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**GOVERNING ARMENIA: THE POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE  
MAKING OF GLOBAL DIASPORA**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

FEMINIST STUDIES

with emphases in POLITICS, CRITICAL RACE & ETHNIC STUDIES, and  
HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

by

**Veronika Zablotsky**

June 2019

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Lori G. Kletzer  
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## **Abstract**

### *Governing Armenia: The Politics of Development and the Making of Global Diaspora*

Veronika Zablotsky

This dissertation reconsiders the history of Armenian displacement from the standpoint of feminist and postcolonial theory. It investigates how colonial imaginaries of the Armenian nation were produced by trans-imperial entanglements between the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and the North Atlantic since the early modern period in order to develop a postcolonial critique of neoliberal development in post-Soviet Armenia. Building on Edward Said’s framework of Orientalism, it argues that constructions of Armenians as representatives of the “West” in the “East” not only disarticulated Armenian claims to indigeneity in West Asia but also facilitated the global expansion of colonial logics of race and empire.

The four chapters of this thesis deploy a mixed methodology that combines empirical and archival research with analyses of textual and visual materials to rethink the concept of emancipation in West Asia. They draw on a range of sources from novels and memoirs, including *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Émin* (1792), to diplomatic reports, newspaper articles, and naturalization cases that determined whether Armenians were to be categorized as “free white persons” in the United States. Furthermore, they discuss the silent film *Auction of Souls* (1919) alongside images and photographs of Armenian orphans by Near East Relief, the writings of Fridtjof Nansen and Karen Jeppe, among others, as well as images and illustrations in an Armenian-language Soviet women’s journal. Based on open-ended interviews and

participant observation among diasporic reformers in post-Soviet Armenia's non-governmental development sector, this thesis demonstrates that neoliberal development in post-Soviet Armenia actualizes colonial logics that preceded and exceeded Soviet statecraft. By contrasting the early Soviet project of women's emancipation with the inter-war mandate system in the Middle East, and colonial subjection by the English joint-stock corporation in South Asia, it develops an alternative account of globalization that offers a postcolonial approach to postsocialism and diaspora in West Asia. Drawing on critical race and political theory, it concludes that moving toward collective futures beyond the colonial gaze will require emancipation *from* the logic of development, or "developmentality," as a rationality of government.

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## Introduction

*“Armenia” is in a position of relative subalternity, in so far as it cannot be recognized as postcolonial. [...] Perhaps, once again, it is the exceptions, the counter-examples, the strategically excluded narratives that will disrupt the dominant, this time the postcolonial, story.*

– Gayatri C. Spivak, *Other Asias* (2008), 117-118

Where is Armenia? A seemingly simple question. And yet, there is no easy answer. Armenians in the West know this. When asked, we maneuver and explain, “It is in the South Caucasus.” Often blank stares follow. In Germany, for example, a well-intentioned questioner may ask, to clarify, “Romania?” In the United States, the conversation might end there, having established that Armenians hail from “Caucasia.” Armenians are *white* then. *Christians*. What else is there to know?

Located neither in the West, nor strictly speaking in the East, Armenia is a place that ceased to be part of the “second world” in 1990, when it declared national independence and the Soviet Union ended. As a result of its historical absence from Third World alliances, such as the non-alignment movement of the 1950s, Armenia is missing from postcolonial imaginaries of the Global South.<sup>1</sup> If Armenia is in Eastern Europe, by the logic of geography, then so is Turkey. However, its Western neighbor is stubbornly denied this designation. Some reimagine the region as the wider Eastern Mediterranean, yet Armenia is a landlocked country. Although it is undeniably located

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<sup>1</sup> See Carl E. Pletsch, “The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, circa 1950 to 1975,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1981, 565-590; Nigel Harris. *The End of the Third World: Newly Industrializing Countries and the Decline of an Ideology*. London: I. B. Tauris, 1986. See also Susan Buck-Morss. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

in West Asia, only few would suggest that Armenia is part of the Middle East. But then, again, its place in the world would be defined in relation to Europe. Is its proximity near, middle, or south, south-east, or far?

Not geography but race and geopolitics define Armenia's "position" in the world. Its "Northern-ness" is disputed by its neighbors to the North, first and foremost the Russian Federation, which holds Armenia's sovereign ambitions in check. Its brief flirtation with the European Union was crushed, by the stroke of a pen, when it became locked into the Eurasian Union in 2015. Set on actualizing the abstraction of "Eurasia," this emerging formation is far from settling Armenia's millennial predicament. The Republic of Armenia, the small country that remains, is wedged between the West and its other, the East – that is, if the East was to be granted ontological status.

Historically, most Armenians lived in Anatolia. After the Ottoman genocide of 1915, which practically annihilated Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian communities throughout the territories of present-day Turkey, many Armenians settled in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq, but also in Russia, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. They joined pre-existing Armenian communities in Iran and Ethiopia, India, and China. Successive waves of displacement throughout the twentieth century took some of these communities to Europe and the Americas, first and foremost to France, the United States, and Canada, but also to Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 forced Iraqi Armenians to flee. Many of them subsist as refugees on the outskirts of Yerevan, the Armenian capital. Most recently, the international proxy war in Syria displaced hundreds of thousands of Syrian Armenians

alongside half of the entire country's population. This incomplete account helps illustrate the central role of displacement in Armenian history. It gestures towards the many diasporas of Armenia, though few are of the Republic of Armenia, all retaining the dialects and culinary traditions of ancestral homes, the inter-generational silences, syncretized with the distinct cultures and political ideologies of their new countries of citizenship, if any, including the post-Soviet state called Armenia.

This dissertation takes Armenia's constitutive ambiguity as its point of departure and explores how dispersion came to be perceived as a problem to be remedied through a study of the political bodies that have been envisioned for Armenia in the Armenian diaspora, by Soviet reformers, and by the West. Instead of telling the story of Armenia as a national homeland of Armenians worldwide, it asks how a series of displacements informed national projects in the Armenian diaspora prior to the establishment of an Armenian nation-state. I argue that the idea of Armenia was constructed in relation to European colonialism, though not necessarily produced by it, and trace how the "Eastern-ness" of Armenians came to be perceived as an obstacle to self-government since the early modern period. Not only is the "other" integral to the national self, but the Armenian "nation" is also pluralized on a global scale. This irreducible hybridity has tormented Armenian nationalism from its modern inception.

As a result, nationalist Armenian historiography reads as a series of failed attempts to "unify" Armenians. Posited against real and imagined threats of death and destruction, these nationalist movements were often coded in terms of "revival." I take the vitalist underpinnings of this term seriously to reconsider how Armenian

nationalism became tied up with European ideas about the nation as a living organism. This troubles not only historicist accounts of a continuity of the Armenian struggle for national liberation but also challenges inherited analytical templates that privilege Europe in studies of nationalism and proceed by analogy. Two formations called “nationalism” need not resemble the same kind of “imagined community” (Anderson 1983), to reiterate a tenet of this well-treaded field. Instead, I ask, how did imaginaries of kinship and affiliation with the West enter Armenian political thought?

In the Armenian context, I argue, colonial relationships proceeded through modes of selective inclusion. They entailed symbolic operations that separated Armenians from their material circumstances, both geographically and racially, to “naturalize” strategic and temporary affiliations with colonizing powers. In effect, Armenians came to be perceived as “European” by colonized peoples, and their recognition as “white” in the West rested on constructions of Armenians as “foreign settlers” in their own homelands.

Return, another central theme of this project, is therefore an ideologically fraught project that not only runs into geopolitical and material challenges – the logistics of moving from West to East – but also holds uncanny experiences of difference in stock where aspiring repatriates may expect to find familiarity. How are modern discourses and practices of resettlement, the other side of forced displacement, folded into Armenian conceptions of identity and belonging? The idea of return to a national homeland also bears the imprint of humanitarian legacies. I adopt a postcolonial perspective to think through the constitution of Armenian identity as



inherently contradictory and fractured. By reconsidering how European colonialism informed political projects in the Armenian diaspora, I tease out the silences that have been relegated to the “obscure corner of the archive” (Trouillot 1995, 53). While situating the aporias of Armenian nationalism in relation to global coloniality, I show how unequal encounters with Armenians, as transitional rather than colonial subjects, also materially and symbolically shaped Western modernity.

The diasporic condition of Armenians is at the core of this intervention which excavates stories of complicity and cooptation that are marginalized in the dominant historiographies of the West and Armenia alike. By destabilizing the idea of a global center and linear narratives of progress, it also questions Armenia’s provincial status. It brings Armenia’s unlikely worldliness into view by highlighting lesser known circulations that unsettle conceptions of region and period. I offer an alternative account of globalization that decenters political thought in Europe by foregrounding how its unintended readers in the Armenian diaspora, displaced and dispersed, mobilized colonial logics to reimagine Armenia as a settler colony, anchored on the Armenian plateau in the South Caucasus. Extraterritorial visions for the Armenian body-politic set off a series of governmental projects, entangled with circular migrations, intended to help the Armenian nation “catch up” with the receding horizon of Western superiority. Although developmentalism is conventionally defined as a

defensive state policy, the Armenian case illustrates that it can also function as a “stateless” governing logic.<sup>2</sup>

While colonial encounters with Europe sparked this developmentalism in the Armenian diaspora, Soviet rule institutionalized it in Armenia. Its tenets continue to operate in the contemporary period in which ongoing conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan supplies the geopolitical rationale for renewed efforts to restructure the existing state of Armenia, its political culture, population, and institutions, as a “necessity” of national survival. By asking how the logic of development became hegemonic in the first place, and examining its effects in this particular context, I seek to unravel the narrative of inevitability that dominates debates about development in Armenia in order to carve out space for a new, a postcolonial politics.

By centering fragmentation over unity, and plurality over identity, this dissertation questions the coherence of Armenia as an object of study in order to analyze, instead, the *desire* for coherence and its colonial origins. It challenges the historicism and positivism that still predominates in the field of Armenian studies, and amplifies, instead, feminist scholarship that is emerging in the margins of its institutional mainstream. Moving beyond purely historiographic and sociological accounts, this dissertation develops an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates feminist and critical race theory, postcolonial studies, transnational cultural studies, political theory, and area studies in order to excavate the historical linkages and shared

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<sup>2</sup> See James Gelvin. *The Modern Middle East: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

presuppositions of liberalism, socialism, and neoliberalism, three economic theories that are usually constructed as competing ideological projects.

While complicating dominant modes of inquiry in Armenian studies, including Armenian diaspora studies, it also challenges postcolonial studies to include colonial relations of power in West and Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> As Gayatri C. Spivak noted in *Other Asias* (2008), Armenia's position cannot be understood according to the "South Asian model" of postcolonialism (251).<sup>4</sup> The "South American" model of decoloniality<sup>5</sup> has been mobilized by scholars of the region<sup>6</sup> but has only little traction with local activists. Similarly, American ethnic studies do not offer the tools to decipher the

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<sup>3</sup> See Deniz Kandiyoti, "The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, nor Modern?" *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2007, 601-623.

<sup>4</sup> For the "South Asian" model, see Ranajit Guha. *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay of the Idea of Permanent Settlement*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996 [1963]; Gayatri C. Spivak. *In Other Worlds*. New York: Routledge, 1987; Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak, eds. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; Partha Chatterjee. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London/New York: Routledge, 1994; Lata Mani. *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> For decolonial theory, see Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2-3, 2007, 168-178; Maria Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2007, 186-219; Ramón Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2011; Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018; Boaventura de Sousa Santos. *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> See Madina V. Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo. *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*. Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2012. See also Deniz Kandiyoti, "Postcolonialism Compared: Potentials and Limitations in the Middle East and Central Asia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2002, 279-297.

shifting meanings of Armenian transnationality which signifies as “whiteness” in North America, “Middle Eastern-ness” in Western Europe, “European-ness” in the Middle East and South Asia, and “blackness” in Russia.<sup>7</sup>

Working from this hybridity, rather than against it, my research explores what writing “postcolonialism into globality” (Spivak 2008, 131) might look like in relation to Armenian displacement. It takes its cues from Spivak’s provocation to “think ‘Armenia-in-Asia’ rather than ‘Armenia’ as deployed by ‘Armenian-America’” (110). This “immense imaginative labor” (ibid.), as she puts it, requires genealogical deconstruction. I analytically embrace Armenia’s indeterminacy, its “position without identity,” as a privileged point of departure to envision “*other* Asias” (131; original emphasis). Spivak offers “critical regionalism” as an alternative to “identity,” i.e. nationalism, by virtue of its plurality, yet the idea of a “pluralized Asian *synoikismos*”<sup>8</sup> has been coopted by the Eurasian Union, a neoliberal geoeconomic formation that mobilizes the rhetoric of the non-alignment movement to consolidate post-Soviet Russia’s regional dominance. Working from this present, I argue it is still worth holding onto the project of genealogical deconstruction to reimagine “Armenia-in-

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<sup>7</sup> The word “black” in Russian is a derogatory term used to describe various immigrant groups from Central Asia and the Caucasus, including Armenians, in Russia. Since most labor migrants in Russia are from these regions, “black” also carries connotations of a lower class status, though its primary function remains to conjure fears of sexual aggression and criminality as a racial slur. Similarly, most Armenian phenotypes do not pass as “white” in Western Europe, though national contexts vary in this respect. The legal construction of Armenians as “white” and “European” in the United States are discussed in the first and second chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>8</sup> Spivak borrows the term from Edward W. Soja to describe “economic and ecological interdependencies whose cohabitation in space is rendered purposeful.” See Gayatri C. Spivak. *Other Asias*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, 309. See also Edward W. Soja. *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Asia” through a humanistic method of study that “attempts an uncoercive rearrangement of desire” (Spivak 2008, 226), with uncertain outcome.

Spivak rightfully critiques “minoritarian, identitarian, and left-liberal” versions of Armenian nationalism that disguise themselves as “Armenian” postcolonialism (99), yet she does not trouble the colonial origins of the “indeterminate ‘Europeanness’ of the Armenians” (112). Genealogical deconstruction, here, also entails a closer look at the “strategically excluded narratives that will disrupt the dominant, this time the postcolonial, story” (117-118), as she herself notes in the epitaph to this introduction. Instead of accepting tropes that position Armenians and “Muslims” as binary opposites, in which Armenians function as imaginary proxies for the West, I investigate at what point and how Armenians became reduced to the idea of “a Christian nation seeking to protect itself from Muslims” (111). To acknowledge the well-documented atrocities suffered by Ottoman Armenians at the hands of Muslim executioners does not cancel out Armenian complicity with Islamophobia and European colonialism. Neither is pointing out that syncretic affinities run deep in the subaltern stratum necessarily recuperative or motivated by a “U.S. ideological position” (99), as Spivak seems to suggest, which sweeps this complicity under the rug to paint all Armenians as victims. It is, rather, to articulate a postcolonial framework that revisits this complicity in tension with the colonial appropriations that enabled it, and through which this complicity proceeded, resulting in the impossibility of a specifically *Armenian* postcolonialism.

The questions I ask are informed by my training in feminist studies, an interdisciplinary field that seeks to destabilize traditionally-wrought distinctions between the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences. Instead of considering gender as a stable object of inquiry, as its name seems to suggest, feminist studies trace how the category of gender is constructed as such. Feminist analytics are not limited to the experiences of women but trouble the conditions of intelligibility of both the identity and sign “woman” as well as the idea of experience. They center the margins to attend to the state-sanctioned, social, and epistemic production of violence at the intersections of gender with race, class, sexuality, ability, citizenship, and, more broadly, difference in transnational perspective.

Feminist scholarship also challenges the role of reproductive heteronormativity in the construction of national ideologies and border regimes. At best, it extends these critiques to the idea of history and the history of ideas. As a heterodox field, feminist studies also continuously deconstructs itself by working against operations of power in the archive, questioning the formation of canons, and the disciplining of bodies, the imagination, and critical thought itself. Though I doubt that “non-disciplinarity” is attainable, I mobilize the “undisciplining” impulse of feminist studies to expand categories in political theory, my disciplinary area of expertise, through postcolonial and poststructuralist engagement with Armenian nationalism and diaspora as gendered formations of power in, of, and outside of the West.

In order to re-embed questions of justice in the region, a postcolonial narrative of Armenia may function as a critical lever against militarism and neoliberal

hegemony. This dissertation therefore attempts to assemble a new conceptual infrastructure to support an emancipatory politics of diaspora that is no longer bound up with settler colonial imaginaries of nation and development. In order to move beyond historicism, which codes the nation as a historical agent, and geopolitics, which reduces land to territory, its chapters do not construct a linear argument. Though they are sequenced chronologically, they cross-hatch in multiple ways, working forward and backward in time and across space to capture the global effects of colonial events through the circulation of people and ideas in West Asia. This multidirectional diffusion defies neat schematizations of region, stable identity, and linear time because it foregrounds returns, displacements, and deferred consequences over resolution and progress.

A feminist mode of reading allows me to center how marginal figures transacted colonial visions through the trans-continental networks of the Armenian church and secular diaspora. Each chapter zooms in on a conjuncture at which protagonists in the footnotes of modern history became conduits of coloniality in Armenia, each layering over and refracting previous governmental projects while grinding against located notions of sovereignty. The difference between complicity and subjection is blurred by these moments of conscription, which resulted in a kind of incomplete incorporation of Armenians in two senses of the word. First, some Armenians were included in colonial projects as transnational brokers, for example in colonial India, whose status of relative privilege depended on claims to racial superiority vis-à-vis colonial others. Second, this complicity was articulated in

corporate terms that implicated *all* Armenians, resulting in an extraterritorial or “global” imaginary of Armenian nationhood. This two-fold incorporation remained incomplete because of the geographical dispersion of Armenians and their overall disparate experiences of subjection across empires and states. Into the contemporary period, national reformers negotiate this tension between Armenia’s constitutive plurality and corporate visions for a singular national body.

In order to unravel this tension, I combined discourse analysis and close reading techniques with archival research, participant observation, and ethnographic fieldwork. I consulted sources and interlocutors in multiple languages, including Russian, Armenian, English, and German, and collaborated with feminist scholars and activists in Armenia to dive into the texture of gendered difference in the Armenian lexicon. This project took me to field sites and archives in Armenia, Georgia, Russia, and the United States, including Boston, New York City, and Los Angeles. Similarly, my previous research in Germany and brief visits to Iran and Turkey, including its Kurdish territories, in 2013, as well as parts of the former autonomous region Nagorno Karabakh, the de facto Republic of Artsakh, in 2011 qualitatively informed this investigation. One could say *this* genealogical deconstruction was quintessentially diasporic in that it sometimes had to proceed in translation, and feminist for its ethics of collaboration, always marked when appropriate. Moving toward a truly interdisciplinary analysis, this research deployed mixed methodologies in order to supplement the respective strengths of literary and empirical approaches in the humanities and social sciences.



Perhaps counter-intuitively, feminist studies complicated the way in which this project grapples with questions of gender and sexuality. Instead of prescribing a normative approach, it rendered undecidable who or what should be the subject of postcolonial feminism in Armenia. From the standpoint of transnational feminist theory, liberal conceptions of sexual and women's rights become problematic because they often operate through Orientalist tropes and implicitly uphold Western savior discourse in relation to Armenian women.<sup>9</sup> Instead of acknowledging that neoliberal reforms strained the fabric of post-Soviet Armenian society, international organizations constructed Armenian tradition as inherently violent. The global anti-domestic violence campaign of USAID, for example, mimicked the Soviet discourse of women's liberation but channeled local feminist activism into non-governmental advocacy. This further discredited feminism as a donor-driven agenda in the eyes of many local Armenians.<sup>10</sup> These precedents make it difficult to embrace liberal discourse although it is often mobilized by women's rights activists in Armenia.

While Armenian feminism historically remained beholden to a national frame, this dissertation is concerned with nationalism itself as a colonial phenomenon. Therefore, it goes beyond a feminist critique of Armenian nationalism, and asks what

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<sup>9</sup> See Chandra T. Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2002, 499-535; Rosalind C. Morris, ed. *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> See Armine Ishkanian, "En-gendering Civil Society and Democracy-Building: The Anti-Domestic Violence Campaign in Armenia," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2007, 488-525. See also Breny Mendoza, "Transnational Feminism in Question," *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2002, 295-314.

a postcolonial feminism might look like in the Armenian context. It is inspired by queer and anarchist feminists in Armenia who are reimagining new feminist and queer genealogies for their emancipatory projects<sup>11</sup> but turns towards postcolonial theory to explore the possibility of a “third” space from which to challenge the “ethnic outlines of reproductive heteronormativity” (Spivak 2008, 127) in Armenia.

With this purpose in mind, it focuses on the repatriate community in Yerevan to turn the gaze towards transnational spaces and examine dominant logics of development through open-ended interviews that were primarily conducted in English. These narrative encounters often took a dialogical form. My goal was to find out how founders and directors of non-governmental organizations interpreted the meaning of their work as repatriates in Armenia’s development sector. Given my ongoing personal relationships with many of these interlocutors, I explicitly shared the premises of my dissertation, invited conversation, and offered opportunities to take critical distance and reflect with me, clarify, push back, or share additional information.

The postcolonial aspect of this work was met with unexpected enthusiasm during my time in Armenia. Its feminist angle, however, seemed more contentious. In many cases, local interlocutors rejected feminism as a Western framework. In turn, repatriates from the West, with the exception of those engaged in women’s right activism, often reduced the question to a technical issue of gender parity. Feminist

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<sup>11</sup> Due to the pioneering scholarly and translation work of Shushan Avagyan, Victoria Rowe, Jennifer Manoukian, Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, and others, a transnational conversation about the “first wave” of Armenian feminism is emerging around the writings of Hayganush Mark, Shushanik Kurghinian, Zabel Yessayan, and other early-twentieth century Armenian feminists.

scholars, artists, and collaborators helped me understand the local politics of gender while I attempted to read them in relation to diasporic reform projects. Despite their generosity and my theoretical preparation, I could not fully do justice to this question due to my limited fluency and short time in the field. However, I have attempted to lay the groundwork for future studies that could build on my critique of national incorporation to think through the postcolonial framework of diasporic return I develop as an original contribution.

Writing across disciplines proved a task of translation in itself. Each of four chapters engages with a different site and period to convey a sense of disjointedness and plot a new narrative through rearrangement and unexpected juxtapositions. Materials and sources seemed to impose the rhetoric of the disciplines that conventionally claim them so that chapters vary in voice and style depending on the discursive contexts they speak to. In order to engage in genealogical deconstruction, I identify and disaggregate the composite parts of Armenian identity, examine their texture, and arrange them in a sequence that leap-frogs instead of adding to already-formed narratives. In the sense of a montage, this project intentionally fuses genres to move from micro-analyses of specific words and phrases, studies of legal and policy documents, visual media, and literature, to macro-level discussions of power and globalizing processes in West Asia.

Bringing humanistic modes of inquiry to bear on social scientific methods required me to balance between disparate theoretical frameworks that tend to oscillate between an over-emphasis on signification and an uncritical reliance on the idea of a

positively knowable reality. The resulting intertextual linkages signpost contingent continuities rather than historical progress without excluding alternative interpretations and different meanings these conjunctures might engender in the future. Working from the present, I hope this interdisciplinary technique can counter the emerging hegemony of post-neoliberalism that has not been named yet.

Staging a conversation across disciplinary divides between history, literature, anthropology, and political theory, this dissertation also navigates geopolitical difference. It is informed by Foucauldian theories of power that I first encountered as a student in a political science department in Berlin. Unlike its namesakes in the United States, this department encouraged humanistic inquiry alongside providing training in empirical methods. This laid the intellectual foundations for graduate research on the politics of Jewish diaspora in Germany. Once I crossed into U.S. academia for my doctoral work, I began to wonder, with a renewed sense of possibility, how questions of globalization were being negotiated in the Armenian diaspora. This trajectory was informed by debates in cultural studies and literary theory. It was encouraged by postcolonial theorists and scholars in black studies.

As soon as this inquiry developed into a postcolonial critique of diasporic imaginaries of development in Armenia, its affiliation with black studies, in particular, seemed suddenly placed under erasure as if there could be no relationship. The alienating effects of the repeated and insistent inscription of the sign of Armenia with Europe ultimately moved into the center of my argument. By exposing the colonial genesis of the Armenian inclusion in geopolitical formations of whiteness, the arc of

this dissertation also aims to unsettle the framing operations that construct blackness as an inherently alienable and therefore non-genealogical form.<sup>12</sup> Lest it be expropriated, yet again, the critical inheritance of blackness as a mode of thought, rather than an ontology, must be properly marked here as a debt that cannot be repaid in kind. Its apparent epistemic non-inheritability, beyond appropriation, is propped up by the disciplinary canon of political theory. One of the aims of this project is therefore to theorize an emancipatory politics of Armenian diaspora that conceptually displaces, rather than perpetuates, the terms of black and indigenous dispossession. Its second aim is to trouble the constitutive exclusions that secure the dominant conceptual apparatus of politics as such.<sup>13</sup> By wielding displacement against itself, it excavates

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<sup>12</sup> See Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 106, No. 8, 1993, 1707-1791. See also George Lipsitz. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018 [1993]; C. B. Macpherson. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979 [1962]. On natal alienation, see Orlando Patterson. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1987, 64-81.

<sup>13</sup> For dominant scholarship in Anglophone political theory, see Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007 [1932]; Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]; Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution*. London: Penguin Books, 2006 [1963]; Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. New York: Picador, 2008; Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, eds. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991; Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998 [1995]; Judith Butler. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997; Nancy Fraser. *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010; Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London/New York: Verso, 2013; Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books, 2015. For new directions in political theory, see Joanne Barker, eds. *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggle for Self-Determination*. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005; Kehaulani J. Kauanui. *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*. Durham, NC: Duke

alterity within and beyond the margins of Armenian national discourse. This deconstructive impulse is owed to critical race theory and black studies.<sup>14</sup>

In order to move beyond epistemic and material legacies of slavery and settler colonial ideology, categories such as “liberation” and “emancipation” must be theorized anew. I do so by tracing how Armenians adopted the colonial gaze to interpret their own communities in relation to Europe, rather than Asia, and thereby constituted a modern national discourse that is founded on the idea of a binary opposition between the two terms “Europe” and “Asia.” Edward Said famously theorized this “style of thought” as Orientalism, a “systematic discipline by which

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University Press, 2008; Donna V. Jones. *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010; Jodi A. Byrd. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011; Audra Simpson. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014; Banu Bargu. *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi. *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. New York: Athenium, 1992 [1935]; C. L. R. James. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989 [1938]; Frantz Fanon. *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]; Cedric Robinson. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000 [1983]; Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York & London: Routledge, 2000; Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2001; Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2003, 11–40; Hortense J. Spillers. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003; Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2003, 257-337; Saidiya Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; David Scott. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2004; Colin Dayan. *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011; David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (Said 1979, 2-3). Other tropes such as “Islam” or “Africa” are similarly reified and denied epistemological status within this European system of knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

This aporetic constitution of Armenia complicates the idea of a stable “origin” that is often posited to anchor the politics of “return.”<sup>16</sup> Through an anti-foundationalist reading of Armenian history, literature, and political thought, this dissertation turns toward the illegitimate in order to *face*, rather than efface, and thereby *relate* to difference in an ethical way.<sup>17</sup> This counter-intuitive movement

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<sup>15</sup> See Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979; Edward W. Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered,” in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iverson, and Diana Loxley, eds. *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976-1984*. New York: Routledge, 1986, 210-229. See also Valentine-Yves Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988; Valentine-Yves Mudimbe. *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> See Ronald G. Suny. *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993; Armine Ishkanian, “Diaspora and Global Civil Society: The Impact of Transnational Diasporic Activism on Armenia’s Post-Soviet Transition,” in Touraj Atabaki and Sanjyot Mehendale, eds. *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Transnationalism and Diaspora*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 113-139; Daniel Fittante, “Connection without Engagement: The Paradoxes of North American Armenian Return Migration,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2-3, 2010 [2017], 147-169. See also Takeyuki Tsuda, ed. *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009; Tsuda, Takeyuki, “Ethnic Return Migration and the Nation-State: Encouraging the Diaspora to Return ‘Home’,” *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2010, 616-636.

<sup>17</sup> See Gavin Rae, “The Political Significance of the Face: Deleuze’s Critique of Levinas,” *Critical Horizons*, Vol 17, No. 3-4, 2016, 279-303. On the idea of the face in ethical thought about alterity, see Martin Buber. *Ich und Du*. Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1983 [1923]; Emmanuel Lévinas. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

toward the other is emancipatory because it negates a version of the national self that is built on negation.<sup>18</sup>

All four chapters highlight the *editorial* function of whiteness as a framing device that excludes the inconvenient as illegitimate. I trace how whiteness operates in English-language memoirs written by Armenians for Western consumption since the early modern period – beginning with the eclectic travelogue of Joseph Emin, an Indian Armenian from Persia, whose narrative was edited by Sir William Jones, the founder of modern Orientalism, to translated accounts of Armenian survival during the Ottoman genocide such as Aurora Mardiganian’s *Ravished Armenia* (1918), a heavily edited memoir that was presented as authentic testimony, and, lastly, ventriloquy and simulacra such as the silent picture *Auction of Souls* (1924),<sup>19</sup> which starred Mardiganian as herself, or Karen Jeppe’s *Misak: An Armenian Life* (1928),<sup>20</sup> a

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<sup>18</sup> For the Armenian radical tradition, see Louise Nalbandian. *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963; Khachig Tölölyan, “Cultural Narrative and the Motivation of the Terrorist,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1987, 217-233; Markar Melkonian, ed. *The Right to Struggle: Selected Writings by Monte Melkonian on the Armenian National Question*. San Francisco, CA: Sardarabad Collective, 1993 [1990]; Markar Melkonian. *My Brother’s Road: An American’s Fateful Journey to Armenia*. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005; Gregory Topalian. *A Self-Criticism by Monte Melkonian*, trans. Seta Melkonian. London: Gomidas Institute, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> See Henry L. Gates, ed. *Ravished Armenia, The Story of the Christian Girl Who Lived Through the Great Massacres*. New York: Kingfield Press, Inc., 1918. On the illusion of a “perfectly descriptive machine that offered all the signs of the real,” see Shushan Avagyan, “Becoming Aurora: Translating the Story of Arshaluys Mardiganian,” *Dissidences: Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism*, Vol. 4, No. 8, 2012, Article 13, 12; see also Leshu Torchin, “‘Ravished Armenia’: Visual Media, Humanitarian Advocacy, and the Formation of Witnessing Publics,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 108, No. 1, March 2006, 214–220; Anthony Slide, ed. *Ravished Armenia and the Story of Aurora Mardiganian*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Karen Jeppe. *Misak: An Armenian Life (Karen Jeppe’s Story of an Orphan Who Became a Son)*, trans. Jonas Kauffeldt. London: Gomidas Institute, 2015.



novel that framed the natal alienation of Ottoman Armenians as an opportunity for racial adoption in order to promote European colonial expansion in West Asia.

By showing that this process of appropriation played out in various imperial theatres, I reframe the discourse of progress in the United States not only in relation to race in the North Atlantic but also to colonialism in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, as well as Soviet modernization in Eastern Europe. Arguably, the idea of European patronage of Armenians informed the constitution of post-war international relations, the discourse of modern humanitarianism,<sup>21</sup> as well as forms of global development that persist into the contemporary period.<sup>22</sup> In a succession of iterations, the colonial logic and utopian temporality of development resulted in a

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<sup>21</sup> See Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1962 [1951], 267-302. See also Keith D. Watenpaugh. *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015; Laura Robson. *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017; Seyla Benhabib. *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, “On Humanitarian Architecture: A Story of a Border,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2017, 519–521; Katharina Lenner and Lewis Turner, “Making Refugees Work? The Politics of Integrating Syrian Refugees into the Labor Market in Jordan,” *Middle East Critique*, 2018, 1-31.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Mitchell. *The Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Julia Elyachar. *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005; Aihwa Ong. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006; Tania Murray Li. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009; Ananya Roy. *Poverty Capital: Microfinance and the Making of Development*. New York and London: Routledge, 2010; Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, eds. *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*. Chichester/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011; Stephen J. Collier. *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011; Keller Easterling. *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. London/New York: Verso, 2014; Michel Feher. *Rated Agency: Investee Politics in a Speculative Age*. New York: Zone Books, 2018.

variety of attempts to constitute Armenia – as a Christian protectorate, a liberal republic, an American mandate, a Soviet Socialist republic, and a neoliberal enterprise. As the historical arc and trans-hemispheric scope of this dissertation demonstrates, Armenians provided a connective tissue of globalization as objects and subjects of colonial discourse. Their difference, however, was framed in national terms. This idea of Armenia forms an “empty” center of gravity that anchors the project of diasporic return. Unlike the physical locale of Armenia, it is not populated, and therefore available for projections. It is an imaginary site of return that merely seems to coincide with a place in the South Caucasus.

Fundamentally, and counter-intuitively, I posit that diasporic return to Armenia is not merely a function of ethnic nationalism. Incited by colonial encounters, it is a governmental project that entails political, social, legal, economic, cultural, and infrastructural reforms which are designed to discipline, educate, and refashion Armenians into liberal subjects, laboring individuals, social entrepreneurs, and human capital. By locating the capacity to act – agency – on the side of diaspora, these reform projects often cast the actually existing Republic of Armenia and its population as a passive substrate for diasporic initiatives.

“Governing Armenia,” the title of this dissertation, encapsulates my core argument that governmental aspirations in the Armenian diaspora articulate a colonial relationship to the imagined homeland. It also alludes to Timothy Mitchell’s *Colonising Egypt* (1988), an account of the epistemic conquest of Egyptian society by

European order.<sup>23</sup> The procedural form of *governing*, as an activity and an aspiration, highlights the ongoing nature of this process as a kind of epistemic self-colonization. While existing critiques of international development often draw neat dividing lines by showing how Western-dominated donor organizations benefit from the economic dependencies of former colonies,<sup>24</sup> the co-ethnic status of diasporic interventions in Armenia complicates the terms of critique. I push through this seeming contradiction by suggesting that the colonial relationship proceeds precisely through claims to national unity. In light of the “colonial violence through which the capacity to own self and earth is produced” (Roy 2019, 13), how might radical responses to the historical dispossession of Armenians move beyond seeking remedy in property? While imaginaries of “Armenia-in-Asia” (Spivak 2008, 110) might be foreclosed by the binary terms of Orientalism, “abolition geographies” (Roy 2019, 15) promise to displace “postcolonial whiteness” (11), a term borrowed from Jacques Derrida, in order to arrive at new horizons of freedom beyond the liberal terms of imperial inclusion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Timothy Mitchell. *Colonising Egypt*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Rodney. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London/New York: Verso, 2018 [1972]; Samir Amin. *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1976 [1973]; Arturo Escobar. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011 [1995]; Aram Ziai. *Development Discourse and Global History: From Colonialism to the Sustainable Development Goals*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Ananya Roy draws on the black radical tradition, in particular the thought of W. E. B. Du Bois, Cedric Robinson, and Robin D. G. Kelley, to complicate Jacques Derrida’s framework of hospitality as radical dispossession. See Ananya Roy, “The City in the Age of Trumpism: From Sanctuary to Abolition,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 0, No.

This critical orientation toward the material and imaginative geographies of empire draws on the intersections of comparative literature and geography.<sup>26</sup> It is further informed by the turn toward world history in Armenian studies, largely to the credit of Sebouh Aslanian and Kathryn Babayan, which emphasizes transnational networks, mobility, circulation, and interaction across imperial boundaries and continental scales.<sup>27</sup> The recent formulation of an “Armenian Mediterranean,” as an interconnected space of cross-cultural fluency, mobilizes a maritime metaphor to reimagine “Armenianness” as a “loosely legible code” that is embodied and relational, akin to “Mediterraneanity,” rather than self-contained and fixed (Babayan/Pifer 2018, 10).<sup>28</sup> This shift promises to put the field in conversation with Caribbean discourse and Black diaspora studies in which scholars such as Eduard Glissant and Paul Gilroy have foregrounded the cosmopolitanism and relational poetics of African diasporic spaces

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0, 2019, 1-18. See also Jacques Derrida. *The Politics of Friendship*. London/New York: Verso, 2005 [1994].

<sup>26</sup> See Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979; Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1997; Anna Tsing, “The Global Situation,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2000, 327–360; Gayatri C. Spivak. *Other Asias*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> See Sebouh Aslanian. *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa, Isfahan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010; David Gutman, “Travel Documents, Mobility Control, and the Ottoman State in an Age of Global Migration, 1880-1915,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2016, 347-368; Kathryn Babayan and Michael Pifer, eds. *An Armenian Mediterranean: Words and Worlds in Motion*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> This formulation is reminiscent of “Armenity,” a transliteration of the French term *Arménité*, a concept developed by Adelina Cüberyan v. Fürstenberg as a theme for the National Pavilion of the Republic of Armenia at the 56<sup>th</sup> Biennale Di Venezia in 2015. It united contemporary artists from the Armenian diaspora under the “banner of a dispersed identity” in order to “rethink the notion of Armenianess” through the neologism of “Armenity.” See *armenity*, URL: <https://www.armenity.net/concept> (last accessed April 3, 2019).

in anticipation of the “oceanic” turn in world history.<sup>29</sup> As Indian Ocean scholars point out, early modern processes of globalization spanned the more recent divide between Western and Eastern hemispheres. Ashley L. Cohen, for example, suggests that the “West Indies” and the “East Indies,” though often treated as unrelated, were effectively *co-constituted* by “imperial networks that were (and are) global in scale.”<sup>30</sup>

A “radical rehistoricization”<sup>31</sup> of the colonial entanglements of Armenian diasporic formations with these imperial networks is needed in order to open up new ground for “translational relationalities.”<sup>32</sup> Alliances across difference can only be forged after a wide-eyed appraisal of colonial complicities. In order to travel the global pathways of diaspora,<sup>33</sup> I draw on the strengths of Armenian studies to read both with

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<sup>29</sup> Edouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997 [1990]; Paul Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993; M. Jacqui Alexander. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations of Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. For the emergent discourse of the Black Mediterranean, see S. A. Smythe, “L’Italia Meticcica Being and Belonging in the Black Mediterranean,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> See Ashley L. Cohen, “The Global Indies: Historicizing Oceanic Metageographies,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 69, No. 1, 2017, 11. For an overview of Indian Ocean studies, see Antoinette Burton, Madhavi Kale, Isabel Hofmeyr, Clare Anderson, Christopher J. Lee, and Nile Green, “Sea Tracks and Trails: Indian Ocean Worlds as Method,” *History Compass*, Vol. 11, No. 7, 2013, 297-502.

<sup>31</sup> David Scott, “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” *Small Axe*, Vol. 8, 2000, 197.

<sup>32</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam. *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic*. New York: New York University Press, 2012, 298.

<sup>33</sup> Levon Abrahamian retraces and unravels the history of Armenian identity in sixteen “paths” and many more forks. The rhizomatic structure of his work performs polycentrism and bridges divisions between Anglophone and Russophone communities of reading in Armenian studies. See Levon Abrahamian. *Armenian Identity in a Changing World*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2006. By mobilizing Mikhail Bakhtin’s writing on Rabelais’ *Gargantua* rather than Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651), Abrahamian’s work on the emergence of civil society in post-Soviet Armenia offers an alternative account of the nation-body as fleshly and visceral, in contrast to the liberal tradition of “civil society” based on legal individualism. See Levon Abrahamian and Gayane Shagoyan, “From Carnival Civil Society Toward a Real Civil

and against the grain of the field.<sup>34</sup> By challenging the subordination of femininity in that context, postcolonial feminism, “through Armenian eyes” (Babayan/Pifer 2018, 10), poses a powerful challenge to visions of the Armenian nation that are predicated on the colonial gaze. Postcolonial feminist alliances may point toward new modes of being and relating to estrangement.

The curatorial practice of Neery Melkonian, the late art historian and feminist critic, embraced the “disposition of guests, strangers, exiles, travelers, queers, etc.” in the “dispersed practices” of modern and contemporary artists that “carve out a more fluid or alternate path” through “multiple local affinities.”<sup>35</sup> Her formulation of “dispersed practices,” borrowed here slightly out of context, turns toward the constitutive ambiguities of Armenian identity in order to “gather anew,” as Melkonian put it, in an effort to counter-archive how “diasporic clusters meet and drift apart.”<sup>36</sup>

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Society: Democracy Trends in Post-Soviet Armenia,” *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2012, 11-50.

<sup>34</sup> Any overview of interdisciplinary perspectives in Armenian studies is necessarily incomplete. However, literary scholars and anthropologists have been at the forefront of contestations to the dominance of historiography and philology in the field. See, for example, Hrach Bayadayan. *Becoming Post-Soviet*. dOCUMENTA 13, No. 59, 2012; Nanor Kebranian, “Lost in Conversion: Mourning the Armenian-Turk,” *Middle Eastern Literatures*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2014, 238-262; Angela Harutyunyan. *The Political Aesthetic of the Armenian Avant-Garde: The Journey of the ‘Painterly Real,’ 1987-2004*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017; Joanne Randa Nucho. *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon: Infrastructures, Public Services, and Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017; Tamar Shirinian, “The Nation-Family: Intimate Encounters and the Genealogical Perversion in Armenia,” *American Ethnologist: Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2018, 48-59; Nelli Sargsyan, “The Importance of Collective Care as a Feminist (Prefigurative) Political Act,” Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, South Caucasus, March 9, 2018, URL: <http://www.feminism-boell.org/en/2018/03/09/importance-collective-care-feminist-prefigurative-political-act> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>35</sup> See Neery Melkonian, “Lebanon in the Armenian Imaginary: So Close with a Distance,” *Seismopolite: Journal of Art and Politics*, May 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

This “gathering” does not suggest that there is an inherent affinity that needs to be reconstituted. Rather, Melkonian described the “diasporic condition” as a constellation of aesthetic practices that “belong by not belonging.”<sup>37</sup>

In the field of diaspora studies, loosely construed, the modern definition of diaspora is contested. The term “diaspora” derives from the Greek word *diaspeirein*, “to scatter, to sow.” It can be translated as “dispersal,” a “scattering” produced by the centrifugal powers of displacement from a remembered or mythologized origin.<sup>38</sup> Until the 1990s, the field was primarily dedicated to the study of Jewish and Armenian dispersion as two paradigmatic cases of groups that maintained “national” identity without a state.<sup>39</sup> However, this sense of “statelessness” is a phenomenon that is tied to the emergence of the modern nation-state.<sup>40</sup> As a problem, it first erupted onto the international scene after the late Ottoman Empire denaturalized millions of its Greek

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> In the Armenian lexicon, diaspora is called *spyrk*, or “scattering.” Accordingly, Armenians from the diaspora, as opposed to the Republic of Armenia, are *spyrkahay*, “scattered” Armenians. This form can be modulated to specify the nationality of a diasporic Armenian. For example, an Armenian from the United States would be called *amerikahay*, as in “American Armenian,” an Armenian from Germany, *germanahay*, or “German Armenian,” and so on.

<sup>39</sup> See Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1993, 693-725; Khachig Tölölyan, “Rethinking *Diaspora(s)*: Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1996, 3-36.

<sup>40</sup> Only with the disintegration of “multi-national” imperial formations, such as the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, newly created nation-states designated title “nationalities” while other populations living within their territories became defined as “ethnic minorities.” See Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1962 [1951], 267-302. See also Karen Barkey. *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

and Armenian subjects.<sup>41</sup> These genocidal policies resulted in the state-sanctioned mass murder and forced displacement of almost the entire Ottoman Armenian population.<sup>42</sup>

While diasporic life can be framed in maritime terms, the waves of forced displacement that produced it remain inscribed in the landscape of the late Ottoman border zones between Syria and Turkey. At present, necropolitical violence is not only deployed to produce Kurdish populations that are “differentially exposed to violence and rendered disposable,” but can also be unleashed, so Banu Bargu, on “the dead as a surrogate for, and means of, targeting the living” (Bargu 2016, 5). In the context of

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<sup>41</sup> Without a state to turn to for protection, Armenian and Assyrian survivors were either integrated in the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, primarily French Mandate Syria and Lebanon or British Mandate Palestine. The ethnic cleansing of Ottoman Greeks during and after World War I culminated in a calamitous population exchange. The League of Nations, itself founded in 1919, appointed its first High Commissioner for Refugees in 1921 in response to the mass displacement of former Ottoman citizens. Although avenues for emigration to the United States tightened significantly after the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, many Armenians attempted to leave the region altogether as immigrants to the Americas or Western Europe. Some made their way to the short-lived Republic of Armenia in the South Caucasus, founded in 1918, and inadvertently became Soviet citizens in 1920. See also Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, “Armenian Refugees and their Entry into Canada, 1919-30,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 71, 1990, 80-108; Kim Hekimian, “Armenian Immigration to Argentina: 1909-1938,” *Armenian Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1990, 85-113; Simon Payaslian, “Diasporan Subalternities: The Armenian Community in Syria,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Vol. 16, No 1-2, 2007, 92-132; Hakem Al-Rustom, “Diaspora Activism and the Politics of Locality: The Armenians of France,” in Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani, eds. *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*. London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013, 473-493; Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, “Republic of Paradox: The League of Nations Minority Protection Regime and the New Turkey’s Step-Citizens,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 46, 2014, 657-679; Hrag Papazian, “Between Gezi Park and Kamp Armen: The Intersectional Activism of Leftist Armenian Youths [sic] in Istanbul,” *Turkish Studies*, 2016, 1-21.

<sup>42</sup> See Raymond Kévorkian. *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011; Ronald G. Suny. “*They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*”: *A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015. See also Avedis Hadjian. *Secret Nation: The Hidden Armenians of Turkey*. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2018.



the Armenian genocide, the necropolitical struggle over the realm of the dead continues on the terrain of memory.

In present-day Syria, bone fragments are still scattered throughout a “mostly unmarked necrogeography” of the Dayr al-Zur desert.<sup>43</sup> Elyse Samerdjian suggests that these unburied remains call on Armenians in Lebanon and Syria, in particular, to perform informal pilgrimages to sites of collective memory that are “embedded in the very topography of the landscape” (Samerdjian 2018, 59). Seemingly ubiquitous because “the actual sites of mass atrocity have been left to the elements to decay,” these fractured and anonymous bones bear witness to a state-sanctioned and calculated mass exposure to death that “weaponised [...] the landscape itself” – not only against the living, but also to desecrate their dead (ibid.). In the areas surrounding a formal memorial created by the Armenian Apostolic Church of Syria, Armenian visitors often ritually collect a few bone fragments with the help of local guides in order to mourn their ancestors and “symbolically unearth the truth of 1915 that lies beneath the sand” (72).

Samerdjian’s materialist theorization of “bone memory” productively complicates scholarly debates about questions of memory and trauma in the Armenian diaspora. It emphasizes trans-communal forms of witnessing that recover lived regional affinities, instead of appealing to the Western gaze for recognition, which has

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<sup>43</sup> Elyse Samerdjian, “Bone Memory: The Necrogeography of the Armenian Genocide in Dayr al-Zur, Syria,” *Human Remains and Violence*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2018, 56-75. See also Samar Kanafani, Munira Khayyat, Rasha Salti, and Layla Al-Zubaidi, eds. *Anywhere but Now: Landscapes of Belonging in the Eastern Mediterranean*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Beirut, 2012.

become a focus of most community organizing and academic scholarship in the Armenian diaspora.<sup>44</sup> By considering the materiality of memory, its embodied and topographically embedded forms, Samerdjian moves beyond psychoanalytic frameworks that were arguably inherited from studies on trauma and memory in the Jewish diaspora.<sup>45</sup>

Scholars such as Lawrence L. Langer and Cathy Caruth theorize trauma as a lapse in memory after an event that is too catastrophic to grasp and experience. In order to bear testimony, the witness, however, has to *narrate*. Imagined as a therapeutic practice, testimony is linked to self-narration in order to restore a linear progression of time. This approach has sparked a new methodological orientation toward oral and visual history. Recorded on video and audio tape, thousands of accounts were archived in massive databases and indexed with key words to make them searchable.<sup>46</sup> The epistemic presuppositions and material implications of this archiving practice are rarely troubled while its presumed benefits are often readily assumed.

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<sup>44</sup> For a critique of this focus on juridical proof, see Marc Nichanian. *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> See Lawrence L. Langer. *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, eds. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992; Dominick LaCapra. *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994; Cathy Caruth. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995; Geoffrey Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History*, Vol. 26, 1995, 537-563; Marianne Hirsch. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

<sup>46</sup> The two most prominent examples are Geoffrey Hartman's *Fortunoff* Archive at Yale University and the Visual History Archive of Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation at the University of Southern California. The latter has also acquired and integrated the archive of the Armenian Film Foundation. The Toronto office of the Zoryan Institute also holds videotaped oral histories but has a more restrictive access policy and no digital database.

For the most part, scholarly and artistic engagement with the Armenian genocide has confronted the silence of survivors as a problem. Informed by Eurocentric theories of trauma, the relative lack of narrative closure is often construed as a shortcoming that frustrates the ability of subsequent generations to make sense of their traumatic inheritance.<sup>47</sup> Here, again, a postcolonial approach provides a helpful shift in perspective that moves the conversation beyond the presumed impasse of Armenian inadequacy in relation to a European ideal.<sup>48</sup> Veena Das, for example, complicates the narrative focus of trauma theory by suggesting that the body can be a medium of mourning.<sup>49</sup> If trauma is a kind of poison that lodges itself in the body, holding it can also be understood as an act of love. Instead of passing on the violence, it is withdrawn from the symbolic order. It is contained, digested, and decomposed.

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Peter Balakian. *Black Dog of Fate, a Memoir: An American Son Uncovers his Armenian Past*. New York: Basic Books, 2009 [1997]; Fethiye Çetin. *Anneanem [My Grandmother]*. Istanbul: Metis, 2004; Nancy Agabian. *Me as Her Again: True Stories of an Armenian Daughter*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2008. See also Suzanne Khardalian's documentary *Grandma's Tattoos* (2012).

<sup>48</sup> Postcolonial scholarship has broadened the scope of genocide studies which previously centered the Holocaust. Beginning with the publication of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), the limits of psychoanalysis have been tested and expanded by anti-colonial and postcolonial theorists and practitioners of psychiatry in colonial contexts. This paved the way for comparative studies of genocide that attempt to reframe the genocidal effects of European colonialism in Asia, Africa, and the Americas as similarly unjust and immoral violations. See Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1963]; Ngugi Wa Thiong'O. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2004 [1981]; Ashis Nandy. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983; Stefania Pandolfo. *Knot of the Soul: Madness, Psychoanalysis, Islam*. Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Veena Das. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2007.

Das also points out that “violence is embedded in different patterns of sociality” that mediate how experience is narrativized (Das 2007, 103).<sup>50</sup> This argument is further nuanced by theorists of secularism who show that secular conceptions of agency and subjectivity are far from universal.<sup>51</sup> Talal Asad, for example, argues that the endurance of pain can be understood as agential, rather than necessarily incapacitating.<sup>52</sup> Going against the grain of liberal feminism, Saba Mahmood demonstrates how “agentival capacity” is enacted in “dimensions of human action whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance,” including “submission to recognized authority” (Mahmood 2005, 14-15). She theorizes *through* her own affective response to “different kinds of bodies, knowledges, and subjectivities” (37) as a symptom of “embodied attachments to historically specific forms of truth” (14), such as the idea that self-mastery is desirable,

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<sup>50</sup> See also Joan Dayan. *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1998; Elizabeth Povinelli. *Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002; Christina Sharpe. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> See Talal Asad. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini. *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. New York: New York University Press, 2003; Web Keane. *Christian Moderns: Freedom & Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007; Daniel Colucciello Barber. *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion, and Secularity*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011; Hussein Ali Agrama. *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012; Mayanthi L. Fernando. *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014; Gil Anidjar. *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; Saba Mahmood. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Talal Asad. *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

rather than a sign of the inherent inadequacy of forms of agency that are not “liberatory” (Mahmood 2005, 35).

If genres through which gendered subjectivity is narrated and experienced in the Armenian context were taken into consideration, the silence of survivors might be newly interpreted as an impossibility to narrate on the redemptive and alienating terms of the archive. This wayward silence may speak to the presence of difference, rather than to an absence of meaning. It is often assumed that shame *caused* this silence, but *shame* may be the ethical response to the forensic logic of proof. As argued by literary theorist Marc Nichanian, it is the “appeal to the external gaze,” the gaze of “civilized humanity,” that produces feelings of shame “each time testimony was exhibited, presented, offered as proof [...] of our own death.”<sup>53</sup> A postcolonial orientation toward trauma and memory in the Armenian context may open up new ways of navigating this shame. As a negative evaluation, shame is symptomatic of subjection. It registers that the Western gaze has been internalized and inflicts punishment on the self for its own presumed inadequacy.

A closer look at the emergence of Jewish nationalism in nineteenth century Europe might help situate this Armenian orientation toward Europe. After centuries of persecution, anti-Jewish stereotypes about the Jewish diaspora became engrained in

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<sup>53</sup> Marc Nichanian. *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 120. See also David Kazanjian and Anahid Kassabian, “Naming the Armenian Genocide: The Quest for ‘Truth’ and a Search for Possibilities,” *new formations*, No. 8, 1989, 81-98; David Kazanjian and Marc Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” in David Eng and David Kazanjian, eds. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 125-147; Marc Nichanian. *Writers of Disaster: Armenian Literature in the Twentieth Century*. Reading: Taderon, 2002.

Zionist discourse. While settlement in Palestine was linked to masculinity, diasporic experience became associated with emasculation and weakness.<sup>54</sup> Whether for religious or political reasons, Jewish critics of Zionism, however, opposed the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine because they affirmed dispersion as a quintessentially *Jewish* experience. They resisted the idea that Jewish resettlement was emancipatory.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, nationalism in the Armenian diaspora is characterized by aspirations to return to an ancestral homeland that was continuously inhabited by Armenians since late antiquity. This imaginary origin cannot be reduced to nostalgia because it was *remembered*, until a couple of decades ago, by a generation of displaced survivors. Their stories, or silence, shaped the Armenian discourse of repatriation around phantasies of revenge and reversal. The ongoing denial of the Armenian genocide by the Republic of Turkey has locked Armenians into a politics of recognition that seeks to negate Armenian negation by affirming it. This paradox

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<sup>54</sup> See Tamar Mayer, “From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism,” in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 283-308. See also Sander L. Gilman. *The Jew’s Body*. London: Routledge, 1991; Daniel Boyarin. *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1997; Nira Yuval-Davis. *Gender & Nation*. London: Sage Publications, 1997.

<sup>55</sup> See David H. Weinberg. *Between Tradition and Modernity: Haim Zhitlowski, Simon Dubnow, Ahad Ha-Am, and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identity*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996; Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz. *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007; Allan Arkush, “From Diaspora Nationalism to Radical Diasporism,” *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experiences*, Vol. 29, 2009, 326-350; August Grabski, ed. *Rebels Against Zion: Studies on the Jewish Left Anti-Zionism*. Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny Im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2011; David Landy. *Jewish Identity & Palestinian Rights: Diaspora Jewish Opposition to Israel*. London: Zed Books, 2011; Judith Butler. *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012; Max Czollek. *Desintegriert Euch! [De-integrate Yourselves!]*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2018.

results in a negative identification with genocide that can only be “reversed,” but not overcome, lest the loss of Ottoman Armenia is accepted and mourned without recognition.

Furthermore, Western support for Armenian resettlement in Anatolia depended on intelligibility within domestic racial hierarchies. In order to solicit popular sympathies for Armenian independence, Armenians had to be framed as “white.” In order for Armenians to be recognized as “white,” however, they had to be defined as “European settlers” in their own homeland. Insofar as this affiliation with Europe affirmed Armenian aspirations for self-government in racial terms, it *naturalized* their natal alienation by the late Ottoman Empire and rendered their indigenous status in Anatolia *unintelligible*. Consequently, self-colonization – the colonization of the Armenian homeland by Armenians, with European assistance – was offered as the only viable response to Ottoman Armenian displacement. Although the idea of an American Mandate Armenia was quickly abandoned, as were Ottoman Armenians, this geopolitics of whiteness reconfigured the discourse of Armenian diaspora in colonial terms.

While the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 displaced close to a million Arab Palestinians, many of whom continue to languish in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan,<sup>56</sup> none of the historically Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire were

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<sup>56</sup> See Ilan Pappé. *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. See also Edward W. Said. *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994; Rosemary Sayigh, “Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1998, 42-58; Rashid Khalidi. *The Iron Cage: The Story of*

turned over to the Republic of Armenia, a social democracy that was first founded in 1918 and Sovietized in 1920. Located in the South Caucasus, across the Ararat mountain range, it occupies only a fraction of the territory that founds the diasporic imaginary of the Armenian homeland. Only after the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia declared national independence in 1990, the *idea* of Armenia begun to merge with an actually existing *state* of Armenia.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike the first wave of the so-called “Great Repatriation” of the Stalin era, which led to personal tragedy for thousands of Armenians from the Americas, France, and Lebanon that heeded the Soviet call to return “home,” developmentalism – the will to *improve* – motivates the contemporary repatriation movement to Armenia. Return is promoted by a diaspora-led cluster of non-governmental organizations, rather than by the Armenian state itself. In contrast, Zionist statecraft is centered on “return” from the Jewish diaspora due to the demographic need to populate the state of Israel with a Jewish majority.

Theodor Herzl, one of the founders of political Zionism, imagined the “Jewish state” as a “stately iron vessels” that could be carried by a “river” of force.<sup>58</sup> He suggested that “affliction” and “plight” bound Jews together as a “motive force” that,

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*the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Ronald G. Suny briefly notes that the logic of “*hairenadartsutiun* (return to the fatherland),” or “Armenian ‘Zionism’,” as he puts it, was stalled because few segments of the Armenian diaspora “embraced the particular political form under which it [“Armenia”] was governed” before national independence in 1990. See Ronald G. Suny. *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 199, 216.

<sup>58</sup> Theodor Herzl, “The Jewish State,” in Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959, 213; See also Theodor Herzl. *Der Judenstaat: Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage*. Leipzig und Wien: M. Breitenstein, 1896.



“if properly harnessed, is powerful enough to propel a large engine.” While Herzl proposed the “cogs and wheels” that should “constitute the machinery,” he argued it would be left to “better mechanics [...] to carry the work out.” In this “scheme,” the state was a *machine*, a technical apparatus, that had to be constructed by skilled engineers in order to produce a *national* economy.

The contemporary discourse of repatriation in the Armenian diaspora envisions a future state of Armenia that would be constituted through diasporic return as a development strategy. In this sense, the post-Soviet moment in Armenia is closer to the tenets of Zionist statecraft than to the neoliberal permutations of Soviet discourse that characterize conversations about development in other parts of the post-Soviet region. Developmentalism, in the sense of a desire to “catch up” with the West, is a function of colonial governmentality that measures against an implicit standard of development in order to justify a “rule of experts” that is withdrawn from the democratic process.<sup>59</sup> Instead, informal reform efforts are legitimized by *technical* results, such as quantifiable growth.

The historical differences between Zionism and nationalism in the Armenian diaspora have overshadowed these ideological similarities.<sup>60</sup> A reckoning with unequal encounters in the margins of Europe would require that Jewish and Armenian diasporic experiences be decoupled and examined on their own terms but within a

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<sup>59</sup> See Timothy Mitchell. *The Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Tania Murray Li. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009.

<sup>60</sup> For a rare comparative study, see Richard G. Hovannisian and David N. Myers, eds. *Enlightenment and Diaspora: The Armenian and Jewish Cases*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.

*relational* frame. Without centering Europe, a postcolonial approach to world history offers an angle that is wide enough to consider both within *one* historical frame in order to analyze the entanglements of diasporic and settler colonial formations.

Though Jewish and Armenian histories of persecution bear certain discursive resemblances, such as derogatory associations with cunning and usury, even a brief excursion into the historical relationship of the Zionist movement to the Armenian national movement reveals significant differences and tensions. In 1896, before the publication of *Der Judenstaat*, Theodor Herzl approached Sultan Abdul Hamid with a colonization charter. He hoped to win the support of the Sublime Porte for a Jewish nation-state in Syria-Palestine, then still a province of the Ottoman Empire, by working to suppress the propaganda activities of Armenian revolutionary committees in Western Europe. In the aftermath of the Hamidian massacres of 1894, the latter were successfully shoring up public support for Armenian independence.<sup>61</sup>

As an assimilated German Jew, Herzl internalized racist ideas that he not only projected onto Jews, in his efforts to reverse anti-Jewish stereotypes, but also onto Armenians, whom he believed he could instrumentalize in order to further the Zionist cause. Despite his best efforts, Herzl failed to sway Armenian revolutionary leaders in Vienna and London that it was in their best interest to disarm and capitulate to the Sultan in exchange for liberal reforms.<sup>62</sup> This little known episode is better understood

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<sup>61</sup> See Marwan R. Buheiry, "Theodor Herzl and the Armenian Question," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1977, 75-97. See also R. Patai, ed. *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, Vol. 1. New York: Herzl Press, 1960, 345-346.

<sup>62</sup> Theodor Herzl met Avetis Nazarbekian in London in July 1896. In his diary, he framed the encounter in racial terms. He described Nazarbekian as a "genius" with "Black, tangled

as evidence of the Orientalized position of Armenians vis-à-vis Europe than in terms of competition between two nationalist movements, which normalizes the settler colonial goals of the Zionist movement.

Postcolonial interventions point toward analytic horizons beyond the classic limitations of diaspora studies. After a first wave of public intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, and Amílcar Cabral reimagined anti-colonialism in cosmopolitan terms,<sup>63</sup> scholars in British cultural studies such as Stuart Hall and Avtar Brah mobilized the concept of “diaspora” to theorize the effects of forced displacement on South Asian and Black imaginaries of belonging in and beyond the West.<sup>64</sup> These interventions expanded the field of diaspora studies to include phenomena that previously fell beyond its purview,<sup>65</sup> such as, for example, the transnational identities

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serpentine locks, black beard, pale face,” and noted, “wild Armenian faces appear[ed] in the crack of the door.” It appears that Nazarbekian’s wife Maro, whom Herzl does not name, strongly opposed any alliances with the Zionist movement. Herzl mentioned, “The woman kept interrupting us, speaking in Armenian and evidently against me,” adding that she had “a wicked look.” See Marwan R. Buheiry, “Theodor Herzl and the Armenian Question,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1977, 94.

<sup>63</sup> See Cedric Robinson. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000 [1983]; Edward W. Said *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993; Gary Wilder. *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2015.

<sup>64</sup> See Paul Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993; Avtar Brah. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. New York: Routledge, 1996; Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, Kenneth Thompson, eds. *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996, 184-227; David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, ed. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>65</sup> See Khachig Tölölyan, “The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1991, 3-7; James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1994, 302-338; Robin Cohen. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: UCL Press, 1997; Khachig Tölölyan, “The Contemporary Discourse

of non-resident citizens of India and China in the United States,<sup>66</sup> Vietnamese refugees and Turkish guest workers in Germany,<sup>67</sup> or the geopolitics of homosexuality.<sup>68</sup>

Shushan Avagyan, a literary theorist based in Yerevan, reconsiders *translation* as a process by which “the loss of memory” may be reconciled “with the memory of loss.”<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Yasemin Yildiz suggests that the “monolingual” paradigm of trauma theory fails to account for diasporic multilingualism. She discusses the works of authors who write in multiple languages and use translation as a tool in order to engage with trauma.<sup>70</sup> As a method, translation loosely connects disparate terms of experience without imposing universal meaning. Because it requires a deep familiarity

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of Diaspora Studies,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2007, 647-655.

<sup>66</sup> Rey Chow. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993; Aihwa Ong. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Zafer Şenocak. *Atlas of a Tropical Germany: Essays on Politics and Culture, 1990-1998*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000; Kien Nghi Ha, ed. *Asiatische Deutsche: Vietnamesische Diaspora and Beyond* [Asian Germans: Vietnamese Diaspora and Beyond]. Berlin: Assoziation A, 2012; Ozan Zakariya Keskinliç and Ármín Langer, eds. *Fremdgemacht & Reorientiert – Jüdisch-Muslimische Verflechtungen* [Estranged & Reoriented – Jewish-Muslim Entanglements]. Berlin: Verlag Yılmaz-Günay, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> See Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, ed. *Queer Diasporas*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000. For a critique of “homonationalism,” that is, the uses of LGBT-identified subjects to legitimize nationalist projects through sexual exceptionalism, see Joseph A. Massad. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007; Jasbir Puar, “Rethinking Homonationalism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 45, 2013, 336-339; Tamar Shirinian, “Sovereignty as a Structure of Feeling: The Homosexual within Post-Cold War Armenian Geopolitics,” *lambda nordica*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2017, 93-124.

<sup>69</sup> See Shushan Avagyan, “Becoming Aurora: Translating the Story of Arshaluys Mardigianian,” *Dissidences: Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism*, Vol. 4, No. 8, 2012, Article 13, 4.

<sup>70</sup> See Yasemin Yildiz. *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010. See also Jacques Derrida. *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 [1996]; Babara Johnson. *Mother Tongues: Sexuality, Trials, Motherhood, Translation*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2003.

with multiple versions of the self, rather than the self and its other, translation involves an ethics of difference.<sup>71</sup> Constitutively open to the other, both terms are contingently connected while remaining situated in time and space. This methodological orientation toward ethics, rather than colonial projections, allows to excavate different conceptions of time and agency that exceed the politics of recognition in the archive. Material forms of memory – embedded in the landscape itself, rather than displaced – and trans-communal practices of witnessing can forge ethical relationships that recognize the catastrophic destruction of Ottoman Armenian communities *despite* the ongoing denial of the Republic of Turkey.

“Translational relationalities”<sup>72</sup> may open onto a temporal plane of human freedom that allows to act “anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences.”<sup>73</sup> Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s political thought, David Scott argues that *forgiveness* in the aftermath of “radical evil” is “connected to *freedom* and therefore to *futurity*.”<sup>74</sup> Such *unconditioned* forgiveness – emancipation from the logic of recognition – would be no small feat in the absence of narrative closure. Queer and feminist artists and curators are at the forefront of aesthetic experiments in political freedom because they “act

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<sup>71</sup> See Gayatri C. Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York and London: Routledge, 2009 [1993], 200-225.

<sup>72</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam. *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic*. New York: New York University Press, 2012, 298.

<sup>73</sup> Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, 241.

<sup>74</sup> David Scott. *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 165; original emphasis.

anew and unexpectedly” despite the hegemony of reproductive heteronormativity. Though the stakes of non-reproductive sex are particularly high in the Armenian context, where it is symbolically linked to the Ottoman dismemberment of the Armenian nation-body,<sup>75</sup> queer theory allows to unsettle the governmental logic of reproduction by showing that the figure of the child is not the only way to represent the intention of a collective future.<sup>76</sup>

Through a wide historical and geographical arc, which by necessity leaves out entire subplots, this dissertation charts the diffusion of colonial governmentality through diasporic formations that were transnational in scope before the emergence of the modern nation-state. This is not to suggest that the Armenian case is exceptional but to demonstrate, through its historically specific entanglements, how West and Central Asia were shaped by colonial encounters that both preceded and exceeded Soviet statecraft. This approach offers a new way of thinking about the relationship between postcolonialism in formerly colonized regions of the Global South and postsocialism in the post-Soviet region.

As a field formation, the study of postsocialism is not only concerned with political and economic transitions in the former constituent republics of the Soviet

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<sup>75</sup> See Lerna Ekmekçioğlu. *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Queer theory destabilizes the biopolitical investment in the securitization of life. See Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *October*, Vol. 43, 1987, 197-222; Lee Edelman. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004; José Esteban Muñoz. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009; Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman. *Sex, or the Unbearable*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014. On sexuality as a political technology, see Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1: An Introduction*. New York: Random House, 1990 [1978].

Union, and its satellite states in the Balkans, Baltics, and Eastern Europe,<sup>77</sup> but also the social and cultural transformations of societies that are nominally still socialist, such as China or Vietnam, but increasingly governed by neoliberal ideology.<sup>78</sup> West and Central Asia, however, have received only little scholarly attention from theorists of postsocialism outside of the region. This marginalization reproduces the racialized hierarchies of socialism without troubling the geopolitics of this omission.<sup>79</sup> The layered histories of coloniality in West and Central Asia are more fully appreciated through a postcolonial lens because “postsocialism,” despite its broadness, is perhaps too *narrow* a frame to account for disparate experiences of race in relation to Eastern Europe, even if understood as a subordinate part of Europe.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” *PMLA*, Vol. 116, No. 1, 2001, 111-128; Chris Hann, ed. *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Lisa Rofel. *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007; Shu-mei Shih, “Is the Post- in Postsocialism the Post- in Posthumanism?” *Social Text*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2012, 27-50; Thu-huong Nguyen-vo. *Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008; Xudong Zhang. *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

<sup>79</sup> For exceptions, see Farideh Heyat. *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*. London: Routledge, 2002; Deniz Kandiyoti, “The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized nor Modern?” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2007, 601-624; Laura Adams and Assel Rustemova, “Mass Spectacle and Styles of Governmentality in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan,” *Europe-Asia Studies Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 7, 2009, 1249-1276; Bruce Grant, “Cosmopolitan Baku,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 75, No. 1, 2010, 123-147; Diana T. Kudaibergenova, “‘My Silk Road to you’: Re-Imagining Routes, Roads, and Geography in Contemporary Art of ‘Central Asia’,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 8, 2017, 31-43.

<sup>80</sup> See Wlad Godzich, “Sekend-Hend Europe,” *boundary 2*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2014, 1-15; Anita Starosta. *Form and Instability: Eastern Europe, Literature, Post-Imperial Difference*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016.

By breaking down walls between the transnational analytics of postsocialism, postcolonialism, and neoliberalism, the Armenian case moves the transnational feminist conversation beyond the mounting impasse that has recently led postsocialist feminist thinkers to denounce the “postcolonial lens” as a “Western-centric methodological tool” that is used to discount the “secondary” difference produced by Soviet ideology.<sup>81</sup> The tension between Soviet statecraft and colonial governmentality in the Armenian diaspora shows that colonial discourse travelled *across* colonized sites, instead of solely emanating from Europe. The diffusion of colonial governmentality from East to West, and back, across hemispheres, through bodies of water and written in the sand, suggests that the modern history of political ideas should be reevaluated from the standpoint of Eurasia. Conceptualized as a site of “border thinking” between Europe and Asia (Tlostanova 2010, 13), this constitutively hybrid position destabilizes all national projects of “return” to pure origins. In conversation with Gloria Anzaldúa, a feminist theorist of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands,<sup>82</sup> “being the border and thinking from the border” (26) in Eurasia calls for a new theory of emancipation as a politics of relation.

I overall rethink the category of emancipation through a series of colonial encounters and displacements that transformed political aspirations in the Armenian

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<sup>81</sup> Madina Tlostanova, Suruchi Thapar-Björkert and Redi Koobak, “The Postsocialist ‘Missing Other’ of Transnational Feminism?” *Feminist Review*, Issue 121, 2019, 81-87. For a more optimistic assessment, see Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, “Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2009, 6-34.

<sup>82</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.



diaspora. The four chapters of this dissertation discuss critical conjunctures at which the entanglements of Armenian communities in South Asia and North America shaped social and economic development in West Asia. I take a multi-sited and relational approach to trace the circulation of governmental logics through transnational networks of diaspora and analyze their effects on national imaginaries that have produced a series of reform projects. On the basis of archival research and original fieldwork, I examine how subjectivity became a site of contestation between the “extraterritorial” governmentality of reformers in the Armenian diaspora and the situated sovereignty of Armenian states. I draw on transnational feminist critique to push against the sexual politics of Armenian nationalism and develop a postcolonial analytic of diaspora and globalization in West Asia.

In Chapter One, “The Making of Anglo-Armenian Law in Early Colonial India,” I draw on world history and political theory to analyze colonial discourse in English- and Armenian-language early modern texts published by Armenians in South Asia. The chapter shows how Armenian displacement in the borderlands of the Ottoman, Russian, and Persian Empires set the stage for the colonial subjection of Armenians by the English East India Company. It traces how Armenian national discourse was reconfigured after a 1688 trade agreement with the English joint-stock corporation merged early modern notions of “nation” and corporate conceptions of extraterritorial sovereignty. I argue that the interaction of ecclesiastical and colonial conceptions of the law rendered Armenians susceptible to emergent biopolitical visions of state power that promised “human” status under the aegis of Christian

sovereignty as against “beastly” existence without guarantees of self-possession. I chart this transformation through a close reading of an English-language memoir by Joseph Emin, an Indian Armenian reformer from Persia, first published in London 1792, then republished in Calcutta in 1918, and finally translated into Armenian in Beirut in 1958. Through a discussion of the material circumstances surrounding this publication, I show how the Armenian Enlightenment was shaped by the emergent discipline of Orientalism. I argue that the first Armenian constitutional draft, published by a group of Armenian reformers in colonial Madras in 1788/89, envisioned national independence as a form of corporate government that was modelled on the colonial joint-stock corporation. By zooming in on this early modern conjuncture, I show how the secularization of Armenian nationhood was informed by British imperialism in South Asia.

Chapter Two, “Adopting an Orphan-Nation: Armenian-Americans and the Geopolitics of Whiteness,” turns to the aftermath of the Armenian genocide to examine how the natal alienation of Ottoman Armenians was reinforced by American humanitarianism in the Near East. Through a close reading of legal cases, expert reports, international treaties, visual media, novels, and newspaper reports, it traces how conceptions of Armenians as an “orphan-nation” facilitated the international circulation of progressive-era racial logics. I connect the statelessness of Ottoman Armenians to naturalization cases in the United States to suggest that the racial inclusion of Armenians under the umbrella of American whiteness reinforced their denaturalization in the Near East. In order to be categorized as “free white persons” in

the United States, Ottoman Armenians had to be constructed as “foreign settlers” in their own homeland. I show how new media technologies such as the motion picture were deployed to erase Armenian claims to indigeneity in West Asia and critique the gendered and racialized scripts through which this erasure proceeded. Race was not only inscribed in the bodies of naturalized Armenian-Americans but it also governed the American response to forced displacement in the Near East. In order to appease eugenic anxieties about racial mixing, strategic priorities shifted from racial adoption to segregation and racial quarantine. In 1919, Near East Relief was chartered by the United States Congress in 1919 to resettle and concentrate Armenian orphans in Soviet Armenia. During this brief period of collaboration, the American staff of Near East Relief, League of Nations officials, and exiled Armenian nationalists competed with Soviet administrators and Bolshevik feminist over the allegiance of Armenia’s orphaned and displaced inhabitants. Until 1931, a public agency of the United States collaborated with the recently established Soviet authorities to supply the future citizenry of a nominally Armenian state.

Chapter Three, “Emancipating ‘Woman-Nationals’ in Early Soviet Armenia,” flips the narrative to the Soviet side to show how competing conceptions of the nation – one biopolitical, the other vitalist – collided during the Soviet campaign to emancipate “Eastern” women. Through close readings of Russian-, Armenian- and German-language archival materials, I investigate what kinds of subjects Bolshevik reformers and Soviet feminists sought to engender in the Soviet East. Existing scholarship has focused on unveiling campaigns in Central Asia, but gender relations

in Transcaucasia also became the target of social and legal reforms that aimed to abolish so-called “crimes of daily life.” At the intersection of the “woman question” and the “national question,” the “woman-national” emerged as a gendered and racialized figure whose emancipation coincided with subjection. Volunteer-run consciousness raising programs were designed to educate so-called “woman-nationals” about the new Soviet system and their central role within it. Their imagined counter-part was the “Liberated Eastern Woman,” an individual agent that participated in the public labor force, spoke her mind in public, and informed Soviet authorities on “crimes of daily life” in her household. By soliciting women’s speech, the Soviet state became involved in the regulation of sex in the Armenian home. In contrast to the nation-body, which was imagined as a living organism, the “new life” of Soviet society was conceived as a synthetic assemblage that would amalgamate disparate subjects and abolish the organic content of the nation-form. Through the conscription of “woman-nationals” as Soviet agents, the Armenian nation was to be emancipated from reproduction in the patriarchal household. I argue that the Soviet project was a kind of vitalism, rather than a colonial regime, because it aimed to socialize labor-power, or vital energy, beyond the organismic bounds of the nation.

Chapter Four, “The Neoliberal Return of the National Enterprise: Global Diaspora in Post-Soviet Armenia,” turns to the period of postsocialism in Armenia, bookended by the Velvet Revolution of April 2018, to make sense of the emergence of the neoliberal discourse of return, or new movement of “repatriation” (*hayrenadartz*, return to the fatherland), which has reconfigured the practice of

international development in Armenia. Through ethnographic fieldwork among repatriate activists in Armenia's development sector, I theorize how corporate conceptions of the Armenian nation are reactivated and reworked in neoliberal times. On the basis of narrative interviews and participant observation, I argue that the formerly "stateless" Armenian diaspora has adopted the post-Soviet state as a "national enterprise" that is centered on the Armenian plateau but extends from North and South America to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In this global vision of diaspora, sovereignty is vested in the corporate nation, rather than the state, resulting in efforts to reconstitute Armenia as a "start-up country." I critique the new paradigm of development through repatriation, or "Development 2.0," as a neoliberal project of diasporic self-making that offers capital as emancipation. Through a close reading of consultant reports and transcribed interviews, I chart the transformation of post-Soviet development from civil society promotion by NGOs to social impact investment by a cluster of diaspora-led private foundations. This entrepreneurial turn incorporates all self-identified Armenians as shareholders and potential investors in a global nation. At the nexus of geopolitics, nationalism, and neoliberalism, I argue, transnational networks of Armenian diaspora are governmentalizing the post-Soviet state and realizing alternative forms of globalization in the process.

## Chapter 1

### The Making of Anglo-Armenian Law in Early Colonial India

*[T]hose being the true Christians, who can inherit the kingdom of God; and not they that lead a lazy cowardly life, like us, who are become cattle, devoured by wolves [...] a rational being should not suffer himself to be a wilful slave to others; he ought even to be cautious not to be domineered over by his own fellow-christians; since God has created them all free alike, to be ruled or governed by good laws, with the same justice to the rich or to the poor; shewing that every man is honourable, otherwise he is no better than a beast [...] that perisheth.*

– Joseph Emin, *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Émin, An Armenian, Written in English by Himself* (1792), 160-161

#### Introduction

In 1751, a young Armenian man, twenty-five years of age, boarded the East Indiaman “Walpole” at Balasore, present-day Baleshwar to the south of Calcutta, to leave for England on the last cargo ship of the season. After many failed attempts, he finally struck a deal with its commander, a certain Thomas Fea, to work in exchange for his passage. Convinced that “he was going towards a paradise upon earth” (Apcar 1918, 23), he willingly scrubbed the deck, gallery, and pigsty with a broom and a swap for six months, until he arrived in Woolwich, to the east of London, with ten shilling in his pocket. His name was Joseph Emin.

When he first witnessed “the Fort of the Europeans and the Soldiers Exercise, and the Shipping” as a nineteen-year old in Calcutta, it appeared to him “they were dextrous [sic] and perfect in all things” (58). Thoroughly mesmerized by the appearance of “regularity or order” (247), he felt a sudden jolt. Judging “European management” (457) to be superior to “Asiatic camps, pitched in the night-time in their irregular way” (247), he recognized himself a colonial other. As long as Armenians

were subjected to “piratical diabolical law” (Apcar 1918, 157), he felt, he could not “bear to live like a Beast, eating and drinking without Liberty or Knowledge” (59). Emin resolved “to go to Europe to learn Art Military and other Sciences to assist that Art” in order to orchestrate an Armenian uprising against Ottoman and Persian rule. His life-long mission became to reinstate “Armenian sovereignty” (446) in accordance with the “European system of wise laws and useful regulations” (2), which he compared to “the sun, which spreads its magnificent light over all the universe” (17).

Relying on Enlightenment tropes about night and day, projected onto the binary terms of Asia and Europe, his “main design” for Armenia was to form “a respectable alliance with Georgia, and then becoming tributary to a Christian power” (211). He not only wanted “to go into Armenia like an European Officer” (59), but he also desired to sharpen and polish his mind in order to “serve him who has the rule over his nation” (109). Emin sought education and military training in England to become advisor to king Heraclius II, the legitimate heir of the Bagratid line,<sup>83</sup> whom he hoped to convince that “a nation is not a nation [...] without wisdom” (110).

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<sup>83</sup> As the Georgian prince, Heraclius II secured the independence of the Georgian kingdom from Persian rule after the death of Nadir Shah in 1747. He was also the heir of the Bagratid line of Armenian sovereignty, derived from series of territorial conquests since the reign of Tigran the Great in the first century B.C. (Nalbandian 1963, 7). As the ancient Armenian kingdom was disbanded, the first sovereignty of conquest passed onto a territorially diminished and decentralized polity upheld by the Aršakuni dynasty (Hovannisian 1997). Armenia’s land-owning nobility was practically annihilated between the demise of the Aršacuni dynasty and the short-lived Bagratid Kingdom of Armenia, another sovereign estate that existed until 1045 C.E. by conquest. A “new” Armenian barony was established in Cilicia and raised to the status of a kingdom when Leo II, later Leo I, received the crown from Henry VI., German emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and Roman Catholic Pope Celestine III. The *derivative* sovereignty of king Leo I veered from the “old” model of sovereignty by right of conquest. It set the precedent for a series of efforts to secure Armenian sovereignty through alliances with Christian power residing to the West (*arevmutq*, “where the sun sets”). A

He was born into an Armenian merchant family in Hamadan, in the northwest of present-day Iran, where his ancestors settled after Shah ‘Abbas I, the Safavid emperor, torched their village of Julfa to the ground as he retreated from the Ottoman frontier.<sup>84</sup> Before his first encounter with the English East India Company in Calcutta, Emin’s youth had been profoundly shaped by war and displacement in the borderlands of West Asia. When he was five years old, Ottoman troops invaded Hamadan, forcing his extended family to flee to Baghdad, the capital of present-day Iraq.<sup>85</sup> Shortly after,

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number of feudal *meliks* in Karabakh successfully leveraged Persian and Russian rule to maintain independence until the early nineteenth century. The existence of these Armenian melikdoms inspired Emin’s liberation campaigns.

<sup>84</sup> As the Persian army retreated from the Ottoman frontier in 1604, it set fire to everything in its path. However, Shah ‘Abbas I spared the residents of the Armenian village of Julfa and deported several thousand families to the Safavid capital of Isfahan and its provinces in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea. After Julfan merchants outbid the English Indian Company at a royal auction for the tax monopoly on the Safavid silk trade in 1619, a royal land grant (*farman*) institutionalized the Armenian presence at the Safavid court by bestowing the right to build and settle in an area adjacent to Isfahan slated to become the municipality of New Julfa (Babaie et al. 2004, 62; Aslanian 2010, 53). Shah ‘Abbas I. recognized the value of the Julfans not only as experienced producers and traders of silk but also as Christian foreigners who could traverse Ottoman territories under a special system of capitulations that guaranteed certain privileges based on a treaty concluded between the King of France and the Sublime Porte in 1535. According to Nasim Sousa, the Ottoman system of capitulations was based on Byzantine jurisprudence which held that “the sovereignty of a state applied only to its subjects” (Sousa 1933, 32, ft. 50). Under the early capitulatory regime, Julfan merchants were exempt from land and poll taxes imposed on resident non-Muslims in Ottoman territory and enjoyed “exemptions from [...] the Ottoman financial system” (Sousa 1933, 72). By the late seventeenth century, these circumstances led to the emergence of a vast Armenian trade network centered on New Julfa that spanned from Amsterdam, Venice, and Cadiz to the west, Canton and Manila to the east, and as far south as present-day Zimbabwe on the East African coast (Aslanian 2007, 138).

<sup>85</sup> Emin specifically notes that the freedom of sixty-five relatives, both men and women, was bought by his grandfather Michael from a Turkish officer, for twenty *tuman* each, as he emphasized, an astronomical sum at the time. The enslavement of Christians in the Ottoman Empire was sanctioned by doctrine and governmental practice. For example, *devşirme*, a form of elite slavery, existed in the Balkans, where many Armenians had been deported during the reign of Justinian I (Hovannisian 1997, 109). Forced conversion transformed the identity of Christians “from the abject other to that of a member of the Muslim community (*umma*) with all of its attendant social stratifications” (Babaie et al. 2004, 3). In the Safavid Empire, the



his mother and brother passed away during a nine-month siege laid on the city by the Persian army. At the age of eleven years, he was moved back to Hamadan by his grandfather Michael, and reunited with his father Hovsep. Both men were Armenian merchants that were away on permanent circulation throughout the Indian Ocean world (Aslanian 2010). During the later years of Nadir Shah's reign, the family had to flee again, this time to Bengal, where Emin's father was stationed for trade. With his uncle David, the sixteen-year old Emin travelled from Gilan to Qazvin, then joined a caravan to Isfahan to meet his grandfather in New Julfa, the Armenian suburb of the Safavid capital.<sup>86</sup> After two years, the two boarded an Armenian cargo ship in the Iraqi sea port of Basra, and sailed to Surat, a former Portuguese stronghold in Gujarat, before traveling onwards for another two months until they finally arrived in Calcutta in 1744. There, Emin found Hovsep, "carrying on a slave merchandize" (Apcar 1918, 16).<sup>87</sup>

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status of Armenians was governed by Shah Safi's royal decree of 1631 which granted them protection as "slaves" (*ghulam*) that were symbolically attached to the royal household (52). Although Ottoman Armenians, in particular, were vulnerable to enslavement, Islamicate forms of slavery arguably differed from the Western imaginary of a "static problem of 'un-freedom,' coerced labor, 'commodity,' or 'property'" because they were marked by a "dialectic of captivity and transfers along a socially integrated continuum, as a dialectic between alienation and intimacy" (Chatterjee/Eaton 2006, 19). For slavery as "social death" in the transatlantic world, see Patterson 1982.

<sup>86</sup> New Julfa is a predominantly Armenian municipality of Isfahan that was granted limited administrative autonomy. Though its description as a "suburb" may appear anachronistic, Joseph Emin himself described it as "the suburbs of Ispahan" (Apcar 1918, 11). This speaks to an urban imaginary of the imperial capital as a modern city.

<sup>87</sup> Although Emin frequently invokes "slavery" as a metaphor to express his disdain for Armenian merchants, it is entirely possible that his father was indeed engaged in the slave trade. In my reading, the somber tone of this specific paragraph does not suggest that this passage is a polemic turn of phrase. While there is little scholarship on the role of European trade companies in the slave trade in the early modern Indian Ocean, there is practically none

His father's fortune was ruined when two Armenian-freighted vessels were confiscated by the British Admiralty close to Fort St. David by Madras.<sup>88</sup> Emin was then sent to Dhaka, the capital of present-day Bangladesh, to "learn trade, which he did not like at all" (18).<sup>89</sup> Instead of learning Portuguese or French, the two dominant languages of colonial trade, he elected to study English, an impractical choice at the time. Although he formed a distinct disdain for the mercantile profession, he enlisted in a scheme to save the property of a deceased Armenian merchant from confiscation by the Mughal authorities. Narrowly escaping torture, he returned to Calcutta, with bales of fine cotton, though by now fully determined to leave for Europe.

### **Difference in Translation**

Wandering the streets on London upon his arrival in 1751, he initially shared in the condition of the English working class and found himself close to signing an indenture contract at London's Royal Exchange. Already set for departure to Jamaica,

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about the extent of Armenian involvement on the "supply side" of the slave trade in Bengal (see Vink 2003).

<sup>88</sup> Sebouh Aslanian corroborated that at least one vessel, the Armenian-freighted *Santa Catharina*, was confiscated by the British Admiralty in India in 1748 (Aslanian 2004). He meticulously reconstructs the two trials that followed in London between 1749 and 1752 to show how Armenian merchant networks appealed to British institutions in an attempt to recover their cargo. Emin noted that he attended what would have been the second trial upon his arrival in London in 1752, and falling ill for forty days after that out of "indignation" (Apcar 1918, 17).

<sup>89</sup> According to Sebouh Aslanian, young Armenian men often attended specifically set up schools to learn skills of trade such as basic mathematics, geography, currency conversion, and different weight systems. Some of these schools supplied their students with manuals that could later serve as a reference guide on their travels as commercial agents (Aslanian 2010, 144). Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries also "printed grammars in the Julfan dialect" to teach European languages such as Portuguese, French, or Italian (ibid.). John Fryer, a British travel writer, visited Isfahan in 1677 and observed that Armenians in New Julfa were "addicted to learn[ing] languages" (ibid.). Young associates of family firms were sent into the field as young as fifteen or sixteen years of age.

he narrowly escaped involuntary servitude in the West Indies due to the intervention of Mr. Middleton, his former schoolmaster, who employed him as a servant until he went bankrupt. For two years, Emin got by as a porter, and spent his Sundays at St. James Park to observe “the drilling of the recruits [...] as well as the exercise of the king’s guards” (Apcar 1918, 49).

One afternoon, he made the unlikely acquaintance of a young Edmund Burke and became his scribe. As Emin briefly noted three decades later in *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Ēmin, An Armenian, Written in English by Himself*, his English-language memoir, Burke “was writing books at the time, and desired the author to copy them; the first was, as imitation of the late Lord Bolingbroke’s Letter; the second, The Treatise of Sublime and Beautiful” (53).<sup>90</sup> Burke “never missed a day without seeing Emin” and encouraged him to “put his trust in God” (52). Through a chance encounter with an Armenian groom delivering an Arabian horse from Aleppo, Emin also gained the patronage of the Earl, later Duke, of Northumberland, who helped him enroll at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich. Probably through Edmund Burke, Emin also forged a life-long epistolary friendship with Lady Elizabeth Montagu,<sup>91</sup> the literary

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<sup>90</sup> These books would have been Edmund Burke’s *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), and his better-known work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Without a reference copy three decades later in Calcutta, Emin recalled the second title wrongly as “The Treatise of Sublime and Beautiful.” However, his reference to Lord Bolingbroke’s posthumously published *Works* (1754) corroborates his account because it shows that Emin was aware of Burke’s polemic intent while it was missed by most of his contemporaries (Womersley 2004, 2).

<sup>91</sup> Though twenty-nine years her junior, Elizabeth Montagu was a contemporary of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the better-known travel writer who first introduced smallpox inoculation in England after residing in Constantinople as the wife of the British ambassador from 1716-1718. Though the two were not directly related, their husbands were third cousins as grandsons of Edward Montagu, first Earl of Sandwich. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu left England before

patron and famous host of the Hill Street salon in London which formed a circle known as “Bluestocking.”

After the hardships of his first years, Emin found himself steeped in London’s early modern high society, including Lady Yarmouth, a concubine of King George II installed at St. James Palace in 1740, which secured him access to the highest echelons of the British monarchy and its most ardent supporters.<sup>92</sup> When Great Britain formed an alliance with Prussia during the Seven Years’ War, Emin volunteered on the battlefield as an “apprentice” where he alleged to have made the acquaintance of Friedrich the Great, the reform-minded Prussian monarch, whom Emin greatly admired. Eventually, his extensive network of English patrons supplied him with letters of recommendation that secured him passage to “Upper Armenia” (Apcar 1918, 136), i.e. the Mt. Ararat plains by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, by way of St. Petersburg, the seat of the Russian Empire, its provinces in the northern Caucasus, Ottoman Anatolia, and Safavid Persia.

Emin’s extraordinary social mobility was facilitated by his outsider status as a curiosity, which he knew to exploit, for example by comparing himself to a

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Emin’s arrival in London in 1751 and did not return until 1762, the year of her death. Insofar, it is unlikely that Emin ever met Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, though he caught the early years of Elizabeth Montagu’s salon. See also Matthew Montagu, ed. *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, with some of the Letters of her Correspondents, in Two Volumes*. Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1825. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s famous embassy letters were first published over a decade later. See Lord Wharnclyffe, ed. *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Paris: Baudry’s European Library, 1837. For a critical discussion, see Billie Melman. *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918, Sexuality, Religion and Work*. London: Macmillan, 1992.

<sup>92</sup> According to one of Lady Montagu’s letters to her husband, Lady Yarmouth introduced Emin to William Pitt in 1758 (Apcar 1918, 92). The first Earl of Chatham, a leader of the Whig Party, was central to the British war effort during the Seven Years’ War of 1756-1763.

“dromedary brought over by a Greek, and exhibited in London” (Apcar 1918, 173). At a time of greater racial fluidity, he was addressed as a slave, devil, and animal (27), called “very ugly” (32), and treated as a bad omen (33), but also mistaken for a German or Frenchman, due to his name, which was then similarly injurious in light of ongoing wars and hostilities. Prior to the consolidation of the expanding British Empire, Emin’s literacy, growing familiarity with English cultural norms, and dedication to the cause of Armenian independence under the aegis of Christian sovereignty eventually earned him the esteem of early modern British royalty and nationalist intellectuals such as Burke and Montagu.

Until racial hierarchies hardened in the later decades of the eighteenth century, South Asian visitors in early modern England were perceived as “rare and exotic outsiders” (Fisher 2004, xi). As “half a dozen people from India wrote books based on their experiences,” a market emerged for memoirs that explained “India to Britons and Britain to Indians” (24). Although Emin himself traversed the solidifying binary between East and West, he believed that the “words of European travelers sufficiently prove their [i.e. Asiatic] dispositions have been always contrary to those of Europeans” (Apcar 1918, 484). After several failed attempts, Emin’s liberation campaign was finally thwarted by conspiring secular and ecclesiastic powers. At last, he escaped the political intrigue by marrying into a local family in New Julfa, “principally for the safety of his life” (457).

Eventually, Emin decided to return to India with his oldest son Arshak, leaving behind his wife, another son, two daughters, and “several other relations” (467), in

order to seek employment with the English East India Company. Despite his qualifications, Emin could only secure a junior position as an ensign “in the third company of European invalids” (Apcar 1918, 480). Wounded in his pride, he claimed he was a “white man” in India that “was neither a beggar, nor a cripple [...] he was young and stout, and could serve the Honourable Company, if they thought him fit” (431). For a while, a new benefactor, “Mr. Cox the Persian translator” (430), invited him to mingle with Company elites for “balls and concerts in their garden-houses.”<sup>93</sup> Until Mr. Cox’ death, Emin felt he was “treated like one of their own countrymen” (431). Soon after, however, he noticed a subtle shift that he wrote off, at first, as “hasty opinions” and “prejudices” (433). When objections to his presence were raised during a Company dinner, he rebuked, “you are young, and newly entered into the world; but for the future, I hope you will be cautious, and not commit such ungenerous mistakes” (433). He had become accustomed to traversing social boundaries as a curiosity, and was infuriated that he should no longer be permitted to do so. Emboldened by a letter of support from the Duke of Northumberland, he countered the open racism of new colonial officers as if they should know better. However, it was him who failed to realize that racial hierarchies had hardened since his departure from India in 1751.

By way of a consolation, Sir John Macpherson, whom Emin briefly met at Madras before he became the Governor-General of Bengal, commissioned a “short memorial from him” (478). Acting as a paternal figure, Northumberland encouraged

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<sup>93</sup> Amy Apcar explained in a footnote to Sir William Jones’ letter that “Gardens” was a designation for the outskirts of Calcutta. There, affluent residents often established a second residence in addition to their “town houses” (Apcar 1918, xx).

Emin to memorialize his “noble part” as a “brave man, who loved his countrymen, and wished to rescue them from misery and slavery,” and do so without shame or “the least injury to your reputation and fame” (Apcar 1918, 434). He was reassured, after “so many years of your life spend in the severest fatigue and toil,” he deserved to retire, and if Armenians did “not concur with you themselves, that is their fault” (ibid.). On a small pension “according to his rank, for his pay, batta, and house-rent,”<sup>94</sup> Emin was allowed to stay in Calcutta “to finish his narrative” when the third company of invalids was transferred to Chunagur (480).

Titled *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Émîn, An Armenian, Written in English by Himself*, his memoir contained what the author called the “Narrative of his Transactions in Life” (xxviii). The manuscript was entirely written in English and, although prepared in Calcutta, first published in London in 1792. Emin dedicated his account to Earl Cornwallis, Governor-General of Bengal, without whom he claimed he “could never have finished his Memorial” (480). He also acknowledged a “friend at Calcutta,” no other than Sir William Jones, the founder of the modern discipline of Orientalism, who “corrected the bad English and false spelling, but has designedly left the rough style without any alteration” (480). Although Jones refused to be named as Emin’s editor – because he did not wish “to be accessory to any thing [sic] that appears even in a questionable shape” (491) – he was one of its foremost supporters. In a 1789 letter to Lady Elizabeth Montagu, Emin’s long-time patroness in London, he

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<sup>94</sup> According to the Marriam-Webster English Dictionary, “batta” was an extra payment for the subsistence of British officers, soldiers, and employees in India.

emphasized that he “should never had undertaken to do it” if it had not been for the encouragement of William Jones and his wife, “Lady Jones” (Apcar 1918, 491). The pair pre-ordered (and pre-paid) five copies of his memoir to help finance its publication.

While Emin’s narrative persona consistently refers to itself in the third person, the author conducted his epistolary in the first person singular. For the most part, his account follows a chronological order. However, its progression is frequently interspersed with authorial reflections on the narrator’s future anterior. Although modern scholars have classified Emin’s writing as an autobiography (Seth 1937; Joannisian 1989), it lacks the psychological depth that a modern reader would expect. The ambiguity of the early modern text is compounded by the cultural hybridity of an author who was inventing a new genre while writing in an acquired language. Defying modern conventions, the work combines elements of travel writing with features of the slave narrative.<sup>95</sup> Unlike Sebouh Aslanian, who describes Emin’s *Life and Adventures* as an “Indo-Armenian Memoir Written in English” (Aslanian 2012, 366), I propose to frame it as an Anglo-Armenian memoir to emphasize that it was written

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<sup>95</sup> There are some interesting similarities between Joseph Emin’s *Life and Adventures* (1792) and Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) in tone and narrative structure. Though both works are published in London only three years apart, it is unlikely that Emin would have become aware of Equiano while residing in Calcutta. While Emin was advised by his English patrons to write in the third person, Equiano uses a first-person narrator. This makes their voices quite distinct, though both occupied marginal positions in early modern English society. I am grateful to Duncan Faherty for drawing my attention to Olaudah Equiano’s narrative.



in colonial India by a Persian Armenian in the service of the English East India Company.

Although Emin's account is steeped in Armenian and Persian literary and ethical traditions (Kia 2006; Goshgarian 2007), it was entirely shaped by its colonial setting. Unambiguously, his imagined audience was a British readership. He lamented, if "they could possibly dive into his thoughts, to observe the hardship he undergoes in this task with an unpolished education" (xxviii). Although William Jones, Emin's ghost editor, congratulated him on his "command of words, in a language so different from Persian or Armenian," he implied his "errors in language and orthography [...] were unavoidable in an English work written by a native of Hamadan" (xix). He condescended that it was an accomplishment for Emin to have acquired the English language at all, even if only imperfectly, while he himself claimed to have mastered, by virtue of his European superiority, eight "Oriental" languages, including Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, among twenty more he alleged to have studied.

Convinced of his inferior ability to reason, Emin regretted that he was not able to shed the "Asiatick style of panegyrick" which Jones castigated as "utterly repugnant to English manners" (xx). Over and over, Emin self-deprecated to underscore how much he strived to overcome what he believed was the deficiency of his Eastern formation. I suggest Emin wrote an "Anglo-Armenian" memoir because he was so centrally concerned with mastering the "English style" (Apcar 1918, 5), which, to him, implied more than just the abstraction of "language." Revering it as a style of

thought, tied up with the language itself, he closely studied the manners and dispositions of Europeans in order to grasp the *substance* of liberty. It seems he formed a materialist theory of ideas and imagined the mind as a space for their appearances, not unlike Plato's cave, that could be either dim or illuminated. This rhetoric was distinctly European in provenance. It implied acquiescence to a new kind of imperialism that universalized British sovereignty, laws, norms, and ideas. Although he believed that "Orientals know not what freedom is" (Apcar 1918, 484), he suspected that Armenians could attain liberty if only they learned how to *think* like Europeans. Although he admitted that he was not primarily writing *for* Armenians, he expected that his work would come to serve a pedagogical function. Because he subordinated the Armenian language, he hoped his Armenian readers would be "improved" through immersion in the "English style." Though his memoir was commissioned by the English East India Company, it was not merely circumstantial that he recorded his *Life and Adventures* "in English by himself," as his title page spelled out to orient his British readers. This choice was also a crucial part of his design for Armenia and Armenians.

Plagued by the sense that his mind was "a blunt, rusty knife, cutting a thick bar of iron" (xxviii), he wrote he "puzzles his brains to express his meanings" to his "poor countrymen" (xxx). Since Emin desperately wished to discard his old habits of mind, he explicitly distanced himself from other Armenians. In the introduction, he claimed that his attempt "to write his own history" was a "novelty never before attempted by any of his richest countrymen," whose minds he described as "gloomy" (xxxii). In his

conclusion, he mused that “young Armenians, whose knowledge of the [English] language is but superficial may easily read and understand a work so plainly written” (Apcar 1918, 484). By emphasizing the accessibility of his “plain” style, he implied that his narrative was also intended as advisory literature for common people (*khrtakan*) (Goshgarian 2007). While he wished to “rouse them from their slumber” (484) and incite masculine valor, his address to the Armenian youth also implied that his Armenians readership was “to come.” He correctly predicted that it would fall to future generations to translate his writing into Armenian. It would take over one and a half centuries until his memoir was deemed worthy of publication in Armenian.<sup>96</sup>

While Emin is now widely celebrated as a national hero, his text is rarely *read* but often treated as an uncomplicated example of “patriotism.” Its Orientalist structure, however, goes mostly unnoted. As much as he desired to gain recognition for Armenians as “free and true Christians” (xxxii), he also hoped, above all, to entertain and ingratiate himself with his colonial benefactors. Despite his third person narration, he wished to position himself as a “singular” individual who was unlike any other Armenian. Neither the first nor the last to enlist the support of Europeans in hopes of securing Armenian sovereignty in Asia, he was perhaps the first to be so willingly conscripted to the new “ordering structure of power and reason that constitutes colonial modernity” (Scott 2004, 125). Resigned, Emin “found at last that he was

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<sup>96</sup> Amy Apcar reserved the right of translation in 1918. However, Joseph Emin’s *Life and Adventures* was only translated in 1958 and first published in Armenian in Beirut, Lebanon. See n/a. Յովսէփ Էմինի Կեանքն ու Արկածները [The Life and Adventures of Josef Emin], trans. Y. Khashmanian. Beirut: Meshak Press, 1958.

grasping at nothing” (Apcar 1918, 483). Though he believed he dedicated his life to his “nation,” as he understood it then, he ultimately served the English East India Company and helped legitimize British imperial expansion. Bequeathed as an obscure inheritance, his scheme for Armenia’s liberation under the aegis of a Christian power cannot be understood outside of its colonial context.

### **Colonial Governmentality**

Although Emin remained firmly rooted in the cultural idioms of his native milieu, highly syncretic and practically global in scope, his ideas about the meaning of independence were transformed by his colonial encounter with the English East India Company in South Asia. With his father’s blessing, Emin had enrolled at St. Anne’s Charity School in Calcutta, an English school set up in an old British court house. Yet, he hesitated to disclose his plans to Hovsep because “God did not give him understanding in these things” (Apcar 1918, 59). Afraid to defy his father, Emin turned to Mr. Parrent, his fortuitously named English teacher, to inquire, instead, if “the law of England could stop a person, who should chuse [sic] to leave his father and go to a far country” (19). Full of disdain, the schoolmaster “laughed heartily, saying ‘What slaves you [Armenians] are, and how ignorant is your nation, who have resided so many years amongst us without knowing our laws’” (ibid.). Addressed as a surrogate father, Mr. Parrent advised Emin to disobey his father should he not consent. By questioning Armenian cultural norms and patriarchal authority, he taught Emin his first lesson in colonial power.

British ascendancy to colonial dominance in South Asia was not yet a foregone conclusion. The English East India Company competed with both rival European joint-stock corporations and established Asian trade networks over the Mughal market in silk, spices, and other commodities that could be sold at a profit in Europe (Aslanian 2015). In the seventeenth century, the Company of Merchants of London trading to the East Indies, as the English India Company was called then, engaged in a losing trade war against the Dutch East India Company (Philips 1940). It regained its footing through aggressive new tactics. It formed a Committee of Secrecy in 1683, presided over by Sir Josiah Child, its Deputy Governor,<sup>97</sup> which orchestrated the Company's every move in India.<sup>98</sup>

Through a “balance of English charters, Asian grants, and the Company's own political behavior” (Stern 2008, 262), the Company exploited loop holes in the political architecture of the Mughal Empire. Its armed fleet assumed control over Mughal sea lanes in the Bay of Bengal in 1695. Slowly usurping juridical authority, it eventually “rendered the British subject in Asia a Company subject as well, responsible to its laws and liable to its punishment” (263). By instructing its colonial

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<sup>97</sup> Sir Josiah Child was appointed Deputy Governor in 1681. Hailing from humble Welsh origins, he first made a name for himself when he published a treatise entitled *Brief Observations concerning Trade and Interest of Money* (1668). He was a staunch mercantilist with experience in the American colony.

<sup>98</sup> The Court of Directors endowed the Secret Committee with “exceptionally wide and unrestricted power of managing ‘the affairs of Surat, Fort St. George [in Calcutta] and the Bay of Bengal’” (Philips 1940, 302). Between 1683 and 1688, its reign was almost absolute. Its powers were limited in 1689 and expanded again in 1716, when it became an annually reelected body. It became so engrained in the daily affairs of the Company that it was listed as one of its “standing sub-committees” (305). After Madras was captured by the French army in 1744, the Secret Committee in London acted as the de facto government of the English East India Company (307).

officers to take out “agreement[s] in the name of the English East India Company only, & not the English Nacon [sic] in general” (Stern 2008, 266), the secret committee in London refashioned the English East India Company into a colonial government, de facto sovereign to act in its own right.

British merchants resented their Armenian competitors on the ground, but the view from London made traders in the New Julfan network appear as ideal brokers to be exploited and coopted in order to “get favour and respect” from the Mughal court (425) and obtain political and trading privileges. European imaginaries of sovereignty in South Asia interacted with native authorities and capital in ways that refashioned Armenian mercantile elites into willing participants in its colonial expansion. Through a combination of coercion, cunning, and consent, Armenians were incorporated as middling agents in the legal, built, and social environments of the company towns of Madras and Calcutta.

In 1688, Israel Sarhad accompanied his uncle Phanoos Kalandar, a Bengali Armenian of notable wealth, on a visit to London (Seth 1937, 422). Only few Armenians resided in London at the time. It appears both were disconnected from the New Julfan trade network (Aslanian 2015). With the assistance of Jean Chardin, a French travel writer,<sup>99</sup> the Court of Directors of the East India Company approached

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<sup>99</sup> As a Huguenot, Jean Chardin was persecuted in France and found refuge in Great Britain. He had extensively travelled in Persia and was widely regarded as an expert on the region. After Kalandar’s death, Chardin became the executor of his will. However, Sebouh Aslanian argues that his reputation as a “friend” of Armenians was unfounded. In a private letter to his son, Chardin wrote in 1703, “you must only expect sorrow after dealing with them [Armenians]” and thanked God for managing “to extricate” himself (Aslanian 2015, 203). For

Kalandar. On June 22, a trade agreement was signed “on behalf of the Armenian nation” (Baladouni/Makepeace 1998, 86). Concluded between Sir Josiah Child and Phanoos Kalandar, it also noted Jean Chardin’s role as an interpreter.

It spelled out that Armenians

shall have liberty to live in any of the Company’s cities garisons [sic] or towns in India, and to buy sell and purchase land or houses, and be capable of all civil offices and perferments [sic] in the same manner *as if they were Englishmen born*, and shall always have the free and undisturbed liberty of the exercise of their own religion (Baladouni/Makepeace 1998, 87; emphasis mine).

The agreement put Sir Josiah Child’s commercial strategy of toleration to the test. While the agreement promised Armenians freedom of religion,<sup>100</sup> however, it also enshrined their difference. Although it guaranteed Armenians property rights in land and houses, and made them eligible to serve as agents of the East India Company, the qualifier “as if” cemented that they were evidently *not* and could not *be* “Englishmen born” (Baladouni/Makepeace 1998, 87). By offering equal treatment, the Company effectively naturalized Armenians in India as British subjects and leveraged their subjection to bolster its claims to sovereign jurisdiction. The agreement was designed to bind “the Armenian nacion” (86), yet most Armenians merchants in India had little to gain from it. Many family firms were deploying their own vessels. They had cultivated excellent relations with Mughal authorities and travelled unarmed. Then

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Chardin’s writing, see Ronald W. Ferrier, ed. *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin’s Portrait of a Seventeenth-century Empire*. London/New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1996.

<sup>100</sup> Over the centuries, the Armenian Church sought out alliances at Ecumenical Councils but refused to recognize the supremacy of the Catholic Papacy or the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Constantinople.

held in higher esteem than British traders, and by far more familiar with local culture and languages, low custom taxes did little to incentivize Armenian merchants to transport their goods on the ships of the English East India Company (Aslanian 2004, 50).

Furthermore, Kalandar's signature did not contractually bind all Armenians, as Sir Josiah Child would have liked to believe. His claim to represent the entire "Armenian nation" was not only misleading, but unfounded. No such entity existed, nor could have such powers of representation been vested in him. In the late seventeenth century, the term "nation" would have ordinarily referred to a "race" of people living in a shared realm. Such an Armenian realm did not exist.<sup>101</sup> Armenians were dispersed across imperial jurisdictions and spoke different dialects. If Armenians had anything in common at all, it was their membership in the Armenian Apostolic Church, which Kalandar, as a merchant, could not have claimed to represent.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Armenian correspondence and contracts in New Julfa sometimes referred to "one of our own," "our people" (*mer jumiat*), and "our nation of Julfa," but these designations rested on a "place- and culture-specific [...] sense of community" (Aslanian 2010, 177). The "self-representation" of the New Julfan community was limited to the collective payment of taxes to the Safavid treasury through a municipal "provost" (*kalantar*) (Aslanian 2015).

<sup>102</sup> The term *azg* (ազգ), describing the Armenian covenant of the faith, only later assumed the meaning of "nation" in the modern sense of a co-ethnic population with a shared language and territory. In the late seventeenth century, the body of the Armenia Apostolic Church was divided between competing centers (Aslanian 2004b). St. Gregory the Illuminator, the first patriarch saint of the Armenian church, established the Catholicosate, the hereditary office of the patriarchate at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, in the early fourth century. However, the Armenian church was jolted by rivalries between Armenian kings and patriarchs. This led to the double murder of the respective heirs of the Armenian Crown and the Catholicos. Shah 'Abbas I attempted to shift the center of the Armenian church to Persia. Though he failed to move the whole compound of Etchmiadzin to Isfahan, he desecrated "a few stones" to build a new cathedral in New Julfa in 1615. This was offered as a "new spiritual beginning" (Babaie et al. 2004, 56). Accordingly, the year 1615 became "year 1 in Julfan account books across



Individual members of the British parliament had only recently come to be “thought of as acting for the whole nation,” rather than as agents of their particular constituencies (Pitkin 1972, 250). Sir Josiah Child understood the difference between the English East India Company and the “English Nation in general” (Stern 2008, 266). To Phanoos Kalandar and his nephew, as well as to their Armenian peers and competitors, the concept of “virtual” representation would have been unfamiliar. Still, the 1688 trade agreement positioned them as stockholders in a “national” joint-stock corporation.<sup>103</sup> It framed a loose conglomeration of family firms as *one* rival company of the chartered and incorporated European trade companies.

This agreement did not immediately render all Armenians in India “complacent colonized” (Trouillot 1995, 76). Most remained unaware, or unswayed, by its corporate terms and promises (Aslanian 2015). However, the signing of the 1688 trade agreement between the English East India Company and the “Armenian nation” in London, quite literally, laid the groundwork for the British colonization of India. In 1715, Kalandar’s nephew Israel Sarhad appeared before the Mughal emperor in Delhi with a delegation of the English East India Company. Although the Calcutta Council considered him “inferior to all the English Gentlemen,” it strategically exploited his

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the world” (ibid.). The Armenian church also played a central role in maintaining the boundaries of the community by supplying eligible spouses to travelling agents.

<sup>103</sup> In contrast to European joint-stock corporations, a legal innovation that emerged in the context of colonial expansion, Armenian trade was organized in family firms. See Shushanik Khachikian. *Nor Jughayi hay vacharakanut’iunè yev nra arevratntesakan kaperè Rusastani het XVII-XVIII darerum* [The Armenian commerce of New Julfa and its commercial and economic ties with Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries]. Yerevan: Haykakan SSH GA Hratarakch’ut’yunm, 1988.

“valued friendship” in order to make sure that “the King would [not] in that case regard him most, which would be an affront to our nation” (Seth 1937, 422). Positioned as an “equal,” Sarhad helped secure the royal land grant for the construction of Fort William in Calcutta.

Three decades later, this became the site of Joseph Emin’s conscription to colonial modernity. The guarantees spelled out in the 1688 agreement, so marginal then, acted as a “catalyst” (Aslanian 2015, 47) for displaced Armenians from the Safavid Empire. Fleeing persecution under Nadir Shah, many New Julfan merchant families resettled in the fortified towns of the English East India Company in India. They became subject to its colonial jurisdiction. By the time that Earl Cornwallis, its Governor-General in Bengal, commissioned Joseph Emin’s memoir in the 1780s, the works of Count de Buffon, a French natural scientist, popularized a new discourse of race. No longer able to move freely through Company circles, Emin depended on his old patrons in London for assurances to a new generation of colonial officers. As he found himself on the other side of hardening racial taxonomies, the “passing” privileges of Armenians no longer held in the colonial situation.

While the concept of the “nation” retained its primary association with mutable “mores,” “race” emerged as a signified of a new kind of “immutable” difference (Hudson 1996). Rather than merely a common stock, “nation” was defined by a “heritage of social customs and beliefs” that organized a people into a “coherent tradition” (Hudson 1996, 257). This tradition was called “national character” and, as argued by David Hume, “implanted solely by education and government” (ibid.).

However, a people were only considered *worthy* of the “honorific title a ‘nation’” if they had constituted a political order (Hudson 1996, 257). In contrast, a “loose family or collection of individuals” was *not* a “nation.” It was a disorderly “assembly of independent barbarians, each obeying only their own particular passions” (ibid.). On the basis of the Enlightenment dichotomy of reason and passion, “the polished nations” of Europe were distinguished from the “rude and barbarous” ones that did not subordinate the individual to the abstraction of a general will (Hirschman 1977, 61).

Emin internalized the idea that Europe represented “reason,” while the East embodied its subordinate instance, the passions. If Armenians were to become a nation, they would have to be educated and governed, rather than ruled over. As long as they obeyed “the will of a single tyrant” (Apcar 1918, 484), which was irrational, they remained akin to an “assembly of barbarians” (Hudson 1996, 257). Similarly, he faulted Armenian merchants for their lack of “love for one another” (Apcar 1918, 112). By this, he meant that their “disunion” (ibid.) resulted in “chaos” (206). Aspiring to “deliver” Armenians from their “unnatural” subjection to Ottoman and Persian rule, which he believed was rooted in “the savage manners of those countries” (484), he hoped to educate, improve, “gather together” (113), and *govern* Armenians in order to make them a “nation” deserving of the “honorific title” (Hudson 1996, 257).

Based on his experience in Hamadan and Baghdad, Emin believed that Armenians were vulnerable to dispossession under Ottoman and Safavid law. Restoring Armenian sovereignty, to him, was therefore not an end in itself but *necessary* in order to secure self-ownership. He set out to become “a perfect Servant”

to what he described as his “Sheeplike-Shepherdless Armenian Nation” (Apcar 1918, 103). While his frequent comparisons of Armenians to “sheep” drew on biblical metaphors of sacrifice, it also invoked that “those beautiful hills of helpless Armenia” (155) were defenseless without a shepherd. By studying the art of war, he hoped to fashion himself into an advisor that could help his king “deliver a Country from Slavery” (84). Since he became convinced that “all Asia” was “blindly ignorant” to this “true meaning of liberty” (484), he sought to “improve himself” (484) and tame “his wild Asiatic temper” (75).

Based on his identification with “us Asiatics” (xxx), Emin claimed exceptionality as “the only Armenian, out of several thousands, and in thousands of years, who has had an inexpressible thirst for improvement and liberty” (xxviii). As Joseph Emin’s interaction with his English schoolmaster demonstrated, spaces of cultural exchange were already fraught with tension before the consolidation of Company rule. However, racial fault lines were then expressed through the antonyms of liberty and slavery. He hinted that Heraclius II was himself a “wolf,” not a “shepherd,” for allowing “good subjects” to be “enslaved away” (529), instead of letting Emin “strengthen and polish” his kingdom, “like the kingdoms of Europe” (113). Through the prism of racial inferiority, Emin’s “Asiatic prince” appeared tainted by a “greenish brown complexion” (226) that stemmed from his “avaricious Asiatic disposition” (256). In a letter, Emin suggested that if Heraclius II “gather together the Armenians, a rich and trading people [...] under the protection of your majesty’s arms in your own country, no kingdom in the east would be like your kingdom for riches

and glory” (Apcar 1918, 113). If only all Armenians were collected in one realm, they might become unified. Under the weight of a nagging sense of inadequacy, Emin’s hopes for Armenian independence were crushed by Armenian sovereignty itself. He never received an answer.

By proposing to “acquaint your Majesty how it is, or by what means, that the European nations are such conquerors, and so brave warriors” (109), he attempted to appeal to his prince’s honor, yet “dark angels [...] stepped in the way with their black hearts” (226). He impressed on Heraclius II that “he would always rather chuse [sic] to die than see a Christian enslaved” (291), and offered to teach him how “to fight like Europeans [...] who with a few overcome many” (109). When Emin realized that the Georgian sovereign was not interested in his learned counsel, he exhorted, “what is not built on knowledge, though it is very strong and lofty, is as if it were built upon sand” (113). Resigned, he appealed to God to “direct your Highness’s heart to the right way of protecting” his subjects (285), but invoked an Armenian proverb to suggest that “a man cannot change his nature” (259). What is the use of “preaching the gospel over the head of a wolf,” he asked, if he still exclaimed, a “flock of sheep is passing” (ibid.)? In tension with theological discourse, Emin imagined the gospel as a secular guideline for virtuous conduct.<sup>104</sup> He suggested that the sovereign was only a man, an “Asiatic” one, at that, whose will had to be restrained in order to prevent arbitrary rule.

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<sup>104</sup> In contrast to Emin, Machiavelli’s advice to his prince, Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici, in *Il Principe* (1532) suspends questions of morality in order to devise strategies that are purely designed to secure sovereign power. However, even in Machiavelli, this power is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to express “the valor of an Italian spirit” (Machiavelli 1905, 355). In “An Exhortation to free Italy from the Barbarians,” for example, Machiavelli suggests that

Though resonances with Machiavelli's *Ill Principe* (1532) can be discerned, the genre of "mirror of princes" flourished at Persian and Mughal courts where works such as the *Qābus-nāme* or the *Siyāsat-nāme* ("Book of Government") were widely read (Boroujerdi 2013).<sup>105</sup> Emin's efforts to fashion himself into an advisor to the king are certainly not just a form of mimicry. Perhaps filtered through the Armenian literary tradition,<sup>106</sup> Emin adapted gendered codes of honor and virtue to a moment of European colonial ascendancy. Bringing the ethical idioms of Safavid Persia and Ottoman Iraq to bear on the Indian Ocean world he inhabited, his enthusiasm for liberal imaginaries of liberty<sup>107</sup> was imbricated with syncretic allegiances to regional concepts of ethical masculinity (*javānmardī*), proper conduct (*adab*), and the concept of

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Italy was a poor country "without life" that needed a prince who could "heal her wounds" (354-355). Emin's exhortations to Herculius II are similarly grounded in a national framework. I thank Wlad Godzich for pointing out that Emin positions himself as an advisor akin to Machiavelli.

<sup>105</sup> I am grateful to Mana Kia for introducing me to this body of work.

<sup>106</sup> It is more probable that Emin was beholden to syncretic codes of honor and masculinity than that he was purely guided by tropes in liberal political thought. Though there are resonances with European "mirrors of princes," an advisory genre most associated with Machiavelli's *Ill Principe* (1532), it is unclear if Emin was aware of Machiavelli's work because he does not cite or name most of his philosophical influences. In the absence of an "Armenian court system capable of dealing with the everyday needs of its people," Armenian monks composed advisory literature for "common people" (Arm. *khatakan*) in order to instruct "readers and listeners how to behave correctly" (Goshgarian 2007, 242-243). In order to advise pious but illiterate Armenians in "specifically-delineated modes of behavior" (212), this literature was written in the Armenian vernacular (Arm. *ashkharhabar*) rather than in the language of sermon, so-called "classical" Armenian (Arm. *grabar*), and deployed fables and poetry. These texts circulated into the fifteenth century (see Goshgarian 2007).

<sup>107</sup> In the British legal imagination, liberaty amounted to a "defence [sic] of the supremacy of property" (Macpherson 1979, 257). As a result of criticism of so-called "Oriental despotism" by the English East India Company in its Indian settlements (Greene 2010), Lord Cornwallis, then its Governor-General of Bengal, privatized all title to land in perpetuity in March 1793. This policy of permanent settlement had devastating effects on monastic modes of inheritance and effectively dispossessed Indian women (Chatterjee 2010). Ranajit Guha discusses the "rule of property" instituted in India as a way of binding and subjugating "many millions of the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain" (Guha 1996, 180-181).

*futuwwa* (Arab., “qualities of youth”) (Kia 2006; Goshgarian 2007). His exhortations were directed at the Heraclius II as much as at the Armenian youth, whom he admonished for “ignorance” and “stupor” in order to incite masculine valor and “rouse them from their innocent slumbers” (Apcar 1918, 198).

Although Emin remained beholden to the dynastic model of power, he believed its shortcomings were reducing Armenians to “cattle” (160). His vision for Armenia entailed a social and political reorganization in line with the kind of order that appeared to him in the colonial environment of Calcutta. Observing English soldiers, he witnessed that “thousands of men, by one word of command from their officer, instantly, all together, [could] move and act as if they were but one single man” (112). In comparison, Armenians seemed to him “disorderly and ignorant” (206). Faced with both corporate rule by the English East India Company, and its military discipline, Emin felt a sense of missing unity, or “corporateness” (Mardin 2013, 282), among Armenians. This new problem-space made itself felt as an “empty center” at the heart of a new governmental project: how “to produce the effect of unity by virtue of which the people will appear, in everyone’s eyes, ‘as a people,’ that is, as the basis and origin of political power” (Balibar 1991, 93-94). The empty center, so unbearable to Emin, remained unfilled by the covenant of the Armenian faith, the Armenian Apostolic Church,<sup>108</sup> which was itself fragmented between multiple centers that were primarily

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<sup>108</sup> In the absence of an Armenian sovereign, the Armenian Apostolic Church provided a “focus for the allegiance” of Armenians and thereby generated a sense of identity that was “separate” and “independent from [...] the fate of the realm” (Hovannisian 1997, 84). Although belonging to the body of the church conditioned participation in communal life, the

concerned with their own affairs. Only by the late eighteenth century, Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi undertook efforts to “organize” the ecclesiastical “body” (ւզգ, “*azg*”) of the church and center it on the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin (Aslanian 2004b).

Emboldened by his new-found association with European knowledge, Emin valued honor and virtue over wealth and dynastic descent. By privileging the popular need for security of self-possession over the divine right of the king, he ascribed sovereignty to the Armenian nation as a whole. With reference to an “English phrase,” namely that there are “many born handsome [wealthy]; but they are not like that man who acts handsomely,” Emin suggested that he, “the son of an Armenian,” should be able to be a prince if he “acts as a prince” (Apcar 1918, 189). A number of father figures appear throughout the narrative to symbolically legitimize Emin “as a king among the Armenians” and “a prince *sans royaume*” (475), a prince without a royal realm. Through his appeal to patrilineal descent as a principle that constitutes the nation, he effectively imputed sovereignty to the nation *as a whole* rather than to a royal lineage. In this sense, he extended the Armenian “covenant of the faith” (ւզգ, “*azg*”)<sup>109</sup> to a national foundation of blood. On this basis, an Armenian that “acts handsomely” (Apcar 1918, 189), by exercising his capacity to reason with wisdom and

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Armenian “covenant of the faith” was not imagined as a population to be governed (Cowe 2014, 93).

<sup>109</sup> The Armenian Church held draconic sanctions in store for converts. These could range from excommunication and the annulment of marital ties to expulsion and forced exile. Partially, this was a defensive response to the encroachment of Christian missionaries that regarded Armenians as heretics and sought to convert them to Western Christendom.



honor, may legitimately govern as a prince. In principle, any Armenian could, under certain conditions, stand in for another. This metonymic logic was distinctly modern. It was liberal insofar as it mobilized a new mode of representation, the sense that any individual may virtually act on behalf of the Armenian nation, understood as “a rich and trading people, who are scattered to the east and the west, to the north and to the south” (Apcar 1918, 113). Insofar, neither subjection to an Armenian sovereign nor the Armenian church defined Armenian nationhood. Emin argued that the king and the church should be subordinated to a third instance – to *national* sovereignty – and derive their legitimacy from serving a *people*.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Hannah Arendt discusses this shift from a “‘Race’ of Aristocrats” to a “‘Nation’ of Citizens” in France through the work of Edmund Burke, who influenced Emin, and illustrates the stakes of genealogy through the debate on “‘Rights of Englishmen’ vs. the Rights of Men” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Once man is emancipated from nature and divine right, so she argued, it is no longer his status as human but his belonging to the nation that endows him with rights. By the early twentieth century, “the nation had conquered the state” (Arendt 1955, 575; my translation). Arendt’s insight that “man had hardly appeared as a completely emancipated, completely isolated being who carried his dignity within himself without reference to some larger encompassing order, when he disappeared again into a member of a people” (Arendt 1962, 291) is also instructive for the Armenian case. Reading this against the grain, Emin’s diasporic claim to sovereignty posits “the Armenian nation” as a sovereign body before the state and anticipates the French *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* of 1789. In my opinion, Arendt’s theorization of modern popular sovereignty is sharpest in the 1955 revised German edition. Thinking through Edmund Burke, who had a profound influence on Joseph Emin, Arendt notes: “Die einzige Rechtsquelle, die bleibt, wenn die Gesetze der Natur wie die Gebote Gottes nicht mehr gelten sollen, scheint in der Tat die Nation zu sein [The sole source of law that remains when the laws of nature and the commands of God are to no longer apply, appears to be indeed the nation]” (Arendt 2015, 619). Compare this to the 1958 English version: “According to Burke, the rights which we enjoy spring ‘from within the nation,’ so that neither natural law, nor divine command, nor any concept of mankind such as Robespierre’s ‘human race,’ ‘the sovereign of the earth,’ are needed as a source of law” (Arendt 1958, 299). For the German edition, see Hannah Arendt. *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft: Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totale Herrschaft*. München: Piper, 2015 [1955]. See Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1962 [1951].

As long as the king failed to “gather” Armenians into a *population* and take charge of its life, his scattered people were reduced to a *bestly* existence. Emin’s references to bestiality not only replayed Enlightenment tropes about Man but also evoked the human-animal dichotomies that structure the mythical foundations of Armenian conversion to Christianity in 314 A.D. After King Trdat the Great tortured and incarcerated Gregory, a servant who refused to sacrifice to Anahit, the goddess of fertility and healing in the Zoroastrian pantheon, he was transfigured into a “dumb beast” (Hovannisian 1997, 82). Distraught, his sister Khosrovidukht was sent a divine vision. If Gregory was raised from the pit, she insisted, he would “heal” the king (Cowe 2014, 93). After Gregory restored the human form of the king, he baptized the sovereign in the Euphrates river. Through the figure of Khosrovidukht, the king’s sister, Anahit’s powers of healing passed onto Gregory, who was consecrated St. Gregory the Illuminator (*Grigor Lusavorich*) and became the first patriarch of the Armenian church (Hovannisian 1997, 82). This origin story fused pagan and biblical elements to subordinate the feminine instance to patriarchal sovereignty. The “outside” of Christianity, conceived as a spatial order,<sup>111</sup> was demarcated as “wild.” Internal rifts facilitated a series of foreign conquests of Armenia that were perceived as the result of “unjust conduct” and recorded as a transformation of Armenia into a “flock handed

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<sup>111</sup> Roman law extrapolated a political theory of empire from the Christian motif of “healing.” Justinian canon law (*Corpus Juris Justiniani*) justified that a world-spanning Christian republic (*Respublica Christiana*) was necessary in order to “secure” the world as a bulwark (*Kat-Echon*) against the coming of Anti-Christ (Schmitt 1974, 29). While illiberal sovereignty is expressed *through* the conquest of land (*nomos*), liberal orders are instituted through constitutional acts (*logos*).

over to wild beasts” (Cowe 2014, 93). As Emin exhorted, “true Christians” understood “God has created them all free alike,” as “rational being[s],” that become “cattle” and perish “no better than a beast” if they fail to realize “the kingdom of God” (Apcar 1918, 160-161).

In order to “make men” of Armenians, Emin advised Herculius II, “Break them into small pieces like glass, to be cast afresh” (207). Instead of focusing on those who had been “brought up in a wild way, without education,” he proposed to set up “common schools, and make their children go” (ibid.). He outlined how the cost could be offset by a small tax and shared his vision for a national curriculum. Disparaging trade schools, he spelled out that the youth “should be taught the principles of religion from the ages of seven to sixteen,” then “be taught the use of arms, like the Europeans, from sixteen years of age to twenty” (ibid.). He specified, “Let that be the work of the morning, and about three in the afternoon let heroic lectures be read to them, about three quarters of an hour; short and sweet: then let them go to play” (ibid.). While “heroic lectures” were to instill a sense of honor, i.e. courage to defend the realm in combat, the daily schedule would foster the kind of discipline that would allow for power to be exercised over a “multiplicity of men” as if “over a single one” (Foucault 1980, 152). An “efficacious” deployment of power required artfulness in government.

The incorporation of Armenians in the category of Man by treaty right in 1688 had paved the way for Emin’s “English education” (Apcar 1918, 204). Through the lens of the colonial gaze, he observed that “liberty” was “the source of all comforts in life” (485). In contrast, Armenians in the Ottoman and Safavid realms, he claimed,

could not be “sure of their own lives for half an hour” (Apcar 1918, 484). In his mind, self-possession and the security of life derived from a “knowledge of European manners” (ibid.), by which he meant fortification and armed protection. Emin’s understanding of liberty was entirely different from an abstract argument informed by European debates. As an effect of Armenian trans-imperial mobility, it entailed an early biopolitical imaginary of “the nation” that emerged in the context of colonial subjection. Emin no longer wished for Armenian survival to be left up to chance. He wanted to eliminate contingency as systematically as possible and *secure* the life of his nation within a fortified territory. In this sense, he recognized that “statelessness” rendered Armenians vulnerable. Emin grasped the emergent modern rationality of government in the colonial situation. He applied this colonial governmentality to Armenia, a place he sought to “liberate” not only from foreign rule but also from sovereignty that exercised its “right to *take* life and *let* live” but failed to assume “power over life” (Foucault 1990, 136). Emin urged Heraclius II to take charge of life and protect Armenians from exposure to death, including absorption into the Muslim *umma*, a kind of “social death” in the Christian imaginary.<sup>112</sup>

With “a little European management,” he counseled, Armenia could “flourish and be happy, without being obliged to depend upon any other nation” (Apcar 1918, 174). In Europe, he observed, “learned men [...] are able to do things of great wonder

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<sup>112</sup> In his forthcoming book, *Early Modernity and Mobility: Port Cities and Printers Across the Global Armenian Diaspora, 1512–1800*, Sebouh Aslanian compares medieval practices of excommunication to “social death”. I thank him for sharing one of his chapter drafts with me. On the concept of “social death,” see Orlando Patterson. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

and usefulness” by studying “the way in which God has made all things according to nature” (Apcar 1918, 111). This offered a secular interpretation of contingency. By uncovering the laws of nature, a ruler may govern in a rational way, “in accordance with the course of things themselves” (Foucault 2007, 344). Through knowledge of the regularities that God embedded in nature, he may *anticipate* adverse events and plan ahead to *avert* them. The reason of state no longer resided in the laws that sovereignty sets for itself, but “in the things it manages” (Burchell 1991, 95). Government, rather than rule, was legitimated by “the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the processes which it directs” (ibid.). However, Heraclius II did not recognize the problem of colonial governmentality. The sovereign rejected Emin’s proposed solutions. Under his son George, in 1800, his realm, including its Armenian portions, was annexed by the Russian Empire.

### **Secular Salvation**

How was Emin’s liberation scheme received by his Armenian peers? Two years after the publication of his *Life and Adventures* in London, a new Armenian periodical in Madras noted that an Armenian had published a book in the English language.<sup>113</sup> Without giving the book’s title, the journal’s editor, Harut’iwn Kahana

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<sup>113</sup> The periodical was called *Azdarar* (“Intelligencer”) and appeared in Madras between 1794 and 1796. It offered “literary articles and contributions,” notified the Armenian community of “births, marriages, and deaths,” and contained “commercial and shipping intelligence, reviews of books and the advertisements of the Armenian merchants of Madras” (Seth 1937, 599). When the first issue was published in October 1794, it had only twenty-eight subscribers (598). However, each copy would have likely circulated among several readers and reached even more listeners. Despite the small scale of the public it generated, its reach was significant. *Azdarar* maintained several “overseas ‘correspondents’” (Aslanian 2012, 389) who wrote from Isfahan, the center of the New Julfan trade network, and St. Petersburg in the Russian Empire.

Shmavonian,<sup>114</sup> indicated that although he had himself lacked “time” to read the book, he did not “doubt that it must be a history of our nation and about the victories of our kings that also expresses its gratitude to the present protectors of our forlorn nation” (Aslanian 2012, 407). Regardless of whether or not Shmavonian had indeed lacked the time (or the literacy) to read Emin’s memoir, his summary effectively prescribed what Emin’s narrative *should* have contained from the standpoint of Armenian common sense at the time. It should have *praised* Armenian kings, instead of exposing their weaknesses, and included “an exhortation and plea to the luminous, foreign kingdoms of Christians, so that with their assistance we may be able to once again enjoy our natural heritage” (Aslanian 2012, 407).

This “natural heritage” was Armenian sovereignty. Reflecting a popular “structure of feeling” among both literate elites and the illiterate majority of Armenians in the eighteenth century,<sup>115</sup> Shmavonian believed that Armenian

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<sup>114</sup> Harut’iwn Kahana Shmavonian arrived in Madras in 1784 and was “an Armenian recluse, deacon, and one-time member of an Iranian Sufi brotherhood in Shiraz” (Aslanian 2012, 386). According to Sebouh Aslanian, he became the vicar of the Armenian church in Madras and officiated for forty more years until his death in 1824.

<sup>115</sup> Raymond Williams, a Marxist cultural theorist, defined “structures of feeling” as “a kind of feeling and thinking which is [...] social and material [...] before it can become fully articulate” (Williams 1977, 131). He contrasts this deep structure with “received and produced fixed forms” that may exist in tension with modes of *practical* experience. However, this tension is not a “conscious comparison” but registers as “an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency” (130). I mobilize Williams’ framework of “structures of feeling” to distinguish between Joseph Emin’s articulation of Armenian self-liberation through European knowledge, and a “particular quality of social experience and relationship” (131) to which his narrative does “not speak at all” (130). In this sense, Emin perhaps first sensed “*changes of presence*” in Calcutta that “exert[ed] palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action” before they were defined, classified, and rationalized as English colonialism (132; original emphasis). His narrative contains “evidence of forms and conventions—semantic figures—which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new

independence could only be attained through suzerainty.<sup>116</sup> From a modern perspective, this vision of national liberation appears contradictory. It called for foreign assistance and protection, rather than armed struggle, to attain freedom from foreign rule. Although Shmavonian referred to Armenians as a “forlorn nation,” he drew on a vision of sovereignty that was not “national” but Christian in nature. Armenians hoped to partake in Christian sovereignty, rather than exist under Islamic rule, and believed this attainable only under the aegis of European powers. For *this* reason, they appealed to the “foreign kingdoms of Christians” as liberators.

Although Emin considered Europeans superior to Armenians, he decidedly rejected this version of liberation. He sought to refashion Armenians through the deployment of European “methods” in order to *restore* agency to the Armenian sovereign. If national character was malleable, the “Asiatic” remainder that rendered Armenians incapable of “liberty” could be extinguished. Their difference was rooted in custom. In Emin’s eyes, Armenian subjection to Ottoman rule was being encouraged by the Armenian clergy.<sup>117</sup> He argued that if “the Christians of Frankestan [...] had listened to their priests, and had understood the Gospel in the manner in which

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structure is forming” (133). See Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 128-135.

<sup>116</sup> Byzantine emperor Basil I (867-1056) first positioned himself “as the suzerain as well as the protector of all Christian rulers” by claiming to represent “Christ on earth” (Hovannisian 1997, 160). In order to incorporate the “Armenian realms within the [Roman] empire” (188), he dismissed all Armenian military forces. This created a “vacuum of power” (197) that prepared the Seljuk and Mongol invasions of the Armenian provinces.

<sup>117</sup> Ottoman law divided non-Muslim subjects into confessional communities (*millayet*) headed by clerical elites who adjudicated personal status and collected taxes on behalf of the imperial seat in Constantinople. Emin believed Armenian priests had been corrupted by their role in Ottoman governance.

our holy fathers have explained it to us, [...] they would have been as great slaves to the Mahometans [sic] as we are now” (Apcar 1918, 159). Insofar, Armenian inferiority was not rooted in unchangeable nature. It was created by design, through adherence to a *false* “holy prophecy” (143).

When Emin asked Armenian villagers in Anatolia why they were “not free” and had no sovereign of their own, they replied, “Sir, our liberty is in the next world. Our king is Jesus Christ” (141). Since “the Armenian nation has been subject to the Mahometans [sic] from the creation of the world,” they argued, Armenians “must remain so till the day of resurrection” (ibid.). According to the “Holy Fathers of the Church” (ibid.), Armenian subjection was divinely ordained. For Armenians to become warrior, like Emin, was therefore contrary to divine providence. Emin prepared to counter with *secular* history,<sup>118</sup> but the village priest explained,

the holy prophecy is for 666 years to be fulfilled; during that period, we must continue in subjection; 638 years are expired, there remain 28 years more to complete our persecution; then we shall become free; then no power in the world can oppress us (143).

Only after the expiration of this period, the Lord would return to “deliver” Armenians from the hands of their oppressors, the “enemies” of their faith (ibid.). Emin, however, desired “liberty” in *this* world. He rejected the messianic idea that

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<sup>118</sup> Joseph Emin referenced the “Geographical History of Moses Khorinesis” as secular history (Apcar 1918, 142). However, the chronicles of Armenian history compiled by Moses of Khoren, or Movses Khorenatsi, in the fifth century A.D. are now widely considered “a mixture of mythologies and biblical traditions” (Hovannisian 1997, 24). Although Khorenatsi’s narrative reflects a medieval sense of history as rooted “within the pages of Scripture,” rather than a secular realm of human intervention, he is still often described as a “historian” (ibid.).



Armenian sovereignty was bound up with the second coming of Christ. Instead of divinely ordained subordination, he propagated “principles of zeal and honour” in order to “awaken” the Armenian youth and “harangue” them into armed rebellion (Apcar 1918, 158).

Emin’s staged encounter with the Armenian villagers represented a confrontation of the illiberal past with its “Enlightened” mirror image, facing off across the threshold of modernity. Despite his secular convictions, Emin still shared a certain millenarian sensibility. After all, the “holy prophecy” of St. Nerses the Great was structured around the idea of liberation by “external–European–powers” (Panossian 2006, 116).<sup>119</sup> A Flemish missionary noted in the thirteenth century that the “Nerses prophecy” was “believed across all of Armenia as if it was the gospel” (Johannissjan 1913, 20).<sup>120</sup> He had been assured Armenians were awaiting “the arrival of the Franks as eagerly as the souls in limbo are awaiting to be released by the coming of the Lord” (ibid.). As illustrated by Shmavonian’s response to Emin’s *Life and Adventures* in 1794, the hopes of Armenians remained fastened to Western Christendom.

Aschot Johannissjan argues that the Armenian liberation legend was forged by Armenian scribes when crusading European armies passed through Seljuk-occupied

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<sup>119</sup> St. Nerses the Great inherited the office of the Catholicos of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin as St. Gregory’s great-great-grandson. He was murdered at the order of King Pap in 373 A.D. This historical injustice formed the basis of the Armenian liberation legend. See Aschot Johannissjan. *Israel Ory und die armenische Befreiungsidee*. Munich: M. Müller & Sohn, 1913.

<sup>120</sup> All English translations of Aschot Johannissjan’s German language dissertation are my own.

Armenian territories on their way to Jerusalem (Johannissjan 1913). After a thousand years of gruesome submission, they claimed, “paradise on earth” (11) would follow on the arrival of the “Franks.” This “liberation” prophecy was retroactively attributed to St. Nerses the Great, a descendent of St. Gregory the Illuminator. It was thereby rendered “holy.” The historical injustice of his murder at the order of an Armenian king in the fourth century, about a millennium prior, served as the epistemological template that allowed to make sense of the unexpected arrival of Christian armies in occupied Armenia. Framed as an omen of the second coming, this disruptive event produced the millenarian sense that there could be worldly “intervention into the reality of Armenian history” (27), but that it would come from *outside* of Armenia. While subsequent occupations by Mongol Tatars were believed to herald the apocalypse, the coming of European armies represented “liberation” from Armenian subjugation in this world, followed by “such a deep peace [...] that the living will pity the dead, because they were not ordained to witness the magnificence of the new era” (18). One chronicler envisioned, “The people will grieve their ancestors, who did not know about this happiness and comfort. It will be such until the coming of Antichrist, whose reign, according to the words of the prophet, will succeed ‘the fourth world empire’” (17).<sup>121</sup>

From a modern standpoint, the “old language of legend” may appear as a “fable convenue,” a made-up tale that is believed to be true (151). However, Emin recounted

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<sup>121</sup> Armenian eschatology is grounded in the Book of Daniel of the Old Testament. On apocalyptic thought in the Armenian tradition, see Kevork B. Bardakjian and Sergio La Porta, eds. *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition: A Comparative Perspective*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

“grieving” for his “religion” after first witnessing the exercises of English soldiers at Fort William in Calcutta. He suddenly felt his “country” was “in Slavery and Ignorance” (Apcar 1918, 58), but his secular message of salvation offered “liberty” instead of liberation. The Armenian discourse of liberation remained structured around the “desire for the attainment of political freedom with the help of an external power” (ibid.). Over time, it had coalesced around various figures – from the crusading armies of the “Franks,” to the Catholic Papacy, a German prince, and even Peter the Great, the emperor of the Russian Empire.<sup>122</sup>

By the sixteenth century, the Armenian church had sent several delegations on missions to Rome in order to *accelerate* the coming of liberation and request military assistance. In 1563, Catholicos Mikhael of Sebast bent under pressure and offered to

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<sup>122</sup> By turning to Peter the Great, Israel Ori was the first to break with the westward looking script of the “holy prophecy” of Armenian liberation. He turned the gaze toward the North when he arrived in St. Petersburg to recommend himself as a student of French military arts and diplomacy (Johannissjan 1913, 65). Despite Emin’s claims to exceptionality, he was aware that he had had a predecessor. However, he disdained Israel Ori as a “low despicable Jew” because the latter declined to be made “chief of the Armenians” by Peter the Great (Apcar 1918, 189). Trafficking in anti-Semitic expletives, Emin argued that Ori was a merchant that “could be made nothing higher than a Banian” (ibid.). Despite Emin’s disparaging remarks about Jews, his rejection of Ori was primarily filtered through the colonial gaze. The term “banian” derived from the Gujarati word *vanya*, meaning a “caste of merchants,” but came to describe “a personal Indian agent to assist in the commercial affairs of a particular European official or merchant” (Curtin 1984, 175). In Bengali English, its meaning morphed into “any Indian merchant at all” (ibid.). Contrary to Emin’s charge of mercantile subservience, Ori was of noble descent. Furthermore, it appears he bore no affiliation with India. As the son of an Armenian *melik*, he was born in 1659 in Nakhchivan. In 1678, he joined a delegation that embarked to Rome in order to request military reinforcement against foreign invaders. After his father was poisoned, the delegation disbanded and Ori continued alone. Failing to secure the assistance of Rome, Venice, and France, he moved to Germany to pursue trade. In 1699, by a turn of events, he offered the Armenian crown to Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz, a German *Kurfürst* (Johannissjan 1913). The latter ostensibly took some interest in a “small subsidium under the leadership of the Georgian prince and the Catholicos” (68) but ultimately abandoned the idea.

enter into communion with the Holy See. He suggested that the “coalition” of a “shepherd and a flock” could be renewed on the condition that Armenians were to be “liberated from captivity” (Johannissjan 1913, 29). Subsequent delegations sent by Armenian *meliks* offered assurances that Armenians would “return into the fold of the true Church” if they were “saved” “from the yoke of the unbelievers” (82).<sup>123</sup> When Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz, a German *Kurfürst*, agreed to assume the mantle of Armenian sovereignty in the late seventeenth century, he was advised to ride into Armenia at the helm of a battalion and carry a cross as well as an image of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the first patriarch of the Armenian church, in order to be recognizable as the liberator of the “holy prophecy” attributed to St. Nerses the Great. However, as the political wind changed, the prince’s interest waned. Neither the “German” nor the “Russian program” of Armenian liberation came to fruition (Johannissjan 1913).

In Joseph Emin’s eyes, the colonial ascent of the English East India Company in Bengal positioned the British as a liberating force of Ottoman and Persian Armenians. Yet, his “English program,” if you will, did not rest on military intervention. He set out to attain “European knowledge” as a *pharmakon* that could

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<sup>123</sup> The Armenian Apostolic Church separated from Western Christendom after the Chalcedonian schism of 451 A.D. The papal bull *Ecclesia Romana* affirmed their heretical status in 1548. The discord rested on a disagreement over the nature of Christ. While the Catholic church resolved that it was “twofold,” the Armenian Apostolic Church rejected *dyophysitism* (“two natures”) and insisted that the nature of Christ was “one,” both divine and human but without mixing. The Roman theory of Christian empire rested on the Chalcedonian idea of a “bipartite” body of Christ (*corpus dominicum bipertitum*). Christology served as grounds for the dogma of transubstantiation in 1215 which positioned the “social body of the [Roman] Church” as the “supra-individual *corpus mysticum*” of Christ (Kantorowicz 1997, 199). In contrast, the Armenian Apostolic Church lacked the ambition to enjoin all of mankind in its “ecclesiological body corporate” (ibid.).

transform Armenian sovereignty itself. Identified with Europe, *reason* replaced God and Christian armies as the “external” force that would “deliver” Armenians. By referring to himself and other Armenians as “us Asiatics” (Apcar 1918, xxx), Emin failed to envision emancipation in the modern sense of political autonomy. His secular scheme for liberation through rational self-government continued to be other-determined because it hinged on colonial ideas about the national self *as* other. Because Emin’s liberation campaigns were propelled by a powerful desire to *become* European, he yearned for epistemic “emancipation” from Asia. In this way, he hoped to complete the racial inclusion of Armenians that was promised in the 1688 trade agreement which governed the terms of Armenian subjection by the English East India Company. As biological discourses of race were beginning to consolidate, the strategic incorporation of Armenians in the colonial enterprise a century prior functioned as a constant reminder of all the ways in which Armenians were *not* akin to “Englishmen born” (Baladouni/Makepeace 1998, 86-87).

In response to the publication of Emin’s memoir, an Armenian merchant in Madras recounted in 1794 that he found his friend “weeping” and “pounding” a book “written in English by a certain Armenian [...] who instead of sowing his seeds on his own soil and counseling his own nation directly, recounts the bad reputation of his nation [...] according to his own fancy and in the language of others” (Aslanian 2012, 411). The same author mused, with reference to a “wise Persian proverb,” that “the best response to idiots is silence” (415). It follows that at least some of Emin’s peers regarded him as an “idiot” for exposing “his own nation” to the ridicule of others. This

was felt to be an unforgivable betrayal. Instead of responding, however, it was determined better not to react at all. The “silence” that surrounded Emin’s *Life and Adventures* for over a century after its publication might therefore not so much reflect a lack of “understanding” on the part of his Armenian readers, as he may have reckoned, but a visceral rejection of his Anglo-Armenian design.

### **Colonial Legacies**

In 1916, Amy Apcar found a dilapidated copy of a manuscript in her attic in Kolkata.<sup>124</sup> Leafing through its tattered pages, she discovered it was the English-language memoir of a certain Joseph Emin, published in London in 1792. It turned out he was her great-great-grandfather. Intrigued, she busily went about reconstructing her forgotten ancestor’s life. In order to corroborate his incredible account, she consulted church registers and grave stones, archives of local newspapers, and the collected letters of his British benefactors. Extensively annotated with footnotes, maps, facsimiles and excerpts of handwritten letters, as well as the only surviving portrait of Joseph Emin, she published a “second edition” of the memoir in 1918 with Baptist Mission Press in Kolkata. Later, it was distributed by Luzac & Co. in London. Since the publication immediately followed on World War I, Apcar dedicated its proceeds to “the needs of the Soldiers of Great Britain Crippled in The War for Liberty” (Apcar

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<sup>124</sup> Mesvrob J. Seth, a historian of Armenian life in India, refers to Apcar as a “highly accomplished lady” whose grandfather Gregory Apcar moved from New Julfa to Bombay in 1808. The fact that Apcar had an attic, an architectural feature reserved for European-style homes, suggests a degree of affluence. Apcar may have been a descendent of one of the three children that Emin fathered and left behind in New Julfa. Seth praises her as a scholar of ancient Armenian music and mentions that she republished the “autobiography of her ancestor, Joseph Emin” (Seth 1937, 531).

1918, iv) – among them, of course, millions of British subjects from colonial India, Egypt, and elsewhere across Great Britain’s expansive empire.

Both the title of the memoir and its structure were substantially altered. Apcar omitted Emin’s identification as an “An Armenian,” so prominent in the original, and dropped the qualification “in English” from the second edition. Titled *Life and Adventures of Emin Joseph Emin, 1726–1809, Written by Himself*, it emphasized, instead, Emin’s authorship. Apcar historicized the work by indicating the span of his lifetime, over a hundred years in the past. She further broke up Emin’s continuous narrative into chapters, included a detailed table of contents, and highlighted specific events through her choice of chapter titles. Adding a foreword, pages upon pages of his correspondence, as well as carefully cropped scholarly analysis and historical commentary, she asserted her editorial authority as the author’s great-great-granddaughter, inflating the book’s overall length from 640 small-leafed pages to 532 pages in a larger format.

Her editorial decisions responded to a new historical moment. They were epistemic interventions that reflected the growing momentum of anti-colonial contestation and colonial backlash fought out on the shifting terrain of racial hierarchies that benefitted Armenians in India for nearly two centuries. By the time that the memory of Joseph Emin resurfaced in the early twentieth century, British colonial rule in South Asia had long consolidated. While Emin witnessed its ascent, Apcar lived through the onset of its demise. In light of the long *durée* of privileged subjection, she no longer considered it noteworthy that an Armenian author should

have elected to write in English. Neither did she want the title to emphasize that Emin was an Armenian. A couple of decades later, Armenian resident communities in India lobbied colonial authorities to recognize the “European” status of displaced Ottoman Armenians, who were then categorized as “Eurasians” (Seth 1937, 547). Once again, Anglo-Armenians in India navigated the shifting terrain of coloniality, though this time through the modern language of race.

After the table of contents, and before Emin’s original introduction, Apcar inserted a letter by Sir William Jones, whom she proudly introduced in a footnote as “the famous Orientalist” (Apcar 1918, xix). Addressed to “my dear Emin,” this letter was dated in 1788 and signed “your faithful servant.” After critiquing the unpublished manuscript for its “Asiatick style” (xx), Jones responded to its content. Offering Emin a few words of consolation, he wrote, “I know mankind too well to be surprised at the failure of your enterprize [sic]” (xix). He recommended “to establish a republican government” in Armenia, “like that of England,” but contradicted himself a few sentences later by adding, “if your design was to transplant our constitution to Armenia, I heartily lament your disappointment, though I cannot wonder at it” (xix).

His advice for Emin, whose “project” he commended as “extremely laudable,” was not only symptomatic of Jones’ relativist essentialism. It also spoke to his own growing sense of frustration as a judge at Calcutta’s Crown Court. Since his appointment in 1783, Jones hoped to transform Earl Cornwallis, then Governor-General of Bengal, into “the Justinian of India” (Cohn 1996, 69). By extension, he aspired to model himself after Tribonian, the Byzantine legal scholar who compiled



the *Corpus Juris Justiniani*, the first comprehensive law code of Roman canon law, during the reign of Justinian I.<sup>125</sup> He wanted to assemble a “complete digest of Hindu and Mussulman law” (ibid.) in order to codify Mughal legal practices according to the rubrics and logics of Roman law. He believed that standardized and written law codes would create a “complete check on the native interpreters of the several codes”<sup>126</sup> while allowing the East India Company to govern “in accordance” with the “cultural habits of natives” (Hallaq 2009, 373). This design emerged as a solution to the “question of how to understand and legally manage native society in an economically efficient manner” (ibid.).

While Jones was fashioning himself into “one of the architects of Anglo-Muhammadan law” in colonial India (ibid.), he was a supporter and formative interlocutor of Joseph Emin. As his unnamed editor, Jones, alongside Edmund Burke, Lady Elizabeth Montagu, and the Duke of Northumberland, among other English benefactors, fundamentally shaped Emin’s Anglophile vision for Armenia. Therefore,

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<sup>125</sup> After the accession of Justinian I. to the Roman throne in 527 A.D., the Byzantine emperor ordered extensive legal changes that transformed the remaining Armenian satrapies into imperial territories under Justinian military administration (Hovannisian 1997, 104). Nina Garsoïan argues that “the traditional structure of Armenian society” was “incompatible” with the new legislation. Changes in inheritance and property law resulted in the “rapid fragmentation” of its land and power base and concentrated the commons in the hands of individual male heads of households (106). The dispossession of the collective impoverished the realm and led to the assimilation of Armenian nobility within the administrative apparatus of the Roman Empire. See also Nikoghayos Adontz. *Armenia in the Period of Justinian: The Political Conditions based on the Naxarar System*. Lison: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1970.

<sup>126</sup> The original citation is from Michael R. Anderson, “Legal Scholarship and the Politics of Islam in British India,” in Ravindra S. Khare, ed. *Perspectives on Islamic law, Justice, and Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, 74. Wael B. Hallaq is citing Anderson by way of Cohn 1996, 69.

it is insufficient to read Emin as a secular figure that politicized “religious interpretation[s] of Armenian suffering” (Panossian 2006, 173). Rather, the texture of the politics of liberation should be more closely examined in order to trace how divine right was disaggregated into secular technologies of government. Without taking into account the colonial setting that enabled Emin’s trans-imperial circulations, this shift in Armenian political culture cannot be fully appreciated. As Jones leafed through Emin’s handwritten manuscript in Calcutta, Armenian and British imaginaries of property, law, reason, sovereignty, and providence meshed to entangle the political aspirations of Armenian reformers in a web of Christian empire, Orientalism, and colonial logic.

### **The Making of Anglo-Armenian Law**

Three years prior to the publication of Emin’s memoir in 1792, a small circle of Armenian intellectuals in Madras completed a detailed law code for a future Armenian republic they envisioned on the Mt. Ararat plateau in West Asia. Divided in two parts, the draft consisted of a preamble, titled *Entrapment of Glory* (Որոգայթ փառաց),<sup>127</sup> and a second, much longer part that catalogued two hundred and fifty-one laws and regulations.<sup>128</sup> Backdated 1773, its two parts were intended as a template for

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<sup>127</sup> Although Որոգայթ փառաց (*Vorogayt Parats*) can be translated as “Snare of Glory” (Aslanian 2004b; Seferian 2014), the term “glory” in contemporary English usage does not fully convey the negative inflection that was probably intended in the original. Instead, “snare,” “pitfall” or “entrapment” illustrate more faithfully that the referent of “glory” – power – was to be restrained by the legal framework of a constitution.

<sup>128</sup> The original manuscript was digitized and is freely available on the website of the National Library of Armenia. For a modern reprint, see Poghos Khatchaturyan. *Որոգայթ փառաց*. Yerevan: Hayastan, 2002.

a future Armenian constitution. Once the proposed liberal reforms were instituted, its authors argued, Armenia would be liberated from foreign rule within a year (Joannisian 1989, 280). The bipartite manuscript was printed in Madras on the first Armenian press established in India by Shahamir Shahamirian, a wealthy Armenian merchant, on behalf of his son Hagop (Seth 1937, 592).<sup>129</sup> Although the latter died in 1774, he is named as the sole author of the book.<sup>130</sup>

However, its authorship was collective. In one passage, readers are assured by a third-person narrator that his motivation rested on “what he has seen with his own eyes during his life among different nations” (Joannisian 1989, 287).<sup>131</sup> Another voice emerged in a different passage to position an unidentified first-person narrator, likely Shahamir Shahamirian, as a “merchant,” “father of a family,” and “master of a family and house” (ibid.). In ascending order, these markers secured the publication’s claim to legitimacy. Since Joseph Emin passed through Madras on his way to Calcutta in the

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<sup>129</sup> The Armenian printing press was located on the compound of the Armenian Church of St. Mary in Madras (Aslanian 2012, 386). Its inaugural publication in 1772 was titled *New Pamphlet Called Exhortation* (Arm. Նոր տետրակ, որ կոչի յորդորակ). It was the first Armenian publication in India. According to its title page, it was “composed for the awakening of the Armenian youth from the weak and idle drowsiness of the sleep of slothfulness, and with an ardent and tender desire printed at the expense and through the exertions of Jacob Shameer by his tutor Moses Baghrum, for the benefit of the tender Armenian youth, in the year of the incarnation of the Word 1772 and in the year 1221 of the Armenian era. In India, at the city of Madras, at the press of the said Jacob Shameer” (Seth 1937, 596). Similar to Emin’s *Life and Adventures*, the author(s) of *New Pamphlet Called Exhortation* attempted to rouse the Armenian youth for its “stupor” and encourage them with vigorous words to throw off the “yoke of captivity” (Hovannisyan 1989, 260). In order to dispel “superstition,” it also instructed its readers in Armenian history and geography.

<sup>130</sup> The prevailing scholarly opinion is that *Entrapment of Glory* was published sometime between 1788 and 1789, although the preamble may have been completed before Hagop Shahamirian’s death in 1774 (Aslanian 2004b, 69).

<sup>131</sup> I am working with translated passages in Abgar R. Joannisian’s Russian-language study of Joseph Emin from 1989. All English translations are my own.

late 1770s, he likely collaborated with the Madras group, though the extent of his contribution to the constitutional draft remains unclear.

Likely completed before the news of the French Revolution broke in India, the constitutional draft was silent on political turmoil in Europe. It mentioned, however, regional events such as the death of Karim Khan Zand in 1779 and Haydar Ali's conquest of Madras in 1780. In passing, *Entrapment of Glory* also referenced an American "uprising" but commented on its "yet unclear outcome" (Joannisian 1989, 283). Though the publication explicitly acknowledged George Washington's aspiration to secede from the British center, it diplomatically noted that independence was in accordance with human nature. There could therefore be "nothing sweeter than freedom" (265). The wordliness of the Madras circle, however, does not render its 1773/1788 constitutional draft a derivative project. Rather, its vision of Armenian independence was an Asian response to the colonial Enlightenment. It imagined a constitutional monarchy many thousand miles away, in ancestrally Armenian territories, rather than an Armenian colony in India. This political imaginary drastically differed from the settler colonial project of Anglo-American independence.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Nareg Seferian compares the Madras circle to the "Founding Fathers" in Philadelphia, but does not fully account for the fact that the 1773 preamble of *Entrapment of Glory* predates the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution by three and fourteen years respectively. Though they enjoyed certain privileges, the position of Armenian merchants in colonial India drastically differed from the position of slave-holding elites of Anglo-Saxon whites in the American colony.

However, it shared a peculiar affinity with Sir William Jones' aspiration to establish a legal canon. Just as Jones hoped to fashion himself into "one of the architects of Anglo-Muhammadan law" (Hallaq 2009, 373), the Madras circle, including Joseph Emin, exhibited a marked *will to codify* a kind of Anglo-Armenian law.<sup>133</sup> The reformers envisioned a hybrid polity on the Armenian plateau that would incorporate an array of English-style institutions, syncretized with Armenian

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<sup>133</sup> The Madras constitutional draft included a comprehensive fiscal plan to fund the social and military programs of the state through customs and duties on imported goods. In order to prevent drainage of revenue, which was needed to fund war efforts, the export of precious metals and weapons was only to be conditionally permitted. Though no tariffs had to be paid initially, the value of exported good had to be reimported at a 130% profit within three years. The draft also included a land code which foresaw the creation of a Ministry of Territory whose agents would measure and take stock of the landscape, plan roads, and engage in forestry. The future state would also regulate communication and establish a stamp duty. In order to instill principles of virtue in the minds of Armenian citizens, it was proposed that each settlement of twenty-five houses or more should receive a co-educational public school with two teachers so that "all can read useful books" (Joannisian 1989, 265). Boys were to train at military schools in the afternoon (270). The military would be administered by nine commanders-in-chief, respectively nine general officers of the cavalry and artillery, and ninety colonels in charge of battalions consisting of one thousand soldiers (267). Plans for a standing army of 90,000 troops were fleshed out in great detail. For example, Armenian state officials were to maintain and steadily enlarge an arsenal of ready weapons (Art. 66). They were also to oversee the production of gunpowder by artisans (Art. 67), the preparation of crews and carriages (Art. 68), and the pitching of tents that would house the soldiers at a permanent military base in the European style (Art. 69). The law code noted that the soldiers' wages should be disbursed without delay. Furthermore, special agents would be deployed to safeguard that the tax code was correctly implemented and all revenue deposited in a state treasury. The state would own and operate hospitals that would offer free health care to citizens to maintain public health. An office of a "chief" of the sick and poor would be instituted whose duty it would be to maintain public houses for the care of the poor and homeless (272). This vision for a public authority to oversee the poor bore similarities to the administration of poor laws in England which arguably first established a "labor market [...] on a national scale" (Polyani 1944, 92). It also echoed colonial regimes of property in South Asia which first instituted individually held and permanent title to land (Guha 1996; Chatterjee 2010). However, the Madras constitutional draft deviated significantly from enclosure in England and Bengal because it sought to abolish all forms of involuntary servitude.

customary law.<sup>134</sup> Framed as a “sermon” (Seferian 2014, 14), the preamble was intended to *persuade* Heraclius II and Simeon Yerevantsi, then the Armenian Catholicos,<sup>135</sup> that both the Armenian king and the church needed to yield their power to a national parliament, called the “Armenian House” (սոսկը հայոց).<sup>136</sup>

Its thirteen elected representatives were to serve for three consecutive years and were called “landlords” (սաւստերերը, “master of the house”). They would be randomly selected among candidates that were to be elected at the municipal level.<sup>137</sup> The tenure of each member of parliament could be extended by another three years. It could also be curtailed if he was found in violation of the law. Among members of parliament, a Governor or “Lord” (սախարար)<sup>138</sup> would be appointed by lottery. As

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<sup>134</sup> An explicit reference to Adam but not Eve establishes that only men could be the heads of Armenian households. By extension, only men had the right to be elected as national representatives of the “House of Armenia.” It appears that women were not entitled to serve in public office. However, they were granted legal standing in court and the right to sign contracts. In this way, the Madras constitutional draft codified the customary rights Armenian women enjoyed in New Julfa and Astrakhan (Berberian 2012).

<sup>135</sup> Prior to publication, the Madras group sent a copy of the manuscript to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin for approval by Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi. The latter condemned the reform plans as “propaganda activity” and singled out Moses Baghramian, Hagop Shahamirian’s tutor, as the alleged author. Calling him a “deceitful person” and a “demoniac” that, “though brainless, bereft of intellect, and without circumspection and imprudent, was treated with great respect in Madras as a scholar” (Aslanian 2004b, 74), Yerevantsi excommunicated Baghramian and forced him into intermittent exile in Egypt and Iran. After Yerevantsi’s death in 1780, this decision was reversed by the newly elected Catholicos Gukas. The latter gave the Madras circle permission to resume its work on the publication.

<sup>136</sup> Abgar R. Joannisian translates սոսկը հայոց as “Armenian Chamber” (Russ. *армянская палата*) while Nareg Seferian translates it as “House of Armenia.” This governing body was intended as a house of elected representatives, a parliament composed of members of the Armenian Church that were considered exemplary by their peers. I translate it as “Armenian House” in order to emphasize its affinity with the “East India House,” the headquarters of the English East India Company in London.

<sup>137</sup> It specified that a municipality or electoral district would consist of up to twelve thousand households (Joannisian 1989, 265).

<sup>138</sup> The original refers to this position by the Armenian name for a landlord (*nakharar*). In English, the term “Governor” is perhaps closest in intended meaning, although “Prime

indicated by this random selection procedure, the authors of the Madras constitutional draft integrated the legal innovation of virtual representation (Pitkin 1972). Any Armenian deemed “virtuous” by his peers was in principle capable of governing all, a nation defined by membership in the Armenian Apostolic Church. Anyone born on the territory of the future Armenia would be considered an Armenian citizen and was granted the right to worship in his or her own way (Art. 5). However, only members of the Armenian church could assume government posts and freely purchase or sell land. Since Armenian “nationality” was coextensive with the body of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Madras constitutional draft effectively decoupled citizenship and civil rights. Only Armenian citizens of Armenian nationality, albeit both men and women, were entitled to full and permanent political participation. Citizens of Armenia that were not members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, however, had guaranteed right of residency (Art. 8, Art. 9).

By envisioning a state that could confer membership irrespective of belonging to the church, *Entrapment of Glory* took a step toward secular imaginaries of the state and the church as two separate entities. Although the Mother See at Holy Etchmiadzin would be allowed to send one delegate to sit in parliament, and its possessions were to be exempted from taxation (Art. 11), the “genuine sovereign of Armenia” would be the “Armenian House” (Joannisian 1989, 260). In order to mark this sovereign status of the national parliament, a special edifice was to be constructed (ibid.).

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Minister” might also be accurate. Interestingly, the Armenian term used also means “feudal lord.” The word itself derives from Farsi and denotes the sense of a “first actor” in the realm.

As the “head of the nation” (Joannisian 1989, 280), the Governor should be advised by a “senate” or council of elders (ծերականյախ).<sup>139</sup> In addition, a secret committee was to be instituted. The latter would dispatch spies throughout Armenia (and abroad) in order to gather intelligence. Its role was to brief the Governor in weekly reports (Art. 65). As a kind of *primus inter pares*, the Governor remained the “first servant” of the state. He was subject to the law and liable to its punishment like any other dignitary of the future state. If he transgressed against the law, his tenure of three years could be cut short. Answerable with his “head,” he might not only be deposed but also decapitated.

Unsurprisingly, when offered this position, Heraclius II declined to surrender his supremacy.<sup>140</sup> In theory, however, any heir of Armenian sovereignty could request to be appointed as the Governor. Through the permanent enclosure of dynastic sovereignty within a legal space, permanent checks on the bearer of this power could be instituted. Once a sovereign contender would elect to be made Governor, the civil office would be converted into the “hereditary” position of a life-long Governor-king.

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<sup>139</sup> Joannisian translates the original *ծերականյախ* as “senate” in Russian. A more faithful translation would be either “assembly of elders” or, literally, a “pile of elders.”

<sup>140</sup> Shahamir Shahamirian hoped to win the sovereign’s favor by sending lavish gifts “including a valuable diamond” to accompany his “useful suggestions” in 1775 (Seth 1937, 589). Instead of consenting to the scheme of the Madras group, the Bagratid heir conferred the title “Prince of Georgia” on Shahamirian and his male descendants. He also granted him the city of Lori “with all the surrounding villages, fields, mountains, forests, [and] waterways” (590). In a royal edict of 1786, he invited the newly minted landlord to take up residence and “enjoy the same rights and privileges and be honoured with the same honour as the native Princes of Georgia” (ibid.). Since this ran counter to the liberal convictions of the Madras circle, which hoped to institute a constitutional monarchy, the land surrounding the city of Lori remained unclaimed. It was eventually annexed by the Russian Empire along with the rest of Georgia in 1800.



In this event, the governorship would lose its representative character. As a trade-off, however, the legitimacy of dynastic sovereignty would be absorbed by the state and pass onto parliament.



Figure 1. Frontispiece, Որոգայթ փառաց  
(Entrapment of Glory), Madras, 1773/1788<sup>141</sup>

An illustration on the very first page of the constitutional draft, placed opposite of the title page, depicts a pastoral scene that allegorized this secular politics of salvation. A man is studiously guiding a flock of sheep into an enclosure. The image is of unknown provenance but includes Roman-style buildings in the background, nestled in a landscape dotted by vaguely Mediterranean vegetation.<sup>142</sup> Clothed in simple European attire, the shepherd in the foreground is wearing a wide-brimmed hat.

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<sup>141</sup> See the Public Digital Collection of the National Library of Armenia, URL: [http://greenstone.flib.sci.am/gsd/collect/armenian/Books/vorogayt\\_parac\\_index.html](http://greenstone.flib.sci.am/gsd/collect/armenian/Books/vorogayt_parac_index.html) (accessed March 2019). The image is inserted in vertical position before the title page of the original manuscript. It is taking up the entire page and rotated to the left by 90 degrees on a horizontal axis.

<sup>142</sup> Though the beardless features and particular type of hat worn by the shepherd suggest that it might have originated in Europe, it remains unclear if the etching was specifically commissioned for the publication or simply reproduced from another book. Neither the original 1773 edition of *Entrapment of Glory*, nor its reissued 2002 editions elaborate on the opening image. See Poghos Khatchaturyan. *Որոգայթ փառաց*. Yerevan: Hayastan, 2002.

Birds are dotting the sky. There is a sense of dynamic movement. Stuck to the brim of the shepherd's hat, a single feather suggests a connection. Focused, with an open mouth, his gaze follows the tip of a walking stick that he uses to direct the grazing sheep towards an open gate. It is unclear what lies beyond it.

Beholding this image, the reader is to understand that Armenians, left out in the "open," were defenseless and vulnerable in the same manner as sheep.<sup>143</sup> Exposed to death and dispossession, among "wolves," they were in need of guidance by a wise shepherd. Once directed through the open gate, however, they would be safely enclosed in a pasture. This realm would be the "abundant soil of Ararat" which, so the reformers, God had "given" Armenians (Joannisian 1989, 265). Bound by a shared

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<sup>143</sup> With respect to the Madras constitutional draft, Nareg Seferian argues that "it is the law, in the end, which is to take over the role of the Divine Right" (Seferian 2014, 3). However, according to the scholastic argument that framed the text, the law was still subject to reason. It authors argued, "God endowed Adam with the power to rule over nature but not over reasoned creatures" (Joannisian 1989, 263). It was logically deduced that "he could very well have kept his nature under control so as not to transgress the commandments of the Lord" if he had "permission to rule over the rational nature of man" (Seferian 2014, 3). In this way, the biblical story of original sin was posited as the reason of state. The Armenian term *բնական* (rational; reasoned) is rooted in the biblical word for "speech, word; Logos; thing, precept" (*բն*). It carries the sense "derived from Logos" but also "in accordance with things" (Martirosyan 2009, 166). By virtue of the human capacity to partake in divine reason, man is entitled to rule over "beasts," which lacked the capacity to apply rationality. Therefore, it was divinely ordained that man "may rule solely over the natural nature [...] of beasts on this earth, but not over the rational nature of man" (Seferian 2014, 3). Accordingly, Joseph Emin argued that Armenian subjection to arbitrary rule was unbearable because it reduced man to "a beast [...] that perisheth" (Emin 1792, 161). Drawing on Armenian biblical tradition, this argument echoed the Enlightenment thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and other legal theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and Montesquieu. The latter's magna opus *The Spirit of Laws* was first translated into English in 1750. It was widely read in Britain and its American colonies. This suggests that it was likely also available to Joseph Emin and the Madras circle in colonial India.

law code, they could be “liberated” from the state of nature that reduced them to a beastly existence.

Without a social contract to unify them, however, they were in a “sad and miserable situation” (Joannisian 1989, 264). The Madras group announced that “the necessary cure has been found” (ibid.). They urged, this “medicine has to be taken before death and not after,” and claimed it could not wait, it had to be “applied immediately” (ibid.). If an Armenia republic was instituted, it would “make Armenians happy, will free them from slavery, will encourage them to good deeds, and motivate them to voluntarily fulfill their social obligation” (ibid.). This cure, an invisible power flowing from the wand of the European shepherd, was “European management” (Apcar 1918, 174).

Since “Armenians have the same human nature as other happy people” (Joannisian 1989, 265), so the authors concluded, they were endowed with reason. Therefore, they were mandated by God to govern themselves. Legal restraints were necessary in order to infuse power with rationality, if necessary against the sovereign’s will. No longer subjected to arbitrary rule, the citizens of Armenia would finally be “without danger” (ապահովութիւն, “security”) (264). No longer vulnerable to dispossession, the constitutional draft recognized individual freedom and private property in land as inalienable rights of Armenian nationals (263). It guaranteed the right of women and children to inheritance. In order to protect individually held property, it also proposed to regulate spousal relations by contract (Art. 82). Upon entry into the realm, slaves would be automatically transformed into servants with

indenture contracts. They would have the fundamental right to abandon their station, however, if they were not adequately fed, clothed, or paid (Joannisian 1989, 269).

By granting legal personality to all natural persons, the Madras constitutional draft significantly curtailed the customary right of the masters of Armenian households. They were no longer free to fully dispose of their dependents at will. The latter had standing in court and could file a grievance against any party, including the government.<sup>144</sup> It would be the elected representatives of the “Armenian House,” instead, who would watch over the *entire* realm as if it was an extended household. They would be passing laws that were impartial and *therefore* just. They would be “exercising power in the form and according to the model of the economy,” as Michel Foucault defined the art of government, and “set up economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising [...] a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his good” (Burchell 1991, 92).

In order to separate the judiciary from the executive and the legislative branches of government, in a nod to Montesquieu’s legal thought, these laws would be adjudicated by thirty-six district judges that would be overseen by a Supreme Court with twenty-four appointed “members” (Joannisian 1989, 267). Interestingly, the “Supreme Court” was to consist of the exact same number of members as the Court of

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<sup>144</sup> This article may have been directly inspired by Montesquieu but exceeded *The Spirit of Laws* (1750) in its abolitionist imaginary. Instead of enfranchising the slaves of masters that were accused of treason, all enslaved persons in Armenia were declared free in principle and granted legal standing to testify in court. See Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu. *The Spirit of Laws*. London: Printed for J. Nourse and P. Vaillant, 1750, 278-279.

Directors of the English East India Company's "East India House," its central headquarters in London, which was made up of twenty-four constituent committees (not counting its secret committee) (Philips 1940, 299). Further, the small number of representatives in the "Armenian House" deviated from the Westminster model of the British parliament. The office of the "Governor" synthesized the figure of the Armenian sovereign with the model of the Deputy Governor of the English East India Company, as evidenced by the recommendation to create a "secret committee" that should advise him as the head of the future Armenian government.

In the context of an independent Armenian polity, the Governor's duties would significantly differ from the function of a municipal provost (*kalantar*) whose role in New Julfa was limited to the collection and payment of Safavid taxes. The legislative powers of the envisioned "Armenian House" would by far exceed the jurisdiction of the assembly or "community of merchants" (*jumiat*) in New Julfa. The latter administrative council consisted of "twenty district heads (who were themselves representatives of Julfa's wealthiest families, each with its own family firm) as well as the *kalantar*, or mayor, of the Julfans" (Aslanian 2010, 151). It arbitrated trade disputes between family firms but did not function as a "Court of Directors" since they were not organized as a joint-stock corporation. Rather, they tended to the profit of their own "house." These commercial partnerships were formed on a temporary basis. They were concluded between two partners on the basis of *enkeragir* contracts.<sup>145</sup> With the

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<sup>145</sup> The *enkeragir* contract was a legal technology that governed Julfan Armenian trade. It facilitated the circulation of "agents" (Arm. *enker*, "associate") and the capital of sedentary "investors" (Turk. *agha*, Arm. *ter*, or Farsi *kwaja*, master or lord) across far-flung distances.

natural death of one of the partners, the enterprise would be dissolved. Unlike European joint-stock corporations, Armenian family firms were not regarded as immortal legal persons (Kuran 2008).<sup>146</sup>

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In the case of a bilateral contract, the associate could invest stock-in-trade in a temporary joint venture with the principal investor at a profit rate of 50% (Aslanian 2010, 137). These partnerships depended on the legal and natural persons of both partners. Unlike European joint-stock corporations, they were dissolved after their death and could not legally exist in their own right. Though the liability of agents was limited, sanctions were in place that made negligence and indiscretions costly because an agent's livelihood depended on his reputation (Aslanian 2010). During the agent's absence from New Julfa, the investor maintained his associate's family and household. A successful agent might eventually settle down in New Julfa and become an investor himself. Agents were almost exclusively man. Armenian women had legal standing in court, "unlike slaves, illiterate persons, criminals, and those under twenty-five" (Berberian 2014, 110), could hold and inherit property, and enter into contract with their husband's permission. When husbands were away, "exceptions were made" (110). Houri Berberian argues that New Julfa was "populated by women, functioning adeptly in the absence of men" (105). While most investors were men, there were notable exceptions (Seth 1937, 263ff). The Julfan *enkeragir* contract bore similarities to the Mediterranean *commenda* contract (Aslanian 2007) and was informed by Islamicate forms of commercial partnership such as the *qirād*, sanctioned by the Maliki school of Islamic law, or the *mudāraba*, sanctioned by the Hanafī school (Aslanian 2007, 127). The *mudāraba* contract limited the liability of partners engaged in trade and likely emerged on the Arabian Peninsula before the emergence of Islam (Aslanian 2007, 128; Udovitch 1970). Similar to Mediterranean trade (Lane 1944), Armenian family firms were informed by Islamic modes of commercial partnership rather than European modes of incorporation. Held together by bonds of kinship, capital, trust, and the centripetal pressures of the Armenian church, the family firm established a "relation of constraints," spelled out in the *enkeragir* contract but "entirely different from contractual obligation," which underwrote "the acceptance of a discipline" (Foucault 1979, 222). In other words, credit and the demands of trans-imperial commerce gave rise to a "type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology" (215).

<sup>146</sup> Armenian trade was infused with Islamicate practices and set in a cultural milieu that did not offer analogues to European "corporateness" (Mardin 2013, 282). The idea of a corporate person alive in perpetuity was considered undesirable in Islamic law and economy (Al-Daghistani 2017). Some scholars have falsely claimed that an Armenian joint-stock corporation existed in New Julfa (Bhattacharya 2005, 281). However, historians of the Julfan trade network argue that this claim is based on a mistranslation (Khachikian 1988; Aslanian 2010). In 1673, a coalition of Julfan family firms signed a trade agreement with the Russian Empire. Instead of the "plural form of 'companies' (*kupanek*)," they were falsely glossed in the singular form, as *one* "company" (Aslanian 2010, 151).

It troubled Joseph Emin that Armenians seemed devoid of the desire to join their stock, both in the sense of forming an Armenian joint-stock corporation, and in the metaphorical sense of a “flock” joining together in an enclosure, as depicted in the opening illustration to *Entrapment of Glory*. The Enlightened merchants of the Madras circle envisioned the “Armenian House” as a sovereign body that would finally *incorporate* Armenians, defined by membership in the Armenian Apostolic Church, but in the *secular* manner of citizenship, taxation, and the “management” of a shared territory by “national” representatives.

This “corporate” solution for Armenia replicated the extraterritorial sovereignty of the joint-stock corporation that governed the Armenian authors as British subjects in colonial Madras and Calcutta.<sup>147</sup> Headquartered in London, the English East India Company arrogated to govern India from afar. As an immortal legal person, the joint-stock corporation could act as a sovereign body. Dating back to the Roman theory of corporate personality, which distinguished between “natural” and “legal” persons, the legal principle of incorporation is part of the English legal tradition.<sup>148</sup> A municipality “could turn itself into a corporation through the collective will of its members” (Kuran 2008, 800), meaning it could “incorporate” and become

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<sup>147</sup> The also remained subject to the Mughal authorities, with which the English East India Company competed, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and the jurisdiction of the “Assembly of Merchants” (*jumiat*) in New Julfa (Aslanian 2010).

<sup>148</sup> The legal theory of joint-stock corporations emerged on the basis of medieval innovations in political theology. Ernst Kantorowicz argues that the distinction between “bodies natural and mystic, personal and corporate, individual and collective” (Kantorowicz 1997, 199) emerged in thirteenth century Europe to curb the “nascent self-sufficiency of the secular bodies politic” (194). The doctrine of the “king’s two bodies” established that the Roman Church was the *corpus mysticum* of Christ, so that “the Church organism became a ‘mystical body’ in an almost juristic sense: a mystical corporation” (201).

“an aggregate body, acting as a unit, making by-laws, having a common seal, holding property in succession, and appearing in courts of law” (Kuhn 1912, 43). By the sixteenth century, medieval conceptions of an “artificial civic body” were extended to “profit-oriented production, finance, and commerce” (Kuran 2008, 802). The expediencies of colonial expansion “triggered further innovations, making creativity feed on itself” (Kuran 2003, 807). Outside of the purview of the British Crown, the directors of the English East India Company strategically leveraged their royal charter to establish sovereign jurisdiction “over all English subjects [...] when in Asia” (Stern 2008, 263). Over the course of the eighteenth century, complex governance structures emerged that could not be legally dissolved.<sup>149</sup> The Company *itself* was alive in perpetuity.

Although ecclesiastical conceptions of the Armenian nation (ւոգ, “*azg*”) remained foundational to the corporate vision of the Madras reformers, their Enlightenment thought was a function of the colonial situation that rendered them susceptible to liberal governmentality. Introducing the principle of virtual representation, they argued that Armenians could be “incorporated” by virtue of a legal act – a constitution – inspired not only by social contract theory but also the colonial government of the English East India Company, a London-based joint-stock corporation that claimed extraterritorial authority over its colonial subjects in India.

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<sup>149</sup> Queen Elizabeth chartered the East India Company in 1601 and granted it “the right to all the English trade, traffic, and passages by sea to and ‘beyond the *Cape of Bona Esperanza*, to the Streights [sic] of *Magellan*” (Stern 2008, 262). The British House of Commons rescinded the immortality clause of the English East India Company in 1773. This paved the way for the annexation of all of its assets in 1858 and the transfer of colonial rule to the British Crown.



Braided from many strands, their constitutional vision merged early modern European imaginaries of sovereignty with Armenian institutions that customarily instilled a sense of belonging across distances.<sup>150</sup> Combined with Christian thought about the dignity of human life, as opposed to the beastly existence of non-Christian others, corporate imaginaries of power propelled the Madras reformers toward colonial modernity. In turn, the patriarchal household, previously a collective entity, was reconfigured as a realm inhabited by individuals, available for scrutiny by the state. Once Armenians constituted a political body, liberal education and the rational administration could be deployed in order to extinguish their “Asiatic” remainder.

Power was to take charge of life itself in order to “ensure” that Armenians were no longer vulnerable to dispossession. Protected by impartial laws and military might, they would enjoy self-possession and permanent property in land “without danger”

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<sup>150</sup> In the absence of a formally “Armenian” realm, Armenians were practically “stateless” (Tölölyan 1996), though the extraterritorial status of New Julfa arguably produced a secular identity that was portable. Associates in the Julfan trade network were expected to know how to record purchases and expenditures in a daily double-entry ledger called *kata ruznama* (Aslanian 2010, 143). This ledger required newly minted merchant subjects to give account of themselves as individuals and assume responsibility for their daily actions, decision, and calculations. The discipline of commerce prescribed a rationality that had to be internalized, manifested, and recorded for examination by the investor – deferred in time but virtually inescapable – who would reciprocate with a steady supply of detailed instructions (109). Investors and agents were often members of extended households that, according to French travel writer Jean Chardin, could have as many as five hundred members (153). While Julfan trade was firmly rooted in the centralizing Safavid state, New Julfa was granted a certain degree of autonomy as a municipality. The Armenian church played a central role in maintaining the integrity of the New Julfan trade network by supplying eligible spouses to travelling agents who remained subject to the jurisdiction of the “community of merchants” (*jumiat*). Depending on the number of merchants residing in centers of Julfan trade such as Surat, Calcutta, or Madras, a portable system of courts, travelling priests, and the constant circulation of letters ensured allegiance and social control across vast distances even if no local chapter of the church was installed (Aslanian 2010).

(Joannisian 1989, 264). *Security* was the “medicine” to be applied “before death” (ibid.). The Madras constitutional draft entailed a biopolitical program that reflected not only European political thought but also its rising hegemony in Asia. This utopian vision was projected across spatial distance onto the “abundant soil of Ararat” (265). However, the Madras reformers were not only spatially but also *temporally* removed from their imagined homeland. They envisioned an Armenian republic that had never existed, but believed it was only a matter of time until it would. Liberation was *coming* but they hoped to *accelerate* the process.

Since they remained beholden to dynastic and ecclesiastical modes of authority, they hoped to incorporate both dynastic sovereignty and the ecclesiastical authority of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in their liberal scheme. Both, the body of the Armenian church (ւոզ, “*azg*”) and the artificial personality of the Armenian nation (also յոզ, “*azg*”) merged into one, a kind of secular miaphysitism of the nation.<sup>151</sup> This epistemic transformation was informed by historical events.<sup>152</sup> Although it operated in secular time, it reproduced the messianic temporality of the Armenian liberation legend (Aslanian 2002). Bound by the Armenian faith, modern *azg*-ism hinged on Christology but reimagined “the nation” through the colonial

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<sup>151</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the tension between secularism and Armenian miaphysitism, see Christopher N. Sheklian, “Theology and the Community: The Armenian Minority, Tradition, and Secularism in Turkey,” Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2018.

<sup>152</sup> For a discussion of the effects of British colonialism on Indian commercial practices, see Ritu Birla. *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. British imaginaries of the market also reconfigured Islamic economics. See Sami Al-Daghistani, “The Making of Islamic Economics: An Epistemological Inquiry into Islam’s Moral Economic Teachings, Legal Discourse, and Islamization Process,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Leiden University, 2017.

encounter of Armenian merchants with the English joint-stock corporation in South Asia. Instead of competing “houses” of Armenian family firms, Armenians were to be incorporated as a “House” of the Armenian nation-family.<sup>153</sup> This remained a “task of the future” (Joannisian 1989, 278).

The codification of law was central to this project of centralization. While Joseph Emin elaborated the political ideology of Armenian inferiority in Calcutta, the Madras circle canonized the first body of law that was “Anglo-Armenian” in spirit. They framed the fact that Armenians existed in clusters around multiple centers of allegiance (Aslanian 2004b) as a symptom of ill-constitution. Dispersed and “disorderly” (Apcar 1918, 206), Armenians could not *act* because they were *many*. This plurality was conceived as a *malaise* to be staved off through “love for one another” (112), i.e. an affective embrace of the novelty of secular nationhood.

Spurred by these bonds of love, the Madras law code replicated the “jural colonization” of India (Hallaq 2009). It applied its methods of organization to an imagined Armenian state that amalgamated customary and corporate conceptions of sovereignty. Always already routed through English colonialism in South Asia, its authors proposed a “Roman” law for Armenia that was, at least in part, inspired by Sir William Jones, Joseph Emin’s unnamed editor. As “one of the architects of Anglo-

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<sup>153</sup> Understood in light of the colonial origins of Armenian nationalism, the persisting trope of an Armenian “nation-family” can be reconsidered as a commercial formation that has become “naturalized.” “Blood” only became imagined as the medium of Armenian nationhood after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Armenian community in Anatolia in the early twentieth-century. On the trope of a “nation-family” in modern Armenian national discourse, see Tamar Shirinian, “The Nation-Family: Intimate Encounters and Genealogical Perversion in Armenia,” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 48-59.

Muhammadan law” (Hallaq 2009, 373), the latter, in turn, went on to found the discipline of Orientalism.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of the early colonial encounter with the English joint-stock corporation in South Asia, the political imagination of the Armenian nation was captured by the emergent logic of Orientalism. This logic was founded on the newly binary distinction between “Asia” and “Europe.” While Orientalism lends both terms the appearance of ontological cohesion, according to postcolonial critic Edward Said, it is a “style of thought” that privileges the epistemic position of Europe (Said 1978, 2). Emin’s secular vision of Armenian liberation not only hinged on a peculiar coalescence of Christology and liberal discourse, it also internalized the “hegemony of European ideas about the Orient” (7). Insofar as Armenians were “Orientals,” Emin believed, they could not “*know* [...] what freedom is” (Apcar 1918, 484; emphasis added).<sup>154</sup> In order to attain “liberty,” they had to learn to *think* like Europeans.

At a time when national imaginaries in Europe were still in flux, the story of Armenian conscription to early colonial modernity was staged in national terms. This demonstrates how forced displacement and persecution in West Asia facilitated the diffusion of emergent ideologies of European domination. In order to circulate

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<sup>154</sup> The term “Oriental” appeared in the end of Emin’s *Life and Adventures*. It only replaced the term “Asiatic” in his vocabulary when he was already completing his memoir. Since he was likely introduced to the idea of the “Orient” by Sir William Jones, it appears his editor’s intellectual influence on Emin’s political thought was potentially limited. Yet, its resonances with the discourse of Orientalism show that the *discipline* associated with Jones was informed by broader cultural phenomena that shaped Emin’s interactions with his English patrons since the 1740s. Insofar, Armenians were among the first subjects to be constituted by Orientalism.

between competing empires, Armenians had to navigate multiple legal frameworks, languages, and cultural settings. This mobility afforded a sense of relativity. The customary institutions that governed the conduct of Armenian trade imposed virtual obligations across distances. The maintenance of trans-local relationships required extraterritorial discipline.

Competing with ecclesiastical and dynastic modes of sovereignty, corporate imaginaries of the Armenian nation translated existing categories of Armenian thought into the colonial terms of Enlightenment discourse. Once some Armenians adopted the colonial gaze as a framing device through which they interpreted their own communities, they became aware of the way in which they appeared to Europeans. Joseph Emin conceded to Armenian inferiority in order to harness the “flexible *positional* superiority” (Said 1978, 7; original emphasis) of European knowledge to the advantage of Armenians. Informed by the colonial conditions of his textual production, he deployed the “style, figures of speech, setting, [and] narrative devices” (21) to produce the idea of Armenia as a subject of identification.

By advocating for a mode of government that would enable Armenians to “act as if they were but one single man” (Apcar 1919, 247), Emin advocated for a corporate agency that derived from the surrender of individual households to the artificial person of the nation. While the messianic temporality of the Armenian liberation legend remained structurally key to his hybrid account, he conceived of history as a result of human action, albeit divinely guided. From the modern side of the epistemic divide,

he counseled Armenians to bring about the event of their own liberation through collective action.

However, his conception of emancipation did not lead towards an affirmation of self.<sup>155</sup> This unified Armenian “self” had not been invented yet. While the Haitian Revolution of 1791 arguably actualized Black freedom in the Caribbean before the French Revolution (James 1989; Scott 2004; Buck-Morss 2009), the desire for Armenian self-determination – similarly “unthinkable even as it happened” (Trouillot 1995, 73) – was immediately absorbed into the terms of colonial experience. Insofar as Armenians were incorporated in the colonial enterprise as a nation, they remained determined by others even in their positive aspiration for national independence.

The governing body of the “Armenian House,” as envisioned by the Madras reformers, would represent the sovereignty of this artificial person called the “Armenian nation.” Its sovereignty would be embodied in its catalogue of laws, which were derived from divine reason and therefore sanctioned by God. The members of the “Armenian House” would not be the heads of particular family firms, but represent their composite interest as stockholders in the corporate enterprise of the “nation.” An “Assembly of men” would be appointed “to *beare their Person*” (Hobbes 1969, 87;

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<sup>155</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel first published *Phenomenology of the Spirit* in 1807, over a decade after the publication of Joseph Emin’s *Life and Adventures* in 1792. Although Emin frequently deployed “slavery” as a metaphor to describe Armenian subjugation in the Ottoman Empire, he was not influenced by Hegelian thought. To the contrary, his liberation campaigns predated the formulation of a dialectic relationship between lordship and bondage. It was rooted in biblical thought and colonial experience. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *System der Wissenschaft, Erster Theil, die Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Bamberg und Würzburg: Joseph Anton Geobhardt, 1807.

emphasis mine). Randomly selected among them, the Governor would be “called Sovereigne, and said to have Sovereigne Power” *because* he “carryeth this Person” (Hobbes 1969, 88) of the nation. By surrendering their natural persons, Armenians would invest the nation with an immortal legal personality that could incorporate and constitute a state with the “power and strength” to “reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will” (87). Its purpose would be to secure them all against “the injuries of one another,” as well as “the invasion of Forraigners” (*ibid.*).<sup>156</sup> Centered on the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Armenian realm would be established as a body-politic on the Armenian plateau.

In Joseph Emin’s narrative, this unifying project operated through patrilineal genealogical claims. While his father Hovsep appears sickly and weak, he finds surrogate paternity in European figures such as Mr. Parrent, his English schoolmaster, who first releases him from the obligation to obey his father’s command. Emin’s alienation from other Armenians is illustrated by his authorship in English, a foreign language. His claims to exceptionality further estranged him from literary traditions in the region that favored “exemplary narratives of virtuous action” (Tölölyan 1987, 229). It would take over one hundred years until Armenian national discourse caught up with his idiosyncratic “master-narrative” (*ibid.*). The world of Amy Apar, his second editor, was entirely saturated with colonial discourse. His first-time translator into Armenian, Y. Khashmanian of Meshak Press in Beirut, retroactively assigned

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<sup>156</sup> See Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan, or The Matter, Form, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*. Menston: Scolar Press Facsimile, 1969 [1651].

value to Emin's actions in 1958. Despite Emin's deference to European "mastery," he was reclaimed as a hero of the Armenian struggle for national liberation. After a close reading of his narrative, however, it becomes clear that his thought operated through gendered and racialized modes of subordination that reproduced the dispossession they opposed, albeit by another name – "liberty."

Shuttling between East and West, West and East, Emin's text perpetually traversed the aporetic constitution of diasporic identity *on* and *through* the "line separating Occident from Orient" (Barker et al. 1986, 346). Far from a neutral description, Armenia's position in the "imaginative geography" (ibid.) of Asia and Europe rested on "dominating, coercive systems of knowledge" (359) that remain its condition of possibility.

This idea of Armenia first took root in South Asia, among a multiply displaced trade diaspora of Armenians from Persia. As a consequence of colonial subjection, some came to believe they knew how to govern a place on the Ararat plains they imagined to be their distant homeland. For this reason, colonial governmentality arrived in West Asia by way of South Asia, rather than Europe. It was the result of global circulations that rendered Armenians susceptible to liberal political thought. Rather than functioning as a merely derivative conduit of Enlightenment thought, the Armenian adaptation of its ideological tenets furthered English colonial expansion in the early modern period. Long forgotten, this South Asian convergence became the counter-intuitive foundation of Armenian national discourse.



Edward Said's challenge to the idea of a fundamental opposition between East and West helps unsettle imaginaries of Armenia that are beholden to Orientalism. It opens up new possibilities for insubordination beyond the terms of self-possession and property. Joseph Emin's *Life and Adventures* defamiliarizes these terms for the modern reader by stating them plainly and with startling fidelity to the colonial mastery of the English other. It offers narratives of liberation that counter contemporary sensibilities because they precede the analytical hegemony of Hegelian thought. Reading Emin's writing creates a distancing effect that may help move us toward *another* emancipatory politics. A radical critique of domination displaces the opposition of Christian empire and animality in order to analyze Armenian inclusion as a form of domestication or captivity within the colonial edifice of modernity. This postcolonial perspective allows to reinvent the present moment. By shedding the logic of empire, the freedom to act might be actualized in relation to alterity.

## Chapter 2

### Adopting an Orphan-Nation: Armenian-Americans and the Geopolitics of Whiteness

*We find, then, that there is no European or white race, as the United States contends, and no Asiatic or yellow race which includes substantially all the people of Asia; that the mixture of races in western Asia for the last 25 centuries raises doubt if its individual inhabitants can be classified by race; that, if the ordinary classification is nevertheless followed, Armenians have always been reckoned as Caucasians and white persons; that the outlook of their civilization has been toward Europe. [...] that the word 'white,' as used in the statutes, publications, and classification above referred to, though its meaning has been narrowed so as to exclude Chinese and Japanese in some instances, yet still includes Armenians. Congress may amend the statutes in this respect.*

– Judge Lowell, Circuit Court of Appeals, District of Massachusetts, *In re Halladjian et al.*, 174 F. 834 (1909)

*I have felt shame every time we spoke of ourselves. For, each time we spoke of ourselves, we did not speak to ourselves. [...] As survivors, we have never ceased, in fact, to appeal to the external gaze. In the moment of this appeal, it is testimony that was constituting me. It was constituting me by the shame I was feeling, by my belonging to this 'we' I have just uttered, under the gaze of the civilized other, by this gaze itself.*

– Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion* (2009), 120

### Introduction

In 1909, four citizens of the Ottoman Empire appeared before the Circuit Court of Appeals of the U.S. District of Massachusetts. All four were men, residents of the United States, and were denied the right to file for naturalization as citizens. They were petitioning the court to determine their racial status after the U.S. Department of State concluded that they were *not* “free white persons,” and therefore ineligible for U.S.

citizenship.<sup>157</sup> Their names were Halladjian, born in Aintab, Ekmakjian, from “Diarbekir or Dikranagerd,”<sup>158</sup> Mouradian, from Adana, and Bayentz, from a “suburb of Constantinople on the west side of the Bosphorus.” With the exception of Bayentz, who thereby specified that he hailed from the European side of the Ottoman capital, Halladjian, Ekmakjian, and Mouradian were described as natives of “Asiatic Turkey.” All four were identified as “Armenians by race.” The presiding Judge, Francis Cabot Lowell, explained that although he found the petitioners were “white persons in *appearance*,” the court had to decide “whether they *are* white or not.”<sup>159</sup>

Although the case set a precedent, the ranks of Ottoman Armenians in the United States had been steadily growing at least since the 1880s. Circular labor migration between Anatolia and North America became an increasingly widespread practice. Eventually, Ottoman authorities attempted to curb the re-entry of Armenian returnees because they suspected them behind the increasingly revolutionary demands of the Armenian national movement (Nalbandian 197; Gutman 2016). In 1909, the Armenian communities of Adana, the provincial capital of Cilicia, and the hometown of Mouradian, one of the Armenian petitioners, were devastated by state-sanctioned massacres that left thousands of Armenians dead, orphaned, or displaced.

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<sup>157</sup> See *In re Halladjian et al.*, 174 F. 834 [1909], Circuit Court of Appeals, District of Massachusetts, December 24, 1909. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes that follow are citations from Judge Francis Cabot Lowell’s opinion.

<sup>158</sup> Dikranakerd is the Armenian name for the city of Diyarbakır.

<sup>159</sup> *In re Halladjian et al.*, 174 F. 834 [1909], Circuit Court of Appeals, District of Massachusetts, December 24, 1909; emphasis added.

Humanitarian concern, however, remained entirely beyond the purview of the naturalization case.

In order to decide if the petitioners were racially “qualified” for U.S. citizenship, the court was tasked to determine the *biological* identity of Armenians. This “racial essence” had to be disarticulated from their phenotype, which “appeared” to be white, and their geographical origins, which were racialized as “Asiatic.” Orientalist conceptions of region collided with biological definitions of race. Because Europe and Asia were constructed as binary opposites, legal recognition as “white” depended on the erasure of the belonging of Armenians in West Asia – their indigenous status on the *land*. If Armenians were to be classified as “white,” race had to be rooted, instead, in their *bodies*. This tension could only be resolved if Armenians were defined as “foreigners” in their own homelands.

Because the Armenian petitioners were positioned outside of the domestic dichotomy of “white” and “black,” which circumscribed the privileges and entitlements reserved for citizens of the United States, the court was placed before a novel demand. Judge Lowell was expected to determine the “statutory color” of Armenians regardless of “mere nativity or of personal color,” which was known to fluctuate between persons, on the basis of existing statutes that excluded Chinese persons from the right to file for naturalization on racial grounds. The Judge had to determine whether “*all* the people of Asia” were to be classified as “Asiatic,” as the U.S. State Attorney’s office maintained, or whether the term “Asiatic” should be

limited to “members of the Mongolian or yellow race.”<sup>160</sup> Were Armenians, as West Asians, akin to Europeans, he wondered, or the “yellow race”? This raised questions about the definition of “European by race,” as Judge Lowell noted, and what “proof [should] be admissible.” The district attorney argued that “the average man in the street understands distinctly what it means [...] without being able to define a white person,” but the Judge rejected common sense as an insufficient basis for a legal decision. Instead, he combed anthropological, historical, linguistic, and biblical texts for passages about Armenians.<sup>161</sup>

While conceding that “ethnological theories have varied greatly and at short intervals,” he consulted “books on ethnology” that showed “complete agreement,” he argued, “in the proposition that Armenians are to be classed as white or Caucasian.” In the “warfare which has raged since the beginning of history about the eastern Mediterranean between Europeans and Asiatics,” he projected, “the Armenians have generally, though not always, been found on the European side.”<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, he pointed out, “Christianity in the Near East has generally manifested a sympathy with Europe,” however defined, “rather than with Asia as a whole.” Without “heresy on their part,” he preempted, Armenians split from Western Christendom as a result of “their remoteness,” not their racial difference.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *In re Halladjian et al.*, 174 F. 834 [1909], Circuit Court of Appeals, District of Massachusetts, December 24, 1909; emphasis added.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

He argued that “the present inhabitants of western Asia” could not be racially classified as a whole because they had “their racial descent so mixed that there are many individuals who cannot safely be assigned by descent to any one race, however comprehensive.” Doing so, he claimed, would contradict “the principles upon which the classification depends” – the idea of racial purity – because the “present inhabitants of western Asia and the eastern shores of the Mediterranean” were *distinct* from “aboriginal peoples of Asia” – the “Asiatic or yellow race” that had been barred from entry to the United States since the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.<sup>164</sup>

By claiming that Armenians were *not* “aboriginal peoples of Asia,” he positioned them as *settlers* whose presence in West Asia was reversible and perhaps even arbitrary. It was a matter of history, rather than anthropology. Since “no Asiatic or yellow race which includes substantially all the people of Asia” *as such* were held to exist, Armenians were “to be classed as Caucasian or white” *if* “ordinary classification is nevertheless followed.” Because “the outlook of their civilization has been toward Europe,” he argued, they would readily adapt to “European standards” and “become westernized.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> See Forty-Seventh Congress, “An Act to Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese,” Chap. 126, May 6, 1882.

<sup>165</sup> *In re Halladjian et al.*, 174 F. 834 [1909], Circuit Court of Appeals, District of Massachusetts, December 24, 1909.

Sensing the rising hegemony of eugenic discourse,<sup>166</sup> Judge Lowell, close to retirement, perhaps considered it a matter of principle to insist on greater historical accuracy. With notable irritation, he admonished,

[A] reasonable modesty may well remind Europeans that the origin of their letters was in Phoenicia, the origin of much of their art in Egypt, that Asia Minor claimed, at least, the birthplace of the first great European poet, and that the Christian religion, which most Europeans believe to have influenced their civilization and ideals, was born in Palestine.<sup>167</sup>

Race and geography were not to be conflated. With the erudition of an Orientalist scholar, he pointed out that the “mixture of races in western Asia for the last 25 centuries” had yielded some of the proudest “achievements” of European civilization.<sup>168</sup> It was not to be feared because “white men” were “not a single uniform race,” “but a varied and mixed population” as well.<sup>169</sup> This echoed the racial theories of Edward B. Tyler, a Darwinist anthropologist, who argued that “various kinds of dark-whites” (or “melanochroi”) were a result of “intermixing” with “the brown races of the far south,” while “fair-whites” (so-called “xan-thochroi”) were the “original

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<sup>166</sup> On the eugenic ideology of “progress,” see Donald K. Pickens. *Eugenics and the Progressives*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968. On the impact of the eugenics movement on the civil rights of racialized minorities in the United States, see Natalia Molina. *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. On the international dimensions of the eugenics movement, see Stefan Kühl. *For the Betterment of the Race: The Rise and Fall of the International Movement for Eugenics and Racial Hygiene*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

<sup>167</sup> *In re Halladjian et al.*, 174 F. 834 [1909], Circuit Court of Appeals, District of Massachusetts, December 24, 1909.

<sup>168</sup> According to Martin Bernal, this is a revisionist claim that required significant whitewashing of European history. See Martin Bernal. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

<sup>169</sup> *In re Halladjian et al.*, 174 F. 834 [1909], Circuit Court of Appeals, District of Massachusetts, December 24, 1909.

stock” (Baum 2006, 145).<sup>170</sup> Since “no European or white race” *as such* could be found to exist, “as the United States contends,” Judge Lowell suggested that a *political* decision was needed in order to establish if West Asian immigration to the United States was desirable.<sup>171</sup>

Ultimately, he granted the request of the Armenian petitioners not because he was in disagreement with the exclusion of whole groups of persons on the basis of race but because he was uneasy about applying racial statutes that did not *explicitly* exclude “persons not otherwise classified.” While Chinese and Japanese immigrants were at “one time [...] deemed to be white,” he explained, they were “not usually so reckoned today.” Concerned about legal ambiguity, rather than with justice, he concluded that “the meaning of the word ‘white’ [...] still includes Armenians,” but recommended that Congress “amend the statutes in this respect.”

The provisional nature of the legal decision raised questions about the *permanence* of Armenian admission to U.S. citizenship and, by extension, to the shifting field of whiteness in the United States. Before Armenians could be assimilated as U.S. citizens, they had to be incorporated as “free white persons.” By granting Armenians standing to apply for U.S. citizenship, Armenians were framed as “settlers” in West Asia. Their inclusion in statutory whiteness rendered them alienable as

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<sup>170</sup> Building on Johann F. Blumenbach’s notion of a “Caucasian race,” Edward B. Tyler endorsed Thomas H. Huxley’s distinction between “fair whites” and “dark whites” and elaborated it further in his entry on “anthropology” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1875).

<sup>171</sup> The Canadian government, for example, insisted that a person’s place of birth determined their racial status. Until 1930, the entry of Armenian refugees to Canada was restricted because they were classified as “Asiatic” (Kaprielian-Churchill 1990).



second-class citizens of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>172</sup> It prepared their *denaturalization* as Ottoman subjects during the state-sanctioned annihilation campaigns on 1915.<sup>173</sup> Lowell's decision foreshadowed the events that "orphaned [...] the Armenian nation itself" (Suny 2017, 347) and linked them to white supremacy in the United States, secured through the natal alienation of African Americans. It inscribed the forced displacement of Ottoman Armenians in the flesh of Armenian-Americans as a condition for the racial adoption of the Armenian nation by the United States. This symbolic transfer of patronage from the Ottoman Empire to the United States, a kind of geopolitics of whiteness, was accomplished through the figure of the Armenian orphan, newly available for racial adoption, as a transnational conduit of eugenic and humanitarian sentiment that constituted the post-war international system in the Middle East.

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<sup>172</sup> The Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire introduced civil reforms in the *Hatt-i Sharif* of Gulhane of 1839 and the *Islahat Fermani* of 1856, two imperial edicts that promised all Ottoman subjects "perfect security for life, honor, and property" (Gelvin 2016, 168). The period of the so-called *Tanzimat* reforms, also known as the constitutional era, ended in 1878 when these proclamations were rescinded and Sultan Abdul Hamid II resumed autocratic rule.

<sup>173</sup> The Hamidian massacres of 1894-1896 and the Cilician massacres of 1909 built toward the state-sanctioned, premediated, and systematic mass murder of Ottoman Armenians during the genocidal deportation campaigns of 1915-1917. Despite overwhelming evidence, the Republic of Turkey, the legal successor state of the Ottoman Empire, denies the Armenian genocide although the events meet the criteria for "genocide," as defined in the *United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (Res. 260 A, III). Turkish officials continue to evade responsibility because the category "genocide" was only legally codified in 1948. They rely on the pretense that it cannot be retrospectively applied. For a comprehensive historical account of the Armenian genocide, see Raymond Kévorkian. *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011; Ronald G. Suny. *"They can live in the desert but nowhere else": A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

## **Alienation in West Asia**

Before the Ottoman massacres at Adana, the promise of Ottoman citizenship had offered hope to Armenians in West Asia. In late 1908, Sultan Abdul Hamid II had been successfully pressured by a group of military recruits, called the “Young Turks,” to reinstate the constitution of 1876, and restore the Ottoman parliament. The new government dismantled the *millet* system that had governed Armenians as a communal aggregate, and extended Ottoman citizenship to all subjects who were endowed, for the first time, with *individual* rights and duties. These civic reforms were welcomed by Armenians who became liable to military conscription and regular taxation. They believed “they could now enjoy freedom of speech and assembly” (Hovannisian 1997b, 230) but soon paid the price for supporting the democratic reformation of the Ottoman Empire.

During the faraway trial of Halladjian, Ekmakjian, Mouradian and Bayentz, Armenian quarters and villages throughout Cilicia were destroyed by the Sultan’s militias and sympathetic irregulars. Thousands were killed and displaced.<sup>174</sup> While the responsible officials largely evaded punishment, Armenian survivors were blamed for “provoking the violence,” imprisoned, and hanged (231). Effectively sanctioning mass murder with impunity, the reinstated Young Turk government conducted a “public memorial service for both Turkish and Armenian citizens who had sacrificed their lives ‘in defense of the revolution’” (ibid.).

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<sup>174</sup> A parliamentary investigation found that the overwhelming majority of the victims were Armenian. Out of the official estimate of 21,000, 19,479 were identified as Armenian, 850 as Assyrian, 422 as Chaldean, and 250 as Greek (Hovannisian 1997, 231).

Although the state refused to acknowledge that it had broken its promise of equal protection, Armenian intellectuals such as Zabel Yessayan, a feminist writer from Constantinople, emphasized their *civic* allegiance, however tortured, to the Ottoman constitution. In her preface to *Among the Ruins*, first published in 1911, Yessayan addressed her “compatriots of other nationalities” as “a free citizen and true child of this land, enjoying the same rights and charged with the same duties as everyone else” (Yessayan 2016, 5).<sup>175</sup> She urged her readership to “forget the author’s nationality” (and gender) and “take a hard, courageous look at [...] our bleeding country” based on the “spontaneous, heartfelt impressions of an ordinary human being” (ibid.). Yessayan called upon a shared humanity that she believed had a duty to oppose “revolting injustices” and “the return of tyranny [...] now threatening [...] our common Fatherland” (ibid.). Her record of “human feelings alone” is placed in the service of overcoming “our mutual distrust,” as she put it, and offered testimony “without regard for conventional formulas” (4-5). By showing “our true feelings” – how Armenians felt about the betrayal of shared Ottoman identity – she hoped to displace “racial hatred of any kind whatsoever” (ibid.). Though “nightmares” had made the “soil dry and barren, like the breasts of a mother without milk,” readers were reminded that “emaciated, defenseless bodies [...] have feelings and a will [...] their

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<sup>175</sup> Zabel Yessayan, an Armenian writer, documented the immediate aftermath of massacres after travelling the region from June to September 1909 as part of a fact finding mission sent to Cilicia by the Armenian Red Cross and the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople. Her testimony captured the catastrophic dimensions of the violence in literary form. See Zabel Yessayan. *In the Ruins*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian. Boston, MA: AIWA Press, 2016. See also Marc Nichanian. *Writers of Disaster: Armenian Literature in the Twentieth Century*. Reading: Taderon, 2002.

souls are full of sacred fire” (Yessayan 2016, 5). In this image, all Ottoman citizens were children of shared *paternity* and therefore endowed with the natural right to be nurtured by their *maternal* soil.

Yessayan’s account marks the threshold at which the narrowing cosmopolitanism of Ottoman citizenship still generated potent affiliations that were *not yet* incompatible with national sentiment. Arguing that fleeing was an “irrational decision” (ibid.) made only under extreme duress – considering that it entailed abandoning ones “native land” – she held on to the birthright of shared *Ottoman* paternity. It followed that the Ottoman state, to her and other Armenian citizens, was “our common Fatherland,” its Armenian provinces a mother-country – a womb that birthed and nurtured Ottoman Armenians. Unable to comprehend their natal alienation, survivors exclaimed in outrage, “this soil is ungrateful; it is like a stepmother!” (138). The massacre had suddenly turned a land irrigated by the sweat of one’s brow into “the enemy’s land” (ibid.). One no longer ought to “bear children [...] nor should one build on it” (ibid.).

Yessayan dedicated *Among the Ruins* to “Armenian Mothers” whom she deplored to “love and care” for the “thousands of orphans” offered up by “the terrible, indescribable catastrophe” (21). She pleaded with them,

When you hear their names, do not think of them the way one thinks of the victims of a remote, obscure tragedy. Try, rather, to see your own child in all of them; mourn each and every one individually; and open your hearts wide, open them without reserve to this unlooked-for, this grief-stricken motherhood (ibid.).

Instead of focusing on mere physical survival, as marked the humanitarian efforts of “foreigners [who] approached the survivors with smiles and songs,” she responded by mourning “with tears, and tears alone...” (Yessayan 2016, 140) – “a grief beyond redress” (154) in all of its dimensions. To Yessayan, only the hearts of “Armenian Mothers” could “mourn each and every one individually,” see their “own child in all of them” (21). Mourning the loss of the mother-land would have to take place in the hearts of Armenian mothers.

In her later works, after the Armenian genocide of 1915, Yessayan no longer attempted to bear witness. As a displaced survivor, she dwelled on the experience of exile.<sup>176</sup> After her alienation from the “Fatherland” was complete, she could no longer conjure a plane of justice that would allow to mourn the scattered bones of the unburied dead. Each wave of Ottoman persecution had further undermined the civic standing of a people denied the status of kin – total disaffiliation. The severing of the intimate relations that had made up Ottoman-Armenian worlds was final – a loss beyond repair. “Fatherless,” Armenians were denaturalized and became “strangers” in their own homeland. The mother-country had treated them as enemies, cruel as a “stepmother.” Stripped of land, property, kin, religion, and even their names, many Armenian

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<sup>176</sup> Yessayan explored themes of desire and human creativity in *My Soul in Exile* (1922), a psychological novel, and returned to her youth in Constantinople in *The Gardens of Silihdar* (1935), a memoir full of female protagonists struggling with the demands of urban middle-class domesticity. See Zabel Yessayan. *My Soul in Exile and Other Writings*. Boston: AIWA Press, 2014; Zabel Yessayan. *The Gardens of Silihdar: A Memoir*, trans. Jennifer Manoukian. Boston: AIWA Press, 2014.

survivors, most of them women and children, lost everything but their bare lives.<sup>177</sup> Those who were displaced beyond the territory of the newly founded Republic of Turkey were denied the right to return. This constituted natal alienation and produced *orphanhood* as the symbolic and material condition of Armenian survival.

The erasure of intimate affinities that was begun by the Ottoman executioners was continued by Armenian clergy and community leaders abroad who “worked to eradicate all everyday phenomena that continued to link the Armenians to the Turks and the Turkish-Ottoman environment” (Tachjian 2009, 67). Calling for the “boycott [of] everything that is Turkish” (68), they aspired to reverse the social engineering of the Young Turks by *disavowing* Ottoman paternity. They negated the kinship that had been negated. Instead, they intended to “create a completely Armenian character,” as one Egyptian Armenian community leader suggested, that was “freed” from “the features of the vile Turkish character grafted upon us” (ibid.).<sup>178</sup>

The botanical metaphor of a “graft” mobilized biologist ideas about national character to suggest that the Ottoman government had no right to the Armenian

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<sup>177</sup> The majority of Armenian survivors were women and children. Many died of exposure, hunger, or disease during or after the death marches into the Syrian desert, or endured years of captivity, forced marriages, rape, and involuntary pregnancies. An unknown number of abducted Armenian women and children remained with their captors or adoptive families, either voluntarily or against their will, to live out the remainder of their lives as “hidden” Armenians with an erased past and new names. Many citizens of present-day Turkey are believed to have unacknowledged Armenian ancestry. See Avedis Hadjian. *Secret Nation: The Hidden Armenians of Turkey*. London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018.

<sup>178</sup> Moushegh Seropian, an Armenian archbishop and nationalist leader in Egypt, suggested as much in a Cairo-based newspaper in 1918. He headed the Armenian Relief Committee of Mesopotamia (ARCM) and directed a rescue operation, known as the “Mission of Salvation” or “Liberation Mission,” to recover abducted Armenian women and children (Aleksanyan 2016).

provinces. It rejected cultural affinities as the artificial outcome of a forced symbiosis between “alien” elements and implied that “Turkish” rule was a parasite on the land that owed its vitality the Armenian nation – a living organism that was well-adapted to the environment before the arrival of the Ottomans. While the image of a “graft” suggested that Armenians were the “trunk,” rooted in the soil and therefore indigenous to the land, it also conceded that certain features had to be shared, since the “graft” had succeeded in the first place, and could not be extricated without altering the nature of the whole. Designating “everything Turkish” as a “vile” imprint on an inherently “pure” Armenian national character was an attempt to reconstruct meaning amidst formlessness. The project of “purification” was driven by the hatred and vengeance, the sheer despair of the aftermath period. It confronted the difficulty of inventing the “pure” national character that was to be created because few survivors spoke Armenian in their everyday lives. They were urged “to speak Armenian and reject Turkish,” the language associated with the perpetrator state, because it was interpreted as a “crime against the Armenian language [...] for an Armenian to speak to another in Turkish” (Tachjian 2009, 68). The speaking of Turkish in an Armenian household had suddenly come to represent a betrayal, a “desecration of the Armenian ideal” (ibid.) that seemed to offend against the order of life itself.

In the aftermath of the Armenian genocide, “ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions” (Douglas 2002, 4) had become more pronounced. The new emphasis on “purity” was a response to an “inherently untidy experience” (ibid.). It was a “positive effort to organize the environment” and make it

“conform to an idea” (Douglas 2002, 2). The “symbolic pattern” to be imposed was “purity.” This “semblance of order” (4) required that the Turkish language be excluded as a form of “pollution” in order to wrest the life of the Armenian nation from death. It represented the “relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death” (6). The attempt to construct an Armenian identity that was “pure” and self-contained, rather than rooted and relational, was not rooted in the discourse of racial hygiene but a response to genocide and forced displacement. Although it resonated with the eugenic agenda of “unmixing,” which came to define the Western relief effort, it was focused on the reconstitution of the patriarchal household through motherhood and the “ideal” of the Armenian language.

While the process of alienation entailed separation and estrangement, the vulnerable position of Armenians in West Asia rendered them susceptible to Western appropriation. Their intermittent admission to legal whiteness in the United States created the conditions of possibility for their racial adoption as an “orphan-nation” that was deserving of Western protection. In opposition to a racialized and “degenerate” East, the United States deployed new technologies such as the stop motion camera to construct a new self-image on nitrite film. Both domestically and abroad, it projected itself as the “savior” of Armenians through the new medium of the motion picture.

### **Emancipation in North America**

The legal coordinates of citizenship, race, property, freedom, and the family shaped the symbolic field of whiteness that Armenians formally entered in 1909 as petitioners for naturalization in a federal court in Massachusetts. The status of “free



white persons” in the United States was secured through the “right to exclude” (Harris 1993, 1714) from the “status of being white” and relegate racialized others to the alienated status *of* property (1713). Because the sovereignty of whiteness, its “conceptual nucleus” (Harris 1993, 1714), rested on conquest, the self-appointed “Courts of the conqueror” suspended “rules of first possession and labor as a basis for property rights” when it came to the bodies, land, and families of the enslaved and colonized (1723). While whiteness, as property, protected family relations from severance, African American and Native American families were routinely separated in order to enforce private property interests (Spillers 2003; Smith 2013).

In California, constituted as a “free state” in 1850, slave owners could assume “guardianship” over enslaved persons and their children. This not only positioned racialized adults as children but also alienated the bond to their own children. Claiming “guardianship” over their “enslaved wards” (Smith 2013, 111), the white captors of Native American children were legally entitled to “their labor and their earnings until they reached adulthood” (11). The “compulsive nature of children’s household labor” was made “culturally invisible” (*ibid.*) through bonds of “love” in the family. Framed in benevolent terms, white guardianship was presented as a *civilizing* influence on the ward who would emerge from “temporary” bondage, at the age of twenty-one years, as a “civilized, christianized [sic], and educated being” – reformed into a “free laborer” (134). Through racialized conceptions of labor and the family, the natal alienation of Native American children was sanctioned as an “antislavery measure that advanced the emancipatory principles of the Thirteenth Amendment” (5).

The “antislavery cause” effectively flipped the language of protection to construct “slavery” as a danger to *white* citizens and supplied the cynical rationale for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which remained in effect until 1943, because Chinese workers were constructed as “unfree” (Smith 2013, 3). Discriminatory intent was denied because “Asians” fell outside of the racial binary that governed civil rights legislation in the United States.<sup>179</sup> The implicit recognition of racialized personhood as unprotected and alienable, despite the formal abolition of slavery and involuntary servitude in 1865, “except as a punishment for crime,” facilitated the exclusion of Chinese persons from naturalization and entry to the United States.<sup>180</sup> This naturalized unfree labor as a function of racialized status.

Judge Lowell’s classification of Armenians as “white” provided the prism through which popular and political responses were negotiated when reports of anti-Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire reached the American public. President Woodrow Wilson, a Southern Democrat, proclaimed in November 1918 that four million “starving Armenians and Syrians” had become “homeless sufferers” in “Western Asia,” “the vast majority of them [...] helpless women and children, including 400,000 orphans.”<sup>181</sup> He called on the American public to help “reestablish

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<sup>179</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1866 declared that “all persons born in the United States [...] excluding Indians not taxed” possessed the same right to “the security of person and property, as is enjoyed by white citizens.” See Thirty-Ninth Congress, “An Act to protect all Persons in the United States in their Civil Rights, and furnish the Means of their Vindication,” Session I, Chapter XXXI, April 9, 1866.

<sup>180</sup> See Section 1, Amendment XIII, *The Constitution of the United States*, ratified December 6, 1865.

<sup>181</sup> See “The American Committee for Relief in the Near East: Its History, Its Work and the Need for Support as Outlined by President Wilson and Others,” National Campaign Committee of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East, New York City, 1918.

these ancient and sorely oppressed people in their former homes on a self-supporting basis.”<sup>182</sup> A number of high-ranking American diplomats, industrialists, and philanthropists, including Henry Morgenthau,<sup>183</sup> established the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. This committee was incorporated by an Act of the United States Congress in August 1919 as “Near East Relief.” Chartered as a body corporate of the District of Columbia, its purpose was to “provide relief and to assist in the repatriation, rehabilitation, and reestablishment of suffering and dependent people of the Near East and adjacent areas.”<sup>184</sup> It was the first public development agency created by the United States to operate abroad.

Utilizing the mass appeal of the motion picture, the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief formed a National Motion Picture Committee in order to draw attention to the massacres in the Near East and raise \$30 million U.S. dollars for the relief effort. At first, Morgenthau hoped to turn his own memoir, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (1918), into a screen play. Wilson, however, questioned if depicting “so many horrors” on screen would have a “stimulating” effect (Ambrosius 2017, 160). Instead, the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief commissioned William Selig, a Hollywood entertainer who built his career on

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Henry Morgenthau served at the U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1913 to 1916. His testimony offered an official eye-witness account that was considered beyond doubt. See Henry Morgenthau, Sr. *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1918. An earlier report by James Bryce, former British Ambassador to the United States, also made a strong impact on public opinion in the United States. See Vicount Bryce. *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16*. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916.

<sup>184</sup> See Sixty-sixth Congress, Session I. Chapter 32. Section 2, “An Act to Incorporate Near East Relief,” Public No. 25, District of Columbia, August 6, 1919.

travelling minstrel shows and exotic animal zoos, to adapt a memoir by Arshaluys Mardigian, an Armenian survivor from the Ottoman province of Dersim. The campaign book of the film emphasized that “no apology need to be made for using the motion picture screen, the modern medium of publicity, to convince and to crystallize the sympathies of the American people into the giving of prompt and ample aid.”<sup>185</sup> In 1918, Selig hired Oscar Apfel, a well-known director, to shoot *Auction of Soul*, an eight-reel silent film, which would feature the survivor in the role as “herself,” cast to reenact the traumatic events for the American screen. It premiered in New York City in January 1919.

Mardigian arrived in the United States as an orphan in 1917. She was taken in by an Armenian family in New York City that helped her search for her brother. After she was interviewed by the *Sun* and the *Tribute*, two American newspapers in wide circulation, she was contacted by Henry L. Gates, a screenwriter, who expressed interest in her story. Mardigian did not speak English but shared her testimony in Armenian, orally translated into English for Gates by an uncredited interpreter. While positioning himself as Mardigian’s editor, Gates proceeded to write her account, under her name, which he decided to change to “Aurora Mardiganian.” He took creative license to embellish the events she described, which, in effect, became not Arshaluys Mardigian’s story, but that of “Aurora Mardiganian,” Gates’ ventriloquy, a story of

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<sup>185</sup> See William Selig Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 27.

survival framed by Orientalist tropes and mediated by several layers of translation.<sup>186</sup> Gates' wife, the novelist Eleanor Brown Gates, petitioned the Surrogates' Court of the County of New York to assume legal guardianship over Mardigian, then still a minor.<sup>187</sup> When Gates was approached to transform *Ravished Armenia* into a screenplay, the pair did not hesitate. As Mardigian's guardians, Brown was entitled to her earnings. Without her consent, Mardigian was moved to California to film *Auction of Souls*. She was asked "to copy a copy of herself" in order to create the illusion of "a likeness, a perfectly descriptive machine that offered all the signs of the real" (Avagyan 2012, 12).

On set, Mardigian was surrounded by white American actors, costumed as Armenians and Turks. None of them spoke Armenian.<sup>188</sup> Without translation, she was told what to do on the spot, without ever seeing the script, which aggravated the traumatic impact of the reenactments. The film's campaign book boasted that "two hundred Armenian children" had been "loaned [sic] by their parents in California," and "used in the scenes that re-enact the massacres." This was to convey a sense of "realism," but suggested that Armenian children were akin to property. Without regard for their mental or physical well-being, they could be temporarily transferred. A

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<sup>186</sup> See Henry L. Gates, ed. *Ravished Armenia, The Story of the Christian Girl Who Lived Through the Great Massacres*. New York: Kingfield Press, Inc., 1918. See also Anthony Slide, ed. *Ravished Armenia and the Story of Aurora Mardiganian*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.

<sup>187</sup> See James Bone, "Auction of Souls," in *The Curse of Beauty: The Scandalous & Tragic Life of Audrey Munson, America's First Supermodel*. New York: Regan Arts, 2016, 235-242.

<sup>188</sup> I draw on Anthony Slide's interview with Aurora Mardiganian on December 17, 1988, conducted in her apartment in Van Nuys in Los Angeles, CA. The transcript is deposited in the Anthony Slide Collection at Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles. See Folder 12, "Auction of Souls – Miscellaneous."

parallel mention of a “caravan of 42 camels and 1,500 sheep” completed the symbolic dehumanization of the Armenian cast.

Asked to jump from roof to roof on set, as if escaping from a Turkish harem, Mardigian fell twenty feet and fractured her ankle. At the film’s premier, her left foot was still in a cast. Yet, she was expected to tour and promote *Auction of Souls* at screenings throughout the United States and abroad. After she suffered a nervous breakdown and refused to make any more public appearances, she was confined to a convent school by her guardians. In the meantime, seven “Aurora impersonators” were hired to travel the country and promote the film in her stead (Slide 2014). Mardigian eventually threatened to commit suicide in order to be released from the convent, where she was being held against her will. Although her guardians withheld her pay, she was soon “reconciled” with them in court. Her relationship to her editor and his wife was injurious, both figuratively and literally. They patronized and erased Arshaluys, on behalf of the renamed American Committee for Relief in the Near East, by turning her into “little Aurora,” to rouse humanitarian feeling toward Armenians, as “helpless victims,” and loosen the purse strings of the American public. All the while, they were exploiting and disposing of Mardigian as their ward. To the American audience, it did not matter much who represented the *idea* of Aurora, a “little persecuted waif.”<sup>189</sup> Although Mardigian’s participation in the production of *Auction*

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<sup>189</sup> See “Like a Story in the Fairy Books,” *The Washington Times*, January 5, 1919, William Selig Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 22.

*of Souls* was coerced, she remembered it as a sacrifice she willingly made to save the Armenian people.<sup>190</sup>

### **Adopting Armenia on Screen**

When the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures passed and approved *Auction of Souls* for general audiences in 1919, it noted that the propagandistic value of the film lay in its “appeal to every drop of red blood in America’s manhood and womanhood.”<sup>191</sup> Board members argued that “restoring Armenia” was a “crusade in which the American people should ardently desire to take part.” This firmly embedded relief work in a continuum of missionary zeal and Christian conquest. It also identified the “American people” with the “blood” of white men and women whose duty it was to defend the honor of “Christian girls” against the sexual aggressions of racialized men. Between 1919 and 1922, *Auction of Souls* was screened over a thousand times. Elevated to the status of patriotic duty, cities engaged in fundraising contests and mobilized their residents to see *Auction of Souls* at movie theatres across the United States.<sup>192</sup> It was also promoted through an “Oriental song and foxtrot,” *Armenian Maid* (1919) by Wilbur Weeks, which delivered the “message of an Armenian maid” in

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<sup>190</sup> During a video-recorded interview, Arshaluys Mardigian claimed that General Andranik, a fabled Armenian army general, had sent her to the United States as an “ambadress” to raise awareness about the Armenian genocide. The interview is undated but appears to be from the 1980s. It is deposited in the Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation.

<sup>191</sup> See William Selig Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 26 and Folder 27.

<sup>192</sup> According to an unpublished study by Anthony Slide, the last recorded screening of “Auction of Souls” in the United States was in Utah in April 1922. See Anthony Slide. “Ravished Armenia/Auction of Souls: A Record of U.S. and U.K. Screenings,” April 2016, unpublished. The study was commissioned by the Armenian Film Foundation. I thank Anthony Slide for sharing his findings with me.

another popular form, asking the “Sweethearts of other lands” to “make just a little room in your hearts for me” (Slide 2014, 20).

The American public poured out in support of a screenplay that owed its mass appeal to depictions of violence that were advertised as “vivid, authentic portrayal of the greatest tragedy the world has ever witnessed.”<sup>193</sup> Audiences were promised “real harems,” “reconstructed with faithful historic attention to detail,” showing, for the first time, an “authentic reproduction of the modern slave markets.”<sup>194</sup> The abduction of Christian women into Eastern harems was a quintessential trope in the Western imagination long before the genocidal campaigns of the Ottoman government made it into the headlines and onto the movie screens of Wilsonian America. The attraction of the harem scene that gave *Auction of Souls* its title rested on a desire to “see and know and understand” sexual excess in the Orient (Said 1978).<sup>195</sup> Film posters and promotional materials depicted Aurora as a petite white figure in the “clutches” of a monstrous-looking “Turk” – “swarthy” and seemingly twice her size. Moral outrage

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<sup>193</sup> See William Selig Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 29.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, Folder 27.

<sup>195</sup> A sheer bottomless fascination fueled the careers of countless European writers, some of whom attempted to leverage their status as white women to cross the harem’s fabled threshold (Melman 1992). Armen Ohanian, for example, an Armenian dancer and writer from Azerbaijan, published *La Danseuse de Shamahka* (1918), a French-language memoir that was endorsed by prominent figures such as Anatole France, a French novelist. She drew on the Orientalist tradition of harem writing while self-consciously emphasizing her privileged position as narrator that could “mediate” between East and West by virtue of her status as a Christian Armenian. Ohanian went on to become an active member of the Mexican Communist Party. She later wrote a Spanish-language non-fiction guide book on Soviet Armenia. See Armen Ohanian. *The Dancer of Shamahka*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1922; Armen Ohanian. *Armenia Feliz* [Happy Armenia]. Mexico, D. F.: Editorial “Cimientos,” 1946.



mixed with eugenic anxieties about racial and sexual transgression. Orientalist phantasies and notions of Christian martyrdom framed the Armenian genocide through the lens of racial science and played on fears of miscegenation (Pascoe 2010).

This often ignored current within the body of Western responses to the Armenian genocide explains why European and North American relief workers located their “efforts on behalf of Armenians within a tradition of nineteenth-century movements for emancipation” (Watenpaugh 2010, 1325). Imagining “themselves as inheritors of the abolitionist tradition” (ibid.), they projected the eugenic terms of population control and race relations in the United States onto a vastly different cultural and historical context. By classifying Ottoman Armenians and Greeks as “white Christians,” and racializing their abusers and executioners as “savage Turks,” the genocide unfolding in West Asia became a screen for projections of white victim phantasies rooted in Reconstruction era revisionism. Audiences that derived whiteness as property from ongoing histories of conquest, settler colonialism, slavery, forced assimilation, genocide, and segregation imagined themselves absolved by performing a symbolic reversal in which the racialized other was “enslaving” a white proxy-self.

The identification of white settlers with Ottoman Armenians required and reinforced their construction as alien elements in West Asia. Both abolition and racial science, however, were inadequate lenses through which to view the natal alienation of a people made strangers in their own homeland. Rather than a process of enslavement comparable to the transatlantic slave trade or chattel slavery in North America, it was a kind of forced removal that collapsed policies of extermination and

assimilation in order to found a new nation-state, the Republic of Turkey. Since Armenians were being constructed as “white settlers,” however, the genocide was interpreted as the inevitable outcome of an “unnatural” subjugation of a “civilized” nation by an “inferior” race. According to the gendered script of white supremacy in the United States, any sexual threats to white femininity called on white men to “protect” and reinforce the divide between white citizenship and Black subjection.

To extend this logic to a foreign region such as the Near East, *Auction of Souls* offered the mediation of white character to signal how racial fault lines were to be drawn and interpreted. An English teacher, Ms. Graham, played by Anna Q. Nilsson, was elevated to a lead role in the film. She was “blonde, in contrast to her scholars,” Armenian girls at an orphanage school.<sup>196</sup> One day, she found the English flag on the floor of an empty classroom. She realized that her charges had been abducted, “picks it up & rises to her feet – holds it up & calls on Heaven for vengeance.” Allied powers had failed to protect the Christians of the Ottoman Empire, and civilians such as Ms. Graham were now called upon to intervene. Through the character of Ms. Graham, the film identified civilian relief work with white femininity. It empowered white women as agents on the international scene, while subordinating Armenians in a position of dependency as her children.

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<sup>196</sup> For the final script, see Anthony Slide, ed. *Ravished Armenia and the Story of Aurora Mardiganian*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014, 203-269. Citations that follow are from the film scripts that are deposited in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles. See William Selig Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Folders 16, 18, 19, and 20.

Fulfilling her “desire” to become a participant, and *understand* the East, Ms. Graham vows to accompany Aurora and her family on the death march. As the massacres unfold, the family gives her “a shawl to disguise herself.” After the death of Aurora’s mother, Ms. Graham “comforts” Aurora and assumes her position. To the point of becoming the main protagonist, Ms. Graham is structurally identified with Aurora, both as her friend and her guardian. This proximity secured Aurora’s “bond” to whiteness upon which the sympathy of the audience depended. It also served to abate racial anxieties about the status of Armenians and offered a hopeful prognosis of their ready “amalgamation” with Europeans.

*Auction of Souls* also featured a crucifixion scene in which the fully naked bodies of eight young women with flowing black hair were displayed on a row of large wooden crosses mounted in the desert, filmed at the Santa Monica beach in Los Angeles (Erish 2016, 209). On the screen, the radiant-white bodies represented “Armenia” as an innocent virgin that had been “martyred” because Western publics failed to intervene on her behalf. The bodies of Armenian women, played by white extras, were thereby identified as the symbolic ground of a staged confrontation between the West, Christianity, and whiteness with the racialized East and the “barbarism” of Islam.

Both Ms. Graham and Aurora are presented as equally vulnerable to the looming threat of rape and coercion. When Aurora is abducted into a “harem,” Ms. Graham follows her. It mattered little that European status would have afforded immunities to foreigners that Armenians did not possess in the Ottoman Empire. When

“Miss Graham is put up” on the auction block, an Orientalist phantasy is fulfilled when “lively bidding” ensues – “she being a blonde.” Such and similar cues construct the desirability of white women as a universal fact. They also affirmed the trope that white people were vulnerable to slavery. The racial and sexual suspense of the harem scene is resolved when both Aurora and Ms. Graham are “bought” by Andranik, a young Armenian man played by Irving Cummings, who appears out of nowhere and outbids all other contenders in disguise. Transforming an elderly shepherd, mentioned in the memoir, into a young and “well-to-do herder,” he was concocted as an altogether fictitious love interest for Aurora.<sup>197</sup> Although he saved both Ms. Graham and Aurora, the ending established his place in the “battlefields” of faraway lands.

The last scene of the film showed Aurora “gazing off at the Statue of Liberty,” aboard a vessel taking her to safety on American soil.<sup>198</sup> Because Andranik’s masculinity was casting doubt on Aurora’s status as an orphaned “maid,” and by extension, Armenia’s claim to Western protection, there was no room for him aboard the vessel. Represented by the Statue of Liberty, the “old” Europe was symbolically replaced by the United States as the only power that “stood” to secure Aurora’s freedom. This positioned the “American people” at the helm of a new international order. When the film ends, Aurora’s character remained suspended at sea. The

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<sup>197</sup> See William Selig Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 20.

<sup>198</sup> See William Selig Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 16, “Armenia Crucified. Picture No. 869.”

audience was therefore spared the “burden” of responsibility it was asked to assume for her survival.

An article in *The Washington Times* juxtaposed her previous condition – crouching on the floor of a cattle car, holding a coarse chunk of bread under the watchful eyes of male guards in vaguely “Oriental” uniforms – to her “triumphal trip” to California where she was presumably “greeted like a princess.”<sup>199</sup> It framed her *de facto* abduction by her *de jure* guardians as a story of racial redemption.

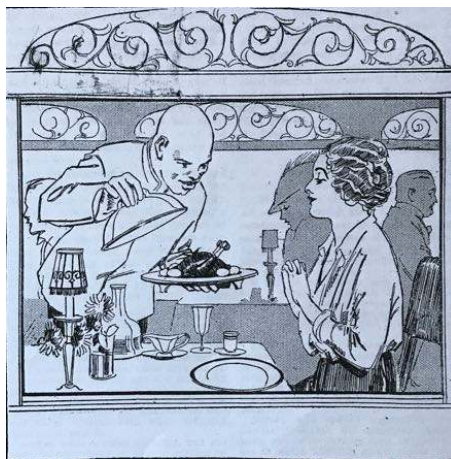


Figure 2. “Like A Story in the Fairy Books,”  
*The Washington Times*, January 5, 1919.

An accompanying sketch allegorized her “new” condition of aspirational whiteness. The gaze of her *transformed* self, elevated to the “status of being white,” albeit temporarily suspended, was affixed on a roast chicken, apparently the epitome of American greatness. The “Christian Girl Refugee” does not acknowledge the Black servant that was waiting on her. Framed by ornament and décor, the scene was set in

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<sup>199</sup> See “Like A Story in the Fairy Books,” *The Washington Times*, January 5, 1919, William Selig Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 22.

the dining car of a train, seen through the window from the outside. In this image, the arch of Aurora's story of immigration to the United States, the forward propulsion of a train moving West, the motion picture, and the subordination of African Americans in the United States merged into an allegory for civilization, emancipation, and *progress* itself.

However, it soon turned out that the status of orphaned wards was the only role available to Armenians in American popular culture. Representations of Armenian victimhood in Western media were mirrored by the relative powerlessness of Armenian delegates at the Paris peace talks that were to decide over the political future of Armenians in West Asia. Nation-wide campaigns by charitable organizations acting on behalf of Armenians were successful in raising donations and creating the public sentiment that they “‘knew’ the Oriental races” (Kearney 1976, 439). Any “presumed affinity,” however, quickly devolved into “racial antipathy,” in particular towards Armenians – “except when undergoing massacre.”<sup>200</sup> The status of being white was seemingly granted upon the condition that Ottoman Armenians remain blank figures available for the imaginary identifications and wish fulfillment of white audiences. Though the nine reels of *Auction of Souls* are widely presumed lost, the nitrite base of the film, even if it still existed in storage, would have long decomposed and evaporated into a highly combustible gas. Inadvertently, the unstable materiality of the medium itself corrected the ethical failure of the production. Yet, justice was not done. Aurora

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<sup>200</sup> See Helen McCready Kearney, “American Images of the Middle East, 1824-1924: A Century of Antipathy,” Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Rochester, 1976.

lived out the remainder of her life in California. At the age of ninety-three years, in 1994, she died alone and forgotten. The “real truth” of Arshaluys Mardigian’s life had not been told.<sup>201</sup> Her remains were left unclaimed. Cremated, she was buried in an unmarked grave site in Los Angeles (Slide 2014, 28).

### **American Tutelage**

By 1918, Armenian and Greek citizens of the Ottoman Empire found themselves effectively denaturalized and faced renewed threats of persecution. In the aftermath of expulsion, few relied on protection by a defeated government least interested in enforcing Armenian or Greek restitution claims. Through the eyewitness accounts of foreign diplomats and Christian missionaries, Western audiences became increasingly aware of the situation of displaced persons battling hunger and disease in make-shift refugee camps in the Syrian desert. Doing what they could, Armenian advocates appealed to Allied powers conferring at Paris to respond to their demands for political independence. Outside of the circuits of Armenian diaspora, their voices were effectively drowned out. Through a “peculiar mix of sexual stimulation with persecution and martyrdom,” new visual technologies and daily reporting generated new “witnessing publics” around representations of Armenian dependency (Torchin 2006, 217).

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<sup>201</sup> These are the final words of an interview that Anthony Slide conducted with Aurora Mardigian in her Van Nuys apartment in Los Angeles, CA on December 17, 1988. The transcript is deposited in the Anthony Slide Collection at Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles. See Folder 12, “Auction of Souls – Miscellaneous.”

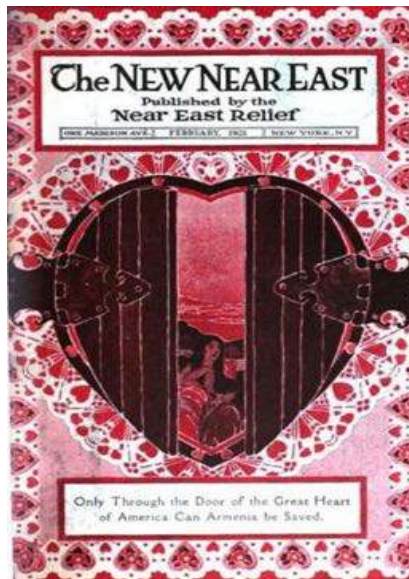


Figure 3. Cover image, *The New Near East*, Near East Relief, New York, February 1923.

A 1923 cover of *The New Near East*, the journal of Near East Relief, allegorized the racial adoption of Armenians by the United States as a matter of the “heart.” Depicting heart-shaped wooden shutters on heavy metal locks, cracked open to allow a glimpse of a female figure, crouching on the ground and surrounded by two children, the issue was subtitled “Only Through the Door of the Great Heart of America Can Armenia be Saved.” The grotesque juxtaposition of heart symbols lining the margins of the cover, reminiscent of a hand-made valentine’s card, the medieval looking wooden shutters, representing immigration restrictions in the United States, and the sight of the woman, distraught under a blood-red sky, suggested that Armenians were worthy of the bloodline of American whiteness, that they were deserving of America’s “love,” and that they should be “saved” through resettlement under American protection. Through the wooden shutters, the sight of the Armenian woman is framed as if through a keyhole, generating the impression that the viewer is



beholding a forbidden scene. This motif conjures an Orientalist aura of seclusion and sensuality. It sexualized the subject of genocide by offering intimate access to Armenian women and children. Furthermore, the title of the journal itself, “The New Near East,” spelled out the desire to reconfigure the Near East in the American image.

Arguably in response to Soviet policies that promised national self-determination,<sup>202</sup> U. S. president Woodrow Wilson positioned the United States as a neutral arbiter that was sympathetic to the political aspirations of nationalist movements across the Middle East. In his address to U. S. Congress on January 8, 1918, Wilson spelled out his liberal agenda for the “new world order.”<sup>203</sup> He presented “fourteen points” that centered on the principle of national self-determination and transparency as guideposts for American foreign policy. This display of idealism inspired various groups to form national delegations,<sup>204</sup> including one that represented the Republic of Armenia, headed by Avetis Aharonian, and another Armenian delegation that represented Ottoman Armenians, headed by Boghos Nubar, founder of the Armenian General Benevolent Union in Egypt. Although the United States formally recognized the Republic of Armenia on April 23, 1920 (Ambrosius 2017,

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<sup>202</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, “О праве наций на самоопределение [About the Right of the Nation to Self-Determination],” *Просвещение* [Enlightenment], No. 4, 5, 6, 1914.

<sup>203</sup> “President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points,” *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, URL: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp) (accessed in July 2018).

<sup>204</sup> Not all desiring parties reached Paris. In Egypt, a nationalist party known as *Wafd* (Arab. “delegation”) requested to attend the peace talks but was denied by the British administration of colonial Egypt. This interference sparked the Egyptian Revolution of 1919 and forced limited concessions that resulted in the so-called “Liberal Era” (1923-1952) in Egypt.

187), neither delegation was seated during the post-war negotiations at Versailles (Ambrosius 2017, 169).

Deploying the language of property, Wilson argued that existing colonial claims should be “adjusted” in line with “the interests of the populations concerned.” The “title” of a government to its colonial possession was to be given “equal weight” in determining whose “equitable claims” to sovereignty were to be prioritized.<sup>205</sup> With respect to the Ottoman Empire, he suggested its “Turkish portion” was entitled to “a secure sovereignty” while asserting the “other nationalities [...] now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolute unmolested opportunity for autonomous development.”<sup>206</sup>

In a region marked by competing and seemingly contradictory allegiances, this distinction between sovereignty and autonomy on the basis of nationality not only privileged the “nation” as the only bearer of rights but also suggested that “sovereignty,” understood as the right to exclude others, was conditional upon an “international” assessment of national “development.” However, Wilson did not specify how “national” autonomy *without* sovereignty – “an absolute unmolested opportunity for autonomous development” – was to be “secured” within the

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<sup>205</sup> Point V, “President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points,” *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, URL: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp) (accessed on July 29, 2018).

<sup>206</sup> Point XII, *ibid.* During the international occupation of Constantinople, “Societies for the Defense of Rights” were formed across Anatolia to demand territorial integrity and national independence for the Turkish-identified population of the former Ottoman Empire. After the formation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, Allied powers returned to the negotiation table to revisit the terms of peace with Mustafâ Kemâl Paşa, first President of the Republic of Turkey.

framework of a “Turkish” nation-state, nor who should decide which groups were to be defined as “nationalities.” Ethnographers, geographers, and anthropologists were called upon as experts to advise on the validity of competing territorial claims.<sup>207</sup>

In his last point, Wilson urged the creation of a “general association of nations” to afford “mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small nations alike.” This proposition for a “general association of nations” found its way into the Versailles Treaty of June 1919 as the Covenant of the League of Nations. In twenty-six article, this document envisioned a transformation of the colonial system into a “mandate” system under international supervision. Article twenty-two expanded on Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” speech and offered a justification for “mandatory” power without clarifying its meaning. It offered the “mandate” of a “Mandatory” (the state exercising the mandate) as the “best method” to ensure the “well-being and development of such peoples” that have “ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them.” Without providing any further detail, it specified the “character” of a mandate depended on “the stage of the development of the people” as well as “the geographical situation of the territory, [and] its economic conditions.”<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Wilson turned to social science to supply “objective” criteria for rational government in the international arena. He relied on memoranda prepared by a group of scholars called “The Inquiry,” later named the Division of Territorial and Economic Intelligence of the American delegation at Versailles (Gelfand 1963; Hovannisian 1969).

<sup>208</sup> In order to uphold the illusion of objectivity and consent, the American section of the international commission on mandates in Turkey sent a civilian fact finding mission to gauge public opinion, receive petitions and delegations, and survey popular desires for independence. The so-called King-Crane Commission was composed of only two members – Henry Churchill King, president of Oberlin College in Ohio, and Charles R. Crane, a Chicago-based

The notion of “stages of development” served to differentiate between “advanced nations,” “communities” whose “existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized,” and “peoples” who were “not yet able to stand by themselves.” The latter two categories were declared subject to the “tutelage” of a “Mandatory” that should hold the deferred sovereignty of its subject population in a “sacred trust of civilisation [...] until such time as they are able to stand alone.” This temporal formulation enshrined “the nation” as the source of sovereignty but endowed the League of Nations with the power to withhold or bestow independent status. As a “trustor,” the League was envisioned as an authority that could temporarily transfer the sovereignty of others to a “trustee” or guardian who would exercise it to the presumed benefit of a ward. This meta-sovereignty would be derived from the “sanctity” of civilization itself.

The Convent acknowledged that “certain communities” *may* be eligible for independent status but still required those “provisionally recognized [...] as independent nations” to “subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory.” As a concession, “the wishes of these communities” were to be considered in the “selection” of the Mandatory. This arrangement was supposed to differ from previous forms of colonialism. The mandate system would be founded on the Covenant as a kind of international constitution that would guarantee “securities

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businessman. See Henry Churchill King and Charles R. Crane, “King-Crane Report on the Near East,” *Editor & Publisher*, Vol. 55, No. 27, December 2, 1922.

for the performance of this trust.” Therefore, “tutelage” would be exercised with the *consent* of the governed and “on behalf of the League.”

The language of “tutelage” positioned former subject populations as children, and Western nations as their guardians. The rhetoric of a “trust” relied on a logic of property that was closely linked to race in the American imaginary. A mandatory was to be “entrusted” with the “asset” of sovereignty to the presumed benefit of a third party, or “trustee.” This juxtaposition intertwined notions of family and property to legitimize coercion as beneficiary and temporary. If a person was determined to be a ward, a court of law may appoint a guardian to make decisions on the ward’s behalf, ideally for his or her own good. If sovereignty was an “asset” that could only be utilized well by “advanced nations,” holding it in “sacred trust” until such time as its beneficiaries were deemed qualified to dispose of it properly would be a measure of safeguarding. By making sovereignty conditional on presumed development, American foreign policy in the Near East differentiated between nationalities that were deemed “fit” for self-government, and “other peoples” that were not. Geography and race determined which “communities” were entitled to “claim” their sovereignty at a later time, and those who were considered *too far* removed “from the centers of civilisation” to achieve the mandated “stage of development” anytime in the foreseeable future. It was specified that those “other peoples” were the “indigenous population” (sic) of Central Africa, South-West Africa, and “certain of the South Pacific Islands,” thus suggesting that “civilization” emanated from Europe and North

America. The geographic proximity of West Asia to these “centers,” as indicated by the designation “Near East,” translated into a claim to racial affinity.

By 1919, Ottoman Armenians had ceased to be under the sovereignty of the Ottoman state as a de facto stateless population. They found themselves “orphaned” and made alien in their “Fatherland.” However, they were recognized by some international actors as a community that could potentially “exist” as an “independent nation.” As an orphan-nation, they could be transformed under the “tutelage” of a Mandatory that might adopt, protect, and nurture its charge until the “little waif,” not unlike Aurora, could “stand alone.” After Armenians were thus positioned as wards, the United States was offered the Armenian mandate.

### **Armenian-American Advocacy**

The paternalism of the newly founded League of Nation did not go unnoted by Armenian-American advocates for full independence. Vahe Cardashian, a Yale-educated lawyer based in New York, left his position as a secretary at the Ottoman Embassy in Washington, D.C. to found the Armenian Press Bureau in 1918. Its goal was to “educate American public opinion” (Habeshian 2014, 122). Shortly after, in 1919, the Armenian National Union of America in New York published a 40-page pamphlet, titled “The Case of Armenia.” Initialed “V. C.,” its author, likely Cardashian, assembled political, geographic, military, ethnographic, historical, and moral arguments for the creation of an independent Armenian state in Anatolia. Demanding the “unconditional liberation” and “restoration” of “Turkish-Armenia,” he argued its territorial boundaries were “as well defined and fixed as those of

England.”<sup>209</sup> Considering the contentious nature of the borders of England within the United Kingdom, this comparison was perhaps unintentionally apt. It also conveyed that subjecting Armenians to the new mandate system denied their demonstrated affinity with “advanced nations.”

A drawing, confidently titled “Armenia, as it will reappear on the map,” depicted a “Greater Armenia” encompassing Cilicia and stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Taurus Mountains. The pamphlet’s author conceded Armenia was “to-day a No-Mans-Land” and argued the “Turks and Kurds have suffered even more than the Armenians” at the hands of their ruthless leaders who had not only destroyed “possibly one-half of the Armenians of Turkish Armenia,” but also “75% of their own people in Armenia” (ACIA 1919, 13). By downplaying the loss of Armenian lives, and inflating the numbers of non-Armenians that perished during World War I, he implied that the land was available for resettlement. The Armenian National Union of America envisioned a majority of “over 3,000,000” Armenians among a population of 4,000,000 to 4,500,000 in an area of 133,289 square miles. To show that “Armenians have physical sufficiency to maintain an independent State of Armenia” (15), it was asserted a demographic majority could be achieved through the “necessary union of Turkish and Russian Armenians” (13).<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> See “The Case of Armenia,” The Armenian National Union of America, New York, 1919.

<sup>210</sup> This anticipated the goals of the great repatriation drive of the 1940s. Two decades after the arrival of Near East Relief in the Caucasus, radio stations across the Middle East advertised Soviet Armenia as “the fulfillment of the Armenian national project” (Nalbantian 2013, 826). The broadcast announced a “Soviet-engineered repatriation drive” to address all Armenians “as part of a larger Armenian diaspora” and urged them to “relocate” to Soviet Armenia (825). Tsoli Nalbantian argues that this repatriation campaign enlisted third countries in “the growth

Self-consciously addressing the “world court” at Paris as an advocate for the Armenian cause, Cardashian closed his case by questioning if the “scattered remnants of the heterogeneous Turkish race in Turkey” (ACIA 1919, 14) *were* a nation. He mobilized the logic of development, recently elevated to international law, to emphasize that Armenians, in contrast, “possess moral fitness for self-rule” and would not accept “some makeshift arrangement” (15). “The Case of Armenia” made maximum demands to stake out solid ground for national independence on the turf of Western civilization. At the cost of inflated numbers, Cardashian sought to preempt the objections he anticipated.

As if appending evidence to a court or medical file, Vahe Cardashian compiled statements by various “Armenophile” Orientalists attesting to the “Indo-European stock, (Alpine Aryan like the Swiss, North Italian and most Greeks)” of Armenians (47). Lengthy expositions on what experts “know” about Armenians were followed by population statistics on the composition of “Turkish Armenia” and “Caucasian Armenia” in 1914 (52). Without citation, the observations of Sir Edwin Pears, a British

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of the Soviet Union” (826). The newly independent Republic of Lebanon, for example, “assisted in the loss of thousands of its citizens” (826). The exclusion of Armenians as “not Lebanese” allowed the new state to consolidate its sovereignty and nationalize its population. Paradoxically, this entailed the denaturalization and physical transfer of its own citizens to a foreign state. While participation in the repatriation drive was voluntary, the process was irreversible. Between 1946-48, at least one hundred thousand Armenians arrived in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia by land and sea from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, France, China, and the United States (see Ghanalanyan 2013). For many of these repatriates the age-old dream of Armenian sovereignty turned into a nightmare of disenfranchisement and alienation. Once in Soviet Armenia, they were treated as “foreigners” and struggled with inter-generational stigma. For oral history on the “Great Repatriation,” see the Museum of Repatriation, URL: <http://www.hayrenadardz.org/en/> (last accessed on August 15, 2018).



lawyer in Constantinople, were excerpted to instruct the reader that Armenians were “physically a fine race” (ACIA 1919, 48). Pears added,

The men are usually tall, well built and powerful. The women have a healthy look about them which suggests good motherhood. They are an ancient people of the same Indo-European race as ourselves, and speak an allied language. [...] Though subject to persecution for centuries under Moslem rule (because of their Christian faith, their superior intelligence, their industry and thrift), they have always managed to have their race respected.<sup>211</sup>

Other passages fused sentences from various authorities in their fields, none of them ethnographers, to reassure American observers that Armenians “represented the West in the East and fought its first battles” (against “ever surging hordes of barbarians from the wilds of Asia”) (48). By drawing on philology, history, and archaeology, Cardashian realized the weight of “impartial testimony” but did not catch on to the rise of anthropology as the authoritative science of race. Yet, he well understood how to appeal to its underlying eugenic logic.

Cardashian insisted it was only due to “artificial conditions” that the “Turk (sic), Greek and Armenian populations” of West Asia “now overlap [...] and are mixed with each other” (37). For this reason, he argued, Armenians were “resolved not to have any further direct or indirect political connection with the Turk” (37). To

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<sup>211</sup> Cardashian omitted the first sentence of Sir Edwin Pears’ Chapter XII on “The Armenians”: “In some respects the Armenians are the most interesting people in Asia Minor” (270). It is possible that he sought to distance Armenians from any association with Asia Minor. Also left out was a comparison with “the Jews,” potentially to emphasize that Armenians remain “grounded” in land and soil. Pears reproduced an anti-Semitic trope that also fueled Zionist romanticism about Jewish agrarian settlement in Palestine. See Sir Edwin Pears. *Turkey and its People*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1911, 270.

undermine plans of a “blanket mandate for Constantinople, Anatolia and Armenia” (ACIA 1919, 41), he insisted that “the Turk” was “unfit” to “rule the subject races, or even himself” (37). In contrast, he claimed Armenians were a “nation gifted with the necessary attributes that make for nationhood” (ibid.). Since any “successful” political entity could “as a general principle” only “operate [...] on racial or national foundations,” the “instinctive aspirations for nationality” presumably shared by all Armenians qualified them for “separate statehood” (ibid.). He recommended “repatriation, immigration and emigration” – partition, resettlement, and population exchange – as a mandatory “cure” against “unnatural” intimacies. After all, so Cardashian, “the Turk” had not “contributed one jot to the make-up of our [Armenian] civilization” (36). Despite centuries of proximity, the “blood” and “civilization” of Armenians were “known” to have remained untainted. As a “protective barrier” against “alien races” (41), he suggested, a separate state for Armenians was therefore in the interest of Europeans.

The conflation of geography and race, of Asia with “Asiatic,” made Armenian claims to indigeneity in West Asia increasingly impossible if Armenians were to be categorized as “white.” However, whiteness functioned as an implicit precondition for political independence under the new mandate system that seemed to promise the only viable path to Armenian statehood. Insisting that other peoples in the region were “alien” to Armenians, however, risked portraying Armenians themselves as “aliens.” Seen through the lens of population control, Armenians were a “minority” that could only pass as “white” if portrayed as “settlers” in their West Asian homeland.

Though Cardashian made it clear that Armenians aspired “to become free and independent not only from Turkish association, but also from any other foreign domination” (ACIA 1919, 41), advocates for Armenian statehood inadvertently gave up claims to belonging and indigenous status when pursuing land claims through the principle of national self-determination on grounds of greater proximity to the “West” than to the “East,” increasingly defined as mutually exclusive terms. Discursive maneuvers to attain international recognition as an “independent nation” came to little avail while Armenian refugees were left in limbo without any “nationality” whatsoever.<sup>212</sup> Under the premise of presumed racial kinship with Europeans, the alienation and isolation of Armenians in West Asia ultimately only served to legitimize the prerogative of Western expansion.

### **Racial Reconnaissance**

Henry C. King, former President of Oberlin College, and Charles R. Crane, a Chicago-based businessman, were sent on a fact finding mission as delegates of the American section of the International Commission on Mandates in Turkey to survey

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<sup>212</sup> As a stateless population, Armenians from the former Ottoman Empire found themselves effectively denaturalized. Armenians became the constituent subjects of a new “refugee regime” (Watenpaugh 2014), preceded only by the earlier wave of “émigrés” from revolutionary Russia. After being stripped of their Ottoman citizenship, displaced persons could neither travel nor work and remained confined to refugee camps, mostly concentrated in French Mandate Lebanon and Syria. In order to relieve their “plight,” the League of Nations began issuing an international travel document to Armenians in May 1924 to serve as an official proof of identity for *de jure* stateless persons. Named after Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian polar explorer cum diplomat appointed first High Commissioner for Refugees on June 27, 1921, the “Nansen passport” was recognized by fifty-four states and enabled displaced persons to work and travel. Although Armenians had been granted refugee status by an Act of Congress (Watenpaugh 2014), their admission into the United States was severely restricted to a quota of just 124 persons per year by the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 (Craver 2009, 49).

conditions in the former Ottoman territories. After two months of travel in June and July of 1919, they affirmed the Allied position that “Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Arabia must be completely severed from the Turkish Empire” (King-Crane Report 1922, 10). They claimed this was due to the “historical misgovernment by the Turks of subject peoples” (ibid.). In the case of Armenia, they concluded that independence as demanded by Armenian leaders “would be no fair trial of a truly Armenian State.” Claiming that independence at this time would place Armenians in a “false and untenable position,” presumably not doing justice to a “truly Armenian State” (14), the report recommended an American mandate under the condition that Armenians “give up all revolutionary committees” (15). Adding that this would be a “peculiarly difficult mandate” requiring the “genuine desire of the Armenians” and the “cordial moral support of the Allies” (ibid.), King and Crane insisted America should be given *more* than one mandate in Turkey.

Conceding that a “scientific ethnological survey [...] under disinterested control” was still pending, and the literature may “under-estimate the number of Armenians in some areas,” the Commissioners calculated that even if “order will be restored so that all survivors can return” by 1920, only 8% of the population of “Larger Turkish Armenia” would consist of Armenians (15). King and Crane recommended the creation of a “definite area” in which Armenians could “gradually concentrate” under “complete assurance, that there they would never be put under the rule of the Turks.” At the same time, it was concluded that the Turkish population might gradually “withdraw” from said area. A “strong Mandatory Power” and “pretty long mandatory

term” (King-Crane Report 1922, 15) were deemed necessary until “the Armenian constituted an actual majority of the entire population, or at least until the Turks were fewer than the Armenians” (14). However, this mandate would have to be not only “long enough to make the people thoroughly ready for both self-government and self-protection, through an increasing use of Armenians in the government even from the beginning,” but they also cautioned there would be a “natural need of considerable time for the amalgamation and consolidation of the Armenian people, as against some tendency to split up into fragments” (ibid.). King and Crane thus questioned whether Armenians *were* a nation entitled to sovereignty in the sense of article twenty-two of the League of Nations Covenant. While affirming it was the “deliberate intention of the Peace Conference” to form a “separate Armenian State,” they cautioned that “separation” would involve “very difficult problems” (13).

As talk about an American mandate for Armenia was becoming more serious in 1919, U.S. Army General Harbord was sent on a “military mission” to survey “conditions” in the Near East.<sup>213</sup> While acknowledging the “strong sense of international duty” to secure the “safety of Christian lives and property” (Harbord 1920, 24), Harbord doubted that an Armenian majority was attainable “in a region about the size of New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio” (8). Even if “the last survivors of the massacres and deportations have returned to the soil” (7), he estimated “perhaps half a million refugee Armenians as available [...] to which would be added those, not

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<sup>213</sup> See James G. Harbord. *Conditions in the Near East: Report of the American Military Mission to Armenia*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920.

refugees, who might return from other lands” (Harbord 1920, 8). This estimation included orphans, whom Harbord called “pathetic little survivors,” and female refugees out of whom, so he was “informed,” every second was “infected with venereal disease” (7). As if coming to the defense of the “morality” of Armenians, he added “women of this race were free from such diseases before the deportation” (7). He implied that other “backward races” (18) in the region harbored immorality and disease. Weighing the “reasons for” an American mandate for Armenia, Harbord noted that “America would clean this hotbed of disease and filth as she has in Cuba and Panama” (26). Insinuating that such undesirable exposure might endanger public health in the United States, however, he considered this point also a “reason against” the mandate because “Americans would serve in a country of loathsome and dangerous diseases” (ibid.).

Overall, Harbord argued that “the capacity of the Armenian to govern himself is something to be tested under supervision” (18). He reasoned “the Armenian generally does not endear himself to those of other races with whom he comes in contact” and compared Armenians to “the Jew” with whom he believed Armenians shared a “strong and preeminent ability” (ibid.). Yet, he claimed it was likely that “the best elements of the Armenian race have perished” (ibid.). He doubted whether “wealthy and influential Armenians long domiciled in happier lands,” so he presumed, would want to “return to their somewhat primitive ancient home” (ibid.). Casting doubt on their racial stock, he argued that Armenians were “racially allied” with, though also “cordially hated” by, “the wild Aryan Kurd” (ibid.). To illustrate why an

Armenian mandate would be so difficult to “secure” for an American mandatory, he added that even “the American missionary, who in so many instances has risked his life for his Armenian charges, does not as a rule personally like the Armenian” (Harbord 1920, 18).

These passages suggested that “the Armenian” had been subjected to massacres as a “penalty” incurred for “racial superiority” that made “him” *stand out* among “backward races.” Despite a recognition of “many estimable qualities” such as “tenacity of race and religion,” Armenians were nonetheless positioned as *inferior* to the “advanced nations” represented by American missionaries. The report concluded, “whether they wished it or not,” the “peoples in question live in adjacent territory and [...] are neighbors” (16). Therefore, he recommended a “single mandatory for the Turkish Empire and the Transcaucasus” as the “most economical solution” (*ibid.*). Harbord concluded that it was desirable that the “same power” govern both “Armenia and Transcaucasia” and “Constantinople and Anatolia” to *dampen* “exaggerated separatist tendencies” (*ibid.*).

If the “races” of the former Ottoman Empire were in the last instance more similar than they were different, the “cost” of Armenian independence for the American mandatory outweighed the “moral” benefits. Considering Harbord’s reservations about contagion and disease, he went against the grain of his own argument when he advised that only an American mandate encompassing all of Anatolia, Constantinople, Armenia, and Transcaucasia was worth the “effort and money spent” (26). It might very well prove “fatal to success” (30).

Vahe Cardashian vehemently opposed Harbord's proposition for a "joint mandate." This time, he enlisted the support of high-ranking American diplomats, philanthropists, and public figures.<sup>214</sup> Expanding, partially duplicating, and at times revising "The Case of Armenia," Cardashian published another pamphlet<sup>215</sup> under the auspices of the newly founded American Committee for the Independence of Armenia (ACIA). In "The Joint Mandate Scheme" (1919), Cardashian solicited contributions from supporters of Armenian independence to intervene in public debate surrounding the possibility of American involvement in the government of any part of the former Ottoman Empire.<sup>216</sup>

Instead of relying on popular enthusiasm for "starving Armenians," as was the preferred method of the American Committee on Syrian and Armenian Relief, Cardashian and his supporters appealed to the racial sensibilities and self-interest of white America. James W. Gerard, former U.S. Ambassador to Germany, affirmed it was in the "interest of Christian civilization" to create an Armenian state "which alone

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<sup>214</sup> Cardashian founded the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia (ACIA) in 1918. The executive committee of the New York-based organization consisted of prominent members such as James W. Gerard, former U.S. ambassador to Germany, Cleveland H. Dodge, treasurer of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, and Alice Stone Blackwell, former secretary of the National American Women Suffrage Association, among others. ACIA was the template for the Armenian National Committee of America which remains an active lobbying and community organization to this day.

<sup>215</sup> See "The Joint Mandate Scheme – A Turkish Empire Under American Protection," The American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, New York, undated [1919?].

<sup>216</sup> The pamphlet anticipated the "nature of the recommendations of the Mission" based on the "forecast" of "credible news correspondents" before the official publication of the report in 1920. Cardashian sought to intervene in American public debate which he perceived to slowly shift in disfavor of an Armenian mandate. Without access to Harbord's report, Cardashian correctly anticipated the racial, moral, and strategic logic of an American mandate but underestimated the economic concerns raised by Harbord.



can become effective barrier against the Pan-Turanian [sic] ambition” (ACIA 1919, 5). According to Gerard, it was in the “interest of Christian civilization” – and “the peace of the world” – that Armenia should stretch “from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean” to separate “the Turks of Anatolia from their kinsmen of the Caucasus and Trans-Caspian” (9). To illustrate the strategic advantage that “Christendom” should recognize in an Armenian “separating barrier” against “pan-Turanian civilization,” contributors following on Gerard elaborated on the scenario of an impending invasion. The Armenian state would serve as a bulwark of civilization against “Asiatic marauders” (15).<sup>217</sup> Defining Turkic peoples as “Asiatic” allowed the specter of “pan-Turanianism” to travel across the Atlantic divide.

Major General Bagratuni, a decorated Russian-Armenian military official formerly stationed in Turkestan, assured his American readers that “the Armenian soldier [...] is the equal of the best Aryan soldier” (15). With only a “little initial help,” so he argued, Armenians could “successfully defend the frontier of western civilization” (ibid.). Effectively conceding that Armenians were not “Nordic,” Bagratuni argued that they were the *closest* relatives to Europeans in West Asia – “equal” to Aryans – and therefore positioned at the first line of defense of the West in its Eastern borderlands. A short comment by Benjamin Ide Wheeler, late President of

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<sup>217</sup> This conception of West Asia or “Eurasia” as a border space and “barrier” against the Other, symbolized by the East, was elaborated in the discipline of geography. Accordingly, Cardashian advanced a position that would have been considered “scientific.” For an example of this discourse, see Halford MacKinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 170, No. 4, 1904, 298-321.

the University of California,<sup>218</sup> followed on Bagratuni's essay to assure readers, "we know them as a people better, probably, than any other Eastern stock" (ACIA 1919, 15). The interjection of the word "probably" betrays a lingering ambivalence. After all, Wheeler attested to the "Eastern stock" of Armenians. This placed the desirability of Armenian affiliation with America under erasure. Yet, the relative wealth of written sources and ethnographic studies on Armenians allowed for a reasonable sense of "knowing" them well. This was "probably" the best assurance available in the uncertain world of racial progress at a time of American expansion.

### **Adopting the Orphan-Nation?**

Racial classification played a central role in the arguments of both proponents and opponents of an American mandate for Armenia. If Armenians were to become American "wards," it was paramount to determine whether they were *worthy* of "adoption" by the "American" people. Assessing their racial "stock" and purported "stage" of development not only decided over the political future of Armenians in West Asia but also tied into domestic debates about citizenship in the United States. Because "adoption" supplied a framework for the transformation of the "strange" into the "familiar," the practice soon became a target for eugenicists.

In order to contain "the risk of contaminating the race," Henry H. Goddard, the inventor of the term "feeble-minded," demanded in 1911 that children of unknown

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<sup>218</sup> Benjamin Ide Wheeler was President of the University of California from 1899 to 1919. According to Alexandra M. Stern, he did not join any local or national eugenic organizations but "endorsed eugenically driven immigration restrictions and the dreams of Aryan and Nordic supremacy" (Stern 2016, 147).

ancestry should be quarantined in “colonies” rather than placed in “good homes.”<sup>219</sup> In a progressive weekly, he warned that even a “nice-looking child” could still be of “poor and diseased stock.” It was therefore necessary to “inquire into the pedigree” of potential adoptees and *ensure* they “would be worth raising.” Goddard still had to defend his eugenic positions against readers whom he anticipated to be “disturbed through fear that we are preparing to attack the plan of finding homes for the homeless.” Instead of taking in children in need “as members of the family” out of “pity and sympathy,” he insisted, “statistics” supplied “scientific facts” which showed there was no better method than forced isolation in colonies to prevent the “perpetuation of mental and moral deficiency.” Justifying crimes against the living, he argued affiliation and “intermixture” with “unknown [...] blood” was a “crime against those yet unborn.” The “protecting walls” of institutions would both offer a “home” to the “homeless and neglected child” while safeguarding unsuspecting “fathers and mothers [...] interested in the welfare of their own families.”

Early eugenic discourse, represented by the passages above, permeated American philanthropy and social work, conceptions of class, race, ability, and age, welfare policy, and ideologies of “progress” (always in opposition to the imagined threat of “degeneration”). Goddard proposed measures of “racial hygiene” in the realm of adoption that mirrored the logic for objections raised by American commissioners *against* an American mandate for Armenia. Ideas about sexuality, population control,

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<sup>219</sup> See Henry H. Goddard, “Wanted: A Child to Adopt,” *The Survey: Social, Charitable, Civic: A Journal of Constructive Philanthropy*, Vol. 27 (October 14, 1911), 1003-1006.

and “public health” supplanted concerns about honor, religion, and morality as rationales that either mandated or prohibited racial intimacies between white Americans and Turkish Armenians.

If Armenians were of “Eastern” or, at any rate, “unknown” stock, were they “worth” the investment that it would take to “raise” them? What is more, was there “danger” in adopting and “intermixing” with them? Hesitations to naturalize, adopt, or “raise” Armenians to govern themselves revealed a direct link between gender, race, nation, and sexuality. Did Armenians have the “pedigree” to achieve and maintain political independence as a nation? Since the nation was imagined on the model of the family, and the family treated as a representation of the race, whiteness required heteronormative sexual relations and the subordination of women and children to men. The principle of national self-determination, as sketched in the League of Nations Covenant, presumably did not discriminate between “great and small states”<sup>220</sup> as long as they could be imagined on the model of the white, heterosexual family. In the case of Armenia, the American public would have to be convinced that Armenian manhood

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<sup>220</sup> In his 1918 “Fourteen Points” speech before U.S. Congress, Woodrow Wilson described his vision for a “general association of nations” that could guarantee the “political independence and territorial integrity of great and small states alike” (XIV.). Accordingly, Henry Morgenthau dedicated his account of the massacres and deportations of Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire to Wilson, “the exponent in America of the Enlightened public opinion of the world, which has decreed that the rights of small nations shall be respected and that such crimes as are described in this book shall never again darken the pages of history” (Morgenthau 1918).

could be reconstituted in order to prove that the Armenian “nation-family”<sup>221</sup> could “stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.”<sup>222</sup>

The logic of the new mandate system enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations harked back to a longer history of white supremacy in the United States and beyond. Conversations about the actual or symbolic adoption of Armenian orphans domiciled in orphanages across the Atlantic tied into questions of naturalization of Armenians as U.S. citizens and bled into debates about “tutelage” of the Armenian orphan-nation. Far from settling once and for all if Armenians were “free white persons,” the Halladjian et al. naturalization case of 1909 had rather opened them up to further scrutiny. From the standpoint of racial hygiene, it remained to be determined if their admission to whiteness had been desirable. Similarly, Americans remained ambivalent about assuming responsibility for an Armenian mandate in a region reportedly full of “loathsome and dangerous diseases” (Harbord 1920, 26).

Despite these reports, public opinion continued to favor an American mandate for Armenia. In 1919, Woodrow Wilson promised to accept “trusteeship for Armenia” (Ambrosius 2017, 181). Upon his return from Paris, however, he insisted that he first needed Congress to approve the Covenant of the League of Nations. Since the latter was part of the Treaty of Versailles, discussion about the mandate was deferred until a political agreement about the terms of peace could be reached. Only after the Paris

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<sup>221</sup> On the trope of the “nation-family” in contemporary Armenian political discourse, see Tamar Shirinian, “The Nation-Family: Intimate Encounters and Genealogical Perversion in Armenia,” *American Ethnologist: Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2018, 48-59.

<sup>222</sup> See League of Nations, “The Covenant of the League of Nations,” 1919, Article 22.

peace treaty was rejected in March 1920,<sup>223</sup> Wilson finally submitted the mandate proposal to Congress. By this time, however, a bi-partisan majority of Senators had decided that the mandate was “too costly and too entangling” (Ambrosius 2017, 188). They had cast aside their “avowed desire to assist Armenia.”<sup>224</sup> The United States never joined the newly created League of Nations, and withdrew from the mandate scheme. Nevertheless, American public opinion and foreign policy under Wilson shaped international discourse beyond the inter-war period. Its liberal tenets remained wedded to white supremacy and eugenic discourse that favored segregation and rejected any form of “racial mixing” as undesirable and harmful.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> On “isolationism” as an inadequate framework for understanding the American foreign policy debates of the inter-war period, see William Appleman Williams, “The Legend of Isolationism in the 1920s,” *Science & Society*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1954, 1-20. The United States did not join the League of Nations until its dissolution in 1946. See also Charlie Laderman, “Sharing the Burden? The American Solution to the Armenian Question, 1918-1920,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2016, 664-694.

<sup>224</sup> By the time Wilson approved and submitted a report with proposed boundaries for “Wilsonian Armenia” for further consideration at Paris in late 1920, the Anatolian portion of Armenia had fallen under the control of the Turkish army. The Armenian Republic declared in the South Caucasus was about to be occupied by the Soviet army. By December 1920, the Turkish military began its advance on Yerevan, the capital of the newly formed Republic of Armenia. Its fate was sealed when Alexandre Khatisian, its foreign minister, was forced to sign the Treaty of Alexandropol on December 3, 1920 and give up all claims to the provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van. Armenians also forfeited the right of return granted by the Treaty of Sèvres in August 1920.

<sup>225</sup> Frank L. Polk, Acting Secretary of State of the Wilson administration in 1920, advised the President that “various races are so mixed up in North Eastern Asia Minor” that governing them would require a strong presence of “international police” (Ambrosius 2017, 185). Lord Curzon, former British viceroy in India, was a key figure at Lausanne in his role as British foreign secretary. He recommended “population unmixing” as a strategy he had tested during the colonial partition of Bengal in 1905. On the trauma of partition in India, see Das 2007. Underlying was the colonial idea that “intermixture” of “various races” inevitably led to conflict so that “realigning” territories with homogenous population sets and definite borders would keep the “peace” (see Marrus 1985; Naimark 2001; Weitz 2016). For “minorities” in the former Ottoman Empire, the resulting 1923 Treaty of Lausanne not only multilaterally sanctioned the catastrophic violence of the “population exchange” of millions of Greeks and

Advocates for a partition of the former Ottoman Empire drew on anxieties about interracial government and mobilized racist tropes they expected to resonate with white publics in the United States. In 1902, Wilson himself had published a political history of the United States in five volumes in which he consistently differentiated between “the negroes” and “the nation.”<sup>226</sup> Despite the Thirteenth Amendment of 1865, he considered the constituent “people” at the base of American sovereignty to be adult men that were “free white persons.” He decidedly rejected the political leadership and participation of freedmen in the federal government during the era of reconstruction. Abolition democracy had merely begun to be built (see Du Bois 1935). Yet, Wilson considered its few gains “a menace to society itself” (Wilson 1902, 18). He argued it was unacceptable that “the negroes should thus of a sudden be set free and left without tutelage or restraint” (18).<sup>227</sup> Instead, he favored a gradual “transition” in which “the negro” was supervised by “the nation” until such time as “he” was deemed “able to make his freedom good for himself, unassisted” (8). This echoed the terms that he proposed as the foundation of the new international system less than two decades later.

To Wilson, white supremacy was a “natural” right of those he believed entitled to political mastery. While suggesting that African American leadership was not only

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Turks along the Aegean seaboard but also denied any right of return that had been guaranteed to displaced and de facto stateless Armenians by the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920.

<sup>226</sup> Woodrow Wilson. *A History of the American People*. New York & London: Harpers & Brothers Publishers, 1902. For an anti-racist history of reconstruction, see W. E. Burghardt Du Bois. *Black Reconstruction*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935.

<sup>227</sup> For a discussion of the impact of white supremacy on Wilson’s foreign policy, see Ambrosius 2017.

incompetent but also hostile to the “white South,” Wilson also likened freedmen to “children” with “idle hopes” that “had never learned independence or the rough buffets of freedom” (Wilson 1902, 18). He argued that “men who could not so much as write their names and who knew none of the uses of authority except its insolence” had been placed in local offices by “congressional leaders” determined to “put the white South under the heel of the black South” (49-50). The message was that if there *must* be emancipation, then “inexperience” disqualified Black citizens from the “masterless, homeless freedom” (50) that had been too suddenly “bestowed.” In Wilson’s view, “tutelage or restraint” (18) were means to avert nothing short of the “veritable overthrow of civilization in the South” (49). In accordance with his “scholarly” positions, Wilson supported the segregation of the federal government and purged its ranks of African Americans as soon as he assumed the Presidency in 1913.

While the vicious racism of Wilson’s commentary on emancipation and reconstruction is easily noted, his motivation in endorsing the idea of an American mandate for Armenia remains to be stripped of its persistent aura of liberal benevolence. Reading his early writings through the League of Nations Covenant of 1919 allows to trace how the idea of “tutelage” was translated into the international mandate system. According to article twenty-two of the Covenant, “advanced nations” were to act as guardians to child-like peoples who had “not yet” reached the “stage of development” it would take to be considered capable enough to govern themselves – “unassisted.” Nor could those who might exist as “independent nations” be “trusted” with the government of subject peoples, especially if those were “superior” to



themselves. It was found similarly undesirable that Armenians govern anyone other than themselves, and themselves only. The framework of the “nation” became the unit of political rights because it reflected conceptions of sovereignty as the prerogative of “civilized” and racially homogenous peoples.<sup>228</sup>

Through the looking glass of race in the United States, partition in West Asia appealed to Wilson because it offered segregation on the basis of “race” as a familiar strategy in response to a “strange” problem. As Armenian and Greek survivors were reeling from the atrocious violence, unspeakable loss of life, and altogether catastrophic expulsion from their Ottoman homelands, they grappled with an aftermath that was sealed, rather than challenged, by its interpretation as the outcome of an “unnatural” intermixture of “various races.” Proving that Armenians were a “superior” race, presumably embodying the “West” in the “East,” failed to give comfort to Armenian advocates because recognition on the terms of white supremacy ultimately reinforced the alienation that Western protection promised to remedy. It is impossible to know what kind of justice could have been done if abolition-democracy had guided the way.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Lloyd E. Ambrosius argues that Wilson’s graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University exposed the young southerner to a “germ theory of history” which held that “modern nations grew like biological organisms from primordial racial roots” (Ambrosius 2017, 68). According to this framework, “Anglo-Saxons accounted for the essential identity of the American people, including their democratic institutions” (ibid.). At Johns Hopkins University, Wilson also made the acquaintance of Thomas Dixon Jr., author of *The Clansman* (1905), with whom he maintained a close friendship and who later praised Wilson’s *A History of the American People* (1902) (68).

<sup>229</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois coined the term “abolition-democracy” in *Black Reconstruction* (1935). As a political project, it exceeded the mere abolition of slavery and entailed a process of fundamental transformation precipitated by the “incorporation” of former slaves “into the body civil, politic, and social” (Du Bois 1935, 202).

## Nordic Paternalism

As prospects for an American mandate or independent Armenian state on formerly Ottoman territory waned, League of Nations officials probed if Armenian refugees could be resettled in colonies. After Karen Jeppe accepted the post of the High Commissioner for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, the former Danish missionary became instrumental in setting up a model colony in the countryside of French mandate Syria.<sup>230</sup> Meanwhile, her Norwegian colleague Fridtjof Nansen, a former polar explorer appointed as the first High Commissioner for Refugees in 1921, sought to resettle twenty-five to fifty thousand Armenian refugees on the dry plains and swamps of Armenian territories along the Arax river.<sup>231</sup> As Scandinavians, both League of Nations Commissioners mobilized their Nordic origins to position themselves as *neutral* arbiters and guardians of Armenian sovereignty in the region.

Crediting Armenian representatives with the proposal, Fridtjof Nansen organized a fact-finding mission of his “own experts” in 1926 and headed to the Ararat plain to study “the details [...] on the spot” (Nansen 1928, 5). He considered resettlement “highly desirable” to “procure for the Armenians that ‘national home’

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<sup>230</sup> Karen Jeppe served as a liaison of *De Danske Armeniervenner* (“The Danish Friends of Armenia”), a secular aid organization that sought to “carve out a role for Danes in the international campaign to aid the Ottoman Armenians” (Kauffeldt 2015, xiii). She was first dispatched in 1903 to teach at an orphanage of the German Orient Mission (*Deutsche Orient-Mission*) in Urfa that was directed by Corinna Shattuck, a philanthropist with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

<sup>231</sup> See League of Nations, “Scheme for the Settlement of Armenian Refugees. General Survey and Principal Documents,” Geneva: Publications of the League of Nations, IV. Social 1927. IV. I. This report was the last in a series of publications by the Secretariat of the League of Nations on the settlement of Greek, Bulgarian, and Russian refugees.

which the Western Powers of Europe and the United States of America had pledged themselves to give to the Armenian nation, and of which the League of Nations had repeatedly held out a prospect” (Nansen 1928, 5).



Figure 4. Fridtjof Nansen’s 1926 expedition to the Sardarabad Plain, Armenia (Nansen 1928, 136).

Nansen wanted to inspect an unfamiliar landscape and people, both under Soviet control, to open both up to Western scrutiny. Exploring an alien environment, he assembled a crew of English, French and Italian engineers with experience in subtropical agriculture and hydraulic construction work (6). At least one engineer boasted colonial experience as a former British supervisor of the Egyptian Ministry of Labor. The so-called “Nansen Scheme” was supported by Soviet officials who needed international subsidies for “irrigation canals to cultivate larger areas of land, hydroelectric plants, and improvement in literacy” (Nercessian 2016, 84). With a

technical eye, Nansen's recorded the physical features of an unfamiliar landscape and people.<sup>232</sup>

Both Fridtjof Nansen and Karen Jeppe worked to re-embed Armenians in the region, albeit newly segregated in enclaves. In their publications, they addressed a wider public beyond the League of Nations. While Nansen limited himself to the non-fiction genre of the report, Jeppe ventured into novelistic accounts to solicit empathy and donations from her Danish readership.<sup>233</sup> Although both figures were valued as authorities on the region, Jeppe's writing and mandate as a commissioner were feminized. While Nansen's operations remained confined to masculinist registers of technical expertise, she successfully navigated gendered hierarchies in the international arena to claim intimate familiarity with Armenian culture and identity. As she wrote in the introduction of her novel *Misak: An Armenian Life*,<sup>234</sup> published in installments between 1922 and 1928, she not only sought to "know the Armenians," but she "came to love them" (Kauffeldt 2015, 15).

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<sup>232</sup> His account was first published in Norwegian under the title *Gjennem Armenia* [Through Armenia] in 1928, then translated into English and published in London. See Dr. Fridtjof Nansen. *Armenia and the Near East*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928.

<sup>233</sup> Jeppe was a key member of the organization *De Danske Armeniervenner* ("The Danish Friends of the Armenians") and published in its bi-monthly journal to solicit donations until her death in 1935.

<sup>234</sup> During her tenure at the German orphanage in Urfa, Karen Jeppe adopted an Armenian boy named Misael "Misak" Melkonian (c. 1891-1978). He had been orphaned during the Hamidian massacres in Musch near Lake Van. Her writing fictionalized Melkonian's biography and interwove it with her relief work in the Near East. Jonas Kauffeldt first translated and published her Danish-language columns in the bi-monthly journal *Armeniervenner* in book form in 2015. See Kauffeldt, Jonas, ed. *Misak: An Armenian Life (Karen Jeppe's story of an orphan who became a son)*. London: Gomidas Institute, 2015.

While Nansen is remembered as a “friend” of the Armenians, rather than a “Father,”<sup>235</sup> Karen Jeppe, an official liaison of *De Danske Armeniervenner* (“The Danish Friends of Armenia”), is often characterized as their “Danish Mother.” In the patriarchal setting of Armenian national discourse, Jeppe could be fashioned as a “Mother,” especially in relation to displaced and orphaned Armenian refugees, while Nansen could not replace Hayk, the mythical “Father” of the Armenians, without erasing the “character” of the Armenian nation. This did not make his “friendship” horizontal.

At an orphanage in the Sardarabad plain, run by Near East Relief,<sup>236</sup> he observed the “strange” racial physiognomy of the Armenians. Seeing thousands of Armenian boys “collected” at Sardarabad, as if regarding a racial tableau, he discerned “various types, from the purely Armenoid dark type with long hooked nose, narrowing face, and dark, highly pigmented complexion, to types that were almost Nordic” (Nansen 1928, 138). Over breakfast, he inquired if a “young fellow with light hair and beard, a fair complexion, and a face which might well have been Scandinavian” was indeed “pure Armenian” (139). Even after he was assured that “fair individuals are not uncommon in Armenia,” he continued to suspect an “intermixture of Russian blood” or with “the fair Kurds” (139). Following the circular logic of racial science, he

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<sup>235</sup> See, for example, Emma Malkhazyan, “Фритъоф Нансен - Друг Армени [Fritjof Nansen – A Friend of Armenia],” *Вестник архивов Армени* [Newsletter of the Archives of Armenia], National Archive [of Armenia], Vol. 2, No. 26, 1970, 83-84.

<sup>236</sup> Mobilizing the evangelical infrastructure previously established in Asia Minor by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Torchin 2006), the American Committee for Armenian Relief, later the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, took up operations in September 1915.

concluded that the “Armenian race” must have “purely Armenoid” features: “dark” and “extremely [...] short-skulled” (Nansen 1928, 139).

Ultimately, Nansen failed to secure the international funds that were needed for the irrigation and drainage works he proposed. Considering the human and ecological toll of perennial irrigation agriculture in Egypt, for example, his unrealized plans for the transformation of the arid south of Armenia, along the river Arax, into agricultural land for the cultivation of grain, cotton, and fruit, may have saved thousands of Armenian refugees from resettlement to a region that offered little more than backbreaking labor and man-made disease.<sup>237</sup> The 1926 expedition came to little more than a field trip. In the face of shifting geopolitical priorities, the political technology of the expert report proved powerless.

Based on years of experience in the “Orient,” which had endowed her with an ability to “tell the different races apart” (Kauffeldt 2015, xlvii-xlviii), Jeppe argued in 1925 that Armenians were “the furthest most outpost in the struggle against Asia” for “our [Nordic] race” (xlvii).<sup>238</sup> While Armenians were “acclimatized and accustomed” (liii), she claimed, they remained superior in “essence,” although “distinctions of race and individuality” were “hiding” among “the Oriental” (11) to the eye of the inexperienced outsider. Since her interpretation of “religion” was racialized, she favored a “calculated and selective approach” to the “quality of person” (xxxiii) she

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<sup>237</sup> On agriculture and the colonial economy in Egypt, see Jennifer L. Derr, “Labor-Time: Ecological Bodies and Agricultural Labor in 19<sup>th</sup>- and Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 50, 2018, 195-212.

<sup>238</sup> See “Breve fra Karen Jeppe [Letter from Karen Jeppe],” *Armeniervennen*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1947, 8. Cited in translation in Kauffeldt 2015.

considered worthy of rescue or admission into her League of Nations Reception House in Aleppo.<sup>239</sup> Eugenic anxieties about “degeneration” led her to denigrate Armenian Muslims as “weak and degenerate individuals” (Kauffeldt 2015, xxxiii).<sup>240</sup> While she cast “the spirit of Islam” as a “dark force” (6), she associated Christianity with health, vitality, and progress.

By distancing Armenians from their Arab, Bedouin, and Kurdish neighbors in Syria – positioning the latter as “natives” and the former as “foreign settlers” – she triangulated Armenians in relation to Nordic Europe, rather than West Asia. She hoped to “revitalize” the Armenian tradition by syncretizing it with *Nordic* elements, not least to “promote a Danish role in spurring self-help” (Kauffeldt 2015, xv). Merging “traditional Armenian crafts and techniques” with “patterns and designs from Denmark” (Kauffeldt 2015, xvii), she employed Armenian refugees in a dyeing

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<sup>239</sup> In this capacity, Jeppe and her staff filled out thousands of intake surveys to record the identity and fate of women and children accepted into the Reception House. Archived at the League of Nations Archive in Geneva, these files form a unique body of evidence. The collected narratives and photographs do not allow for unmediated access to the persons and perspectives of survivors but document the strategic priorities of international operations among Armenians in Syria.

<sup>240</sup> Jeppe supported a network of Armenian agents working under the auspices of the Armenian Relief Committee for Mesopotamia (ARCM) who sought to identify and reclaim abducted Armenian women and children from Muslim households. Despite Jeppe’s preferences, it was entirely up to the Armenian operatives to determine who would be rescued and brought to Aleppo. Jeppe’s primary role was to mediate between the rescue mission, local authorities, and French Mandate officials. Armenians considered the rescue mission vital to the “future regeneration of Armenia” and invested their personal fortunes. Many genocide survivors gave their last means to support operatives that were throwing themselves “with selfless enthusiasm into the slaughterhouse to collect the remaining Armenian fragments,” as one Armenian newspaper reported in 1919. See Anna Aleksanyan, “Rescuing Armenian Women and Children after the Genocide: The Story of Ruben Heryan,” *The Armenian Weekly*, May 31, 2016. See also Shemmassian 2003; Kévorkian/Tachjian 2006; Tachjian 2009; Watenpaugh 2010; Ekmekçioğlu 2013.

workshop, weaving mill, and tannery, where they produced handicrafts for export to Denmark. She also bought a farm near Garmuch, an Armenian village in Syria, to allow her charges to “gain experience in cultivating the soil” (Kauffeldt 2015, xv). Hoping to create a “strong and thriving peasantry fit to understand and to be understood by the native population,” she envisioned agriculture as an occupation that would allow Armenians to “become Armenians again” (liii), implying that they had *ceased* to be Armenians while domiciled in West Asia.

After her position as the League of Nations High Commissioner on the Protection of Women and Children ran out in 1926, she not only retained “all the property purchased using League funds” (xxxvii), which consolidated her position as an indispensable link between Ottoman Armenian refugees and international assistance in Syria,<sup>241</sup> but also replaced the League of Nations Reception House in Aleppo with two Armenian colonies in the vicinity of Tal Saman (Shemmassian 2003, 102). Inspired by the “salutary” effects of Zionist settlement in British Mandate Palestine, Jeppe proposed a “colonization scheme” for “these young Armenians with all the energy of their race tingling in their veins” (Kauffeldt 2015, liii).<sup>242</sup> French Mandate authorities, however, refused to allow “thousands of Christian foreigners to occupy lands in traditionally Muslim Arab areas” in order to avoid “tensions” (lvi).

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<sup>241</sup> After her tenure as a League of Nations Commissioner, Karen Jeppe relied on contributions from “The Danish Friends of Armenia” (*De Danske Armeniervenner*, DDA).

<sup>242</sup> See League of Nations, “Protection of Women and Children in the Near East,” Geneva, September 1924, A. 46. 1924. IV. *League of Nations Documents*, 1919-1946.



While Nansen seemed to harbor some doubts about the racial kinship of the “Nordic race” and the Armenians, Jeppe zoomed in on one “figure” among the “multitude” – a “friend in need” she adopted in 1906 – to prove her point. Misael Melkonian, the main protagonist of *Misak: An Armenian Life*, a series of installments written for a Danish readership, was a young Armenian boy who lost both of his parents during the Hamidian massacres in Urfa. In 1895, he witnessed the grueling death of Hovagim, his adoptive father who had showered him with “tenderness [...] rarely seen even between fathers and sons” (Kauffeldt 2015, 29). Hovagim, the Armenian patriarch, had the power to restore dignity to Misael, but he could not protect his family from harm. Jeppe’s status as a white European woman, in contrast, afforded her political immunities that she wielded in order to secure Misael’s future.

At the German orphanage, Misael became Misak, a “number.” “No one was truly responsible for him,” Jeppe noted, “since he had ‘no relatives’” (95). Once he confided that he felt “terribly abandoned,” having watched “other children’s mothers,” she burst out: “Misak! I love you, and I’ll be your mother” (125). Their “pact” was sealed with a “tender kiss on her hand,” so Jeppe, reflecting Misak’s “very soul, as only Armenians know how to commit themselves to those people who have won their hearts” (ibid.). Their familial bond originated *within* “before manifesting itself physically” (ibid.). Just as “advanced nations” were to guide the way in Armenia’s development, Jeppe presided over Misak “progressing further in life” (ibid.). As the Dane decided to adopt the Armenian, neither of the two “realize[d] exactly what they had promised each other” (ibid.). Armenians were “related ethnically to Europeans,”

she claimed, but their “nature,” as it had developed in West Asia, was “generally foreign to Europeans” (Kauffeldt 2015, 31). In order to recover racial kinship, the veil of “the Oriental” would have to be cast off (126). If the “relationship [was] to ever flourish,” it would take a “firm sense of purpose and love for each other” (ibid.). For the strangers to become kin, “momentous challenges” would have to be overcome, originating “from their surroundings and from within their own hearts” (ibid.).

Her tutelage restored Misak to “his true name and birthplace” (ibid.) vis-à-vis the Ottoman state. Operating outside of the symbolic order, she functioned as both mother and father – a position otherwise reserved only for divinity.<sup>243</sup> By virtue of her influence, she left Misak “dead [...] in the official registry” (140). Transacted by five gold coins, he was “reborn,” at her will, as “Misael, son of Melkon from Avran near Musch” (ibid.). Exercising this peculiar power of life, Jeppe also arranged Misael’s wedding to Lucia, her assistant, on the ten-year anniversary of her arrival in Urfa (154). As an Armenian orphan, Lucia had worked her way up as a former servant of Jeppe’s to becoming the director of the orphanage school. Prior to the marriage, the three shared a household and “lived together as a family in harmony and joy” (153). Since “introducing a woman outside their circle might be disruptive to the family,” Melkonian agreed to marry Lucia whose “greatest wish,” in turn, it purportedly was “to always remain by your [Jeppe’s] side” (154). The “Eastern home,” as Jeppe described it, now felt most “vivid and alive” (154). Determined to revive the Armenian

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<sup>243</sup> In Greek mythology, for example, Zeus gave birth to Athena “from his head” after swallowing her mother, Metis. In the Christian tradition, Maria conceived and gave birth to Jesus as a virgin mother.

homespace, Jeppe conjoined two Armenian orphans in matrimony to symbolically recreate the Armenian nation in *her* image – not bone of her bones and flesh of her flesh, but adopted under the Danish flag. The marriage formalized Jeppe’s position as the head of the Armenian household.

As the procession walked down the aisle, the priest and the girls’ choir performed a Danish hymn – “Your House Shall You Build”<sup>244</sup> – in Armenian translation (Kauffeldt 2015, 156). To conclude his marriage, Misael sat in the same chair, and church, as when he was a little boy, when his “protector” Hovagim negotiated his adoption (153). Jeppe’s protection, however, was superior because it secured Misael’s adulthood. By Jeppe’s intervention, so she claimed, “the foundation to their [Misael and Lucia’s] future had been properly and firmly laid” (157). Misael and Lucia were now free to determine their own fate, but on Jeppe’s terms. By hybridizing the wedding ceremony with symbols of Danish sovereignty, Jeppe orchestrated a wedding that linked Armenian sovereignty to Denmark as a mandatory power that could bestow independence in accordance with the League of Nations Covenant of 1919. The “house” to be built was not only the household they would create but also the national home promised to materialize under Western tutelage.

Outside the abbey’s walls a gray mass of humanity stood assembled while inside the women’s multi-colored dresses brightened the scene. The fortunate ones were the invited guests, the ones who’d been lucky enough to receive the much coveted little card decorated with the *Dannebrog* flag in the corner. For everyone else, the doors were closed, as there

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<sup>244</sup> According to Jonas Kauffeldt, *Jert hus skal I bygge* was composed by Jacob Paulli in 1878. It draws on chapter 65, verse 21 of the book of Isaiah in the bible: “And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.”

wouldn't otherwise have been room inside for all the guests (155; original emphasis).

This scene reads as an allegory for the mandate system which “invited” those who were “lucky enough” to join the family of nations. While all others stood reduced to a “gray mass of humanity,” the “fortunate” ones were still “guests” and beneficiaries of the host. Aptly, the doors to sovereignty were closed to those outside the guarded space of whiteness. Unlike the independence symbolically bestowed onto Armenians by the wedding scene, their actual status on the international scene more closely mimicked that of those guests that had “gained access [to the abbey] by other means” and “under specific conditions” (Kauffeldt 2015, 155).

Jeppé believed the racial intimacies she forged might move the Danish public to share in her cause of patronage and “adopt” Armenians as racial kin.<sup>245</sup> Writing her last installment in 1928, she ended *Misak: An Armenian Life* with a storm that represented the “foreboding spring” of the Young Turk era (158). Although – or rather, because – Jeppé had witnessed the “great calamity” while stationed at Urfa, she could not narrate the “bloody events that were forever seared in my [her] mind” (159). Although she had “had a great deal to tell” (ibid.), she reached the limits of narration. With these last words, a call to action, her readers were returned to the future anterior of devastation.

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<sup>245</sup> The paternalistic ties she had personally forged in the region quickly unraveled after her death in 1935 when the Danish leadership accused her adopted son, Misak Melkonian, of mismanaging her finances. It was concluded that supporting Armenian villages was no longer viable without a Danish representative to oversee them. It appears Melkonian sent a letter to the organization in March 1946 (titled in German: *Meine Mutter*, “My Mother”). It is filed away at the Danish State Archives (Kauffeldt 2015, lxviii-lxix).

### **Inscribing American Sovereignty in Soviet Armenia**

After the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia was formed in late 1920, the new state lacked institutions and resources to mold its population of peasants, refugees, and orphans into a socialist citizenry. In the absence of an overarching national identity and infrastructure to operate, the Armenian Revolutionary Committee granted Near East Relief a mandate to organize “orphanages for homeless children” and supply “the needy population with food, medicaments, shoes, etc.” (Nercessian 2016, 83). These operations were funded by donations and charitable subscription of members of the American public. Independent of the international relief effort by the League of Nations, which the United States never joined, Near East Relief utilized the infrastructure of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission to establish American orphanages throughout West Asia.

Since Ottoman Armenians had lost their right of return in 1920, Near East Relief determined that Soviet Armenia should become the future national homeland of all Armenians. Its mission of repatriation resulted in an effort to concentrate “all Armenian orphans in the Caucasus” (xvii). To this end, Near East Relief converted a former Russian military base in Alexandropol, present-day Gyumri, into the largest orphanage in the world, also known as the “City of Orphans” (xiii).

Housing over 20,000 Armenian orphans at a time, the three complexes of Kazachi, Severski, and the Polygon, located at a distance of several miles, consisted of one hundred and seventy barracks, most of them two-storied, and covered an area of almost five square miles that were formally under American administration.

Reporting to Sergei Abovyan, the appointed liaison of the Armenian Revolutionary Committee, Near East Relief became an official partner in the project of Soviet reconstruction. Until the Soviet government could articulate and implement its own goals for “the orphans of Turkish Armenia” (Nercessian 2016, xvii), Near East Relief was entrusted with the task of “sheltering, healing, feeding, and educating thousands of orphans” (82).

However, conflicts emerged over the ideological program that would transform the “diseased, traumatized, and starved orphans” into “citizens capable, and worthy of, building the new Armenia” (xvii). While American administrators envisioned the children as “loyal harbingers of American values capable of leading Armenia toward a progressive American way of life,” the Soviet government wanted Near East Relief to “raise them as the bearers of an Armenian legacy redefined through Bolshevism, proudly marching toward a socialist state” (xvii). Both visions for the national identity of future Armenians were founded on the idea of progress. While the discourse of progress in the United States hinged on the idea of racial segregation, Soviet schemes were geared toward amalgamation. This tension resulted in a mounting conflict over population control. No records were kept of the “exact number of orphans, their names or their locations” (107).<sup>246</sup> Before Soviet regulations on foreign adoption went into

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<sup>246</sup> Although the identity and fates of these children remain unknown, eye witness accounts suggest that siblings were routinely separated during the process of “orphan selection” with the “measuring tape” (Nercessian 2016, 107). Those selected for adoption by Americans in the United States “were all of the same height, same facial shape, and same beauty” (108). Though it is unclear what “type” was sought, there is little doubt that anthropometric techniques were deployed in order to determine the assimilability and desirability of potential adoptees in relation to a white norm. An emphasis was placed on proportions between the

effect in 1925, large numbers of Armenian orphans were shipped in “trainloads” from Batumi to ports in the United States. After 1925, requests by Near East Relief for adoptions of Armenian children by “American citizens abroad” were routinely denied.

As early as 1923, fundraising campaigns by Near East Relief began to promote *symbolic* adoption through monthly subscriptions that allowed American citizens to “invite one of these children into your family circle” at a distance, without facing the hurdles of legal adoption. Providing for Armenian wards in a far-away American colony appeased eugenic anxieties about racial hygiene and the unknown “pedigree” of Armenians. The desire to *quarantine* the orphans outside of the United States also “helped” Soviet authorities which sought to retain them. Near East Relief devised new strategies for forging relations of “care” across distance. A massive public relations effort called “Golden Rule Sunday” was rolled out to solicit pledges for payments of one to two thousand U.S. dollars to provide for meals, schooling, and vocational training of individual children. American citizens were urged to prepare an “orphanage-style meal” for their families according to recipes that represented “actual meals of the Near East Orphan.” They were asked to donate the savings to the relief effort in the Near East.

The consumption of food, images, and narratives forged an imaginary space of proximity through objects and curated embodied experiences of “knowing” the other

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thumb, the forearm, the neck, and the waist. These examinations likely resulted in the separation of siblings. Height, or a “big” nose, could rule out one child as “undesirable,” while its sibling might pass the physiological requirements. Conceivably, complexion might also have played a central role.

*without* intimacy or risk of contagion. While these “Golden Sunday” charity drives made the trope of “starving Armenians” a staple at American dinner tables, they also generated a sense of “progressive” nationhood for the United States that cohered in relation to distant others. Endorsed by U.S. President Calvin Coolidge in 1923, “International Golden Rule Dinner Sunday” was to support the “training of leaders for a New Near East” while instilling “self-discipline and character-building in the American home.” Detailed instructions and “suggested menus” were publicized to approximate the orphans’ low-calorie diet. In 1924, over five hundred “Golden Rule Dinner Sunday” events were held throughout the United States. Near East Relief even hosted an official gala with one and a half thousand guests in attendance that consumed their dinner from “tin plates and cups that orphanage children had made from empty condensed milk cans.”<sup>247</sup>

1924, Near East Relief launched a “Children’s Crusade” to raise one million U.S. dollars for its Zappeion orphanage in Athens, the “Bird’s Nest” orphanage in Antelias, close to Beirut, and orphanages throughout Armenia. It enlisted Jackie Coogan, a child actor who played Charlie Chaplin’s adopted son in *The Kid* (1921), to travel across the United States and Europe in a customized train in order to collect cash, clothing, and condensed milk. His last stop was in Athens. This “Children’s Crusade” targeted children as philanthropists, educated them about the geography of the United States and Europe, and affectively linked them to peoples and places in the

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<sup>247</sup> See “Charles V. Vickrey and the Golden Rule,” Near East Foundation, October 30, 2015, URL: <https://neareastmuseum.com/2015/10/30/charles-v-vickrey-and-the-golden-rule/> (last accessed August 14, 2018).



Near East that had previously been considered alien. The American relief effort in the Near East also forged a national image of the United States in the world, both domestically and abroad.

American staff at the Near East Relief orphanage in Alexandropol worked to reinforce these linkages through “military drills” that functioned to inscribe and showcase American order and discipline. In the vast spaces stretching between the barrack complexes, the Armenian orphans were assembled and arranged in formations that spelled out slogans and messages intended for the supporters of Near East Relief in the United States. Dressed in all white, the black hair of children whose bodies were arranged in geometrical formations appeared as a line in photographs taken from a bird’s-eye view. One such photograph showed Armenian orphans sitting in rows upon rows to form the abbreviated biblical notation “Matt. XIV. 16.” A small herd of cattle can be seen grazing in the distance. The meaning imposed by the verse spoke directly to Near East Relief’s mission of repatriation, rehabilitation, and reestablishment in the region.



Figure 5. “Matt. XIV. 16.,” formed out of the bodies of two thousand Armenian girls at the Polygon orphanage in Alexandropol, Armenia (Nercessian 2016, 142).

Reading, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat,” this verse implied that twenty thousand or more Armenian orphans were able to survive due to the generosity of the American public while remaining in their new homeland. Accordingly, another image spelled out “AMERICA WE THANK YOU” – formed out of the bodies of two thousand Armenian girls at the orphanage. Some of these “drills” stretched over such a vast area that photographs of slogans such as “GOLDEN RULE CHILDREN OF THE NEAR EAST” blur out at the edges of the image (Nercessian 2016, 143).

Not only were the little bodies disciplined and their lives put in order, but they also became a vehicle to inscribe American tutelage in the Armenian environment. In one astonishing instance, 4,200 Armenian girls formed a map of the Near East and sketched – with their bodies – the outlines of Armenia, Turkey, Palestine, Cyprus and Greece. The locations of Near East Relief orphanages appeared “crowded” with bodies while geopolitical boundaries were omitted. Outside of the enormous rectangular frame of the map, young boys formed the words “NEAR EAST RELIEF” as a title.



Figure 6. “Near East Relief,” map outline formed by girls of the Sversky orphanage school, title by boys from Polygon school, Alexandropol (Nercessian 2016, 141).

This imaginary map of flesh linked geopolitics to biopolitics. It enshrined the role of the United States in the international effort to remap and reengineer sovereignty in the Near East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. For the distant gaze of a disengaged observer, it rearranged the “multitude” and imposed its own meaning. While sending a message of gratitude, these images also functioned as evidence that large numbers of destitute Armenian children could be concentrated and provided for abroad. This resonated with eugenic anxieties about mass migration into the United States after World War I. If Near East Relief was able to fulfill its mission of “repatriation,” these children did “not need to go away,” as the bible verse implied, and could become citizens of a nominally Armenian state.<sup>248</sup>

### **Naturalized as “White”**

After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Congress remained divided over the desirability of rising numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. The Immigration Act of 1907 created a nine-member commission to investigate the issue. Its charge was to devise an immigration policy on the basis of “scientific” criteria. Had the American “nation” reached the limits of its fabled “power of assimilation” (Zeidel 2004, 3) vis-à-vis new European immigrants of “questionable” whiteness?

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<sup>248</sup> The territory of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia (SSRA) represented only a fraction of the territory that many Armenians (and Kurds) considered their historical homeland. Near East Relief and the League of Nations legitimized its bid to become the future homeland of all Armenians before a comprehensive national identity had been articulated to integrate repatriates. As the Soviet government caught up with the need to control and govern its “national” populations, ideological competition with international relief organizations eventually led to the expulsion of Near East Relief from the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia in 1931.

The so-called Dillingham Commission immediately went to work. Its members reviewed census data, compiled statistics, and travelled to countries of origin to survey conditions. Franz Boas emerged as a preeminent voice of immigration reform after proposing a study that was sponsored by the Commission in 1908. Questioning the notion of static “racial types,” he asserted that the “American” environment exerted a favorable influence on the physiognomy of immigrants. His study on “Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants” (1910)<sup>249</sup> was given weight by his position as a leading anthropologist and professor at Columbia University. In order to measure the “level of assimilation” achieved by a particular group of immigrants in the United States, he outlined “anthropometric techniques” that entailed “taking three head measurements and observing the hair and eye color of representative individuals” (Boas 1940, 87).<sup>250</sup>

On the basis of his findings, Boas suggested that the “cranial configurations” and “physical stature” of immigrants were adaptable to environmental conditions rather than determined by “immutable racial characteristics” (99). He argued that the “intermingling” of “European types” in the United States was conducive to “progress.”

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<sup>249</sup> Based on his previous studies on growth and child development, he argued that “human types” were unstable and subject to fluctuations due to environmental factors. See Franz Boas, “Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants (1910-1913),” in *Race, Language, and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940, 60-75.

<sup>250</sup> These techniques potentially played a role in the selection of Armenian orphans for adoption by U.S. citizens at the Near East Relief orphanage in Alexandropol. According to accounts of descendants of children that stayed behind in Armenia, measurements of the head and other physical features served as a basis for determining how likely individual children were to “assimilate” as adoptees in the United States (see Nercessian 2016).

Accordingly, he dismissed eugenic anxieties about immigration from southern and eastern Europe as unfounded (Boas 1940).

In order to appease proponents of immigration restriction, the Dillingham Commission still recommended a quota system that limited immigration by “nationality.” A series of Quota Acts passed in 1921 that were intended to “restore” a population majority of Anglo-Saxon whites by limiting the influx of whites from southern and eastern Europe that were suspected of “degeneracy.” The quota system was designed to “absorb” these foreign-born groups and “assimilate” them as quickly as possible among their American-born counterparts. Quotas for so-called “new” immigrants were adjusted at a generic minimum while “Asiatics” remained categorically excluded from entry and naturalization in the United States.

There were few exceptions to the limits imposed by the new quota system. One of few remaining loopholes was for naturalized citizens to sponsor relatives for immigration to the United States. Since the new quota system dramatically limited the number of immigrants that could enter the United States at all, the outcome of naturalization cases decided over life and death for Armenian refugees. Armenian citizens of the United States were often the only surviving family members of relatives they were now able to sponsor for immigration to the United States. If they could afford it, they were also entitled to invite prospective spouses (Kaprielian-Churchill 1993). In light of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, this option was not available to applicants who were categorized as “Asiatic.” This racial prerequisite significantly raised the stakes in the classification of Armenians in the United States. Were they

entitled to the status of “free white persons,” as Judge Lowell refused to rule out in 1909, or had Armenians been falsely included in this category, as the U.S. government contended?

In 1925, the latter sued to cancel the citizenship of Tatos O. Cartozian, an Armenian rug dealer from Portland, Oregon, on the grounds that “at the time of the issuance of his certificate, he was not, nor is he now, entitled to naturalization as a citizen of the United States.”<sup>251</sup> The case was brought before the District Court of Oregon to “test” the 1909 decision and determine, once and for all, if Armenians were entitled to citizenship in the United States. It was widely publicized and closely watched as a high profile case that was to settle the limits of whiteness in North America (Tehrani 2000; Craver 2009; Maghbouleh 2017).

The status of West Asia in the popular imagination had changed since the late Judge Lowell of Massachusetts pronounced “there is no European or white race, as the United States contends, and no Asiatic or yellow race which includes substantially all the people of Asia” (Halladjian et al. 1909). Although strategic priorities had shifted from adoption and immigration to concentration and resettlement in a national homeland, far away from North American shores, Armenian women and children were highly visible as wards in need of American protection. This visibility had been produced by Near East Relief, its motion picture *Auction of Souls* (1919), and the “Golden Rule Sunday” campaign of 1923 which encouraged ordinary Americans to

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<sup>251</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all citations that follow are from District Judge Wolverton’s opinion in *United States v. Cartozian*, District of Oregon, District Court, 6 F.2d 919, July 27, 1925.

prepare “orphanage-style” meals and symbolically adopt Armenian orphans. Eugenic anxieties about racial intimacy banished these bonds of affection to the symbolic space of humanitarian representation. As immigration from southern and eastern Europe was increasingly restricted, what was the place of Asia Minor in the landscape of American whiteness? Could Armenians “adapt” to the American environment? From the standpoint of “racial” progress, was it desirable that Armenians be allowed to “intermix” with American-born whites?

As *The Morning Oregonian* titled in April 1925, the Cartozian case involved “many highly interesting racial questions”<sup>252</sup> at a time of hardening demarcation lines.<sup>253</sup> Recent Supreme Court decisions had narrowed the meaning of “white person” to “what is *popularly* known as the Caucasian race” (U.S. v Bhagat Singh Thind, 261 U.S. 204 [1923]; original emphasis) to exclude “person[s] of the Japanese race” and “high-caste Hindu[s], of full Indian blood” from this category. Now, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service had lined up a “series of test cases” to narrow in on “the boundary between white and Asian” (Craver 2008, 31). Other “Asiatic races, such as Afghans, Syrians, Armenians, Turks, Kurds, Arabs and Bedouins” (ibid.) were still considered “border line cases” that charted “a zone of more or less debatable

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<sup>252</sup> “Racial Questions Involved in Trial,” *The Morning Oregonian*, April 8, 1925, 8.

<sup>253</sup> Tatos O. Cartozian’s legal team was poised to take the Armenian case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The latter had recently ruled that Japanese and “Hindus” were not “free white persons” within the meaning of “Caucasian” in Section 2169, U.S. Revised Statutes. Takao Ozawa’s petition to the District Court for the Territory of Hawaii had been rejected in 1905. Bhagat Singh Thind’s petition to the District Court of Washington was denied in 1919. However, he reapplied to the District Court of Oregon on the basis of Halladjian et al 1909 and was granted citizenship in October 1920. See *Ozawa v. United States*, November 13, 1922, 43 S. Ct. 65; *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, February 19, 1923, 268 F. 683.

ground outside of which, upon the one hand, are those clearly eligible, and outside of which, upon the other hand, are those clearly ineligible for citizenship” (*Ozawa v. U. S.*, 260 U.S. 178 [1922]). This boundary, which Judge Lowell found impossible to determine in 1909, had to be settled in order to appease eugenic anxieties and tighten the screws on American whiteness.

In the naturalization case of Bhagat S. Thind, Judge Charles E. Wolverton of the District Court of Oregon had refused to “discuss” if a “high-class Hindu, coming from Punjab” was “ethnologically a white person” (*In re Bhagat Singh Thind*, 268 F. 683 [1920]). His decision to grant Thind’s petition for citizenship on the basis of the 1909 Armenian precedent was overthrown by the Supreme Court in 1923. The latter maintained that “individual qualifications of the appellee” were irrelevant because the Immigration Act of 1907 designated a racial “class” of “white persons” that were deemed eligible for U.S. citizenship. It rested on a standard of “popular” knowledge about “the Caucasian race” (*U.S. v Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 [1923]).

In 1909, Judge Lowell of the Circuit Court of Appeals of the District of Massachusetts rejected the argument of the U.S. government that “the average man in the street understands distinctly” who or what a “white person” was “without being able to define” it (*In re Halladjian et al.*, 174 F. 834 [December 24, 1909]). However, in 1923, the Supreme Court corroborated that the status of being white was “popularly known” according to the “understanding of the common man” (*U.S. vs. Bhagat Singh Thind* [1923]). The Supreme Court maintained that “racial difference” was “instinctively recognize[d]” and rejected without the “slightest question of racial



superiority or inferiority” – it was “merely” undesirable that “distinct” racial groups would “mix.” The “common sense” of white men was affirmed as the fuzzy standard by which petitioners were to be classified as either clearly *eligible*, or clearly *ineligible*. Outside of the “speculative processes of ethnological reasoning,” did Armenians share *physical* characteristics that “unscientific men” would recognize as “sufficiently the same” – “bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh” – to classify them in the statutory category of “white persons”?<sup>254</sup> The Supreme Court conceded that some “types” may elude “grand racial division” and “justify an intermediate classification” due to an “intermixture of blood.” If Armenians were not “people of Primarily Asiatic stock” (sic), the Supreme Court required that classes of petitioners be “received as unquestionably akin,” as a test, by “Nordic” white people, specifically “from the British Isles and Northwestern Europe.” They had to be “readily amalgamated with them” as the “Slavs and the dark-eyed, swarthy people of Alpine and Mediterranean stock” that constituted the “great body of our people.”

By the time Tatos O. Cartozian’s naturalization case was brought before Wolverton in 1925, the Judge had a chip on his shoulder. Going out of his way not only to discuss whether Armenians were *popularly* “known” as white, he suggested it could “scarcely be doubted” that Armenians were of the “Alpine stock” (*U.S. v. Cartozian*, 6 F. 2d 919 [1925]). Citing Greek and Roman sources, American

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<sup>254</sup> This was the standard set by the Supreme Court decision in *U.S. v. Thind* (1923), the ruling that overturned Wolverton’s decision in *In re Bhagat Singh Thind*, 268 F. 683 (1920).

ethnography, and British travel writing as “scientific” evidence,<sup>255</sup> he maintained that Armenians had entered “their historical seats” in Asia Minor from an “adobe in Europe” – as settlers “from the west.” Wolverton also invited expert testimony from Ronald B. Dixon, a supporter of the Immigration Restriction League founded at Harvard University in 1894, and “profound scholar” of anthropology, as well as Franz Boas, introduced as a “lecturer and author on the subject.” Dixon attested that “the weight of authority is overwhelmingly in favor of the proposition that Armenians are white persons, and that Caucasian and European, as used in common speech, are practically synonymous [...] in current usage.” Boas confirmed “nobody doubts [...] the European origins of Armenians and their migration into Asia Minor.”

James L. Barton, foreign secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, also one of the founder of Near East Relief, testified that he had never heard it suggested “that they (the Armenians) were not white” and affirmed “Americans and foreigners” had “always regarded them as white” in Turkey and Armenia. Another “scholar of note,” Paul Rohrbach, a German advocate for colonial settlement, testified that “the color line is not drawn against the Armenians anywhere in the world.” From the standpoint of racial science, it was absurd to invoke the “color line” in the Ottoman context. However, it was a calculated remark which was to suggest that Armenians in the United States were neither “black,” nor “Chinese,” and therefore sufficiently “white.” This was affirmed by Boas who stated “it would be

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<sup>255</sup> He cited Herodotus and Strabo, Daniel C. Brinton’s *Races and Peoples: Lectures on the Science of Ethnography* (1890), William Z. Ripley’s *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (1899), and H. F. B. Lynch’ *Armenia, Travels and Studies* (1901).

utterly impossible to classify them (Armenians) as not belonging to the white race.” Ironically, this testimony affirmed the possibility of doubt by denying it.

Would “children born in this country [...] retain indefinitely the clear evidence of their ancestry,” or would they “lose the distinctive hallmarks of their [...] origins”?<sup>256</sup> Judge Wolverton maintained that Armenians would “readily amalgamate with the European and white races.” He argued that they had “always held themselves aloof” from the “Mongolian or other kindred races” which were, according to James L. Barton, “always marked as completely distinguishable from the Armenians.” Paradoxically, the proposition of Armenian assimilability with “white races” implied that Armenians were *neither* “European,” *nor* “Asiatic,” but a “race” *onto its own* – neither “white,” nor “not white.”

Mrs. Otis Floyd Lamson, an Armenian woman married to an “American citizen born in Wisconsin,” testified that Armenians adapted “American home life, provided they speak English.” She had become a U.S. citizen in 1911.<sup>257</sup> Born in Anatolia, she

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<sup>256</sup> As part of his report on “Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants” (1910), Boas measured the skulls of Armenian immigrants in New York City. He argued that the “Armenian head form” was characterized by “flatness of the occiput” that was allegedly aggravated by traditional cradling techniques (Boas 1940, 74). Unlike in his studies of Italians, Bohemians, and Jews, he did not find that Armenians born in the United States had “narrower faces” than foreign-born Armenians. His sample also suggested that most Armenians had dark or light brown eyes and black or dark brown hair. He did not measure pigmentation of the skin. On the index of “equiformity” (*Gleichförmigkeit*) of siblings, Armenians ranged “below” the median of “European groups” but “above” African and indigenous groups. Since the Dillingham Commission could no longer fund Boas’ research on the plasticity of immigrant “types” after 1910, he published his findings on Armenians in a separate German-language article in 1924. See Franz Boas, “Bemerkungen über die Anthropometrie der Armenier,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. 3-4, 1924, 74-82.

<sup>257</sup> It was also pointed out that she “mastered six or seven languages” and was overall “very intellectual and highly cultivated.” This was significant because literacy tests were applied in

was presented as a paragon of Armenian assimilation to American whiteness. Her example served to affirm that “Armenian blood” *faded* through “intermarriage [...] with native Americans” (implied to be white persons). Other witnesses testified to the existence “Armenians in Boston who have married American wives” (again, implied to be white women), or more generally, find “Armenians intermarrying with white people everywhere” (sic). Franz Boas and M. Vartan Malcom, an Armenian attorney from New York City, supplied the court with statistical evidence that testified to a “normal” Armenian “intermarriage rate.” Out of 52,840 persons identified as Armenian on the 1920 census, 9.63 percent were married to “native white Americans,” that is, Anglo-Saxon whites, as compared to 10.4 percent of the “first generation of immigrants” from southern and eastern Europe.<sup>258</sup>

Tatos O. Cartozian’s marriage to an Armenian woman, however, had been concluded in Anatolia. Out of five children, two had been born in the United States since their immigration in 1910. The defendant stated in *The Morning Oregonian* that he was “greatly surprised that a contention has been advanced that we are not white people.”<sup>259</sup> He argued that he had “never been discriminated against because of my race or nationality.” In defense of his claim to whiteness, he advanced that “Armenian generally are law-abiding people,” “a Christian nation,” and that those who were

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addition to racial prerequisites to identify and exclude “undesirable” petitioners among those that were formally eligible.

<sup>258</sup> Considering the timeliness of the question, Boas pointed to a recent study by a student at Columbia University. See Julius Drachsler, “Intermarriage in New York City: A Statistical Study of the Amalgamation of European Peoples,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1921.

<sup>259</sup> See “Racial Questions Involved in Trial,” *The Morning Oregonian*, April 8, 1925, 8.

domiciled in the United States “mingle on terms of equality with native Americans and frequently intermarry with them.”<sup>260</sup> This was to show that Anglo-Saxon whites found Armenians worthy of commingling, implying that the racial difference of Armenians was minor and therefore potentially fleeting.

In order to retain the right to remain in the United States, it was necessary for the Cartozian family to “make Armenians legibly white to the court” (Maghbouleh 2017, 167). To this end, as noted by Neda Maghbouleh, “every possible piece of social evidence at hand” was “strategically deployed or muted” (167). In light of the criteria set out by the Supreme Court in 1923, *Hazel and Orie Cartozian*, the defendant’s foreign-born adult daughters, were showcased as “proof incarnate of Armenian assimilability” (ibid.). Racial “progress” in the United States mandated that Armenians were as “adaptable” to the “American environment” as “white races” (Boas 1940, 65). According to the script supplied by Franz Boas a decade earlier, the Cartozian sisters were presented as “upstanding, well-groomed, and confident young women” that had readily and happily “sloughed off their Armenianness in favor of a mainstream American identity” (Maghbouleh 2017, 167). Through the successive exclusion of Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and now, Armenian identity, this “mainstream” American whiteness was being invented during the litigation process.

While “intermixture” with “Asiatics” was strictly discouraged, “intermarriage” with “native American whites” was practically mandated. In order for Armenians to be naturalized as “white,” the daughters of Armenian immigrants had to perform white

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<sup>260</sup> See “Racial Questions Involved in Trial,” *The Morning Oregonian*, April 8, 1925, 8.

femininity. The status of Armenians in the context of increasingly narrowing pathways to citizenship depended on the desirability of Armenian women as spouses for white men. Notably, the trial involved only cursory references to marriages between Armenian men and “American wives.” During the trial, as in popular culture and humanitarian discourse, Armenian masculinity was downplayed as sexually unthreatening and therefore racially inconsequential.

Judge Wolverton decided that Armenians had been unduly confined to the “zone of uncertainty” (Craver 2008, 35) between Europe and Asia that the Supreme Court hoped to eliminate. He decided they had passed the racial test:

Armenians in Asia Minor are of the Alpine stock, of European persuasion; second, that they are white persons, as commonly recognized in speech of common usage, and as popularly understood and interpreted in this country [...]; third, that they amalgamate readily with the white races, including the white people of the United States.

The court granted Tatos O. Cartozian the certificate of naturalization he had been denied and dismissed the U.S. government’s bill of complaint. The sexual logic of race and citizenship in the United States effectively denied the capacity of Armenian women to determine and transmit group belonging. This repeated the genocidal calculation of the late Ottoman government. Insofar as the space of whiteness shared structural features with the patriarchal logic of abduction in the Near East, it sanctioned coerced consent as a “necessity” of public health and racial hygiene.

### **“Accidents” of Geography**

Unbeknownst to Judge Wolverton, his expert witnesses, and the reporters of *The Morning Oregonian*, the naturalization trial of Tatos O. Cartozian was closely

watched beyond the shores of the United States. In late 1927, a column appeared in the Calcutta-edition of *The Statesman*, an English-language newspaper in wide circulation across vast stretches of the British Empire. Titled “Armenians in America,” it offered no clues to the occasion or timing of its publication.<sup>261</sup> Its anonymous author (or authors) made no references to the rise of anti-colonial sentiment in British India. Neither did they explicitly mention the Cartozian case. Instead, the article presented a series of curious “facts.”

First, it informed readers that Armenians were among the “early settlers” in North America, beginning with a certain “Martin the Armenian” who had allegedly been recorded as a “member of the colony of Jamestown” in 1618.<sup>262</sup> Two more Armenians, readers learned, had been “brought over” in 1653 to produce silk in Virginia. Secondly, the article continued, the number of Armenians in the United States of America had steadily increased until their immigration rate almost doubled in 1895.<sup>263</sup> By 1917, their ranks had increased to a total of 73,980 individuals, so the statistic given by the article, before reaching over 100,000 in 1927, “at present.” Armenians were described as “peace-loving and law-abiding,” “easily approached,”

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<sup>261</sup> See n/a, “Armenians in America,” *The Statesman*, Calcutta, Vol. XCIII, No. 17025, December 11, 1927, 25. Unless otherwise noted, all citations that follow are from this article.

<sup>262</sup> Jamestown Colony was established near Williamsburg in the present-day state of Virginia in 1607 as the first permanent English settlement in North America.

<sup>263</sup> While the article states “about 3,000 Armenians” resided in the United States prior to 1895, 2,767 more were admitted in 1895 alone. Conceding that “political unrest” in the Ottoman Empire had “started the movement,” the article explained that American missionary activity had “awakened” a “new interest among the Armenians toward America.” As soon as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) established its first station in the Ottoman Empire in 1820, Ottoman Armenians became targets of conversion campaigns because it was determined that they practiced a “corrupt” form of Christianity. See Edward M. Earle, “American Missions in the Near East,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1929, 398-417.

and “akin to English, French and Germans.” It followed that in “Europe, as well as in America,” they were “easily assimilated.”

As one reads on, it becomes clear that the overall purpose of the article was to repudiate the “erroneous impression” that Armenians were “an Asiatic people.” It was admitted that the “fact that Armenia is geographically located in Asia Minor” confused “some people” who lacked “racial knowledge.” However, the reader was informed, Armenians belonged to “the Aryan race, which is divided into three main branches: (1) the Nordic, (2) the Alpine, (3) the Mediterranean.” This had been corroborated – “beyond any question of doubt” – by “testimony of the world’s greatest historians, philologists, and anthropologists.” Cut and dry, “Armenians belong to the Denarian family of the Alpine branch.” Since “they are a branch of the same tree,” it was asserted, they “command all the intelligence, energy, and virtues of the best European stock.”

The notion of “testimony” implied that a trial had taken place, though it was unclear where, and that “doubt” had to be dispelled by “racial knowledge.” Science had been summoned by a court of law in the United States, and the opinion of an American judge now offered the occasion for an article about “Armenians in America” in a British newspaper in Calcutta. Its aim, however, was to secure a place of privilege for Armenians in India. Its effect was to cast their lot with colonial power.

Accordingly, the remainder of the article made plain that Armenians had “established themselves” in Asia Minor “as the white man supplanted the Indians in America.” They were “akin to English, French and Germans” and their church



“nearest” to the Church of England. This absurd claim was followed by references to Lord Cromwell, an English statesman, who arguably “called the Armenians ‘the intellectual cream of the East’,” while “others,” going even further, were purportedly referring to them as “the Anglo-Saxons of the East.” On the basis of this implausible assertion, the article concluded that “Armenians, for centuries, have been the standard-bearers and guardians of the western civilization in the East.” Thus, the author(s) positioned Armenians not only as “settlers” in North America but also in their West Asian homeland.

Claiming the status of racial kin of “the white man” was a strategy that depended on his recognition. The landscape of colonial rule had begun to shift in India and the “special status” of Armenians appeared increasingly in jeopardy (Seth 1937, 546). Unsettled, members of the Armenian “minority community” in Calcutta (544) drafted a letter to the British Viceroy and Governor General of India at Delhi. Its purpose was to “remind” the Earl of Willington of the commitments made to Armenians by his predecessors and the many “services” rendered by them to the British colonizer in India (545). Sent ahead of the 1935 Government of India Act, on March 24, 1934, they requested that the status of “Armenians domiciled in British India be defined” and invoked “an important Charter [that] was granted to the Armenians on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of June in the year 1688” (542).<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> For a discussion of the 1688 trade agreement between the English East India Company and the “Armenian nation,” see Chapter One.

In case the Viceroy had forgotten, they enumerated the privileges granted to “the Armenian nation” in 1688 for “all times hereafter,”<sup>265</sup> namely that they be treated “in the same manner as if they were Englishmen born” (Seth 1937, 544). Since these privileges had “never been revoked,” Armenians – as “loyal citizens of this great Empire” (546) – demanded to be “favourably considered in the new Constitution for the future Government of India” (545).

Three weeks later, the “memorialists” had their response. On behalf of the Viceroy, his private secretary curtly replied on April 13, 1934 that “Armenians who are British subjects [...] will enjoy the same privileges as other subjects of His Majesty” (547). It followed that Armenians were not natural-born citizens – “Englishmen born” – but subjects that could only ever hope to be “naturalized” and treated “as if” they were equal under British law. It did not matter that they considered themselves “akin” to the English, or if they claimed proximity to the Church of England. No “special status” was available to this self-identified “minority” among the colonized. In accordance with the law, the Crown, as the sovereign instance, might well revoke the privileges it granted at will.

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<sup>265</sup> They argued these “Charters” were “granted to the Armenians in India, through their representative, the illustrious Khojah Phanoos Kalandar” (Seth 1937, 544). I complicate this claim in Chapter One by suggesting that not only the meaning of the term “nation” did not designate a political entity but also that the modern concept of representation was still in formation in 1688. As Sebouh Aslanian has shown, Kalandar could not have been considered a “representative” even through the lens of this anachronistic reading. By 1934, it had become expedient to claim him as “the head of the Armenians in India” (544) in order to demand a set of civil rights for all Armenians in British India.

To express his disappointment, Mesrobian J. Seth, one of the undersigned, published the full “memorial” in his seminal study *Armenians in India* (1937) and exposed the reply to public scrutiny. He explained,

there are a number of Armenians working on the Indian Railways who are most arbitrarily classed with the Eurasians, or as they are now called, Anglo-Indians, with the result that whereas the European employees of the Railways get two months [of] sick leave in the year, with full pay, the Armenian employees are allowed full pay for fifteen days only when they go on sick leave.

He asked, “Why this injustice? Are the Armenians in any way inferior to the Europeans in purity of blood, colour, physique, intelligence, religion, loyalty, integrity, capability, social habits and mode of living?” And answered, as if to rest his case, “We think not” (Seth 1937, 547).

If the treaty rights of the “Armenian nation” were to be disregarded, the framework of race might capture “*all* the Armenians residing in India, whether British subjects or subjects of foreign countries” (ibid.; emphasis added). To this end, Seth corroborated his claim that “Armenians are of European origin” through excerpts from the article “Armenians in America” which he presented as “irrefutable facts” (548). Since the Cartozian decision had collapsed nation with race, race had to be mobilized to protect the “interests” of “*all* the Armenians [in India], irrespective of their country of origin or place of birth” (ibid.). If they were, in turn, “grouped with any community other than the European community,” it was understood that “their interests may not be adequately represented” (ibid.).

After the passage of the Government of India Act by the Parliament of the United Kingdom in London in 1935,<sup>266</sup> Seth solicited “expert opinion” on the “status of the Armenians in the New India [...] through the medium of the public press” (Seth 1937, 548). This query produced a response by Dhirendranath Sen, a young Bengali journalist and constitutional expert,<sup>267</sup> which Seth excerpted “for the information of our compatriots who are not born in India” (549). Based on the legal advice provided by Sen, Seth instructed Armenians that were “not ‘natural-born British subjects’ to take out Certificates of Naturalization, whereby they can be recognised as British Indian subjects” (549). Reducing the matter to a legal technicality, which did “not cost more than a hundred rupees,” Seth claimed those previously categorized as “Eurasians” would be “classed with the Europeans” once naturalized. However, Dhirendranath Sen’s response emphasized that it was “not correct to presume that if all the Armenians in India are of ‘European origin,’ they should be treated as Europeans under the new Act.”<sup>268</sup> He also explained he could not “follow” the assertion that “all ‘the Armenians are of European origin despite the fact that their country is by an arbitrary geographical distribution placed in Asia’.” As a budding anti-colonial intellectual, he rejected the logic of race on the grounds that “the question of ‘arbitrary geographical’ division” raised “an issue which is beyond the range of the

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<sup>266</sup> The Government of India Act, 1935 [25 Geo. 5. Ch. 2.] envisioned a federal system for British India and offered limited autonomy for constituent states but did not address the issue of civil rights.

<sup>267</sup> For Dhirendranath Sen’s legacy, see Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay. *The Bengali Intellectual Tradition: From Rammohun Ray to Dhirendranath Sen*. Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1979.

<sup>268</sup> See “Armenians and the New Constitution,” *The Statesman*, Calcutta, Vol. CIII, No. 19896, March 23, 1937, 14.

municipal law or the constitutional law of the British Empire.” He added, perhaps sardonically, that the “India Act, 1935 gives no relief against such ‘arbitrary’ division.” Armenians remained colonial subjects and were, technically, “neither Europeans nor Anglo-Indians as contemplated in the Act.”

Once the decision in the naturalization case of Tatos O. Cartozian travelled to Calcutta, it raised a number of questions about the nature of citizenship, the common law tradition, and the global effects of the colonial enterprise. In the context of colonial jurisdiction, racial classification served to expropriate the colonized and enfranchise a class of settlers. Armenians in the United States and in British India mobilized the idea of the West, the authority of its racial science, and the letter of its law to press for civil rights. Debates about naturalization and “eligibility” laid bare the legal construction of race and revealed its irreducibly contextual meaning.

### **Conclusion**

As the United States of America ascended to colonial power in its own right, the political technology of race came to determine the fate of Armenians in West Asia. Armenians in British India attempted to leverage its rising hegemony in the face of decolonization and fear of an impending loss of status. Race in the settler colony disarticulated bodies from land, and land from bodies. It dislodged Armenians from their station in West Asia and supplied the logic on which recognition depended: the idea of an “arbitrary geographical distribution.” Ultimately, this recognition refashioned Armenians as an extraterritorial entity that could incorporate, for the first

time, each and all. Though not “global” in its reach,<sup>269</sup> race in the United States effectively embedded Armenians on the imaginary plane of the globe. It transformed the orphan-nation into a global diaspora.

As the Armenian case illuminates, imperial formations reinforce and shape each other in ways that the study of discreet colonialisms obscures. Seeming footnotes to the grand narratives of power render chronology uncertain and open onto always already inter-linked worlds that are sustained by the transnationalism of empire before the nation. At that, debates about the racial status of Armenians in the colony show that regimes of truth on which modernity depends did not break with expediencies of conquest but codified them as positive science that shaped subjectivity and molded national identities. The irreducible possibility of doubt shaped the Armenian diaspora and enmeshed its national discourse with American discourses of progress and development.

Naturalization in the United States required that Armenians be defined as “foreigners” in West Asia. Positioned as white settlers, they were symbolically adopted into the American family. Thus, *Cartozian v. United States* determined that some West Asians would henceforth be considered “white” (enough) in the United States. Any legal recognition of “assimilability,” however, came at the cost of erasure of intimate ties to West Asia and West Asians. It was conditional upon a display of “European persuasion,” defined not by Armenians themselves but by their European

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<sup>269</sup> For the contrary view, see Denise F. da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

judges. Because this notion was constitutively ambiguous, it left open the possibility of reclassification as “Asiatic” and loss of status at a later time. The constant threat of denaturalization and deportation ensured complacency and banished difference to narrow spaces beyond public scrutiny. For those defined at the “boundary of white” (Craver 2008), inclusion would remain uncertain. It depended on the denial of indigenous status in West Asia, and symbolically repeated the violent loss of the Armenian homeland. It offered alienation as emancipation.

## Chapter 3

### Emancipating “Woman-Nationals” in Early Soviet Armenia

*Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations.*

– Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), 160

*They smash the old traditions but building the new ones is not an easy task. [...] don't think that the [new] life is easily built. It is a rather complicated process. Sometimes the old and the new get together, join each other, old and new emotions get mixed up. It is only with active struggle that the old can be overcome!*

–Araks, *A Girl-Communist's Letters* (1934), 29

### Introduction

In the Ottoman Armenian tradition, the figure of the “Armenian Mother” represented the “heart” of the Armenian nation, its “uncontaminated, unique core” (Ekmekçioğlu 2016, 11). The quality of “Armenianness,” all that “which made a person Armenian,” was imagined to “spring from the homespace” (ibid.). Armenian feminists such as Hayganush Mark, the founder of *Hay Gin* (Հայ կին, “Armenian Woman”), an Istanbul-based Armenian women’s journal that reached audiences as far afield as Egypt, France, and Canada, argued that “modern” Armenian women should be able to cross the “line dividing the homespace and public space” *without* ceasing to be Armenian (ibid.). As long as they were *educated* in the “songs, lullabies, food, garb, and crafts,” which constituted the *life-blood* of the nation, they could “act in the realm



of politics” without being “transformed too fundamentally” (Ekmekçioğlu 2016, 11).<sup>270</sup>

The threshold of the Armenian household symbolized a boundary that organized “the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death” (Douglas 2003, 6). This “symbolic pattern” (ibid.), foundational to Armenian national discourse, assigned the traditional Armenian woman the function of a “heart.” While Armenian men were ascribed “the capacity to transmit Armenianness” (Ekmekçioğlu 2013, 525), Armenian women were to keep it alive and nourished, beyond public scrutiny, as mothers and homemakers. Not only were they expected to reproduce the *flesh* of the Armenian nation, by giving birth and raising Armenian children, but they were also to instill the affective bonds that would connect its members in the absence of an Armenian state to subject them.

Lerna Ekmekçioğlu argues that Armenian men and adolescent boys were the first victims of the Armenian genocide because its “goal was to destroy Armenianness and prevent its reproduction in the future” (ibid.). Armenian women and children, however, were considered devoid of the capacity to *generate* “Armenianness.” For this reason, they became vulnerable to abduction by bystanders, primarily Kurds and Arabs, along the routes of death marches that eliminated almost the entire Ottoman Armenian community (Kévorkian 2011; Suny 2017). After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 put an end to the active extermination campaigns, scattered survivors

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<sup>270</sup> On gendered orality in the Armenian tradition, see also Melissa Bilal, “Thou Need’st Not Weep, For I Have Wept Full Sore: An Affective Genealogy of the Armenian Lullaby in Turkey,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2013.

were left alone to grapple with the aftermath of unfathomable destruction. While unknown numbers were subjected to forced labor, sexualized violence, and unwanted pregnancies, many succumbed to hunger and disease or died from exposure in the Syrian desert. Few were able to take refuge in international shelters and orphanages.

With the support of British and French occupying authorities, Armenian church and secular leaders orchestrated rescue missions in order to find and “recover” as many Armenian women and children as possible from Muslim households (Shemmassian 2003; Tachjian 2009; Watenpaugh 2010; Rowe 2011; Aleksanyan 2016; Ekmekçioğlu 2016). These efforts were considered vital to the “regeneration” of the Armenian nation as a whole.

*Turke* [Arm. “the Turk”] had attacked the Armenian family, violated mothers, sisters, and wives, kidnapped daughters and sons, killed husbands, fathers, and brothers. Therefore, National Rebirth had to start by reconnecting the broken pieces of the nation. Remnants had to find each other and form new families. The new families would reproduce Armenians, who would then inhabit the soon-to-be-established Mother Armenia [Arm. *Mayr Hayrenik*, “mother fatherland”] (Ekmekçioğlu 2016, 22-23).

The patriarchal household offered a familiar future-making script that was mobilized in order to “reverse the results of extermination campaigns” (Ekmekçioğlu 2013, 524). Since survivors “associated ‘living’ with vengeance” (29), the “wedding of two Armenians” (45) was considered the ultimate “revenge on the enemy” (29). Through the life-giving powers of Armenian motherhood, Payladzu A. Captanian, a survivor from Samsun, wrote, “three families [would be] established on the ruins of one ruined family” (Ekmekçioğlu 2016, 30). She continued, “that’s how the Armenian

Nation would come back to life and reconstitute itself” (Ekmekçioğlu 2016, 30).<sup>271</sup> According to Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, the project of reconstitution was often described in capitalized terms such as “National Rebirth/Restoration/Revival (*Azkayin Veradznunt*) and National Reconstitution (*Azkayin Verashinum* and *Azkayin Veraganknum*)” (22-23). While the image of “rebirth” directly links the survival of the nation to the reproductive capacities of Armenian women’s bodies, its capitalization conveyed its character as a political project.

Upon his return from exile in 1918, Zaven Der Yeghiayan, the Armenian Archbishop of Constantinople, called for the “gathering of orphans” (*vorpahavak*) (34). The physical “recovery” of abducted Armenian women and children raised questions about their new symbolic status. It required a revision of “pre-genocide ideas about purity and propriety” (35). In order to transform them into “proper marriage candidates and future mothers” (*ibid.*), they were decreed “innocent victim[s]” that were *not* to “be held morally responsible” (36). Armenian men in the diaspora, primarily labor migrants in the Americas, were urged to marry orphaned or rescued Ottoman Armenian women and girls without inquiring into their past. This was framed as a *national* duty because “these women still represented the honor of the nation [...] that men had to protect by marrying them” (*ibid.*).<sup>272</sup> Since the integrity of the Armenian hearth had been violated, the honor of survivors had to be declared

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<sup>271</sup> See Payladzu A. Captanian. *Tsavag* [Little Pain]. New York: Armenia Dbaran, 1922.

<sup>272</sup> See also Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, “Armenian Refugee Women: The Picture Brides, 1920-1930,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1993, 3-29.

inviolable. Even in captivity, they had to remain “pure,” rather than polluted, in order to restore the virility of Armenian manhood through their “recovery.”

Hayganush Mark and others sought to renegotiate gender roles in this radically altered discursive environment. With national conceptions of honor in flux, “feminism among Armenians reached its zenith in the aftermath of the genocide” (Ekmekçioğlu 2016, 54). Taking up the pen to write about modern Armenian womanhood, Armenian feminists in Istanbul,<sup>273</sup> Cairo, and elsewhere began to publish in Armenian language women’s journals, newspapers, and periodicals (Rowe 2003; Ekmekçioğlu 2016). They hoped to integrate liberal feminism and Armenian nationalism.

Women’s emancipation also became a central tenet of early Soviet statecraft in the newly founded Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.<sup>274</sup> However, Soviet reformers conceived of feminism in an entirely different way. Concerned with the coming of the “truly” socialist society, they sought to reconfigure the nation-body into a transnational

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<sup>273</sup> After the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the city of Constantinople was renamed Istanbul.

<sup>274</sup> At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Armenian delegates had set their hopes on allied promises of a “Greater Armenia,” an Armenian mandate state in Anatolia under American administration. By late 1920, however, the end-games of imperial play on the chessboard of Asia Minor maneuvered Armenians into a checkmate. As a result of the Turkish advance on Yerevan, Alexander Khatisian, the foreign minister of the Republic of Armenia, a short-lived liberal republic, was forced to sign the Treaty of Alexandropol and forfeit Armenian claims to the Ottoman provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van. This also voided the right of return for displaced Ottoman Armenians that was guaranteed in the Treaty of Sèvres. On the basis of the remaining Armenian territories in the South Caucasus, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (*ASSR*) was formed on December 2, 1920. It was subsumed in the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (*SFSR*) in 1922. After this federation was dissolved in 1936, its constituent regions of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan individually joined the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (*USSR*).

form, corporealized as an integrated system of *energy*,<sup>275</sup> or labor-power, rather than congealed in flesh and blood. Opened up to entirely new “connections,” as put by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the epigraph to this chapter, the new “Soviet body” of the nation, per Joseph Stalin’s infamous directive, was to be endowed with “socialist” content.<sup>276</sup> This body was a hybrid, *synthetic* organism with *new* organs, reconfigured and sutured across both difference and distance by the political apparatus of the Soviet state.

New institutions were created in order to render the nation-body malleable, ply it open *without* killing it, and assemble it *anew* so that its life may flow along new “circuits, conjunctions, level and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensities, and territories and deterritorializations” (Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 160). In order to make this “new life” viable, new *rules* of living were imposed. Through penal codes that criminalized so-called “way of life offenses” (*бытовые уголовные дела*),<sup>277</sup> the

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<sup>275</sup> For the notion of “energetic regimes” in political economy, see Matteo Pasquinelli, “Introducing Four Regimes of Entropy: Notes on Environmental Fatalism and Ergo-Determinism,” unpublished paper, *Beyond Entropy Symposium*, Venice, August 27, 2010. Entropy is a thermodynamic measure of change that represents the capacity of an energetic system to reorganize itself. See also Yuri Grigoryan, “Systemic Principles of Evolution,” self-published, n/a. URL: <https://sites.google.com/site/philosophistor/Home/evolution1a-1> (accessed January 10, 2018).

<sup>276</sup> After Vladimir I. Lenin’s death in 1924, Joseph V. Dzhugashvili, a Georgian Bolshevik who became known by his alias “Stalin,” began to transform his previously administrative office as the General Secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Communist Party into a position of unlimited authority. Until his death in 1953, he instituted a totalitarian police state. At the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party in 1930, Stalin announced that “the building of socialism in the Soviet Union is a period of blossoming of national cultures, socialist in content national in form” (Nasim 1930, 83; my translation).

<sup>277</sup> See S. Akorov, “Борьба с бытовыми преступлениями [Struggle with Way of Life Offenses],” *Революция и Национальности* [Revolution and Nationalities], No. 4-5, 1930, 58-69.

national “milieu” was to be altered in such a way as to incite its “organs” to metabolize with nature in a new – a *socialist* – way, which was yet to be invented.

### **Inventing the Women-National**

Soviet feminists believed the “Eastern” woman *sequestered* at the “heart” of the tribe or the nation. They campaigned for her “release” from the “traditional” household. Unlike Armenian feminists in Istanbul or Cairo, however, they sought to harness her capacity to labor to the Soviet project. Whether hailed anew, or for the first time, the “growth” of socialism depended on the “energetic,” “lively,” and “active” participation of women, youth, and peasants in “social-political life.”<sup>278</sup> The threshold of the household, the symbolic boundary of the national organism, would have to be *crossed* – either in one direction, *voluntarily*, or the other, by cunning and force – because the Soviet project required each and all to *join* in this new *mode* of living. Those found unreceptive, would have to be subjected, and that which could not be converted, would have to be *excised* – as a fleshly matter obstructing the circulation of “revolutionary” energy. The nation, as “community of blood,” was to be abolished through the emancipation of so-called “wom[an]-nationals” (*женщин-националок*).<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> See N. A. “Что такое делегатские собрания и что они дали труженице Закавказья [What Are Delegate Meetings and What Have They Given the Female Laborer of the Caucasus],” *Издание отдела работниц и крестьянок ЗКК РКП* [Press of the Section of Female Workers and Female Peasants of the Transcaucasian Communist Party], Tiflis: *Красная книга* [Red Book], 1924.

<sup>279</sup> See S. Акоров, “Борьба с бытовыми преступлениями [Struggle with Way of Life Offenses],” *Революция и Национальности* [Revolution and Nationalities], No. 4-5, 1930, 58-69.

Across the fundamental divide of Orientalism, the fault line between Europe and Asia, legal technicians invented a new category of the subject in order to grapple with questions of sexual difference (*вопросы пола*) in the East. Preoccupying Soviet feminists and party leaders alike, the figure of the “woman-national,” however, could only be encountered in West and Central Asia. She was the intersection of the so-called “Woman’s Question” and the “National Question,” the embodiment of the divisions that ran through the political subject of Soviet socialism. Insofar as she belonged to a “national” community, that is, a non-Slavic group that was recognized as a “nation,” she was imagined as an individual whose labor-power was consumed, and thereby “wasted,” by the patriarchal household. The “woman-national” was presumed to be a worker in the clutches of “backward” tradition.

This notion hinged on the same Orientalist tropes that were used to justify British colonial rule in India or French colonial rule in Algeria. Scholars of women’s emancipation in the Soviet East have focused on the colonial conquest of predominantly Muslim contexts in West and Central Asia. While “unveiling” campaigns, for example, have been critiqued as part of a colonial strategy to disempower native elites (Massell 1974; Northrop 2003), the lens of religion does not account for legislative and governmental attacks on gender relations in the Christian setting of Armenia. This suggests that the frame must be widened in order to critique Soviet Orientalism on its own terms, rather than imposing critiques of Western European colonial discourse that seem to come with ready-made conceptions of race, religion, and indigeneity.

Through a close reading of archival and primary materials, in the Russian original, I argue that Soviet reforms sought to accomplish *more* than “saving brown women from brown men” in order to morally prop up the supremacy of white men.<sup>280</sup> Critiques of Soviet discourse as an extension of Russian imperialism may be geopolitically expedient, but they fail to get at the *vital* importance that was attributed to women’s emancipation campaigns in the East. The communist future *materially* depended on the subjection of “Eastern” women as individual agents. When rendered in the more familiar terms of “tradition” as “customs,” the decidedly *vitalist* undertones of the struggle that Soviet reformers waged against so-called “survivals of tribal life” (*преступление, составляющие пережитки родового быта*) are lost in translation.

### **Lost in Translation**

While S. Akopov uses the term “wom[an]-nationals” (*женщин-националок*) in his article “Struggle with Way of Life Offenses” in the Russian original of *Revolution and Nationalities*, a monthly periodical of the Soviet of Nationalities in Moscow, the second chamber of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union between 1924 and 1937, the term is entirely omitted from the English translation offered by Rudolf Schlesinger, the classic Anglophone source on Soviet family law.

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<sup>280</sup> This aphorism was first coined by Gayatri C. Spivak to describe the British codification of Hindu and Muslim family law in colonial India. It was widely taken up by transnational feminist critics to relation to other colonial contexts. See Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice,” *Wedge*, Vol. 7-8, 1985, 120-130. See also Lila Abu-Lughod. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.



Furthermore, the title of Akopov's article is translated as "The Struggle against Offences Rooted in the Traditional Way of Life." The Russian title "*Борьба с бытовыми преступлениями*," however, includes neither the verb "rooted" nor the qualifier "traditional." In a footnote, Rudolf Schlesinger's anonymous assistant noted, "A single adjective in Russian (*bytovie*) serves for this phrase [the title]; but in the text I have sacrificed accuracy for brevity and rendered it by 'traditional'" (Schlesinger 1949, 188). The false association of the target of Soviet reforms with "tradition" was further reinforced by Gregory J. Massell who identified S. Akopov as one of the Bolshevik "party's legal specialists in the battle with tradition" (Massell 1974, 333).

The issue of translation and limited access to primary materials during the Cold War likely led American scholars of Soviet transformation in Armenia such as Mary K. Matossian to rely on secondary sources. Because she drew on Rudolf Schlesinger's *Changing Attitudes in Soviet Russia: The Family* (1949), rather than S. Akopov's original article, she reproduced the inaccuracies and errors of the excerpted translation. In *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (1962), for example, she indicated that only four cases of "bride-purchase" (*калым, kalyt*), a newly criminalized "way of life" offense, were persecuted in Armenia in 1926 (Matossian 1962, 70). However, the original statistic, extracted from S. Akopov's 1930 article, indicated *thirty-four* such cases. Matossian copied the wrong number from Rudolf Schlesinger's translation (Schlesinger 1949, 197).

Similarly, according to Akopov, not one hundred twenty-two but *two hundred* twenty-two "middle-class farmers" (*середняки*) in Armenia were convicted of "way

of life” offenses in 1926. In an omission that was her own, however, Matossian also left out an entire category of offenses that was still included in both the original and Schlesinger’s translation. Although fifteen cases of “polygamy” were tried in Armenia in 1926, she decided to ignore the evidence. This decision speaks to the operation of racialized perceptions of difference in West Asia between Armenians, as Christians, and Muslims, who were more firmly associated with the practice in the Western imagination of the East. Since “polygamy” had been framed as a “traditional” offense, it became problematic for Matossian, working with Schlesinger’s translation, to imagine that Armenians, as Christians, could have been found to engage in the practice. Conceivably, she assumed that the data pertained to non-Armenians, or Muslims, residing in Armenia, whom she excluded from Armenian “nationality” by omitting the statistic. By applying a nationalist lens that discounted the political belonging of non-Christian populations in Armenia, she conflated religion and ethnicity in order to construct this Armenian “nationality” as ethnically exclusive. Her subtle omission of “polygamy” cases in Armenia inscribed Christianity as the source of Armenian “tradition.” Since the Armenian Apostolic Church did not sanction either divorce or marriages between more than two spouses, Orientalist stereotypes about Muslims helped sanitize the Armenian family-unit of associations with “tribal” custom, despite evidence to the contrary.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> None of the archival sources that are cited by Mary K. Matossian could be located in the National Archive of Armenia or Communist Party Archives in Yerevan, Armenia, and Tbilisi, Georgia. I examined the archival catalogue in use during Matossian’s 1957 visit to Armenia and concluded that her citations probably are not accurate. Overall, the history of the Soviet campaign to root out so-called “way of life” offenses in Armenia remain elusive. While in

## Abolishing “Tradition”

The Republic of Armenia, a short-lived attempt at liberal democracy in the South Caucasus, had been Sovietized in 1920 under threat of military occupation by the Turkish army. Without either much popular enthusiasm or defiance, power was transferred in the middle of the night to a Russian-instated Armenian Revolutionary Committee. For a brief period of time, Armenian nationalists, League of Nations officials, and international organizations such as Near East Relief, chartered by the United States Congress in 1919, competed with Soviet administrators and Bolshevik feminist over the allegiance of Armenia’s orphaned, displaced, and traumatized inhabitants. Disparate regimes of power – one biopolitical, the other vitalist – began to vie for hegemony. Through a close reading of Soviet discourse about women’s emancipation in the East, I demonstrate why sex in the “traditional” household became the focus of governmental experiments in early Soviet Armenia.

Between 1924 and 1936, non-Slavic Soviet Socialist Republics introduced criminal codes that were specific to their respective “national” context. Although the Soviet constitution of 1936 imposed a uniform law code across all constituent republic

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Yerevan, I consulted senior archivists and legal experts on the early Soviet period in Armenia on the 259 trials that were referenced by S. Akopov in 1930. Although they had overseen the reorganization of the legal archive of the Armenian Supreme Court and the Communist Party Archive of Armenia, respectively, these researchers had never heard about “way of life” trials nor seen any archival records that would have preserved the evidence. In her unpublished “Soviet Diary,” Matossian described being closely monitored and followed during her fieldwork in Armenia. It is very unlikely that she would have been permitted to access any Soviet archives, in particular legal archives that contained sensitive information about the Soviet persecution of Armenian customs. Therefore, it appears more plausible that she derived her information entirely from Rudolf Schlesinger who cited, in turn, S. Akopov’s 1930 article. For now, the archival trail seems to end there. I thank Jeremy Johnson for sharing Matossian’s unpublished field notes with me.

of the Soviet Union, “culturally” specific criminal codes were retained “in certain regions inhabited by non-Russian nationalities” until the 1950s (Stites 1991, 344). Soviet reformers understood that legislative change alone could not achieve the desired social transformation. In addition to measures of “social protection” (*меры социальной защиты*), which punished so-called “way of life offenses” (*бытовые преступления*) in the “national” union republics, the Bolshevik party also created new institutions to “improve” the everyday life (*быт*) of women.

The term *быт* (pronounce “*byt*”) refers to everyday life that is primarily reproduced in the household. It corresponds to the Armenian term կենցաղ (pronounce “*kentsakh*”). *Byt* exceeds natural life and entails all the mundane and repetitive activities such as cleaning and cooking that make a life. Without necessarily becoming the subject of conscious reflection, *byt* is the “way” in which a life is lived, a “lifestyle,” so to speak, that depends on spheres of life withdrawn from public scrutiny. An “inspection service” was instituted by the “Commission for the Improvement of Women’s Way of Life” (Կանանց կենցաղը բարելավող հանձնաժողովը), a committee formed in 1923 (Matossian 1962, 67). In order to surveil conditions *within* households, members of the *Komsomol*, the Communist Youth League, were recruited as volunteers. Girls, in particular, were urged to “win the sympathy and trust of the parents” (73) by contributing to house work. After gaining access to homes, they were to spread awareness about the new “way of life” legislation and “report cases of child beating, wife beating, and forced marriage” (66). Inculcating the will to *improve*, the

Communist Youth League drilled its membership on emancipation as a principle of Soviet society (*общественность*).

In effect, the Soviet state conscripted Armenian youth to inform on their own parents and peers. They were called upon to expose their most intimate relationships. This was to undermine the unquestioned authority of the father in the Armenian home. It established the claims of the Soviet state to the “individuals, goods and wealth within the family” (Burchell et al. 1991, 92). The “good management” of the Armenian household was a prerogative of its “head,” usually a man, who freely reigned over its members, often a multi-generational community with up to eighteen children, restricted only by his own conscience (Villa/Matossian 1982). The crossing of its threshold, in particular in rural areas, was governed by gendered codes of honor. Exposed to the gaze of strangers, acting in public was a potential source of shame. It was reserved for Armenian men whose masculinity was anchored to everyday life in the home – “womanspace” (Spivak 1999, 80).<sup>282</sup> The political economy of the household was to be set up at the level of society. Since “customary” ways of life tended to withdraw labor from governmental regulation, gender relations *within* the home became the target of a multi-pronged assault.

In 1926, less than two percent of all criminal cases tried by Soviet courts in Armenia were classified as “way of life” offenses. Almost half of the two hundred fifty-nine defendants were persecuted for marrying a minor, followed by forty-four

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<sup>282</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak argues that the para-subject fails to perform as a gendered agent because she is set apart in “womanspace.” In this conception, para-subjects are individuals that are not subjected and therefore not governed by the rationality of power.

cases of abduction, and five cases in which a woman had been forced to marry without her consent (Akopov 1930, 64-65; Schlesinger 1949, 197). Only twenty-six out of the hundred ninety-two convicted persons were women. All were classified by their class status, rather than their ethnicity. Most were middle class (*средняки*), that is, employees of large land owners (*кулаки*), followed by day laborers and small peasants (*бедняки и батраки*). Only three persons were classified as “workers” – the “title nationality,” so to speak, of the Soviet state. Five persons belonged to the Soviet bureaucracy and eleven were identified as “non-working elements” (*нетруд-элементы*), the most undesirable category.

After the Soviet Family Code of 1926 raised the legal minimum age for marriage to sixteen years for girls and eighteen for boys, marrying a minor became a criminal offense. Individual consent was enshrined as a legal requirement at the core of Soviet conceptions of emancipation. A marriage was defined as “the voluntary union of a man and a woman” (Schlesinger 1949, 220). Setting up a conjugal household with a spouse whose age was below the marriageable threshold was also perceived to endanger public health. Some women’s advocates argued that the minimum age of consent for marriage should be raised even further. A certain comrade Sopagova from the town of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, north-east of Moscow, declared during a party debate about the 1926 draft of the Soviet Family Code that young girls would “cripple themselves and develop serious illness” not knowing “how to preserve their health” or “rear a healthy child” (109). Comrade Kursky, the People’s Commissar of Justice, however, maintained, “racial characteristics include an earlier sexual

maturity” (Schlesinger 1949, 87). This assertion racialized cultural practices, such as arranged marriages and marriages below the new legal threshold, as a function of *biological* difference.

Presumed racial and geographic proximity to Europe seemed to determine if infractions were construed as “survival of tribal life” and therefore “way of life offenses,” or lapses in the judgement of an individual. The penal code of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, for example, considered “polygamy” a criminal offense *only* if “a marriage occurs as a form of religious and tribal survival” (215). If defendants “belonged to a nationality for which these actions cannot be regarded as survivals of tribal custom,” these actions – while certainly *immoral* – were not “punishable” (ibid.). In the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the category of “way of life offenses” only applied to those “national units where survivals of tribal life still exist” (Akopov 1930; my translation). According to this tautological reasoning, one and the same offense could have been either found “criminal” or simply “immoral” depending on the nationality of a defendant.

The codification of “criminal” forms of life in the “national” union republics was framed as part of a “battle” against “survivals,” “living remnants,” or “remnants of life” (*пережитки*) (Akopov 1930; my translation). Cultural practices such as arranged marriages were designated “backward” *precisely* because they were imagined to *slow* the progression of history toward communism. This sense of a “lag” in time was constructed through the denial of coevalness (Fabian 1983). It produced racial others that were *temporarily*, rather than permanently, inferior, but that would

have to become *like* European workers in order to “catch up” on the universal timeline of European development as the only path toward emancipation (*раскрепощение*).

The underlying racialization of “ways of life” spelled out a colonial relationship between the Soviet apparatus and its “nationalized” populations. While Soviet ethnographers hurried to take stock of national identities for the second Soviet census of 1937 (Hirsch 2005), technocrats deployed the designation “national” as an umbrella term for cultural “belatedness” (*отсталость*) on the stage of history. The status of “woman-nationals,” in particular, was considered “vital” to the new Soviet order because it marked the difference between the “new life” and the *decaying* remnants of the past in the present. The latter were “polluting” (*засорять*) the nascent Soviet body, they were “symptoms of alien elements metastasizing” (*явления разложения, бытового сращивания с чуждым элементом*) (Акопов 1930, my translation). Conceptualized as cancerous growths, native or “tribal” forms of life (*родовой быт*) were imagined to *delay* the progress of historical development toward communism. Instead of merely punishing individual offenders, nationally specific penal codes were targeting the entire cultural stratum in which “socially dangerous” practices persisted. In order to *abolish* “backwardness” (*отсталость*, lit. “belatedness”), so Акопов, its “basic conditions” (*предпосылки*) should be “rooted out” (*искоренение*). As Soviet society “progressed” toward communism, so the idea, the native *milieu* that was giving rise to “criminal” forms of life would *atrophy* and “die away” (*будут отмирать*) (ibid.).



As demonstrated by the terminology used, Soviet technocrats such as S. Akopov approached social transformation in a clinical manner. Legal reform was one of the tools that was used to operate on the nation. Soviet science made sense of non-Slavic societies through biological metaphors – borrowed from the disciplines of physiology and pathology – that applied conceptions of organic life in order to *organize* societies in a new way. Across the divide between Eastern and Western Europe, organic life was defined by its capacity to center the environment *around* itself, thereby rendering it its *milieu*.<sup>283</sup> The nation was imagined as a kind of social organism, a teleological form that metabolized nature as an end in itself, in order to satisfy its needs, rather than a means to the achievement of Soviet socialism. Although the Bolshevik revolution introduced new visions of life, through socialist *rules* of living, national “ways” of life were imagined to persist. The campaign to emancipate “woman-nationals” was designed to disrupt this mode of organization. It was intended to *denature* the status of woman as an “organ” that metabolized *for* the nation, at its sacred core, the *homespace*, and harness her capacity to labor to the Soviet project. By altering its gendered division of labor, it was imagined, the “backward” ways of life would eventually be no longer be viable.

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<sup>283</sup> On the debate between German biologism and Soviet evolutionism, see Francine Hirsch. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2005. On the impact of physiology and pathology on philosophies of life, see Georges Canguilhem. *The Normal and the Pathological*. New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1966]. On the notion of the organism and its milieu, see Georges Canguilhem. *Knowledge of Life*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008 [1965].

## The Concept of Emancipation

Binary oppositions between man and woman, human and nature, and Europe and Asia informed how the new Soviet regime navigated the “National Question” in West and Central Asia. In 1920, the first “Soviet Congress of the Peoples of the East” was held in Baku. Armenians, among the other “Oriental” contingents in attendance, were represented by a delegation of “peasants and workers.” Cheated out of independent statehood, they found themselves addressed as *subjects* rather than comrades.

you, peasants of Armenia, whom the Entente, despite all its promises, are allowing to starve, so as the better to keep control of you [...] Now we see that you yourself are beginning to understand your own needs, and so we address ourselves to you, in our capacity as representatives of the European proletariat, possessing great experience accumulated in our struggle, in order to help you achieve your emancipation.<sup>284</sup>

Figured as a “people of the East” who lacked the revolutionary consciousness to achieve their own emancipation as workers, Armenians were offered emancipation as an object of knowledge that was already formed out of the experience of the “European proletariat.” This proposition ran directly counter to materialist conceptions of emancipation.

Karl Marx’s thought on the status of woman illustrates this problem. In his 1844 notebooks, posthumously discovered in the Berlin archives of the Socialist Democratic Party (*SPD*) and published in 1932, the young Marx first schematized his

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<sup>284</sup> N. A. *Congress of the Peoples of the East. Baku, September 1920. Stenographic Report*, trans. Brian Pearce. U.K.: New Park Publications, n. a.

theory of alienation: neither the individual nor the collective could be fully human as long as any single one human's practical energy (*praktische Energie d[es] Menschen*) is alienated in (*entfremdet*) or captured *as* private property by another (Marx 2005, 94). He famously noted, "the entire stage of development of the human [can be] judged [...] on the basis of this relation [...] of *man* to *woman*."<sup>285</sup> The problem of alienation (*Negation*) has to be sublated (*Negation der Negation*) in two ways. First, the "commodity fetish" that positions the product of human labor as if it had power of its own (*Vergegenständlichung*) had to be demystified. When the worker becomes *conscious* of the negation of human labor power as the origin of the commodity's value, he or she can negate this negation and *effectively* appropriate the product of his or her labor (*wirkliche Aneignung*). This *conscious* appropriation of labor, in Marx' conception, *is* emancipation.

Secondly, private property negates the essential *individuality* of human being (species-being; *Gattungswesen*) but also alienates his or her from the productive life (*produktives Leben*) of the human species (species-life; *Gattungsleben*) (Marx 2005, 62). In Marx's conception of conditioned humanity, species-life must *not* be consumed by individuals because private property is a false *appropriation* of *another's* labor that is not *proper* to oneself. In other words, the humanity of all depended on the abolition of private property. Membership in the human collective *mandated* that one recognize

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<sup>285</sup> "Aus diesem Verhältnis [des Mannes zum Weibe] kann man also die ganze Bildungsstufe d[es] Menschen beurteilen," see Karl Marx. *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2005, 85. The emphases are in the original but the translation is mine.

the humanity of others as one's own *need* because only life in common was productive of *human* life. Marx argued that species-life was “the life which generates life” (Marx 2005, 62).<sup>286</sup> Communism, often falsely understood as the teleological principle of Marx' thought, was merely the “energetic principle [*energische Prinzip*] of the *near future*” (99; emphasis added). He explained that “communism as such was not the end [*Ziel*] of human development” (ibid.). This *end*, to Marx, was the *having taken shape*, in the future anterior, of the “*Gestalt* of human society” (ibid.).<sup>287</sup>

The being or essence (*Wesen*) of all individuals belonging to the human species, so Marx, was to *appropriate* nature by consciously acting on it, making labor – our metabolism with nature – an instrument of our practical self-generation *as human*.<sup>288</sup> In order to become fully human, we must recognize that nature exists *for us* and that the products of one's labor have value because one *invests* them with (labor) power in the production process. While human beings are acknowledged as part of

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<sup>286</sup> “Das produktive Leben ist aber das Gattungsleben. Es ist das Leben erzeugende Leben.” (Marx 2005, 62).

<sup>287</sup> “Der Kommunismus ist die Position als Negation der Negation, darum das *wirkliche* [effective], für die nächste geschichtliche Entwicklung notwendige Moment der menschlichen Emanzipation und Wiedergewinnung. Der Kommunismus ist die notwendige Gestalt [lit. “what will have necessarily taken shape”] und das energische Prinzip der nächsten Zukunft, aber der Kommunismus ist nicht als solcher das Ziel der menschlichen Entwicklung – die Gestalt [lit. “taking shape”] der menschlichen Gesellschaft” (Marx 2005, 99; my translation).

<sup>288</sup> “Der *Kommunismus* als *positive* Aufhebung [Negation der Negation] des *Privateigentums*, als *menschlicher Selbstentfremdung* und darum als *wirkliche Aneignung* des *menschlichen Wesens* durch und für d[en] Menschen; darum als vollständige, *bewußt* und innerhalb des ganzen Reichtums der bisherigen Entwicklung gewordene Rückkehr des Menschen für sich als eines *gesellschaftlichen*, d.h. **menschlichen Menschen**. Dieser Kommunismus ist als vollendeter Naturalismus = Humanismus, als vollendeter Humanismus = Naturalismus, er ist die *wahrhafte* Auflösung des Widerstreits des Menschen mit der Natur und mit d[em] Menschen, die wahre Auflösung des Streits zwischen Existenz und Wesen, zwischen Vergegenständlichung und Selbstbestätigung, zwischen Freiheit und Notwendigkeit, zwischen Individuum und Gattung” (Marx 86; bold emphasis added).

nature, our human nature (species-being), so Marx, is to recognize that the “unorganic” rest of nature (all matter that is not organized in a human body) is to be reworked to serve human ends. Accordingly, no human may involuntarily serve another or give consent to become instrumental to another (“false consciousness”) *precisely* because this would prevent the self-realization of humanity as a whole.

Here lies the crux of Marx’s thinking on “primitive” or “Asiatic” communalism as a form of life that is not alienated from nature, therefore *unaware* of human nature, and for this very reason *incapable* of transforming itself into a truly *human* society. To Marx, the revolutionary consciousness of the worker could not arise from subsistence agriculture because the peasant is imagined to “mistake” the “products of human industry” – the harvest and women’s labor – for *nature acting on itself*. Not only did this conflate “woman” and “nature,” but, more importantly, it did not properly recognize the locus of human agency. Through her emancipation from nature, woman’s membership in the human collective would be *actualized* so that society could fully “humanize” itself.

In other words, it was through *willed* application that the vital energy originating within the individual organism acts upon its milieu. This, by definition, was nature, *unless* it was a fellow man. Since nature is *for* man, it has no “organs” of its own. Instead, man metabolizes nature with his organs (*die ganze Nature ist sein unorganischer Körper [...] die er erst zubereiten muß zum Genuß und zur Verdauung*) (Marx 2005, 61). In the product of human labor, his or her practical will and capacity to labor is materialized as value. The capacity to *transform* nature by metabolizing it

resides entirely within the human *mind* as the locus of the *will* that directs the body to labor in a particular way. In order for human labor to be emancipatory, in this sense of human emancipation from nature, the human capacity to act on the environment must be *consciously* recognized as an *idea* before it can be set to work on the *material* world.

Gayatri C. Spivak critiques the notion of man's "organic" nature because it is secured by the "inorganic" nature of "primitive" man who is dehumanized *precisely* because he or she is presumed to lack the *practical consciousness* that nature is not *in* itself but *for* him (Spivak 1999). In Spivak's close reading of Marx, this idea of man's human nature as essentially "organic" generalizes a particular form of subjection as universally desirable.<sup>289</sup> As faculties of the mind, man's "organs" are subjective patterns of thought, cognitive pathways that are incited by a certain *discipline* of labor. They are shaped by the *will* to transform nature in the human image.

Based on this dialectic conception of emancipation, Soviet reformers approached "woman-nationals" in the East as para-subjects *without* "organs" in the sense that they appeared to lack a *consciousness* of themselves as human agents.<sup>290</sup> But Marx's scheme of emancipation fell short of resolving the tension between man and animal that was secured by the sign "woman." In the Armenian lexicon, the capacity for speech sets the human apart from "animal" (սխառնակ, "one who does not speak"). While the Russian term *пол* designates sexual difference as a biological

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<sup>289</sup> Spivak draws on Karl Marx. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, New York: Viking, 1973, 472-479.

<sup>290</sup> The Greek prefix *para* denotes a form of difference that is "adjacent to" or "beside" the subject. Therefore, the "para-subject" appears as a "selfed other" that "has not yet differentiated itself into Species-Being" (Spivak 1999, 80).

category, the closest Armenian term for “sex” would be *utn* (*ser*). However, *utn* (*ser*) means “type” in English and connotes differences that might be best described as stock, kind, blood, or race rather than gender.<sup>291</sup> Furthermore, there are no Armenian pronouns to demarcate sexual difference.

Based on a 1935 ethnography by D. P. Karbelashvili, a Georgian researcher at the N. I. Marr Institute in Caucasiology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Carla Kekejian argues that women “throughout the historical Armenian space” were expected “to yield their speech as a form of respect to men, or to remain silent as an expression of their modesty in the presence of others.”<sup>292</sup> This suggests that sexual difference was secured through context-specific restrictions on women’s speech, rather than scientific conceptions of biological sex. In rural areas, married and older Armenian women wore headscarves to cover their hair, ears, chin, neck, and often also their mouths while outside the home. During meals, it was considered polite for Armenian women to cover their mouths or eat alone. Only after a married women gave birth to her first child, her speech would be gradually restored. This could mean years of cohabitation in silence.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> The English word “gender” has been integrated as a loanword in contemporary Armenian usage (*գենդեր*, *gender*).

<sup>292</sup> See Carla Kekejian’s foreword to D. P. Karbelashvili. *Manual Speech in the Caucasus: Research on Baranchinsky Region Armenian SSR*, trans. Mitchell C. Brown, 2016. Karbelashvili argued that newly married Armenian women were using “manual speech” (*ручная-речь*) or sign language that allowed them to communicate basic needs without violating “speech taboos.”

<sup>293</sup> Carla Kekejian, “Harsneren: Language of the Armenian Bride,” *Gender and Sexuality in Armenian Studies*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, April 21, 2017, presentation.

Because Armenian women yielded their speech for designated periods of time in the conjugal household, as well as in the presence of strangers, they appeared “passive” in the eyes of Soviet reformers who believed they were “voiceless in their families” and “did not dare to speak their mind” (Kazandjian 1962).<sup>294</sup> Although Armenian women wore headscarves, women’s emancipation campaigns in Armenia did not focus on “the veil,” overdetermined as a sign of women’s oppression in Muslim contexts, but on women’s *speech* as the contested ground of Soviet modernization. Soviet reformers believed that the absence of speech also signaled an absence of subjectivity.<sup>295</sup> However, yielding one’s speech required an *active* engagement with silence. Rather than a sign of absence, withholding speech could also be understood as an *agential* practice. It not only secured the modesty of Armenian women but also the status of Armenian men as agents that were expected to handle potentially “polluting” interactions with strangers outside of the household. These gendered practices were central to Armenian national discourse. The difference they managed ran *deeper* than tropes of “passivity” and “backwardness” could capture.

Speech prohibitions moved the sign “woman” in proximity to the Armenian sign “animal” (անասուն, lit. “one who does not speak”). Because “woman” was subject to necessity in the patriarchal household, her subordination rendered “man”

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<sup>294</sup> V. O. Kazandjian, “Cultural Work Among Women in Soviet Armenia (1920-1925),” trans. Lilit Hakobyan, *Messenger of the Archives of Armenia*, No. 3, Yerevan, January-June 1962, 209-232.

<sup>295</sup> On the trope of speech in Soviet discourse, see also Anastasia Kayiatos, “Pantomimes of Power and Race: Can the Socialist Subaltern Speak?” *ULBANDUS*, Vol. 16, 2014, 24-44; Anastasia Kayiatos, “Silence and Alterity in Russia after Stalin, 1955-1975,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.



“capable of mastering and, eventually, destroying his own animality” (Agamben 2004, 12). This was so because gendered reproduction in the household, in the classical sense, secured the appearance of a “realm of *human* affairs” that was *not* determined by necessity (Arendt 1958, 25; emphasis added). By excluding “everything merely necessary or useful,” this public sphere (*polis*) actualized the humanity of man, “a living being capable of speech” (*zōon logon ekhon*) (27), through “action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*)” (25) between the heads of individual households who became “free” to inter-act as equal peers. Decidedly, this classical definition of the *political* way of life (*bios politikos*), as theorized by Hannah Arendt, fundamentally differed from liberal conceptions of politics as the public administration of life.

From the perspective of Hannah Arendt’s political thought, Marx’ materialist revision of Hegel’s philosophy of history introduced necessity into the realm of human affairs. By rooting historical progress in labor-power as a force propelling society “forward,” the meaning of the term “law” changed from a “framework of stability” to an “expression of motion” (463). Reducing man to animal existence, “man’s ‘metabolism with nature’” (464) was unleashed to grind away at the world that allowed for the appearance of human freedom. While the materialist turn to needs, to Arendt, voided the political, the actualization of humanity as species-being, to Marx, depended on this instrumental and universal human laboring with nature.

Although the Soviet Union is often categorized as an “illiberal” political formation, Soviet power in the East reworked existing organization through social reforms that resulted in the *disappearance* of the political realm, thereby reducing each

and all to “animality,” in Arendt’s definition, in the name of human emancipation. By negating the reproductive function of the household, universal subjection to necessity was achieved at the unprecedented scale of an entire society. Soliciting the speech acts of “woman-nationals” in public set up the symbolic realm of the Soviet economy. Collective efforts to manage social necessity in public cafeterias, kindergartens, and laundrettes, however, were cut short by the death of Vladimir I. Lenin in 1924. In effect, women throughout the Soviet Union became burdened with a “double shift” of domestic labor and participation in the public labor force.



Figure 7. Still image, *Белое солнце пустыни* (White Sun of the Desert), Mosfilm, 1972.

The Soviet transformation of “woman-nationals” into human agents remained a ubiquitous trope in popular culture and political discourse. *White Sun of the Desert*, a 1972 film set in early Soviet Central Asia, for example, allegorized the gendered nature of the colonial relationship through the adventures of its main protagonist. The Bolshevik hero saves ten Muslim women from their husband, a local chief, by assuming their guardianship, reluctantly, and placing them in an empty museum for protection. As a pun, he converts the space into the “First Dormitory for Liberated

Women of the East” and places a sign above its entrance that reads, “Down with Superstition! Woman – She is a Human Being as well!” By replacing the “harem” with the “museum,” *White Sun of the Desert* stages the symbolic transfer of “Eastern” women – played by Slavic actresses in costumes, with drawn on facial hair, and counterfeit jewelry – from “Eastern” households, headed by “barbaric” men, to the Soviet state, represented by a virtuous Russian man. At a time when Soviet audiences had officially “overcome” their differences, *White Sun of the Desert* fulfilled “white savior” phantasies at the “safe” distance of the “past,” a “backward” milieu that had been declared “abolished” by 1972.

### **Engineering the Soviet Nation**

The Soviet Union was “a new type of multinational state that shared some similarities with the European empires but defined itself in anti-imperial terms” (Hirsch 2005, 188). Its constituent republics and autonomous regions were administered on the basis of national identities that afforded a sense of self-determination, though not national independence in the sense of a sovereign state with a national economy (Suny/Martin 2001; Martin 2001). Administrative categories such as the “nation” (*нация*), “nationality” (*национальность*), “national minority” (*нацменьшинство*, lit. “nats-minority”), or “peoples” (*народность*, an ethnicity that is not a nation) were still in flux. With paper and pencil in hand, Soviet ethnographers and linguists were preparing the “conceptual conquest of land and peoples” (Hirsch 2005, 101). This required governmental improvisation on the ground. Soviet reformers experimented with sex as a political technology to mold the “national” economies of

peoples within the Soviet realm into one population, materially and across difference, not only at the level of the party, its law, and planned economy, but also, and fundamentally so, at the micro-level of the will and desire of individuals.

Under the rubric of “cult-enlightenment” (*культурпросветительная работа*), “cultural work among women” emerged as a political strategy to transform “woman-nationals,” peasants, refugees, and orphans into individuals, citizens, and builders of Soviet socialism. Cultural work would facilitate the “first awakening of individuality in the masses,” so Leon Trotsky, writing from his Mexican exile, and raise up a “new human stratum” in the Soviet East (Trotsky 1972, 177). Among the “backward nationalities of the Union,” he argued, the “old semi-clan culture” had just been “destroyed by the tractor” (171). Before the “question of a new socialist culture” could be posed, an extended “period of borrowing, imitation and assimilation *of what exists*” was necessary in order to “accelerate [...] the locomotive of history” (171-172; emphasis added). Though Trotsky, like Lenin, was opposed to “Russian chauvinism,” he maintained that “wholesale imitation” of “ready-made models of technique, hygiene, art, sport” (175) was “progress [...] in a certain sense” (173). From the standpoint of the materialist dialectic conception of emancipation, such an “appropriation” of “Eastern” life to “Western” art was not desirable. However, the presumption of universal history allowed him to embrace the positivism “of what exists” as a necessity to “move forward” on the timeline of human development “in an infinitely shorter time” (175). If Soviet power “had given nothing but this accelerated forward movement, it would be historically justified,” so Trotsky claimed, because it

could at least pride itself in accelerating the “tempo” of cultural development, “ready made in its latest forms,” by taking the “techniques” that “bourgeois pioneers had to invent” in the West and applying “the borrowing not partially and by degrees but at once and on a gigantic scale” (Trotsky 1972, 174). Once launched onto the plane of development, native forms of life would destabilize and fade away just as a landscape seen from the window of a train in motion. The purpose of cultural work in the East was to inculcate “progressive customs” and endow “a backward country [with] the possibility of gaining the level of the most advanced,” but “in a much shorter space of time than was needed formerly in the West” (ibid.). This calculated deviation from “socialist methods” (1) reveals the limitations of the Soviet conception of emancipation in the East. Because Soviet technicians relied on European philosophies of history, life, and society, they positioned West and Central Asia as their “Orient” in order to constitute the Russian center as modern and civilized (Tlostanova 2010).

Before Joseph V. Dzhughashvili was appointed as the first Chairman of the People’s Commissariat for Nationalities (*Народный комиссариат по делам национальностей*) (*Narkomnats*), he authored a slim booklet on *Marxism and the National Question* (1913). Writing in Austrian exile, under his pen name “Stalin,” he drew on the linguistics of Ernst W. J. W. Mach to define the “nation” (*нация*) as a “historically formed, stable commonality of people” with shared “psychic stock” (*психический склад*). The Russian term *склад*, for “stock,” also connotes the particular way in which something is “folded” or “stored.” The “character,” or cognitive patterns, of a “nation” were formed, so Stalin, in relation to the environment,

the “conditions of life” (*условиями жизни*), including the spoken language. Adapted to a particular habitat, a “nation” was a “national organism” (*национальные организмы*) that carried the “imprint” (*печать*) of its milieu on its mental physiognomy (*физиономию нации*). Stalin’s materialist conception of nationality was positivist, but not biologist. He argued that national character was not “given once and for all but changes together with the conditions of life, since it exists at every given moment.”<sup>296</sup> During the early stages of capitalism, he argued, “nations mend together” (*нации сплавиваются*). Once they exhausted the resources of their environment, he claimed, they would be forced to “disperse” and scatter in search of livelihood.

Writing in Austria in 1913, Stalin’s understanding of the “national question” was informed by his lived experience in the South Caucasus, as a Georgian Bolshevik, and by his immersion in Marxist debates in Central Europe. He had many occasions to observe the diasporic condition of Armenians, Georgians, and Jews. The ideological position he developed would come to inform Soviet policy on nationalities in West and Central Asia. A nation could not be “artificially welded together” (*искусственно спаять*), it could only be *organized*, artfully, on the basis of a positively existing *mentality*, the national physiognomy of the nation as a living organism.

In an inversion of the negative dialectic, the “content” of a given nation – its mental faculties or *way* of life – would be *reshaped* through changes made to its legal

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<sup>296</sup> The original passage reads: “‘национальный характер’ не представляет нечто раз навсегда данное, а изменяется вместе с условиями жизни, но, поскольку он существует в каждый данный момент, – он накладывает на физиономию нации свою печать.” See J. Stalin, “Марксизм и национальный вопрос [Marxism and the National Question],” *Просвещение* [Enlightenment], No. 3-5, March-May 1913, my translation.

and discursive environment. Through *positive* changes to the conditions of everyday life, the composition of national organisms could be altered. This empowered the milieu over the organism, so to speak, and ran counter to Marx's conception of human emancipation as the negation of the negation of property. In a triumph of techné over nature, Soviet ideologues such as Vladimir I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Joseph Stalin imagined that the "new order" (*новый строй*) of Soviet society would take shape once the organic life of nations was rearranged and harnessed by the political organs of the Bolshevik party. No longer an end in itself, the nation-body became instrumental to the Soviet project.

Reformist and utopian at the same time, this vitalist discourse prompted innovations in political technology. At the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party in 1930, Stalin announced that "the building of socialism in the Soviet Union is a period of blossoming of national cultures, socialist in content national in form" (Nasim 1930, 83; my translation). Stalin's idea to rearrange the "content" of the nation in a "socialist" form, resulting in "socialist content," stemmed from his suspicion that the national organism would become "more vivacious" (*более живуч*) if given the opportunity to "hide" behind a "mask" of socialist development (Stalin 1913). It fell to artists and cultural producers in the "national" republics of the Soviet Union to interpret this cryptic prescription.

Ali Nasim, a critic of the early Soviet period of "reconstruction," captured the confusion of the "workers of national arts" that appeared "tormented" at the first All-Union Olympics of the Theatres and Art of the Peoples of the USSR in Moscow in

1930.<sup>297</sup> In a review article in *Revolution and Nationalities*, the monthly periodical of the Soviet of Nationalities in Moscow, he asked, “What is a national form? Where to search and where to find her? From what, and out of what does this same national form form?”<sup>298</sup> He remarked that “the answers to these questions were not found” at the festival although “all theatres, except Russia’s, were consciously trying to find the origin from which to source elements of the national form.”<sup>299</sup> This Russian exceptionalism was characteristic of Soviet nationalities policy because it normalized the dominant status of Russian arts and culture in the Soviet Union. With respect to the “rest,” Nasim argued,

The point is that the national form is not important in itself but as a manifestation of proletarian, socialist content. The national form is closely tied to proletarian content and as proletarian theatre and art in the national republics are weak and not yet long developed, it is obvious that the problem of the national form could not be resolved without a solution to the problem of proletarian content.<sup>300</sup>

He surmised that the “arts of nationalities” should “unite the question of proletarian content in dialectical relation to the question of national form” but conceded that this “task” had not been accomplished at the All-Union Theatre

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<sup>297</sup> See Ali Nasim, “Реконструктивный период и задачи искусства национальностей: К итогам 1. Всесоюзной олимпиады театров и искусства народов СССР [Reconstructive Period and Tasks of the Art of Nationalities: On the First All-Union Olympics of the Theatres and Arts of the Peoples of the USSR],” *Революция и Национальности Ежемесячный журнал совета национальностей ЦИК СССР и коммунистической академии* [Revolution and Nationalities Monthly Journal of the Soviet of Nationalities of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR and the Communist Academy of Science], No. 4-5, 1930, 83-93, my translation.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.



Olympics.<sup>301</sup> Although the “question of national form was treated separately from the question of proletarian content,” he admonished, this was understandable “in the absence of trained theoretical workers...”<sup>302</sup> Stalin’s formula of a “national form” with “socialist content” had thrown cultural workers into despair. Representing the “new” nation with socialist “content” required impossible ideological contortions, yet the show had to go on.

The “Russian Empire’s feudal and colonial past” was haunting the Bolshevik revolution (Hirsch 2005, 231). Anxieties about “regressive elements” fueled the Soviet campaign against “living ‘survivals’ (*пережитки*)” that were persecuted in order to “accelerate [...] the process of the revolutionary transformation” (ibid.). Through the lens of Stalin’s organismic conception of the nation-body, in line with both European social theory and Armenian national discourse, tenacious “survivals” of “backward” ways of life were believed to endanger the life of Soviet society. Imagined as a cancer that vied for the vital forces of its host, “backwardness” was presumed to defer the structural integration of the “new order.”

Though Trotsky opposed Stalin’s embrace of the state as an end in itself, rather than a temporary prosthesis, he fully endorsed Stalin’s “official formula” that “Eastern” nations should be engineered to appear “national in form” but “socialist in content” (Trotsky 1972, 185). His only reservation was that “art” was “far less capable than science of anticipating the future” (ibid.). Once a professional class of Soviet

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

technicians had been created, the utopian vision of the “future culture” (Trotsky 1972, 180) had been betrayed, so Trotsky’s verdict in 1937, before the future anterior of “socialist society” (178) could have taken shape. He painted a picture of the party apparatus as a “parasite stopping up the living pores” of the body of society (50).

Originally intended as a prosthetic device that should not consume the life of its host organism – the masses – making its implantation permanent amounted to a breach of the “schema of the workers’ state according to Marx, Engels and Lenin” (52). Instead of acting as a “*stimulator*” (53; original emphasis), the “actual state now headed by Stalin” (52) had in reality created a “social physiognomy” (135) that Trotsky saw in direct opposition to revolutionary ideals. Though it had been designed as a “withering” device that “immediately begins to die away and cannot help dying away” (49) as soon as the “socialist form of life” (145) grows and comes into being, it deviously clung to the masses to “oppress” them and conduct their conduct. By raising a “ruling stratum” – technocrats – to head the workers’ state, bureaucracy, with its own “specific consciousness,” had been placed on life support as a synthetic organism with its own “flesh and blood” (ibid.), a separate nation-class, so to speak, that fed on society.

The organismic metaphors that permeated Soviet discourse about scientific socialism were a direct outgrowth of the European tradition of social thought and American anthropology. At Karl Marx’ funeral in 1883, Friedrich Engels, his great benefactor and editor, remarked, “Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic life, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history” (Arendt

1958, 463). In his magna opus, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Engels put the American anthropologist Lewis H. Morgan on par with Marx.<sup>303</sup> Lauding Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), subtitled *Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization*, as "one of the few epoch-making works of our time" (Engels 1884, 28; my translation), he adopted his "classificatory system" wholesale.<sup>304</sup> Engels believed that his own materialist history of the family had finally reconciled Darwin's theory of evolution with Marx's theory of value *through* Morgan's typology of kinship.<sup>305</sup> Lewis H. Morgan, a lawyer from rural New York, took up anthropology as a hobby. He argued there were three types of the family that represented stages of development on a linear timeline of human evolution. The "American Indian family [...] of the Bow and Arrow," he claimed, represented the universal human past of "savagery." The highest stage of development, "civilization," was represented by the "Aryan Family," a heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman. In between the two "types," he inserted

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<sup>303</sup> Friedrich Engels. *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staates; Im Anschluß an Lewis H. Morgans Forschungen*. Hottingen-Zürich: Verlag der Schweizerischen Volksbuchhandlung, 1884.

<sup>304</sup> See also Lewis H. Morgan, "A Conjectural Solution of the Origin of the Classificatory System of Relationships," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 7, 1868, 436-477.

<sup>305</sup> Engels was neither the first nor the only social theorist to apply Charles Darwin's thought about natural processes to societal change. Herbert Spencer, a British philosopher, pioneered the field of social Darwinism and was arguably the first to apply Darwin's theory of evolution to society in *The Synthetic Philosophy* (1862). Francis Galton, Darwin's half-cousin, applied principles of Darwin's theory of evolution to human reproduction and invented the discipline of eugenics.

the “Malayan Family,” which he believed “originated in *compound marriages in a communal family* [...] in the primitive ages” (Morgan 1868, 439).<sup>306</sup>

Ferdinand Tönnies’ empirical distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) mimicked this typology.<sup>307</sup> He argued that either “type” represented a social formation (*soziale Wesenheiten*) that was essentially organized by distinct “mentalities.” The original subtitle of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), “Essays on Communism and Socialism as Empirical Forms of Culture” (*Abhandlungen des Communismus und des Socialismus als Empirischer Culturformen*), *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), was omitted from the first English language translation in 1955. In the American reception, Tönnies’ *materialist* approach to “culture” as an empirical form of thought was disarticulated. “Communism,” in Tönnies’ framework, was a social formation based on *communal*

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<sup>306</sup> Conflating Malaysia and Hawaii, Lewis H. Morgan described his “Malayan Family” as the “Hawaiian form.” For a postcolonial account of indigenous relations in Hawaii, see Kehaulani J. Kauanui. *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008; Maile Arvin, “Still in the Blood: Gendered Histories of Race, Law, and Science in *Day v. Apoliona*,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 3, 2015, 681-703.

<sup>307</sup> See Ferdinand Tönnies. *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Abhandlungen des Communismus und des Socialismus als Empirischer Culturformen*. Leipzig: Fues’s Verlag, 1887. This work exerted great influence on German sociology before it was first translated into English in 1955. In his foreword, Pitrim A. Sorokin, a Russian emigré who founded the department of sociology at Harvard University, noted that *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* were “two different modes of mentality and behavior” that fundamentally set apart “two different types of society” (Tönnies 1955, v). See Ferdinand Tönnies. *Community and Association*, trans. Charles P. Loomis. London: Routledge & Paul, 1955. See also Ferdinand Tönnies, “Das Wesen der Soziologie”: Vortrag in der Gehe-Stiftung,” *Neue Zeit- und Streitfragen*, Vol. 4, 1907; Ferdinand Tönnies. *Fortschritt und soziale Entwicklung, Geschichtsphilosophische Ansichten*. Karlsruhe, 1926.

relationships – on “blood.” “Socialism,” or society, was structured by *rationality*, a way of relating to strangers that *transcended* “blood” as an organizing principle.

This distinction was foundational to the emergence of social sciences in Europe. Émile Durkheim, a French sociologist and ethnologist, for example, argued in his doctoral thesis that societies could be categorized in accordance with two distinct *modes* of social organization – either “mechanic” or “organic” solidarity.<sup>308</sup> While “modern” society, according to Durkheim, was characterized by a *dynamic* division of labor that promoted individuation, “primitive” society, in contrast, was static and rigid because its members merely labored *alongside* each other, without recognizing their social interdependency. Although he called these “primitive” subjects “monads,” they lacked individuality and merely functioned through a “mechanic” solidarity. It was distinct from “modern” society because it was not bound by “organic” solidarity. Bound by “collective conscience,” which was “communal,” and therefore did not allow for critical reflection, “primitive” society was a social body without organs.<sup>309</sup>

Gil Anidjar argues that organismic conceptions of “community” were fundamentally Christian because they presupposed “all communities had to have been

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<sup>308</sup> See Émile Durkheim. *De La Division du Travail Social* [The Division of Labor in Society]. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1893.

<sup>309</sup> Under Durkheim’s influence, this “collective conscience” became French ethnologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s object of study in *La Mentalité Primitive* (1922). He saw himself in sharp contrast to British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor’s work in *Primitive Culture* (1871) who approached culture in a functionalist vein. Both shared the fundamental assumption that distinct types of society could be classified and their development measured along a universal timeline of “cultural” evolution. See Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. *La Mentalité Primitive*. Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1922; Edward B. Tylor. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*. London: John Murray, 1920 [1871].

made of one substance, as it were, analogous to blood (this is said of the family, the class, the tribe and the race, and the nation too” (Anidjar 2013, 43). Because Lewis H. Morgan invented a “science of kinship on the basis of a ‘community of blood’,” he naturalized the idea that “civilized” societies were “evolved” because they had “emancipated themselves from blood” (ibid.). This hegemonic model of social evolution determined how Soviet ideologues framed women’s emancipation campaigns in West and Central Asia.

As noted by S. Akopov in 1930, the criminalization of certain “way of life” offenses aimed to “abolish” social practices that were considered “backward” because they reproduced the national organism. Its *fleshly* substance, so to speak, its *life-blood* was to be transubstantiated into *vital energy*, labor-power, to feed the “new life” of Soviet society. The nation-body was to be *reformed* according to *socialist* principles that were *revolutionary* because they *transcended* blood. Soviet reforms were designed to individuate so-called “woman-nationals,” in particular, introduce a “rational” division of labor across the entire Soviet realm, incite “organic” solidarity, as it were, among newly subjected populations, primarily in the Soviet East, that had previously subsisted in individual households. The Soviet project of “progress” on a universal timeline required that “communities” such as the “tribe” or the “nation” *emancipate* themselves from “blood” in order to move toward the *Gestalt* of the “human society” that Marx envisioned as the *end* of human development (Marx 2005, 99). This new kind of society was a mode of relating, a sociality (*общественность*).

Soviet vitalism departed from organismic thought about the nation but was consistent with the European life sciences. Georges Canguilhem argued that physiology (*anatomia animata*) was not concerned with anatomy as a stable form but with the animating force of *movement*. Instead of privileging “blood” as a *substance* of “livingness,” so to speak, William Harvey sought to observe the *circulation* of blood in order to open “the doors to the unlimited” (Canguilhem 1991, 205).<sup>310</sup> It was the *pulse*, the beating heart, that made *life* visible in *motion*. The anatomy of Soviet society, as envisioned by its architects, would be animated by the circulation of revolutionary energy – the will to *socialize* the individual’s capacity to labor beyond the bounds of the household, as the “core” of the national organism. At the center of the nascent Soviet body would be the *mind*, rather than the heart. Its engine of circulation would be revolutionary *consciousness*, its medium were *words*, rather than blood, and the political apparatus of the party state would its cardiac pacemaker, as it were, pumping “enlightening” information from the party center through the capillary structures that connected its local branches to the “masses” that would supply its energetic life.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> William Harvey discovered in 1628 that blood circulated through the human body. He became the founder of physiology, a discipline that is concerned with the living body, instead of the way in which it is composed, with its anatomy.

<sup>311</sup> The early Soviet period was marked by utopian experiments. Alexander Bogdanov, a close associate of Vladimir I. Lenin, believed that the vitality of individual bodies could be harnessed through scientific innovations that would allow to resurrect the dead and achieve immortality for all. See Boris Groys and Michael Hagemester, eds. *Die Neue Menschheit: Biopolitische Utopien in Russland zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* [The New Humanity: Biopolitical Utopias in Russia at the Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005. See also Alexander Bogdanov. *Red Star*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1923]; Richard Stites. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the*

Social science and political art converged in governmental campaigns to subject woman-nationals in the Soviet East. Through the symbolic labor of the sign “woman,” “Eastern” nations would receive their “socialist content.” Because the nation-body had been conceptualized as an organism, women’s emancipation campaigns were designed to “denature” its closed circuit and “reconstruct” social relations in accordance with the new “vitalist” telos. In order to accomplish this task, the Bolshevik party created the “women’s department,” a new piece of “political machinery” (Stites 1991, 343) that was to carry out “cult-enlightening” work among women. In order to incite revolutionary consciousness, its campaigns in the Soviet East focused on making “woman-nationals” *speak* their minds in public. This amounted to a frontal attack on the principles of honor and modesty that governed sexual difference through restrictions on women’s speech in Armenia.

### **The Political Apparatus of the Women’s Department**

Marxist feminists such as Inessa Armand and Nadezhda Krupskaya, close confidantes of Vladimir I. Lenin, called attention to the “Woman’s Question” prior to the Russian revolution of 1917. The revolutionary subject, the proletariat, they argued, was internally divided by gender. In 1901, with Lenin’s editorial support, Krupskaya published “The Woman-Worker” (*Женищина-Работница*), a short brochure that denounced the exploitation of female workers and peasants in Russia (Stites 1991,

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*Russian Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; Barbara E. Clements. “The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 1992, 485-496.



241).<sup>312</sup> In collaboration with Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand, and other Leninist feminists, Krupskaya formed a geographically dispersed editorial board which published the first issue of “The Woman-Worker” (*Работница*), a Russian language journal dedicated to the emancipation of women, while still in exile in 1913.

Despite considerable controversy about the dangers of “feminist separatism,” the central executive committee of the Russian Bolshevik party eventually established a special “department” dedicated to “work among women” (*Отдел по Работе Среди Женщин*) in 1919. As a new political organ, the women’s department (*Женотдел*, *Zhenotdel*, lit. “wom-department”) was endowed with branches at the central, regional, provincial, and district level of each constituent republic of the Soviet Union. Labor unions and cooperatives established women’s sections as well. Until the dissolution of its central bureau in Moscow in 1930, it was headed by a central director that coordinated with regional directors and volunteers which staffed and coordinated its campaigns across dozens of subsections. Richard Stites argues that the women’s department functioned as an “engine of mobilization” that sent “impulses [...] from the Moscow center” to be “transmitted by local branches out among the female masses” (Stites 1991, 335). Despite low rates of literacy among its constituency, its primary “vehicle of propaganda” (*ibid.*) was the printed word.

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<sup>312</sup> Nadezhda Krupskaya was arguably inspired by the attention that the “woman’s question” had received in German socialist circles. See, for example, August Bebel. *Die Frau und der Sozialismus: Als Beitrag zur Emanzipation unserer Gesellschaft* [Woman and Socialism: A Contribution to the Emancipation of Our Society]. Hannover: Fackelträger, 1974 [1879].

Regional women's departments translated the Russian language "The Woman-Worker" into local languages and added context-specific content. At the height of its operations, the women's department circulated up to 670,000 copies of women's journals and bulletins in dozens of languages throughout its Soviet-wide apparatus. It reached many more readers and listeners because each copy would have been shared. The aim of its main publication, "The Woman-Worker," was to spread awareness about the new Soviet legislation on marriage, property, and inheritance, popularize modern ideas about health and hygiene, and encourage women to seek legal recourse against newly codified "way of life offenses" such as forced or underage marriage, domestic violence, and polygamy.

The new people's courts were granted unprecedented authority to intervene in household relations. Context-specific penal codes were designed to attack and "starve" cultural milieus that were declared "backward" and therefore "socially dangerous" to Soviet sociality (*общественность*). Sentences, so-called "measures of social protection," varied from fines, conditional sentences, compulsory labor, and up to two years in prison, which involved forced labor in camps. According to Schlesinger, a sentence of compulsory labor prevented a person from changing his or her place of employment without being deprived of personal freedom (Schlesinger 1949, 197). A fine would be deducted from the wage (*ibid.*). These measures were intended to discipline and deter, as well as generate awareness and "publicity" for the new legislation (196).

Abortion was legalized in 1920 but could only be obtained with a special “permit” that authorized women to free treatment at “state hospitals by a state-employed doctor” (Matossian 1962, 64). While the use of contraceptives was actively encouraged, traditional midwifery was outlawed. The state effectively took charge of women’s sexuality. If a woman seeking abortion had “few or no children” (66), or lacked connections to the party, she was unlikely to receive a permit. In 1922, the Soviet Code on Inheritance granted both “illegitimate and legitimate children” the right to equal shares in inheritance irrespective of gender (64). Women were entitled to become the legal heads of households and the principle of private property was extended to spouses in a conjugal household. This broke up a previously *communal* realm and exacerbated land flight to the cities.

Marriages could only be established between two consenting parties, one man and one woman, above the ages of eighteen and sixteen, respectively. *De facto* unions were put on legal par with *de jure* marriages. The right to divorce was introduced and former spouses, irrespective of gender, were entitled to receive aliments for up to a year if in need. This also extended to marriages that had not been registered with the Soviet authorities.

Pamphlets, brochures, and women’s journals were stockpiled at special “women’s clubs” that were created throughout the Soviet Union to provide women with physical spaces to meet, engage in discussions, be educated or trained, and collectively read materials supplied by local sections of the women’s department. In rural areas, so-called “peasants’ corners” were created on designated days at village

councils. As a concession to negative attitudes about the “fraternizing of the sexes outside the home” (Matossian 1962, 66), these “cells” were intended to draw women into the social life of the emergent Soviet polity. Their goal was “to gather workers and peasants around the party, the Soviets, trade unions, cooperatives and to turn them into active communists, ready and capable to work in social, governmental institutions” (Kazanjian 1962).

The Central Executive Committee of the Transcaucasian Communist Party created a regional section of the women’s department in 1921 (*Kinbazhin*, abbrev. Որգան Յ.Կ.Կ. Կենտկոմի Կինբաժնի, lit. “wom-department,”). Headquartered in Tiflis, it incorporated local women’s sections that existed at all provincial levels. Its central bureau was directed by Flora Vardanyan, an Armenian feminist, and employed two coordinators and a secretary. It was dissolved in 1929, arguably at the height of its operations.<sup>313</sup> During its brief period of existence, the Transcaucasian women’s department encountered significant resistance from local bureaucrats and party cadres, most of whom were men. In the provinces, its deputies were often isolated and overworked. Sometimes they were even excluded from party meetings because local officials felt that women’s emancipation was a “woman’s job.”<sup>314</sup> Communication across its provincial branches, where “the connection was weak,” was challenging due

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<sup>313</sup> See V. O. Kazandjian, “Կանանց ճրջանում Տարվող Կուլտուրական Աշխատանքը Սովետական Հայաստանում (1920-1925) [Cultural Work Among Women in Soviet Armenia (1920-1925), trans. Lilit Hakobyan],” *Բանբեր Հայաստանի Արխիվների* [Newsletter of the Archives of Armenia], 1962, 209-232.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

to a lack of coordinators. Their work was further discredited by the “late arrivals of journals.”<sup>315</sup>

In Armenia, comparatively few women participated in the public labor force to begin with. Employed as teachers, nurses, and cleaners in schools, orphanages, and hospitals, rather than in factories, they were predominantly categorized as “technical” rather than industrial workers. Yet, the emancipation of woman-nationals depended on “humanizing” labor (*menschliche Arbeit*) outside of the household (Marx 2005, 98). In order to further this objective, the Transcaucasian women’s department created agricultural cooperatives and artisan workshops for women (*Артель*).



Figure 8. Photo, *Armenia’s Woman-Worker*, No. 4, 1924, 23. A women’s workshop in Leninakan, Armenia, consisting of twenty-four workers, producing socks since April 1923.

These women’s cooperatives produced food, stationary, textbooks, linen, and clothes for soldiers and orphans. Of the few women who worked alongside men, many remained silent during the mandatory meetings of labor unions and cooperative

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

councils. Notably, this problem persisted across towns and villages. In a problematic inversion of Marx' formula of consciousness shaped by the material conditions of labor (*Das Sein bestimmt das Bewußtsein*), the consciousness of emancipated "woman-nationals" was expected to *reshape* their environment, materially, through *active* expression in public. Since Marx's sparse deliberations on the humanity of woman could not offer practical guidance on women's emancipation, it fell to the women's department to devise techniques to give meaning to the "legislative program of emancipation" and actualize the "social revolution from below" (Stites 1991, 329).

Beginning in 1921, the Transcaucasian women's department raised funds to organize conferences for non-affiliated "Eastern" women at the provincial, regional, national, and international level. In 1922, an honorary board of prominent figures such as Vladimir I. Lenin, chairman of the Bolshevik party, Alexandra Kollontai, then director of the central women's bureau in Moscow, and Clara Zetkin, a German feminist and sympathizer of the Bolshevik party, supported a conference for the "women of the East" in Baku. The cause of women's emancipation was officially endorsed by Alexander Myasnikyan, chairman of the central executive committee of the Armenian Communist Party. Although speakers at the Baku conference argued that the "Eastern" woman had finally become "the legitimate owner of her country," the early work of the Transcaucasian women's department was had yielded only few results. In Moscow, Polina Vinogradskaja, an affiliate of the women's department, publically reproached the party for not doing more to confront "problems of byt" (Wood 1997, 197). She caused a stir by suggesting that the Soviet apparatus was not

*agile* and *energetic* enough (*кочность*) to transform the everyday life of women.<sup>316</sup> Soon, she warned, the revolution might devolve into “stagnation [*zastoi*] and even rotting [*zagnivanie*] [...] [in] the country” (Wood 1997, 197). Political anxieties were articulated through the language of public health and gangrene, social development and standstill. The life and death of the Soviet body depended on swift cultural transformation and the emancipation of women.

In the Caucasus, Flora Vardanyan introduced “new methods of work” in order to forge “stronger links” across its provincial network.<sup>317</sup> These “new methods” involved the creation of a new type of decentralized structure, the so-called “delegate’s meeting” (*делегатские собрания*). Its participants were elected by general assemblies of woman-workers in factories, cooperatives, and artisan workshops (*Артел*). Rotating after a specific period of time, thousands of women served as “woman-delegates” (*Делегатки*) and “apprentice” with Soviet institutions such as labor unions and district councils as part of their “training.” As elected representatives, they were expected to report back to their constituencies.

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<sup>316</sup> Elizabeth A. Wood translates *кочность* as “sluggishness.” Though *кочность* can imply a sense of delayed action, its primary connotation is “rigidity.” I have translated it in more words, as “ossified” and not supple enough, in order to convey that it refers to the political apparatus of the party and the women’s department, as one arm of its extensive bureaucracy. See Elizabeth A. Wood. *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

<sup>317</sup> See V. O. Kazandjian, “Կանանց ծրջանում Տարվող Կուլտուրական Աշխատանքը Սովետական Հայաստանում (1920-1925) [Cultural Work Among Women in Soviet Armenia (1920-1925), trans. Lilit Hakobyan],” *Բանբեր Հայաստանի Արխիվների* [Newsletter of the Archives of Armenia],” 1962, 209-232.

In the villages, where the state had not yet created public infrastructure, the village's female residents were to elect a deputy during their general assemblies.<sup>318</sup> Convening weekly or monthly as a group of regular participants, women gathered to discuss literacy and political education, the organization of clubs and reading circles, the improvement of women's living conditions, health, and child rearing, as well as work and technical training. The rural club houses of the women's department also offered lodging for traveling delegates from the city who volunteered to organize discussions, readings, talks, plays, and lectures for rural women. They offered legal advice and played a key role in the political education of their rural counterparts, "woman-peasants," who were presumed to be akin to "slaves."<sup>319</sup>

The Soviet writer Marietta Shaginian, of Armenian descent, remarked sardonically that *nothing* had ever been done for "the people's happiness" (*народная счастья*) before Armenia's transformation into a Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920. Now, she claimed, they were living "happily and full-bloodedly" (*счастливо и полнокровно*).<sup>320</sup> In 1923, she joined a young delegate from Goris, a small Armenian town, on a visit to the village of Sisian, forty kilometers away. She described her travel companion as a delicate girl with an elaborate hairstyle, in a "festive" blouse, and a fine pantyhose. As Shaginian duly noted, this was not exactly ideal attire for a day's journey on horseback. The two women arrived in Sisian at night, one a representative

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>320</sup> See Marietta Shaginian. *Путешествие по Советской Армении* [Travels in Soviet Armenia]. Moscow: *Молодая гвардия* [Young Guard], 1950. All translations into English that follow are my own.



of the “so-called women’s department,” Shaginian noted, as if describing a distant past that had long been superseded, the other an observer. They found the village council packed to the brim with rural women, sitting on benches, tables, even on the floor, and leaning against the walls in the “flickering light of the kerosene lamp” (Shaginian 1950, 81). The married women were veiled according to the “old custom – with a headscarf from ear to ear, covering the mouth and the whole lower part of the face” (ibid.). Pairs of “black, fiery eyes” followed the young woman-delegate from the “city,” “judging her in their own manner” (*по-своему судят*), and scanning her from her “hair to the tip of her shoes, noticing the way she carries herself, the way she is dressed, and styles her hair” (82). After the deputy spoke of women’s emancipation – in a steady voice, “freely and convincingly” – *women began to speak*.

Very slowly and not right away, prodded by questions, reluctantly, from under the headscarf, women began to speak. Gradually headscarves were shifted to the chin, onto the neck, the confusion passed, voices firmed up, a fiery, passionate discussion began, with gesticulation, with yelling. Each stretched toward the table, toward the deputy, and some very old peasant women, half-blind with trachoma, with sunken cheeks and the big, hard-working hands of the eternal woman-worker, called out, with unexpected affection, to my young fellow traveler, her granddaughter in years, the word ‘mayrik’ — [little, dear] mother...<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> This English translation is my own. The Russian-language original reads as follows: “Очень медленно и не сразу, вынуждаемые вопросами, словно нехотя, из-под платка, стали говорить женщины. Постепенно платки были сдвинуты на подбородок, на шею, конфуз прошел, голоса окрепли, началась горячая, страстная беседа с жестом, со скрипом. Каждая потянулась к столу, к завжен, и какая-то очень старая крестьянка, полуслепая от трахомы, со впалыми щеками и натруженными большими руками вековой работницы, неожиданно ласково назвала мою молоденькую спутницу, по летам годившуюся ей во внучки, словом «майрик» — матушка...” (Shaginian 1950).

This scene described the transformation of the timid and “voiceless” women of Sisian into “active” members of Soviet society. Breaking with the old, their headscarves were cast aside, but the focus of Shaginian’s account remained on the voice. The confusion of subjectivation passed quickly, after some “prodding.” It was followed by a *surge* of revolutionary passion, struggling for *active* expression on their faces, through their “black, fiery eyes,” and most importantly, released through the voice box in the form of verbal speech. The discussion continued until the crack of dawn, despite hunger and exhaustion. Impressed, Shaginian noted the woman-delegate’s discipline and party ethics, her dedication to the cell of Soviet society in the remote corners of Soviet Armenia (*актив*, noun, “active”). The appearance of the Armenian woman-delegate, her manner of dress and appearance, represented the “new” Soviet woman – national in form, socialist in content – the “Liberated Eastern Woman.” She sets an example in the scene described by Shaginian, a model that was first judged, then aspired to. Once prohibitions of women’s speech were transgressed, they lost their power. No longer binding, they could not contain the “new” consciousness that violently struggled for *release* as kinetic energy generated in the brain, finding expression through the vocal chords and the throat, the tongue, the mouth, and the lips, and even the hands. Released into the world, women’s speech became the sign of their subjection, their *becoming proper* to a new social order

(*приобщения к новому строительству*). After all, there could be “no socialism without the *active* emancipation of women.”<sup>322</sup>

In celebration of International Women’s Day, on March 8, 1923, Soviet feminists took to the streets of Yerevan and Leninakan, present-day Gyumri, with slogans such as “Give Way to the Liberated Eastern Woman” (Ճանապարհ ազատագրված արեւելյան կնոջը) and “Down with Ignorance and Darkness” (Կորցի տգիտութիւնն ու խավարը). Through political education, the “lawless daughters of the country” were hailed to become the “active builders of the foundation of socialism, public figures and citizens with equal rights.”<sup>323</sup> The following year, on March 8, 1924, the central bureau of the Transcaucasian women’s department launched *Armenia’s Woman-Worker* (Յայաստանի աշխատավորուհի), an Armenian language version of the *The Woman-Worker*, the journal of the central bureau of the women’s department in Moscow. Flora Vardanyan, the director of the central bureau of the women’s department in Transcaucasia, served as its first editor. Since its purpose was to educate a largely illiterate readership on social and legislative changes, the journal included many images. Under the capsized noun “legislation,” or “justice,” one illustration showed a middle-aged Armenian woman in a headscarf – covering her hair, ears, and

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<sup>322</sup> N. A. “Что такое делегатские собрание и что они дали труженице Закавказья [What Are Delegate Meetings and What Have They Given the Female Laborer of the Caucasus],” *Издание отдела работниц и крестьянок ЗКК РКП* [Press of the Section of Female Workers and Female Peasants of the Transcaucasian Communist Party], Tiflis: *Красная книга* [Red Book], 1924; emphasis added. The English translation is my own.

<sup>323</sup> See V. O. Kazandjian, “Կանանց ծրջանում Տարվող Կուլտուրական Աշխատանքը Սովետական Յայաստանում (1920-1925) [Cultural Work Among Women in Soviet Armenia (1920-1925), trans. Lilit Hakobyan],” *Բանբեր Յայաստանի Արխիվների* [Newsletter of the Archives of Armenia],” 1962, 209-232.

neck. However, her headscarf is lowered below her chin in order to allow her to speak freely. She is depicted on the witness stand, airing a grievance against her husband in court.



Figure 9. Illustration, “Justice,” *Armenia’s Woman-Worker*, No. 5, 1924, 38.

Standing before a jury panel of two men and one young woman, she can be seen steadying herself with her right arm on the podium while raising up her left arm in visible agitation. The hairstyle and attire of the young woman on the panel marks her as the emancipated ideal of Soviet discourse, the “liberated” Eastern woman. She is resting her chin on her arm, in a nonchalant manner that conveys detachment, perhaps even impatience, while the expression on the faces of her male colleagues show compassion and seriousness. One of the male jurors is writing notes in a notebook. In the middle of the court room, a male clerk is sitting at a low table and diligently recording the woman’s testimony on a large piece of paper. The defendant, an older man sitting on a bench in the dock, is gazing up at the woman, apparently his wife, with an air of calm and dignity. Resting his hands on his knees, he is patiently waiting for his turn to speak, seemingly assured that justice will be served. Two

adolescent boys are observing the scene with a sense of amusement. As the builders of future socialism, they are witnessing the last travails of the past in the present, an “obsolete” form of life, that evoked curiosity because it was marked out for extinction.

The composition of the scene allegorized the Soviet scheme of women’s emancipation. It represented the court room as a sphere of engagement for newly hailed subjects. Didactically, its protagonists were drawn on different scales to center the figure of the “woman-national” as a native informant whose “enlightened” *consciousness* was to *reshape* her milieu. Soviet justice depended on *her* willingness to testify to her deplorable condition in court. The patriarch is merely her supportive cast. His role is to submit to Soviet authority.



Figure 10. Photo, “Delegates’ Meeting in Ghurgughlu,”  
*Armenia’s Woman-Worker*, No. 5, 1924, 19.

In 1924, the central bureau of the Transcaucasian women’s department dispatched handbooks in four different languages – Russian, Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri, at two thousand copies each – in order to standardize its “cult-enlightening”

work among women.<sup>324</sup> The “socialist” consciousness of woman-nationals would have to be “awakened” through political education in order for the revolution to take root in the East. Titled “What Are Delegate Meetings and What Have They Given the Female Laborer of the Caucasus,” it contained detailed instructions for so-called “wom-organizers” (*женорганизаторы*) – woman-organizers of women – who volunteered to conduct delegate’s meetings in rural areas.<sup>325</sup> The handbook outlined four “cycles” of twenty-five training modules, to be covered in twenty-five sessions. They were designed as “conversations” and systematically moved from the macro-scale of the universe, the sun system, and “spontaneous phenomena in nature,” such as earth quakes, thunderstorms, and rain, to the “earth and its inhabitants,” and the “laws of development of life.”<sup>326</sup> This was followed by the intermediate scale of “physiology and anatomy” and the micro-scale of the household and personal hygiene. Over the course of six to seven months, delegates at these meetings were to be familiarized with the cosmology of the new Soviet system and their role in it.

As a result of the “survival” of “feudal forms of life” in the Caucasus (*пережитки феодальных форм быта*), they were to understand, the woman-national was facing a “situation of bondage” in the household (*Кабаленное положение женщины*). Following the civilizational script of Lewis H. Morgan’s

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<sup>324</sup> See Fond 13, Party Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Tbilisi.

<sup>325</sup> N. A. “Что такое делегатские собрания и что они дали труженице Закавказья [What Are Delegate Meetings and What Have They Given the Female Laborer of the Caucasus],” *Издание отдела работниц и крестьянок ЗКК РКП* [Press of the Section of Female Workers and Female Peasants of the Transcaucasian Communist Party], Tiflis: *Красная книга* [Red Book], 1924, my translation.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

classificatory system of relations, by way of Engel's history of the family, participants learned about "primitive" (*первобытное*) society, the formation of "tribes" (*племена*), and "forms of marriage" – beginning with Morgan's notion of "group marriage." This typology situated Transcaucasia somewhere between "savagery" and "civilization." It was positioned as "backward" because "feudal" practices were presumed to "delay" its development.

Since women's speech was considered instrumental to the coming of socialist society, the local leadership of provincial women's sections throughout Transcaucasia was selected on the basis of its willingness and ability of speak in public. At a 1924 meeting of directors and deputies, attendees filled out Russian language questionnaires that included question about their literacy and oratory skills.<sup>327</sup> At another meeting in 1925, most participants noted that they were between the ages of twenty and forty years, literate, married with children, and unaffiliated with the party (*беспартийная*, "partyless").<sup>328</sup> Approximately half of the Armenian delegates were from Yerevan and Dilijan. The remaining delegates were evenly divided across the Armenian provinces. The only exception was Meghri, a town at the southern border of Armenia and Iran, which was not represented. In 1925 alone, approximately 193 delegate's meetings

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<sup>327</sup> See Fond 13, Depot [*Dela*] 487, Communist Party Archive of the Ministry of Interior of Georgia, Tbilisi. The first record of the Transcaucasian women's department was made in 1921. Its archived correspondence and paperwork steadily increase until 1929, when its activities were seemingly at its height, before it abruptly ends in 1930.

<sup>328</sup> See Font 17, Communist Party Archive of the Ministry of Interior of Georgia, Tbilisi. Given the small size of this sample, at forty questionnaires, this data can by no means be considered representative of all women's delegates across Transcaucasia. More conclusive findings would require extensive research that is beyond the purview of this chapter.

were held throughout Armenia each week. Each meeting was attended by an average of thirty delegates, most of them categorized as “peasants,” a fourth as “workers,” and about a tenth or so as Soviet administrators.<sup>329</sup>

In 1924, the Transcaucasian women’s department hosted an illustrious visitor from Germany. Clara Zetkin, a feminist supporter of Soviet emancipation campaigns, traveled through Transcaucasia and described her visit at the “Muslim Woman’s Club” in a book-length account that has been translated into Russian, but not into English.<sup>330</sup> Her image was taken and appeared in the first issue of *Armenia’s Woman-Worker*, an Armenian-language journal of the Transcaucasian women’s department.



Figure 11. Photo, Clara Zetkin at the Women’s Club in Tbilisi, *Armenia’s Woman-Worker*, No. 3, 1924, 39.

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<sup>329</sup> See V. O. Kazandjian, “Կանանց ճրջանում Տարվող Կուլտուրական Աշխատանքը Սովետական Հայաստանում (1920-1925) [Cultural Work Among Women in Soviet Armenia (1920-1925), trans. Lilit Hakobyan],” *Բանբեր Հայաստանի Արխիվների* [Newsletter of the Archives of Armenia], 1962, 224.

<sup>330</sup> Clara Zetkin. *Im Befreiten Kaukasus* [In the Liberated Caucasus]. Berlin: Verlag für Literatur und Politik, 1926. All English translations are my own.



Seated to her right, Flora Vardanyan, director of the Transcaucasian women's department, leans her head toward Zetkin's, almost resting it on her shoulder, while Zetkin sits upright and stoically stares ahead. To her left, she is flanked by the directors of the women's departments of Turkestan and Kyrgyzstan, both unnamed, who probably travelled for days to see her on this occasion. While one of them leans on her left shoulder, her hand clasped around Zetkin's right shoulder, the other is seated next to Zetkin, resting her arm in her lap and looking away in a more dignified pose. Vardanyan is the only one who is smiling in the photograph.

In her recollections of the visit, Zetkin later recalled that

the bright electric light fell on their multicolored and richly embroidered veils, which, without covering any faces, served to enhance the gracefulness of their figures and movements. Even more interesting and attractive than their colorful exotic garments were the expressions of absolute rapture on their faces. It was clear that a revelatory message [the Revolution, the awakened 'new life'] had reached these women who were stirred to the depths of their beings. Every one of them had acquired a new consciousness [...] This feeling united them all, extending far beyond the confines of the Club and even beyond the borders of the country (Zetkin 1926, 82).

Her account's literary flourish titillated her reader's imagination because it exposed "Eastern" woman to the public gaze. In this passage, her writing evoked the style of English women's writing about the Orient (Melman 1992). For her Bolshevik audience, she garnished and modernized representations of the East with signs of Soviet modernity, represented by the "bright electric light" that fell on the women's "multicolored and richly embroidered veils." Unlike the "flickering light of the kerosene lamp" (Shaginian 1950, 81) in the village council of Sisian, as described by

Marietta Shaginian, the brightness of electric light represented a revolutionary triumph of man over nature, emancipation itself. It allegorized Soviet “enlightenment” as a form of artifice. Unrelenting, rather than “flickering,” and *bright*, the “electric light” of Soviet “enlightenment” was capable of snuffing out the “darkness” of *the old* in the last corners of the Soviet Union, including Armenia.

Reforming the very “physiognomy” of the nation-body, represented by the consciousness of woman-nationals, the *technicity* of electric light produced the “Muslim Woman’s Club,” in Zetkin’s eyes, as the organic “embodiment [flesh and blood] of the proletarian revolution” (*zu Fleisch und Blut verkörperte proletarische Revolution*). The political apparatus of the women’s department was tasked to chase away the “last survivals” (*den letzten Rest*) of “superstition” presumed to hold women’s lives hostage in the East.

Clara Zetkin believed that the Soviet “message of salvation” (*Heilsbotschaft*) had “stirred” a “consciousness” of “new, individual subjectivity” (*sich eines neuen, eines eigenen Innenlebens [...] bewußt*) in the mental depths of women. She argued this new consciousness of self now violently “struggled” to “express” itself (*das nach Ausdruck ringt*). Zetkin made sense of this “inner stirring” as nothing other than the “awakened and willed ‘new life’” (*das erwachte und erstrebte ‘neue Leben’*) of the Soviet collective, registering as the “sudden appearance [tremor; nervous twitch] of revolutionary energy” (*Aufzucken revolutionärer Energie*). This inner *excitation*, barely speakable (*die vor Erregung kaum sprechen kann*), firmly “linked” these “awakened” women and transcended the walls of the women’s club. They were

“united,” *precisely*, in this “o n e [sic] sensation, in o n e [sic] will” – the will to transform their “native milieu” by “expressing” the new *form* of their “inner life” (*Innenleben*) across all organismic bounds and national borders. Words and speech that expressed this “new life” were hoped to grind away, *positively*, at the milieu of “backward” tradition.

Although the women’s department was a key political tool in the Soviet struggle to “unlock the energies of the most backward and remote communities” (Stites 1991, 341), its operations were cut short by the untimely death of Vladimir I. Lenin in 1924. After the loss of its high-ranking advocate, opponents of the women’s department increasingly discredited its work as a waste of “energy” and resources. The task of “cult-enlightenment” was soon transferred to trade unions, which were expected to make a “special effort” to reach “all workers.” The women’s department was dissolved in 1930. Alexandra Artyukhina, the last director of its central bureau in Moscow, attempted to save face by emphasizing there was now a “solid cohort of liberated women” so that “a special organ was no longer needed because the Party as a whole would assume this work” (Stites 1991, 341). Declared “obsolete,” the political machinery of the women’s department was dismantled and transferred to the labor unions. Had its purpose been accomplished?

During its nine years of existence, the women’s department was a key technology of Sovietization in Armenia and other “Eastern” countries. Its directors, organizers, delegates, and volunteers docked the nation-body to the “locomotive” of history toward “progress,” to put it with Trotsky, by linking up with “Eastern” women

– woman-nationals – through artisan workshops, cooperatives, general assemblies, delegate’s meetings, trainings, discussions, and home inspections. It invented “new methods” of subjection and promoted Soviet legislation in both urban and remote rural areas by offering women’s clubs as gender-segregated spaces for public engagement. Newly hailed individuals were drawn into its orbit and recruited to spread the message of Soviet “salvation,” as Zetkin had it, through a snow ball system that was to reach into the depths of women’s minds and most intimate desires. Marietta Shaginian noted, it was “difficult to keep up with the lively life of our Soviet country!” (*Трудно поспеть за живою жизнью нашей Советской страны*). What people only recently dreamt about for the future, was quickly turning into reality before their very eyes. In fact, at the “very minute” of writing, she claimed, the present had “already aged” and “what had just been talked about as the present had already faded into the past.”<sup>331</sup> Ideologically correct, she affirmed that the cultural transformation was proceeding with revolutionary speed.

While Trotsky argued that a “great social crisis” was unfolding because “the old family continues to dissolve far faster than the new institutions are capable of replacing it” (Trotsky 1972, 148), Shaginian was optimistic that the physiognomy of the Armenian people was quickly “improving” as they were being endowed with “socialist content” that expressed its “growth” in “national form” (*сквозь национальную форму выражения росло и растет у нас общее для всего*

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<sup>331</sup> See Marietta Shaginian. *Путешествие по Советской Армении* [Travels in Soviet Armenia]. Moscow: *Молодая гвардия* [Young Guard], 1950, my translation.

*Советского Союза социалистическое содержание*). At the miner’s club in Kapan, an Armenian town, she suddenly recognized during a gymnastic performance in 1925 that millions of people across the Soviet Union were indeed *assembling* into Soviet man, “in the smallest things, and in the biggest things, and in governmental matters, and in a thousand cultural trifles” (*и в самом большом, и в самом малом, и в государственных делах, и в тысяче культурных мелочей*).

### **The “Liberated Eastern Woman” in Armenia**

The figure of the “Liberated Eastern Woman” appeared in Armenia in the form of the woman-delegate (*делегатка*), on the one hand, and the girl-communist (*կոմյերիստուհի*), on the other. The youth was at the forefront of the Soviet transformation because organizations such as the Transcaucasian Communist Youth League drilled their membership on displaying “loyalty to the Soviet regime” through “the virtues of initiative, activism, discipline, and cooperation” (Matossian 1962, 66).

In 1934, the state press of Soviet Armenia published an anonymous account titled *A Girl-Communist’s Letters* (*կոմյերիստուհի սամակները*). Arguably completed in 1929, it was written under the pen name “Araks.”<sup>332</sup> On ninety-two pages, its first-person protagonist Lena narrates her coming of age through letters addressed to her friend Kima, whose responses are implicit but not included, detailing her travails in love, life, and work as a girl-communist and woman-delegate in early Soviet Armenia. Though unremarkable in the literary sense, the work is an extraordinary source on the

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<sup>332</sup> The ending suggests that the manuscript was completed in Gharaqilisa, present-day Vanadzor, the third-largest city of Armenia, in 1929. The placement of “Araks” on the cover suggests that it might be a pseudonym used for the publication by the author.

affective experience of social transformation during the first decade of Soviet reforms in Armenia.

At the time of writing, Lena is twenty years old. Born sometime between 1905 and 1909, she would have lived through the arrival of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons and orphans in the aftermath of the Ottoman genocide in 1915, the founding of the first Republic of Armenia in 1919, and its transformation into a Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920. Her world was always already in flux when she joined the Communist Youth League as one of its few female members.<sup>333</sup> Yet, she described her struggles with the “new life” (կենցաղ). At the everyday level, it was “not easy to build,” she wrote, it had to be created “not only with ideas but also with revolutionary feelings and actions.”<sup>334</sup> The “traditional” Armenian woman was imagined as a prisoner of the household – voice- and speechless, preoccupied with “backward” thoughts, and feeling “old” feelings. Accordingly, the “new” Armenian woman had to learn not only what to think, but also how to feel and how to conduct herself as a member of Soviet society, rather than the nation-body, once she emerged into the light of day. Lena explained,

They smash the old traditions but building the new ones is not an easy task. [...] don't think that the [new] life is easily built. It is a rather complicated process. Sometimes the old and the new get together, join each other, old and new emotions get mixed up. It is only with active struggle that the old can be overcome! (Araks 1934, 29).

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<sup>333</sup> The Armenian League of Communist Youth counted 13,425 registered members in 1926. Only about 10% of this membership was female (Matossian 1962).

<sup>334</sup> Araks. ԿՈՄՅԵՐԱՍՈՒԼԻՈՒ ԼՍՄՎԱԿՆԵՐԸ [A Girl-Communist's Letters]. Yerevan: State Publisher, 1934. All English translations are by Lilit Hakobyan (unpublished).

Through conscious and active struggle with the “old feelings,” she argued, the heart would be transformed to conform to the Soviet environment. Designating the “heart” as the locus of feeling, Lena observed that the “arrangement of our way of life is not organized” yet. During the transition period, it was inevitable that “we will still struggle in our hearts against the environment” (Matossian 1962, 70). Despite these personal struggles, Lena placed responsibility to the Soviet collective above her emotions, which she suspected were muddled and caught up with the “old.” At the level of the individual, “new” and “old” feelings could at times conflict if the “new” appeared before the “old” faded away. As Soviet power caught on, the affective life of Soviet subjectivity exerted pressures on marital relations. Villagers became estranged from their wives – desiring, instead, a “good Communist girl” like Lena. Angered, she rejected her rural suitors. One fellow was puzzled over her cryptic reproach that he “had some everyday living [լիցւաղ] mess in his head” (Araks 1934, 30). Since old attachments were obstacles to living the “new life,” citizens of Soviet Armenia were called upon to “think the past against the present and resist the latter, not in favour of a return but [...] of a time to come” (Deleuze 2006, 119). They had to learn to relate to themselves as individuals in order to be subsumed by Soviet sociality (*общественность*).

As a girl-communist, Lena wanted to serve as a “good example” (Araks 1934, 40). By elaborating her intimate experiences with the “new” morality, she modelled a micro-politics of introspection that helped her readers “understand their bodies and behaviors within a new ethos and through a new vocabulary” (Naiman 1997, 26). They

imagined themselves as the addressees of Lena's letters to Kima and became her confidantes in matters of love, jealousy, pre-marital sex, pregnancy, adoption, and her *de facto* marriage to a co-worker at the hydro-electrical station. She described him as a "simple but thoughtful" man who encouraged her dedication to women's emancipation in the village, as well as her decision to become an engineer.

Not to be confused with "simple-mindedness," his "simple but thoughtful" attitude about Lena's capacity to make her own decisions is a sign of his politically correct *consciousness* as a Soviet subject. He was morally superior to Lena's supervisor, an engineer who was depicted as corrupted by bourgeois ideology after a period of study in Europe. After praising Lena as a "young and active" representative of the "new Armenian woman," this supervisor announced to be "excited" to see her "quarrel and argue" in response to his unwelcome sexual advances. No longer submissive, the "new" Armenian woman displayed *agency* by freely speaking and even arguing with men in public. He complimented her as "the best work of art of the Soviet state" (Araks 1934, 56) – a living embodiment of *progress*.

Attempting to trick her, he suggested she should experiment with "free love" and give into his desires. She pushed back, however, arguing that he "got the whole idea wrong" (*ibid.*). What she endorsed as a "mature" relationship in the end was not defined by passion, tradition, or reproduction. It was informed by a "socialist" ethos, the desire to "love deeper and live the life of socialism fully at all its aspects" (53). By the time *A Girl-Communist's Letters* was published in 1934, the focus of cultural reform had shifted from *inciting* individuality to *lessening* "sexual libertinism"



(Matossian 1962, 70). Lena’s intimate confessions may have echoed *Komsomol* literature elsewhere, but the fact that a number of characters in Lena’s narration were *shamed* into conformity illustrates the particular ways in which Soviet discourse was adapted in the Armenian context. Shame (ամոթ) was mobilized as a disciplinary tool by the political apparatus of the Soviet state in Armenia because the new rules of living required new forms of reckoning with oneself in relation to others.

### **Alternative Visions of Socialism**

At a time of social and governmental experimentation with sexuality, Alexandra Kollontai, the first director of the central women’s department in Moscow, proposed “free love” as an alternative organizing principle of socialist society. The “new culture,” she argued, would *spontaneously* coalesce into a “new morality” through sex as a life-giving force that would obviate the need for a state. In 1924, her infamous essay “Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth” was published in *The Young Guard*, a journal of the Communist Youth League (*Комсомол*) in circulation across the entire Soviet Union. In this manifesto, she fleshed out her vision of “winged eros” as an *infinitely* generative principle of energy.<sup>335</sup> It would not only bring forth a “new personality” – called the “Woman

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<sup>335</sup> Kollontai built on a longer tradition of thought in Russian philosophy. In 1894, Vladimir S. Solovyov published *Смысл любви* [The Meaning of Love], a work that combined theological and functionalist arguments to argue that love was a spiritual force that could guide man towards a higher being. This required that pleasure was lived as an end in itself rather than as a means toward biological reproduction. Accordingly, Solovyov rejected the figure of the child as a symbol of deferment that he associated with *death*. As an alternative, he developed a radical theology of life in the present, as it exists at every given moment, rather than in the hypothetical future. On Solovyov’s moral philosophy, see Vladimir Wozniuk, ed. *The Heart of Reality: Essays on Beauty, Love, and Ethics by V. S. Soloviev*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

Human Being” – but also engender a “love-collective” that would be the self-regulating and “final form of human love” (Wood 1997, 353). Building on her earlier publications,<sup>336</sup> this utopian vision was decidedly materialist. This love-based socialism would be a “many-sided” collective of “many strings,” consisting of “long alliances or brief liaisons” that would constitute “threads connecting soul to soul, heart to heart, and mind to mind” (ibid.). Through “love-comradeship” and “love-play,” she argued, “the person experiencing love acquires the inner qualities necessary to the builders of a new culture – sensitivity, responsiveness and the desire to help others” (Kollontai 1977, 289). This would give rise to a social “conglomerate” (or assemblage) through “complex combinations” of “the new moral ideal” – “a love that embraced both the flesh and the soul” (Kollontai 1977, 283). Supplanting the power of the state, the “love-duty to the collective” – a “more powerful emotion” – would “take precedence, will be firmer, more complex and organic” (276). It would *intermesh* “the collective – the interests, aims, and aspirations of all of whose members are woven in a dense web” (ibid.). Emerging “from the private into the public sphere” (290), such *winged* new “rules of living (i.e. morality)” could generate organic “solidarity” without the need for enforcement by the state (276).

At the same time, Kollontai rejected “wingless Eros,” sex without love, as “unhealthy carnality” (286) that “waste[d] the inner strength of the members of the collective on experiences that did not directly serve the revolution” (Kollontai 1977,

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<sup>336</sup> See Alexandra Kollontai. *Новая Мораль и Рабочий Класс* [New Morality and the Working Class]. Moscow: Издательство Всероссийского Центрального Комитета Советов Р., К. и К. Депутатов, 1918.

277).<sup>337</sup> While “wingless Eros” led to “physical exhaustion” and therefore “lower[ed] the resources of labour [sic] energy available to society” (289), “love-experience” would *replenish* these energies by affording a “fullness of living” (288). She suggested that a society based on “winged Eros” – “bright, joyous, *life-enriching* love” (Wood 1997, 33; emphasis added) – could perpetuate itself in perpetuity because it would generate an *unlimited* supply of energy.

This anarchist vision collided with Lenin’s state-manly desire to *ensure* the coming of socialism, though the latter conceded that communism could not, at any rate, be about “asceticism,” the willed restraint of sexual desire. He cautioned that the “life of sex” (*избыток половой жизни*) was *hypertrophic* and therefore risked to deplete the “vitality” and “vivaciousness” (*жизнерадостность и бодрость*) of Soviet society. Since he imagined the “new order” as an entropic system, any *sudden increase* in energy, the definition of hypertrophy, endangered its stable growth. For this reason, sex had to be regulated by the state. Instead of allowing sexual “hypertrophy” to deplete the “fullness” of “love life” (*полнотой любовной жизни*), it should be enjoyed in moderation in order to avoid depletion (Zetkin 1920). The state harnessed the “life of love” as a means to access the “power of life” (Schlesinger 1949, 77).

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<sup>337</sup> This was Kollontai’s concession to Andrei A. Isaev’s popular theory of “revolutionary sublimation.” In *What Can Women Expect from Socialism?* (1903), the latter argued that sexual pleasure “would not play an excessively large role in the life of the socialist couple” because “much of their energy would be deflected into public activity” (Stites 1991, 262). For the original, see Andrei A. Isaev, “Чего ожидать женщине от социализма?” Stuttgart: J. N. W. Dietz Nachf., 1903.

Kollontai's idea of "free love" was quickly discredited as "un-Marxist" (Schlesinger 1949, 76). It solicited scathing responses from fellow Bolshevik feminists such as Polina Vinogradskaya<sup>338</sup> and Sofia Smidovich, the new director of the central women's department in Moscow, who suggested that "African passions have erupted up here in the North" (Carleton 2005, 31).<sup>339</sup> Her remark illustrated the nexus of race and sex in the Soviet imagination of progress. It racialized sexuality as an "African passion" that was out of place "in the North," where Lenin, Smidovich, and others imagined that rationality should restrain the free pursuit of sexual pleasure. This positioned Russia as a racially superior "North" in relation to the "South," represented by the sign "Africa," a trope that signalled impulsiveness and unrestrained emotion in European discourse. This relationship traversed Russia's relationship to the "East" where "traditional" restraint was to be *lessened* first, then *subsumed* by socialist rationality. Through Stalin's formula of "socialist content" to be expressed in "national form," the "peoples of the East" were to be assimilated with the North through the emancipation of "woman-nationals" as "Liberated Eastern Woman," rather than the "Woman Human Being" envisioned by Kollontai. Not only did the "bureaucratic state," feared by Lenin and decried by Trotsky, let go of the "intention of 'dying away'" (Trotsky 1972, 49), but it effectively disallowed the *auto-poesis* of the political contexts it had subsumed in West and Central Asia. As a decidedly non-statist vision

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<sup>338</sup> See P. Vinogradskaya, "Вопросы Морали, Пола, Быта и Тов. Коллонтай [Questions of Morality, Sex, Daily Life, and Comrade Kollontai]," *Красная Новь* [Red Newness], No. 6, 1923, 179-214. See also Igal Halfin. *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 308, ft. 171.

<sup>339</sup> See Sofia Smidovich, "О любви [About Love]," *Pravda*, May 7, 1925.

of socialism, Alexandra Kollontai's proposition of emancipatory love-play may have afforded more leeway for self-creation, but it was never realized.

### **Conclusion**

While communist women in Soviet Armenia were struggling to “live” the new “rules of living” in the household, *Armenia's Woman-Worker*, the Armenian language journal of the Transcaucasian women's department, and *Hay Gin* (Հայ Կին), Hayganush Mark's Istanbul-based journal “Armenian Woman,” were circulating on a parallel orbit. It is unknown if *Armenia's Woman-Worker* ever found its way onto Mark's desk in Istanbul, or whether Vardanyan was aware of *Hay Gin*. The constituencies of both journals attempted to reconcile feminism with the Armenian tradition. While the approach taken in Soviet Armenia reflected the Orientalist impositions of Bolshevik ideology, nationalist feminists were operating in an entirely different discursive environment. The “traditional Armenian woman” had been positioned as the “heart” of the Armenian home, the site at which the “life-blood” of the nation was reproduced. The Soviet campaign to “emancipate” the “Eastern” woman from the confines of the “national” household echoed demands for women's education. However, the consciousness of woman-nationals became instrumental to the construction of a new kind of social body that depended on her capacity to labor. Rather than her womb, which was central to national reproduction, her mind was designated as the generating principle of Soviet life. Through legal reforms and governmental experiments, Soviet technicians hoped to corporealize a new energetic regime. In contrast, Armenian nationalists desired to govern the nation as an end in

itself. The Soviet projects of “cult-enlightenment” aspired to *absorb* “communities of blood,” such as the nation, and release vitality from its organismic bounds. It sought to *transubstantiate* blood into energy, *abolish* it altogether, in order to foster a new *art* of living, a technical form of Soviet humanity represented by the hydroelectric dam, electric light, and revolutionary speech. The incommensurability of nationalist and Soviet conceptions of Armenian feminism resulted in unequal encounters that confronted the racist assumptions of anthropological discourse about kinship, gender, and social relations in early Soviet Armenia.

As national bodies throughout the Soviet realm were formed and reformed, ostensibly by means of their own symbolic repertoires, the Armenian nation was reorganized to facilitate the circulation of value beyond its familiar bounds. Laboring to live, living to labor, the “Liberated Eastern Woman” was tasked to set her revolutionary consciousness to work as a newly “awakened” Soviet subject in order to transform her “backward” conditions of life in the homespace and at the micro-level of her desire. Liquidated and in motion, her newly incited individuality was harnessed in order to open up the nation to “connections that presuppose an entire assemblage” across boundaries (Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 160). The goal of the Soviet project was to reterritorialize different “distributions of intensity,” rework and reroute them through new “circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds” (ibid.) figured as the heart and mind of the “Liberated Eastern Woman.”

A close reading of key texts and archival materials throws the vitalist contours of Soviet power into relief. As I have demonstrated through original translations of

English, German, Russian, and Armenian language sources, Soviet conceptions of “progress” were informed settler colonial ideologies that required the disappearance of indigenous peoples as always already “vanishing” representatives of a “distant past” in the present.<sup>340</sup> In order to conceptualize Armenian indigeneity in West Asia, I have excavated legacies of American anthropology in Soviet legal and social discourse through the story of women’s emancipation in Soviet Armenia. In order to begin to imagine a different way of living together, gendered divisions of labor should be negotiated through a critical reflection on context-specific constructions of race, nation, and state. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, the desire to “return” to “pure” origins could only ever be a revisionist project. It is neither possible, nor desirable to reconstitute the Armenian household as it was understood by Soviet reformers.

While liberal and socialist feminism shared notions of progress, their ends drastically differed. Offering substantially different forms of emancipation, they were both marked by a complicated relationship to Armenian nationalism. Across the dividing line of West and East, they constituted disparate subjects that were nonetheless aligned in relation to a corporate nation-body. If political life was no longer conceived on the model of the organism and its other, might new ways of representing relationships to ourselves emerge in unexpected sites? What would a society look like that is not presupposed on notions of life and death as its main

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<sup>340</sup> On the ideological uses of indigenous extinction in the United States, see Jodi A. Byrd. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

organizing principles? Instead of linking individuals to a social body, could there be forms of justice that are neither biopolitical, nor vitalist, but ethical? While justice is foreclosed by progress, an ethics of difference might render intelligible what lies beyond.



## Chapter 4

### The Neoliberal Return of the National Enterprise: Global Diaspora in Post-Soviet Armenia

*The new operational reality which implies the emergence of ‘hybrid’ development models [...] demands alternative forms of mandate. Even though the state has always had the exclusive mandate for territorial development, the quest for alternative and innovative development solutions might denote an unprecedented decision to formalize the procedures for assigning the mandate for development to Armenian business and other private actors. An implicit mandate awarded in the bottom-up manner by a collective body representing the local communities, such as the beneficiary committees, can also be one of the alternatives [sic] forms of mandate vesting.*

– Institute for Emerging Market Studies, “Armenia 2030: Transforming the Development Landscape” (2017), 85

#### Introduction

At the nexus of Armenian nationalism, post-Soviet politics, and constructions of identity in the West, transnational networks of diaspora produced a geopolitics of “return” that is the subject of this chapter. Based on transcribed interviews<sup>341</sup> and

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<sup>341</sup> Between August and November 2016, I conducted ten open-ended narrative interviews with founders and directors of private foundations promoting economic development through cultural change in Armenia. These interviews were recorded and ranged in length between one and two hours. I draw on full transcriptions that can be provided in anonymized form upon request. I also attended about a dozen invite-only events as a participant observer. Previously, I conducted open-ended narrative interviews in 2011 with repatriates from Canada, the United States, Iran, Iraq, Russia, France, and Syria to learn about their motivations and experiences in Armenia. Many had initially come as participants in the Birthright Armenia program, but some came to Armenia as part of earlier waves of repatriation prior to national independence in 1989. Over the years, I had numerous informal and ongoing conversations with Armenians that have permanently moved to Armenia from the Armenian diaspora. I also had a number of informal follow up conversations with interlocutors that moved back to the United States or Canada after a few years. Unfortunately, my stay in the field was too brief to interview the most recent cohort of repatriates that were forcibly displaced or evacuated to Armenia after the Syrian civil war began to close in on Armenian communities in Aleppo and Damascus in 2012. A group of Armenian refugees from Iraq was settled in the outskirts of Yerevan province after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, I spoke to an Iraqi Armenian repatriate whose parents moved to Soviet Armenia out of communist convictions in the 1960s. At present,

participant observation in Yerevan, Boston, New York City, Los Angeles, and Moscow, I trace how neoliberal logics circulate through diasporic networks and transform not only the meaning of national identity but also how sovereignty is enacted. Although the term “repatriation” appears to suggest a return to origins, its meaning has been reinvented in ways that push against prevailing orthodoxies of scholarship on transnational migration and international development which privilege material factors over ideological motivations. I interviewed a cohort of Armenian repatriates who have transferred their human and physical capital from the Global North to the Western margins of Asia in order to participate in Armenia’s postsocialist development. In a bid to realize their dream of full Armenian independence, these highly skilled professionals in finance, law, technology, engineering, and other advanced fields, have voluntarily moved from West to East, rather than the other way around, in a counter-hegemonic reversal of predominant migration trends in the region.

Only little scholarship exists on the dynamics of diasporic return in comparative perspective. Takeyuki G. Tsuda defines “ethnic return migration” as the movement of “later-generation descendants of diasporic peoples who ‘return’ to their countries of ancestral origins after living outside their ethnic homelands for generations” (Tsuda 2010, 617). Due to its relatively homogenous demographic

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Syrian Armenians outnumber all other repatriate groups in Armenia by a large margin. As of 2017, approximately 15,000 of 22,000 persons that had entered the Republic of Armenia as refugees from Syria since 2012 remained in the country, most of them Syrian citizens of Armenian ancestry. See “Economic Integration of Syrian Armenians in Armenia: Needs Assessment Report,” *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)*, Yerevan, 2017.

composition, the Republic of Armenia functions as an ethnic nation-state despite its civic constitution. This makes it comparable to other ethnic nation-states such as Japan which, at different points in time, devised diasporic return programs in order to attract unskilled labor “without causing ethnonational disruption” (Tsuda 2010, 616). Tsuda argues that economic pressures motivate migration “from less developed countries to more economically prosperous ancestral homelands” (617). In contrast, many Armenian repatriates expect to see their earning and professional prospects diminished in the Republic of Armenia. Does this make their decision “irrational”?

Though the Armenian discourse of repatriation shares certain features with the discourse of Zionism, the Republic of Armenia, as a post-Soviet formation, has yet to reinvent its relationship to the Armenian diaspora. It arguably functions in reverse order to the state of Israel because it is administering a territory that was continuously inhabited by an Armenian majority. Although an Armenian Ministry of Diaspora was created in 2009, its activities remain limited to symbolic programs and events.<sup>342</sup> In lieu of a state-sponsored campaign, returnees from the Armenian diaspora, or “repats,”<sup>343</sup> are organizing and promoting repatriation through informal outreach.

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<sup>342</sup> Perceptions of the Ministry of Diaspora among repatriates in Armenia tend to be negative. Many question its purpose in light of its purely symbolic activities that neither promote repatriation nor offer material incentives. Apart from periodic outreach and networking events, the Ministry of Diaspora assists with legal questions and supports efforts to create an Armenian trade network. It runs a summer program for Armenian youth, “Ari Tun” (Engl. “come home”), which organizes limited visits with host families in Armenia.

<sup>343</sup> The term “repat” is an abbreviation of the word “repatriate,” a person that has “repatriated” to their ancestral homeland. While repatriation is usually imagined to be an individual decision and therefore a voluntary act, it can also describe the involuntary deportation of undesirable immigrants. Objects and artifacts stolen during colonial times or wars may also be “repatriated” or returned to states that claim them. The notion of a “repat” also invokes the term “expat” which is commonly used to describe a person that has voluntarily left their

Advocates for “high skill” repatriation argue that the non-governmental sector in Armenia offers opportunities for career development. Though these rewards are not monetary, first and foremost, personal satisfaction, happiness, and individual purpose, the “results” could be capitalized later, or “scaled up,” through production chains that link Armenia to the global market.<sup>344</sup>

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country of origin to live elsewhere in the world for a significant period of time or on a permanent basis without entirely severing cultural ties or ruling out return. Although the term “expat” is in itself descriptive, it is not neutral. It designates cosmopolitan elites that self-consciously exist on an entirely different orbit than refugees and immigrants that are forcibly displaced from the Global South and find themselves, at best, contained and administered in the Global North. While expats are imagined as unique individuals, immigrants are usually represented as part of a homogenous group, “crowd,” or “mass.” While the poor and racialized are often denied individual agency and constructed as a threat, communities of “expats” exist as a product of Western imaginaries of unrestricted travel and voluntary migration, complete with a connotation of adventure and self-discovery, outside of North America or Europe. Armenian Americans who have moved to live and work in the Republic of Armenia may describe themselves as “repats” to modernize the prevailing image of “repatriation” as a tragic journey on large steam liners in the 1940s. Its proximity to the “expat” emphasizes individual agency and choice that sets them apart from Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian Armenians seeking refuge as prospective citizens of the Republic of Armenia. The subtle transition from the “expat” to the “repat” further implies a shift in allegiance from the country of origin to the ancestral homeland. Though often existing apart from the local population, “repats” intent to root themselves in Armenia without quite giving up the idea of returning to North America or Europe if necessary or when opportune. On the construction of “low-risk” and “high-risk” migration, see Louise Amoore, “Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror,” *Political Geography*, Vol. 25, 2006, 336-351.

<sup>344</sup> To illustrate the long-term vision for Armenia’s future development, the director of *RepatArmenia* Foundation, a non-governmental organization promoting professional repatriation since 2012, proposed a “three-seven-seven model” in which three million people living in Armenia would engineer products and seven million people in the Armenian diaspora (“salesmen”) would sell them to a global market of seven billion people. In this conception, Armenia’s economy would become entirely geared toward export. In conversation, he attributed this model to Alexander Davern, president and chief executive officer of *National Instruments* (NI), a multinational software and data engineering corporation headquartered in the United States. Once a local class of global producers amassed enough wealth, liberal reforms would become inevitable due to a “change in mentality,” so *RepatArmenia*’s director, which would translate into a popular desire for liberal democracy.

In neoliberal times, the idealism of the post-war repatriation movement<sup>345</sup> has given way to a new realism of return that emphasizes strategic engagement over charity. While the discourse of repatriation was previously driven by a romantic attachment to the idea rather than the place of Armenia, historical trauma, and nostalgia for the past, its contemporary protagonists find agency in speculation about the future through private investment in national development. Since the imagination itself has become a site of accumulation in times of cognitive capitalism, imagined communities such as nations (Anderson 1983) are being rebranded through narrative operations that decouple sovereignty and statehood. I examine how transnational diaspora is being reframed as a “global” nation and argue that the existing state of Armenia is being transformed into a “national enterprise” in the process.

Michel Foucault argued that neoliberalism is a form of criticism that opposes a “present governmentality,” or rationality of government, as “irrational.” Through “criticism of reality,” neoliberal reformers advocate for policy changes that “limit” the

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<sup>345</sup> Between 1921 and 1962, the Soviet government sought to attract “unskilled” agricultural workers to repopulate Armenia’s rural regions (Savvidis 2009, 62). Between 1946-48, at least 100,000 Armenians arrived in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic from across the Middle East, the Balkans, Europe, and as far as the United States and China. Once in Soviet Armenia, many repatriates were treated as “foreigners” and were shocked to find themselves and their children alienated and surveilled in their imagined homeland. Due to Soviet restrictions on exit visa, the move was irreversible. According to Gevorg Poghosyan, a similar number immigrated to Soviet Armenia between 1962 and 1985, including returnees from other Soviet republics. In the 1990s, close to 360,000 ethnic Armenians were forced to leave the neighboring Republic of Azerbaijan as a result of the ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Close to 300,000 Azeri citizens of Armenian heritage found refuge in the Republic of Armenia which, in turn, expelled about 220,000 ethnic Azeris which fled its territory and that of Nagorno-Karabakh. The forced nature of this de facto population exchange disqualifies it from being considered a wave of repatriation. See Gevorg Poghosyan, “Out-Migration from Armenia after 1990,” in Tessa Savvidis, ed. *International Migration: Local Conditions and Effects*. Arbeitspapiere des Osteuropa-Instituts, Freie Universität Berlin, March 2009, 61-72.

state and “rationalize [government] by scaling it down” (Foucault 2008, 321). The Armenian case allows to illustrate that neoliberal policies are not always mobilized to dismantle or privatize public institutions. In light of histories of genocide in the region, statehood is imagined as a non-negotiable guarantee for the future survival of the nation. Since “irrational” government is perceived as an existential threat to the continued existence of the state, deregulation becomes a strategy of nation-building not to destabilize the state but to make room for private interventions that are believed to make Armenian statehood more viable in times of neoliberal globalization. Despite the fundamental territoriality of the national project, these aspirations are by definition extra-territorial because “the globe” is not a place but an idea. Yet, the utopia of a “global” Armenia is presented as a realist proposition.<sup>346</sup> This global vision for Armenia centers on the existing state of Armenia as a transitory form in an ongoing project of nation-state building.

Since the Armenian nation is imagined in excess of the citizenry of the Republic of Armenia, ethnic identity is mobilized to legitimize constructions of diaspora Armenians as agents of progress vis-à-vis a stagnant local environment.

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<sup>346</sup> I argue that advocates in the Armenian diaspora mobilize the genre of realism to shift the discourse of repatriation towards strategic investment of capital in the nation, represented by the economy of the Republic of Armenia. Realism is a mode of discourse that obscures the narrative operations necessary to construct reality as “real.” This is illustrated by the “magical” effect of deviations from realist conventions in “magical realism,” a genre of fiction writing associated with Latin American literature. The Soviet state utilized “realism” to propagate its vision of “socialist society” through art. In television and digital media, so-called “reality” entertainment is selling the illusion of transparency. The term “realism” is also used to describe forms of statecraft and foreign policy that purport to be devoid of “idealism.” For realism in literature, see Frederic Jameson. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London and New York: Verso, 2013.

Through narrative pairings of diaspora with “hope” and local culture with “passivity” or “apathy,” post-Soviet “mentality” is constructed as an object of attack. I track these discursive operations to illustrate that the production of “reality” is still mediated by layers of translation and the power of the narrator to represent the narrated. Based on transcribed open-ended interviews I conducted in Yerevan in 2016, I probe what kinds of subjects neoliberalism has made in the Armenian diaspora, and ask what kind of Armenia is being “incubated” in their midst.<sup>347</sup> I argue that gender remains foundational to the neoliberal discourse of repatriation and show how “global” development is redrawing Armenia’s location on the map in tandem with “new formations of hegemony, including those that travel under the sign of ‘Asia’” (Roy 2016, 208).<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> This motif of extraterritorial relationality predominates in literary engagement with the concept of Armenia in the Armenian diaspora in North America. William Saroyan epitomized this idea of Armenia as a relationship between Armenians rather than a place in his iconic two-page essay *The Armenian & the Armenian*, written in 1935 in New York City. Through an encounter with an Armenian waiter in a beer parlor in Rostov, a city in Soviet Russia, Saroyan narrated how he found Armenia, or “the Armenian spirit,” in “the glance, the gesture, the smile, and through these things the swift rebirth of the race, timeless and again strong, through years have passed, though cities have been destroyed, fathers and brothers and sons killed, places forgotten, dreams violated, living hearts blackened with hate” (438). Saroyan emphasized that although there is “a small area of land in Asia Minor that is called Armenia,” it was “mournful [...] that Armenia [was] nowhere” (437). Yet, so Saroyan, “the race will [...] live again when two of them meet in a beer parlor [...] and laugh, and speak in their tongue” (438). See William Saroyan. *Inhale & Exhale*. New York: Random House, 1936.

<sup>348</sup> Armenia’s location in the “East” became consolidated when the post-Soviet republic joined the Eurasian Economic Union in 2014. Much lamented by liberal reformers, this unexpected move foreclosed further integration with the European Union by contractual clause. The Armenian accession to the Eurasian Economic Union noticeably coincided with the more active participation of the Armenian diaspora in Moscow in Armenia’s development sector. Financial institutions such as the Eurasian Development Bank, founded in 2006, and the New Development Bank BRICS endowed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa in 2014 exemplify the idea of “Emerging Markets-to Emerging Markets cooperation” (IEMS 2017, 21). While the rhetoric surrounding neoliberal integration in regional markets deploys the rhetoric of the Third World non-alignment movement of the 1950s, the discourse originated

## The Gender of Developmental Agency

The aftermath of economic and infrastructural devastation in the immediate post-Soviet period was marked by a profound sense of hopelessness for the future. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, its former peripheries fell in disarray as industrial and administrative infrastructures were dismantled. In Armenia, all those who could poured their savings into visa and plane tickets to pack up for good and join relatives in Moscow and Los Angeles, the two largest hubs of the post-Soviet diaspora. Tamar Shirinian theorizes the condition of those left behind as a feeling of “presentlessness,” or rupture in continuity (Shirinian 2016).<sup>349</sup> Many repatriates denounce this public feeling as a potent obstacle to economic growth in Armenia. Descendants of Ottoman Armenians, exiled outside of the region, adopted the newly independent Republic of Armenia as a fledgling ancestral homeland in need of their

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with global consulting firms. See for example O’Neill, Jim, “Building Better Global Economic BRICs,” *Global Economics*, No. 66, November 30, 2001.

<sup>349</sup> After national independence, hope for a reinstated (phallic) ideal of Armenian sovereignty soon dissolved into anxiety about moral corruption at the core of post-Soviet statehood. This crisis of “F/fatherlessness” (Shirinian 2016, 194) translated into a sense of impotence that seemed to cancel out the future itself. While Shirinian explores the displacement of anxiety about corruption onto the figure of “the homosexual,” she captures the affective dimension of uncertainty associated with the symbolic authority of “fathers” and the post-Soviet state. She argues that the popular dismissal of “perversion” in Armenia is tied to a sense of corruption of sovereignty rather than the Western discourse of sexuality. Shirinian proposes a dialectic take in which this “politics of ‘no!’” in relation to “illegitimate Fatherhood” constitutes a “refusal of the entire symbolic order” (299) and therefore becomes an affirmation of a future without patriarchal authority. See Tamar Shirinian, “Survival of a Perverse Nation: Sexuality and Kinship in Post-Soviet Armenia,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 2016.



support.<sup>350</sup> Newly arrived hopefuls were advised not to *mind* the “negativity” of locals.<sup>351</sup>

Global reformers in the Armenian diaspora seek to recapture the imagination of the future not only to build a neoliberal present but also to reconstitute and fortify the sovereign capacity of the Armenian state in the international arena. This project of reconstitution presumes that the phallus of the nation, its post-Soviet apparatus, is inadequate, weakened, and wounded. Enormous investments of time and capital have been mobilized to transform the fledgling post-Soviet state of Armenia into a “strong” fatherland. National imaginaries of Armenia as both a mother and a father mirror the dualism of the Armenian state and the Armenian nation as two distinct entities to be aligned in order to secure the future survival of the nation. While the state apparatus is masculinized, the stateless and dispersed diaspora is feminized. Articulated through the temporality of finance, in which growth is not pursued on the basis of production or extraction but through branding and speculation, the future Armenia is envisioned as a homeland to a “global nation” of Armenians. Return is also a metaphor for the kinds of neoliberal future that repatriate investors and consultants intend. Through the

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<sup>350</sup> Many Armenians consider Anatolia the heart of the Armenian homeland. Following on the short-lived independence of the first Republic of Armenia in 1918-1919, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) declared independence as the Republic of Armenia after popular protests led to a peaceful secession from the Soviet Union in 1988. The historical borders of the Armenian homeland remain contested.

<sup>351</sup> In diasporic discourses of development, taxi drivers figure as quintessential representatives of local reality from whom repatriates must be shielded, at least initially, in order not to be affected by their pessimism. Accordingly, taxi drivers became valuable interlocutors during my visits to Armenia.

repatriation, or transfer, of human and venture capital from the diaspora to the homeland, the phallus of the nation is to be reconstitution.<sup>352</sup>

The root of the term “repatriation” (հայրենադարձ), both in English and Armenian, denotes a “return to the fatherland.”<sup>353</sup> In relation to the homeland (հայրենիք), the land of fathers, the repatriate is structurally identified as a child. Without nurture or protection by the father, however, the redemptive arch of return is destabilized. Not only does the imagined homeland appear feminized, but its phallic power is felt to be dissipated by corruption. In light of the “presupposition that the body politic must survive” (Edelman 2004, 3), the idea of a “future-less” state becomes unbearable. This sense of unbearability – a state that cannot be “born” – is exacerbated by the acute awareness of past statelessness and genocide that marks the Armenian diaspora. When something is unbearable, it can neither be made nor represented. It finds no release into the world. At the same time, the unbearable is a burden that exceeds what can be endured by the individual. Life without a future, in the present, is unbearable because it offers no sense of *progress*. The capacity to live without resolving gendered contradictions seems to elude the liberal subject.

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<sup>352</sup> This gendered schema does not reflect the social composition of the repatriate community in Armenia. Women and men are as likely to move to Armenia to become involved in the diaspora-led development sector.

<sup>353</sup> The term “repatriation” was first popularized during the state-sponsored campaign that called on Armenians in the diaspora to relocate to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. On the “Great Repatriation” of the 1940s, see Sevan N. Yousefian, “The Postwar Repatriation Movement of Armenians to Soviet Armenia, 1945-1948,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2011. See also Tsolin Nalbantian, “Fashioning Armenians in Lebanon, 1946-1958,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2010.

Tom Mooradian's autobiographical account *The Repatriate* (2017) captures this destabilizing dynamic and shows that "return" remains constitutively open to reversal. If the narrative arch of redemption falls short, as it often does, narratives of repatriation can quickly move from romance to tragedy. Mooradian left the United States in 1947 on the first steam ship that took Armenian Americans to Soviet Armenia. He described his "return" to a land he had never seen as a youthful "adventure" and a "roller-coaster ride to manhood" (Mooradian 2017, ix).<sup>354</sup> Once in Armenia, his imagined fatherland, he adopts a "surrogate father" (126) and "surrogate mother" (263), but continues to feel like "a man without a country" (375). Through bouts of depression, he experiences his repatriation as a time of exile and coercion, rather than as a homecoming. Though a part of the Armenian nation, he remained a step-child of the Soviet Armenian state.

Driven by "reproductive futurism" – a "political order that returns to the Child as the image of the future it intends" (Edelman 2004, 3) – the contemporary repatriation movement wields the discursive tools of neoliberal development to *restore* the "fatherhood" of the father, by making the "manhood" of the state "proper" to the child.<sup>355</sup> Corruption is constructed as a deadly affliction on the state, attesting to the

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<sup>354</sup> Mooradian was born in Detroit as the youngest son of Armenian genocide survivors. His father was a communist, labor organizer, and civil rights activist affiliated with the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). See Mooradian, Tom. *The Repatriate: Love, Basketball, and the KBG*. Seattle: Morediant Publishing, 2017 [2008]. On the rift between communists and nationalists in the transnational Armenian diaspora, see Vahe Sahakyan, "Between Host-Countries and Homeland: Institutions, Politics and Identities in the Post-Genocide Armenian Diaspora (1920s to 1980s)," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2015.

<sup>355</sup> Edelman's "no future" polemic has been extensively critiqued for aligning queerness with death. However, Edelman identifies queerness as "the place of the social order's death drive"

illegitimacy of its current form as an obstacle to the growth of the national economy.<sup>356</sup>

In order to secure the future itself, the repatriate community effectively labors to give birth to the father as an act of *self-creation* vis-à-vis a passive and feminized homeland. In this gendered imaginary of repatriation, the agency to *transform* the homeland rests with the “global” diaspora. No longer feminized, without a state, diaspora is masculinized by virtue of its agency in post-Soviet Armenia. Though few repatriates express “desire to become one of the locals,” many continue to feel a “gap between the local and diasporic populations” in Armenia (Fittante 2017, 162). Instead of allowing the homeland to act on diaspora, the diaspora seeks to act on the homeland. The idea of development is imposed on the environment, rather than allowing the environment to inform the collective future that is intended. This scheme reduces the local population to a passive substrate of diasporic statecraft. It presupposes a linear

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(3) where life can be explored as an end in itself rather than a means to its future reproduction. The “figural status” (3) of queerness in Edelman is to denote the constitutive outside of the law of the father that negates feminine pleasure as an end in itself. Through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis, queerness becomes a site of radical livingness in opposition to the negativity of the symbolic order. For queer futurity, see José Esteban Muñoz. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

<sup>356</sup> This is not to suggest that corruption does not exist. According to the *Caucasus Barometer 2017 Armenia*, a household survey conducted annually by the Caucasus Research Resource Center, 7% of respondents perceived corruption as the most important issue facing Armenia. However, most respondents found unemployment and poverty to be more pressing issues. Interestingly, 99% of respondents denied having paid any bribes during the past twelve months. In 2017, the sample size was 1648 respondents at a response rate of 57%. See URL: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017am/codebook/> (accessed January 2019). For a more detailed discussion of public perceptions of corruption in Armenia, see also Policy Forum Armenia, “State of the Nation: Corruption in Armenia,” October 2013. After the presidential election of 2008, election fraud gained visibility outside of Armenia when eight protesters were shot in front of the national parliament. More recently, coalitions such as “Justice Within Armenia” campaigned to mobilize members of the Armenian diaspora to travel to Armenia and monitor the parliamentary elections as observers.

timeline of development and institutes the ideology of *progress* as a rationality of government – developmentalism.

### **From Civil Society to Social Enterprise**

When the Republic of Armenia seceded from the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenians residing outside of the post-Soviet region discovered they could now freely visit a place in West Asia called “Armenia.” By the late 2000s, a steady trickle of repatriates, the “pioneers of the new repatriation wave” (AGBU 2010, 29), emerged as the primary force of Western-style development in Armenia. After the economic turmoil of the 1990s, the focus of diasporic support for Armenia shifted from emergency assistance and charity to volunteerism and non-governmental advocacy. In contrast to the state-sanctioned repatriation campaigns of the 1940s, the post-Soviet Republic of Armenia has neglected to develop any comprehensive policy on return migration.<sup>357</sup>

The post-Soviet period, often described as a period of “transition,” was characterized by legislative and economic reforms designed to “beat back” the Soviet state and make room for civil society.<sup>358</sup> After the Soviet collapse, the market, as a “site of truth,” had to be *wrested* from state administrations accustomed to economic

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<sup>357</sup> Although the Armenian state did not discourage co-ethnic migration, it also did not, until recently, *promote* repatriation. Only after the so-called “Velvet Revolution” of April 2018, the “New Armenia” invites more active participation from the Armenian diaspora and officially calls for mass repatriation.

<sup>358</sup> The term “civil society” was coined by Adam Ferguson, a liberal thinker of the Scottish Enlightenment. See Adam Ferguson. *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. Edinburgh/London: A. Kincaid & J. Bell/A. Millar & T. Caddel, 1767. For a critical discussion of the concept and presuppositions of civil society, see Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. New York: Picador, 2008.

planning.<sup>359</sup> Liberal theorists argue that civil society emerges after limits on the power of state institutions are imposed through a set of “mechanisms [...] to limit the exercise of government power internally” (Foucault 2008, 27). Through these internal restrictions, the state carves out a space that is *not* the state, called “civil society” or “the market.” Neoliberal reformers assert that this non-governmental space “must be left to function with the least possible interventions precisely so that it can both formulate its truth and propose it to governmental practice as a rule and norm” (31).

The first generation of women’s and human rights NGOs in Armenia such as Women’s Resource Center of Armenia, the Women’s Support Center, PINK Armenia,<sup>360</sup> and Transparency International, among others, focused on the civil rights of individuals and held the government accountable as an entity that should *intervene* in social relation to enforce legal equality among juridical subjects of rights. These non-governmental organizations embody the liberal model of civil society.

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<sup>359</sup> Neoliberal critics argued that the degree of involvement of the Soviet state in the market was pathological. See, for example, Shleifer, Andrei and Robert W. Vishny. *The Grabbing Hand: Government Pathologies and their Cures*. Harvard University Press, 2002. Jamie Peck characterized Shleifer as “the architect of Russia’s privatization program” in the 1990s which wracked havoc on post-Soviet society in Russia. The ideological underpinnings of the sudden privatization of all social services has been famously described as “shock therapy” by Naomi Klein. Shleifer and his deputy Jonathan Hay, two prominent economists at Harvard University, were found guilty of corrupt dealings by the U.S. District Court of Boston, alleging that both had illegally profited from the “free” market they had built in post-Soviet Russia. Though neither Shleifer and Hay admitted liability, both agreed to pay \$2 million to the U.S. Department of Justice. Harvard University settled the dispute with a record breaking payment of \$26.5 million. Insofar, it is ironic that Shleifer, who has been found guilty of corruption, is still considered a leading critic of economic regulation as public “rent seeking” to imply corrupt motives. See Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2008, 235. See also Peck, Jamie. *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>360</sup> PINK Armenia was founded in 2007 and remains the only NGO that is explicitly focused on the rights of LGBT citizens of Armenia.

Transnational feminist scholars critique the “NGOization” of social movements in the Global South as a tool of control that domesticates the revolutionary demands of grassroots activists (see Alvarez 1999; Mendoza 2002; Mohanty 2003). In the absence of a grassroots women’s movement in the post-Soviet region, however, the NGO-ization of women’s rights advocacy requires a different mode of critique. Armine Ishkanian argues that the top-down approach of foreign donor organizations such as the USAID generated the idea that “the problem itself as well as the proposed solutions,” namely anti-domestic violence legislation, women’s shelters, and support hotlines, were being “artificially imported and imposed” in Armenia (Ishkanian 2007, 490). In light of changing geopolitical dynamics, the language of civil society promotion appears to have gone out of fashion. At present, the international NGO model has been all but eclipsed by diaspora-led for-profit foundations in Armenia.

*Birthright Armenia* (Arm. *Depi Hayk*, “go to Hayk”), a U.S. non-profit with an active presence in Armenia, spearheaded the post-Soviet effort to promote repatriation as a development strategy in the Armenian diaspora. Founded in 2003, it was one of the first organizations created in the Armenian diaspora to attract co-ethnic youth to Armenia in order to lay, in its own words, “the foundation to encourage repatriation” (Birthright Armenia 2010, 15). Unlike *Birthright Israel* (Heb. *Taglit*, Engl. “discovery”), upon which it was modelled, *Birthright Armenia* is entirely funded by private donations. After “proving” their Armenian ancestry, through official documentation or informal means, participants between the ages of 20-32 years are sponsored for stays with host families in the Armenian provinces or Yerevan, the

Armenian capital. Upon arrival, they have to enroll in Armenian language classes and pick an organization to support as full-time volunteers for at least three months.

According to *Birthright Armenia*'s "welcome packet," its stated mission is to strengthen ties between the homeland and diasporan youth by affording them an opportunity to be a part of Armenia's daily life and to contribute to Armenia's development through work, study and volunteer experiences, while developing life-long personal ties and a renewed sense of Armenian identity (Birthright Armenia 2010, 13).

It envisions itself as a "powerful, broad-based network of organizations and individuals" that want to afford "all young Armenians across the world" with an "essential rite of passage." Through "service and experiences in Armenia," they are to energize and inspire their local peers to understand "their critical role in nation building" in Armenia (Birthright Armenia 2010, 13). In 2011, the "welcome packet" included "TEN DO'S AND DONT'S" which urged participants to "make friends with local Armenians" and "respect the people and their customs," while discouraging them, as the first commandment, not to "think you are better" (36).

While *Birthright Armenia* initially recruited most of its participants among the Armenian diaspora in North America, it has since expanded into an organization with over 1500 alumni from over 48 countries.<sup>361</sup> Its current database lists over two hundred

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<sup>361</sup> The organization has also significantly expanded its program to encompass seed grants and funding for alumni who want to take the "next step" and start a business in Armenia. It has formalized an "ambassador program" to recruit alumni that want to promote service trips to Armenia in their "region" of origin. It also created the "Pathway to Armenia" program which facilitates "alumni employment-based returns to Armenia by providing lodging assistance and employment search assistance." *Birthright Armenia* has an updated e-mail newsletter and maintains a presence on all major social media platforms, including *VK* (*V Kontakty*, Russian: "in contact, in touch"), a website akin to *Facebook* that is popular in the Russian-speaking



organizations (out of a total of 783 available options) in and outside of the capital that are open to volunteer placement. Organized in eighteen categories, these range from “human rights and gender issues,” which was the dominant category in 2011, to architecture and graphic design, IT and computer science, PR and marketing, tourism and hospitality, and other economic fields. Many of the listed organizations are for-profit businesses, private foundations, think tanks, and even banks, most of which did not exist five years ago.

Its focus has shifted from volunteer service, or ethnic “voluntourism” – a consumptive relationship to a place one visits and claims as one’s own<sup>362</sup> – to professional development and employment opportunities. This change reflects a wider shift in the non-governmental sector in post-Soviet Armenia which is no longer dominated by the non-profit model promoted by international donors. Instead of advocating for civic reforms, many NGOs seek to transform governmental practice through programs that are intended to build economic capacity. By denouncing the non-profit model as donor-driven and unsustainable, neoliberal visions of civil society as a market-place have invaded the liberal discourse of civil society promotion. The

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world. The organization also hired a full-time coordinator to network with alumni worldwide. See *Birthright Armenia*’s website, available in five different languages, URL: <https://www.birthrightarmenia.org/en/> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>362</sup> On *Birthright Armenia*’s original focus on volunteerism, see Lisa Manookian, “Volunteerism in The Homeland,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, February 17, 2011. URL: <https://mirrorspectator.com/2011/02/17/volunteerism-in-the-homeland-part-i-redefining-service-philanthropist-edele-hovnanian/> (accessed January 2019). See also Aaron Terrazas, “Connected through Service: Diaspora Volunteers and Global Development,” *Migration Policy Institute*, August 2010.

new paradigm of engagement with the post-Soviet state appears to be the “social enterprise.”

However, diasporic reformers are targeting the state to ensure its *continued* existence, rather than to dismantle it through privatization. In altered form, they hope it will touch the lives of each and all Armenians. Assuming the role of economic advisors, strategists, and corporate futurists, repatriate activists are not in the business of “usurping” sovereignty but “fear” the “death” or fragmentation of the nation by a “weak” or “corrupt” state. The mandate of national survival fuels the rising hegemony of managerial rationality. I analyze reports, public discourse, and transcribed interviews to show how social entrepreneurship is envisioned by its most committed advocates and scrutinize how the formation of human capital is discussed and promoted through the lens of “social impact” in Armenia. In exchange for personal happiness, repatriation is promoted as a form of investment in the success of the homeland. The more Armenians in the diaspora begin to “invest” in this way, the more its “stock” will go up and the “shareholder value” of return will increase. This is presented as a “win-win” situation in which global circuits of capital and information refashion local and diaspora Armenians into human capital of the nation and entrepreneurial subjects whose self-interest in return also coincides with the collective good.

Private foundations endowed by venture capitalists in the Armenian diaspora have emerged as a primary vehicle through which the post-Soviet administration is informalized and restructured in line with the global vision of neoliberal consultants,

reaching beyond the limiting frame of post-Soviet transition, and toward the global. In a bid to reimagine the nation on the model of a global corporation, an extraterritorial polity anchored on the Armenian plateau, the state of Armenia is to be transformed into a national enterprise, through communication, financial, and legal technology that connects its constituent parts through global networks of diaspora.

As the terms of nationalism are enmeshed in the discourse of neoliberalism, Armenian communities throughout North America, Europe, Asia, and Latin America, reimagined as a “global” nation, are united in a shared venture, the Republic of Armenia, which they *should* want to succeed as Armenian patriots. From this perspective, nationalism functions as a kind of equity culture in which national belonging is quantified as “shareholder value” in a firm. This links the “success of the firm” to “stock options,” as personal compensation, to “provide a workforce with an incentive to increase shareholder value [...] while also increasing the ranks of entrepreneurs” (Saxenian 2006, 30). As subjects of interest,<sup>363</sup> entrepreneurs are called upon to “actively reshape the local environment as they grow their firms by supporting one another and by working to influence policy” (46). In other words, the start-up is conceived as a corporate form or organism that can transform its environment, in this case the political culture of post-Soviet Armenia, *by growing in it*, that is,

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<sup>363</sup> I borrow the term “subject of interest” from Michel Foucault who distilled in this notion the “appearance of interest” as a “form of will” that is “both immediately and absolutely subjective” (Foucault 2008, 273). Postcolonial and transnational feminist theorists have pointed out that this formation of the “interested” subject is not universal. It is Eurocentric because it is rooted in Western individualism. See also Albert O. Hirschman. *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*. Princeton University Press, 2013 [1977].

consumptively acting on it to reproduce itself in excess of itself. However, social impact investors are not only influencing policy but also educating the desire of individuals that are socialized into deregulated work and global markets through participation in social enterprise.

While this entrepreneurial turn in development politics may not be unique to the Armenian diaspora, attempts to “globalize” its circuits of “transnationality” (Ong 1999) capitalize on solidarity on the basis of national identity, and socialize this capital through investments in human capital that await critical attention. The idiosyncratic uses of neoliberal logic in relation to the nation-state indicates a transformation of nationalism by global managerial discourse which has shaped a situated entrepreneurial governmentality. It is not clear if the emerging formation is best described as a kind of neoliberal nationalism, or national entrepreneurialism, but its recombined strategies and techniques are evidently beginning to penetrate the political culture of the Armenian state.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Unlike Aihwa Ong, who examined the transnational publics that are forged by Chinese labor migrants, I am tracking transnational elites in the Armenian diaspora that capitalize on the idea of Armenia to catalyze economic development through repatriation. Apart from demographic challenges for Armenia’s rural regions, seasonal migration of working-class Armenians is rarely accounted for in these conversations. The transnational fabric of working class life in Armenia is unfortunately beyond the purview of this study. However, it should be noted that a gendered division of labor exists between middle-aged women running informal import-export-businesses between Turkey and Armenia, for example, and men of all ages that typically migrate to Russia to sell produce or work in construction. The latter group has little visibility in conversations about migration and how it is affecting Armenian society. See also Aramays Dallakyan and Rafael Bakhtavoryan, “Analysis of Factors Impacting Rural Women’s Labor Force Participation in Armenia,” The Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2014.

In order to transition from “survival to prosperity,” a group of Armenian economists, repatriates from the Armenian diaspora, commissioned the Moscow office of McKinsey & Company to study “development scenarios” for the Republic of Armenia.<sup>365</sup> The goal of the so-called *Armenia 2020* initiative was to increase Armenia’s “national competitiveness.”<sup>366</sup> This report has since become the neoliberal playbook for Armenia’s social and economic development. It reframed the idea of development by shifting the rights-based agenda of civil society promotion towards for-profit enterprise with quantifiable “social impact” indicators. What is social impact? It is a metric that quantifies the social and economic effects of investments made according to principles of sustainability. It asks, do profits cover operational costs? Are resources renewed for perpetual accumulation? What are the social and environmental effects of a venture? Social impact investment upholds the fiction of corporate social responsibility by “blending” financial returns with the need to

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<sup>365</sup> McKinsey & Company is a global management consulting firm that advises governments and private institutions on strategies for economic growth. It was founded in Chicago in 1926 and has grown into a global conglomerate. According to its website, it maintains over 120 local chapters in more than sixty countries worldwide. Ananya Roy points out that a report by McKinsey & Company, titled “Vision Mumbai,” led to the violent displacement of almost half a million people in 2004-2005 when the city of Mumbai bid to become a “slum-free city” (Roy 2009, 174).

<sup>366</sup> See John Hughes, ed. *Armenia 2020: Scenarios Book*. Yerevan, 2004. The initial report is not publically available. However, McKinsey & Company published a 104-page presentation with updates on *Armenia 2020* in 2015 that is available online. In 2017, the Moscow School of Management *SKOLKOVO*, founded in 2006 as Russia’s first international business school, published a follow up report. See “Armenia 2030: Transforming the Development Landscape,” *SKOLKOVO Institute for Emerging Market Studies* (IEMS), 2017.

appreciate (rather than depreciate or deplete) human capital and other finite resources while “accelerating” Armenia’s economic growth.<sup>367</sup>

### **“Imagine Armenia”**

In May 2017, I travelled to Boston to attend an all-day forum organized by *RepatArmenia* Foundation, a Yerevan-based NGO founded in 2012 to promote repatriation in the Armenian diaspora. The forum was titled “Imagine Armenia” and took place in a large lecture hall at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), a prestigious private research university on the East Coast of the United States. Between the Armenian Students’ Association at MIT, interested members of the general public, and the Armenian community of the wider Boston area, approximately two or three hundred people were in attendance. About twenty panelists had travelled all the way from Armenia to speak about their work in the development sector, business projects, or education reform.<sup>368</sup> All were so-called “repats” that had permanently moved to Armenia after growing up or spending significant parts of their

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<sup>367</sup> For an optimistic account of the role of finance in social justice, see Morgan Simon. *Real Impact: The New Economics of Social Change*. New York: Nation Books, 2017. For a critical assessment of the social and political effects of “investor activism,” see Michel Feher. *Rated Agency: Investee Politics in a Speculative Age*. New York: Zone Books, 2018.

<sup>368</sup> Based on over fifty interviews with North American Armenians living in Armenia in 2015-2016, Daniel Fittante distinguishes between activist repatriates that “desire to ‘build’ and transform Armenia,” and those that “assigned to themselves and assumed a role to ‘brand’ (i.e., rebrand) the country” (Fittante 2010, 147). While the distinction is analytically instructive, these two aims are linked and are jointly pursued by diaspora-led NGOs that more and more function as a cluster of joint-ventures and social enterprises in Armenia. Fittante misses this structural dimension of the contemporary repatriation movement. See Daniel Fittante, “Connection without Engagement: The Paradoxes of North American Armenian Return Migration,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 19 (2-3), 2010 [published 2017], 147-169.

adult lives in North America, with the exception of two founding members of *RepatArmenia* who were part of the Armenian diaspora in Moscow.

With most Armenians outside of Armenia concentrated in the Russian Federation, *RepatArmenia*'s fora in Moscow are similarly well-attended.<sup>369</sup> The “Imagine Armenia” forum in Boston was followed by a smaller forum at the New York City headquarters of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) which I also attended the following week. Offering first-hand testimony and face-to-face exchange with diasporic Armenians that permanently moved to Armenia, these fora's entire purpose was to promote “professional” repatriation. Participants were invited to “Imagine Armenia,” as the title suggested, but to imagine and engage with it as a “real” place that could be visited, invested in, or made one's permanent home.<sup>370</sup>

After opening remarks by a speaker from the Armenian Business Network, an NGO connecting Armenian professionals in the Boston area since 2010, Noubar

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<sup>369</sup> The Armenian diaspora in North America continues to be disproportionately involved in the project of neoliberal reconstitution. This may be due to the hegemonic position of the United States and Canada in the international arena, through the equally large Armenian diaspora in the Russian Federation has risen to greater prominence after key investors entered the Armenian development sector.

<sup>370</sup> It had been long customary to “dream” of returning to the homeland for generations of displaced Armenians who never had a chance to set foot on its territory. After the Republic of Armenia declared independence in 1988, this dynamic slowly changed and more and more Armenians in the diaspora, at least those who could afford it, found ways to visit their long fabled but unfamiliar homeland, to find that the Eastern Armenian dialect spoken in post-Soviet Armenia and its Russophile culture were sharply distinct from the Armenia of their dreams. Diaspora-led organizations such as *RepatArmenia* and *Birthright Armenia* propose to overcome this disparity between dream and reality, this idealism, by working to make the dream of Armenia “real” – through an evidence-based assessment of current reality. This “realism” distinguishes the contemporary discourse of repatriation. On the significance of the dream as a dominant trope of repatriation, see also Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), “Realizing a Dream: Then and Now,” Vol. 20, No. 2, November 2010.

Afeyan took the stage. As an MIT alumnus with a doctorate in biochemical engineering, he is now the CEO of a large biotechnology company with hundreds of spin-off ventures in the patent-driven life sciences. However, he was there to speak as one of the founders of *IDeA* Foundation, a private foundation that supports social enterprises in Armenia since 2015. As a visiting lecturer at Harvard Business School, Afeyan knew how to charm and engage an audience. It seemed everyone in the room, including myself, was hanging on his lips as he joked about volunteering his family members to staff the event, drew Venn diagrams on the blackboard with chalk to illustrate his view of diaspora-homeland relations, and talked through a colorful *PowerPoint* presentation that paired McKinsey & Company data sets with professional-looking photographs and videos to promote repatriation.

Noubar Afeyan's involvement in "aspects of Armenian development" began in 2001, at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, where he met Ruben Vardanyan,<sup>371</sup> a well-known Armenian philanthropist that made his fortune as an investment banker in the Russian Federation. Together, in 2015, the two investors

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<sup>371</sup> Over the course of my research for this chapter, I found that Ruben Vardanyan is a central figure in the privatization of Armenia's development sector and the recent shift to social entrepreneurship. He was born and grew up in Yerevan but emigrated to the Russian Federation after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As an investment banker, he amassed personal wealth estimated at close to \$1 billion (USD). He co-founded Initiative for Development of Armenia (*IDeA*) Foundation sometime between 2010 and 2015, which has to date invested over \$500 million in social enterprises and infrastructure projects in the Republic of Armenia. In comparison, the Republic of Armenia received approximately \$1.5 billion in foreign remittances in 2017 but only \$250 million in foreign direct investments. In 2016, the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of the Republic of Armenia was \$10.55 billion with an annual growth rate of 7,2% in 2017. The largest sector of the Armenian economy is manufacturing, followed by agriculture, and to a lesser extent, construction. See URL: <https://tradingeconomics.com/armenia/indicators> (accessed November 2018).



founded Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, a private foundation based in Yerevan that promotes global genocide awareness.<sup>372</sup> He explained, “Building Armenia, building Armenians all around the world is the only thing we can do to reverse the effects of genocide.”<sup>373</sup> As part of the Armenian diaspora, he proposed to link macroeconomic development in the Republic of Armenia to legacies of the destruction and displacement of Ottoman Armenians a century prior. While acknowledging the impossibility of “reviving” the dead, he pointed out that the “shattered, scattered little entities” merely *resembled* a diaspora. In his opinion, which he illustrated on the blackboard below the projection screen, there was no Armenian diaspora, not “one homogenous kind,” or even only “two things that are gonna come together” – a diaspora and a homeland – but, he observed, “it’s a pretty complicated mess” of a “whole lot of different diasporas” that “all sound and look a lot like the place they live, as opposed to Armenia, and, or Armenians.” Armenian communities worldwide should be “reunited,” he argued, into a global nation in order to “reverse” the

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<sup>372</sup> The *Aurora Humanitarian Initiative* was founded in 2015 by Noubar Afeyan, Ruben Vardanyan, and Vartan Gregorian, a US-based historian, “on behalf” of the survivors of the Armenian genocide to market the Republic of Armenia as a global leader in genocide prevention. Since 2015, *Aurora Humanitarian Initiative* recognizes and supports humanitarian efforts through the *Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity*, an award of \$100,000 (USD) accompanied by a \$1 million donation to a humanitarian organization of the recipient’s choice. The annual award ceremony is designed to bring high-profile visitors to Armenia. Invoking the story of Arshaluys Mardigian, a survivor whose memoir *Ravished Armenia* (1918) was exploited in the Hollywood film *Auction of Souls* (1919), the *Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity* harnesses humanitarian discourse, international media, and global capital as part of a multi-pronged campaign to generate and attract human, social, and global capital to post-Soviet Armenia. See also Sassoon Grigorian. *Smart Nation: A Blueprint for Modern Armenia*. London: Gomidas Institute, 2016.

<sup>373</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the citations that follow are based on a transcription of Noubar Afeyan’s talk at the “Imagine Armenia” forum in Boston, at MIT, on May 20, 2017.

“scattering” of genocide survivors and their descendants. Instead of “talking about Armenia as an idea,” he urged the audience “to think about the future of Armenia” and ask, “What can Armenia become?”

In order for Armenians to become Armenian again, perhaps for the first time, it was necessary to move past “the past” – an ontological object to which he argued Armenians remained “highly anchored,” and which “keeps pulling at us every single day” through what is *seen*, such as movies<sup>374</sup> and images, for example of “Syrian refugees today,” and through what is *heard* whenever “somebody said something about Armenians,” and simply “everything” that is *lived* by Armenians today.

He pointed out that “we have a present” that “takes us back to the past,” but that “the future is massively underrepresented in our lives” because, so Afeyan, “we kind of feel like the future is up to other people.” After apologizing for sounding “preachy,” he announced, “I’m here to tell you that the future is the only thing that we should be working on, in the context of the past and the present,” because “the future is the only thing we can actually change.” He thus proposed to unmoor the time of Armenian diaspora from representations of the past and instead, begin to imagine the future as a site in which “unity” could be “reconstituted” from the fragments. Instead of passively enduring the present, as always already determined by the humiliations of

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<sup>374</sup> Afeyan explicitly mentioned *The Promise* (2017), a Hollywood film set during the Armenian genocide that was paid for up front by Kirk Kirkorian, a prominent Armenian philanthropist that made his fortune as a hotelier in Las Vegas. It was widely promoted in the Armenian diaspora in North America, in particular, and functioned as a short-hand for popular representations of Armenian persecution that did not need further explanation at the Boston forum. \$20 million (USD) from the proceeds of the film were used to endow “The Promise Institute for Human Rights” at the School of Law of the University of California, Los Angeles.

the past and “other people,” Afeyan called on the audience to exercise agency and strategize for the future as a site of self-transformation. By visualizing the future in spatial terms, which Afeyan stressed by showing a slide of a map, he conjured the future as a site of material and epistemic conquest.

While macroeconomic indicators and development strategies to navigate the uncertain transition to a future-oriented agency may be the realm of economic and political consultants, Afeyan consoled the audience, there are no experts on “how to help Armenia or develop Armenia” because “Armenia at some level is a start-up.” The advantage of this would be “nobody has ever built that company before” so that not only experts but all Armenians were called upon to engage and “develop our country.” He drew an image of horizontality among Armenian professionals – engineers, dentists, doctors, educators – in contrast to “all these people [at] the World Bank and the IMF [International Monetary Fund]” to whom Armenia was nothing more than “one of a list of 150 countries” (sic). He asked, “if we aren’t gonna do this, why should others? [...] Why should these people care?”

In other words, Afeyan rejected the notion that Armenia would be “saved” by the West. Except to Armenians, who felt connected to the idea of Armenia, the Atlantic world may be at best attracted to Armenia’s food as “a little exotic,” so Afeyan. Implying that international development discourse was self-serving, he implicitly rejected the aid agenda of poverty reduction as investing just enough to consume the other, in this case Armenia’s culinary offerings. Despite its benevolent intentions, the liberal approach to development was rejected as fundamentally extractive and skewed

in favor of the West. Instead, Afeyan offered *self-interest* as a new principle of national development that promised economic emancipation through diasporic agency – an agency achieved through economic emancipation.<sup>375</sup>

By characterizing Armenia as a “start-up,” Afeyan reframed sovereignty as project of economic rather than political independence. Through an analogy between “country” and “company,” he made sense of the state as a kind of enterprise. Etymologically, the “start-up” is a technical form that is *jolted* into being.<sup>376</sup> It also describes a newly built machine that is first set in motion to transfer a force, “just like a chain carries out a transfer of forces from the anchoring point to the last link” (Simondon 2009, 18). As Gilbert Simondon observed, a machine starts up when all its components are adjusted to an “optimum” so that “it becomes capable of maintaining its speed—in other words, its pushing forward—and of furnishing a usable energy of movement” (19). By way of analogy, the state of Armenia is imaged as the last link in

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<sup>375</sup> To some extent, this echoes critiques of development formulated in the Global South in line with postcolonial visions for independence. However, Afeyan and others reframe the terrain of development through the lens of neoliberal economics and enlist the diaspora as an agency for national development in Armenia. It would not be accurate to describe their critique of international development as an embrace of post-development discourse. On the integration of postcolonial critiques in development discourse, see Aram Ziai, “‘I am not a Post-Developmentalist, but...’ The Influence of Post-Development on Development Studies,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 12, 2017, 2719-2734. For the historical continuity between colonialism and international development, see Aram Ziai. *Development Discourse and Global History: From Colonialism to the Sustainable Development Goals*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016.

<sup>376</sup> The first use of the term “start-up” was recorded in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. It is closely related to the inverse term “upstart” which denotes “one newly risen from a humble position to one of power, importance, or rank.” For the etymology of the term “start-up,” see URL: [https://www.etymonline.com/word/start-up#etymonline\\_v\\_38524](https://www.etymonline.com/word/start-up#etymonline_v_38524) (accessed November 2018).

a chain of transmission that transfers vital force or value to West Asia through global networks of diaspora, moored first and foremost to the West.

The Armenian nation, in turn, is reimagined as a community of shareholders with a stake in the “success” of Armenia, the country. Each and all are incentivized to engage and invest to the best of their abilities in order to see their individual “share” appreciate in a joint-venture of national development. This approach defines the desired “reconstitution” as a new “scheme of concretization” (Simondon 2009, 19) that links the diaspora to the state of Armenia. The organic register of the nation makes this imaginary akin to a joint-stock corporation, a legal form in which the firm exists despite a fluctuating directorate and cast of shareholders.

Analyzed by Michel Foucault as “rationalities and mentalities” (Roy 2009, 160) that serve to conduct human conduct (Burchell et al. 1991), government functions as a kind of management of human resources scattered beyond its territorial jurisdiction. With membership defined by ancestry,<sup>377</sup> holding a stake in the Armenian nation becomes a form of equity that founds all social claims to social equality among

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<sup>377</sup> The Republic of Armenia recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as a national church. Therefore, national identity is governed by a set of ethnic and religious criteria despite a formal separation of church and state. Baptism in an Armenian church, birth certificates, Armenian family names, or knowledge of the Armenian language are all considered as potential proof of Armenian ancestry. Documents presented as proof of ancestry be attested by an Armenian embassy or consulate in the country in which they were issued but there is no exhaustive list of types of documents that may be accepted. In effect, petitions are considered on a case by case basis. Foreign citizens with or without Armenian ancestry can obtain special residency status and apply for naturalization after a minimum period of three years (or a total of one year in the case of marriage to an Armenian citizen). After a significant capital investment in the Republic of Armenia, citizenship can also be obtained by decree of the President. The Republic of Armenia explicitly recognized dual citizenship. Candidates running for state office must be Armenian citizens. In the Armenian diaspora, belonging is complicated by the absence of an overarching authority.

Armenians. At that, justice is no longer a function of sovereignty, but a question of return in proportion to investment. The notion of a “start-up country” evokes regional economic development on the model of Silicon Valley or the Boston corridor.<sup>378</sup> In the popular imagination, the notion of the “start-up” also conjures a sense of exponential growth potential on the basis of ideas, for example in IT, marketing, and biotechnology, that are valued by investors before they are realized. The “start-up” is a metaphor that captures and redefines small numbers as an advantage, rather than a handicap, because it fosters in-time transfers of capital and specialized skills on demand – that is, once human capital has been formed through investment.

This technical imaginary of development represents time through the metaphor of “forward motion” in which “a certain amount of energy coming from outside” is necessary in order to start-up, say, an “internal combustion engine that is turned off in a stable state and cannot turn itself on” but reaches “angular speed” through investment of outside energy. In contrast to a subsistence economy, the metaphor of “growth” requires that labor-power be reified and alienated as capital and information “in order to reach the threshold [...] beyond which it functions as a regime of automatism, with each phase of the cycle preparing the conditions of completion of the next phase”

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<sup>378</sup> The Boston area was the first region in the United States where technology companies clustered along Route 128 in newly built industrial parks. On the role of the concentration of military spending and private research universities, see AnnaLee Saxenian. *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994. The “start-up” culture of seemingly horizontal relations in Silicon Valley emerged in opposition to the corporate hierarchies of the biotechnology sector in the Boston corridor. For a critique of biotechnology, see Melinda Cooper. *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008.

(Simondon 2009, 19). This model of automatic phase change reflects linear imaginaries of time as forward motion or “progress.” Accordingly, operations on the present are imagined to correlate with future outcomes. Reconstitution, then, is vital because its “schemas on realities” ensure that there *be* a future.

With Simondon, the study of “the order of reality” that a given technical mentality “seeks to manifest” is best described as “axiology,” rather than ontology (17). An “axis” is defined as an “imaginary motionless straight line around which a body rotates,” or rather, “about which a plan figure can be conceived as rotating to generate the solid.”<sup>379</sup> Axiology is therefore the study of axes and effects of power, i.e. an investigation of the ways in which a corporate body called “the nation” is construed by technical mentality at the core of a governmental enterprise. The idea of Armenia as a “start-up country” further renders the distinction between private and public realms inconsequential by aligning the sovereign power of the state with economic rationality. Without assuming the weight of sovereignty, entrepreneurs and professionals are eminently governable subjects and can therefore *advise* representatives of the state on the government of juridical subjects of rights that double as consumers.

Afeyan identified “mental attitude” as a problem in the Armenian diaspora. Despite the “long-standing dream to come together,” he pointed out that many Armenians relate to the Republic of Armenia as “another diaspora” so that “it doesn’t

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<sup>379</sup> For a definition of “axis” (noun), see *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, URL: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/axis> (accessed November 2018).

feel like a country.” He described the constitutive transnationalism of Armenian communities<sup>380</sup> as a “situation of a fragmented Armenia,” and thereby implied that Armenians were vulnerable unless unified into one body or nation. This insufficient state, he maintained, could only be overcome by *reconstituting* Armenians as “one nation” with “one thought process” – of a “global kind,” as he specified – “that can help hold the pieces.” Thus, he proposed to convert the modern desire for “unity” into a “global strategy” for nation-building. Similar to the management of a multinational corporation, this national development would require a “local message” that is adjusted to specific contexts with this larger goal in mind.

As argued by Benedict Anderson, “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). Although “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them” (Anderson 1983, 6), the idea of “homeland” commands “profound emotional legitimacy” (4) because “in the minds of each lives

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<sup>380</sup> Since the emergence of secular nationalism in the modern period, displaced Armenians from the same ancestral regions have formed hometown associations in far-flung locations. See Sevan N. Yousefian, “Picnics for Patriots: The Transnational Activism of an Armenian Hometown Association,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2014, 31-52. Armenian merchant communities from New Julfa in the Safavid Empire centered around local outposts of the Armenian Apostolic Church created to serve trade settlements throughout South Asia, Africa, and Europe. See Sebouh D. Aslanian. *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian merchants from New Julfa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. The *Young Professionals* (YP) network of the Armenian General Benevolent Union can serve as a more recent example of associational life in the Armenian diaspora. Its first chapter was created in Los Angeles in 1995 to target Armenians between the ages of 22 and 40. AGBU YP has since grown to encompass local chapters in dozens of locations throughout the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East, including a chapter in Yerevan. Insofar, Armenia is not centered but embedded in a global network of “young professionals” as one location among many.



the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983, 6). The way in which the Armenian nation is imagined is shifting in accordance with discourses of globalization that reframe the “glocal,”<sup>381</sup> as explicitly noted by Afeyan, to illustrate the “tension between advancing locally but also thinking globally of Armenians” – *as* “global Armenians.” Such a “global” strategy would unmoor associational life in the Armenian diaspora from local contexts that previously informed how national identity was imagined in relation to a virtual sense of connection to a distant homeland.<sup>382</sup>

The numerically small scale of the nation allows for a vision of global development in which the territory of the Armenian state is reimagined as a

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<sup>381</sup> The notion of the “glocal” combines the terms “global” and “local” to describe a “seamless integration” between the two in a “dynamic, contingent, and two-way dialectic.” Its meaning is captured by the phrase “to think globally and act locally.” See Susan Mayhew. *A Dictionary of Geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Neil Brenner theorizes “glocalization” as a spatial strategy deployed by states. Based on David Harvey’s critique of “entrepreneurialism” in urban governance in the United States (Harvey 1989), Brenner theorizes “glocalization” as “the spatial reorganization of state regulatory arrangement at multiple spatial scales” to concentrate “capacities for economic development within strategic subnational sites” instead of attempting “to equalize the distribution of population, industry and infrastructure across the national territory” (Peck/Yeung 2003, 198). Sites of concentrated economic capacities, such as “cities, city-regions and industrial districts,” or deregulated “free zones” (see Easterling 2014), are then “to be positioned strategically within global and European economic flows” (Peck/Yeung 2003, 198). Aihwa Ong theorizes this neoliberal form of statecraft as “the art of being global” in relation to urban norms (Roy/Ong 2011). The phantasy, or “hysteria,” of “world-class” status is projected onto “the city” as one spatial concept. In order to make sense of “new horizons of the global” that are emerging through “world-conjuring projects” in East and South Asia, urban theorists have turned to an “analytics of assemblage” (Ong/Roy 2011, 4). This means that they trace “practices that rearticulate and reassemble material, technical, and discursive elements in the process of remaking particular contexts” of governing (ibid.). In the case of Armenia, the nation itself numbers less constituents than many “world-class” city-regions.

<sup>382</sup> In this respect, Benedict Anderson’s well-rehearsed argument about the rise of modern nationalism through the circulation of print media remains instructive. However, it does not capture the role of digital information technology in the neoliberalization of a constitutively transnational imaginary of the Armenian nation. See Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983. See also Ernst Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.

“subnational” site that can be strategically invested with capital as the center of a global enterprise. Despite attempts to disarticulate its location on the margins of the “vast swath of territory imagined as Asia” (Roy 2016, 207), it matters because the assemblage called “Global Armenia” exploits its liminal position vis-à-vis the West while setting sight on “new solidarities that collectively seem to raise an inter-Asian horizon of metropolitan and global aspirations” (Ong/Roy 2011, 4). Without a recognition of Armenia’s relationship to Asia, the project of reconstitution remains beholden to the romantic attachment of diaspora to the idea of the West.<sup>383</sup> This is to miss the potential of a “critical regionalism,” as proposed by Gayatri C. Spivak, which could write “postcolonialism into globality” (Spivak 2008, 131) and thereby reconsider the absolute significance attributed to national identity.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Characteristically, neoliberal innovations in corporate governance are reified as “models that can be detached” (Ong/Roy 2011, 14) and “inserted into a different set of material and political conditions elsewhere” (15). These corporate forms function as “situated clusters of neoliberal reason and techniques” (20) that “seek to shape a new space of governmentality attuned to global competition” (4). Even if Silicon Valley on the West Coast of the United States is sometimes considered as a rim of the Asia Pacific region, the social reproduction of its “venture culture” requires a form of subjectivity that is informed by North American neoliberalism.

<sup>384</sup> If postcolonialism is considered as a project of deconstruction rather than a historical period, West Asia can be approached from the perspective of a “critical regionalism” in which the “naming names no real space, but rather names the critical position” (Spivak 2008, 235). In response to global hegemony of neoliberalism, this would allow to reflect from a “position without identity” (240) to experiment with new kinds of solidarity that center neither the West nor replicate the “art of being global” under the sign “Asia,” as critiqued by Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy (2011). So far, area studies of Eurasia have failed to move beyond comparative studies of postcolonialism and postsocialism. Instead, a postcolonial theory of postsocialism in West Asia requires a combination of deeply situated theorizing with a deconstructive relationship to difference. See Gayatri C. Spivak. *Other Asias*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008; see also Stephen Collier, Alex Cooley, Bruce Grant, Harriet Murav, Marc Nichanian, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Alexander Etkind, “Empire, Union, Center, Satellite: The Place of Post-Colonial Theory in Slavic/Central and Eastern European/(Post-)Soviet Studies: A Questionnaire,” *Urbandus Review*, Vol. 7, 2003, 5-25. For comparative studies, see Lowell W. Barrington, ed. *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation*

## Neoliberal Returns

Post-war institutions in the Armenian diaspora<sup>385</sup> have yet to grapple with the global vision of the contemporary repatriation movement. Focused on economic development, as opposed to political reforms, *RepatArmenia* Foundation was established in 2012 by a group of repatriates in Armenia.<sup>386</sup> The organization is

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*in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006; Neil Lazarus, "Spectres Haunting: Postcommunism and Postcolonialism," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2012, 117-129.

<sup>385</sup> Khachig Tölölyan linked the shift from "exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism" (107) to a process of "globalization" but did not anticipate the neoliberal transformation of global imaginaries of diaspora. Tölölyan is concerned with the "discursive turn from exile to diaspora" since the permanence of exile was recognized as a condition of diaspora in the 1960s. At present, transnational elites are no longer "priests and party activists" but free economic agents, or "businessmen-philanthropists" (124), as Tölölyan aptly terms them, that "circulate through the Armenian transnation" (109). See Khachig Tölölyan, "Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation," *Diaspora*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2000, 107-136.

<sup>386</sup> *RepatArmenia* Foundation was arguably the first initiative to emerge from "Club 5165," a closed club named after the altitude of Mount Ararat. When asked, a current member of *Club 5165* explained its vision is to aspire to "something better, tying it to something that's a symbol of the Armenian nation" and aiming to "get to the top" – both "within reach, but beyond reach." Although *Club 5165* is somewhat shrouded in secrecy, I was told that the core group consists of 30 to 40 repatriates and locals working across sectors and industries in Armenia. During monthly meetings, discussions and lecture series serve as a platform for influential individuals to initiate different projects and interconnected initiatives. Each member of the group can recommend new members and has veto rights after a trial period. As one of its members explained, the group started *Arar* Foundation and initiated the campaign "Support Our Defenders" to modernize the Armenian military and support soldiers and their families. Members of *Club 5165* also collaborated with a group of Armenian runners in Moscow to organize the annual Yerevan Half Marathon since 2015 to "put Armenia and Yerevan on the map of half marathons," as I learned. As a sport, running is very cost-effective and therefore suitable to attract locals from all walks of life in a display of unity and positivity. Sponsored by Coca-Cola, the event starts in the very center of the capital to attract international visitors and market Armenia as a place. As a discussion forum on major challenges facing Armenia, *Club 5165* invites experts and politicians to speak to the group. At some point, it summoned the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Economy. Overall, the cluster of individuals organized around *RepatArmenia* Foundation and *Club 5165* are predominantly men who think of themselves and each other as "seasoned, and dedicated, and experienced people that know how to drive projects forward, not just to create a political party or sound off a lot on *Facebook*," as one interlocutor put it. This cluster of individuals commissioned McKinsey & Co. in Moscow to prepare a report on strategies for Armenian economic development, called the *Armenia 2020* report.

headquartered in Yerevan where it is registered as a non-profit foundation that promotes repatriation as a strategy of development and nation-building. Its stated mission is to “inform, initiate and actively champion the return of high-impact (professional, entrepreneurial) individuals and families to Armenia to secure the future development of the Armenian nation.”<sup>387</sup> Why have *RepatArmenia*’s founders embarked upon a mission to build a new repatriation movement?

As the organization’s director and one of its founders explained to me during an interview in 2016, it is to feel ownership and responsibility for the impact of one’s actions. He shared, “I’m a happy person,” and added,

I feel a part of a nation. [...] I feel that a lot of things depend on me as well. I’m not just an ID number. I see the implications of what I’m doing and my friends are doing here, and I understand the importance of time, and the importance of what I’m doing for my children and for others. [...] I do a job which I love, and actually I’m kind of one of those who created that job. This is very rare. In many countries, you can be successful, you can be rich, but not everyone can say that he’s [sic] doing really something which he really loves in his life.<sup>388</sup>

*RepatArmenia* organizes regular fora abroad about professional opportunities in Armenia presented by repats that have moved their lives to Armenia. The

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<sup>387</sup> See *RepatArmenia* Foundation’s website, URL: <http://repatarmenia.org/en/about-us/who-we-are> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>388</sup> This citation is from the transcription of a 40-minute interview I conducted in 2016 with the chairman of *RepatArmenia*’s board of trustees who is also a co-founder of the organization. As a Lebanese Armenian, he grew up in the United States and permanently moved from San Francisco to the Republic of Armenia in 2008. He told me that there were initially two separate groups working on a peer-to-peer repatriation platform that merged when *RepatArmenia* Foundation was created in 2012. While the first was based in the “traditional diaspora,” that is, Armenian communities established in the United States and Europe post-World War II, and the other based in the “new diaspora” of post-Soviet Armenian communities in Russia. *RepatArmenia*’s approach to repatriation as a development strategy originated in the latter group.

organization also hosts networking events for new and established repats in Yerevan. Furthermore, it curates an online forum where questions about daily life in Armenia are asked and answered.<sup>389</sup>

As knowledge and resources are shared informally, transnational networks are formed that give a sense of predictability and demystify the process of relocating to Armenia. As carriers of coveted skills and ideas, repatriates are imagined as free agents that could live in the West but decide to invest their human capital in the nation in return for personal happiness. Instead of framing this as a form of heroic altruism, repatriation is presented as a rational choice made by reasonable individuals with relevant qualifications. In conversation with me in 2016, one founder of *RepatArmenia* affirmed that his involvement in economic development, beyond his personal career in IT, was not a “sacrifice” but a “pure investment in my nation” (which he defined as “not just Armenia” but all Armenians in the world). His activism brought him great fulfillment: “It’s funny. People classify us as these guys, they’re like the zealots... but at the end of the day [...] my days are much more fulfilling than what I would be doing in the [United] States.”

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<sup>389</sup> As a closed group on *Facebook*, the *Armenian Repatriates Network* has over 3500 members. The forum is used to inquire about job opportunities, real estate, or legal questions but also to promote offline events and conduct polls. The organization’s director himself repatriated from Moscow in 2010. He previously served as a high-ranking official at the Ministry of Diaspora. I conducted an interview with him in this capacity in March 2011 and again in 2016, after he co-founded *RepatArmenia* Foundation in 2012. According to this second interview, its operating budget is approximately \$160,000 (USD) per year. Its services are primarily funded through donations by a base of thirty organizations and individuals, mostly in the Armenian diaspora, and remain free to repatriates. I am drawing on transcriptions of both interviews.

*RepatArmenia* defines repatriation as a consistent and long-term engagement rather than a necessarily permanent relocation to Armenia. As long as a person’s “core interests are in Armenia,” repatriates may spend only two or three months out of the year in Armenia. It is no longer the “quantity” of time but the “quality” of skills brought to bear that is emphasized in this new image of “brain-gain repatriation.” *RepatArmenia*’s approach is to “create excitement” among “connectors of Armenia with the bigger world” in order to recruit repatriates “who create opportunities” instead of “looking for opportunities.” It advises the Ministry of Diaspora on strategies to create a “pro-repatriation environment” and offers policy recommendations based on comparative analyses and surveys. Through its networked approach, the new repatriation movement promises to snowball into a significant force of change in Armenia.

Focusing on “precedent,” as the organization’s director explained to me during an interview in 2016,<sup>390</sup> helps build a “critical mass” of Armenians that feel “ownership” in the state of Armenia. He explained that “non-Armenians” – so-called “Armenians by Choice,” or “ABC” – were welcome to “join the cause” as long as they did not attempt to “mold” it. In his view, Armenian statehood was under threat as a result of “being in a very difficult region” and needed to be secured against “the next invader.” He reflected on the current geopolitical moment as a *window of opportunity* to bring in “turbo-stuff [sic] from outside” in order to “accelerate” development in a

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<sup>390</sup> The interview was conducted in a conference room at Impact Hub Yerevan in October 2016. It was recorded and took slightly over an hour. The citations that follow draw on a transcription of the interview.

“much quicker” way than could be achieved in a “cycle of evolution.” This sense of urgency – “we are running at 150 miles an hour here,” as one interlocutor put it – conveys a view of development on a linear timeline. It posits that “progress” is organic – an “evolution” – and that it has been “artificially” curtailed by foreign intervention and lack of agency in Armenia. As a result, political techniques and global forms – “turbo-stuff” – needed to be introduced in order to overcome “problems in Armenia” that were a result of “seven centuries” without a nation-state.<sup>391</sup> In this image, the population is a dough, the state its crust, and neoliberal policy a yeast that is expected to activate exponential growth.

As *RepatArmenia*’s chairman, a repatriate from the United States, explained to me during an interview in 2016, the goal remained to “combine experience and access to markets and ideas from the West with the talent that’s here” in Armenia. He saw the role of repatriates in Armenia’s development as “not a question of helping” but of “unlocking the potential” of resources such as “the sun, and the soil, and tradition.” Ironically, none of these “resources” seem particularly amenable to the world of information technology him and others believe should become Armenia’s new

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<sup>391</sup> In this sense, he took a side in the ongoing debate about whether the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was an Armenian state or not. Although it was governed by a national administration, its sovereignty was arguably compromised by its de facto subordinate position as a constituent republic of the Soviet Union from 1920 to 1989. It remains to be seen if the current position of the Republic of Armenia in the Russian Federation’s sphere of influence and as a member of the Eurasian Economic Union is not a replay of this long-standing relationship of suzerainty. Most liberal and nationalist reformers in Armenia and in the Armenian diaspora in particular believe that national self-determination should not be compromised by pragmatic considerations of national security. Accordingly, new foundations are created to reform military facilities and promote a long-term vision of leadership in new military technologies through education reforms. Israel is often invoked as a model in this context.

“tagline” or brand. Since not “every kid in Armenia can turn into a programmer,” as he conceded, the group advocates for a “complete revolution in agriculture” facilitated by modern technology and eco-tourism as a three-pronged strategy to prevent the further depopulation of the Armenian countryside.

He argued “barriers” in Armenia had to be removed in order to create an “environment” in which talent could “flourish.” When I asked him to identify these barriers, he pointed to “attitudes” as the primary obstacle, alongside corruption and missing tax incentives. He clarified it was a matter of developing the “narrative” because “mentality” ultimately determined “what turns out to happen” (sic). Branding and marketing Armenia was not a question of living in a “dreamland,” he added. I understood his was the most serious of ambitions – the narrative production of a reality in which “it is worth investing in the country.” He explained,

You’re not going to succeed by appropriating something, or just copying somebody else, or having your relative that’s got a position of influence to help you take over somebody else’s business. Because that’s what people think. When we talk about corruption, when we talk about inequality, there’s two sides to it. It’s not just the person that’s done it today, it’s all the other people that say, ‘I want to do it tomorrow.’ And that mentality has to change.

The change or the development promoted by activist repatriates is therefore oriented not only toward the present reality but also imaginaries of the future. When I inquired further, he explained his core concern was that a “concept of collective responsibility for the country” was missing in Armenia. Impact was measured “one person at a time,” in terms of a “shift in the attitude.” He observed that entryways and staircases looked “like hell” while “any single person’s house is very clean and very



organized.” Through a metaphor that is often used to make sense of post-Soviet publics, he asserted that the public had lost trust in the state. It was therefore necessary to reinvent Armenia as “a land of opportunity,” and promote it as “a great place for kids to grow up.” My interlocutor insisted that IT was the profession of the future and should be propagated by the state in order to convince parents to “send children to become IT specialists” and “not lawyers, not economists, not doctors and not policemen” – professions that seem “prestigious” but lack economic prospects in Armenia.<sup>392</sup>

In another vivid image, which he conceded may “sound bad,” he compared the ratio of emigration<sup>393</sup> and the slow but steady trickle of repatriates from the Armenian diaspora into Armenia to a “blood cleansing exercise.” This organic metaphor for the Armenian economy cast emigrants as toxins or surplus that are leaving the body in exchange for “high-impact” repatriates – “the right kind of people” – entering to boost

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<sup>392</sup> Newly minted medical doctors, for example, often emigrate to Canada upon graduation, resulting in severe shortage of medical professionals in Armenia. Computing is a strategic way to retain Armenia’s youth and human capital by offering avenues for gainful employment in Armenia. According to the *Armenia 2030* report, information technology became the fastest growing sector of the Armenian economy with a compound annual growth rate of 33.98% in 2010-2015 (IEMS 2017, 83). For this reason, research and development in information and communication technology, including military technology, have been described as a “pocket of growth” with a “strong potential” to catalyze a “sustainable development ‘miracle’ in Armenia” (ibid.) and “make the Armenian economy more resilient to external economic shocks in the long run” (84).

<sup>393</sup> Between 1990 and 2000, a third of Armenia’s able-bodied population of working-age left the country. While most recent statistics published by the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia indicate a *de jure* population of approximately 3 million residents in 2016, the number of Armenians living outside of Armenia is estimated at seven to eight million people. More persons of Armenian descent live outside of the Republic of Armenia than reside in it. See Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia*, 2017, URL: <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=586&year=2017> (accessed November 2018).

its immune system. As a medical procedure, dialysis is performed on patients with compromised kidney function. The image of “blood cleansing” evokes a sense of the population as “blood,” the economy as a circulatory system, and the state or government as a failing apparatus threatening the life of the organism – that is, the body of the Armenian nation.

By living, volunteering, or studying in Armenia for several months each year, “every Armenian in the world” is called upon to form a meaningful connection with Armenia through active engagement with its social reality. In contrast, tourism was less desirable because it is consumptive and therefore considered a “very passive way of being connected.” Finding the “right formula,” as *RepatArmenia*’s director spelled out, would be key to the success of its incremental approach. While he projected that 80,000 persons per year would come to “experience Armenia” on a temporary basis, visitors would generate a demand for infrastructure that could “absorb 20,000 people who are ready to move and stay permanently.”<sup>394</sup> In addition to the hospitality sector,

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<sup>394</sup> At present, *RepatArmenia* receives approximately 500 applications per year and estimates that one to one and a half thousand people are “getting engaged” with Armenia in a way that satisfies the organization’s definition of repatriation. In contrast, recruiting 20,000 repatriates per year appears to be a bold projection. According to its director, most of its current members are young professionals between the ages of 20 and 35 years, looking for networking and employment opportunities. About half of its applicants already physically live in Armenia by the time they reach out while the other half contacts the organization from abroad. Since no official statistics are available on repatriation to the Republic of Armenia, *RepatArmenia* is keeping its own statistics. Currently, 40% of its constituency are from Syria, followed by 15% from the United States, 12% from Russia, 12% from Lebanon, 5% from Iran, 2% from Canada, and smaller percentages from various other countries that were left unnamed. Further, 6-7% of participants of the *Birthright Armenia* program decide to stay in Armenia after volunteering in the country – often without speaking the language or any prior experience with living in Armenia. *RepatArmenia*’s director referred to these numbers as “extremely encouraging statistics” during our recorded conversation in October 2016.

these infrastructures could encompass, so the director’s “dream,” language study, professional internships, and training in “special IT and web design.” He argued this would “create the right, positive Armenian identity” and stem the tide of the “negative narrative” while “learn[ing] from locals” and “adapt[ing] their cultural professional knowledge to the local circumstances.”

If “professionals” or “specialists” in information technology (IT), digital marketing, web and graphic design were willing to work remotely from Armenia, across time zones, transnational networks of Armenians<sup>395</sup> could collaborate to “put Armenia [...] on the map of [the] IT market.” Despite geopolitical limitations, national entrepreneurs believe that investing in the technology sector can harness the deterritorializing force of global capitalism to Armenia’s benefit.<sup>396</sup>

In recognition of the “cultural” dimensions of neoliberal work, several interlocutors of mine acknowledged that “not everything will work in Armenia,” although none was prepared to identify specific instances of mismatch. *RepatArmenia*’s director offered that new ideas and practices would be accepted in

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<sup>395</sup> In Silicon Valley, for example, Armenian programmers and entrepreneurs can connect through *Hye-Tech*, an informal network that emulates other ethnic associations of programmers in the United States. AnnaLee Saxenian describes how U.S.-based associations of programmers from China, India, and other countries in South and Southeast Asia drive technological development as repatriate entrepreneurs. She does not address this dynamic in the Armenian context. See AnnaLee Saxenian. *The New Argonauts: Regional Advantage in a Global Economy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

<sup>396</sup> This calculation often fails to take into account the materiality of “digital spheres of influence” and the exploitative character of resource extraction that support the illusion of extraterritorial or virtual space. For a discussion of non-traditional territoriality in cyberspace, see Kevin Limonier, “Russia in Cyberspace: Representations and Challenges,” *Hérodote*, Vol. 152-153, 2014, 140-160. See also Matteo Pasquinelli, “The Automaton of the Anthropocene: On Carbosilicon Machines and Cyberfossil Capital,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 116, No. 2, 2017, 311–326.

time if introduced with compassion and patience. In contrast, overly “idealistic or aggressive” approaches portrayed the situation in “black and pink,” as he put it, and oscillated too quickly between resignation and exaltation. Instead of regarding Armenia as a mythical place of the past, associated with genocide, Armenia should be related to “as a real country” with “real problems.” A realist approach to repatriation, intended as a catalyst of development, demanded a “positive mood” and a sense of possibility in order to contravene the opportunity cost of pervasive negativity.<sup>397</sup> It was on private organizations to set precedents and generate enthusiasm for “something entirely new” on an “absolutely different scale.”

### **Global Futures**

In 2016, a group of self-identified “high-profile Armenians around the world” published an open letter in the *New York Times*, a U.S.-based newspaper,<sup>398</sup> to mark the 110th anniversary of the founding of the *Armenian General Benevolent Union* (AGBU).<sup>399</sup> The full-page advertisement was titled “The Future for Global Armenians

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<sup>397</sup> During the interview I conducted in 2016, he argued that resignation was a post-Soviet legacy and “a little bit national character.” Since economic conditions remain difficult in Armenia, many locals imagine “plenty of opportunities” elsewhere while “repat can compare [...] and make a choice based on comparison.” On its website, *RepatArmenia* Foundation advertises “pre-repatriation opportunities” and job vacancies with a net salary of at least \$400 per month – a living wage in Armenia. See URL: <http://repatarmenia.org/en/engage/careers> (accessed June 2019).

<sup>398</sup> On the same day, the letter was also published in the Armenian-language newspaper *Hayastani Hanrapetuthyun* [State of Armenia] and on the website of *IDeA* Foundation, a private foundation endowed in 2014. See URL: <https://www.idea.am/news/2016/10/28/the-future-for-global-armenians-is-now/> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>399</sup> The AGBU is one of the oldest and largest charitable organizations in the Armenian diaspora. It was founded in Cairo in 1906 by Boghos Nubar, son of Nubar Pasha, who served three terms as Egypt’s Prime Minister between 1878 and 1895, and eight other prominent Armenian men in Egypt to help Armenians in Ottoman Anatolia recover from ethnic violence and economic devastation. It continues to be one of the most active organizations in the

is Now,” and announced, in its subtitle, a “Historic Opportunity for Armenians to Unite and Together Enable Armenia’s Future.” More than a gesture, it was the launch of an ongoing campaign to incorporate the Armenian nation at the level of the globe.

While charitable organizations had helped preserve “the Armenian identity throughout a vast network of Diasporan communities,” so the letter began, the time had come to “pivot toward a future of prosperity” and “deliver a better tomorrow for the Armenian people.” Since the 1990s, “pioneering” philanthropists had “helped to build vital institutions and infrastructure” in newly independent Armenia. However, so it cautioned, both the state of Armenia and “the state of the Armenian identity globally” remained “vulnerable” so that “long-term investment” was needed “to restore the social, economic, cultural and technological strengths of the nation, with Armenia at its core.” This could not be accomplished through individual efforts alone but required a systematic approach in an “unprecedented spirit of partnership and coordination among all Armenian organizations and individuals.” The government of Armenia, in turn, should adopt new strategies to incorporate “Armenian citizens” and “Diaspora Armenians [...] as a united force.” This shift in perspective would position Armenia at the center of a global network of individuals “who consider themselves both Armenians and global citizens” and that were committed to the long-term goal of “collectively advancing the nation.” The open letter was described as a “clarion call”

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Armenian diaspora, closely matching the Armenian Apostolic Church in its reach and influence.

– that is, a call to battle – addressed to the government of Armenia, as one actor among many, to “pool their resources and collaborate [...] in order to succeed.”<sup>400</sup>

If “the Armenian community worldwide” contributed to sustained “social impact or commercial investment, innovation, expertise or active involvement,” the post-Soviet state of Armenia could be transformed into a “vibrant, modern, secure, peaceful and progressive homeland for a global nation.” In effect, the Armenian nation would “reconstitute and thrive” in accordance with “the same global standards as those of the countries in which many of us in the Diaspora live.” The twenty-four signatories hailed from ten different countries, only one of which was Armenia.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Citations are slightly rearranged for analytical purposes to build toward the argument. The original passage reads, “Beyond individual efforts, we want to instigate an unprecedented spirit of partnership and coordination among all Armenian organization and individuals. We call on all Armenians to engage in pioneering and long-term investment to restore the social, economic, cultural and technological strengths of the nation, with Armenia at its core. At the same time, we urged the government of Armenia to respond to this clarion call by adopting new development strategies based on inclusiveness and collective action. Individuals, as well as public and private organizations dedicated to the advancement of Armenia, must come together, pool their resources and collaborate to deliver a better tomorrow for the Armenian people. We believe that in order to succeed, we cannot operate in isolation as Armenian citizens or as Diaspora Armenians, but rather together as a united force.” URL: <https://www.idea.am/news/2016/10/28/the-future-for-global-armenians-is-now/> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>401</sup> With the exception of one signatory from Japan, most indicated the United States and Russia, followed by countries in Western Europe. None specified countries in the Middle East or South America. Canada, France, Belgium, Luxemburg, and the United Kingdom were each represented once while the United States was represented eight times, including one retired U.S. District Judge. The Russian Federation counted five signatories. Three signatories were from Armenia proper, including one priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church who was the only cleric on the list. All but one signatory were men. Overall, the undersigned represented a skewed cross-cut of the post-Ottoman (Western) Armenian diaspora and the post-Soviet (Eastern) Armenian diaspora. Its composition suggests that there is a greater penetration of entrepreneurial discourse among Armenians in North America.

Promptly, a counter-letter appeared in *The Armenian Weekly*, an English-language newspaper based in Watertown, Massachusetts.<sup>402</sup> Signed by over eighty self-identified “Armenian feminists,”<sup>403</sup> it “decried the gender disparity” of the open letter published three days prior in the *New York Times*.<sup>404</sup> If the “Global Armenians” advertisement was a manifesto, its critics opposed it with a “pledge”:

[A] full-page advertisement appeared in the New York Times claiming to represent ‘Global Armenians’ [...] Armenian women are leaders, thinkers, artists, teachers, and philanthropists around the world, but with one exception, these women were not among its signatories. While it is an open letter and invites others to join, the discrepancy in participation between men and women cannot be ignored. The letter itself calls upon the government of Armenia to adopt ‘strategies based on inclusiveness and collective action,’ but the process of drafting and publishing the letter should have modeled those same ideals. In an effort towards preventing this kind of exclusion and tokenism, we the undersigned pledge to

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<sup>402</sup> *The Armenian Weekly* is affiliated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA). The ARF is a nationalist political party founded in Tbilisi in 1890, but forced into exile after Transcaucasia was Sovietized. The ANCA is the oldest lobbying group of the Armenian community in North America. *The Armenian Weekly* began as an English-language column in the Armenian-language newspaper *Hairenik* (Engl. “Fatherland”), an organ of the youth wing of the ARF, the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF), in the 1930s. It is squarely rooted in the Armenian American diaspora but reaches a transnational readership with its online media. See URL: <https://armenianweekly.com/history/> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>403</sup> Of the signatories listed, only three indicated that they were based in Armenia. The remaining majority of the letter’s supporters was based in the United States, with only a few undersigned from France, Canada, the United Kingdom, as well as one from Germany and Switzerland respectively. While most signatories of the “Global Armenians” manifesto are primarily engaged in finance and banking, the “Armenian Feminist” pledge drew signatures from dozens of Armenian scholars that are well-known in the U.S. and wider Anglophone academia. It also gathered support from prominent cultural producers, including film makers, artist, authors, photographers, and curators. The pledge was co-authored by one of the founders of the Women’s Resource Center of Armenia (WRCA), herself a Lebanese-Armenian repatriate from Canada. It was also signed by one of the founders of *Birthright Armenia*.

<sup>404</sup> “Armenian Feminists Respond to ‘Global Armenians’ Ad in the New York Times,” *The Armenian Weekly*, November 1, 2016, URL: <https://armenianweekly.com/2016/11/01/armenian-feminists-respond/> (accessed November 2018).

condition our involvement in Armenian community forums on the participation of other women. One is not enough.

By narrowly focusing on issues of numerical representation, feminist critics of the “Global Armenians” manifesto failed to problematize its global design. They signaled that “Armenian feminists” remained beholden to a politics of inclusion that normalizes the nation as a primary point of reference.<sup>405</sup> In effect, its supporters pledged to withhold their “involvement” in the project of “global” reconstitution unless and until Armenian women were equally represented as participants in the process. This implicit concession to a “global” vision for Armenia not only failed to notice its primarily North American parlance, which the feminist pledge reproduced in response, but also allowed the idea to stand that Armenia’s social and economic development would depend on the participation of Armenians “around the world.” Instead of problematizing the hegemony<sup>406</sup> of neoliberal reason, it endorsed its

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<sup>405</sup> It should be noted that Armenian feminism first emerged as a supplement to Armenian movements for national self-determination in the Ottoman Empire. See Victoria Rowe, “Armenian Writers and Women’s-Rights Discourse in Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Constantinople,” *Aspasia*, Vol. 2, 2008, 44-69. Its Soviet variant was largely state-engineered in opposition to national imaginaries of gender differentiation. For the role of Armenian feminists in the project of national reconstruction after the Ottoman genocide of 1915, see Lerna Ekmekçiolu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. Fragments of feminist history are also increasingly used as resources for queer and feminist self-making in post-Soviet Armenia and parts of the Armenian diaspora. For examples, see “Queered: What’s to Be Done with X-Centric Art” (2011) and “In and Between the (Re)public” (2014) by the Armenia-based *Queering Yerevan Collective* or the first issue of a do-it-yourself zine by *The Hye-Phen Magazine & Cyber Collective* (2015). Feminism is also a tenet of civic activism against eviction, mining, and domestic violence in Armenia. See, for example, Nelli Sargsyan, “The Importance of Collective Care as a Feminist (Prefigurative) Political Act,” Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, South Caucasus, March 9, 2018, URL: <http://www.feminism-boell.org/en/2018/03/09/importance-collective-care-feminist-prefigurative-political-act> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>406</sup> Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony during his prison sentence in Italy. He conceived on hegemony as a form of total domination in which alternatives become



managerial vision of the nation as a global enterprise by demanding equal share at the proverbial negotiating table. The feminist response therefore limited itself to a footnote in the grand narrative of “globality” (Spivak 2008, 131) that is reshaping imaginaries of nation in the Armenian diaspora.

In order to gain critical distance, it is helpful to revisit how the seemingly universal appeal of “modernity” gave way to the “notion of an era of globalization” (Tsing 2000, 323). Only after “the shine of modernization began to fade,” it became a foregone conclusion to question how the idea of modernity had “capture[d] the hopes and dreams of so many experts” (ibid.). The current moment, in turn, is defined by the idea of “globality” which lies at the core of neoliberal discourse about development. I invoke neoliberalism as the ideology that undergirds increasingly systematic attempts to restructure Armenia’s governance and reform its political apparatus. By calling this set of strategies “hegemonic,” I suggest that it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern the ideological presuppositions of entrepreneurialism against the receding horizon of liberal democracy promotion. I investigate “global dreams” in the Armenian diaspora to make speculative futures appear strange in hope of wresting open a space for ethical alternatives and a more robust feminist critique of the role of diaspora in the neoliberal development of Armenia.

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inconceivable. See Joseph A. Buttigieg, ed. *Antonio Gramsci. Prison Notebooks, Volume I–III*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

## Governing Armenia

By planning for future “prosperity,” the genre of the report becomes a technology of self-making for repatriate activists. No less idealist, the “realism” of this new engagement construes the present as an object of attack. To engage is to make contact. It is for two disparate planes of reality to interlock, one grinding away at the other. A development strategy is therefore also a plan of attack, a logic of progression in a hostile or, at any rate, unfamiliar environment. By mapping the terrain of development,<sup>407</sup> the report is a genre that takes stock of “the living and its milieu” (Canguilhem 2001), to be transformed through strategic manipulations of the present.

This chapter is a counter-mapping effort.<sup>408</sup> Inspired by the ways in which anthropologists such as Julia Elyachar (2003) have thought about practices of

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<sup>407</sup> I am invoking the map as a technology of power that is used to construct territories for later conquest. Impact Hub Yerevan Social Innovation Development Foundation digitally mapped the “social enterprise eco-system” in Armenia. The Yerevan-based EV Consulting Research Center has prepared an “Investment Map” to supplement its annual reports on Armenia’s “national competitiveness” since 2008. *IDEA* Foundation sponsored the creation of a tourist-friendly *InsideYerevan* map of “Yerevan’s living, breathing contemporary scene” to allow international visitors to “engage” and “experience both the traditional and the unexpected” in the city. *ONEArmenia*, an NGO that uses internet-based “crowdsourcing” tools to fund development projects in “agriculture, tech, tourism and made-in-Armenia products” has developed a mobile application called *HIKEArmenia*. Through GSP tracking, this app allows hikers to connect with local guides and virtually follow unmarked trails. Overall, not only the physical and social landscape but also conceptions and ways of knowing it are diversified and transformed by diaspora-led initiatives in Armenia. For the Impact Hub Yerevan report “Analysis of Social Enterprises and their Ecosystem in Armenia” (2017), see URL: <https://yerevan.impacthub.net/report-analysis-social-enterprises/> (accessed December 2018). The report was funded by the European Union Delegation in Armenia and uses an embedded *Google Map* to indicate the location of “self-identifying” social enterprises in its network that responded to an internet-based survey in 2016.

<sup>408</sup> See also Julia Elyachar, “Mappings of Power: The State, NGOs, and International Organizations in the Informal Economy of Cairo,” *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2003, 571-599.

development through ethnographic methods, I have combined fieldwork with theoretical inquiry to critique the global vision of activist repatriates.<sup>409</sup> As neither foreign consultants nor elected government officials, their status as repatriates lends them legitimacy, in their eyes, as neoliberal agents in Armenia. As spelled out above, the idea of Armenia as a “start-up” country illustrates underlying imaginaries of development as a national enterprise. Therefore, I came to understand my interlocutors as a transnational group of national entrepreneurs organized in the form of a network.<sup>410</sup> While the metaphor of the “network” is perhaps overused, it is accurate in this case not only because it is *explicitly* mobilized by interlocutors but also because it captures an emergent modality of power that operates through social relationships among transnational agents in Armenia.

Etymologically, the noun “network” describes a “net-like arrangement of threads” or “any complex, interlocking system,” originally used to refer to “transport by rivers, canals, and railways.”<sup>411</sup> In the twentieth century, “network” also acquired the meanings of a “broadcasting system of multiple transmitters” or an “interconnected group of people.” Since the advent of computers and the internet, it is frequently used as a verb to describe the act of making (“networking”) or becoming part of a social

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<sup>409</sup> I also took cues from Laura Nader’s notion of “studying up” to position myself in relation to elite networks in the Armenian diaspora. See Laura Nader, “Up the Anthropologist—Perspectives Gained from Studying Up,” in Dell Hymes, ed. *Reinventing Anthropology*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, 284-311.

<sup>410</sup> Caroline Levine argues that the “network” is a “basic form” of representing social relationships. See Caroline Levine. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014. See also Harrison Rainie and Barry Wellman. *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.

<sup>411</sup> For a definition of “network” (noun), see *Online Etymology Dictionary*, URL: [https://www.etymonline.com/word/network#etymonline\\_v\\_6881](https://www.etymonline.com/word/network#etymonline_v_6881) (accessed December 2018).

network (“networked”). A “network” is essentially a medium that is used to connect nodes and transmit or communicate goods or information.<sup>412</sup> As a metaphor for personal relationships, it privileges the individual while pointing to flexible and shifting capacities in relation to others. It is therefore not a neutral metaphor but encodes a specific set of assumptions about the nature of society. Instead of static and vertically integrated relations, a network is a form of association that spreads out horizontally and potentially remains open-ended. Social scientists study assemblages of actors through actor network theory and social network analysis (Freeman et al. 1989). Media and communication scholars further explore connections *between* networks that operate in tandem. For example, Manuel Castells and Amelia H. Arsenault argue that the “success” of corporate media networks depends on their ability to “leverage connections with other critical networks: in finance, in technology, in cultural industries, in social networks, and in politics” (Castells/Arsenault 2008, 730). Although these linkages are difficult to track, they document “personal connections” that can function as “switches” – executives that sit on multiple boards of directors, management and advisory boards, and so on.

My initial interest has been to understand the motivations of repatriates from North America and their perceptions of post-Soviet Armenian society. While this remained significant, I soon realized that the discourse of repatriation had shifted since

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<sup>412</sup> In colonial India, this core function of the state used to be called “communication.” Since this meaning is no longer intuitive, it would be best conveyed by the term “infrastructure” in contemporary usage. See Ranajit Guha. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999.

I had participated in the *Birthright Armenia* program in 2011. As a Russian-speaking member of the Armenian diaspora in Germany with relatives in Armenia, I was positioned as a participant observer in the field. In contrast to my prior visit, I was now affiliated with a university in the United States and better equipped to navigate the social dynamics of Anglophone elite spaces which I had previously found difficult to navigate. Operating through existing contacts, I pursued new connections through a snowball method. I joined Impact Hub Yerevan as a “Hub Diaspora Hub Connect” member,<sup>413</sup> attended dozens of events in Yerevan, Moscow, Boston, New York City, and Los Angeles, accepted invitations to be added to groups on social media, and joined for language instruction at *Birthright Armenia* to meet current participants and staff.

The generosity of my interlocutors placed me before an ethical dilemma. While participant observation requires a certain sense of neutrality of the researcher, I was perceived and treated as a potential “insider.” In order to honor personal relationships in the field, I needed to respond to the implicit (and at times explicit) expectation that I was sympathetic to the reform agenda promoted by many of my interlocutors. I decided to share some of the premises of my project and test hypotheses in

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<sup>413</sup> Impact Hub Yerevan is part of a global network of “Impact Hub” chapters throughout the Americas, Europe and parts of Asia but is currently the only chapter in the post-Soviet region. The full name of the Yerevan-based branch is Impact Hub Yerevan Social Innovation Development Foundation. It is also the only chapter of its kind that offers a “Hub Diaspora” membership. For \$25.00 (USD) per month, supporters that do not physically reside in Yerevan get access to Impact Hub Yerevan’s newsletter, *Facebook* group, and website where videos of talks and events are regularly uploaded. The physical space itself is designed as an “incubator” for social enterprise in Armenia.

conversation with contacts whom I thereby invited to take critical distance and reflect with me. The repatriates I interviewed were highly educated and looked back on substantial experience in international finance, technology, and public administration. I opted for a conversational format that was open-ended but semi-structured by individually tailored questions. The general focus of each interview was to find out how founders and directors of organizations interpreted the meaning of their work as repatriates in Armenia's development sector.

At times, I shared my preliminary interpretations to offer interlocutors the opportunity to clarify, push back, or share additional information. Though I attempted to steer clear of suggestive questions, I decided to solicit analytical input because the illusion of neutrality seemed neither appropriate nor viable. In this way, I learned about the organizational structure and internal culture of private foundations that promote social entrepreneurship and corporate conceptions of diaspora as a model for development in Armenia.

Through these interviews and dozens of informal conversations, as well as observation on social media, I noticed personal connections that seemed to function as "switches" between private foundations that did not otherwise appear connected (Castells/Arsenault 2008). I concluded that a network of repatriate activists clustered around these named and registered entities that interfaced with public institutions though newly formed public-private partnerships. While their overall influence should not be overstated, corporate philanthropists and national entrepreneurs play a significant role as advisors that lobby elected officials to pass reforms of Armenia's

tax code, its scientific institutions, development strategy, school curricula, military equipment, and other physical infrastructure.

As pointed out by Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum, power shapes which “economic imaginaries” – “hegemonic, sub-hegemonic, counter-hegemonic, or marginal accounts” (Sum/Jessop 2013, 265) – are selected and institutionalized as “policy paradigms” (283) that construct and inform material and discursive reality. National entrepreneurship, as I have termed it, is predicated on the global hegemony of neoliberal policy. It conveys an emergent “sub-hegemony,” if you will, of a new conception of the state as a “national enterprise,” development as social impact investment, and diaspora as global shareholders with a self-interest to increase the value of the “start-up country” of post-Soviet Armenia.

Across interviews, the aforementioned *Armenia 2020* initiative emerged as the origin story of this neoliberal imaginary. In 2002, a group of repats – most of them men, many of them trained economists working in technology and investment banking – commissioned the Moscow chapter of McKinsey & Company to prepare a strategic plan for Armenia’s future development. The resulting *Armenia 2020* report identified “priority sectors with the highest economic growth potential” based on McKinsey & Company’s forecast of “global growth.” It recommended strategic investments in “IT, agroprocessing [sic], tourism, healthcare, finance, and mining” (IEMS 2017, 73).<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> See “Armenia 2030: Transforming the Development Landscape,” *SKOLKOVO* Institute for Emerging Market Studies (IEMS), Moscow, 2017. It should be noted that the expansion of the mining sector recommended by McKinsey & Company in the preceding *Armenia 2020* report was met with ongoing resistance by local residents and activists opposing the detrimental

After a series of updates, the resulting *Armenia 2020* report was followed by *Armenia 2030*, a 138-page English-language report published in 2017 by the Institute for Emerging Market Studies at the *SKOLKOVO* Moscow School of Management.<sup>415</sup> Its subtitle, “Transforming the Development Landscape,” signals the scope of its ambition to articulate the next *paradigm* of development – “Development 2.0” (IEMS 2017, 74), as it is called in the executive summary – a “movement” attributed to “a group of prominent diasporan business leaders from the U.S.A., Europe and Russia” (73). Although the Republic of Armenia has an official development strategy for 2014-2025, the 167-page document is only cursorily mentioned in the *Armenia 2030* report.<sup>416</sup> Instead, “Development 2.0” prioritizes the “global momentum” of private investors over “country-level processes” (84). While the capitalized term itself

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effects of open-pit mining on public health and the environment. It fell away and is no longer part of the conversation around *Armenia 2030*.

<sup>415</sup> The *SKOLKOVO* Moscow School of Management was the first private international business school founded in Russia in 2006. In Russian translation, the meaning of “management” (*управление*) is more ambiguous and context-specific. Outside of economics, it can mean leadership, administration, and control. Understood in literal terms, it suggests the conduct of things or people. Therefore, management retains its association with the art of government as defined by Michel Foucault. According to the back cover of the *Armenia 2030* report, *SKOLKOVO*’s Institute for Emerging Market Studies is part of a research network in “fields of strategy and innovation, global markets and institutions, sustainable development, Asian studies, digital technology and leadership” – funded by *Ernst & Young*, a global accounting firm headquartered in the United Kingdom. Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian billionaire-philanthropist and founder of *IDeA* Foundation, is listed as a founding partner on *SKOLKOVO*’s international advisory board which also names Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, among nine more partners including Lee Kuan Yew, the late Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore, Andrey Fursenko, assistant to President Vladimir Putin, and a number of chief executive officers of large international and Russian state corporations. Out of this list, Vardanyan is the only one to also sit on the school’s governing board. He remains a driving force behind the *Armenia 2030* report as it builds on the *Armenia 2020* initiative.

<sup>416</sup> For an English translation of the plan, see “Armenia Development Strategy for 2014-2025,” Annex to RA Government Decree 442-N, March 27, 2014.



communicates the idea that it stands for a paradigm shift, the addition of “2.0” signals social and technological innovation by referencing the so-called “web 2.0,” a more interactive version of the internet.

Under the banner of “social impact,” national entrepreneurs in the Armenian diaspora have reincorporate “managerial” considerations of social distribution, aimed at the “amelioration of conditions within a particular territory” (Harvey 1989, 8). The category of social enterprise has risen to hegemony due to its amalgamation of neoliberal reason and the governmental investment in social reproduction that is highly valued by investors in the Armenian diaspora. It maintains the framework of “the nation” as a non-negotiable coordinate system while reconfiguring it from within.

In 2008, *National Competitiveness* Foundation was established as the first public-private partnership in the Republic of Armenia.<sup>417</sup> Since then, a comprehensive cluster of non-governmental organizations has formed around *IDeA* Foundation (“Initiative for Development of Armenia”), in particular, and set out to reform segments of the state through strategic private investments. The Foundation for

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<sup>417</sup> The term “competitiveness” is a policy paradigm that draws on economic imaginaries to measure a given unit’s “capacity to engage in competition and prevail in the struggle over differential accumulation” (Sum/Jessop 2013, 267). Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum argue that “competitiveness” is a “meta-narrative” that posits something called the “knowledge-based economy” as central to “future growth at all scales, [...] long-term competitive advantage and sustained prosperity” (270). The Organization for Economic Collaboration and Development (OECD) defines the term “knowledge-based economy” as a description of political economies that depend on “knowledge, information and high skill levels, and the increasing need for ready access to all of these by the business and public sectors,” see URL: <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=6864> (accessed November 2018). See also Ngai-Ling Sum and Bob Jessop, “A Cultural Political Economy of Competitiveness and the Knowledge-Based Economy,” in *ibid.*, eds. *Towards a Cultural Political Economy: Putting Culture in its Place in Political Economy*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013, 261-295.

Armenian Science and Technology (*FAST*), for example, was launched by *IDeA* Foundation in 2016 as a “mixed financial vehicle” to mobilize and concentrate “scientific, technological and financial resources [...] in the areas of IT [information technology] and computer science, artificial intelligence, high-tech materials, robotics, biotechnology, advanced engineering and manufacturing technologies” through “research grants and venture financing,” so Ruben Vardanyan, co-founder and advisory board member of *FAST*.<sup>418</sup>

While combining science and venture capital, *FAST* works in “partnership with the government on multiple levels.” It *supplements* the state. The organization’s acronym constitutes a demand – “fast!” – and reiterates the imperative to accelerate development. A seat on its advisory board, which manages the organization, is reserved for the President of the Republic of Armenia. Its board of trustees is composed of four co-founders, including Noubar Afeyan and Ruben Vardanyan, and is sanctioned by the membership of Fr. Mesrop Aramyan, an ordained priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church.<sup>419</sup> Insofar, the governing bodies of non-governmental foundations such as *FAST* serve as fora in which officials of the state and private

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<sup>418</sup> *FAST* was initially endowed with \$10 million (USD) in a bid to raise another \$200 million internationally in the first three years of its existence. It is managed by an Advisory Board composed of “prominent Armenians from Armenia and abroad with a successful track record in science, technology, venture capital and industry.” See “Ruben Vardanyan: ‘FAST must become the platform for a technological breakthrough,’” *mediamax*, July 11, 2016, URL: <https://mediamax.am/en/news/interviews/19036/> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>419</sup> According to Aramyan’s biographical description on the *FAST* website, he also co-founded *Ayb* Educational Foundation in 2011, serves as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the private *Ayb* school it created, and works with the RA Ministry of Education and Science to implement educational reforms based on its curriculum. See URL: <https://fast.foundation/#/community> (accessed November 2018).

individuals associate and discuss infrastructural reforms in ways that are withdrawn from public discourse. This qualitatively new informality of political decision-making unfolds within the parameters of existing legislation and supplements formal political deliberation. Meanwhile, public-private partnerships emphasize fiscal transparency to present themselves as incorruptible. However, expert advisors influence policy decisions of the state without the legitimacy of elected office. Despite the ubiquity of informal relationships in politics, this “rule of experts” potentially undermines the democratic process (Mitchell 2002).

Although *FAST* is a relatively new organization and still has to prove its merits, it is conceivable that its model of flexible “partnerships” with “academic, governmental and non-governmental organizations alongside global players” will quickly reconfigure funding-starved institutions of post-Soviet science in Armenia.<sup>420</sup> Symbolic state initiatives such as the “Pan-Armenian Scientific Forum” in 2016, dedicated to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Armenian independence, pale in comparison to the aspirational futurism of *FAST*’s “Global Innovation Forum,” its “Startup Studio,” a Yerevan-based co-working space, and a network of “angel investors” offering “seed stage” grants (or “risk capital”) for Armenian start-ups in science and technology innovation. It also offers mentoring programs for aspiring entrepreneurs and workshops in partnership with the National Science Foundation of the United States.

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<sup>420</sup> *FAST*’s stated mission is to build “an ecosystem of innovation to lead scientists, technologists and innovators in Armenia and beyond to success on the global stage.” The effects of its focus on “commercially viable and globally competitive solutions” on scientific inquiry will have to be seen. See URL: <https://fast.foundation/#/AboutFAST> (accessed November 2018).

This approach creates a new kind of infrastructure that operates through decidedly global networks.<sup>421</sup>

By investing in “anchor-projects” throughout Armenia, *IDeA* Foundation is effectively developing a “spatial software” that does not only produce new objects but generates a “multitude of interdependent relationships and sequences” (Easterling 2014, 80) that enmesh the local in the transnational and the global. During an interview with *IDeA* Foundation’s corporate relations manager, he explained to me that “social impact” was a major factor in funding decisions. When I asked how *IDeA* Foundation qualified and measured “impact” – in light of the ubiquity of the term, I asked all of my interlocutors this question – he pointed to numbers of visitors that used “Wings of Tatev” aerial tramway, for example, or the estimated income it generated for local communities, after subtracting operating costs. Instead of normative criteria such as gender equality or civic empowerment, which are routinely applied by international organizations, it tracks social impact through financial metrics.

*IDeA* Foundation effectively functions as a venture capital firm that endows and funds smaller foundations and social enterprises. Its portfolio projects are designed to be self-sustaining, that is, they are for-profit businesses, and span a comprehensive

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<sup>421</sup> Its tagline is, “We believe in network theory. Who you know shapes what you know.” See URL: <https://fast.foundation/#/> (accessed November 2018). For contemporary network theory in the United States, see Harrison Rainie and Barry Wellman. *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. Social network analysis predates the emergence of the internet and mobile technology and describes a specific research method and manner of representation. See, for example, Linton C. Freeman, Freeman, Linton C., Douglas White and A. Kimball Romney, eds. *Research Methods in Social Network Analysis*. Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 1989.

range of classic governmental functions from the modernization of infrastructure, military defense, educational reform, labor, banking, mining, health care, information technology, place branding, zoning, repatriation,<sup>422</sup> and population management.<sup>423</sup> When I pointed this out in conversation with my interlocutor at the organization, a repatriate from Moscow whose role is to synchronize *IDeA* Foundation's various projects, he rejected my characterization of the fund as a governmental force. Facing me in a corporate-style conference room, separated from an open plan office corridor by a transparent glass wall, he explained *IDeA* Foundation works as a public-private partnership and does not take the "governmental function" upon itself. *IDeA* Foundation merely stakes the "big pillars," I learned, and the state follows suit: "We built the ropeway, government built the road" (sic).

In a context in which the sovereignty of the state is not guaranteed and appears fragile, investor activism is rooted in the desire to *secure* Armenia's territorial statehood. However, as Neil Brenner points out, "states do not merely 'react' to supposedly external geo-economic forces [of glocalization], but actively produce and

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<sup>422</sup> Although *IDeA* Foundation does not publicize its support for repatriation, my interlocutor at the organization explained one of its goal was to "engage all disengaged Armenians" and "bring 500,000 back" to increase Armenia's GDP. He explained that *IDeA* Foundation plans to invest \$2 billion (USD) or more in Armenia's economic development over the coming years. The interview took place at *IDeA* Foundation's headquarters in Yerevan in October 2016. At a length of 30 minutes, it was significantly shorter than other interviews because my contact was in a rush to return to work. In character, he illustrated his lack of time by prompting me to ask questions "fast, fast, fast!" Unless otherwise noted, I am citing from the transcription of the recorded interview.

<sup>423</sup> In 2008, its *Artsakh Development Program* funded a "wedding marathon" for 700 couples in Stepanakert. This initiative was intended to meet "significant geopolitical challenges" of the de facto Republic of Artsakh and tracked how many Armenian children were born as a result of this "investment." See URL: <https://www.idea.am/artsakh-development-project> (accessed November 2018).

continually reshape the very institutional terrain within which the spatial dynamics of globalized capital accumulation unfold” (Brenner 2004, 201). In 2017, the Armenian government responded to the private push for public sector reforms by creating the “Center for Strategic Initiatives of the Armenian Government” (GCSI) in order to “invite” participation on its terms and coopt investor activism.<sup>424</sup>

When Alexander Khachaturyan spoke at the *Imagine Armenia* forum in Boston a few months after he was appointed as GCSI’s first director, he was introduced as an “entrepreneur from the government” – the “most unusual entrepreneur,” as the moderator ironically remarked.<sup>425</sup> This highlighted the implicit assumption that government and enterprise were either mutually exclusive or that the Armenian government was evidently not “entrepreneurial.” After this jovial but tense introduction, Khachaturyan suggested that while there was no shortage of economic advisors, “there was no hand to take it” on the side of the Armenian government. He explained that GCSI was the solution and announced he was “that crazy guy that picks

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<sup>424</sup> Advertised as Armenia’s “first” public-private partnership, the Center for Strategic Initiatives of the Armenian Government (GCSI) opened its doors in January 2017 in a festive act attended by the Prime Minister. The latter appointed his advisor Alesander Khachaturyan, a young economist, as the Executive Director of the GCSI. According to its website, it was created to “consolidate” existing efforts and initiate “long-term strategic reforms” as a “vital instrument” to “attract long-term and sustainable foreign investments into the country and increase Armenia’s exports.” As if to emphasize that the state is taking charge of the reform process, its official website is “news.reform.am.” See URL: <http://www.gov.am/en/news/item/8701/> (accessed November 2018).

<sup>425</sup> Unless otherwise noted, I am citing from field notes and my transcription of the recording I made at the *Imagine Armenia* forum at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in May 2017. The comment is significant because the moderator of this specific panel was not only a co-founder of *RepatArmenia* but also instrumental to the *Armenia 2020* initiative as an associate at McKinsey & Company in Moscow. It seems appropriate to describe him as a “switch” between networks.

up the phone” when paperwork got “stuck.” He would “probably yell,” he boasted, to “deliver” permits or licenses when they were needed.

While attempting to distance himself from the wayward culture of bureaucracy in Armenia, he affirmed its persisting paternalism by suggesting that a phone call from him would suffice to rectify most legal and administrative problems.<sup>426</sup> Addressing him as a “middle man” between the non-profit private sector and the state, a member of the audience asked if he had advised the government to solicit investments from the Armenian diaspora. He responded he had not, but offered, instead, that the GCSI was created to “make the law work in a more efficient manner.”

Despite the fact that personalized networks within the government are notoriously inefficient at enforcing the law, and that they replicate forms of nepotism often described as corruption, legal infrastructure remains consequential to the market.

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<sup>426</sup> This paternalism should not be reduced to a cultural phenomenon rooted in idealized notions of Armenian village traditions. It is more adequately understood as a Soviet legacy. During Soviet times, “shortages and supply bottlenecks led to bargaining between supervisors and informal groups” (Stark 1996, 994). Production quotas prescribed by central planning authorities were met through “dense networks of informal ties that cut across enterprises and local organizations” (ibid.). These “informal and interfirm networks” at times crossed the threshold of legality but were often tacitly tolerated by state officials in order to “get the job done” (ibid.). The “socialist firm” therefore produced its own theory of management, informality, and private enterprise *within* the category of public ownership. Therefore, Stark’s scholarship destabilizes the idea of “well-bounded public and private sectors” as analytical categories without material basis on social practice both during *and* after the Soviet period. See David Stark, “Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101, No. 4, 1996, 993-1027. From the standpoint of liberal legal norms, this legacy of “parallel structures” – or informal “second economy” – is easily misinterpreted as a corrupt form of “favoritism.” At the same time, market societies that tout merit-based ideals of fairness normalize and even encourage informal networks of patronage as legitimate forms of “mentorship.” Insofar, Orientalism and post-Cold War triumphalism implicitly mediate how political culture in post-Soviet Armenia is perceived in Western scholarship and in the Armenian diaspora alike.

For example, as noted by one of the founders of Impact Hub Yerevan, the 2016 tax code of the Republic of Armenia does not recognize the legal form of a “social enterprise,” that is, a business that is designed to generate just enough profit to sustain its continued operations.<sup>427</sup> By failing to recognize this organizational category, public law inadvertently directs the neoliberal transformation of the non-profit sector. Start-up investees aiming for “social impact” can only choose between the two remaining categories – “foundation” or “for-profit business.” Accordingly, these two forms have proliferated as the newly dominant kind of non-governmental organization in post-Soviet Armenia.

*IDeA* Foundation’s model as a “fund of funds,” so its foundational affairs and corporate relations manager, is replicated by the foundations it endows and supports – clustering into a network of functional alternatives to both government and the international non-profit sector. However, none of its initiatives are designed to dismantle and supplant the state. They are intended to supplement and fortify its power through “spatial reorganization of state regulatory arrangements at multiple spatial scales” (Peck/Yeung 2003, 198). It is involved in a campaign to “rebrand” Gyumri,<sup>428</sup> the second largest city in Armenia, and invested in a series of infrastructural projects

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<sup>427</sup> One of the founders of Impact Hub Yerevan identified this as a key obstacle to the growth of a “start-up eco-system” in Armenia. At the time of writing, in 2019, the government of the Republic of Armenia submitted a substantially amended tax code for parliamentary approval. The draft replaces the notion of the “family business” with the tax-exempt category of the “micro-enterprise.” This legal form would encourage economic associations between individuals who are not related. At the time of writing in June 2019, this draft law had not yet been passed by the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.

<sup>428</sup> For “nation branding” in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, in comparison, see Erica Marat, “Nation Branding in Central Asia: A New Campaign to Present Ideas about the State and the Nation,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 7, September 2009, 1123-1136.



such as the “Wings of Tatev” aerial tramway, as part of its “Tatev Revival Project,”<sup>429</sup> as well as the United World College in Dilijan, another city in Armenia’s north, to attract foreign high school students to learn alongside Armenian locals in an internationally accredited private school.<sup>430</sup> In the capital, it supports the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, an organization that promotes Armenia as a global center of genocide prevention, and Impact Hub Yerevan, a co-working space and social enterprise that is designed as an “incubator” for other social enterprises.<sup>431</sup> At present, the public-private partnership is on the rise as a strategy that allows neoliberal reformers in the Armenian diaspora to link their vision for Armenia’s future as a global enterprise to a “framework of institutions and state policies that are capable of reproducing it” (Brenner 2004, 200). The overarching goal of the repatriate strategists

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<sup>429</sup> Tatev Monastery is a ninth century Armenian Apostolic monastery built on the slope of a scenic mountain range in southeastern Armenia. Due to hazardous roads, access used to be limited. Since the completion of “Wings of Tatev” (*TaTever*) in 2010, advertised as the world’s longest reversible aerial tramway, the annual number of visitors has exponentially increased. Tatev Revival Foundation was endowed by Ruben Vardanyan in 2008, functions under the auspices of *IDeA* Foundation, and is often identified as a prototype of social impact investment in Armenia. *IDeA* Foundation has also completed revitalization and restoration projects in Tbilisi, Georgia and Dilijan, another city in northern Armenia. See URL: <https://www.idea.am/tatev-revival-project> (accessed November 2019).

<sup>430</sup> United World College (UWC) is a network of international boarding schools that started in the United Kingdom in the 1960s. UWC Dilijan was its first branch to open in the former Soviet Union in 2014 and is the only boarding school that currently exists in Armenia. It is part of a broader plan to “revive” and market the town of Dilijan as a regional center of arts and culture. See URL: <https://uwcdilijan.org/our-college/introduction-and-location/dilijan> (accessed December 2018).

<sup>431</sup> Impact Hub Yerevan opened its doors in early 2016. It was founded by a group of repatriates and provides floor space to a number of local and diaspora-led social enterprises and development organizations such as *RepatArmenia* Foundation and Homeland Development Initiative Foundation (HDIF), a fair trade retailer of rural Armenian women’s handicrafts.

of this state project is to “generate ‘state effects’ which endow the state apparatus with an image of unity” (Brenner 2004, 201).

This constitutes a form of “extrastatecraft,” theorized by Keller Easterling as “the often undisclosed activities outside of, in addition to, and sometimes even in partnership with statecraft” (Easterling 2014, 15). These informal networks constitute “de facto forms of polity” through “spatial, infrastructural technologies” that are “removed from familiar legislative processes” and “quasi-official forms of governance” (ibid.). In this conception of power, infrastructure is the medium of “dynamic systems of space, information, and power” that “remain unstated but are nevertheless consequential” (ibid.). Insofar, extrastatecraft produces “multiple, overlapping, or nested forms of sovereignty” (ibid.) through a “mix of speculative fiction and speculative fact,” as Aihwa Ong puts it, that practitioners “believe is for the better” (Ong/Roy 2011, 12). Yet, the state effects produced by neoliberal reforms are notoriously unstable because they leave little room for public participation and lack democratic legitimacy.

By experimenting with the “cluster-based” model of a “fund of funds,” *IDeA* Foundation sets a precedent for the “alternative” development paradigm it endorses and promotes. Building on McKinsey & Company’s *Armenia 2020* report, the *Armenia 2030* report envisions “development-as-a-business” (IEMS 2017, 11) that holds “opportunities” for private capital investment in “nation-building” (10). It declares the “self-reinforcing mechanism of development inflows” – bilateral and international development aid – to be no longer “feasible” (9). The resulting

financialization of development as a “standalone ‘market’,” so the authors of *Armenia 2030*,<sup>432</sup> would make Armenia uniquely competitive through “the most innovative technology-driven social solutions” that could become a “viable export item” to be “later transferred to other comparable countries” (IEMS 2017, 119). Insofar, the Republic of Armenia has become a national laboratory for a new experiment in neoliberal development,<sup>433</sup> called simply the “post-2015 development agenda in Armenia,”<sup>434</sup> under the banner of social impact, blended finance, and “sustainability.” The latter term stands in for the desired shift from soft power to “investment in physical assets” that are hoped to enhance the beneficiaries’ capacity to generate capital (70). The report problematizes out-migration as “human capital flight” that is “destructive” to Armenia’s economy due to “unrealized earnings” (78), though remittances are considered beneficial.

The report envisions a new paradigm – development itself as a market – with a “demand side” of “actors implementing development interventions” (68), defined as

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<sup>432</sup> Kamila Novak and Yulia Adamskaya are listed as the project team. In addition, fifteen contributors are named – all founders, directors, or managers at private, state, and international foundations working in the development sector in Armenia.

<sup>433</sup> Transforming Armenia into a unique “national laboratory” is *explicitly* named as an ambition of the *Armenia 2030* initiative. This is summed up in the question, “How can Armenia realize its innovation potential and become the first of its kind national SDG [Sustainable Development Goals] lab which experience can be transferrable to other countries?” (sic) (IEMS 2017, 77). I interviewed several of the contributors listed in the report, though not its authors or commissioners.

<sup>434</sup> The report treats the year 2015 as a watershed that “marked the transition from the MDG [Millennium Development Goals] to the SDG [Sustainable Development Goals] agenda” (IEMS 2017, 9). Yet, it is unclear how the market-paradigm of development promoted by the *Armenia 2030* report follows on the set of goals articulated in the United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. See United Nations General Assembly, “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” A/RES/70/1, October 21, 2015.

“unit[s] of development activity” (IEMS 2017, 13), and a “supply side” populated by “development capital holders and project funders” (ibid.). The report lists the state as one of five “types of project implementers,” followed by international governmental organizations (IGOs), charities (foundations and non-governmental organizations, or NGOs), start-ups and social enterprises, in this order, and finally, “hybrids” (15). All five types of “development actors” are briefly surveyed in light of the report’s “novel” approach to “development as a market” (15). In contrast to “traditional grant-making,” the report offers “development finance instruments” as an alternative that can be “applied by a wide spectrum of development actors” (23). The repatriate-driven “Development 2.0 movement” therefore discovers “double-digit growth” lying dormant in the “magnitude of the unaddressed economic, social and environmental problems; and the market-based opportunities which the solutions to those problems present” (17). Unlike “microfinance” which extracts capital from the global poor through small-interest loans (Roy 2010), the “development-as-market” approach financializes the entire political economy of a given country, in this case the Republic of Armenia. It could therefore be called “macrofinance” – scaled for “impact” at the level of society as a whole.

Although the singular capacity to redistribute resources across the entire territory of the Republic of Armenia remains with the state, the “development-as-market” paradigm promoted by the “venture philanthropists” that commissioned the *Armenia 2020* and *Armenia 2030* reports hail the state as one investor among many. By defining development as a technical matter, as “un-ideological and non-political

issues that need technical solutions to maximize intended outcomes” (Ong/Roy 2011, 4), the politics encoded in “social impact” are obscured. In anticipation of the destabilizing effects of profit seeking on the political culture of a relatively new constitutional democracy, the authors of the report proposed a “new tripartite social contract” which they call “mandate-for-development” (IEMS 2017, 11).

From the viewpoint of IEMS, the success in unlocking latent market opportunities offered by the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] is conditional on the adoption of a new tripartite social contract between government, business and society. The traditional partnership paradigm [sic] which was extensively applied during the MDG [Millennium Development Goals] era is not consistent with current reality. Today the level of public trust in governments and large corporations is at a low point. IGOs [International Governmental Organizations] and NGOs [non-governmental organizations] are perceived as being inefficient in fund management. At the moment the vectors of three sectors – public, private and civil society – are diverging, although all three are pursuing a universal SDG vision. There is a need for the renewal of a social contract for sustainable development between these three stakeholder groups (85).

The above passage makes claims about “current reality” to declare liberal democracy a bygone “traditional partnership paradigm” (85). It summons social contract theory<sup>435</sup> to demand “alternative forms of mandate” to the “top-down vesting process” of sovereignty in which the “power to act,” as IEMS defines the idea of a “mandate,” is no longer “exclusive” to the state but flexibly devolves to private

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<sup>435</sup> Social contract theory is not a defined body of work but is often refers to the writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although vastly different, all three thinkers are associated with the emergence of liberalism in the eighteenth century. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *On the Social Contract*, trans. David Wootton, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2019 [1762].

agencies. Insofar, the report takes neoliberal imaginaries of development to their logical conclusion and proposes that “procedures” be “formalize[d]” through which the “mandate for development” could be directly “assigned” to “Armenian business and private actors” (IEMS 2017, 85). Reducing the existing state apparatus to a temporary bearer of national sovereignty, the report suggests that a “collective body representing the local communities” may also “award” the right to govern in a “bottom-up manner” (85). By juxtaposing “vesting” with investment, sovereignty and capital are collapsed into one while the democratic process is reduced to a managerial exercise of delegation.

The image of the “mandate” is derived from the inter-war international system of the League of Nations which formalized a mechanism of expropriation by which indigenous communities throughout the former Ottoman Empire, excluding Turks, Armenians, and Kurds, came under the colonial control of Western mandate powers. Though mandates were formally designed to be temporary, mandate power was rarely returned voluntarily. The mandate system resulted in ongoing territorial and ethnic conflict throughout the Middle East.

In light of this colonial history, the call for a new process by which private entities could become formally “vested” with the right to govern “beyond the capacity of a contractor or investor” (85) is disconcerting. *Armenia 2030* ignores the fact that institutions of liberal democracy are rooted in the constitution of the Republic of Armenia which requires that a government be formed on the basis of general elections.

It also suggests that governmental functions should be “unbundled” in order to allow for sovereignty to be monetized in the name of “Development 2.0.”

While none of my interlocutors mentioned this idea of a “mandate” for private development initiatives in Armenia, and outright denied governmental intent when confronted, all identified the need for a change in “mentality,” attitude, or perspective. It remains to be seen if the idea of a “new social contract” will fall away in subsequent revisions of the *Armenian 2030* playbook. Ultimately, the “success” of neoliberal reform projects will depend on the ability of interested parties to manufacture consent and produce willing subjects for techno-futures and global capital in Armenia.

### **Making Neoliberal Subjects in Armenia**

On the “supply side” of development, to stay with the language of the “market,” national entrepreneurs promote repatriation as a strategy for economic growth in Armenia. They hope that highly skilled professionals, as human capital, will decide to relocate to Armenia in order to “add value to their nation” and found social enterprises, create jobs, and expose local Armenians to “world-class” standards. At the same time, venture philanthropists are investing in new types of educational institutions to reform the Armenian curriculum and create new kinds of subjects in Armenia.

While liberal advocates previously called upon *homo Sovieticus* as a juridical subject of rights, neoliberal reformers seek to hail individuals as entrepreneurs – *homo oeconomicus* – as human capital for the national enterprise. Michel Foucault theorized the entrepreneur as a free agent that “invests in an action, expects a profit from it, and [...] accepts the risk of a loss” (Foucault 2008, 252-253). Skills are capital “embodied

in man” (Foucault 2008, 148). They can be informed and acquired through investment at the level of the body. In Foucault’s iteration, the resulting “abilities-machine” is a set of physical and psychological capabilities, or technical knowledge, formed in individuals through education: “Time spent, care given” (228) and “cultural stimuli received by the child” (229) in the context of a set genetic inheritance. Yet, neoliberal subjectivity entails more than just the constitution of embodied skills. It requires the ability to be “incentivized” and behave as a “free” agent. First, the subject has to learn to imagine itself as economic man. It has to recognize its own personhood as a means of production and a form of capital.

Reified in the image of post-Soviet “mentality,” not only “state capture” of the economy but also local attitudes toward work are constructed as an “adversary and target of neo-liberal thought, that which it was constructed against or which it opposed in order to form itself and develop” (217). If the “enterprise” form is to be generalized in the social and political field,<sup>436</sup> labor must be atomized into subjects of interest that

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<sup>436</sup> In his 1979 lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault noted that all human behavior that “responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment” can become “susceptible to economic analysis” (Foucault 2008, 269). Foucault argued that American neo-liberalism was unique for generalizing monetary exchange as a “principle of intelligibility and a principle of decipherment of social relationships and individual behavior” throughout the entire social body. In contrast, German ordoliberalism, a school of economic thought that emerged around the same time, “was a policy that had to take charge of social processes and take them into account in order to make room for a market mechanism within them” (240). In order to make “the enterprise the universally generalized social model” (242), human capital theory emerged to “decipher traditionally non-economic social behavior in economic terms” (246). Instead of creating a market for society, as envisioned by ordoliberal thinkers, neoliberal reformers attempt to create a society for the market. Insofar, neoliberal economics inverts liberal political economy because it subordinates the social to the economic.



will behave as human capital (Foucault 2008).<sup>437</sup> By absorbing the initial risk of failure, venture philanthropists in Armenia cultivate subjects of *national* interest endowed with “knowledge and skill” acquired through “investments [...] made at the level of man himself” (Foucault 2008, 229). In this sense, neoliberal “power gets a hold” on the individual “to the extent [...] that he [or she] is a *homo æconomicus*” (252). It follows that economic man is eminently “governmentalizable” (ibid.) because he or she internalizes capital logic as “the principle of the regulation of power over the individual” (253). The entrepreneur therefore “must be left alone” by the state so that he or she can pursue his or her “own interest” (280). Because the means of labor are integrated into the self, emancipation is no longer feasible. Instead, the entrepreneur is internally divided into laborer and capitalist and therefore becomes the agent of his or her own alienation.

In this strict sense only, the generalization of the enterprise model is “empowering” to an individual that is constituted as a “shareholder,” or enterprise-unit, of the Armenian nation. Since power devolves to the individual, the proposition that sovereignty be “vested” in private entities appears no longer unthinkable. Insofar as the nation is imagined as a global enterprise, incorporating Armenians around the world, the existing state of Armenia can be reconsidered as a “start-up” in need of

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<sup>437</sup> Theodore W. Schultz, an economist at the University of Chicago, was arguably the first to articulate a comprehensive theory of human capital. He argued that “people can enlarge the range of choice available to them [...] by investing in themselves” (1). See Theodore W. Schultz, “Investment in Human Capital,” *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1, March 1961, 1-17.

human capital and expertly management.<sup>438</sup> This framework presupposes that the self-interest of every Armenian will coincide with national interest.

At the same time, the discourse of corruption is mobilized by neoliberal reformers “trying to get free” from the “previous governmentality” that is to be “rationalize[d] by scaling it down” (Foucault 2008, 321). This concern is about more than the fiscal loss by virtue of informal drains on the state budget.<sup>439</sup> It is about a certain cost to “human development” (PFA 2013, 14) incurred in “authoritarian environments” (36) that are believed to restrict “individuals’ opportunities and freedoms” (4) and thereby stifle “human creativity, human inventiveness, and the dismantling of old ways of doing things” (36). Given strategic plans to develop Armenia’s economy through investment in human capital, both repatriated and local, educational initiatives supported by private foundations typically focus on these very

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<sup>438</sup> After the emergence of human capital theory in the United States, the field of management began to explore “enterprise” as an organizational form. Beer Stafford compared the corporation to a body and argued that management is a vital practice that animates the firm by analogy with organs such as the brain and the heart. He called this “cybernetics,” the art of steering or governing. His two companion pieces on “managerial cybernetics” are considered classics in the field of economics. See Beer Stafford. *Brain of the Firm: The Managerial Cybernetics of Organization*. Chichester/New York/Brisbane/Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1981 [1972]; Beer Stafford. *The Heart of Enterprise: The Managerial Cybernetics of Organization*. Chichester/New York/Brisbane/Toronto/Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 1994 [1979]. This perspective on management resonates with Tania Li Murray’s critique of development politics as animated by a will to govern in the name of improvement. See Tania Murray Li. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009. For a discussion of “techno-politics,” that is, government by technocrats, see Timothy Mitchell. *The Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

<sup>439</sup> Policy Forum Armenia, a U.S.-based think tank, estimated that corruption drained the Armenian economy by seven percent in 2012. This constitutes a fiscal loss of \$750 million that could have been invested in economic programs. See Policy Forum Armenia, “State of the Nation: Corruption in Armenia,” October 2013.

qualities. In this context, a perceived lack of creative, reflective, and critical thinking skills is attributed to “outdated” teaching methods and the persistence of “rote learning” in schools.<sup>440</sup>

Overall, “systematic investments” by private foundations in comprehensive reforms of public education are intended to produce new kinds of Armenian subjects. Investment in general educational reform is driven by private foundations that consider the formation of human capital through “alternative” schools critical to Armenia’s economic growth and future development. Private “alternative” school programs propagate a “new culture of learning [...] that meet[s] 21st century requirements.”<sup>441</sup>

TUMO Center for Creative Technologies pursues a different approach to achieve the same goal. Instead of advocating for reforms of general education in Armenia, the private foundation offers high school students in Yerevan and three other locations throughout Armenia<sup>442</sup> access to an entirely new kind of after-school

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<sup>440</sup> Sanjay Seth argues that “critical thinking” is an inherently Eurocentric concept that was used to discipline students in colonial schools in British India. Native ways of learning, in particular so-called “rote learning,” were dismissed as “morally corrupt” and “backward.” See Seth Sanjay. *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

<sup>441</sup> See Ayb Educational Foundation’s official website, Frequently Asked Questions, “What is Ayb Educational Foundation’s mission, and what is it committed to?” URL: <https://foundation.ayb.am/en/projects/npee> (accessed December 2018).

<sup>442</sup> TUMO’s main location opened in Yerevan in 2011. In partnership with other private foundations and companies, TUMO has opened centers in Dilijan (2013), Gyumri (2015), and Stepanakert (2015?). It is currently fundraising to complete the construction of a full-scale center in the north-eastern border village of Koghb, expected to open in 2019, and will open a location in Masis, a town south of Yerevan which will offer instruction in French. TUMO has recently opened its first international location in Paris, and plans to open centers in Beirut, Moscow, and Tirana. Insofar, it is beginning to export its model of technological innovation in education and is thereby accomplishing the goal of putting Armenia on the map of the world through leadership in “innovation-for-development,” as proposed by the authors of the

program at a low or no cost. The center was initially conceived by the Sam and Sylvia Simonian Foundation, a U.S.-based private fund, that planned for TUMO to become a public “internet club.”<sup>443</sup> The organization’s current director envisioned the project anew as an organization that exposes its students to a dazzling array of digital and creative technologies, currently ranging from programming, robotics, game development, animation, web and graphic design, including 3D modelling and digital sculpting, music, filmmaking, photography, drawing, and writing.<sup>444</sup> TUMO’s director explained to me,

It’s not anymore like before where, you know, ‘Let me bring computers to a school.’ The fact that you bring resources like that does not help the school too much until you really focus on how they’re going to use it, and who’s going to use it. Is it the management? Is it the student? Is it, I don’t know, a computer lab or whatever? Even the computer lab is a *passé* word, you can’t create computer labs anymore.

Based on this insight, TUMO’s instructional design accounts for an interactive and individualized learning experience. Once admitted, students between the ages of

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*Armenia 2030* report. Although TUMO’s director and funders are repatriates and diaspora Armenians, the project is not connected to the *Armenia 2020* initiative.

<sup>443</sup> I draw on a 45-minute interview with the director and co-founder of TUMO Center for Creative Technologies which I conducted, recorded, and transcribed. It took place at her Yerevan office, a spacious room with natural daylight, in October 2016. After some time in a waiting room by the TUMO entrance, I was buzzed through an aluminum turnstile, led past dozens of students sitting behind computer flat screens around mobile table units floating through TUMO’s main hall, and into an elevator taking me up into a restricted area on the second floor. Glancing down from the mezzanine, I could see TUMO’s workshop rooms lining the sides of the hall below, behind floor to ceiling glass windows. During a previous tour of the premises, which I arranged before contacting my interlocutor, I was shown TUMO’s indoors amphitheater, cinema, music recording studio, and rooms where students can play and review video games.

<sup>444</sup> See the website of the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, URL: <https://tumo.org/en/portfolio/> (accessed December 2018).

twelve to eighteen years develop their own curricula on the basis of fourteen learning targets. No regular classes are offered. Instead, an in-house software assigns self-learning activities and tracks individual progress. TUMO's "Innovative Path" application automatically coordinates the schedules of up to fourteen thousand active students who are able to use TUMO's facilities and resources at the same time. This system emerged out of the desire to "reach each and every student," "customize their experience," and "create a database" to support those that are "falling behind" as much as "the ones that have a lot of potential."<sup>445</sup>

Instructional units require "big picture" analysis and critical self-evaluation. Before enrolling in game development, for example, students play a video game and write a critical essay about it. Once basic skills are acquired, students are immersed in "more and more practical or real projects." Although not every student gets the opportunity to work on a commercial project, all are expected to assume responsibility for their own learning and work. Self-learning activities and workshops are designed to instill an ethos of work in the students.

We are our own evaluator. [...] What is your goal in reality, are you going towards that goal or not? [...] We judge ourselves, we cannot hide it from ourselves, and we want the best. We are always struggling to do better. [...] Maybe it was not the best quality. They will understand [this] and they will try [to do] better next time.

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<sup>445</sup> Unless otherwise noted, citations that follow are from a transcription of the interview I conducted with the director of TUMO Center for Creative Technologies in its Yerevan headquarters in 2016.

Thus, students at TUMO not only acquire technical skills but also learn the “soft skills” and affective disposition required to sustain project-based work. They are prepared to critically evaluate and proactively improve the results and quality of their work. Newly acquired knowledge and abilities are honed and consolidated into skills in a relatively low-stakes environment. The set-up of the space itself, with its mobile tables and ergonomic chairs that can be rolled around the vast hall, instills ease with flexibility and permanent surveillance by peers. This prepares students to be accountable to employers and comfortable with the demands of transparency. In lieu of teachers, TUMO has “learning coaches” on site that students can consult when they cannot solve a problem. Since there is no external authority to discipline students, students must discipline themselves. With time, students learn to express their opinion, gain confidence in their technical and creative skills, and learn to behave as human capital.<sup>446</sup>

It must become “very natural,” so TUMO’s director, for students to be interested in the “latest gadgets or social media” and “want to know why” applications become successful. TUMO seeks to replicate the “environmental” stimulation of Silicon Valley through a system that will “inject little by little a lot of interesting ideas” so that even if students feel they are “not that kind of person” and are not interested

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<sup>446</sup> Despite their playful presentation as creative technologies, “learning targets” in robotics, game design, and animation have potential military applications. Though this vision is neither officially endorsed nor promoted by TUMO, “solutions” in virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) for export are high on the wish list of neoliberal reformers investing in the modernization of Armenia’s defense sector. The military-industrial complex of the state of Israel is sometimes invoked as a model in this context.

yet, those ideas will “stay in the back of your mind” as cultural stimuli that will “make sense [...] one day.” This incitement of interest is what reformers “have to bring to Armenia,” she argued, “if we want to make Armenia a tech place.”<sup>447</sup>

This “environmental” theory of work also drives Impact Hub Yerevan, a co-working space for social entrepreneurs, that is promoting a new “way of working” in Armenia.<sup>448</sup> In conversation, its CEO explained that the organization encourages interactions between Armenians from Iran, Russia, and the Middle East “who would have never met each other in the real world.” She described the space as a “massive eco-system of every sector you can imagine,” except the “government sector,” though

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<sup>447</sup> The underlying idea is that individuals react to “stimuli” in their environment. Impact Hub Yerevan positions itself as an “incubator” of a larger “social enterprise eco-system” in Armenia. Deriving from behaviorism in the United States, this neoliberal theory of work, despite its rhetoric of initiative, places emphasis on the “agency” of space and infrastructure, rather than the subject, which is informed by its milieu. See also Georges Canguilhem, “The Living and Its Milieu,” *Grey Room*, No. 3, Spring 2001, 7-31.

<sup>448</sup> Citations in this paragraph are from the transcription of a one-hour interview with the CEO of Impact Hub Yerevan which I conducted and recorded in October 2016. We met in her office in the corner of the organization’s floor, overlooking the center of Yerevan. She moved to Armenia from California in 2012 where she previously worked as a public attorney. She first worked at the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies and the American University of Armenia before co-founding Impact Hub Yerevan. My first introduction to Impact Hub Yerevan was over lunch with the country director of *Birthright Armenia*. Glancing across the outdoor courtyard that doubled as a patio for the restaurant he selected, he recognized one of the co-founders of Impact Hub Yerevan, an architect based in the United States, sitting at another table with her husband. After we ate, he introduced me and we exchanged information. Shortly thereafter, we met for a tour of the premises and I discovered that a number of organizations I intended to find out more about, such as *RepatArmenia* Foundation, *ONEArmenia*, and the Homeland Development Initiative Foundation (HDIF), were located on Impact Hub Yerevan’s newly opened floor. During my time in the field, it turned out that I would spend a substantial amount of time in the co-working space to interview interlocutors in its various offices and conference rooms, attend its “Straight Talk” events, and observe as a participant after I signed up for a “diaspora” membership. Although Impact Hub Yerevan was created by a group of repatriates, with the support of *IDeA* Foundation, I was told that approximately 60% of its members in 2016 were locals, 30% were repatriates, and 10% Armenians involved in international projects.

she conceded Impact Hub Yerevan had “played around with the idea.” She credited its success to “great facilities” in combination with a “handpicked” membership in a “really open space,” though staff curates the member-only floor and event calendar “like a big cocktail party where you want all types of interesting people” to “sort of cross-pollinate” between projects led by local and repatriate entrepreneurs.

Interestingly, there were initially doubts if “people really need community in a place that’s all about community in Yerevan, [...] your neighbors, [...] your family, your people, it’s [...] so much community, do we need another?” She argued that the success had exceeded “our wildest dreams” – measured by the number of collaborations started, economic growth of represented projects, and number of people attending Impact Hub Yerevan’s events. The novelty of flexible work – “giving out space but not as a lease, as a membership” for people to come and go “but not all the time” – is reflected in the lack of legal and fiscal categories to register social enterprises as a distinct type of organization that is neither charity nor “pure business.” In 2015, she remembered, “the structures weren’t there to support us, so we just did it on our own.”<sup>449</sup>

While TUMO socializes local Armenian youth into the culture of neoliberal work, “injecting” ideas until they begin to feel “very natural,” to cite its director, Impact Hub Yerevan works to soften the alienating effects of project-based work on

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<sup>449</sup> The National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia is currently debating a draft law proposed by the RA Government to amend the Armenian tax code that would replace the notion of the “family business” with the tax-exempt category of the “micro-enterprise.” This new legal form would encourage economic association between unrelated individuals. At the time of writing in June 2019, this draft law had not yet been passed.



adults. Its CEO explained that those who are willing to experiment with a flexible work environment eventually overcome the “foreign” feeling.

I think that’s something that took a lot of getting used to and then [...] there were some group of people who just got it and some group of people who would walk in and see all of these transparent offices and say, ‘Wow, I don’t ... like everybody’s going to be watching me working all day. How’s that going to work?’ It hasn’t been a problem, but that first feeling of it is very foreign, so just getting over those things.

Instead of partnering with the state, Impact Hub Yerevan and TUMO Center for Creative Technologies are waiting for the state to come to them for advice. Though represented on advisory councils and committees, TUMO’s position is that “fighting against a system that wants to stay [...] doesn’t make sense.”<sup>450</sup> Not only are you “getting into trouble,” its CEO told me, but it would also be “almost impossible” to affect change on a big scale in this way. TUMO’s ambition, instead, is to reach the biggest possible number of teenagers to generate a critical mass that will, later on, transform “the whole mentality, the school system, the new generation.” Asked about TUMO’s long-term vision, its CEO explained, “We’re doing this to have a better future.”

“I believe it’s not impossible,” she said, “It’s a small country. It’s a matter of effort and belief and vision and persistence, [...] technology is just a medium to make things happen.” I asked, why technology? She explained it was not only about investment in technology but also

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<sup>450</sup> The citations that follow are again from a transcription of the interview I conducted with the CEO of TUMO Center for Creative Technologies in 2016.

Everything that technology brings. [...] Technology is fair. Nobody will ask you if you have a very good idea, or you created something very good to say where you are and how you look like. That's beautiful. It brings democracy. [...] It brings freedom of expression. [...] It's not a luxury anymore. Even someone in the village and someone very poor [...] if they want to learn, that doesn't matter anymore. They have the same access and opportunities and resources.

Ultimately, I was told, TUMO's goal was "to bring happiness to the Armenian people" and "make them feel like it was worth staying here, living here, struggling for their kids." Not only is TUMO's after-school program creating a "future" for global technology in Armenia, but it is also preparing a local cohort of "global" Armenians that have the skills to participate in it. By investing in the formation of human capital for this national enterprise, new kinds of educational institutions in Armenia are producing neoliberal subjects that can work remotely for global corporations or create local start-up companies that venture philanthropists are eager to invest in.

TUMO Center for Creative Technologies is perhaps the most spectacular example of the success of the so-called "innovation-for-development" approach that is spelled out in the *Armenia 2030* report and promoted by the diaspora-led repatriation movement.<sup>451</sup> Designed to inculcate individuality, flexibility, and creativity, TUMO's system of self-guided learning and Impact Hub Yerevan's "incubator" space not only introduce Armenians to the neoliberal ethos and culture of flexible work but also create a growing class of Armenian citizens with a "global" outlook. By means of the market,

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<sup>451</sup> It should be noted, however, that TUMO is not funded by or affiliated with the contemporary repatriation movement. Its director, a repatriate from North America, emphasized that TUMO's "total freedom" was its strength.

this investment in Armenia's future is hoped to also bring about the transformation of the country's political culture.

### **Conclusion**

The desire to renew and globalize Armenia's future speaks to the speculative relationship of the current repatriation movement to local conceptions of reality. The proponents of this change deploy their technical expertise through informal networks that span the globe. I have investigated how the cultural repertoire of American neoliberalism is mobilized by a movement of repatriate reformers in the Republic of Armenia. While I found that many of the individuals involved hail from locations other than the United States or Canada, first and foremost Russia and Lebanon, many activists in the private development sector share biographical ties to corporate environments in the United States. While the constitution of the Republic of Armenia identifies its citizens as the people at the base of its parliamentary democracy, the national project emerging in the Armenian diaspora incorporates all self-identified Armenians as shareholders in a global enterprise that is centered on the Armenian plateau but extends from North and South America to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

In other words, a previously "stateless" diaspora has adopted its post-Soviet state. Private actors in the development field, first and foremost privately endowed foundations, create entirely new institutions, low-cost after-school programs, and co-working spaces to make new kinds of subjects and promote a neoliberal culture of work in Armenia. Despite issues of political legitimacy, the public-private-partnership

has emerged as a dominant form of intervention in governmental practice. Instead of advising officials of the state, advocates for the market-based development paradigm set precedents in the region that cannot be ignored. Based on fieldwork, participant observation, and discourse analysis of transcribed interviews and social media ethnography, I found that the goal of “global” Armenians is to *reconstitute* the state in order to *restore* national sovereignty, not to usurp or dismantle it.

While venture philanthropy has emerged as a de facto governmental force in Armenia, “social impact” indicators are applied to lighten the potential disruptiveness of neoliberal reforms. Although the desire to vest sovereignty in private entities envisioned as a new model of government has *curative* intent, its focus on quantitative results fails to account for the qualitative effects of privatization. The market-based development paradigm is rooted in the idea that the state is a technical apparatus that guarantees the continued existence of the Armenian nation. State regulation and bureaucracy are felt as an affliction on the social body of the nation because they are perceived to prevent economic integration between global investors and the local economy. Therefore, neoliberal reformers critique governmental practice as irrational and costly. In contrast, they imagine the coming governmentality as a project of national revival. Imaginaries of repatriation, as a form of development, are also gendered because they position the repatriate as a “child” in relation to a “father.” Perceiving the homeland to be in disarray, the project of repatriation for development constructs the local population as a passive substrate for diasporic agency and self-making.

Investment and enterprise are emerging as paradigms of development through which governmental agency, be it public or private, can interface with all Armenians as the human capital of the nation. In this sense, the ideal future state of Armenia would be slim, agile, and entrepreneurial in relationship to “sectors” and “segments” of the global economy of the Armenian nation. This political imaginary presupposes the idea that Armenians share an “organic” solidarity, as stakeholders, and will invest time and capital in the success of the national enterprise. Strategic planning and “blended” finance are used to hold the state to account as a biopolitical agency that should not become an end in itself but act as a *temporary* bearer of the sovereignty of the Armenian nation. “Development 2.0” in Armenia has staked its claims on the future as a site of cultural, economic, political, and social renewal within the container of the “nation,” though content is transformed by neoliberal logic. Legitimized not by elections, but by technical results, neoliberalism has reached the Caucasus mountains through transnational networks of diaspora. By linking up Armenian individuals in and outside of Armenia to global circuits of information and capital, self-fashioned “Global Armenians” seek to suture the vital forces of the nation, imagined as dissipated and stalled by its post-Soviet state, to the hegemonic futures of the time.

## Conclusion

Each of the preceding four chapters has examined a different historical and geopolitical conjuncture. Together, they combine into an alternative account of globalization. By highlighting minor circulations with major consequences, the overall thesis ties multiple conceptual threads together and demonstrates that neoliberal futures build on colonial pasts. Fundamentally, it argues that past events are not simply bygone. Their effects linger on and engender the present. Based on this basic tenet of postcolonial studies, a school of thought informed by deconstruction, I conclude that Armenia has yet to undergo a process of decolonization. By that, I do not mean that Armenia has been colonized. Rather, I argue that colonial legacies are informing the way in which Armenia is *imagined*. These colonial imaginaries have material effects. They guide structural reforms and policy initiatives. For this reason, it is necessary to critique them.

What are the terms of this critique? What are its grounds? The answers to these questions are not immediately apparent. However, this does not mean that postcolonialism is out of place in Armenia. It means that Armenia cannot currently be represented as a postcolonial form in discourse about Eurasia. This lack of intelligibility warrants a closer look at the presuppositions that govern knowledge production about Armenia. Area studies, for example, often limits its frame of inquiry to the present. By narrowly focusing on the post-Soviet period, scholars in this field often do not examine how their analytical categories were produced in the first place, or what alternative possibilities they may foreclose. A certain positivism also persists

in scholarly writing about Armenian history, not least because the study of Armenia itself has been provincialized. Building on more recent scholarship in world history, cultural anthropology, and comparative literature, Armenia's global history is only now beginning to be more fully appreciated.

Scholarly discourse is only slowly catching up with the pace of neoliberal transformation in the Republic of Armenia. On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation in Armenia's non-governmental sector, I trace a shift from civil society promotion, largely in line with postsocialism elsewhere, to social entrepreneurialism that is largely driven by the venture philanthropy and impact investment of diasporic reformers. Unlike liberal thinkers, who are interested in the idea of a market for society, neoliberal thinkers seek to establish a society *for* the market. As critiqued by Michel Foucault, they “decipher traditionally non-economic social behavior in economic terms” (Foucault 2008, 246) to promote “the enterprise [as] the universally generalized social model” (242). One symptom of neoliberal globalization in Armenia and the Armenian diaspora alike is the emergent discourse of development through repatriation. Because its entrepreneurial rhetoric is shaped by the start-up culture of California's Silicon Valley and the Boston corridor, its programmatic tenets are to a certain extent generic – flexible work, innovation, technology. Through an in-depth case study, however, I unpack the particular ways in which neoliberal developers in the Armenian diaspora seek to reform the Armenian state and economy through non-governmental activism. On the basis of an in-depth discourse analysis, I argue that the lens of “global diaspora” redefines the Republic of

Armenia as a national enterprise. In this scenario, the Armenian nation is imagined as a global corporation. In order to “reverse” the fragmentation of the Armenian nation into many diasporas, neoliberal reformers offer global nation-building as a “unifying” strategy. The “globe,” however, is not a place, but an idea. I critique the notion of global Armenians because it unsettles the place-based ways in which Armenians have historically defined themselves.

I argue that the Republic of Armenia has become a laboratory for neoliberal experiments in global development, and show how its rhetoric is reworking Armenian national identity. A cluster of funds has emerged to invest in “world-conjuring projects” in Armenia that “rearticulate and reassemble material, technical, and discursive elements in the process of remaking” (Ong/Roy 2011, 4). Building on a privately commissioned report, *Armenia 2030*, the repatriate-driven “Development 2.0 movement” redefines development as a market. It discovers “double-digit growth” in the “magnitude of the unaddressed economic, social and environmental problems; and the market-based opportunities which the solutions to those problems present” (IEMS 2017, 17). This entrepreneurial vision *disaggregates* sovereignty, defined as the “power to act,” into so-called “mandate[s] for development” (85). Its protagonists argue that sovereignty should not be a monopoly of the state, but that it should flexibly devolve to “Armenian business and private actors” – “vested” in a bottom-up manner – so that the latter may act “beyond the capacity of a contractor or investor” (85). While the idea of holding sovereignty to popular account may draw on liberal imaginaries, the notion of flexibilizing its delegation would undermine the



constitutional mechanism of free and fair general elections. By juxtaposing “vesting” and investment, private investors propose to “unbundle” sovereignty into governmental functions. Leading up to the Velvet Revolution of April 2018, Armenian infrastructure, education, and military defense were in the process of being restructured by public-private partnerships in the name of “Development 2.0.”

I propose to term this governmental art “developmentality.” As a rationality of government, “developmentality” is distinct from developmentalism because it is not a state policy. Rather, it is a “stateless” logic. Circulating through the networks of the Armenian diaspora, it has constituted a “global” way of governing Armenia. But how *new* is the neoliberal agenda of globalization in Armenia? In order to develop a critique of “developmentality,” I turn to the early modern period and examine how a multiply displaced Armenian trade diaspora became incorporated in the colonial enterprise of the English East India Company in South Asia. Unlike regional forms of commercial partnership, the colonial sovereignty of this joint-stock corporation did not depend on the rotating cast of natural persons that administered its affairs at any given point in time. Its immortal legal personality enabled it to hold property in perpetuity until the British House of Commons rescinded its immortality clause in 1773. This allowed the English East India Company to govern extraterritorially. While based and chartered in London, its factors in South Asia carried on the business of colonial government. After a trade agreement was signed on behalf of the “Armenian nation” in 1688, Armenians became subjected to its corporate power. On the basis of close readings of early modern legal and literary sources, I argue that this colonial subjection reconfigured the

Armenian imagination of sovereignty. It gave rise to conceptions of corporate nationhood that were modelled on the joint-stock corporation, a global form that was colonial at its inception.

The colonial situation hailed reformers who began to perceive the Armenian people as disorderly and fragmented. As a result of their position as intermediaries between colonizer and colonized, secular figures such as Joseph Emin, a Persian Armenian from Calcutta, mobilized European conceptions of law and order in hopes that Armenians, too, could learn to “act as if they were but one single man” (Apcar 1919, 247). Informed by the emergent discipline of Orientalism, the Armenian protagonists of this colonial Enlightenment internalized a gnawing sense of inferiority. They reimagined sovereignty as the artificial person of the nation, and, on this basis, wished to constitute a political body that could incorporate the unruly conglomerate of family firms and extended households that made up the Armenian Apostolic Church. I revisit these writings not merely to chart the colonial origins of secularization, as such, but to trouble the inherently alienating self-image at the base of these reform projects, not least through a critique of the ways in which they are currently understood and historicized.

From a postcolonial standpoint, I argue that Joseph Emin’s conception of national liberation was immediately absorbed into the terms of colonial experience. Insofar as Armenians were incorporated in the colonial enterprise as a nation, they remained other-determined even in their manifest aspiration for self-determination. The colonial terms of this selfhood destabilize simplified notions of “colonizer” and

“colonized,” and therefore open onto a new mode of postcolonial critique. By plainly stating his admiration for the colonial mastery of the English self, Joseph Emin’s *Life and Adventures*, an English-language memoir published in London in 1792, unsettles modern sensibilities about national emancipation. Because his text predates Hegelian thought about lordship and bondage, it creates a distancing effect that defamiliarizes the liberal desire for self-possession and property. This may help move us toward *another* emancipatory politics. Through a postcolonial critique of Armenian incorporation, or domestication, within the colonial edifice of capitalist modernity, a new ethical vision might emerge in relation to alterity.

By linking European colonialism in South Asia to the idea of a national enterprise in West Asia, I explore new ways of thinking about so-called “small” places such as Armenia that are rarely centered in studies of global transformation. Thinking from the “margins” of competing imperial formations illuminates the nexus of colonialism, nationalism, and neoliberalism through “minor” histories of circulation between the Middle East and South Asia. Such a postcolonial approach to neoliberalism in post-Soviet Armenia also broadens the analytic of postsocialism with respect to the long-durée of coloniality in West Asia. I conclude that colonial discourse neither solely emanated from Europe, nor that it was imposed in a vacuum. As the Armenian case demonstrates, it also travelled *across* colonized sites, from East to West, and refracted indigenous forms in ways that were assimilated as features of national selfhood.

Ideologues of partition in late colonial South Asia also had a hand in divvying up the former Ottoman Empire along racial lines. The idea of “population unmixing” was first tested in 1905 in Bengal before it was implemented in the Middle East as a founding principle of the international mandate system that was imposed in the aftermath of World War I. The League of Nations Covenant codified national development as a condition of sovereignty. To be a nation was to be “civilized,” and *therefore* “capable” of self-government. However, the sovereign status of a nation could not be attained or secured on indigenous terms. It was adjudicated by the West. Its rhetoric not only instituted “the nation” as the primary unit of political rights but positioned so-called “advanced nations” as the guardians of peoples who, not unlike children, had “not yet” reached the necessary “stage of development” that was deemed necessary by the West in order to govern themselves.

The (inter-)national framework imposed to adjudicate sovereignty was founded on global projections of white supremacy and settler colonial logic. The legal inclusion of Armenians in statutory whiteness in the United States became linked to the *denaturalization* of Armenians as Ottoman citizens because petitioners were only eligible for U.S. citizenship if they were categorized as “free white persons.” This racialized status of self-ownership depended on the dispossession of indigenous peoples and the natal alienation of African Americans as property (Patterson 1982).

I argue that the American relief effort in the Near East constructed Armenians as “white settlers” in their own homeland. By representing Armenians as a nation of orphans in need of racial adoption by the United States, it effectively sanctioned

Armenian displacement as the result of “unnatural” intimacies in the Ottoman Empire. At its modern inception, American humanitarianism positioned Armenians as wards of the United States through projections of settler colonial logic in the new media of photography and the motion picture that were deployed to generate public support for the idea of American “tutelage” in the Near East.

In the aftermath of the Armenian genocide, the United States briefly considered creating an American Mandate Armenia in Anatolia. Though Ottoman Armenians aspired “to become free and independent not only from Turkish association, but also from any other foreign domination” (ACIA 1919, 41), advocates made their case for Armenian self-determination by insisting that Armenians were “akin” to Europeans and therefore *racially superior* to their Muslim neighbors. By pursuing land claims on the basis of a presumed racial kinship with Europeans, these advocates allowed for the indigenous status of Ottoman Armenians to be erased. Ultimately, the recognition of Armenian nationhood on the terms of white supremacy only served to legitimize Western expansion while disarticulating the land claims of Ottoman Armenians in West Asia.

Although Armenians had been granted refugee status by an Act of Congress (Watenpaugh 2014), their admission into the United States was severely restricted to a quota of only 124 persons per year by the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 (Craver 2009, 49). Near East Relief was incorporated as the first American organization that was chartered to operate abroad. Its mission of “repatriation” served to remap and reengineer Armenian sovereignty by concentrating Armenian orphans in

an industrial-scale orphanage-complex in Soviet Armenia. Through Armenian resettlement in the region, the American relief effort appeased eugenic anxieties about both racial mixing in West Asia and migration to North America. It also inscribed the “geopolitics of whiteness” by taking charge of the bodies and lives of displaced and orphaned Armenian children.

Soviet power figured Armenians as a “people of the East” who lacked the revolutionary consciousness to achieve their own emancipation as workers. After the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was formed in 1920, Armenians were offered emancipation as an object of knowledge that was already formed out of the experience of the “European proletariat.” This proposition ran directly counter to materialist conceptions of emancipation. In order for human labor to be emancipatory, according to Marx’ conception, the human capacity to act on the environment must be *consciously* recognized as an *idea* before it can be set to work on the *material* world.

Women’s emancipation became a central tenet of early Soviet statecraft in the “Eastern” Soviet Socialist Republics. From 1921 to 1930, the women’s department emerged as a key technology of Sovietization in the newly founded Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic as well. Its directors, organizers, delegates, and volunteers promoted Soviet legislation in both urban and rural areas by offering women’s clubs as gender-segregated spaces for public engagement. I discuss the “new methods” of subjection invented by Soviet feminists and discuss how they sought to reach into the depths of women’s minds and most intimate desires. I argue that they aimed to hail them as individuals in order to engender a new kind of collective.

I argue that Soviet reforms aimed to corporealize a new kind of energetic regime that would transcend the nation-form. The *fleshly* substance of the nation-body was to be converted into labor-power, or *vital energy*, in order to engender a form of Soviet nationhood with “socialist content.” This Soviet body of the Armenian nation was envisioned as a *synthetic* organism with *new* organs, reconfigured and sutured across distance *and* difference by the apparatus of the Soviet state. In Spivak’s close reading of Marx, the idea of man’s human nature as essentially “organic” generalizes a particular form of subjection as universally desirable (Spivak 1999). As faculties of the mind, man’s “organs” are subjective patterns of thought, cognitive pathways that are incited by a certain *discipline* of labor.

Drawing on postcolonial feminist theory, I argue that the Soviet project required the subjection of so-called “woman-nationals” as Soviet agents. I discuss how Soviet feminists constructed “traditional” Armenian women as “para-subjects” in need of liberation from the patriarchal household. According to Gayatri C. Spivak, the para-subject is a “selfed other” that “has not yet differentiated itself into Species-Being” (Spivak 1999, 80). As indicated by the Greek prefix *para*, this concept denotes a form of difference that is “adjacent to” or “beside” the subject. Set apart in “womanspace,” para-subjects are individuals that are not subjected and therefore do not relate to themselves as individuals. This also means that the para-subject does not exist in relation to power. In this sense, she was ungoverned.

In order to unpack this theoretical claim, I analyze archival and literary sources to examine how Armenian women may have experienced the first decade of Soviet

reforms. In the Armenian context, women's emancipation campaigns focused on women's *speech*. Soviet reformers believed that the refusal to speak in public also signaled oppression, even an absence of subjectivity altogether. However, yielding one's speech required an *agential* engagement with silence. It not only secured the modesty of Armenian women but also the status of Armenian men as agents that were expected to handle potentially "polluting" interactions with strangers outside of the household. These gendered practices were central to the reproduction of Armenian national discourse. The difference they managed ran *deeper* than Soviet tropes about "backwardness" could capture. I excavate legacies of American anthropology in Soviet ideology about the nation in order to reconceive of Armenian indigeneity in West Asia through a discussion of the Armenian household as a gendered space of subalternity.

By revisiting the story of women's emancipation in early Soviet Armenia, I contribute to scholarship about unveiling campaigns in Central Asia that overdetermine "the veil" as a sign of women's oppression. In Armenia, an Orientalized Christian setting, "the voice" occupied an analogous conceptual space although Armenian women also traditionally wore headscarves. Workshops and trainings were designed to make Armenian women speak in public, and thereby hail their consciousness as individuals. The symbolic realm of the Soviet economy depended on women's speech in public because it demonstrated their "liberation" from the patriarchal household. Released into the world, women's speech became the sign of their subjection, their *becoming proper* to a new social order.



I theorize Soviet power as a *vitalist* regime that prepared the grounds of neoliberal corporatism because it eroded the space of gendered subalternity. It subjected each and all to the governmental rationality of growth and development. Because Soviet technicians relied on European philosophies of history, life, and society, they positioned West and Central Asia as their “Orient” in order to constitute the Russian center as modern and civilized (Tlostanova 2010). The vitalist underpinnings of the Soviet project have been ignored in much English-language scholarship due to translations that skip over the particularities of Soviet discourse. Once I reconsider the target of Soviet reforms, I situate Soviet power in relation to European colonialism and argue that the two forms should not be analogized. By teasing out the vitalist underpinnings of Soviet emancipation campaigns, I also propose new ways of thinking about the post-Soviet period. Instead of an ideological break, I suggest, “developmentality” shares unexpected features with Soviet emancipation campaigns insofar as neoliberal reformers hope to reconstitute Armenian nationhood at the level of the globe.

By approaching Armenia as a global idea, rather than a provincial hinterland, I analyze the production of “developmentality” in the margins of competing imperial formations. I examine the tension between displacement and resettlement, natal alienation and racial adoption, appropriation and repatriation, as well as diaspora and reconstitution, in order to embrace the unintelligibility of Armenia in postcolonial discourse as a point of departure for new imaginaries of open-ended futures and political action.

Queer feminist critiques of post-Soviet transition in Armenia point toward new directions for this research. After national independence in 1990, hope for a reinstated (phallic) ideal of Armenian national sovereignty soon dissolved into anxiety about moral corruption at the core of post-Soviet statehood. Fueled by war, natural disaster, and the social devastation that was wrought by neoliberal structural reforms, this period was marked by a pervasive sense of hopelessness that seemed to cancel out the future itself. Tamar Shirinian's queer theorization of this "politics of 'no!'" as an emancipatory response to the "illegitimate Fatherhood," or sovereignty, of the post-Soviet state, allows to envision a future without patriarchal authority that is founded on the "refusal of the entire symbolic order" (Shirinian 2016, 299).

The Armenia-based artist collective *Queering Yerevan* spray-painted images of "Mother Armenia" on walls in public spaces across Yerevan. The stencil omitted her sword and added the caption "SUCK MY PUSSY" in capitalized Armenian letters. This manipulation of the statue disrupts the phallic ideal of Armenian national discourse and unsettles the teleological logic of national development. What lies beyond incorporation? Is it the chaos of formlessness? The caption "SUCK MY PUSSY" is a provocation that challenges stigmata associated with feminine sexuality in Armenia. It centers the pleasure of clitoral stimulation and transfers phallic power to the figure of the mother while refusing the mandate of reproduction. It also invokes an anarchist vision of demilitarized nationhood without a state.

The "mandate" of the state was recently confirmed and renewed by powerful manifestations of popular will on the streets of cities, towns, and villages of Armenia.

For now, the momentum of the Velvet Revolution of April 2018 may have stemmed the tide of the so-called “post-2015 development agenda in Armenia” (IEMS 2017, 11). However, in order to remain legitimate, the new government of Nikol Pashinyan appears to be taking steps to make the state of Armenia more agile and entrepreneurial. This is being accomplished not only through structural and legal reforms, but also by absorbing more and more neoliberal reformers as administrators of the state. The “New Armenia” has finally endorsed its global diaspora as a national asset. It is officially inviting diasporic return and reportedly plans to roll out “diaspora bonds” to allow for direct foreign investments in public sector infrastructural and development programs.<sup>452</sup> In this sense, the elected government has taken charge of the neoliberal transformation of the Armenian state. It follows that the post-Soviet state has been *governmentalized* (Foucault 1991, 103), that is, it has been invaded by liberal governmentality at last.

What, then, can the globalization of Armenian nationalism teach the world about emancipation? I investigated “global dreams” in the Armenian diaspora to make neoliberal futures appear strange. Through closer scrutiny of the colonial pasts they actualize, I hope to displace “developmentality” and wrest open a space for alternative possibilities. I have shown that emancipation remains a limited framework because it reproduces dependency, or other-determination, under the guise of independence. It

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<sup>452</sup> See “Q&A: Why Armenia is rolling out diaspora bonds for development,” *Devex*, August 15, 2018, URL: <https://www.devex.com/news/q-a-why-armenia-is-rolling-out-diaspora-bonds-for-development-93275> (accessed November 2018). The idea of a “sovereign ‘diaspora bond’ financial instrument” is also mentioned in the *Armenia 2030* report (IEMS 2017, 82).

offers subjection as liberation. Although it is a legal construct, emancipation is not justice. It is impossible to know what kind of justice could have been done if abolition-democracy had guided the way.<sup>453</sup>

I argue that the collective futures that are intended by many national reformers are foreclosed by the alienating terms of emancipation through corporate nationhood. Through an anti-foundationalist reading of Armenian history, literature, and political thought, this dissertation turns toward the illegitimate and the excluded, instead, in order to *face*, rather than efface, and thereby *relate* to difference in an ethical way. This counter-intuitive movement toward the other within is emancipatory because it negates a version of the national self that is built on negation. Without prescribing a settled identity, I have developed a postcolonial critique of emancipation as an aporia in a region that is constitutively indeterminate and therefore offered alienation as an alternative to subordination.

“[T]hinking from the border” (Tlostanova 2010, 26) has allowed me to excavate the various ways in which Armenian incorporation in imperial and colonial projects has yielded forms of negation. Figured as *inclusion*, these visions of national self-hood have come to be assimilated as positive forms of identity. This point has major political consequences because it pushes the discourse of the nation beyond the alienating terms of emancipation.

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<sup>453</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois coined the term “abolition-democracy” in *Black Reconstruction* (1935). As a political project, it exceeded the mere abolition of slavery and entailed a process of fundamental transformation precipitated by the “incorporation” of former slaves “into the body civil, politic, and social” (Du Bois 1935, 202).

A postcolonial angle helps unpack how Armenians became susceptible to appropriation by the West as transitional subjects that, at times, were made to represent the “West” in the “East,” and thereby became instrumental to the expansion of colonial governmentality in West Asia. For this reason, Armenia offers new grounds for a new anti-dispossessive politics<sup>454</sup> that dislodges the logic of emancipation, on the model of property, in response to displacement and dispossession. Instead of seeking emancipation *through* development, I argue that decolonization begins with emancipation *from* “developmentality.” Received analytical categories will not do because they reinforce the grasp of the corporate nation on the imagination. Instead of perpetually reconstituting Armenia in relation to Europe, postcolonial feminist alliances may point toward collective futures that are no longer predicated on the colonial gaze.

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<sup>454</sup> See David Kazanjian. “‘I am he:’ Revising the Theory of Dispossession from Colonial Yucatán,” Center for Cultural Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz, May 15, 2019, presentation.

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