As Stalin’s grip became tighter, society became more and more closed. Intellectuals were labeled nationalists, and although in the beginning they were only

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condemned, by 1937, they became unwilling statistics in The Great Purge. Thousands were exiled, killed or just disappeared. Previous Armenian supporters of Soviet power, like the poet Eghishe Charents, were labeled "bourgeois nationalists" and accused of "right deviationism." It became common knowledge that he and others like him died at the hands of the secret police sometimes right in the neighborhood or in the hidden basements of the internal police building in central Yerevan. Worse yet were the thousands of repatriates who were accused of being members or sympathizers of the ousted Dashnak-ARF party. These repatriates, after years of resettling, raising families and helping in the construction of the new state, were exiled to Siberia, often without trial. Some died in exile and others only returned after decades in barren foreign lands away from the Armenia that they had considered their haven. Exile left scars on the children of repatriates who were programmed to think that their parents had gone against the state and who for years had to bear the "shame" and confusion of having such parents. The late 1930's became a time of repression and quiet acceptance of what the state dictated.

Nowhere were the effects of the Great Purges felt more than in the ranks of the Armenian Communist Party. Khanjian, a popular leader and secretary of the Armenian Communist Party who was born in Van in Western Armenia, "committed suicide." In the following year, countless Armenian communists were arrested and shot. As Suny concludes, "the purges were the destruction of one ruling elite in Armenia and its replacement by another more tightly controlled by the central leadership." As Stalinism developed and the new "police-party-state" took hold of all of society,

Armenia lost two generations of its intellectual and political elite, first the pre-revolutionary elite that was identified with the anti-Bolshevik forces that had ruled Armenia during that brief independence, and then the

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"Ibid, pp. 156-157."
revolutionary elite, who had led Armenia up to the mid-1930’s.\textsuperscript{33} In 1936, officially supported repatriation came to an end as the Soviet state turned inward and closed its doors to the outside world and in the Armenian case to the Armenian diaspora.

During the 1920’s and 1930’s, far from Armenia, in a distant part of the Soviet state, another mass emigration was taking place. During these early decades of the Soviet Union, 25,000 Finns from Canada, the United States and Finland caught "Karelian fever" and emigrated to an area called Karelia.\textsuperscript{34} As a result of the Civil Wars in Russia and Finland, by 1921, Western Karelia had become a part of the new Finnish state while Eastern Karelia was under Soviet control. Stalinist Soviet powers, actively recruited Finnish immigrants to Soviet Karelia because they were convinced that an influx of Finnish workers would generate economic development in the area and perhaps "attract sympathetic attention of national minorities through Europe".\textsuperscript{35} Many who came from the West were "economic refugees" from the Great Depression and, as such, the initial period for the emigres in Karelia was one of economic "prosperity." These emigres also "enriched" general Karelian cultural life. However, as the decade progressed and collectivization took its toll, living standards deteriorated. The dissatisfaction of the emigre Finnish population led to more suspicion and repression, which in turn, by 1934, led to systematic attacks on "Finnish nationalism."

As Stalinism advanced in late 1930’s, national language and nationalistic references were put into question and gradually, immigrants were more likely seen as "infiltrators" of the Soviet states rather than as refugees. Many tried to escape over the

\begin{verbatim}
33Ibid, p. 158.
34See Gelb.
35Gelb, p. 1092.
\end{verbatim}
border. There are horror stories of captures by the Soviet border guards. In general over half managed to leave and among the ones who stayed behind, most suffered arrest, exile, imprisonment or death. The Karelian experiment had come to a complete and unsuccessful end by the late 1930's.\footnote{For another example of a uniquely failed nationality policy, see Gitelman, Goldberg, Low and Pinkus for references on the Bira-Bijan, the Jewish territory that the Soviet Union set up near the Chinese border. These are also good sources of the application of the Soviet nationality policy to the Soviet Jewish population.}

Without any other major parallel, the Soviet Armenian state-supported repatriation of the 1920's remained a unique implementation of the Soviet nationalities policy of the period. Although Stalinist economic and intellectual repression, exile, arrests and death existed in both places, there were no significant cases of escapes over the border in Armenia as there were in Karelia. The Armenians who came in the 1920's stayed, were better integrated and changed the face of Soviet Armenia. Their perseverance set the groundwork for the next and even greater influx of immigrants into Armenia from the West.

The Second Period of Repatriation

With the end of WWII, the fate of numerous nations and nationalities rested in the hands of the Allied countries and in the way that they were going to draw new borders. During this time, along with several other territorial demands, the Soviet government asked that the districts of Kars and Ardahan in Turkey and just on the border of Armenia be given to the Soviet Union. The reason for territorial concessions was, first and foremost, the establishing and maintaining of Soviet spheres of influence especially along vulnerable borders. However, the demands took on a nationalist face and fueled both Diasporan and the Soviet support for a new wave of repatriates to Soviet Armenia. The proposed expansion of Soviet Armenian territory was identified as a
possible solution to the Armenian Question. Therefore, the territorial concessions were purely encased in nationalistic terms and meaning. The territories were to be returned to their "rightful owner," the Armenians. In this manner, the Soviet Union became a champion for Armenian rights and for retribution for crimes committed against the Armenian people.

In 1945, the Soviet government went one step further in its involvement in resolving the Armenian Question. Once again, it opened its doors to Armenians in the Diaspora "to return" to their motherland and live among their brothers. Having more Armenians in Soviet Armenia also served as a justification for territorial concessions. Meliksetian summarizes the Soviet government's positions by stating that the government internationally voiced Armenian demands, since it kept:

in mind that there are over one million Armenians abroad many of whom have voiced the desire to return to the motherland and many of whom would return to their ancestral homes once those lands are returned to Soviet Armenia and the territory is expanded.

In reality, 1945 was the year that the 1925 Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality between the Soviet Union and Turkey was up for negotiations. So, too, were the concerns over control of the Dardanelles Straits and access into the Mediterranean Sea from the Black Sea ports of the Soviet Union. Whatever Stalin's true aspirations were, the fact was that the entire process was articulated in a highly nationalistic manner which rallied the Armenians both in Soviet Armenia and in the Diaspora to the point of supporting and participating in mass immigration. During the post-war period of great economic

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37 The Armenian Question refers to Armenian demands that the Genocide be recognized by the Turkish government and that historic Armenian lands, which are called Western Armenia and which are now a part of Eastern Turkey be returned to Armenians. This idea has been a motivating factor in the Diaspora for decades and led to terrorism in the 1980's against Turkish targets.

38 Meliksetian, p. 173.

39 Ibid.
hardships, the Soviet government spearheaded a very costly propaganda and resettlement program to bring in repatriates from the West. In slightly less than three years close to 90,000 people "returned" to their "hairenik," the fatherland, where they were neither a part of the early stages of the revolution nor the building of the new Soviet state. As quoted in Suny's book, *Looking Toward Ararat*, American intelligence, during these events in the 1940's, had concluded:

> on the whole, Armenians have no use for communism either as an economic ideal or as a system of government. Their present orientation towards the USSR derives not from sympathy for the Soviet regime but from a realization that the fate of their homeland depends on the USSR, that there is no other power likely to uphold Armenian aspirations, and that Soviet support of the Armenian cause can contribute not only to the rebuilding and aggrandizement of Armenia but also to the protection of Armenians in insecure areas.\(^{40}\)

The doors were open only for a few years and were closed once again by Stalin's tightening hold on Soviet society. By 1949, as the alliance with the Soviet Union was disintegrating and the Cold War was beginning, territorial demands were left by the wayside. Turkey fell into the sphere of influence of the United States and the Armenia Question and Armenian demands were lost in the agendas of international negotiations. Although no territorial concessions were made, nonetheless, the results of the Soviet government's support and open door policy for repatriates to Soviet Armenia between 1946 and 1948 had a profound impact on the modern history of Soviet Armenia.

The key to the success of the Great Repatriation program was that it had support not only from the Soviet government but also from the Diaspora. The Diaspora believed that repatriation could solve two main concerns for Armenians: 1. the return of Western Armenia by Turkey, and 2. an end to assimilation in foreign lands.\(^{41}\) Even the Dashnak (ARF) political party, which had been the staunchest anti-Soviet voice in the

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\(^{41}\)Ibid, p. 167.
Diasporan communities, helped in fundraising and encouraging immigration. The support of the Dashnaks was essential since they had their strongest hold in the communities of the Middle East, the areas from which the most repatriates came.

Support came from the head of the Armenian church, the Catholicos who resides, in Etchmiadzin, a centuries old town located in Soviet Armenia, was also crucial. In the summer of 1945, as the church clergy from all over the world gathered in Etchmiadzin, the newly elected Catholicos sent a letter to Stalin asking for repatriation and the return of lands in Turkey. Catholicos Gevork VI later wrote:

finally the desire of the dispersed Armenian people will become a reality, their wishes to unite around their ancestral home and hand in hand with their brothers participate in its development and live within a great national culture.

The church vowed to do all that was necessary and to assist government agencies involved in the repatriation process. The church’s support was essential because it gave the entire endeavor a spiritual aspect of salvation.

With very few exceptions, Armenians are Christians belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church. Historically, the center of the church had been in Etchmiadzin, but centuries earlier, the center had been relocated to different places to avoid vulnerability during times of wars and invasions. When the center of the church was moved for the last time to Etchmiadzin in 1441, the Catholicos in Antelias, located in present-day Turkey, kept his position in Antelias. Nonetheless, for centuries, his power was subservient to the Catholicos’ in Etchmiadzin. However, after the Soviet Union was established, political differences between the Dashnaks (ARF) and the Soviets led to an empowerment of the Catholicos of Antelias. The center was moved to Beirut and the Dashnaks proclaimed that the Catholicos of Antelias was the true head of the Armenian

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43Meliksetian, p. 187.
church. They accused the Catholicos in Etchmiadzin of being a KGB agent and the church in Soviet Armenia in general of being a Soviet farce. And as such, without having any differences in doctrine and belief, the Armenian church was split as of the 1930’s with the Diasporan Armenians uniting their support of the anti-Soviet Dashnak party with support for the Catholicos of Antelias. For those in the Diaspora who did not support the Dashnaks, the Catholicos in Armenia was considered the only head of the church. All others were subservient. Despite these differences, in 1945, both the church and political parties came together to take full advantage of the unique support being offered by a great power, the Soviet Union. Catholicos of all Armenians, Gevork VI, from his Soviet Armenian base, went even further than what the Soviets had asked of Turkey and demanded not only the return of Kars and Ardahan but also all territories guaranteed by the Treaty of Sevres.\textsuperscript{44} From numerous sides, Armenians were being encouraged to return to their homeland, even though the actual "homeland" lands were now in a different country.

On November 21, 1945, the People’s Committee of Commissars of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic adopted a decree to authorize the repatriation of Diasporan Armenians to Soviet Armenia. The wording of the decree was such to indicate that the desire to repatriate was initiated by the Diasporan Armenians rather than being instilled by the Soviet government. It read:

\textit{In response to the requests of Armenians living abroad to return to Soviet Armenia and for the assistance of the USSR in allowing them to return, authorization is given to the Armenian SSR to assist and organize the return of Armenians abroad who have voiced such a desire.}\textsuperscript{45}

Repatriation committees were set up in Armenia and in the Diaspora and the Soviet embassies in various countries prepared to begin the process of accepting and integrating

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\textsuperscript{44}Suny (1993), p. 168. See also Hovannisian (1967), for Treaty information.

\textsuperscript{45}Meliksetian, p. 177.
the "returning" Armenians.

Famous individuals in the arts and the sciences sent their greetings and support to the Soviet government and to the Diasporan communities. On December 2, 1945, the newspaper Soviетакан Hayastan (Soviet Armenia) published the text of the decree and, in the following days, for days to follow the newspaper was filled with declarations of support. On December 4, 1945, beloved author, Avetik Isaakian, in an article titled "Welcome Precious Relatives," wrote:

All of our hearts are filled with great happiness because of the Armenian SSR's decision on the return of Armenians from abroad. With limitless joy we welcome this all-important act. No honest Armenian could have any other feelings about this other than extreme support... We, Soviet Armenians, will greet our brothers who have missed us so much with the same emotions of longing. The tragic fate that separated brothers and sisters, that led us to fight on different fronts against our enemies for the same cause of motherland and freedom, the same national and humanitarian ideals, has today led to the embrace of two relatives on the lands in the liberated home of the Armenians.46

Another very popular Soviet Armenian author, Derenik Demirchian, continued the praise:

The motherland-less Armenian is returning to the motherland ... that is the most natural of things. He must live in his motherland, try and create within his own private home. Only here will his life have meaning. Only with the fate of Soviet Armenia can all Armenians attach their lives and hopes ... let them come home and let the Armenians flourish.47

And one final example of the intensity of emotions that poured can be found in the words of Armenia’s leading linguist, H. Ajarian:

From the very day that you barely escaped the Turkish barbarians, your hearts filled with blood and your eyes filled with tears running away from the fires [referring to cooking fires and to the warmth of one’s home] of your ancestral home searching for refuge under other stars ... we have been waiting for you. You did not forget your country; your physical scars healed, but your soul did not heal. You always remembered your motherland ... the desires of your heart are becoming reality ... you have


47Ibid.
received permission to return to the motherland. With our hearts filled
with hope, our eyes filled with brightness, our souls filled with
tremendous longing and our arms filled with bouquets, we are waiting for
you.  

The road had been paved and all were waiting for the global Armenian family to reunite.
Returning to the homeland was a return to the family. A diasporan Armenian alluded
to the connection between repatriation and the nurturing nature of a mother by writing:

Soviet Armenia is our only living motherland, it is our mother. A mother
does not differentiate between her children. We expect and hope that she
will deal with all of us like a mother does.  

This was also one of the unique instances where differences were mentioned. In general,
only praise, good fortune and warm greetings were found in the salutations. However,
over the years, expectations were not met, differentiation became the norm from both
sides and repatriates found it harder and harder to integrate.

In preparation for the processing of documentation and the arrival of the
repatriates, the Soviet Armenian government worked both abroad as well as internally.
To various countries, the government sent delegations who were to work with the local
Soviet Embassy and the local Armenian organizations and church to facilitate the
paperwork. People were to submit applications to the respective embassies and based
on quotas and preference was given to individuals and families who were under the most
difficult economic situation. The cost of transportation from country of origin, overland
and on ships reaching Black Sea Georgian ports, or trains coming in from Iran, was to
be covered by the Soviets. However, in general, the repatriates themselves covered most
of the costs to reach the Soviet border. Even so, tens of thousands of applications came
pouring in that the original quota for 1946 of only 28,000 repatriates had to be increased
to 51,000 by the end of the year.

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48Ibid.

49As quoted in Meliksetian, p. 185.
By June of 1946, the first caravan of repatriate Armenians left Beirut. There were 1800 people on board the ship to Batumi. In the following six months, boatloads from Middle Eastern countries and trainloads from Iran began arriving in Armenia. Of the 51,000 repatriates in 1946, 22,000 were laborers, 9,500 were farmers, 9,000 were craftsmen, about 350 professionals or intellectuals among which were 61 doctors, 15 engineers, 39 actors, 19 musicians, 32 artists and 2 professors. They came from five countries: Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Greece and Bulgaria (listed in order of most repatriates). They were dispersed to 32 locales in Armenia with only 14,000 settling in Yerevan.

The actual monetary cost of repatriation was quite substantial especially since Armenia was just starting to re-structure itself in the post-war years. Although repatriates contributed to their transportation costs, it was estimated that just for the transportation of repatriates from 1946-1949, the Soviet Armenian government had spent 76.8 million rubles, a substantial figure for those days. Furthermore, the majority of the cost in resettling the repatriates was in providing housing for them. The government authorized construction projects and the creation of resettlement committees to make sure repatriates were given proper housing, in most cases single family state apartments, in others, temporary communal apartments. There were fund raisers in the factories and on collective farms and millions of millions of rubles were collected and put in the general fund for repatriation. Soviet Armenians saw repatriation as a collective effort and supported it with personal money.

In 1947, there was a decrease in the number of people repatriating. By the end of the year, only about 35,000 arrived in Armenia. This time, they came from not only

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Syria, Lebanon and Greece, but also from France, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, the United States (151 people) and China (16). Soviet explanations for the decrease usually involved accusing foreign governments of increasingly setting obstacles in the way of the repatriates. For example 25,000 were to immigrate from Iran but the Iranian government did not finalize their paperwork. Several thousand were scheduled to leave Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, but only a handful managed to arrive. In addition to a change of policy towards the Soviet Union by the respective governments, opposition to repatriation was also developing within the Armenian communities. Support by the opposition party was waning as reports from Armenia were painting a not so rosy picture of the return to the motherland. The result was dramatic. The following year, only 3100 people repatriated and by 1949, only 162. And then in 1949, the Soviet government officially stopped its support of continued repatriation. Internationally, it was clear that the Western alliance had been successful in bringing Turkey into its sphere of influence and away from the Soviet Union. All Armenian hopes for a return of Armenian lands by Turkey negotiated earlier by the Soviet government were lost. The Cold War was beginning and the doors to the Soviet Union, and therefore, to Soviet Armenia, were closed.

With the official closing of the borders to immigration from abroad, Soviet Armenians began the process of integration and adjustment. 90,000 people had flooded the post-war economically ravaged small republic. They had come with the idea that they were returning home, to the family, to live among their siblings. The motherland had opened its arms to embrace its children who had been forced away from her decades earlier. Familial references, i.e., motherland, fatherland, welcoming brothers and sisters, close relatives ("harazatnner") feeling a sense of longing, returning to one's own home, were the most common ways of articulating the emotions of "returning." Even today, the family is a significant form of social interaction and is the structure through
which the vast majority of social activities are mediated. With tongue in cheek, it is said that in order to get anything done in Armenia or to move up socially, one needs "Kh,ts,bh" (a word game with a pun on "Kah,geh,beh" - meaning "KGB"): "kh" for "khnami" meaning in-law, "ts" for "tsanot" meaning someone that one knows well, and "bh" for "barekam" meaning a relative. For the repatriates, even though they had never been to Soviet Armenia or on any of the Eastern Armenian lands, repatriating meant coming home to the family. Before setting foot on the territory of Soviet Armenia, they already had a sense of familiarity with it all. However, it was only after arriving that it was sensed that the reality of the situation did not correspond with the warmth of the emotions usually associated with coming home.

At this point, it must be noted that the interviews with the repatriates were conducted at a very critical time. The late 1980's was a time of immense social upheaval in the Soviet Union and more importantly, it was a time of intense social critique. For the first time, in a public forum, the masses were voicing all of the negative social issues that they said they had internalized for decades. For the first time there was such a thing as "public opinion" and it was an opinion that took its cues not from the centralized social demagogues but from events unfolding minute by minute on the street. The stability which the Soviet Union had so strongly enforced, for so many generations, was instantaneously crumbling. Not only was there open protest against an entire social system, but all that had carried meaning for society was coming under question. Value systems were changing rapidly. Quite literally, the rug was being pulled from underneath one's feet. All that had made sense before - Soviet greatness, foreign policy, the corrupt West, Stalin, Marxism, etc, - was no longer understood in the same way. People easily turned to find meaning in the "opposites" of these things. Issues, social norms and understandings were now black and white; what had been right no longer was, and what had been wrong was becoming right. Most everything was under question or
under criticism. It was during this time that the repatriates were interviewed and their sense of negativism is in some ways framed by the greater backdrop of social critique within society as a whole. Of course, this is not to say that their experiences did not have a negative effect on them, regardless of the timing of the interviews. However, the form that the criticism took and the great animosity with which it was articulated is time-specific and is directly interconnected with the social events of the late 1980’s and the fall of the Soviet Union.

Repatriates were coming not only home but to paradise, "depi erkir drakhtavayr." Ironically, this was also the time of Armenia’s Starvation of 1946. Although spared from the physical ravages and destruction as occurred in the eastern borders of the Soviet Union, in Leningrad and in Moscow during WWII, Armenia was affected directly by post-war economic hardships. Food was hard to get. "I remember my mother passing out small chunks of bread to me and to my five brothers and sisters and saying that this is what we have been given to eat today," recalls Sylvia, who was seven years old when the family repatriated from Iran.

Originally, the Soviet government was giving preference for repatriation to those who were economically bad off in the West. However, once again ironically, it was these same repatriates who fared better than the local Soviet Armenians during the harsh days of 1946. The repatriates were allowed to bring with them anything that they wanted. And bring, they did. From wagon loads of grains, rice, fabrics, to personal jewelry, the repatriates brought with them things that were to become their riches in the homeland. "My parents sold things" recounts Sylvia, "we sold things and bought food with it, so we were better off then the locals." The material and economic wealth brought in by the repatriates was registered at the border; however, the buying and selling of this wealth was often done illegally among acquaintances. No study has been conducted, but the material wealth that was brought in by the repatriates is often cited
as the base for the flourishing second economy that existed in Armenia after the 1960’s and which gave Armenia a much higher standard of living than the rest of the Soviet Union.

A massive government campaign was begun in 1945 to set aside state funds and start the construction of new housing for the repatriates. At a time when most Armenians in the cities were living in communal apartments and had been on long lists waiting for single family dwellings, the repatriates, in some cases, were given priority. Public perceptions of this policy led to resentments in the coming years:

Locals who had gone through the revolution, come as refugees and helped build Armenia were being passed over for the Armenians who were coming and coming with great expectations. They wanted it all and in a way they got it,

said a man of sixty whose grandparents had come from Van in Eastern Turkey at the turn of the century. "The repatriates were promised the world. Instead they lost everything. All in the name of the motherland," was one Syrian repatriates conclusion.

There is striking contradiction in the statements of repatriates. While it is true that most of the repatriates were given housing in a short period of time (a very positive development in the mind of local Armenians), most situations fell way short of the expectations and things imagined by the repatriates (therefore, a very negative development in repatriate minds). The material wealth which they had brought with them not only bought them food but was also because the means by which later they would be able to acquire private homes. Acquiring private homes in the state-run housing system was not only a feat of great wealth but also of ingenuity, of knowing or being one of the "right" people; in other words, one had to be integrated well into Soviet society. By the 1980’s, all of the private sectors of Yerevan had countless repatriate families among were some of the wealthiest homes.

An uncontested consequence of repatriation is the belief that repatriation was a
means of injecting a depleted society with new ideas and energetic individuals who could carry out these ideas. As stated before, by the 1940's, the establishment of Soviet power and later the purges of Stalin, were successful in eradicating two generations of intellectuals, scientists and government cadres. The repatriates stepped in to fill this void. Upon arrival, these repatriates were already better educated than those who had come in the 1920's. Therefore, they were able to move quickly within the higher education system and were able to find top positions. Some opted to join the party, especially if they desired the highest of positions in government agencies. According to Meliksetian, numerous repatriates were immediately elected to local political positions and in 1947, one was elected to the Armenian Supreme Soviet.\textsuperscript{53}

In the late 1980's, numerous repatriates or children of repatriates were holding top government posts. For example in the Health Ministry, one of the most richest of government agencies, the very powerful position of finance director was in the hands of a repatriate from Beirut. A top Vice-Minister's position was in the hands of a repatriate from Syria. Similar examples can be found in most of the top ranking government positions. In general, those who entered the party and had top-positions before independence, in 1991, were much more likely to have a positive view of their experiences as repatriates. They usually felt no discrimination and felt that they had been given all the opportunities necessary for advancement. The most famous individual from a repatriate family is the present first democratically elected president of the independent Republic of Armenia, Levon Ter Petrosian. His parents were repatriates in 1946 from Syria. Even he, the leading member of the anti-government Kharabagh Movement and staunch advocate of anti-communism, when asked whether being a repatriate left him with a negative experience which may have shaped his later political inclinations,

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid, p. 235.
responded that repatriation had not had such an effect. As such, he indicated that his experience did not differ in any way from that of all other Soviet Armenians.⁵⁴

As in the government ranks, repatriates and their children rose in the ranks of higher education and in the academy of sciences. The arts and literature were greatly influenced by repatriates. For example, Berj Zeytouniants, from Egypt was to become a famous writer of prose and later for a brief period of time, became Minister of Culture. Hacob Hacobian, who had the same name as one of the leading Bolshevik revolutionaries repatriated from Egypt and influenced Armenian art with his unique and stark depictions of life and of the city of Leninakan. Hovannes Badalian, who came as a student from Iran and was not allowed to go back, became one of the most popular of Armenian singers and a professor of voice at the Yerevan Conservatory. In speaking with these men and with others in their social circles, I did not get a sense of resentment. Emotions and understandings were directed more towards the recounting of "unfortunate" events or of parents who had been lied to by the great Soviet propaganda machine. They all saw their place in Armenia as being essential to their lives. They believe that their presence in Armenia has led not only to the enrichment of a national identity but also to an intellectual rejuvenation or more exactly an intellectual recreation.

Nonetheless, a sense of resentment was prevalent among repatriate families, especially in stories where expectations met with reality. In defense of the situation, "local" ("non-repatriate") Armenians always maintain that resentment is unacceptable since what the repatriates were experiencing was the same as what they themselves were having to deal with. Negativism becomes even more unacceptable when in a reversal of fortune, the locals believe that the repatriate’s lot was even better than that of most of the people. Inevitably, mutual resentment started developing. "They complain and think

⁵⁴For the complete interview, see Fischer and Grigorian, in Perilous States.
they had it bad," one observer comments:

but Armenia gave them all that it could offer. It did not have much to offer, materially that is. It gave them a homeland, what's better than that. They remained Armenian and helped build Armenia. And still they complain and worse yet, they leave this place and go abroad and complain about the motherland.

It is true that years later, mainly starting in the 1970's, these repatriate families were the first to submit their applications under the Soviet Union's reuniting with family law in order immigrate abroad.

Repatriates and their families were able to leave the Soviet Union at a time when hardly anyone else could since for the most part they had family members who had stayed in the West. Unlike their counterparts in the 1920's, who had lost all their families in either the deportations or the Genocide, the repatriates of the 1940's had close family still living abroad, mostly aunts and uncles and some siblings. Keeping in contact with these people had been quite difficult after repatriating since Stalin's closed-door policy had also meant a censorship of letters. Telephone calls did not exist and personal visits were physically impossible. Letters were the only means of communication and, as most repatriates, confirm the method of choosing the right words to convey ideas and messages about life in Soviet Armenia was a delicate one since such messages were an issue of national security. They could not write of difficult conditions that they were facing and of shortages and resentment. Everyone knew that the KGB would be reading their letters and everyone feared what the consequences would be. Several repatriates recounted that even when their parents managed to get a letter out explaining the harsh conditions to relatives still abroad and warning them not to repatriate, they were met with disbelief and surprise by the relatives. Apparently, so great was the desire to repatriate that when a family who had already immigrated wrote back about their own plight, the remaining family members thought it as impossible and thought it a ploy so that they would not repatriate and enjoy the riches that Armenia had to offer.
Often, letters had to be encoded with messages of foreboding that would escape the hands of the censors. For example, one repatriate recounts writing letters which spoke endlessly of how "Aunt Hasmik" was faring. The point was that "Aunt Hasmik" had died years before they repatriated. They hoped that such talk would make the relatives suspect something. Another used humor in his letters to family in Beirut. He took a contradictory approach by exaggerating everything. For example he wrote of the "grandeur" of Armenia by saying that the chickens were the size of elephants, yet another impossibility that should have been a clue for unsuspecting relatives abroad.

Another story circulating among repatriates is about the passing of information to relatives abroad by using a photo. Apparently, family members had decided to send an encoded photo telling of life in Armenia. The plan was if all in the photo were standing, then life was good. However, if they were all sitting, then life was bad. Well, when the family who had stayed abroad received the photo, they saw that everyone was laying on the floor. All indications are that this is a story in retrospect. Nonetheless, it is very telling of the experiences of the repatriates.

By the ingenious use of language and humor, word did get out that "coming home" may not be as great as was thought. This fact coupled with Cold War issues really cooled the fever of repatriation. Although, Soviet historiography writes of tens of thousands of Armenians who still wanted to repatriate\textsuperscript{55} and were not allowed to do so by the respective governments, Western Armenian sources write of a general change in desires to repatriate after the first massive group had immigrated to Soviet Armenia and news of the realities came filtering out.

While some kept constant touch with family abroad, others were forced to cut ties with their relations. Most of these individuals feared that a connection with the West

\textsuperscript{55}For example, Meliksetian cites that 25,000 were waiting just in Iran to repatriate in 1949.
might jeopardize their social standing in Armenia. Some of these repatriates had either become party members or had high ranking academic positions. The possibility of their traveling abroad for a conference or for other official business (an absolute impossibility for a Soviet citizen of the time) meant that the KGB had to make sure that they did not have close family abroad which might mean undesired encounters and the passing of information. The application for receiving travel documents to attend a state sponsored event abroad had the all important question, "do you have any family or relatives abroad?" Everyone was convinced that a positive answer to this question meant a sure negative reply to travel. This proved to be a delicate dilemma since Armenia was building itself with the minds and hands of people who had left ties in the West. Some managed to lie, others were refused travel documents, while others did actually cut ties with family abroad in order to succeed in their new Soviet society. There was a common factor among those who lost ties with family members. More often than not, in recounting family history, we would inevitably reach the story of a long lost "uncle who ended up in France (or the United States) and who is some sort of a millionaire now."

When the Soviet Union accepted immigration abroad for its citizens based on a law that allowed Soviet citizens to unite with close family abroad, Armenian repatriates became prime benefactors. Whether they had kept ties with family abroad or were able to re-establish ties, the Armenian repatriate families like the Jews, and some Greeks and Germans, had prime qualifications to leave the Soviet Union. Thousands submitted applications and by mid-1980’s over 70,000 had immigrated. However, most of them immigrated to the United States rather than to the countries from which they had originally come. Ironically, the repatriates who had left foreign lands and had come "home" were now headed to new foreign lands. The repatriates ability to leave in this manner was yet another point of resentment on the part of locals who could not immigrate. In the late 1980’s, the consensus among intellectuals, even intellectual
repatriates, was that these repatriates, who were leaving, were "abandoning (lekel)" Armenia. Araik, a non-repatriate, said:

sure things are not that great here in Soviet life. You have lots of things in the West that we can only dream of ... but they [the repatriates] came here, expected things, got more than some. But we were all in the same situation. And the first opportunity that came up to leave and they left.

As the 1990’s led to independence and much harsher economic and political situations, people became less and less judgmental of those who decided to emigrate from Armenia, and more and more people found means to leave. Even so, there has always been a stark description of those who early on "abandoned" Armenia: "they were repatriates," "they were uneducated repatriates," "they were mainly workers," "no intellectuals among them," "they were the 'kharoshi' (good old boys) of 'yerord mas' (a mainly working class neighborhood)."

Even after decades of living together, "they" and "us" was a common way of describing relationships between repatriates and locals. Often, repatriates are referred to by the locals as "akhbar." "Akhbar" is an Eastern Armenian speaker’s take on the Western Armenian speakers pronunciation of the word "yeghbayr" meaning "brother." At the very least, "akhbar" has become a label of otherness ("they versus us"), and at the very worst, it has become a derogatory term which is encoded in negative characteristics as well as in otherness. "We have several very good akhbar families living in our building," says one woman, "akhbars eat different things than we do, they have tabouli, I think that that is with cracked wheat, and homus and those that come from Iran eat something called ghormesabzi." She goes on to name numerous other dishes as she interjects her comments with, "they are very good people," as if the repatriate’s character may be questionable.

Although Iranian Armenians are eastern Armenian speakers and do not have the term "akhbar" in their usage, they too were known as "akhbar jan (dear akhbar)."
Nonetheless, in relative terms, Soviet Armenians had a closer affinity with the repatriates who came from Iran. The major reason for this is the fact that Iranian Armenians, like Soviet Armenians, speak eastern Armenian. Although, there are differences in intonation and some differences in vocabulary, a fact which gives the Iranian Armenians away as repatriates, for the most part, the languages are so close. This similarity greatly influenced the way Iranian Armenians experienced the initial phase of "otherness" which so negatively affected Western Armenian repatriates. Iranian Armenians also shared with their Soviet Armenian compatriots the influence of centuries of Persian rule, in literature, in music and the culinary arts. "Parskahaiereh (Iranian Armenians) are more like us," says Anahit. She goes on to designate those who speak eastern Armenian as speaking Armenian "well" while those who speak western Armenian are speaking Armenian "poorly."

The politics of language difference seems to be meaningful in light of recent understandings since these differences seemed not to pose any major obstacle for the repatriate or local. No horror stories were gathered as to terrible things happening because one did not understand the other or of children at school being harassed. Apparently, the transition from Western Armenian to Eastern Armenian was an easy one and did not leave deep scars of otherness on the repatriates. Yet everyone acknowledges that some sort of difference does exist. And the politics of negotiating these differences are one of the markers of present day Armenian identity.

The majority of repatriates also spoke a second language, whether Arabic, Turkish or Farsi. Yet, none of the repatriate families that I spoke to saw any reason for their children to learn these languages. When picking up Turkish TV on Soviet Armenian TV became a mainstay for the majority of Armenian families, very few commented on how they wished they knew the language that their grandparents and parents knew so well. Even Maggie, herself a repatriate from Iran and the director of
the elementary school with emphasis on Farsi, commented on how few repatriate families had the desire to have their children learn the languages of the countries from where they had originally come. And so, Russian became the second language of repatriate families. Often times, while older repatriates never really learned Russian well, younger repatriates or repatriate children became good Russian speakers.

As with the use of language, the differentiation of "they" and "us" found other ways of manifesting itself. It was far more common for the first generation of repatriates to intermarry rather than marry local Armenians. This practice became less and less common in the following generations. "Akhbarashen" was the term used to describe Malatia, a section of town which had a higher percentage of repatriates living there. An unusual case of otherness came up in a discussion with a repatriate family from Beirut. In listing basic differences that they saw between themselves and the local Armenians (most of which have been mentioned) they also added that they believed that local Armenians had sex with all of their clothes on. Articulation of difference was found in different places.

Resentment of the Soviet experience seems greatest in the stories of those repatriates who managed to leave Armenia. Resentment began from the very first step into Armenia, when they say they were "treated like animals and housed in barn-like structures." Over the years, continued disillusionment with a corrupt system and harsh conditions coupled with wonderful stories of the West sent by relatives, left no room for much that was positive in the stories of the repatriates who had left Armenia in the 1970's and early 1980's. Those who left spoke the worst of their decades in Soviet Armenia. Some of those who wanted to but did not immigrate had no family abroad who would sponsor them. Of course, some of those who remained had no intentions of ever

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56See Touryantz, an autobiography about a repatriates life who immigrated to the United States after repatriating to Armenia in the 1940's.
leaving. Nonetheless, in either case, there was always some sense of bitterness or resentment over the entire experience. One repatriate’s absolute disappointment and anger over his family’s repatriating (he was only seven at the time) led him to say over and over again, "I wish the train that had brought us here would have overturned before we got here." Although, this was the most extreme of emotions articulated among the people with whom I talked, it was clear that repatriation for many of the repatriates had been problematic in all respects. They never fully integrated into the new Soviet society and were very quick in leaving it as soon as leaving was made possible. They felt that they had been lied to by the Soviet government and had been told that life in Soviet Armenia was flourishing. From the very first moment, they say that they realized that this was not the Armenia about which they had been dreaming. A popular joke goes something like this:

> You know, usually when there is some sort of danger on the road, they put a large red flag in front of it. How did you not see this gigantic red flag [meaning the Soviet flag] that had been put in front of this gigantic pot hole [meaning the Soviet Union]?

"We did not heed the warnings," says Araik, "we came anyway because this was the motherland."

A uniquely national experiment within the greater Soviet social experiment had come to an end in 1949. For the first time, the interests of Soviet powers and the interests of Diasporan Armenians, who feared assimilation had intersected and resulted in the movement of nearly 100,000. Polemics continued within the Armenian communities as the Cold War began and the two together put an end to repatriation. No one denies the extreme effect that repatriation had on Soviet Armenia. Whether personal experiences were negative or not, Soviet Armenia in general benefitted from the influx of fresh and energetic Armenians, who were important in establishing new cadres in education, in the sciences, in the arts, in industry and in the government. Repatriation
meant that the link with the West was always strong and eventually became a decisive factor in the nationalism of both Soviet Armenia and the Diaspora in the late 1980's and in the eventual independence of the Republic of Armenia in 1991. And furthermore, they understand that Armenia is the motherland of all Armenians has played a substantial role in the lives of Diasporan Armenians.\textsuperscript{57}

Third Period of Repatriation

It was not until the 1960's when a new wave of repatriation to Soviet Armenia began. Although in the following two decades over 32,000 people repatriated from thirty countries, the vast majority, approximately 25,000, came from Iran. In the beginning, many of those coming from Iran were single and escaping the Shah's persecution of suspected communist supporters of the Tudeh party. One such man was Armen who had been a body guard for top Iranian officials. He and several others secretly made their way to Armenia after they realized they would be imprisoned as communist sympathizers. He had been a virulent man in his thirties at the time and now as an older, pot-bellied man of no particular position in Armenia, his stories were full of nostalgia for a life lost in another country so dear to him. He married a local Armenia but counted as his closest friends other famous repatriates.

Then there was the case of Mrs. Anahit. In the late 1960's she was working in the Soviet Embassy in Iran and says that she just started wanting to move to Armenia. Working in the embassy made the application procedure a little bit easier. She convinced her husband, who was reluctant at first, and together with their four children and several

\textsuperscript{57}As comparison to other immigrations to a homeland, the Jewish alia to Israel is specially noteworthy. The experiences of Jewish "Alia", immigration to the homeland, is explored in the work of Avurch and Deshen and Shokeid. Another excellent comparison is with the immigration of over one million of Greeks from Asia Minor to Greece at the end of WWI. Pentzapoulos is a good source for the Greek "Megali Idea."
family members repatriated to Soviet Armenia. She says that it was very difficult in the beginning, not being given to which that they were entitled, or having constantly to pay bribes. But later things got better and they were given an apartment which she was able to make into a home. However, as I met her in her little domik (box car) which is all that she has after losing everything in the earthquake in 1988, all she remembers are dark days after repatriating. She associates repatriating with the death of her husband and also with the wayward nature of her last son who was a toddler when they came to Armenia. Her husband had been run over by the son of a wealthy individual who managed to bribe his son’s way out of jail; therefore, Mrs. Anahit’s family never got any sort of retribution for her husband’s death. Her youngest son drinks, parties, hangs out with the wrong crowd. She says of this son, "Arthur is just like them (meaning the locals) … does not know what is right and wrong … acts foolishly. I wish he was not like that." This is one of the ways that "they-us" syndrome manifested itself.

Many repatriates who came in the 1970’s had already understood that Soviet Armenia could be used as a stepping stone to getting immigration visas to the United States. The granting of immigration by the States to citizens of the Soviet Union was a relatively much easier process set with a higher quota. Well into the 1980’s, Iranian Armenians were finding that the process of immigrating to Soviet Armenia and then applying for refugee status to the United States was a viable means of coming to the United States. Although some were really escaping a fundamentalist Muslim regime that had taken over Iran, most had visions of eventually reaching the States. For the most part, the second half of repatriation during this third period was thought of as temporary and as a means to another end. Although, they were not escaping persecution, vast numbers of repatriates were successful in gaining Soviet refugee status and eventually immigrating to the United States.
New Repatriation: Armenians from Azerbaijan

One final period of repatriation must be noted although it is still in the beginning stages. This new repatriation involves the influx of over 300,000 Armenians from the neighboring republic of Azerbaijan.\textsuperscript{58} This movement is the direct result of war within Azerbaijan and, as such, these Armenians are described as refugees. The first group came to Armenia in late 1988 when the Kharabagh Movement was at its height. Many relocated in the cities of Leninakan and Spitak. These were the cities that were devastated by the earthquake of 1988, and therefore, many of the refugees lost their lives. There are many similarities between these new arrivals and those who had come decades earlier. Like the refugees of 1920, many had come fleeing the war with only the clothes on their backs. Yet, these refugees were the first to come from the "inner diaspora." Like all those who had come before them, these refugees had difficulties in integrating. Once again language was a marker of difference. At a time when the Armenian language had taken on great significance in Armenia, these refugees were speaking either a different dialect of Armenian or Russian only. Many had come from cities in Azerbaijan, however, in Armenia, they were forced by relocation committees to settle in villages. A number of those who managed to settle in the capital were very rich and their buying power affected several markets. In an irony of situations, people in Yerevan began to become concerned over the price of homes, since the wealth of the newly arrived Baku "refugee" was making the prices in the housing market skyrocket. One woman's comments about her new Baku Armenian neighbors attests to the new manifestation of the "other," the "othar." She says that the refugees "are different, not as hospitable ... and dirty ... well, like ... the Azeri." On the other side, feelings like that of a young academic for the Institute of Ethnography in Baku were commonly heard

as she said in very broken Armenian, "I feel foreign here ... I thought I would be accepted here among the Armenians ... but they treat me differently."

Ironically, when referring to the refugees from Azerbaijan, comments of a "they-us" nature and of an "otherness" were articulated not only by local Armenians, but also by repatriates of earlier days. The same type of differentiating that had existed for years was being played out again in the early 1990's with new players. Markers of difference once again were used to differentiate between Armenians from Azerbaijan - "them" - and local Armenians - "us." However, the "us" in this case included Armenians who had repatriated decades earlier.

CONCLUSIONS

The twentieth century, has been a marker of tremendous change for Armenians in Soviet Armenia. During four consequential times, the Armenian nation has been rejuvenated by debates resulting from the "other" Armenian meeting local Armenians. Through a systematic program of repatriation, Soviet Armenia has been injected with innovative ideas and new ways of doing things leading to new meanings. The force of the new (refugees and repatriates) united with the old (locals) was one of the factors which gave Armenia the fundamental push to renegotiate culturally significant difference. This renegotiation is a mechanism by which culture deals with the extreme social and economic upheaval that has faced Soviet Armenia. Repatriation fueled an understanding of peoplehood which has been crucial in the formation of the new Armenia nation in 1991.
Chapter Four / The Earthquake: Meanings Found Among the Ruins

The following anecdote was circulated after the earthquake:

Finally, cement and steel were brought to court to answer for the crimes of the earthquake. When asked what they were doing during the destruction, cement said, "It could not have been my fault. I wasn't even there." And when steel was asked about its role in the devastation, it answered, "No role. I was not there, either."

The Armenian earthquake occurred on December 7, 1988 at 11:41 a.m. Occurring at a precise point in time, the earthquake became timeless. The massive destruction killed tens of thousands, maimed thousands more, while hundreds of thousands became homeless. The financial loss was in the billions. Literally, a whole nation was crippled. For the Armenians, attempting to understand the earthquake and its aftermath and making sense of the suffering that resulted became critical in the process of cultural construction of an emerging identity as they were at the brink of breaking away from decades of Sovietization. It was a process of replacing the revolutionary "Soviet man" with the new "Armenian man". This process was totally immersed in historical legitimation with references to a grand and long past and above all to a people that had a long history of suffering and endurance.

The play of history is an integral dynamic and its manifestation within the unfolding of the earthquake drama is crucial to the modern construction of Armenian identity. The evoking of a historical past gave a processual dimension to a seemingly ahistorical event, the Earthquake at 11:41 a.m. For the Armenians, the pain of losses suffered, albeit sudden and climactic, made sense within their "this is our historical fate" concept, a concept that was shaping the post-earthquake identity. Therefore, the social implications of a shared, communal suffering was to reinforce not only their sense of
history, but also to act as a powerful cohesive force of a redefined identity.

This chapter will look at Armenian identity adjustments vis-a-vis the Armenian earthquake by looking at cultural forms, symbolism, historical positioning and nationalism in the time before and after the earthquake. Theoretically, I will rely on the discussion of popular memory and nationalism as found in the introductory chapter as they orient changing historical perceptions. Also another section on nationalism as a cultural construction will be included.

THE EARTHQUAKE AS A CLIMAX

The Armenian earthquake occurred at a unique time in Soviet history. It was the beginning of the great political and social upheaval within the Soviet Union which eventually led to its disintegration. The Armenian protest that began in early 1988 were a foreboding of a gripping situation yet to be played out throughout the entire Soviet Union. At first, the Armenian protests called for constitutional rights. They were protests aimed at the constitutional rights of ethnic minorities, specifically of Armenians who live in an enclave within the neighboring republic of Azerbaijan. The political unrest began as a response to "constitutional" and therefore, "legitimate" and "just" demands by the 84% Armenian population in the Autonomous Nagorno-Kharabagh (Mountainous Kharabagh) region of Azerbaijan. This enclave had voted to cede from the jurisdiction of the Azerbaijani Republic and had submitted requests for unification with the Armenian Republic. However, very quickly, the protests took on anti-Soviet dimensions. Immediately, the government in Moscow labeled the protests "nationalistic."

By the end of the first week, in February 1988, the demonstrations had drawn in an estimated one million people into the streets making it an unprecedented event in Armenian history. This meant that nearly a third of the population of the Armenian Republic was involved. These early weeks were described as times of triumph and of
heroism because the Armenians saw themselves as standing up to Soviet oppression and exposing social/political/economic corruption in Soviet society (as opposed to Armenian society).

However, very quickly, the aim of the critique shifted from one of a "just" society opposing Sovietisms, to one defined in uniquely Armenian terms. Ethnic strife had begun between the Armenians and Azeri and as a result, there was a drastic shift from "Armenian versus Soviet" to "Armenian versus Azeri" and eventually to the all encompassing "Armenian versus Turk" understandings.

The implications were that Azerbaijan had deliberately stifled both economic and cultural growth in the Kharabagh region since the beginning of the Russian revolution. Armenians understood that the underlying cause of ethnic strife between them and Azerbaijan was the result of a deliberate, pre-meditated policy aimed against the Armenians by Azeri. Furthermore, this pre-mediated policy was helped along by Soviet (Moscow) concerns and by general Soviet social corruption. As to why the Azeri would do such things, Armenians would answer that the Azeri were after all the same people as the Turks in Turkey and that they just happened to be caught on the Soviet side of the border after the Revolution separated from Turkey by Armenia. Thereby, Azeri and Turkish became interchangeable labels in the Armenian definitions. For Armenians, seventy years of Soviet "brotherhood among nationalities" had not eliminated this tension but had only driven underground the Armenian/Azeri (Turkish) conflict which had climaxed in the early twentieth century with the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire.

Genocide ("tseghaspanootuin") and the notion that Armenians were victims of Turkish aggressors are powerful social symbols in the Armenian cultural worlds. Therefore, it is not surprising that even in the contemporary attempt of definition, these same symbols once again came into play in new ways. The demonstrations and protests
of early 1988 took on a violent turn, when hardly a week had passed and an Azeri mob attacked Armenians in Sumgait, an industrial town near the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku. What actually happened is lost under a colossal Soviet investigation. What was important and clear to the Armenians was that their compatriots in Sumgait had been singled out by Azeri mobs and murdered and that the Azeri government had done nothing to stop the slaughter. The outcry by Armenians was immediate and intense. Sumgait was described as yet another planned "genocide" at the hands of Turks (Azeri) in order to extinguish Armenian self-determination just as the Ottoman Empire had done at the turn of the century, and so too the Azeri wanted to extinguish Armenian self-determination.

References to the Genocide of 1915 were evident at the memorial service held in the capital of Armenia for those killed in Sumgait. Hundreds of thousands marched to the Genocide Memorial to lay wreaths and flowers although such a public assembly was in defiance of the official state of emergency. In the past, people had marched to the memorial at Tsitsernakaberd only on April 24, the Armenian commemoration day of the Genocide. At the memorial, many placards connected 1915 to 1988. As an example one banner read "the blood of a 'brother' on a 'brother's' hands" (referring to the Soviet rhetoric of "brotherhood of nationalities"). Another read simply, "1915-1988."

Moscow’s and Azerbaijani refusal to call the event a "genocide" (in official rhetoric, it was described as an "unfortunate isolated incident") and delays in investigations of the matter heightened tensions. The demonstrations continued for months. There were hunger strikes and work stoppages at all the major factories and establishments. Tensions increased and became violent. Within months, Armenia’s Azerbaijani population of around 200,000 had either moved or been forced to move to Azerbaijan. In the meantime, reports of forced evacuations and terror in Azerbaijan had the reverse effect. In a six month period, 230,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan moved or fled to Armenia. These Armenians became known as "refugees" and many settled in
the northern areas of Armenia. In just a matter of weeks, these very areas were to become known as the "earthquake zone." These refugee Armenians were later thought to be "victims" twice over, first of the Turks (Azeri) and second of the earthquake.

There are many similarities between the tense situation in which the Armenian earthquake occurred and that of the Peruvian earthquake of 1970. In No Bells to Toll, Barbara Bode studies the social implications of the Peruvian earthquake at a time of tremendous social and cultural change. Various elements in Peruvian society were also struggling for a "just" society. The "belittles" coup of 1968 had brought to power the Revolutionary Military Government which vowed to bring about social, political and economic reform in the country. This mission was defined as a "moral" objective and meant to bring together the marginal Indians of the Sierras (those later to be directly affected by the quake) with the coastal dominant mestizo population in a new egalitarian state independent of foreign domination. The other force of change towards a "just" society came from the Catholic Church and the growing theology of liberation. Catholic Reform was not only breaking age old traditions in orthodox Catholicism but also disallowing many of the pre-Columbian aspects of religion that had for centuries become a part of the Catholicism practiced by the Indians. A new revolutionary Peru was in the process of being constructed when the earthquake happened. But rather than destroying it all, the earthquake was seen as a point of new beginnings for the whole society.¹

DISASTER THEORY

Quarantelli, a noted disaster researcher defines a disaster by quoting an accepted definition by Charles Fritz (who has written several well known works on social behavior and disasters, Fritz 1957, 1961):

¹Bode (1989), pp. 189-216.
[a disaster is] an event, concentrated in time and space in which a society or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of a society, undergoes severe damage and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society is prevented.

Quarantelli concedes that the field of disaster theory is still nascent and therefore propositions are not fully established; neither are fundamental models.²

Basically, a disaster can result from "naturally hazardous agents" such as earthquakes, floods or tornadoes or from "risk producing technological agents" such those resulting in the tragedies of Three Mile Island or Bhopal. Cataclysmic disasters are relatively sudden and confined to a definable locale. Most of the studies have been conducted in urbanized, highly industrialized societies. Pooling together the studies that are available, Quarantelli notes that four areas of social change have been defined. The categorical areas are in individual behavior, in organizational behavior, in community behavior and in societal behavior.³

Individuals are usually very uninterested in preparing for a disaster, but interestingly, when a disaster occurs they react well. Although from the outside it seems as a chaotic or confused environment, disaster survivors are generally well organized and perform meaningful activities. They assist tremendously and are usually the first to instigate search and rescue. There is no wild flight from the area. On the contrary, people converge to help others. Panic is very rare in community disasters since survivors have no sense of social isolation. Everyone else is also affected and is suffering in the same manner. And furthermore, pro-social rather than anti-social behavior is common. For example looting is not as rampant as believed and crime is less

³Ibid, p.10.
than what would be normal. All of these points were witnessed in Armenia. As to the last point, talk abounded that the first few cases of looting were immediately stopped by the survivors turned rescuers. Also a story was circulated that even a prison in Leninakan let its prisoners go so that they could search for their relatives and then return.

Finally, the society as a whole is addressed. It is maintained that usually, the image that a given society has of the disaster and its effects is mostly provided by the mass media. Therefore, Quarantelli suggests a link between mass media operations and risk communication not resulting from the scientific world but within the larger socio-cultural world. Symbolisms of disasters and cultural beliefs and values about nature of society are all major factors for research and have been addressed by the mass media rather than scientific research. In Armenia, the initial explanations for the cause of the earthquake which circulated within the population were very socio-culturally based. These same articulations were not reiterated by the media. What the media did expand on was the images of survival and re-building and re-birth. As mentioned before, images of the earthquake were played with by various elements of society which were struggling for new power positions in a new Armenian society.

NATIONALISM PLAYED OUT: Bi-Polar Causes of the Earthquake

As evidenced by anecdotes recounted by survivors of the earthquake, while they were underneath the rubble, they had believed that the destruction had been the result of

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5It is not clear how many came back to the prison.

6Quarantelli, p. 33.

7See Turner (1979); Wilkins (1987).
"the United States invading" or that "war had broken out" between unspecified major powers. As rescues continued, in the early days, two new explanations as to the cause of the earthquake emerged. These explanations were immersed in the ongoing socio-political drama that was being fueled by anti-Sovietism and by "nationalistic" tendencies.

For Armenians using anti-Soviet rhetoric, for Armenians, it was clear that Moscow was to blame directly for the quake. There were several reasons for this argument. Violence was escalating in Azerbaijan, refugees were streaming into Armenia and Armenians were putting increased pressure on the government for resolutions to the escalating tensions. On November 24, (3 weeks before the quake) curfew/martial law (people were unclear on which it was) was set up in Armenia as the Soviet tanks and soldiers filled the city. Tensions increased and the national Kharabagh Movement which had spearheaded the demonstrations went underground. Not only was opposition to Moscow’s authority not ending, it was increasing. Thus for Armenians, Moscow’s motives and desires to drastically put an end to the opposition once and for all seemed all too natural. Popular understanding was that the earthquake had been staged by the Soviet powers in Moscow. But how could they have created a earthquake of magnitude 6.2?

Various "factors" pointed to the Soviets being directly involved in causing the earthquake. It had long been commonly believed that in the area near the epicenter of the quake, there had been a secret military base which had been producing explosives and perhaps even nuclear devices. The belief was that these explosives had been detonated and the resulting explosive force had "caused" the quake.8 People recount hearing explosive sounds or seeing explosive fires seconds before the quake hit. As further evidence of Moscow’s hand in creating the earthquake, people pointed to the sudden and

8Detonated bombs were also a factor in the Peruvian earthquake. See Bode, pp. 168-179.
quiet arrest by the government of the Kharabagh Movement's leaders three days after the quake. In addition, despite the national chaos that had ensued, the imposed curfew in major cities against political demonstrations or public assemblies of any kind, although not strictly adhered to, was not officially lifted until much later. Therefore, in everyday conversations, placing direct guilt on Moscow was common.

If not directly, then the Soviet government/Moscow was indirectly the culprit. Armenians believed that they were paying the ultimate price for "70 years of Soviet social and political corruption" especially of state corruption in the construction sector. As many international experts have stated, the magnitude of the loss of lives and destruction was not only the result of a strong quake but mainly the result of faulty building design and inadequate construction. There was a definite lack of cement and steel beams in the construction of the high rise apartment buildings. Most of the materials skimped on from the design to the construction phase were sold on the side for personal profit. The building design itself which was along the lines of those built in Moscow or Leningrad was also inadequate for a seismic zone. These were built under pressure from centralized powers rather than under the control of local builders.

There were other events that pointed to Moscow's guilt. One was in the reporting of the death toll. The official government death toll of 25,000 dead (as indicated by the total number of death certificates issued by the end of 1988) was seen as a means of undermining Armenian interests. The popular belief was that over 100,000 had lost their lives although there was no documentation to prove this "fact." For Armenians, the

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9For reference, I offer the following ballpark figures. The earthquake zone included three main cities - Leninakan (Gyumri) with a population of 250,000, Spitak with a population of 20,000 and Kirovakan (Vanadzor) with a population of ?. Several villages were also involved. After the earthquake, about 200,000 people returned to live in Leninakan, 10,000 returned to Spitak. The death toll in Kirovakan had only been around 500. Therefore, the population in the cities had dropped by roughly 60,000 people. Of course, some had moved away from the area. How many of the 60,000 had died is under question.
discrepancy in numbers was a deliberate attempt by the Soviets to control information being given to the West. Such information would disfavorably affect financial concerns, as well as the reconstruction and other internal issues.\textsuperscript{10}

The second explanation for the cause of the quake is immersed within another form of Armenian cultural rhetoric. If not Moscow, then Azerbaijan was to be blamed for the earthquake. "After all, Azeri and Turks have had a history of anti-Armenianism as well as genocide," said one observer. By this, his references were the Armenian pogroms of the 1890's in the Ottoman Empire, the Genocide of 1915, and the killing of Armenians in Azerbaijan in 1988. An earthquake not only would have put an end to ethnic strife and territorial claims but also would have been a final blow to all Armenians. The "evidence" supporting this claim was the "sudden" and "hasty" departure of thousands of Azeri living in the earthquake zone in Armenia to Azerbaijan the weeks and days right before the earthquake. This indicated to those Armenians who were using this line of thinking that the departure of the Azeri was not the result of the general political situation and of the increased violence against them, but prior knowledge of the great national disaster that was about to happen. A couple of isolated incidents immediately after the quake helped solidify this argument. Several trainloads of relief goods coming from Azerbaijan to the quake zone had within them congratulatory notes on the occasion of the earthquake.

Placing guilt on Moscow or on the Azeri was very common in the month following the earthquake. But eventually with more data coming in, especially from the international scientific community, these two antagonists, Moscow and Azerbaijan, were cleared of direct involvement in the natural disaster. With direct involvement out of the

\textsuperscript{10}Moscow's connection with earthquakes as possible state control of unrest was expanded even further when after Armenia, an earthquake occurred in Turkmenia and than a few months later in Tbilisi. In both cases, the quakes came at a climactic period of heightened tensions between the people and the government.
way, they were nonetheless never fully absolved of being guilty. Somehow or another, this type of reasoning seemed to creep back into conversations for yet a bit longer.

NATURE AND THE EARTH

These socio-cultural explanations for the cause of the earthquake become more fascinating in light of the fact that Armenia is situated in a seismic zone with a history of extensive earthquake activity. The ruins of Ani, the grand old capital of historic Armenia which survived numerous Turkic invasions but which was destroyed by an earthquake centuries before, stand in present day Turkey within sight from the Armenian border. Ani is a reminder of a great loss to a massive natural calamity as well as a loss to the enemy, the Turk. Ani’s ruins are now on Turkish lands. These are the same lands that Armenians claim as historic Armenia. Another past earthquake destroyed Zvartnots, a cathedral complex which is also considered an architectural masterpiece. What remains of Zvartnots’ ruins are now an outdoor museum outside of Yerevan. Many other ruins, categorized as cultural artifacts, dot the Armenian landscape. To Armenians, these ruins stand as unchanging reminders of a grand past, of violence by nature, of violence by the Turks.

The hundreds of churches that dot the landscape of Armenia are cultural artefacts which stand as a testament to the presence of Armenians throughout the territory.

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11See Bode for Peruvian comparison, pp.151-167.

12Turkey’s position is that while Armenians lived on this territory, it is not Armenian per se just as it is not Kurdish. Presently, Kurds make up the biggest population in this area of Turkey and it is where the PKK is the strongest.

13The modern Yerevan airport built in the late 1970’s is built in the same circular design and is called Zvartnots Airport.

14Monuments of Armenian Architecture, published in Beirut, and the Monuments of Armenian Architecture Series, published in Yerevan are wonderful source books on the more well-known Armenian churches. They are also beautiful picture-books.
They stand as not only religious symbols but as secular ones as well. During the Soviet period, these architectural masterpieces became known as cultural monuments and are referred to as such even today. Although spirituality is present, most of these churches are places that hold immense meaning for the secular Armenian. From the first church built in the fourth century, to the thousands that were built in the centuries following, they are reminders and place-markers to countless wars and invasions, to earthquakes and death, to grandeur, peace and re-birth. As Atom Egoyan shows in his film, Calendar, the Armenian churches are places that are in strong play between nature and culture.15 The fact that they are often built in the most dominant natural local cannot be an accident. According to Egoyan, this is where the greatest energy flows are and it is the peak of connection between the heavens and the earth. The churches in Calendar serve the same paradoxical role that they do in Armenian society, making one wonder about the histories behind the stories, the nature of seduction leading one to wonder what and who is inside, and to marvel at their continued existence. Each church is surrounded by "khatchkar" which are delicately engraved stone markers. Out of the thousands that have survived to date, no two have been found alike. These "khatchkar" mark places that Armenians imagine as uniquely theirs. They along with the churches transgress heaven and earth, past and present, Armenian and Turkish, death and survival.

The churches stand as a reminder that Armenians were once great builders of civilizations and of cities. Many of these centuries old structures withstood several earthquakes before falling. But as a result of the earthquake of 1988, the buildings they built in their modern cities crumbled to dust instantaneously. Leninakan, Armenia’s second largest city, with a population of over 250,000, was totally devastated and the new parts of town with modern high-rises were completely leveled in a matter of

15 Calendar is a film by Atom Egoyan, produced by Ego Films in 1993 in Toronto.
seconds. But within the devastation, one area of town remained intact. The buildings in the center of town did not collapse. Ironically, these buildings were built at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{16} This area is known by the ancient name, Gyumri. The city of Leninakan developed from this city center. In honor of Czar Alexander and the Russian Empire, Gyumri had been renamed Alexandrapol in the 1800's. However, after the Russian Revolution, the town was once again renamed to Leninakan in honor of Lenin. For the Armenians of the post-earthquake period, Leninakan was a harking back to Sovietization, to oppression and corruption. After the earthquake, people believed that Gyumri, symbolizing both Armenianness and the strength of the past, had withstood the tremors. However, the new buildings in Leninakan, especially in the sections like "erankiun" and "boulvarne" which symbolized the accomplishments of Soviet society, had all crumbled. The saying was "Leninakan fell, but Gyumri remained." Ironically, the corrupt Soviet present had crumbled leaving the strong Armenian past. The Armenian image had prevailed over the Soviet image.\textsuperscript{17}

Historically, Armenia has been situated not only within an earthquake zone but has been nestled between rugged mountain ranges, between volcanos, on "fields of stone." "Fields of stone" is a common description of the Armenian landscape. Armenian folktales and cultural symbolism abounds in the two highest mountain peaks of Mount Ararat and Mount Aragats. Both mountains are dormant volcanos and the sheer size of both overpowers the surrounding landscape. Mount Ararat raises 15,000

\textsuperscript{16}The scientific explanation as to why these buildings did not collapse has to do with the particular ground composition and the type of wave that passed the area.

\textsuperscript{17}In the Fall of 1990, the name of Leninakan was changed once again. It became Kumairi, an Armenianized version of the Turkish Gyumri. Later still, when Kumairi failed to hold, the town was officially renamed Gyumri. However, to date, people from the area still refer to the name Leninakan. If they say that they are from Gyumri, this usually means that their forefathers were from the area rather than their being new comers.
feet from the Ararat valley and Mount Aragats raises 10,000 feet between the Ararat and Shirak valleys. These mountains stand facing one another each on opposite sides of the border. They can be seen from many points in the country and their sheer size and positioning make them objects of fascination for the population. In a way, these mountains hold together not only the Armenian landscape, but also the Armenian people, Armenian desires and tragedies and Armenian histories.

In the twentieth century, Mount Ararat of Noah’s ark stories has been encoded with highly emotionalized meanings. The mountain is a natural phenomena, a dormant volcano that presently stands on the border of Armenian worlds. In a great act of nature, it is presently positioned such that it guards the rejuvenated modern nation of Armenia as well as the grand past of Armenian history. If one was standing on the mountain and looking eastward, one would see the Ararat valley which is the most fertile agricultural land that modern Armenia has. On a clear day, one would see Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Looking westward, one would see the vast expanse that was once part of the ancient kingdom in which Armenians lived for thousands of years. One would be reminded that Armenians no longer live there for they have been removed by force and genocide just a few decades ago.

Mount Ararat is very close to the Armenian nation yet it could be thousands of miles away. It is only forty kilometers from the border and towers majestically over the capital city. Yet, it is across the border, a border that was held sacred during Soviet times as well as now. In the early 1920’s, the Red Army had had possession of the lands around Mount Ararat and the old Armenian town of Kars. However, the Soviet government in Moscow, in a conciliatory move to appease the newly formed Republic of Turkey and to bring them into the Soviet sphere of influence, gave these regions and precious Mount Ararat to Turkey. Armenians were told that for the betterment and the future of the new Soviet state, sacrifices had to be made. Mount Ararat was one of these
sacrifices imposed on the Armenian people. As a result, Mount Ararat became a powerful cultural symbol of survival and of loss, of both the present and the past.

The power of the symbol was so great that even state powers conceded to its depiction. The official emblem of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia has Mount Ararat prominently displayed on it. Thus, Armenia was the only republic which displayed some socially meaningful image that was not on its territory or even within the Soviet border. It is commonly believed that the power, the passion, the inspiration and the longing that images of Mount Ararat create are precisely the result of the fact that the mountain is not within reach or within the borders of Armenians. The historical chain of events which placed the largest geological wonder in the Euphrates valley and for thousands of miles around right at the border of modern Armenia but not within it has given the Armenian people more of a passion for making it represent the Armenian people especially in modern times.

As a consequence of the rugged terrain, most of the present arable lands had to be cultivated after rocks and stones were removed from the top soil. Armenians refer to their land as the "Land of Stones" and stories of how Armenians over the centuries removed each stone by hand dot the cultural landscape in stories. Referring to their history, Armenians say that the "stone speaks for itself," telling of the struggles and the love of the land. For centuries Armenians struggled against the earth and against the violence that it could unleash. With the earthquake of 1988, this scenario was being restaged.

LOSS OF COMMUNITY

The Armenian earthquake was not only a background against which issues of national identity were placed, it was also a means of solidifying regional identity concerns. Armenians feared that established images and identities as well as established
communities were in danger of changing or worse yet, of being lost. For example, Leninakan was often referred to as the "humor capital of Armenia." People from Leninakan were not only known for telling jokes but also for the jokes that were usually about their own self-assuredness and their wealth. Indeed, the population in Leninakan as a whole was economically much better off than in other areas of Armenia and they did not hesitate to display this wealth in relatively extravagant lifestyles. People in Leninakan were known to have "a lot of money in their pockets," live in fancier dwellings, spend more on clothing and housewares (mainly from the flourishing black market that resulted from the presence of Soviet bases in town) and outdo themselves on the lavishness of social occasions such as weddings. Immediately after the earthquake, people both in Leninakan and Yerevan proudly recounted that within the shock and tragedy, a sense of humor still prevailed in Leninakan.

A particular series of jokes is prefaced by the same story line: people in Leninakan have such big mouths that ... they could eat an entire feast made for a king, or talk anyone into anything or fit anything of any size in it. Immediately after the quake the following joke was heard in Leninakan:

Question - Do you know why the earthquake happened in Leninakan?
Answer - Yes, a Leninakantsi (person from Leninakan) opened his mouth and yawned.

In retelling this joke, people in Yerevan would supplement it with words of pride and admiration, "it's just like them to joke", "they are good people and happy people, always talking, joking, laughing, they know how to live." Such images were also restated in the media. This very strong sense of community among and about the people was hanging on; however, other aspects of community were being threatened.

In addition to monetary and human loss, people in Leninakan feared the plans for reconstruction would change drastically the "flavor and smell," "hameh oo hotheh" of Leninakan. The drastic need for immediate reconstruction was partially met by a
massive construction work force that arrived from all parts of the Soviet Union. Rumors spread that these construction workers would also be guaranteed housing in Leninakan once the reconstruction job was completed. In Leninakan mainly but also throughout the Republic, there was a public outcry against this possibility. Leninakan, like most of Armenia, is very homogeneously Armenian. The presence of such a diversity of nationalities for an extended period of time or perhaps permanently was seen as a threat to this homogeneity. The protest against this plan was so great that the idea was scrapped by the government. An earlier plan to rebuild the city and name its new sections after the different Soviet nationalities was also rejected. Just as in Peruvian case, people demanded that the old Leninakan be rebuilt and not some new version of it.

Positioning of the community and of the people was an on-going marker of cultural concerns. In the week that followed the quake, rumors of forced evacuation from the city spread throughout the population. People in Leninakan said that they would never leave. Similarly, plans for completely relocating the town of Spitak, the other major city completely leveled by the earthquake, were immediately rejected. City residents fought for and won the right to have the new city built on the same exact site as the old city even though it was still on a known fault line.

In just months, although only a small number had homes to which they could come back, many families from Leninakan and Spitak came back to set up their lives among the ruins. The vast majority lived in tents which slowly gave way to more "permanent" housing in the form of train boxcars or one room wooden structures. In general, families would set up their new "residences" at or near the site of their original home. From the very beginning, the family unit, or at least those that were left of it, returned to the devastated areas and established makeshift living conditions. Almost

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18 Figures quoted by Gyumri city hall indicate that as of 1991, the population of the city was at 204,000.
everyone that I spoke to vowed always to live in the area. A popular song written after
the earthquake illustrates this desire and commitment:

Leninakan, beautiful city, let's go decorate it, I was born in the city, I
will die in the city, I want to share ("thanem") the pain ("tsave") of the
one from Gyumri…

The desire to return to the area of devastation and set up life in the same exact spot as
they had done before was a come occurrence both in the Peruvian earthquake and in the
massive destruction caused by the Buffalo Creek Flood of 1972.\textsuperscript{19}

In his sociological study of the Buffalo Creek flood, Erikson argues that it is not
the specific community per se that is feared will be lost but rather a sense of
communality. The loss of this communality is part of the collective trauma that survivors
endure after a massive disaster. Communality is defined as "the network of relationships
that make up their general human surround."\textsuperscript{20} In society, the persons making up the
networks are usually called neighbors and are intertwined with one another in a
neighborhood community. Neighbors have understandings that are part of the "natural
order" or further

\begin{quote}
\textquote{to 'be neighborly' is not a quality you can carry with you into a new
situation like negotiable emotional currency; the old community was your
niche in the classic ecological sense, and your ability to relate to the niche
is not a skill easily transferred to another setting.}\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

Erikson proposes that it is just this loss of communality, the being "ripped out of a
meaningful community," that brings about the most traumatic symptoms. "It is the
community that cushions pain, the community that provides a context for intimacy, the
\textsuperscript{19}See Bode for Peruvian earthquake; see Erikson, \textit{Everyting in its Path}, for the
Buffalo Creek flood.

\textsuperscript{20}Erikson, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid}, p. 191.
community that represents morality and serves as the repository for old traditions.\textsuperscript{22}

A loss of communality brings with it a sense of dislocation, disorientation, alienation from surroundings, and difficulties in maintaining intimate and familial bonds. The strain on marriages was evident both at Buffalo Creek as well as in Armenia. However, a sense of disorientation and a sense of a "freezing of time" before and after the disasters was not common to both events. At Buffalo Creek, there was an overwhelming feeling that history had in a way stopped at the time of the devastation and that which was being lived now was new and dismembered from the past. As discussed above, it is clear that in the case of the Armenian quake, the events acted not just as a point in history but as a continuum from the past to the present.\textsuperscript{23} The Buffalo Creek survivors' fear of loss of collectivity came precisely from their loss of footings, from their loss of connection to a past great past. On the contrary, in Armenia, the past remained and became an anchor for survivors. Everything in a way fit the natural order of things. People went back to their old communities, to Gyumri and protested new "foreign" arrivals and ideas and new city designs. Despite losses, their collectivity and communality had remained intact. In many ways this communality had even expanded to include other Armenians not in the earthquake zone. This expansion came through a shared narrative of experiences. For the experience of the earthquake could be translated into the broader shared experience of Armenians: tragedy, struggle, death, survival, triumph and rebirth.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid, pp. 193-194.

\textsuperscript{23}In Leninakan, time was frozen in a sense. The clock in the main square was left at 11:41, the time the earthquake hit and when the clock stopped working. However, this stopping of time is just a memorial to those who lost their lives.
A GRAND COMMUNITY

The earthquake directly affected not only those in the earthquake zone but all Armenians throughout the republic. Because of the republic's small size and population, most people in other parts of the republic either had relatives or had friends in the earthquake zone. Therefore, the pain of loss as well as the coping with what was left was a nation-wide phenomenon. Initially, the fact that Armenians are such a small population rose fatalistic fears of total annihilation of the Armenian people. In their understandings, so many factors had been working against them in recent memory especially within the existing political situation. And now was it "possible that nature, too, was against the Armenians?" In the months that followed, disillusionment with life in general and life in Armenia in particular increased. Many more expressed the desire to leave Armenia and emigrate abroad.

After a brief period of fatalism, the "this is the end of us" and "what is there left" attitude gave way to a renewed sense of life. The period of reconstruction following the quake was referred to as the time of "rebirth (veratsnood)." The rebirth was not confined only to the earthquake zone but affecting all of the Armenian republic. During this time, the phoenix was often used to symbolize various events and ideas. No longer were Armenians "doomed" but they were "survivors." They would say that after all, "they had survived for thousands of years," or that "we have survived other disasters." Present day survival was evoking the survival of the pasts.

Disaster theorists and researchers have acknowledged this post-devastation period of euphoric feelings. For example, as observed by Wallace in ?, there is a "stage of euphoria" immediately after an disastrous event. This comes after an initial period when the survivor thinks that it is the end of the world since he has lost much of the support of his society and means of controlling his environment. Wallace in a rather sexist manner describes the situation. This sense of euphoria is linked to the realization that
the community is not all lost or dead. Reassurances are sought by cooperation in rescue efforts by relatives and neighbors to seek life in the ruins. This cooperation and coordination is referred to as a "community of sufferers," an "altruistic community" or "democracy of distress." And when life is found, an individual or the community senses its own rebirth.

In Armenia, euphoria in the form of "rebirth" was the result of conscious manipulation of cultural issues and historical understandings by the Armenian press, writers, historians and even the government. Passivity and fatalism became unacceptable traits. Although what happened was often attributed to the unfortunate nature of "Armenian's fate (Hayi baght)," images of survival and rebuilding.

To counteract the death toll, articles began appearing in the press encouraging Armenian women and families to have more children. This national push had a moral dimension. Having more children was not only the "Armenian" but also the "right" thing to do. Immediate marriage (of course, after the appropriate mourning period) of a person who had lost a spouse in the quake was encouraged so that the family unit would remain intact and begin to procreate as soon as possible. A strong sense of family was not to be undermined.

The repercussions of the earthquake had spread throughout Armenia. All shared in the tragedy and the loss: the loss of relatives, the loss of friends and possibly the loss

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24See list in Erikson, pp. 200-201.

25"Hayi baght" means that all kinds of bad things just happen to Armenians. In a popular story by a contemporary writer, Hrant Movsesian called "It's Just Us and Our Mountains," there is a humorous dialogue between Armenian shepherds about the death of President Kennedy. One shepherd says, "so, why did they kill him?" and the other one replies, "who knows, he must of had an Armenian's fate (hayi baght ooner)!

26Often Armenians would point to Soviet statistics that showed a drop in the number of Armenians births while there was an increase in the birth rate of Muslims in the Soviet Union. This was seen as a threat.
of a nation. There is an Armenian saying, "tsavet thanem" - from "tsav," meaning pain, and "thanel," meaning to take. Roughly translated, this commonly used saying means "may the burden of your pain be placed upon me" or in other words, "may I take you pain away." A socio-linguistic analysis would point to a sense of bonding resulting from shared misfortunes. This expression is used from the most endearing of situations to the most insincere. However, after the earthquake it was injected with a great deal of cultural meaning. The repetition of "tsavet thanem" gave suffering and pain a common dimension. It became a unifying and strengthening concept providing support for the culture to endure the pain of loss and to show that together, they can survive, "in the same way that we have done in the past."

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

There have been several massive earthquakes in the recent past that have been of the same magnitude as that in Armenia and they each have had the same if not more loss of lives or property. However, the type of response directed to Armenia from the international community had unique particularities and allowed the Armenians to understand themselves in the global sense. The international response was the result of a unique and complex set of circumstances. In Western understandings, the earthquake acted as a litmus test for Gorbachev's grandiose plan of perestroika and glasnost. Gorbachev had embarked on a new road filled with promises of change and reform. To sell the idea abroad, he had just begun a momentous tour of the West to encourage the growing world-wide popular support of the new policies. Gorbachev was in New York that December day starting what was to be an extremely popular visit to the United States. Upon hearing of the earthquake and its magnitude, a seemingly tearful, deeply

27Such earthquakes as Peru-1970, Nicaragua-1979 and Mexico-1984 are all relevant.
saddened and worried Gorbachev made hasty goodbyes at the New York airport and headed back to the Soviet Union. Immediately after this departure, for the very first time since the Cold War had begun, the Soviet government asked for Western help. The magnitude and intensity of the international help that ensued was tremendous.

The previously stark, closed Soviet society was surprisingly laid open for the West. Planes began immediately bypassing Moscow and headed directly to the airport in Yerevan. Usually rigorous customs and visa checks were foregone. Although bureaucratic obstacles remained, for the most part, the usually closed institutions and government agencies diligently facilitated the acquiring of information and assistance, for example in acquiring maps and building and city plans that had been virtually unavailable to foreigners. All Westerners - including journalists who had just days before not been allowed to come to Armenia as a result of the growing Armenian-Azeri conflict - were suddenly left on their own. For example, a few days after the quake, ABC's Peter Jennings did his report from the main square in Yerevan with Soviet tanks in the background. These tanks had been brought in a few weeks earlier as part of the curfew and martial law. During that period, it had been illegal even to take photos of the tanks let alone videos. At that time, Armenia had been totally closed to Western journalists. Of course, the journalists made use of the opportunity to investigate not only the quake but also cover the ethnic and political unrest in the area. The West was getting its first close look at Soviet society, not necessarily Armenian society, and everyone wanted to participate.

The general Armenian opinion as to the explanation for the scale of international participation and the globalization of this local tragedy was different from the one given above. In order to make sense of the response, Armenians once again internalized the

\[28\text{With few exceptions, Moscow was the usual port of entry into the Soviet Union.}\]
issues. Other "nationalities" and in particular Western "nationalities" were involved because they cared about Armenia specifically. In the Soviet sense, the "West" was perceived as a series of nationalities rather than countries.

Since there was a lack of general knowledge about similar earthquakes, Armenians believed that their earthquake was the "biggest" and "worst" in history. And this is why the West responded as it did. And as such, Gorbachev’s glasnost and new openness had little to do with anything. These western nationalities came to help because they knew of the plight of Armenians and their long suffering. Comments such as "they came because Armenians are good people" or "they came because they know how much we have suffered," (referring to historical issues as well as recent political issues) reflected common attitudes. The Armenians were not aware that among the Westerners, there were individuals who did not know about Armenian culture or its politics. For example, some of these individuals were among the rescue team sent from the United States.

The global exposure that Armenia received after the earthquake became a catalyst for repositioning in a new geo-political matrix. Their sense of who they were was no longer confined to the space of their borders. Their contact with foreigners, especially Westerners, has suddenly and drastically increased. The in-pouring of international aid was forcing Armenians to understand their own world and define how they were to fit into this "new", larger world "out there". A more detailed look at the affects of these international interactions on new cultural meanings will be presented in the following chapter.

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29 Of course, this is not to say that their identity had been bound by borders. The existence of the Armenian Diaspora and the affects of repatriation also influenced Soviet Armenian identity. See Chapter Three.
CONCLUSION

Therefore, at a time of great social stress and subsequently at a time when Armenians were in the process of articulating and restructuring their identity. The earthquake served as a pivotal point around which culturally relevant implications of tragedy and survival became replayed. The quake brought together historical issues and ethnic conflict; it brought together isolation and contact; it brought together oppression and self-determination; it was the end of the closed Soviet society and the beginning of a new open Armenian society. The physical pain experienced in the earthquake zone became expanded as a metaphorical pain as shared experience for the people. This shared experience pulled them between that which was understood and familiar, such as history and tradition, and that which was new and unfamiliar, such as the "new" Armenian, catapulted onto a new world order.

Final Images

As you drive over the mountain range, just an hour north of Yerevan, and start the winding rode down into the valley, the beauty of the landscape is unquestioned. The valley, nestled between the mountains has been for centuries inhabited by Armenians. The valley was where the small city of Spitak had been before it was totally leveled by the quake. Spitak was the name given to the town after the Revolution. It had previously been known by its name Hamamlu, derived from Turkish. This is where the city was; yet, this is where it will be again. On the outskirts of the city, on a hill which can be seen from numerous directions and for miles around, a new structure was erected after the earthquake. This structure spans the centuries and brings the past to the present and places the present in the past. The construction of this structure in 1989 parallels the construction of history, of memory, of cultural artifacts and values. The structure is an Armenian church. The design of the church follows uniquely Armenian centuries-
old architectural style; yet, because of a lack of building material and because of the exigencies of time, the church is completely covered in aluminum sheeting. Therefore, the church, bright and shiny, reflects light from all directions. It adds a sense of surrealism, of futuristic aestheticism, of juxtaposing of old and new, of the modern within the centuries old, unchanging natural beauty of the valley. In Armenia, the present is indeed the past and the past remains in the present.
Chapter Five / New "Others" for Armenia: 
Crisis, Transition and the West

It was the beginning of 1991 and the commemorations of the two year anniversary of the earthquake had just passed. A group of people were gathered at a friends house for a social event and after the customary toasting of family and friends and of the victims of the earthquake, the conversation turned towards the all too familiar by now and what I have come to call the "have and the have nots" discussion. In this respect, the "have" column pertains to the Western world, where supposedly everything proceeds according to desires and plans, where one is capable of reaching one's goals, where everything is available. The "have not" column includes the Armenian world where there is devastation, where there are shortages and discomfort. This time however, the conversation took on an interesting twist. One of the guests who was a Diasporan Armenia asked the following question:

why do you always compare yourself to France or the US? These are incredibly large nations with powerful economies. Why don't you compare yourself to other countries with whom you may have more in common and see where they are now and where you are now. For example, why don't you ever compare yourself to Pakistan or Vietnam or to some African nations? It is always the United States.

The answer from a local Armenian was simply, "Why shouldn't we?" Another added that "it's the last thing we would do (mez hents eth er manatsel) to compare ourselves to places like that."

By saying "places like that," the speaker's intention was made clear. These other countries and nationalities were deemed to be "backward (hethamenats)" and they could not be compared to the Armenia which "after all is not undeveloped." Once again, here was a paradox of expectations and ideals. For no matter how readily critical the Armenians were of their own society, they were quick to defend their social situations
when compared to other cases which they deemed "backward (hethamenats)," cases which included most of the non-G7 countries of the world. As justification for such comparisons, Armenians would say, "after all, we are very educated," "we have seen the world (ashkhar thesat enk)," and "we have a lot to offer to the world" and therefore, "why shouldn't we live like people in the United States?"

Using Western and especially American standards to define their own lives was becoming more and more common. As an example, I look at the way homes were being bought and sold during this time. In the former communist state, homes were given by the state to the people and by law they could not be sold. On the other hand, private homes (but not the property that they were on) could be sold at certain set prices. However, for decades, wheeling and dealing had gone on with the paying of bribes and the fixing of papers so that both types of homes could be sold for higher than official prices. In the early nineties, as the foreign community in Armenia grew and as foreigners inquired about buying homes, a new market of selling homes developed. Although there were only a handful of foreign nationals actually buying homes, prices in dollars skyrocketed. These prices seemed not to be determined by any sort of a market understandings. For example, the same type of apartment could go any where from $10,000 to about $100,000 while the comparable ruble price for the same home using even the lowest of conversion rates would be $5000 or $10,000. Private homes were going for much more than $100,000 and sometimes for $200,000. But in rubles, they were much less expensive. The much higher dollar price was asked of foreigners and once when I asked how could there be such a discrepancy, I was told by a wealthy homeowner, "what is a few tens of thousands to a foreigner? In any case, I want my son in Los Angeles to be able to buy a house there. This one for an exchange there." Like others, he was placing a monetary value on his possessions based on a superficial understanding of western market trends. To them, that did not matter. What mattered
was that the value of their possessions was "naturally" comparable to values in the United States. A person selling his handmade carpets told the prospective buyer, "you can get $1000 dollars for this in America and you only want to pay $50. No. I will sell it to you for $1000."

A dual natured market had developed. One was based on the Soviet subsidized ruble economy and the other was based on cultural understanding of value and worth in a capitalist economy, especially in the United States. Interestingly, this meant that the same item had two different prices. Western involvement vis-a-vis the United States was effecting and shifting attitudes of the Armenians about themselves and their positioning in the world order. This involvement brought about an interesting blend of acceptance and rejection of Western situations, qualifiers and markers within the "purely (makour)" Armenian world.

Although, in relative terms, Armenian connections with the West were nothing new, the scope and intensity of activity that followed the earthquake was unique. Before the earthquake, especially because of the Diaspora and repatriation, Armenians were hardly isolated within the Soviet Union from the Western world. Scholarly exchange of Armenians who would be known as "Soviet scholars" rather than "Armenian scholars" had taken place for decades between the Soviet Union and other countries. Even those who did not travel to the West, had a unique access to the West. Armenians because of their geographic location had a clear and constant view of the world via the unlikely source of Turkish TV. They were part of the very "lucky (bakhtavor)" few in the Soviet Union who could tune into Turkish TV and be constantly exposed to shows and movies from Hollywood as well as to Western advertising, most of which was unknown to the rest of the Soviet Union. Although few understood Turkish, having Turkish TV on was a constant in most people’s homes. Sometimes Turkish TV would be on simultaneously while other Soviet programming was being watched. Turkish TV, with its Western
movies and "hollywoodesque" look was literally, a window, albeit distorted, to a world that seemed unattainable. And as such, ironically, Turkish TV and mass media was influencing Armenian worlds.

However, after the earthquake, the environment in Armenia changed rapidly. Extensive exposure to the West was no longer through the medium of TV. They had been given a real opening into the world and the play between Western and Armenian situations became a pre-occupation and a vital source of Armenian cultural construction. The sudden and massive influx of Western relief and aid organizations after the earthquake and the subsequent influx of expatriate workers brought about changes in identities, in meaningful dialogues and in world-views. Armenians were no longer defining themselves within the boundaries of the Soviet Union. As a result of foreign connections, changes occurred in cultural understandings as well as in institutional systems. I will try to trace some of the changes. At first, there was a total acceptance of everything new coming in from the West. Later, some of these new ideas were rejected. On one level, I will look at how foreign aid affected the everyday lives of Armenians and on another level, I will look at institutional changes as they occurred within the Armenian Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health is a good focal point since in the beginning stages, it was the recipient of much of the foreign assistance.

SOCIAL CHANGE

In the aftermath of the earthquake, numerous other worlds came to Armenia. Within the Soviet realm, various work brigades from republics as varied as Uzbeki to Estonian arrived in the earthquake zone to begin the process of rebuilding.\(^1\) Armenian

\(^1\)Gorbachev promised that the earthquake zone would be completely rebuilt in two years. Of course, before those two years were up, the Soviet Union fell apart. All of the work brigades left Armenia to tend to their own problems in their own republics and thousands of buildings remained unfinished in Armenia.
interactions with other Soviet nationals was nothing new. It was a rare Armenian city
dweller who had not traveled extensively in the Soviet Union. And in almost all cases,
males were exposed to other nationalities and other regions while they served together
in the Soviet army. However, what was new for the Armenians was the influx of so
many other nationalities within the previously homogeneous Armenia. Before the
earthquake, in the Armenian Republic of over three and half million people, 200,000 had
been Azeri, there was a small Kurdish population\(^2\) and a much more smaller and
irrelevant Russian population.\(^3\) These work brigades brought in close to 30,000 other
Soviet citizens to the earthquake zone in Armenia.\(^4\)

It was not the presence of other Soviet nationalities in this highly homogeneous
Soviet republic that made the most impact as much as the presence of a handful of
American and European organizations which came to work in Armenia. The emergence
of this Western community within Armenia was to act as a catalyst in quickly redefining
Armenian cultural identity and situating it into the world order while at the same time
that Armenia was struggling between Armenian and Soviet pressures.

As stated before, at first, Armenians believed that the foreigners had come to the
aid of Armenia because of uniquely Armenian reasons. They believed that foreigners
knew about and sympathized with the suffering of the Armenians and that foreigners
believed that "Armenians were good people." In the months following the earthquake,
hundreds of millions of dollars were collected by Western organizations some of which
got to direct immediate humanitarian aid, some of the rest went to medical treatments
in the West for earthquake victims and some to long term projects within Armenia.

\(^2\)These were mainly Christian Kurds called Yezdi or Yezidi.

\(^3\)These were mainly of the religious sect called the Molokans.

\(^4\)Some of the immediate consequences of having these different Soviet nationalities
in Armenia are addressed in Chapter Four.
Initially, the pouring in of such aid no matter in what form was accepted by the Armenian government and the people. "Let them [West] help, why not. We need everything" said a local Yerevan official. Money and supplies kept pouring in and hundreds of individuals were processed to be airlifted to Europe or the States or Israel for medical treatment. All of these projects were begun amongst a great deal of fervor and excitement. Who was selected to go, where they would go, what would be done to them were all important matters. However, the process was not devoid of trickery and underhanded dealings. Nonetheless, what remained as topics of constant conversation were not who went but with what kinds of Western consumer goods these individuals would return from the West. Consumerism was a paramount concern.

In the months following the earthquake, Armenia had not only received millions of dollars worth of food stuffs, medicine and clothing but also the government in cooperation with Western organizations had signed numerous agreements for construction and medical projects within Armenia. The fever and pace of interaction with Westerners remained for the most part unbridled. As I was told by high ranking health ministry workers, most everything suggested by the organizations was accepted at face value without any long term studies of need and feasibility or coordinating efforts among similar endeavors. From sending old clothes to building clinics, from sending California raisins to developing new medical sub-specialties, from sending outdated medicine to building new hospitals and schools, the West was flooding Armenia with one project after another. The growing international community of experts, professionals and assistants were very welcomed.

As this foreign community increased and as the projects they represented developed, the decrepit state of Armenian phone and communication lines posed as major obstacles. Computers, copy machines, fax machines, newer telephones flooded the republic. This need led to the eventual joint cooperation agreement between AT&T and
the Armenian government to make Armenia the first republic which would break the communication dependence on Moscow. AT&T had agreed to totally revamp Armenian international communications because at the time, Armenia ranked second only to Moscow in the traffic of international calls to and from the Soviet Union.\(^5\)

Western professionals, especially doctors, were no less than demi-gods who could cure the sick, including a sick society. So often, individuals who were ill would not be satisfied by a Soviet diagnosis until the same diagnosis was also reiterated by a Western doctor. Confidence of the abilities of Soviet medicine was at an all time low as reliance upon and unreal expectations of Western medicine was increasing. For example, in a group that went to Israel for medical treatment, several people were expecting that they would regain full use of their limbs just because they were in the West. Further still, one woman was angered at the news that she would arrive in Armenia with a cast on her leg. The cast was to remain on her leg because the healing process would take much longer than the nine weeks that they were to spend in Israel. "How can I get off the plane like this," as she pointed to her leg, "why can't they take it off now? Isn't it better yet?" Israeli doctors constantly stated that although they were using state of the art medical treatments, and yet, fully rehabilitating these particular limbs was not possible and that they had done the best that they could have done. This message was very difficult to understand for those patients on this "airlift of earthquake victims" and even harder for those who were left behind in Armenia in the hands of Soviet medicine.

Exposure to medicine in the West also brought with it a new understanding of variety: variety in thought, practice and as well as in consumer goods. For example, the patients in the Israeli group found it difficult to understand why other members of the group were given different prosthetic devices even though the diagnosis had been the

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same for each individual. In order to maximize donations and efficiency in the project, the organization that was handling the airlift had placed some of the Armenian patients with different local Israeli hospitals which were served by different prosthetic companies. Although the final prosthetics were to be functionally the same, meeting the needs as prescribed by a physician, cosmetically they were to be different. The different companies had made use of varying materials, had come from different schools of training and added slight differences, "extras", in the functioning of the limbs. These differences were a point of great concern. "Why is his different than mine. He can do things with his foot that I cannot. Why are they not the same," one amputee kept asking. Doctors insisted that there was no basic difference, yet the questions and confusion never subsided.

The problem was not just a lack of knowledge of medicine or prosthetics but rather a problem of coming to terms with differences and variety since the same confusion existed whether it was related to a medical treatment, or learning a new specialty or more so when buying consumer goods. Over a two year period, in a series of lectures provided to train local medical professionals in a new field of physical and occupational rehabilitation, several expatriate therapists provided classroom and clinical training. From the beginning, there was already an inherent problem with this program. The numerous therapists came at different times, were from different countries and had different medical backgrounds. On one particular day filled with confusion, the students spoke out about matters that they had been discussing for a while in private amongst themselves. One student therapist commented to me:

I do not understand. Mary [the therapist who had been lecturing a few months back] told us to do this procedure a different way and now Ellen

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6There was always great confusion when the patients were trying to buy something that they thought would be simple enough. Often, they were overwhelmed by all of the choices for the same type of item.
is telling us to do it another way. Which one are we supposed to do?
I suggested that she ask Ellen about the differences. However, the student therapist
continued, "No. I will do it the way Ellen says." In inquiring further about the
differences, the student said two very interesting things: "No, I will not ask. Ellen is
our guest and she may be offended if I ask about the differences. In any case, we never
question our teachers. We just learn from them." I remembered that often, while
attending the university in Yerevan the year before, I would hear similar comments on
how professors were hardly ever questioned on the materials that were being taught. In
the therapist's situation, there was an added dimension of hospitality to the conforming
reverence of sorts for a teacher. Diversity in thought, teaching and teaching technique
was a new experience. Questioning authority, in this case the teacher, was unacceptable;
however, to question a guest would have been a much harsher offense.

At this stage, identity in Armenia was being re-negotiated such that it had to
incorporate new understandings from the West while maintaining traditional Armenian
sensibilities. In the minds of non-professionals, the Western scientist or professional was
seen as having far more knowledge and expertise about matters than the Soviet or Soviet
Armenian counterparts. In addition, these Westerners were guests in the country offering
a helping hand and were due all of the respect that any guest would have in one's home.
Therefore, in the beginning almost all of the suggested projects were accepted by the
respective national and local governing bodies. All kinds of relief goods were accepted
even though in private, their need was in question (i.e., among other things there were
the supply of blankets and the supply of "Desert Storm" rations).

Another prime example of these questionable projects were the used clothing
shipments. Numerous organizations in the Armenian Diaspora had begun to collect
clothing right after the earthquake and continued sending such collections even years
later. Interestingly, beyond the first few weeks of the earthquake when people were just
getting over the loss of their belongings, these massive tonnages of clothing were not wanted by the people. I was witness to several airplane full loads being trashed or sent away somewhere else like to Kharabagh. The problem was that these clothes were second hand and despite the lack of Soviet resources or the existing national crisis, Armenians did not want such hand-outs. In private, I was told by a member of one of the local organizations helping to distribute the clothes "what do they think, that we are naked? What is this that they send, old, dirty clothes. We have plenty of clothes and nice ones too. I do not need someone else's clothes which instead of being thrown in the garbage are sent to me." A ministry worker commented, "what must they be thinking of us? They must be saying 'poor Armenia, they do not have anything to wear.' You know, these people are just feeling good sending this junk to us. They think that they are doing something good for us (mez lavoutoun en anum), well, let them think that." And so all was accepted without public grievances.

However, as time passed and as Western criticism of Armenian society increased, changes developed in the way Armenians began to look at the Western world and how they were to fit into this new setting. Changes in attitudes also resulted from contact with Diasporan Armenian organizations. Unofficially, most of these "foreigners" took it upon themselves to be social critics as if they all had a thorough knowledge of Armenian and Soviet histories and understandings. They were often critical but often by stereotyping. Foreign workers often commented on how Armenians "were lazy" or how they "did not know how to conduct official business." The reference was to the way a visitor was received in someone's office. In general, being hospitable was seen as a form of respect on part of the host, but the visitor saw it as a nuisance and as a way of avoiding important issues. A foreign visitor wanting to work on a project with the Ministry of Social Welfare made the following observations:

First there is all of the niceties, then comes the coffee and then the fruit
and some more small talk. And then more coffee and suddenly the whole team is whisked away to a restaurant for lunch that lasts several hours. I came for only a week with a schedule that says where I should be at ten o’clock, then at eleven, and so on. Here it is two o’clock and I haven’t done a damn thing.

Although not common in the higher ranks of government, these "extravagant" business meetings were often part of local level politics among heads of factories, companies and hospitals. In asking for a response to such criticism, one construction director told me, "they [the guests] should want as much (shat el uzen)" and continued in a cynical tone "well, are we supposed to eat nothing (bah, me ban chouthenk)?" A head of a hospital commented that in so doing, "we respect our guest. They have come to our home, Armenia is our home and we have to treat them as guests."

Social criticism by Westerners was increasing just as attitudes of the local Armenians was also shifting from acceptance to tolerance and then to resentment. Once again, there was the play between the West on one hand and the Diaspora on the other. As far as the Diaspora was concerned, local Armenians began to believe that Diasporan Armenians were furthering their own goals rather than helping with the needs of Armenia. A point of great tension remained the allocation of millions of dollars of earthquake monies collected by Armenian organizations in the States from the Armenian communities, monies which were still in the United States years after the earthquake. The general Diasporan argument for not sending the monies was a concern over whether the money would reach their destination or fall into the wrong hands or in the black market. Private conversations in the Diaspora indicated that people were sure of the lack of sufficient controls and were concerned about the monies sent to those yet to be sent. Local Armenians whether in government or not, eventually began understanding that this lack of confidence on the part of the Diaspora was merely a "play" of holding back necessary things as a ploy for advancing their own causes. As such, the Diasporan was being seen in an unfavorable light by the local Armenian.
The sending of monies and goods caught the local Armenians between a rock and a hard place. While they were hearing of millions and hundreds of millions of dollars (or of worth of goods) being sent to Armenia, they had no way of balancing what they were receiving with what they thought they should be receiving. Although the same comments were never heard by government officials, so often, resentment on the part of those receiving goods was great. Usually, such sentiments reflected the receivers feelings that they were not receiving everything that was their share or which reflected the massive numbers being heard about. It is a fact that certain humanitarian goods were seen being sold openly in the market. In response to this, officials justified their positions. They maintained that most everything got to where it was supposed to go; however, accountability was difficult since so many organizations were involved and, as one official said, "how can you stop someone for selling the dry milk, if he has enough of it or the money is more important to him." In addition, no one contradicted the fact that the handling of such quantities of goods and sums of money in such short periods of time was something that Armenia had not been equipped to do. A whole new system of warehouses, distribution centers, transportation, accountability needed to be set up. The government felt that it was doing the best job possible; the people did not agree.

Resentment, growing from interpretations of actions and attitudes of the Diaspora as well as of Westerners, became more widespread. One high ranking official commented:

foreigners think that they know it all. But they do not know anything about this place. They do not understand how we work and how we live. And they come and tell us we have to change it all. Why? ... Let them come live here for a while or for the last seventy years and then try to make the suggestions that they are making.

Another person of high rank was angered by it all:

where do they think they are coming ... to some backward place? Everyone now knows that we have good doctors, but that it is just our lack in technology that keeps the doctors from developing.
People in the construction sector were not so kind in their assessment of Western influence and criticism. A construction official commented:

Who does he [in reference to a American engineer working on a project but articulating a general sentiment about Westerners] think he is? So he got a degree in some foreign university and built a few things. We [Armenians] have been builders for centuries. Just let them try to work within the Soviet system when there were pressures to finish an apartment building just because the [communist] party said that it had to be finished. It is not because of a lack of knowledge that we built these monstrosities, it is because of pressures from above, from people, who were not builders.

In less than three years after the earthquake, as the "the world out there (darsi ashkhareh)" entered the "world in here," Armenian understandings of their situations were being once again renegotiated. At the forefront of such understandings was how Western aid which had flooded the country, usually in the form of goods and services, was perceived. The affects of this aid were balanced between positive and negative poles. The aid came at a highly critical time, a time of great economic and political upheaval. And as such it was very necessary and welcomed. However, as many commented, it was also leading the country and its citizens on the road to a "beggar mentality." Comments from a ministry official attest to these concerns, "We have never really been on our own," said one government official,

the Soviets took care of us in a way, of course we sent them our best and brightest, anything from scientists to apricots to cognac. But this is different. Now, it seems as if the people are getting used to getting handouts. People are starting to think that they are supposed to get these things. But nobody is obliged to give the people anything. What we need is technical assistance and money to buy technical equipment. We do not need more worn clothes, more medicine, more assessment teams. People are becoming beggars, it will not be good if this continues.

In a very short period of time, the Armenians, rather than passively accepting Western understandings, began actively picking and choosing that which they wanted. While at first, everything that was from the West, whether goods, professionalism or values was thought of as correct reason enough to emulate, Armenians quickly shifted to believing
that what they had had all along was good enough and only needed specific adjustments. Such adjustments could come from the West but only if directed by the local Armenians. And so, unlike in the period immediately following the earthquake, government agencies began to take more active roles in the decisions about what was necessary and in what particular field. They also began asking for money rather than services, justifying this request by stating that they could more easily and more efficiently buy technical assistance or services in the world market that they specifically needed. One vice-minister commented that such requests were only natural:

we have to do it for we are the only ones who know how this place works. No foreigner can figure it out. So if they want to help, let them give money. We know how to best make use of it.

As Armenians asked for more money rather than services, Westerners, such as an official from the European Bank, commented privately, that they believed the Armenians wanted money not because they can use it better but because, "the society is so corrupt that money is the most soluble form of fortune to be made and stolen." In any case, this official continued, "Armenians have no concept of management," and so the giving of money would be sabotaged even under the best of intentions.

Four years after the earthquake, a balance of sorts had been reached by the Armenians, who had been looking westward in order to understand what was happening to them internally. No longer was the West the all perfect place. It was not so much that Westerners knew more than the Armenians; it was just that they had money to back it all up their knowledge. That is why money needed to be brought into the country and as for the rest, "well," as an artist said, "you can keep it to yourself." No longer were American doctors quite literally seen as gods or other experts seen as holders of absolute knowledge. Some members of foreign organizations were critical of Armenian's management skills: "if we give them money and it is not lost by corruption then it will be lost through poor management or rather no management" said another member of the
European Bank team. In response, another ministry official said, "there are problems but it is just a matter of adjusting for we are great managers. After all we have managed the Soviet system for all these years." They conceded that the Armenian way of doing things was not so bad after all:

What is wrong with respect ("pathiv"), shame ("amot"), "khatr" (from Persian "khater", a form of respect for someone such that you would do something for them that you normally would not do)? What is wrong with making your guests feel at home? They have come to help, so I tell them what I need. What? They know this place better than me?

The "Armenian way" referred to the possibilities that some project monies would go to supplement the pitiful government salaries, some to scratching someone's back which would mean a favor in return. Not being on the job either meant that one was out competing for limited resources or one was lost in the bureaucratic maze, and above all that one’s personal connection and one’s personalistic stylistic approach to any activity was first and paramount. Jobs got done much more quickly and with success if one was quite simply "liked." For example, I will cite the case of the engineer who was working with me on the rehabilitation project. A very amicable fellow, who was originally well liked by the people who had met him and especially by the work crew under him, he had, nonetheless, slowly eroded away these pleasantries as more and more he began to question the abilities of not only the workers but also of the construction supervisors. Several unfortunate exchanges of blatant domineering behavior on part of the engineer had already taken place when the climactic incident occurred.

It was a day when the head of construction in Gyumri and all of those under him were making the monthly rounds of the sites. His entourage arrived at a time when already a disagreement about the proper installation of some pipes was taking place. The American engineer was vociferously objecting to the method used and while saying so using many colorful "construction" statements was actually questioning the ability of the workers to build in general. His interpreter could not and at times did not on purpose
match word for word the extensive nature of the insults in English. Tensions had been at an all time high for everyone involved the opening of the Center was slated for a month later and the amount of work left to do was still massive. The workers were muttering their grievances and disagreements to themselves, until they found my found a sympathetic ear. "He is crazy," they said. "He tells us one thing then another. He does not give us the plans, keeps it to himself and then yells at us for not knowing where things are supposed to be. How can somebody work like that?" Another added:

I've been building homes for decades now and you know how things are here, you need to improvise and we improvise well. It is unbelievable how we make things work and work well. Just by looking at your stuff from the West, I know what to do with it. And here is a guy who I am trying to respect and make him feel good, telling me that I am doing it all wrong!

I, like the interpreter, did not translate the harshness of the statements to my American engineer. If he got wind of how the workers also thought he too was lacking in construction know how, things would have gotten more tense.

Nonetheless, tense they did become. While the workers gathered around me, they did not make any attempts to make their angered position known to the engineer. For most practical purposes, my American engineer had no authority over the workers and was actually to work jointly with a local supervisor who was to control all of the construction issues. However, the American was allowed to "play" supervisor since after all, he was still a guest, no matter how unwelcome he was becoming. It was not until the municipal director of construction, Mr. A. Sahakian, a very wealthy and powerful man, arrived on the site that I saw the clash of cultures. He calmly heard everyone's arguments as they awkwardly tried to leave out the profanity for my sake. The director did not even talk to the engineer with whom he had been very chummy in the past and he came directly to me. He said,

Stella, get rid of him. Enough already of these foreigners coming to tell us how to build our homes and our lives. He does not know the slightest
thing about building and he knows nothing about builders here. Enough already. Who does he think he is? Get rid of him I say.

I responded that I would not be able to do that. He kept insisting that I get rid of the engineer since the workers had threatened to quit working under someone like him; and therefore, the whole project was in jeopardy. I reiterated that I could not. And then, he finally said the words that I had grown accustomed to hearing in other situations.

Alright, fine. You have your reasons. Fine, I will talk to the workers. They will listen to me. But I am doing this just for you. I spit on any other reason. You are a good person. And I will do this just for you.

So, there was the clincher. The project was to proceed not because of some sort of management finesse or negotiating ability on my part. Quite simply, success was around the corner because I was familiar, within the family, "understood" what Armenia was about and most importantly, I was liked. And therefore, the halting of a multi-million dollar project along with all of the mess that would arise was derailed.

It would be naive not to note that there was a possibility of another level of wheeling and dealing that I was not privy to. The "talk" among other foreign projects was that the local officials benefitted financially from such foreign construction jobs. Even though monies and supplies for this project were minimal compared to the other construction jobs in town, this project uniquely enlisted the cooperative efforts of the Armenian and local governments to get the project completed. As such, the Armenian government had already allocated sums of money to the project which we were never fully aware of. And as such, the juggling around of finances for the project could easily be done without our outside control. For example it was later that I learned that thousands had been allocated for landscaping, but landscaping was never done.

In this way, the construction sector, taking its cue from past practices was naturally trying to make money on the side. In the case of this project, finances allocated by law years earlier managed to fall through the cracks. This is the manner in
which business was conducted during Soviet times in order to extract money from the
government. From public funds to private hands, fictitious workers would be signed on,
budgets would be padded and supplies would walk away. In a new world which involved
foreigners who were scrutinizing the moves of the locals, the construction sector was
coping with new situations. As one local construction official said,

we know how to build, we know what to take and how to take it without
anybody knowing it. But we do not do it always. We do it to survive …
in your case, you are a very good person. Your project will get done, do
not worry, what is necessary will be spent.

And the project did get completed. It was completed the Armenian way: lots of lunches,
a great many toasts, angered sentiments over the "arrogance" and "self-assuredness" of
the foreigners, perplexing relations among the officials, unknown sources and limits to
finances, hardly ever catching someone on the job, promises sworn on one's mother's
grave, and above all the passion for the familial - "sister dear, you are a good person,
I will do it just for you."

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The Armenian Ministry of Health was one of the most powerful government agencies in the Soviet Armenian Republic. Its size, its yearly allocations of government funds and the health services that it managed and regulated make the Ministry one of the
most influential government bodies in the lives of people. In the aftermath of the
earthquake, although numerous ministries were engaged with foreign organizations in
relief and development work, the health ministry received the most contacts and was
among the first to establish joint projects and new programs with these Western
organizations. Such programs not only included projects that brought Western
equipment, medicine, dollars and medical professionals to Armenia but also included
projects for retraining professionals, especially doctors and nurses, sometimes aboard.
The Health Ministry found itself amidst foreign contacts and projects just as society was breaking away from the Soviet dominance of Moscow. The Ministry also faced the growing social tensions brought about by political unrest, the indirect involvement in the Kharabagh War, the shifting of the economy from that of centralized system to a market system. In response to these greater social pressures, the ministry made subtle as well as distinct changes, some under its control, others not, in its structure, work environment and personal.

Within the Soviet system, the Armenian Health Ministry had total control over ideas and nomenclature as well as total usurpation of supplies and finance in the medical sphere. It in turn was controlled by the Soviet Health Ministry in Moscow. In the Armenian Republic no aspect of health care could function, change, introduce innovation without the knowledge and consent of the Health Ministry. There were a few exceptions to the rule as in the Post-Graduate Institute which was directly connected to Moscow rather than to the Ministry. However, in most cases the Ministry had the entire health care system in Armenia centralized within it. It was also the agency which would determine research needs as well as allocate the research funds to the Post-Graduate Institute and to the Armenian Medical Institute. Therefore, to be appointed minister of health, one would be acquiring a very powerful position. The minister of health along with other appointed ministers collectively made up the council of ministers which worked under the Prime Minister of the Republic.

The republican political structure followed that which was dictated from Moscow and as such, the Prime Minister was also the First Secretary of the Communist Party.

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7 The medical school in Armenia was under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education as well as under the Ministry of Health. In the late 1980's, the Ministry of Higher Education changed its name to the Ministry of Enlightenment.

8 Although there have been several regional health directors who were women and several vice-ministers, the health minister has to date been male.
And so, the ministers were also party members. In the case of the health ministry, all administrative positions as well as appointments as heads of hospitals were given to medical doctors rather than other administrative professionals. Of course, independent management positions did not exist within the Soviet system. "It was not a problem," said one present administrator in the ministry,

    since the parallel encounter with the party and the party apparatchiks gave those in position the sense to manage. And as far as the hospitals were concerned, only a doctor could know what was needed and how to maneuver around the Soviet system in order to get the most important of things.

Like so many other aspects of present day Armenian life, the past decades are often thought of in ironically nostalgic terms. As another ministry appointee recounted:

    Back then, there were rules and regulations (cark ou canon). If someone had a complaint there were proper channels that it would go through and the problem would be solved early on. If for whatever reason the problem was not solved then the regional party would take over. Then it would be solved since the worst case would be if the complaint reached the USSR level. To approach any issue indifferently would not be tolerated. There was order (cark) back then.

To disturb this order meant a mark would be placed in one's party book and such a mark meant the end of one's career. This was the control that the hierarchy had over those underneath them. Strong control over matters was established by the fear that the "order" could not be disturbed. In such settings, the minister had to be "strong and respected" and at least from the seventies on, it was important that he was also Armenian.

    One of the longest appointments as health minister was that of Dr. Emil Gabrielian. He was from the old communist party school originally trained as a pharmacologist. He was appointed in 1975 by the then secretary of the communist party,
Karlen Demirjian. The 1970's under the leadership of Demirjian was a time of great social change for the Armenians. It was common knowledge that Demirjian built around him a system that was fueled by family ties, patronage and corruption. He appointed family members to top positions and quickly tightened his political grip on Armenian society. There are two things that Demirjian was known for: 1. corruption, and 2. his love for Armenia and being Armenian. In the first category, people recount that before the seventies, corruption existed but it was for kopeks or a few rubles. The seventies was a time when everything, whether a service or a scarce product, gained a specific price and that price was in the hundreds or thousands of rubles.

Through the hindsight of the late 1980's and early 1990's, Demirjian was described as a "grand mafioso." And those that were appointed around him were also part of "the mafia." Learning to deal with this new mafioso structure was imperative. A factory director made the following statement:

Suddenly, you had to pay hundreds of rubles to get a piece of paper signed or thousands to get you name on a list for housing. We all learned the cost of everything and we also learned to whom we had to give this bribe ("kashark"), this was not only a means of moving ahead but also of surviving.

"Kashark" became widespread in society and eventual formed a second economy that worked parallel to the set legal system. People knew how much and to whom to give in a very structured sense. "Kashark" - with negative connotations - would at times take a more culturally acceptable turn in the form of "magharitch." In Armenian custom, the "magharitch," loosely translated as "gift," is given to others by a person to whom good fortune has fallen. In this sense, if one gets a new job, or a car or a new home he gives

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9A series of "Armenianized" first names indicate the Armenian connection to the Soviet regime. For example, there is the first name, Karlen, which is very close to the Armenian Karen, was actually an abbreviation of Karl Marx and Lenin. Mels was an acronym for Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Lendrosh, very close to the Armenian Androush, meant "Lenin Flag." For women, there was Ninel which is backward for Lenin.
"magharitch." In old times, some sort of sweets would suffice as this gift. In present times, taking one to a restaurant or buying him cognac would do much better. In the "grand mafia" scheme of things, the "gift" was, more often than not, money and large sums of it considering that at that time the average worker was only making 120 rubles a month.

The Health Ministry was no exception to the rule. While health care was legally free within the Soviet system, everyone was aware of the cost of any appointments as administrator or head doctor or the cost of a medical procedure or treatment or medicine. "In general the health care system was primitive since it was based on non-profit, however, there was money to be made personally," said a former ministry worker. Surgery would cost money: changing bandages cost money: changing hospital sheets cost money. The cost was never directly talked about but it was always indirectly understood either through others who had had the same thing done or through a "middleperson" who would direct one to the ballpark figure. And of course, these bribes would manage to "trickle" upwards as subordinates would pay part of their received bribes to their superiors. There was a common joke about a now infamous perhaps mythical doctor who would be paid by his patients not so that he would do surgery but so that he would not do surgery. Apparently, he was such a bad doctor that everyone feared the consequences and were willing to pay to get out. This story indicates the general feeling that from the seventies on, corruption was so widespread that many individuals received unqualified medical degrees through bribery. Only in the late 1980’s when everything was spoken about in open terms was there a discussion of the effects of such corruption on the professionalism in the medical system and of the resulting lack of confidence of the system within the population.

It was not just "kashark," bribery that was paid but also "pathiv", "homage" and "respect." "Pathiv" can also be translated as "pride". One must have "pathiv," must
have pride and respect in one's self and one must be able to "give pathiv," to give respect. As was customary, a patient would give the doctor "pathiv" by paying him money or sending flowers or other gifts. A subordinate would give "pathiv" by usually taking his superior out to a restaurant and ordering the best of delicacies. In the ministry, when a visiting team would come from Moscow or elsewhere in the Soviet Union, ministry officials with comparable ranks to the ones who were visiting would meet the delegation at the airport and take them somewhere to give them "pathiv." Usually, this involved long, many coursed meal lunches with lots of vodka, cognac and toasting in the private rooms of restaurants. It was versions of this "pathiv" given to foreign organizations that Westerners found difficult to comprehend. "Pathiv" was a means of establishing networks and necessary social ties within and outside of the Republic. "Pathiv" was a form of making outsiders part of the family. "It is a big deal sharing your bread with someone, it ties you together." Being tied together was a necessity in a world of scarce resources. And eating as the paramount form of "pathiv" was the only means of strengthening friendships. After all, the etymology of the Armenian word for friend, "unker," comes from the root meaning "eating together."

But as one ministry worker pointed out "pathiv" was not just a means of "one hand washing another," it was also an indication of manhood or more specifically of Armenian manhood:

If you cannot give good "pathiv" then that means that you do not know how to work within the system. Which then means that you cannot make money. Which in turn means you cannot take care of your own. To be a man, you have to take care of your own, whether that is your family or your people.

And so to get ahead in one's career, one would give "pathiv" to his superiors. To make sure that Armenia got the best and the most from Moscow, ministers and vice-ministers, heads of factories and hospitals, etc. would give their Russian counterparts "pathiv."

"Russians were easy," a former ministry worker said,
all you needed to give them was some alcohol. But we would not stop there. We would give them our best cognac and caviar and other delicacies. They always left amicably and issues were often easily solved.

And thus, doing "pathiv" in the right way meant that the interests of Armenia as well as personal interests were achieved. And in the final result, giving good "pathiv" was an indication of being a good Armenian.

The first secretary, Karlen Demirjian, was just such a good Armenian. He not only amassed a fortune around himself but also made sure that Armenia got as much autonomy and received as much as possible from Moscow. One of the favorite stories told is of how he reacted when a multi-million ruble modern sports complex which had been built in the early 1980's, burned down just after it opened. The stories recount how Demirjian cried the tears that "only an Armenian could have cried" and vowed that this example of Armenian ingenuity and grandeur would once again be rebuilt. He stuck to his promise and managed to raise the money again to rebuild this sports complex which was known throughout the Soviet Union. In a long discussion of Demirjian's faults, a man that I was talking to finished the discussion by saying, "but he was a good Armenian."

Much in the same manner, Dr. Gabrielian was a good administrator as well as "a good Armenian." A present day ministry worker who knew Gabrielian describes him in the following way:

he was a strong man ... he acted like a minister. By this I mean that not everyone could approach him. When one did, he was a man of few words but what he promised, he got done ... At that time, God forbid, one was not at work when one was supposed to be there. One could never leave without permission ... as we do now.

Gabrielian gathered around him other Armenians as vice-ministers. At the same time, many medical professionals as well as ministry workers, were sent to Moscow so that the networks in the hierarchy would remain intact. Although the daily functioning language of the ministry was Armenian, all of the official paperwork was done in
Russian, mainly so that commissions from Moscow would have access to them. Even before independence, the tendency to use Armenian as an official language had already begun.

This shift of language usage as well as other shifts within the Ministry took place in the late 1980's in response to critical changes within Soviet Armenian society. In light of the Kharabagh Movement, issues of "Armenianness" versus big brother Russianisms were discussed openly. Speaking Russian in public, a common occurrence especially among the elite class in Armenia, was frowned upon. Several Russian schools were closed and the emphasis was placed on teaching Armenian and only Armenian. Of course, as more Westerners arrived and the opportunities to go abroad were increasing, the English school's enrollment was also increasing. The schools with intensive English curriculum were quickly becoming, like Russian schools had been before, the place to be and the place to get an education. The use of Armenian as the only language was even carried to an extreme. Some top computer programmers ignoring the value of knowing computer languages based on English, were fast at work trying to develop a programming language in Armenian. Very soon this endeavor was halted in favor of the already existing universal computer languages. In any case, in the late 1980's issues of language and the "correct" and "pure" use of Armenia were topics of heated debate. Not since the 1930's had there been such debate and leanings towards a more "pure" form of the Armenian language. Scholarly and lay debates over the merits of Soviet Armenian orthography versus classical orthography, merits of Eastern Armenian versus Western Armenian, the use of Russian over Armenian were played out in the daily newspapers. Therefore, the shift of the Health Ministry to the use of the Armenian language was a reflection of these greater social changes.

In the Spring of 1988, when the Kharabagh demonstrations were reaching climactic levels, besides focusing on the Supreme Soviet building, demonstration
organizers also targeted the Ministry of Health. Khatchik Stambolian, the most religious member of the Kharabagh Movement, had participated in the ecology movement from which the Kharabagh Movement developed. He, along with other writers and scientists, was using the idiom of the health of the Armenian people as a metaphor for greater social ills. The powerful ecology movement had as its fundamental goal the eradication of the numerous chemical plants, specially the monstrous Nairit Rubber Plant, which the movement accused of spewing toxins into the air. Since the health of the population was at risk, the Health Ministry was a primary target and through the Ministry, other Soviet powers. Another unrelated unfortunate incident in one of the Yerevan hospitals also fueled mistrust of the people towards the ministry. Some thirty women were somehow poisoned in one of Armenia’s leading women’s hospital. The investigation into this matter became a public spectacle. People demanded explanations and the Ministry promised a full investigation. The incident elevated questions of health in general, affects of toxins and poisons, to the level of concerns over Soviet dominance and communist cover-ups. The medical incident quickly became rallying point for the demonstrations call for political justice and self-determination.

The Health Ministry was feeling the full impact of the social drama that was unfolding in the streets of Yerevan and which would eventually lead the republic to independence. The ministry was also adapting by participating in the demonstrations. The Minister, although a stoic hardliner from the old communist school and a member of the well established mafia, attended the demonstrations. It must be remembered that he, like the first party secretary that he served under, was after all "a good Armenian." He wanted to see what was happening first hand and was one of the first top officials to do so personally. An insider to the Minister’s office recounted how the Minister would get calls from other top officials about concerns over his attending what was becoming an anti-Soviet movement. In response, Dr. Gabrielian would say that he needed to know
since he had "the welfare of the people in mind." Gabrielian would personally send doctors and ambulances to the Opera Square where hundreds of thousands gathered day in and day out for the demonstrations. He allowed the ministry staff to attend the demonstrations during working hours. The image of Gabrielian was that he was a hard line communist bureaucrat but when push came to shove, he was a "good Armenian." These seemingly contradictory identities of communist, yet Armenian, gave Gabrielian the flexibility to respond to changes in society and to address issues from an Armenian focal point rather than a Soviet one, precisely at a time when the former was taking precedence over the latter.

However, change came too rapidly. The entire Armenian Soviet government hierarchy was called to account for past deeds as the Kharabagh issue escalated and as the earthquake gripped the Republic. In 1989, the very powerful and previously very popular first secretary, Karlen Demirjian, was removed from power. Suren Harutiunian, another communist, becomes the new first secretary of the Republic. As Demirjian leaves, so too is Gabrielian removed. Harutiunian stays in power only briefly until the democratic forces, headed by the members of the Kharabagh Movement, take control. However, in the meantime, he manages to appoint a new Minister of Health, Dr. A. Aznavourian.

In response to the onslaught of foreign organizations coming to Armenia after the earthquake to do relief work and mainly dealing with the Health Ministry, the Armenian Supreme Soviet passed a very crucial referendum. In May of 1989, an order came down that the Health Ministry was to open a department of foreign affairs. This was to be the first of its kind and served as a proto-type for those that were later established in most other relevant government agencies. Dr. Sevak Avakian, a fluent English speaker, was asked to head the department. The purpose of the department was to consolidate, facilitate and to organize all kinds of contacts between the foreign organizations and the
areas in which they wanted to work. It was to be the first stop of the vast majority of foreign organizations and therefore it was a highly sensitive project. Dr. Avakian recalls that it was the most difficult of times. The scale of the earthquake was such that the country was at the verge of collapse; people had died and people were homeless; the war was escalating; the blockade of Armenia had begun. Yet at this very critical period, Armenia was opening its doors to foreigners who had for the most part never set foot in the Soviet Union, let alone in Armenia. He felt it absolutely imperative to have a group working to ease the way for the foreigners "who had come to help" and facilitate their movement through the vast bureaucratic maze that lay before them.

However, for reasons unknown to me, these new department plans were scrapped by the newly appointed minister. The nascent department was closed and the foreign organizations were left to fend for themselves again. Dr. Avakian however continued his connection to work with foreigners by returning to the Post-Graduate Institute which, as stated before, was funded directly from Moscow. A sort of foreign department was set up there whose main concern was the study of foreign medical health care systems, especially of Canada. Already the seed had been laid to change the stagnant Soviet Armenian health care system by applying other systems.

Changes continued. Harutjunian and the entire communist party fell from power in 1990 and not surprisingly, general discontent over the Health Minister led to a new appointment as well at the end of 1990. The acting head of parliament, V. Manoukian, commented that changes were necessary in the Ministry of Health. Interestingly, one of the reasons for discontent over the Health Minister was his closing of the foreign department. The complaints of foreign organizations had reached top government agencies and were making a difference. The new minister was of a new sort. Dr. Nazaretian, a hematologist, although working in the medical division of "Gosplan" (government planning agency) had been a practicing physician. He spoke English
fluently as well as other languages. Those who met him described him as a "stately" individual who was very "open," "intelligent," "amicable" and knew "how to talk to foreigners." All of these qualities were cited as in opposition to his ousted predecessor. Dr. Nazaretian was a prime example of social changes. He was the first appointee of the new democratic government. He was also a man who had not been in the network of Soviet bureaucracy for long. In speaking about him, his underlings would often call him by his first name, Mihran, or by a diminutive form of it, Mirik. Previous ministers were only referred to by their first names followed by their patronymic. Which was a very Soviet way of addressing people. Therefore, the former minister was addressed Emil Samsonovich, rather than just Emil or Dr. Gabrielian. Dr. Nazaretian was to be different. He was to be a man of his times, less bureaucratic, less Soviet, more Armenian, more familiar. Upon his appointment, he immediately reopened the foreign department and brought Dr. Avakian once again to head it.

Dr. Avakian was also a sign of the times. He was a highly educated Armenian born in Yerevan and had received his higher degrees in Moscow. Both of his parents were doctors and his father had done extensive research in Europe in the sixties as a Soviet scientist. He was fluent in English and was able to quickly change the style of his language from the formal British English taught in Soviet schools to a more American English. He was also fluent in Russian. Yet he also well versed in the works of the great Armenian writers, especially of the poet Paruyr Sevak. Dr. Avakian was a new breed of educated Armenian who could have easily immigrated abroad, as so many were doing at that time, but he made the conscious decision to remain.

Dr. Avakian purposefully gathered around him a group of young doctors. As he said, he wanted people whose ideas had not yet solidified ("had not turned to stone") and therefore who would be flexible enough to learn new things. He did not want people around him who just criticized Armenian society without doing something about it.
Accepting the fact that society was changing and that independence was exposing so much that was bad in society, he say this as the ideal time to fix these "flaws" while these "flaws" were still apparent. With this purpose in mind, he hand picked a group of young doctors with whom the foreign department was opened in order to meet he needs and to direct the ever growing foreign community and connections.

Although always ready and willing to speak negatively about other government agencies, foreigners usually had nothing but good to say about this particular department. Perhaps, unlike other places, everyone there spoke English. Perhaps, it was the pleasant way that everyone was greeted. Usually, one would see very stern and serious faces sitting behind government desks. Music was played sometimes and laughter could be heard often which lent to a laid back approach. Whatever the reasons, it was clear that this department was different from the other ministerial departments and as such it became a focal point within the ministry itself. For example, in a very short period of time, the foreign department acquired the first non-Soviet computer in all of the ministry. They were also the first to have a fax machine and a xerox machine. These technical tools of the West added to the uniquely different aura of the department.

Indeed, the department became very well known not only to the foreign community but also to the locals. It was not only a portal through which the foreigners entered into the entire Armenian medical sphere but it was also a portal through which locals could pass to the world abroad. In a world of difficult visas and lack of dollars to spend, getting an invitation from a foreign organization to visit abroad or to be treated abroad was one of the most advantageous of situations to be in. It was through this office that such information about the prospects of going abroad would be disseminated and the paperwork facilitated. And therefore, if previous methods of operation were followed, there would be a great deal of money to be made on the side, or from underneath, as Armenians say. Bribery should have been rampant. However, all
indications are that this was to be a new experiment that tried to shake loose the yoke of corruption in the Soviet system. "Doctors and patients are amazed that we do this without talk of money under the table," said one department worker. She continued, "people feel like they have to do something for all of the good that we do so they bring flowers or a 'magharitch' like that."

The department grew larger and stronger and became more involved in directing the scope of foreign programs rather than just accepting and facilitating. Dr. Avakian describes this shift in activities in the following way:

since we had no previous experience with foreigners, in the beginning the foreigner was more of an abstract idea rather than a real being or concrete projects. We accepted everyone with open arms. Then we saw some antagonisms and later we realized that we also had a stake in the matter, so we too started making decisions. I believe that in a matter of a few years the work was completed to find some sort of common ground between the local and the foreigner. But, you know, foreigners just do not know how this place works.

And one of these unknowns was the sudden change once again in the appointment of the minister. Dr. Nazaretian was removed and Dr. Babloyan was appointed the fourth minister in a less than four year period. This was one of the highest turnover rates in the ministerial system in Armenia. Dr. Babloyan made the complete transition. Although Dr. Nazaretian had been a practicing physician in the past, he did have some bureaucratic experience. Dr. Babloyan, on the other hand, was a complete novice in the game of governing much in the same way as Ter Petrosian, the orientalist, who became president, Manoukian, the physicist who became Prime Minister or Galustian, the anthropologist, who became the mayor of the capital city. Dr. Babloyan was the top urologist in the country and the first to do a successful kidney transplant. Many were critical of his appointment saying that his talent would be wasted. Following the same line of argument, many were critical of the other top officials listed citing that their appointments were a misdirection of "cultural talent." It was later that qualifications of
these individuals to govern came under question.

Dr. Babloyan inherited a health care system that was in total need of reform and innovation and in trying to revamp the system, he look towards the West. Dr. Avakian, as well as several others, was influential in spearheading a debate on updating the entire health care system. First of all, there was a need for major streamlining. There were some 80,000 individuals employed by the health service of which 15,000 were doctors. In this highly bureaucratized Soviet system, hospitals would acquire more beds, not because of patients, but because that was the way to hire more doctors which would in turn bring in more revenue. The estimate was that ten to twenty percent of medical professionals could easily be cut. Second, the ministry began studying the feasibility of a taxation and insurance system to compensate the roughly one dollar per person spent per year by the government on health care. Both taxation and insurance systems were both uncharted territory for the ministry. Third, to reduce government involvement, the ministry looked into the possibility of privatizing many of its hospitals and clinics. Information for these changes were gathered through studies of the health care systems of mainly Canada and France. The Ministry drafted proposals on all of these matters but the proposals are still stalled in Parliament and, for all practical purposes, the Armenian health care system remains stagnant. In a note of foreboding which also indicates Western leanings, Dr. Babloyan is quoted as saying in a magazine article that

having the present system for much longer threatens our survival. People demand what they have gotten used to, and patients in Armenia want the same treatment available in the West.\textsuperscript{11}

With a new attitude towards reform, the Ministry hoped to become slim and fit. It saw

\textsuperscript{10}Armenian International Magazine, July 1992, p.15.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid, p. 20.
a need for sweeping change from the ground up, decreasing bureaucracy, decreasing personal, in turn decreasing corruption, instigating taxation and insurance, increasing educational standards, all in very Western ways. Interestingly, the American system was not in question for it was considered too vast and too expensive. In looking towards foreign systems, remnants of the past Soviet system were to linger on since Armenia looked towards the West to learn about socialized medicine.

As more and more foreign, especially Western, influences were shaping internal structures and changing the focus of interest and values more and more Armenian institutions were changing. The Ministry like the general population, saw the need to understand the foreigner and to internalize aspects of foreign lands, as a means to move ahead in a society caught in an immense economic crisis. At first, all that the foreigner had to offer was accepted. Later projects and products were picked and chosen by the ministry. In this manner, the Ministry went from a passive role to an active role. The general population took a sort of active role when it began to resent the attitude of the foreigner as all knowing, for after all "we too have good doctors, they just lack advanced technical support." The active role of the ministry was more the result of continued contact with the West and the knowledge gained that they indeed had good doctors. It was just that these doctors were lost in too big of a system left to fend for themselves without money and technical equipment. "We cannot take any one system and transport it here ... it has to be adapted to specific Armenian needs," said a vice-minister while addressing the fact that thousands may become jobless as a result of reform.

CONCLUSION

Armenian society was rapidly changing in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Through a period of crisis and transformation, attitudes as well as institutional systems
grew to adapt to the changing environment. The biggest influence on these shifting understandings was the influence presented both directly and indirectly by the West. At a time when quite literally, the rug had been pulled from under their feet, Armenians turned to the world that for so long had remained a mystery to them but which offered possible alternatives. What for decades, the Armenians had been taught as being real was now crumbling quickly as more and more of it became an illusion. The West, which had been an illusion, was quickly becoming a reality. In a play of opposites, that which was white had become black and that which was black had become white. Values and identities were shifting ground as the Armenians struggled to hold amidst these re-workings of oppositions.

In the play of opposites, the West as well as the Diaspora had leading roles. Very soon after becoming president, Ter Petrosian appointed an American Armenian as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Later still another American Armenian was appointed as the Minister of Energy. These were two of the highlights of a trend of Diasporan Armenians who were volunteering as consultants and were becoming directly involved in the internal structure as policy makers. However, these appointments also followed the line of acceptance, then rejection. Less than two years later, the Foreign Minister was removed from office by the very president who had appointed him. This move came just a few months after the ouster of the head of the leading Diasporan political party from Armenia. Mr. Maroukhian was one of the leaders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, a political party in the Diaspora which for years had been not only anti-Soviet but also anti-Soviet Armenia. The open-door policy for political activity which began with independence had also allowed this previously illegal organization to work in Armenia. However, one the democratically elected president took over, he made strong accusations against the part. He accused them, among other things, of sabotage
as well as collaboration with the communists.\textsuperscript{12} Once again paradoxical interpretations of what the West symbolized, of having and not having (whether consumer goods, or knowledge or technology) of accepting, yet resenting and rejecting, of being passive and active, were all ways of mediating changes in meaningful ways. Issues of hospitality, corruption, bureaucracy and professionalism were at one and the same time accepted and rejected. In addition, self-criticism found a unlikely partner in self-assuredness. At times both concepts were present at the same time. Armenians were caught between that which they did not have and therefore wanted, and which they did have and therefore did not want. Once the highly idealized image of the West was exposed, Armenians fell back on that which they had earlier criticized in their own society. Complexity in contradiction continued to be a social factor in pre- and post-independent Armenia as this new nation faced the "other", the West.

\textsuperscript{12}In January 1995, the ARF and all party affiliates were declared illegal organizations and all activities were ordered to cease.
Chapter Six / Conclusion: Returning to the Past or
Just a Few More Stories

Conclusions put ends on things and if I have made one point in all of the pages that preceded, these stories have everything but an end. Concluding them and conclusions would truly be tragic and not to mention a dis-service to the cultural phenomena that constantly produces meanings in light of the new. With this thought, I proceed to tell more stories.

Three years have passed since I finished my research and the age old ironic saying holds true: the more things change, the more they stay the same. At the end of the twentieth century, Armenians are still struggling with and redefining the concept of peoplehood. This time, the Armenians that occupy this small piece of land once known as the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic find themselves with a new independent country on their hands. And so these Armenians have returned to a past, when centuries ago they had an independent principality.

Ironically, now that his is a country, more and more people are leaving it and leaving behind for those that remain the growing fears of a loss of a nation once again leading to a loss of a culture. The modern fear is that of a "brain drain" as more professionals leave Armenia. Before, they left in small numbers to Moscow. Today, they leave in large numbers to the United States. Immigration of whole families was more the case in the past. Escaping Soviet oppression was the excuse. Now, families are torn apart as one individual manages to get a visa abroad and once there stays, with a status and emotions that are neither in the place they are at or in the homeland. Today, the excuse for leaving is the state of the homeland, itself. Before, for those leaving and those staying judgement calls were very clear. Leaving meant that you were a traitor to
your people. Staying was a choice. Now people are not so quick to judge. Leaving is seen as survival, although not of a people but of a person. Staying is not a matter of choice anymore. Mainly it happens to those who cannot leave. In search of personhood, Armenians now once again fear the loss of peoplehood. National survival is once more a theme.

A democratic freely elected society has emerged. Yet stories of rampant corruption point to a society run iambic. Ironically, despite a serious political, economic and energy crisis, this new nation remains the most stable country in the region. The corruption is with a new twist. The price of things are no longer in thousands of rubles but in thousands of dollars. No longer does one know to whom bribe payments must be made or how much must be paid for that matter or whether that person will turn against you even after being paid. It is a longing to return to the old days when corruption had a system. You knew what to pay to whom to get what you wanted. It is a longing to return to days when men were men and stuck to their word. Everyone knew how the old system worked and it worked well for them. Now they look backwards to the days when they could get all of the meat that they wanted, all of the crystal and all of the electricity. In the past, they would say that they had everything while the world thought that they had nothing. And now they have nothing as the world thinks they have it all. After all, having democracy is everything, is it not?! It is a new country with special new ATT lines to the outside, yet, the internal phone system still does not work. Now, People feel trapped, just the same way that the West thought all Soviet citizens did in the old day: Now, people do not believe their government, just as the West thought all Soviet citizens did not believe. Now, with a new country, Armenians have returned to the past, but ironically, it is to a past defined by the West.

Call it diplomacy, call it survival. Whatever you call it, it is a return to a past before the demonstrations, before the war, before the bloodshed and the martyrdom when
a neighbor was a neighbor and the Muslim was just a Muslim. Armenian connections to Iran were on multi-levels. Not only was there a large group of Iranian Armenian repatriates, but that piece of land had been under Persian rule for centuries. The Armenian language has a great deal of ties to Farsi. And now, Iran is the only link to the world outside and a source for revenues and products and business and much needed fuel. Iranian / Armenian business is booming. And then there was the other neighbor, Turkey. Just a few years ago, Turkey was the source and the window to the world through its TV broadcasts that could be picked up in Yerevan. No one seemed to mind then. Just two, three years ago, the Turkish border cities became the source of a great trade of goods coming into Armenia. Mainly people from Gyumri would either cross the nearby border or travel to Georgia and cross at the border there, taking with them gold and bringing back with them bathroom fixtures, chocolates, car horns and clothes. And now the freely elected government of Armenia has proposed to establish friendly ties with its Turkish neighbors.

Foreign organizations continue to set up programs in Armenia. Ironically, for many of these organizations, Armenia is considered the most stable of the new countries in Transcaucasia. Along with smaller development organizations stand the multi-millions of dollars of Western government agencies and of the World Bank. The American University of Armenia opened its doors in 1991 and continues to educate a young generation in management and computers. As things stand, these young graduates have no real prospects in the country and the fear is that they too will look abroad for their futures. The number of foreign health care programs have increased, so has the number of doctors who decide to stay abroad once they have gone abroad for short re-training program. After so much has been said, the country still does not have a national health care policy. Everything is in limbo, operating without money and supplies.

Money and the values that it represents sets up the most Perplexing and the most
contradictory of categories. The money in the pockets of people has changed face from the Soviet Ruble, to the Russian Ruble, to the Armenian Dram and to the king of them all, the American Dollar. People have had to go back to their past when it was not their salaries that helped them live but rather other economies. Often outsiders were bewildered that a person receiving 120 rubles a month (at that time about $10) could survive in a society were most people traveled, had cars, had grand pianos, crystals and fabulous jewelry, and threw lavish get-togethers. Where did the money come from? There was a prospering second economy and there was life within an extended family which pooled its resources. Now people’s salaries are about $1 per month while the cost of living has exponentially increased. Where does the money come from is again a reasonable question. It comes from another economy based on Western loans and humanitarian aid, based on monies and goods sent from abroad by relatives. Armenians have returned to a past where one’s salary never really mattered.

Armenians have come fully circle to a past when rivalries between the people in Yerevan and the people in Gyumri (Leninakan) were strong, strong enough to establish isolationist sentiment. Six years after the earthquake and the second largest city is still in ruins and lives are still devastated, people are still homeless. People in Yerevan see themselves as more educated, more worldly and suffering more. People in Gyumri see themselves as more sincere, more lively and suffering more. While Yerevan and the rest of the nation has adopted the new Armenian Dram as a currency, people in Gyumri deal in the Russian Ruble. There is a lot of energy spent on converting monies from this to that from today to tomorrow. People are back to calling their city, Leninakan, instead of Gyumri. And although just an hour and half away, differences are so great between these two cities that they might as well be in different countries.

And I keep returning to this past of mine. Often hoping that things would be the same as when even the most unfavorable moment had a satisfying side to it. In a way
things are the same. There is still the hospitable people waiting to greet me. There is still much difficulty in day to day functions. The landscape is as rugged and majestic as before. The centuries old churches still stand and fill the observer with some sort of spirituality. Every time I have gone back, Armenia has managed to do what it does best and that is constantly to pull me between the extremist of emotions. I have never been as happy as I was in Armenia and I have never been as sad as I was in Armenia. Armenia is an exercise in emotions. But things are not the same. I no longer am an enigma with fragmented selves. There are far too many foreigners and Diasporan Armenians there now. And things are not the same. Only a few of my friends, their relatives, their acquaintances, or people they have only heard about are left, the rest are in Europe or the States, wanting to go back but knowing that they will not. Those that have left have given up one paradoxical world for another in the form of paradox of exile cultures.¹

And then there is the Diaspora, growing everyday just as before, rather than shrinking. And just as before, the Diaspora remains bewildered and puzzled by what is happening in that space called the homeland.

In modern complex societies, change is fleeing and fast paced and the process of change needs to be documented quickly for fear that its lessons will be lost to the intellectual mind. Can this mean that one of the tenets of old world anthropology is true? That studying the "primitive" or rather, the "other" as the subject is known to the academic of the present, is essential since in the "evolution of things", culture change would cause a culture to be lost forever. Perhaps it is not so dramatic, but it is true that attitudes, sentimentalities, constructions and structures are quickly being reinvented in new forms. The vast majority of this dissertation is about fleeting constructs. These

¹See Naficy, in The Making of Exile Cultures.
particular constructs would already be blurred for the anthropologist in the field in Armenia in 1995.

Ironically, anthropology tries hard to maintain that there is no essence in culture; yet, the very same culture tries very hard to say that there is. It is apparent that paradox is not unique to Armenian culture. Perhaps the Armenian should ask the anthropologist, "inch ka chka."

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