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Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era: Urban Symbolism and Narratives of the Nation in the Landscape of Armenia's Capital

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

RE-IMAGINING YEREVAN IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA: URBAN SYMBOLISM
AND NARRATIVES OF THE NATION IN THE LANDSCAPE OF ARMENIA'S
CAPITAL

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

by

Diana K. Ter-Ghazaryan

2010

To: Dean Kenneth Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

This dissertation, written by Diana K. Ter-Ghazaryan, and entitled Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era: Urban Symbolism and Narratives of the Nation in the Landscape of Armenia's Capital, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

Ralph Clem

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Roderick P. Neumann, Major Professor

Date of Defense: June 2, 2010

The dissertation of Diana K. Ter-Ghazaryan is approved.

Dean Kenneth Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

Interim Dean Kevin O'Shea
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2010

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DEDICATION

To Yerevan and Yerevantsis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though inspired by readings completed in graduate seminars during the first few years of my doctoral studies, the central question of the dissertation, in its very raw and unfiltered form, puzzled me during my many summer returns to Yerevan, years before I read about connections between place, landscape and identity. What was happening to the city in which I grew up and which I loved and how were those changes altering the cherished relationship of the residents with the city? My changing relationship with the city could probably be explained by the fact that I no longer lived there and was a mere visitor, perhaps reminiscing more about a bygone time than a place. But, time and again, I was confronted by similar feelings of alienation and loss in the face of rapid transformations of the city that were often expressed by those who continued to reside in Yerevan. Armenia's post-independence elites were reinventing Yerevan as a new city with grand construction projects and large-scale re-appropriation of public space, and, in a subtler manner, reimagining Armenian national identity. I decided to learn and write about those issues, and this journey has been as much an academic exploration as an incredible process of adventure, self-discovery and an evaluation of my relationship with the place where I grew up.

During this journey I have been blessed with the guidance, support and encouragement of many wise advisors. My major professor, Rod Neumann, believed in the project since its earliest stages and assisted me every step of the way. His wisdom, invaluable counsel, constructive criticism and unending patience have made me a more articulate writer, a more inquisitive thinker and, overall, a better scholar. He read draft after draft, helping me identify parts that were well-written and improve the rest. Even

when the going got tough and my doubts about the project mounted, a meeting and a chat with him would reinvigorate me and fill me with renewed enthusiasm and excitement about my work. I am honored to have been his apprentice throughout my years at Florida International University. Other committee members have also been there to generously lend a helping hand and offer expert advice. Professor Ralph Clem, who shared my regional interest, provided valuable insight into the peculiarities of the post-Soviet region, and generously shared seasoned advice for the day of the defense. Professor Patricia Price continuously encouraged my interest in cultural geography and ethnographic research. Professor Assefa Melesse offered expert counsel with technical issues regarding the GIS component of this dissertation. The staff of the Department of International Relations—Michelle, Martha, Luz and Mary—were there to offer their help, support and, from time to time, a much-needed colada.

This work would not have been possible without the generous financial support that I received from several funders. The USDA Agroecology Program at FIU provided me with a scholarship that supported travel to Armenia, in-country travel and other expenses. The FIU Graduate School Dissertation Year Fellowship allowed me precious time away from teaching in order to finish the write-up of this manuscript. Throughout my tenure at FIU I have also been supported by teaching assistantships from the Department of International Relations and Geography, and during my final two semesters by a research assistantship from NSF's ULTRA-EX Grant.

My deepest gratitude goes to many members of my family, who have been extraordinarily supportive throughout this project and my entire graduate career. My parents have offered unwavering support, always celebrating my accomplishments and

gently nudging me towards the completion of this project. My grandfather clipped newspaper articles pertaining to anything going on in Yerevan most zealously, and without his help I would have had to spend countless more days poring over bound newspapers in the National Archives in Yerevan. My aunts and grandmother cooked delicious meals and waited for my return from interviews to serve a refreshing drink, a delicious snack and to discuss my impressions of the day's work. My cousin Alisa helped me during research reconnaissance trips, identified possible interviewees and helped me contact them. I cannot thank my family enough, as their role in the completion of this dissertation is immeasurable. The list of names would be too long to include, but I would also like to thank all my friends, in Miami and far away—for being there for me with words of advice and encouragement and for reminding me that there is life outside of and after graduate school.

From the very inception of this project my partner and best friend, Douglas Krull, has been there for me every step of the way. Always excited about my work, he read countless drafts and offered precious insight, especially unique because he had seen Yerevan, but experienced it as an outsider. He has also been instrumental in helping me generate the graphics for this dissertation and my defense presentation, looking at them through the eyes of a designer. Nearing the completion of the project, he helped me push through periods of writer's block and exhaustion by giving me pep talks, hiding the modem to keep the distraction of the internet away from me, and offering to buy me any pair of shoes of my choosing after the defense. Thank you for your sense of humor, your love, support and excitement about my work.

And finally, I would like to thank my interviewees, both formal and informal, including people whose conversations I overheard on the streets of Yerevan, for providing me with rich and compelling material for this work. It is to them, and to the city in which they live, that I dedicate this work.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION
RE-IMAGINING YEREVAN IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA: URBAN SYMBOLISM
AND NARRATIVES OF THE NATION IN THE LANDSCAPE OF ARMENIA'S
CAPITAL

by

Diana K. Ter-Ghazaryan

Florida International University, 2010

Miami, Florida

Professor Roderick P. Neumann, Major Professor

The urban landscape of Yerevan has experienced tremendous changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Armenia's independence in 1991. Domestic and foreign investments have poured into Yerevan's building sector, converting many downtown neighborhoods into sleek modern districts that now cater to foreign investors, tourists, and the newly rich Armenian nationals. Large portions of the city's green parks and other public spaces have been commercialized for private and exclusive use, creating zones that are accessible only to the affluent. In this dissertation I explore the rapidly transforming landscape of Yerevan and its connections to the development of contemporary Armenian national identity. This research was guided by principles of ethnographic inquiry, and I employed diverse methods, including document and archival research, structured and semi-structured interviews and content analysis of news media. I also used geographic information systems (GIS) and satellite images to represent and visualize the stark transformations of spaces in Yerevan.

Informed by and contributing to three literatures—on the relationship between landscape and identity formation, on the construction of national identity, and on Soviet and post-Soviet cities—this dissertation investigates how messages about contemporary Armenian national identity are being expressed via the transforming landscape of Armenia’s national capital. In it I describe the ways in which abrupt transformations have resulted in the physical and symbolic eviction of residents, introducing fierce public debates about belonging and exclusion within the changing urban context. I demonstrate that the new additions to Yerevan’s landscape and the symbolic messages that they carry are hotly contested by many long-time residents, who struggle for inclusion of their opinions and interests in the process of re-imagining their national capital. This dissertation illustrates many of the trends that are apparent in post-Soviet and post-Socialist space, while at the same time exposing some unique characteristics of the Armenian case.

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INTRODUCTION

The urban landscape of Yerevan has experienced tremendous changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Armenia's independence in 1991. Domestic and foreign investments have poured into the national capital's building sector, transforming many of Yerevan's downtown neighborhoods into sleek modern districts that now cater to foreign investors, tourists, and the newly rich Armenian nationals. In neighborhoods representing Yerevan's historical and architectural heritage, historic buildings have been pushed out by new construction that offers high-end residential and commercial real estate. Many of the city's green parks and other public spaces have been commercialized for private and exclusive use, creating spaces that are accessible only to the affluent. These changes partially erase the older Yerevan landscape, in order to project a new vision for post-Soviet Armenia's capital and to communicate certain messages about Armenian national identity. This new landscape and the vision of a new national capital that it projects introduce public debates and socio-political tensions concerning the residents' belonging and exclusions within the changing urban context.

In this dissertation I investigate the changes in the cultural landscape of Yerevan and how those changes are connected to the development of contemporary Armenian national identity. In it I posit that the transforming urban landscape of Yerevan is intimately tied to the construction of contemporary Armenian national identity, and that this construction is politically contentious. Describing the manner in which the residents'

connections to place are changing as a result of sweeping transformations, I maintain that the altering material and symbolic landscapes of Yerevan produce a certain vision for Armenia's capital, as well as the national identity of Armenians overall. This research is informed by and contributes to three literatures: on the relationship between landscape and identity formation, on construction of national identity, and on Soviet and post-Soviet cities. I present a brief review of these literatures and the theoretical underpinnings of this study in Chapter II.

Yerevan is the national capital of Armenia and its landscape is laden with symbols of "Armenianness". City streets bear the names of national heroes, and monuments in their honor adorn urban plazas and squares. Museums bearing witness to the long history of Armenians display their holdings proudly. However, most of the urban landscape of Yerevan inherited by Armenia's post-Soviet regime was produced during the Soviet era and under centralized socialist planning. Yerevan, which had been chosen as the capital of the First Armenian Republic in 1918, remained the capital upon Armenia's incorporation into the Soviet Union. Soviet principles of design guided the development of the city's landscape, but many of Yerevan's notable constructions of the Soviet period were imbued with messages of Armenian nationhood. The Soviet Armenian elites, carefully navigating the central-command bureaucracy and circumventing anti-nationalist directives from the Communist party interpreted Soviet nationality policy in favor of the Armenian national interest and constructed Yerevan as a most significant representation of "Armenianness," securing its place in the iconography of the nation (Panossian 2006; Ter Minassian 2007) and promoting its role as a national symbol for Armenians (see Chapters II and III).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Yerevan became the capital of a newly-independent post-Soviet republic. When Armenia's independence was declared, Yerevan became the capital of all Armenians worldwide, including those who were part of the diaspora. The Armenian diaspora is proportionally large—there are many more Armenians living outside of Armenia than inside it. Out of an estimated 9 million Armenians in the world today, only 3 million live on the territory of the Republic of Armenia (Panossian 2006). The size of the Armenian diaspora has varied throughout the years and was greatly enlarged because of the atrocious events of the early 20th century Armenian Genocide, during which nearly 1.5 million Armenians living in Western Armenian provinces (then part of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire) perished. The survivors of those events settled either in the soon-to-be-sovietized Eastern Armenia, or left that part of the world to join established diasporic communities and to form new ones, primarily in Western Europe, South America and North America, and the USA in particular (see Chapter III). Now that Armenia is independent and decisions about urban development and design are not restricted by a centralized planning agency or directives from Moscow, what choices about the construction of the city's landscape are made? Furthermore, what is the role of the Armenian diaspora in this process of re-imagining Yerevan as a national capital and in the construction of contemporary Armenian national identity?

In this introductory chapter I describe my research methods and analysis, provide a brief summary of subsequent chapters and discuss the significance of this research. I turn first to a detailed description of methods.

Methodology

The overall methodological approach of this dissertation has been ethnographic research. In my research for this dissertation I have been guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the current and ongoing transformations of Yerevan's landscape construct, affect, and reflect post-Soviet Armenian identity in the nation's capital?
2. What symbolic messages, intended and unintended, are produced through the post-Soviet spatial reconfiguration of Yerevan's landscape?
3. What effects do these spatial and symbolic transformations have on the residents' connections to Yerevan's landscape?

In the pursuit of answers to these questions I have employed diverse methods, including document and archival research, structured and semi-structured interviews, content analysis of news media and interpretation of aerial photographs and satellite images. The formal research period for this dissertation encompasses a period of about six months—four and a half months in 2007 and one and a half month in 2008. In addition to these six months, I have gathered information during my trips to Yerevan in the summers of 2005, 2006 and 2009. I was born and raised in Yerevan, and left Armenia for the United States in 1998. I have traveled to Yerevan nearly every summer since I arrived and spent anywhere between one to four months there. These regular trips to visit my family and my city were instrumental in formulating the initial research idea. Having been absent from Yerevan, I noticed sweeping changes upon my summer returns to

Yerevan. There were numerous new buildings and construction sites, new supermarkets along the city streets, first-floor apartments converted into hair salons, clothing boutiques, florist shops and pharmacies, new cafés wedged into urban green parks. More drastic changes followed, such as the conversion of an entire downtown residential neighborhood into a construction zone for what was to become Northern Avenue, a wide thoroughfare of upscale residential, office and retail space. Some of these developments, such as the addition of varied retail and grocery stores, as well as other shopping choices, were welcomed, while others, such as the conversion of a large percentage of public green space into cafes and entertainment complexes—less so. Protesting opinions were widely voiced in Yerevan’s newspapers, and they reached their loudest when hundreds of families were asked or forced to leave their homes to make way for the construction of Northern Avenue in particular. Observing these changes, I wondered: how are these developments altering the cultural landscape of post-Soviet Yerevan, and, given that Yerevan is Armenia’s national capital, what connection do they have to the development of contemporary Armenian national identity?

Having been born and raised in Yerevan gave me immeasurable advantage during my research. I am fluent in Armenian, know the city well, and have a deep understanding of subtle cultural signs and implications. I should note, however, that although access to government offices was relatively easy, getting hold of certain official records was next to impossible (for example, I was denied access to the equivalent of tax assessor’s data and was repeatedly told that records of investment and ownership of buildings on Northern Avenue were unavailable). Operating in a non-transparent system required

resorting to alternate means of information, such as what was widely published in the press and what was widely discussed in society.

In this manuscript I have used many direct quotations, voicing the opinions and concerns of the residents of Yerevan in their own words. But this is also a deeply personal project. Having grown up in this city, I remember quite a bit about the way the city was before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and before investment started pouring in and transforming the spaces which are so important to residents of Yerevan, or *Yerevantsis*. At various points in this dissertation I employ the method of autoethnography¹, using memories and experiences of the years I spent in Yerevan to describe places and events. This self-reflexive approach comes through strongest in my recollection of Yerevan's interior courtyards (*baks* in Armenian), of Yerevan's endangered green spaces, as well as in my description of the years of economic hardship Armenia endured shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Being "of the place" gave me invaluable insights into the meaning and significance of certain actions, statements and conversations. Admittedly, having such a strong connection to the place which I studied also came with certain limitations. Colored by the personal feelings that I experienced as a result of rapid transformations of the city in which I grew up, some of my interview questions were biased and steered conversations with interviewees in certain directions. At times it was difficult to stay objective, and I fully acknowledge the subjectivity that comes through in certain parts of this study. Because I have such intimate knowledge of the place and its history, I also sometimes left things unexplained,

¹ Autoethnography is a research method, the use of which involves the writer acknowledging and including her/his own knowledge and experiences in formal writing (Muncey 2010; Reed-Danahay 1997, 2001).

and this is where the review and comments of my advisors and early readers has been instrumental.

Nevertheless, the bulk of the dissertation rests upon the empirical data collected during in-depth interviews, by reviewing books and unpublished reports, as well as articles, interviews and editorials published in Yerevan's newspapers, by analyzing planning and policy documents released by numerous governmental agencies in Armenia, and by interpreting visual data, such as aerial and satellite images. A description of the types of data I collected and details on how they were obtained follows.

Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were a key component of data collection for this project. In order to identify interviewees I combined purposive sampling with snowball sampling techniques (Fowler 2002; Somekh and Lewin 2005), and interviewed representatives of various non-governmental organizations, community, historic preservation and environmental activists, journalists, architects and urban planners, employees of government planning agencies, as well as several elected and appointed officials in Yerevan's municipal government. I conducted the interviews in either Armenian or Russian (based on the preference of each interviewee), recorded them with a digital voice recorder, and later transcribed and translated them into English. All interviewees, with the exception of elected and appointed public officials, were given pseudonyms, and I used those pseudonyms throughout the text when providing direct quotations and otherwise citing my interviewees. I also used interviews with key officials published in Yerevan's newspapers, especially in cases when interviews with those

officials were not granted to me. In addition to formally conducted interviews and interviews published in Yerevan's newspapers, I used information collected from informal conversations that continued with interviewees after the digital recorder was off, as well as from discussions with friends, family members and other residents of Yerevan, who were eager to share their perceptions and understanding of the rapid transformations of Yerevan's landscape.

Documents and Published Material

I collected various documents pertaining to the changes in Yerevan's landscape throughout the research process, including policy documents, white papers and NGO reports. At the end of each interview I asked each interviewee whether she/he had access to documents, reports, white papers or any other informational material on post-Soviet changes in Yerevan's landscape, and was able to obtain, among others, the Summary Portion of the 2005 Yerevan Master Plan, the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the 2005 Master Plan, reports of studies documenting the disappearance of green space in Yerevan, reports and articles on the status of the preservation of historic and architectural monuments of the city, and so forth. At the National Library of Armenia, I identified works published on Yerevan, its history and urban development before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the National Archives of Armenia I identified a number of documents related to the city's urban planning process, such as, for example, an inventory of buildings on the Soviet list of historically protected structures. I also relied on websites of several governmental agencies in Armenia, in order to obtain copies of laws, decrees and other legal documents. In this endeavor, <http://www.arlis.am>, a

searchable web database that archives all policy statement and governmental decrees of Armenia, was particularly helpful. I also analyzed reports and editorials published in Yerevan's newspapers, as well as reports published on the English-language Armenian news website <http://www.armenianow.com>. In addition to the sources mentioned, I widely utilized data (such as Census, statistical yearbooks and other publications) available from the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia.

GIS Data

Though the domain of GIS analysis has traditionally been quantitative research, qualitative applications of GIS mapping are increasingly being explored (Kwan 2006; Madden and Ross 2009; Pavlovskaya 2004, 2006 and 2009; Sadahiro and Igarashi, 2006). I employ GIS analysis in a qualitative way, and primarily for visualization purposes. According to Pavlovskaya (2009), visualization "is arguably the most powerful and widely used function in GIS" (2009, 22) and "... is no longer a means to represent analytical results but a means of analysis itself" (2009, 23). During my research I obtained two QuickBird (Digital Globe) images of Yerevan, one taken in 2002 and the other in 2004. Relying on these images, as well as GeoEye satellite images available from Google Earth, I used ESRI's ArcGIS software to generate maps and visualize Yerevan's landscape and its rapid and drastic transformations, as well as the evolving landscape(s) of belonging and identity in the city. Since the QuickBird images of 2002 and 2004 were obtained so close in time, they did not show the full range of neighborhood transformations of Yerevan during the past decade. Thus, I decided to supplement these high-resolution images with images from 2000 and 2009 available from Google Earth. I

saved the Google Earth raster images of Yerevan in 2000 and 2009 in .jpeg format, since Google Earth does not allow export of spatially-referenced data. I then imported those images into ArcMap and georeferenced them based on the 2002 QuickBird image, and used a combination of the four images(2000 Google Earth GeoEye, 2002 QuickBird, 2004 QuickBird and 2009 Google Earth Geoeye) to document rapid transformations of Yerevan's landscape. During my 2008 trip I also gathered GPS points of various spots in Yerevan. Maps based on these GPS points and the images mentioned above are located throughout this dissertation.

Visuals

Visual documentation plays an extremely important role in this work. During all my trips to Yerevan I carried a digital camera with me to photograph the spaces and their transformations analyzed within this dissertation. These photographs have become an important part of my analysis, and are presented at the end of chapters. As a result of my annual visits to Yerevan, in some cases I was able to document the transformations of the landscape as they took place, which provided a temporal record of the rapid changes. My photographic record will also serve as a rich personal archive for future research in Yerevan. Unless otherwise noted, the photographs included in this manuscript have been taken by me.

Note on Translation and Transliteration

I have performed all the translations of sources from Armenian and Russian. There are a few terms in Armenian that I use throughout the dissertation, and instead of

translating them into English I use their transliterated version. The first time I use the term or phrase, I familiarize the reader by translating it into English and giving an explanation of its significance. Examples of such terms include *Yerevantsi*, which means “resident of Yerevan”, and *bak*, which means “interior courtyard”.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation consists of six chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter II outlines the theoretical underpinnings of this work, focusing on the connections between the three literatures to which it contributes. By investigating the changing cultural landscape of a post-Soviet city, and the ways in which it reflects and influences the process of construction/development of a post-Soviet Armenian national identity, I connect the literature on landscape, place and identity to the literature on the formation of national identity, at the same time placing the study in the context of Yerevan’s geographic location—in an urban area located in post-Soviet space. By gathering from and contributing to these three literatures, this study adds unique insight to sub-literatures on embodiment of national identity in national capitals of cities, on the efforts of post-Soviet elites at re-invention of national identities, and on cities in post-Soviet space.

Chapter III presents a detailed history of Yerevan, viewed through the lens of Armenian history. In this chapter I trace the history of Yerevan while at the same time tracing the history of the Armenian nation. No story about Armenian national identity can be told without recalling the Armenian Genocide committed by the Young Turk

government, which ruled the remnants of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century. The Armenian Genocide has been described in great detail by various authors (Akcam 2006; Balakian 2003; Bobelian 2009; Hovannisian 1992; Hovannisian 2007 and many others), and I offer only a brief review of these atrocious events because of their intimate connection to contemporary Armenian national identity. In this chapter I also write about the importance of the Armenian diaspora and address the fact that it has been an integral part of Armenian history and has played an indispensable role in the promotion of Armenian nationhood, especially during the pivotal time of national rebirth in the 19th century. Today the diaspora plays an instrumental role in the re-development of independent Armenia by contributing development aid, providing significant capital for the infrastructure of Armenia and cultural landmarks in Yerevan, such as, for example, the Cafesjian Center for the Arts, which opened in Yerevan in late 2009 (Kimmelman 2009), and devoting private funds to investment in real estate.

In Chapters IV and VI contain the bulk of my research findings. In those chapters I draw heavily on the information gathered during my interviews and from documentary and archival sources collected while in Yerevan. Chapter IV describes the spaces that are particularly endangered by the current transformations of Yerevan's landscape, such as, for example, the diminishing urban green parks, the interior courtyards (*baks*) and other public spaces. I describe the spaces that are in danger of disappearance in Yerevan, and the ways in which residents of Yerevan have reacted to these drastic changes. For example, I describe the several protest movements that have been formed in Yerevan by residents struggling to defend their right to public and communal space, as well as green space in the city.

Chapter V deals with symbols and symbolic places in Armenia's capital and their connection to the construction of contemporary Armenian national identity. In it I explain the importance of Mount Ararat as a ubiquitous national symbol, and describe in greater detail three particular places within the landscape of Yerevan—Opera Square, Northern Avenue and Republic Square. The three places under consideration in this chapter exemplify some of the processes that Yerevan is currently undergoing—the overwhelming move from public space to private property, the proliferation of “elite” retail, residential and commercial space, and the trend of making the city more appealing to foreign investors and visitors. I examine the symbolic and material changes that have altered these three places, and, by doing so, also examine narratives of national identity and belonging that are being constructed and inscribed onto the landscape of this post-Soviet national capital. The concluding chapter extends this analysis, offering thoughts on the construction of a renewed narrative of Armenian national identity, and how the search for it is reflected and written upon the landscape of the national capital of Armenia.

Significance of Research

Documenting landscape transformations in a post-Soviet city, this dissertation illustrates many of the trends apparent in post-Soviet and post-socialist space. This research is important for several reasons. First, the current transformations of Yerevan's urban landscape are going to determine the spatial and symbolic arrangement of the city, which will in turn affect the ways in which this urban space is lived and experienced for

years to come. The large-scale conversion of public spaces into private and exclusive spaces—a consequence of the change from a socialist to a post-socialist regime—will have major social consequences for Yerevan’s residents and visitors, at times by excluding many individuals and allowing access only to a few. Second, by analyzing the relationship between urban space and identity in this post-Soviet context, this study addresses the peculiarities of identity construction in the Soviet Union (and especially in Armenia), as well as its development after the drastic regime change. And third, this research is especially timely and salient in view of the current debates about the place of Armenia and Armenians in the world, particularly as a push for normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey has been introduced to the international diplomatic agenda. 95 years after the fateful year of 1915 Armenia and Armenians are being pushed into a collective “forgetting” of the atrocities of the Armenian Genocide and opening the border with Turkey, while the Genocide remains unrecognized by Turkey.² A painful chapter in the history of Armenians, the memory of the Genocide continues to carry incredible symbolic weight. Its collective remembrance remains a uniting force, and, in a way, a referent for national identity (see Chapter V).

The processes described in this dissertation are ongoing. The rapid transformation of Yerevan’s landscape continues, and since the completion of this dissertation research, many more neighborhoods in Yerevan have been slated for reconstruction, with old, one-story private homes giving way to upscale commercial and residential neighborhoods full of sleek steel and “blue glass”(term borrowed from Mariusz Czepczynski, 2008) high rises. The demolition of older neighborhoods and their rebirth as glossy districts home to

² 1915 is considered the year when the Armenian Genocide at the hand of the Young Turk Triumvirate of the Ottoman Empire began (see Chapter III).

diplomatic missions, business centers and shopping malls raise concerns and, oftentimes, resistance from the former residents of those neighborhoods and *Yerevantsis* in general. These new landscapes, and the messages about Armenian national identity that they contain, continue to be questioned, challenged and debated.

II.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In order to examine the changes in the cultural landscape of Yerevan and the development of contemporary Armenian national identity I build on three literatures: on the relationship between landscape and identity formation, on construction of national identity, and on Soviet and post-Soviet cities. Since the overarching concern of this work is to investigate the ways in which landscape (of Yerevan) and (Armenian national) identity co-constitute one another, I will begin by offering a brief review of the literature on landscape, identity and place. I will then discuss the development of Armenian national identity, with special attention to the peculiarities of Soviet Union's nationality policy, which played a significant role in the development and reinforcement of Armenian national identity among Armenia's population during the Soviet years. Throughout this study I focus on the connections between landscape and national identity, and since the contemporary landscape of Yerevan owes much of its existing configuration to the Soviet regime, I will also offer a brief summary of the literature on Soviet and post-Soviet cities, and what specific characteristics set those cities aside from other urban areas in the world.

Landscape, Identity, Place

Human geographers have long been concerned with links between people and (their) place(s). In the 1970's, through the work of humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu

Tuan (1974, 1977) and Edward Relph (1976) and partially in response to the “cool, hard logic of spatial science” (Cresswell 2004, 20), place began to take on more philosophical leanings.³ In his classic work *“Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience,”* (1977) Yi-Fu Tuan described places as humanized spaces, and contended that the “humanization” of space and its metamorphosis into place happened through experience—via humans experiencing the space. Spaces pass through human cognition and the subconscious and, as we experience them, we form deep and profound attachments to them, we memorize them and begin telling stories about them. Tuan and Relph wrote about place as imbued with experience and subjectivity, “an idea, concept and way of being-in-the-world” (Cresswell 2004, 20), articulating a clear distinction between the concept of place and concepts such as area and location, which simply implied geographic locale. In his *“Place: A Short Introduction”* (2004) Cresswell upholds the humanistic conception of place by describing it as “...also a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world” (Cresswell 2004, 11). Place draws attention to the emotional connection to a location—to “place” oneself is to attach oneself to a specific location, to develop feelings toward it and, to use a popular metaphor, to grow roots there.

According to humanistic geographers of the 1970’s, forming attachments to place is one of humans’ most intuitive undertakings, and place is central to a person’s identity. In his philosophical *“Poetics of Space”* (1964) Gaston Bachelard wrote of a person’s

³ Key texts on place include, but are not limited to, Yi-Fu Tuan’s works, *“Place and Placelessness”* by Edward Relph, 1976; *“Space, Place and Gender”* by Doreen Massey, 1994; *“Place, Consumption and Modernity”* by Robert Sack, 1992; *“The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History”* by Dolores Hayden, 1995; *“In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression”* by Tim Cresswell, 1996.

connection to the house in which she/he was born and grew up and of the role that connection plays in the formation of that person's identity. He wrote that our birthplaces are inscribed in us and that they continue to contribute to our identities throughout the rest of our lives. According to Bachelard, "our" places define us, they give us our view of the world, the lens through which to see reality. In the writings of Bachelard as well as humanistic geographers such as Tuan and Relph place, though different from area and location, is fixed, an exact geographic location about which one can have memories and to which one can return.

The connections of our identities to place are often deeply felt, and many ethnic groups define their identity based on attachment to a certain geographic place. National identities, or identities of nations, are often conceived of as intimately connected to the places that those nations occupy or occupied at one time—their "ancestral homeland." In the *"Handbook of Cultural Geography"* (2003) Cosgrove writes:

"Among the most powerful connections between nation and state is the material landscape. While nations are imagined communities, in which no citizen can ever be intimate with every fellow citizen, they are also imagined territories, since no citizen can ever know intimately the land of the whole state. Iconic images of nature and national landscape have played a powerful role in the shaping of modern nation-states as visible expressions of a claimed natural relationship between a people and the territory or nature it occupied" (Cosgrove 2003, 263).

This concept of "imagined territory" is most relevant to Armenians. Although there is currently an Armenian state and a national territory, large portions of the Armenian Highland, which is divided between present-day Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan, are

considered to be the “true” Armenian ancestral homeland. For many Armenians, and especially those in the diaspora, the place that they are connected to is not present-day Armenia, but the Armenian Highland and historic Armenia. The boundaries of historic Armenia are disputed by historians, but in general this term refers to the areas which Armenians had occupied for centuries before the Armenian Genocide (see Chapter III). In a sense, this connection of Armenians to a place that is no longer Armenian implies an identity connected to a place that is no more, or the memory of a place, a “remembered Armenia.” This conceptualization of place—one that transcends the traditional, location-centered characteristic of place and questions its fixity—implies novel ways of conceptualizing the term.

In contemporary geographic literature the steadiness and distinctiveness of place is being questioned, as the world’s population becomes more and more mobile, and displacement, relocation and migration are becoming exceedingly common. Some geographers argue for the continued significance of place as a concrete location for humans to form attachments to, whereas others propose to conceive of place in more non-traditional terms, thinking of place as an abstract notion, as a network or nodes and connections.⁴ Though place is usually conceived of in positive terms, as a concept that helps people connect to locations important to them and with the help of which identities can be formed, place can also be a way to discriminate and to marginalize. In addition, just as there are links between place and identity, there can be links between displacement and identity, and this is especially true of diaspora communities.

Furthermore, a place to which people connect does not have to be a particular locale, an

⁴ For a discussion of how the concept of place is changing and adapting see “*The Cultural Geography Reader*” by Price and Oakes, 2008.

absolute location, but can be a node within a network of global connections. In her 1994 *“Space, Place and Gender”* Doreen Massey writes of place as an abstract notion that can encompass many networks of meaning. Even though place in its traditional sense has been associated with fixity and rootedness, Massey writes that there is no reason why place could not also be associated with fluidity and motion. Traditionally, “places have single, essential identities” (Massey 1994, 152), but Massey asserts that places can also have multiple identities, represent multiple linkages among various places on Earth. She calls for a step away from a traditional sense of place as a locale, an absolute location on Earth’s surface, and instead proposes to think of place as a network of connections, an abstract matrix to which people are attached through their memories and experiences. She calls this concept a “progressive sense of place” (Massey 1994, 151). Thinking of place as a network of connections, as an abstract matrix to which people are attached through their memories and experiences, as Massey did in her 1994 book, is suitable particularly in the Armenian case, and especially for members of the Armenian diaspora.

Another key geographic concept that figures in human connections to location is landscape. The concept of landscape has been a prominent tool for theoretical inquiry in geography for quite some time. This concept has come to encompass not only the visible, tangible features of the land, which include landforms, biota, the built environment and artifacts, but also the abstract layer of meanings and messages that can be imagined and memorized about particular locales. Landscapes in which we live both shape and are shaped by us and our identities, both “physically, by means of cultivation and building, and imaginatively, by projecting our aspirations and fantasies of wealth, refuge, well-being and awe” (Czepczynski 2008, 1). Landscapes contain sets of cultural experiences,

they are created with the help of stories told about them and territorial claims laid to them. Landscape is, in Cresswell's words, a "palimpsest—a stratigraphy of practices and texts" (Cresswell 2003, 278). Landscapes are repositories of meaning, but they are not passive recipients of information—they are also involved in the process of their own constitution. They are media in which power relations are encoded, and also play a role in shaping power relations, affecting social arrangements of a particular time and place.

Championed in the writings on Carl Sauer, throughout its evolution the term "landscape" has experienced various shades of meaning, from mainly visual and material, to highly experiential and abstract. Put simply, "landscape refers to the shape—the material topography—of a piece of land" (Cresswell 2004, 11). This description of landscape as the shape and topography of land refers to the term's highly visual origins. Before Carl Sauer's introduction of the term to cultural geography (and its subsequent development into its more abstract incarnations), landscape's historical meaning referred to a portion of land, which was visible in its entirety from a particular spot, usually away from the landscape itself (Cosgrove 1984). In his seminal work titled "*Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*," (1984) Denis Cosgrove focused his attention on the relationship between landscape and the eye, and extended the definition of landscape as a "way of seeing," a phrase coined by John Berger (Berger 1972). Berger maintained that even though seeing, a function that the human eye carries out, is a semi-involuntary physiological function, the "way of seeing," a function that the human brain carries out, is a voluntary and, moreover, learned activity. Thinking about landscape as a "way of seeing" references its artistic origins, couched in the tradition of Renaissance Italian art, expanded on by Cosgrove in 1984. Landscape has also been conceived of as "scenery,"

especially as the concept was developing in 17th and 18th century Europe (Cosgrove 1984).

Other prominent writers on landscape include J.B. Jackson, James Duncan and Don Mitchell. In his *“Discovering the Vernacular Landscape”* J.B. Jackson defines the concept of landscape as a “portion of land which the eye can comprehend at a glance,” another definition of the concept in highly visual terms (Jackson 1984). In his *“Landscape in Sight: Looking at America”* Jackson emphasizes the importance of ordinary, vernacular landscape, which are created by everyday people going about their business of everyday living (Jackson 1984). Vernacular landscapes are counteracted by official landscapes, which are those that are espoused by the official ruling elite, they are landscapes planned by governments, and can be thought of as “landscapes of power.” James Duncan, one of the pioneers of the “landscape-as-text” approach writes that landscapes can be read like texts, and meanings that are hidden in texts can also be hidden in landscapes. According to him, landscape is a system of communication, a system constructed to encourage some readings rather than others, but one that cannot control all the meanings that might be read from it (Duncan 1990). Denis Cosgrove, while agreeing with Duncan on many points, has a slightly different take. He writes that landscapes carry symbolic meaning, but only for the initiated, that is for those who have somehow learnt or have been taught what meaning(s) those landscapes carry (Cosgrove 1988).

Don Mitchell writes about California’s agricultural landscape as a sort of façade that displays the result of hard work, but at the same time hides the workers and the labor they perform in order to make it beautiful. Thus, in Don Mitchell’s conception, the

landscape serves to hide relations of power by excluding the process and displaying and reifying only the result, presented to the gazer as a visual spectacle to be consumed and enjoyed. He describes landscape as a “quasi-object,” which means that not only is it a reality (buildings, trees, fields), but it is also all the representations of those physical things, “it embodies all the multifarious relations, struggles, arguments, representations and conclusions that went into its making” (Mitchell 1996). A resultant landscape, Mitchell writes, represents the tension and the struggle between its residents and those who have the power to make decisions about this landscape. In the *“Handbook of Cultural Geography”* Mitchell adds that landscape is a social product, it is “a place that has been made and remade, constantly produced and reproduced, toiled in and toiled over” (243) and that it is a “concretization or reification of the social relations that go into its making” (Mitchell 2003). He also points out that even though oftentimes landscape is considered to be in continuous flux, “landscape must also be understood as “structured permanence” (245), because in spite of its forever-changing outlook, some of its effects, such as the violence and oppression evident in California’s agricultural landscape, seem to continue uninterrupted.

In his entry in the *“Handbook of Cultural Geography”* (2003) Tim Cresswell catalogs the history of the term “landscape,” splitting the historical trajectory of the development and taxonomy of the term into three paradigms: 1) Carl Sauer and the Berkeley school, which maintained that landscape was a material artifact, neither natural nor cultural, but both at the same time. Sauer and his successors wrote of cultural landscape as made out of natural landscapes, through the agency of a mysterious and overarching culture. 2) The 1970’s humanistic geographers took the Sauerian and

Berkeley conceptions of the term, reformulated it, and articulated a view of landscape that took the human imagination into account. According to the 1970's humanists, of whom Yi-Fu Tuan was one, landscapes reside within the minds and eyes of the beholders. This is where the term took on its more ethereal, imaginative qualities, where the meaning of the term shifted towards one of representation of the material conditions on the ground, rather than material conditions themselves. 3) In the mid-1980's Cosgrove, Daniels and Olwig, "fired by the ascendancy of Marxism, argued that landscapes were materials productions within which were coded particular ideologies (Cresswell 2003, 270). According to them, landscapes helped reiterate the very power structures that created them. Therefore, according to Cresswell, Carl Sauer and his successors focused on the morphology of landscape, the humanists focused on the experience of landscape, and the "Marxists" focused on the construction of landscape (Cresswell 2003). In this study I use the concept of landscape in its multitude of meanings, but my main focus is on the experience of landscape. I am concerned with how the landscape of Yerevan is constructed, by whom and for whom, but, above all, I am concerned with how those landscapes are experienced and understood.

Some recent critiques of landscape have claimed that it is too abstract of a concept and that, unlike place, has little room for people and their everyday practices and experiences (Cresswell 2003, 278). However, I think of landscape in slightly different terms. In my view, landscape is not only something to be viewed, seen, imagined and remembered about a place, but also the result of human presence in that place. Landscape is what people do in a certain place, be it grandiose construction, clear-cutting of forest, tearing off a leaf from a tree or taking the same route to work every day. This includes

what people build in a place, what they destroy in a place, what they hope about a place, what they envision for a place. In a sense, landscape is what bears evidence of human experience and presence in a place. This intimate connection of people with their landscapes returns materiality to the term, making it a lived and experienced phenomenon.

Landscapes are encoders of power relations, but they are not passive recipients of information; the very same power relations are also shaped by the landscape, and the landscape in turn affects social relations in a particular time and place. In this dissertation I investigate Yerevan's landscape as a text, into which certain symbolic messages about Armenian national identity are woven. Even though those, who inscribe messages about identity have a particular goal for them, just as with texts, they cannot control all the meanings that will be extracted from those inscriptions of identity in the urban landscape. Urban landscapes, particularly those of national capitals, are often used to promote narratives of the nation, to inscribe foundation myths, social memory, and hopes and aspirations for the future of the particular nation. The construction of a national capital's landscape is part and parcel of programs of construction and maintenance of nationhood, aimed at continuously "educating" the masses into national consciousness.

The urban landscape of Yerevan, generated mainly during the Soviet times, was built to reproduce Soviet ideologies and narratives. However, though built to advance Soviet ideologies, Yerevan's landscape was created at the hands of the "nationally aware" leaders of Armenia's Community Party, as Panossian claims in his book on the development of Armenian national identity. Though the general morphology and organization of Yerevan's cityscape resembled that of a Soviet and socialist city, there

were various symbols scattered throughout the capital that accentuated Armenian history, and, in a most literal sense, promoted Armenian national consciousness. This phenomenon was also evident in other spheres besides architecture and urban planning, such as education, art, music and other fine and performing arts (Panossian 2006).

Landscapes and identity are by no means fixed entities, and are constantly changing. As Yerevan's physical and cultural landscapes transform, so do the messages about Armenian national identity that are embodied in these landscapes. In order to put the changing landscape of Yerevan in context with the development of contemporary Armenian national identity, I now turn to the literature on the construction of the contemporary Armenian nation.

Constructing the Contemporary Armenian Nation

Is nationhood an irreducible characteristic of humans, inherited from ancestors, much like genotype and phenotype, or is it the result of a careful project of national construction, whereby certain ethnic and regional characteristics are encouraged and others marginalized? Is nationalism inherent in a population or does it need to be created, nurtured and promoted by a certain group of individuals who have plans for the particular nation? Answers to those questions are varied. Scholars within the primordialist school of thought maintain that "nations are as old as history" (Bagehot 1887 quoted in Hobsbawm 1990, 3) and are a "natural" way to classify humans. Though this approach has largely fallen out of fashion in academic literature, statements such as "nations are as old as history" are oftentimes invoked by nation-builders (Panossian 2006) for the purposes of national construction and promotion of nationhood. The constructivist school of national

identity provides a critique of the primordialist school of national identity, which maintains that national sentiment is no construct and has a real, tangible base inherent in a particular population. The social constructivist school of thought asserts that national identities and nationhood are not inherent in a population and that their creation and perpetuation are part of a careful project undertaken by (political) elites (e.g., Anderson 1983; Brass 1991; Breuilly 1982; Hobsbawm 1990; Hroch 1985; Gellner 1983). This school of thought maintains, in general, that a nation “is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 1983, 6), and that national sentiment is specifically promoted by political elites for nation-building purposes. In his 1983 *Nations and Nationalism* Gellner writes:

“Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent...political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures” (Gellner 1983, 48-49).

According to Hobsbawm (1990) a “nation” is not considered “a primary nor an unchanging social entity” (Hobsbawm 1990, 9), and “it is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the “nation-state”” (Hobsbawm 1990, 10). Scholars within the constructivist school maintain that nations are imagined and/or constructed, but they do not consider national identity and nationhood imaginary. In other words, though social constructivists claim that nationhood and national identity are not inherent in a population, they do not claim that they are strictly hypothetical. On the contrary—nationhood and nationalism have real, tangible consequences, such as

defending and dying for one's country out of feelings of patriotism, engaging in ethnic conflict, war, and, in extreme cases, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

My analysis in this dissertation stems from the social constructivist assumption that national identity and nationhood result from the hard work of picking and choosing, imagining and promoting a specific set of characteristics by a particular group of people for the rest of the population. My study is informed particularly by Ronald Grigor Suny's (1993a) approach to the formation of Armenian national identity. In his "*Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*" he writes:

The Armenians have constituted a *people* all over the world, in hundreds of communities and for many centuries, but for the first time in modern history they constituted a *nationality*, in the sense of a conscious and mobilized ethnic group, by the end of the nineteenth century. Armenians continue to constitute a *nationality* in the twentieth century in various parts of the world where their communities organize for cultural and political preservation and advancement—for example, in Lebanon, France, Argentina and the United States. But the Armenians constitute a *nation* in only one part of the world, in Hayastan⁵ itself, in the various incarnations of the republic of Armenia—independent, Soviet, and independent again (Suny 1993a, 131-132, emphasis in original).

Suny argues that while the Armenians have long existed as a distinct ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious community with a common myth of descent and a shared notion of

⁵ Hayastan is the name by which Armenia is known in Armenian.

history, language and religion⁶ (Suny 1993b), the formation of the modern Armenian national identity and nationhood occurred only in the past 100-150 years (Suny, 1993a). Since Armenian territories seldom enjoyed independence and statehood, it was the Armenian Church that bore the task of preserving and passing down the cultural mores and traditions of the Armenian nation, oftentimes figuring as the sole protector of Armenian nationhood. The Armenian Church considers itself a large part of Armenian ethnic self-identification to this day. However, in the mid- and late 19th century secular Armenian nationalism flourished in the Armenian communities in Russia and Georgia, and the patriotic intelligentsia promoted the idea of Armenian self-determination. These nationalists were instrumental in forming the Democratic Republic of Armenia in 1918, which did not last, and in the early 1920's Armenia incorporated into the Soviet Union as one of the republics.

The role of the centuries-long history of the Armenian people and their ethnic identity in the subsequent formation of modern Armenian national identity cannot be discounted. Razmik Panossian makes this and other convincing arguments in his compelling book titled "*The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*" (Panossian 2006). Though the construction of the contemporary Armenian nation began in the 19th century and continued into the Soviet period, the Armenian ethnic or collective identity had been formed centuries before and "was cemented further with the adoption of Christianity and a unique alphabet in the fourth and fifth centuries [CE]" (Panossian 2006, 33). Panossian points out that nations are thoroughly modern constructs, therefore to speak of nations as old as history is an oxymoron, but at the same

⁶ For more details on the origins of the Armenians see "*The Armenians*" by Anne E. Redgate, "*A Concise History of the Armenian People*" by George Bournoutian and works by Richard G. Hovannisian.

time, in the case of some nations or ethnic communities, such as the Armenians, it would be erroneous to deny their existence and crystallization before the age of “national awakening,” the era that is traditionally considered by social constructivists as the time when nations began to be constructed. Here he carves out a niche for the study of the formation of Armenian national identity, carefully borrowing from both primordialist and constructivist schools of thought, and weaving his analysis of the formation of Armenian national identity through the two schools of thought. He writes:

“Nations as we know and experience them are modern constructs with their legitimacy based on popular sovereignty, but they do have pre-modern roots that affect and define contemporary identity and politics in different ways and degrees” (Panossian 2006, 9).

I agree with both Panossian and Suny in their approaches to the development of Armenian ethnic or collective identity throughout the course of Armenian history, and to the role of the Soviet Union in the construction and fortification of contemporary Armenian national identity in the 20th century. If nothing else, the Armenians’ rich history provides a lot of material from which the “nation constructors” can choose. The importance of history for the construction of contemporary Armenian national identity will be explored further in Chapter III.

The Soviet Union played a significant role in the development of contemporary Armenian identity. The early Soviet state was an avid promoter of (non-separatist) national identity, which was considered an extremely important part of individual and collective Soviet identity. Even though their Marxist leanings are evident in the policy statements of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, in the early days of the Soviet Union they

felt there was a need to combat “Great Russian chauvinism,” in order to make the indigenous populations feel less oppressed by ethnic Russians, and to avoid comparisons of the new Soviet regime to the Russian imperial regime (Zisserman-Brodsky 2003).

During the early years of Soviet power in Armenia, many traditional Armenian mores and institutions (such as the patriarchal family, the subordinate role of women, the authority of religion and the national church) were attacked by Soviet modernization. On the other hand, however, Soviet policy was also directed towards “preserving, indeed nourishing many aspects of Armenian national life...[and] at making Armenia more Armenian” (Suny 1993a, 145). The nourishment of Armenian national identity included educating children in the national language, promoting national culture, and appointing and including ethnic Armenians in the republic’s Communist elite through a process known as “nativization” or *korenizatsiia* in Russian.⁷ Selecting its national symbols, traditions and shared histories, interpreting and reinterpreting them, imagining and reconstructing its ancient past, the transformations of the Soviet years shaped modern Armenian national identity.

This process of construction of Armenian national identity was a vivid example of the paradoxes present within the Soviet nationality policy. The Soviet state, especially during its early years and under Lenin had many programs directed at preservation and in many cases development of national cultures within the USSR. Non-Russian nationalism was promoted as a decolonization measure, and the early Bolsheviks became the

⁷ Also known as “indigenization” this was an early Soviet policy which encouraged members of local nationalities to run for office in their own areas. The policy was aimed at encouraging local participation and membership in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

“vanguard of non-Russian nationalism” (Martin 2003, 76). In “*A State of Nations*” edited by R.G. Suny and Terry Martin, Martin writes:

“Soviet policy systematically promoted the distinctive national identity and national self-consciousness of its non-Russian populations... through the formation of national territories staffed by national elites using their own national languages [and] through the aggressive promotion of symbolic markers of national identity: national folklore, museums, dress, food, costumes, opera, poets, progressive historical events and classic literary works. The long-term goal was that distinctive national identities would co-exist peacefully with an emerging all-union socialist culture that would supersede the pre-existing national cultures” (Martin 2003, 74-75).

In terms of nationality policy, Terry Martin called the Soviet Union an “affirmative action empire,” in that it greatly favored national minorities and established affirmative action programs for non-Russians on a vast scale, of which *korenizatsiia* was one. Martin again:

“The term “affirmative action empire” represents an attempt to capture the paradoxical nature of the multiethnic Soviet state: an extraordinarily invasive, centralized, and violent state formally structured as a federation of sovereign nations; the successor state to the collapsed Russian empire that successfully reconquered most of its former national borderlands but then set out to systematically build and strengthen its non-Russian nations, even where they barely existed” (Martin 2003, 79).

Korenizatsiia, and the policies of promotion of “allowable” forms of national self-expression, such as national folklore, dress, food, architecture, and so forth were established in 1923, but by the early 1930’s Soviet leaders became discontent with some of the unintended consequences of these pluralistic policies and began reversing them in favor of a more Russian-centric set of policies. In the late 1930’s a campaign for cultural-linguistic russification was introduced all around the Soviet Union. Even though the commitment to training and employing indigenous cadres remained in place, language policy was amended and, with the exception of Georgia and Armenia, Russian became the dominant language of the government, the party, large industrial enterprises, and higher educational institutions in the non-Russian republics (Martin 2003). Russian language became a compulsory subject in schools and many languages were transferred to the Cyrillic script (Armenians were able to keep their script, created by Mesrop Mashtots in the 5th century CE). In the 1930’s and 1940’s ethnic stratification assumed greater dimensions as the recording of a person’s nationality or ethnic origin in the passport commenced. The combat was now aimed at fighting bourgeois nationalism rather than “Great Russian chauvinism,” and the Russians’ dominant status was reaffirmed time and again, especially in the famous 1945 speech about the role of the Great Russian people given by Stalin at a reception for Red Army commanders, where he lauded the Russian nation as “the most outstanding of all the nations within the Soviet Union, . . . the guiding force of the Soviet Union among all other peoples of our country” (Zisserman-Brodsky 2003, 25).

Why did this radical socialist state with an internationalist agenda end up promoting national sentiment and sponsoring the creation of nations? Terry Martin writes:

“...by granting the forms of nationhood, the Soviet state could split the above-class national alliance for nationhood. Class divisions would naturally emerge, which would allow the Soviet government to recruit proletarian and peasant support for their socialist agenda” (Martin 2003, 69).

In this dissertation I extend Ronald Grigor Suny’s argument that the development of the contemporary Armenian nation has been greatly assisted by the processes of social and political modernization in Soviet Armenia (Suny 1993a). In other words, I agree with Suny that the fortification and further development of contemporary Armenian national identity was a Soviet project, and add that this process of nation-building and the process of making Yerevan the Armenian capital were parallel processes, enacted and carried out by many of the same people. Therefore, these two—the landscape of Yerevan and contemporary Armenian national identity—share an intimate connection. Armenian national identity as we know it today is the product of a careful project of construction of the Armenian nation undertaken by the Soviets, and inherited from them by independent Armenia, which now has the responsibility of projecting various messages about national identity to the populace.

The current Armenian state is a major source of narratives about Armenian national identity and an avid promoter of it, but, as Panossian (2006) argues, the formation of Armenian national identity has not been centered solely around the Armenian state, but has been a multi-local process. Panossian writes:

“...Armenian national identity continued...along more than one track...One was the Sovietised republic of Armenia, the other the post-Genocide diaspora. Once again identity construction continued in a multilocal manner, through parallel processes” (2006, 4).

Panossian’s argument is especially useful in thinking about the multi-locality of the formation of Armenian national identity and this formulation is especially salient today as various conceptions of Armenianness battle for the right to be “heard” and seen in the transforming landscape of Yerevan, the national capital of Armenia and of all Armenians around the world. National identity is an ongoing development and the further development of contemporary Armenian national identity is in the hands of the Armenian state, as well as the diasporic Armenian communities across the world.

As a national capital, Yerevan bears messages about Armenian national identity and its landscape is inscribed with narratives of national consciousness. Much of the current landscape of Yerevan was generated during the Soviet years, and it is therefore important to understand the principles that drove Soviet urban development. I now turn to describing Soviet and post-Soviet cities, with a particular focus on Yerevan and its development during the Soviet times.

Living in Soviet and post-Soviet cities

In this dissertation I argue that contemporary Armenian national identity and the landscape of Yerevan have been and are parallel and co-constitutive processes. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of an independent Armenian state created new avenues for the development of Yerevan’s landscape and the negotiation of

Armenian national identity within in. Most of Yerevan's landscape as we see it today was constructed during the Soviet Union by Soviet urban planners, architects and builders, which warrants an examination of the form that Soviet cities took. Today's Yerevan was constructed as a Soviet city and the principles of Soviet and socialist urban design, which guided its development, define its cityscape to this day. It is important to remember, however, that Yerevan, though built as a Soviet city, was also constructed as an "Armenian" city, as a city representative of the history of the Armenian nation and coded with symbols of Armenian nationhood. Several important public constructions (the Tzitzernakaberd Memorial of Armenian Genocide Victims, the Matenadaran Museum of Ancient Manuscripts, monuments to various national heroes, such as Vardan Mamikonian, David of Sasun, and others) were built during the Soviet years, and though they might have been Soviet/Socialist in terms of design, their underlying message meant to promote the history of the Armenian nation, its unique ancestry and inheritance in that part of the world (see Chapter III). I will deal with the history of Yerevan and its construction as a Soviet and Armenian capital in Chapter III. I now turn to a brief discussion of development and morphology of cities in the Former Soviet Union.

Urbanization was a sweeping force in the development of the Soviet Union from its very early days. Prior to the demise of the USSR in 1991, Soviet society had become highly urbanized—over 60% of its population lived in urban centers by the late 1970's (Bater 1980, 1). In opposition to their Western counterparts, which sprouted and flourished in response to a host of economic, social and political pressures, Soviet cities were usually developed around planned industrialization. There was an additional dimension to the specific way in which Soviet cities developed—land-use allocation was

in the hands of planners, and the role of free market forces in this process was almost entirely absent. Soviet cities were to advocate as agents for directed social and economic change in newly-settled regions and to promote the ideals of the absence of residential segregation (based on market forces and ability to pay), readily available public transport and limitations to consumerism (retail establishments were dispersed in the city according to a careful plan and were rather sparse, especially as compared to their post-collapse ubiquity). Soviet cities, in concert with the rest of the Soviet system of social security, were to provide “cradle to grave security in return for some restrictions in personal choice of place of residence and freedom to migrate” (Bater 1980, 5). Since all resources in the Soviet Union, including land, were nationalized, citizens did not permanently own their place of residence, thereby substituting collectivism for private ownership. There were, of course, exceptions to rule, such as, for example, the small one-story privately-owned homes in downtown Yerevan that were left in the hands of their owners after Sovietization. Though private property was not recognized by the Soviet regime, and larger private homes were seized by the authorities and divided among several families, in the case of the smaller privately-owned homes the authorities looked the other way and allowed Soviet citizens to “own” property that they inherited from family.

But what are the other characteristics of Soviet socialist cities and how do they differ from cities elsewhere in the world? In their 1979 *The Socialist City*, French and Hamilton argued that there was, in fact, a true socialist city, and that the main defining characteristic of it was that its planning and layout was to strictly follow the tenets of Marxism-Leninism in terms of spatial design, housing and transportation policy, and

distribution of resources. More than twenty years later and post-collapse, Eric Sheppard offered a counter-argument in his 2001 article titled “Socialist Cities?” in which he contends that cities found in the post-socialist sphere were far too diverse and dissimilar (in terms of their historical, cultural and economic development) to be lumped into a unitary category of “socialist,” and after 1991, “post-socialist” (Sheppard 2001). He argued that the locale and history of those cities needed to be taken into consideration, and that too much generalization was defeating to the purpose of devising a separate, “socialist” category of urban agglomerations. In their 2001 contribution to David Turnock’s volume on environment and society in East Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union, Grime and Kovacs argue that cities built after 1945 are the only ones that can be considered “true” socialist cities. These settlements were built on “greenfield sites,” which implied that socialist planners had no previous urban layout to deal with and work around. The primary purpose of the first wave of those “true socialist” cities was industrial production (usually heavy industry), as many of them were built around mining operations. The second wave of “true socialist” cities was built around the atomic industry. The cities already present in the area when socialism arrived Grime and Kovacs called “socialized.” Yerevan was somewhere in the middle on this spectrum between “true socialist” and “socialized” cities. It had been an urban settlement for centuries at the time of Sovietization, but its small size and limited infrastructure demanded expansion and major improvements in order for the city to be “made” into a Soviet republic capital. The initial attempts to “capitalize Yerevan”⁸ were made through the

⁸ The “capitalization of Yerevan” is a phrase used by Taline Ter Minassian in her 2007 book on the construction of Yerevan as a Soviet capital titled *Erevan: La construction d’une capitale à l’époque Soviétique*.”

first Soviet master plan for Yerevan completed in 1924 by architect and urban planner Aleksandr Tamanian. In this master plan Tamanian considered the existing street network, but also made many drastic changes to the landscape of the city, adding many new buildings, extending the street network, establishing the system of public green spaces, and otherwise making the city fit for its title as a Soviet republic capital.

Regardless of whether cities were “true socialist” or “socialized,” there were a few prevailing principles that organized socialist urban space. According to Bater (1980), French and Hamilton (1979), French (1995), Andrusz, Harloe and Szelenyi (1996), some of the main characteristics of a socialist city were:

- emphasis placed on the importance of symbolism in the central city, for example a central square and wide avenues to allow for processional displays of military power;
- a core downtown area that would provide cultural entertainment and higher education opportunities;
- equal access to housing and no segregation in residential quarters;
- rationalized traffic flow and a good public transportation system, with an aim to shorten the journey to work as much as possible;
- limited city size;
- green spaces to allow for communal recreation (individual recreation was to be discouraged), and
- town planning as an integral part of national planning.

Though these principles of Soviet and socialist urban design were used in the construction of Yerevan’s current landscape, the construction of Yerevan’s landscape

also took on nationalist undertones at various times during Armenia's Soviet history. As the Soviet "affirmative action" philosophy towards nationalities played out in Yerevan and the policy of *korenizatsiia* worked to install Armenians in high-ranking party positions, much of what was built in Yerevan (with the exception of residential construction, which followed a design pattern devoid of nationalist expression), particularly in the 1950's and 1960's, took on a distinctive Armenian character. Carefully navigating the system, many high-ranking leaders of the Armenian Communist Party expressed their nationalism in doing all they could in order to promote national consciousness among citizens of Soviet Armenia by dotting Yerevan's landscape with markers of Armenian history and nationhood, such as monuments to national heroes Vardan Mamikonian and David of Sasun, the mythical forefather of the Armenians Haik Nahapet, the Tzitzernakaberd Memorial to the victims of the Armenian Genocide, the Matenadaran Museum of Ancient Manuscripts, and others (Panossian 2006; Ter Minassian 2007).

There are two other concepts that provided a certain spatial organization for many Soviet cities: Milyutin's concept of "linear city," inspired by Ebenezer Howard's "garden city" concept, and Strumilin's concept of *mikrorayon* (micro-region). Milyutin's "linear city" concept proposed a linear orientation of industrial, residential and recreational zones in socialist cities, in which residential and recreational areas would be upwind from industrial areas, as to not subject them to pollution. Strumilin's *mikrorayon* was to be a small, relatively self-contained spatial unit within a socialist city, which would provide some of the most necessary services to its residents—daycare facilities, schools, grocery stores, and so on. In Strumilin's original conception the *mikrorayon* would become a

haven for communal living, as areas of communal dining and recreation would be the central organizers of the space. Neither of the two concepts took off as planned, but “micro-regions” continue to be a major feature of spatial organization in post-socialist cities (in terms of spatial organization and relative containment, they can be likened to suburban towns in the US). Though Milyutin’s concept of “linear city” was quickly discarded, Ebenezer Howard’s assertion that “nature should be brought into the city” became important, and green spaces and urban green parks became a defining feature of socialist cities (Bater 1980; French 1995). Howard’s “garden city” theory found its place in Tamanian’s 1924 master plan for Yerevan, as the city was envisioned with large swaths of green space and public green parks.

The building, organization and allocation of housing in Soviet cities were a fundamental task for city planners. The underlying principles for assigning urban housing were made into law in 1922, and nine square meters of living space per person became the minimum norm in all of the Soviet Union. This base allocation dictated the minimum, but exceptions were made for certain categories of the workforce, such as, for example persons holding high ranking position in the party, the government, the administration of the economy, the arts, etc. Professionals such as architects who often worked at home were also given a higher allocation of living space. According to Bater (1980), from 1918 to 1950 about 350 million square meters of housing were built by the state. The fact that a housing crisis ensued after WWII in spite of the housing construction boom points to the level of inefficiency of Soviet housing policy and scarcity of places to live. The high demand for housing in Soviet cities and their slow construction meant that single-family occupancy apartments were hard to come by. Many apartment houses were designed to

be communal, where each family would be allocated a living room, and was expected to share the kitchen, bathroom and entrance hall with three or four other families. Even though a privileged few had far more than the average, the system of housing was largely inefficient, and attempts to rectify this problem did not come about until after Stalin's death in 1953. With Khrushchev in power, many new housing developments, dubbed *Khrushchevkas* were quickly built and distributed to the rapidly growing urban population of the USSR. *Khrushchevkas* are still a prominent feature of post-Soviet cityscapes, including that of Yerevan. In spite of disrepair, and in some cases outright dilapidation, many of these buildings are still fully inhabited.

Whatever the principles behind their design, post-Soviet cities must deal with the consequences of their Soviet past, and even though every post-Soviet city is different, in general, "ex-Soviet cities today face a special set of circumstances that differ in a number of respects from those occurring in a "capitalist" cities and which vitally affect the appearance of the city, its functioning and the way of life of its citizens" (French 1995, ix). Transformations on multiple levels have ensued since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and urban areas have been affected by these transformations a great deal. After the fall of socialism cities in the Former Soviet Union have faced vast conversions, which have been accelerated by the "explosion of the free market and flow of capital, reintroduction of land rent and privatization, as well as the appearance of new actors, including local governments, the free media, private owners and investors, as well as inhabitants and NGO's" (Czepczynski 2008, 149).

The legacies of socialism and centralized planning have left their prominent marks on the cities of the Former Soviet Union (Andrusz, Harloe and Szelenyi 1996;

Bater 1996; French 1995), and journalistic reports on changes in the Post-Soviet sphere are abundant. However, aside from a few studies on Moscow and St. Petersburg (Bater 1996, 2001, and 2006; Golubchikov and Badyina 2006; Pavlovskaya 2001 and 2004; Vendina 1997 and 2002), studies of changing cityscapes and meanings produced by post-Soviet transformations in specific cities are still relatively scarce in academic literature (cf. Bell 1999; Grigor 2007; Stronski 2003; Ter Minassian 2007). This dissertation aims to fill part of this gap by illuminating the ways in which Armenian identity was forged in the urban space of Soviet Yerevan, while it was being built as the new national capital of Soviet Armenia, and by documenting the manners in which Armenians national identity is changing in concert with the contemporary changes in Yerevan's cityscape.

The contemporary landscape of Yerevan, as that of a national capital, is imbued with messages about Armenian national identity. The connections between Yerevan's landscape and contemporary Armenian national identity are particularly strong, because the two were constructed during the same time period and by many of the same people. As capital of an independent Armenian state, Yerevan is also the national capital for some 6 million Armenians who live in diasporic communities outside of Armenia. During the Soviet times Yerevan, though constructed according to directives of central control, was constructed by Soviet Armenian leaders with specific goals of "ethnicizing" its landscape, as well as the general population (by creating job opportunities and moving Armenians from the countryside into the capital). Currently, the landscape of Yerevan is being constructed by the political elites, with responses and reactions from the general population, and with considerable input from the Armenian diaspora, both financial and intellectual. There is a lot of investment into the landscape and

infrastructure of Yerevan from the Armenian diaspora, and this creates an interesting dynamic. A post-Soviet city, dotted with buildings with high nationalist content and symbolism, is being transformed by forces of neo-liberalism and shaped not only by the Armenia's political elites and the public, but also diasporic Armenians. I describe and analyze this mosaic landscape of Yerevan in the chapters that follow.

III.

YEREVAN AND ARMENIAN HISTORY

Landscapes of national capitals bear inscriptions of foundation myths and public memory (Cosgrove 2003) and convey important messages about national identity and belonging. Yerevan is the national capital of Armenia, and thus is an essential symbol in the Armenian national iconography (Panossian 2006; Ter Minassian 2007). Although the current landscape of the city was generated mainly during the Soviet period and according to Soviet principles of urban design, many of its notable constructions bear the stamp of “Armenianness” and are imbued with messages about Armenian nationhood. A case in point is the Tzitzernakaberd Memorial (see Figure 3.1), which was built between 1965 and 1967 to commemorate the atrocities of the Armenian Genocide. A large-scale memorial with such explicit ethnic history would not have been approved had it not been for the nationalist efforts of Communist leaders in Armenia. The decision to allow the construction of this memorial was also largely influenced by the 24-hour protest that was staged in Yerevan during the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in 1965. Another example is the Matenadaran Museum of Ancient Manuscripts (see Figure 3.2), which was built in 1959 to house a collection of ancient manuscripts, many of them Armenian, and previously held by the Armenian Church. Throughout Soviet history, and especially during the post-Stalin “thaw,” Armenian elites, carefully navigating the central-command bureaucracy and circumventing anti-nationalist directives from the Communist Party, constructed Yerevan as a most significant

representation of Armenianness (Panossian 2006; Ter Minassian 2007). This work of imbuing the landscape of the national capital with narratives of national identity and nationhood continues today, performed by contemporary Armenian elites.

Though an ancient urban settlement, Yerevan is relatively new in its role as Armenia's national capital. It first took this title when Armenia gained independence as the Democratic Republic of Armenia in May of 1918 (Hovannisian 1997). Independence did not last long, and Armenia was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920. Yerevan remained the capital of Soviet Armenia, and work began to transform the town of 30,000 into at once a national capital and the capital of a Soviet republic. When Armenia gained independence in 1991, Yerevan was the principal metropolitan center, and was the obvious choice for a national capital. Located in the northeastern portion of the Ararat plain, Yerevan is the largest urban center in Armenia.⁹ Yerevan's current outline occupies a territory of about 227 square kilometers, with an approximate 16 kilometer diameter from North to South, and a 13.5 kilometer diameter from East to West (Danielyan et al. 2007). According to the 2001 population census, Yerevan has a population of 1.1 million residents, which comprises 1/3 of Armenia's entire population (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2001), but the city's population

⁹ Yerevan is located just 23 kilometers from the border between Armenia and Turkey, at approximately 40°18' N and 44° 30'E, in the northeastern portion of the Ararat plain (also known as the Ararat Valley), which is part of the Armenian Highland. The Armenian Highland, also known as the Armenian Upland or the Armenian Plateau, is a plateau which lies between the Lesser Caucasus Mountains and the Taurus Mountains in Transcaucasia. Though altitudes in Yerevan range between 800 and 1300 meters above sea level, most of the city resides within the average altitude of about 900 meters above sea level. Two rivers run through the city: Hrazdan (also known as Zangu) and its tributary Getar. Hrazdan, which is a tributary of the larger Arax River, splits the city with a picturesque canyon, and the Hrazdan gorge serves as a recreational area for the city's residents. The Arax River, also known as Aras or Araxes, is one of the largest rivers in the Caucasus, and a section of it forms part of the boundary between Armenia and Turkey, as well as the boundary between Armenia and Iran. Yerevan is surrounded by uplands to the North, East and West, and to the South looks onto Mount Ararat.

is estimated to have grown to 1.25 million since the official census of 2001 (Yerevan Municipality 2009a). Yerevan is Armenia's primary administrative, economic and cultural center—a true primate city. The Office of the President of Armenia, Armenia's National Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Armenia and its Ministries operate in Yerevan. The Central Bank of Armenia and most commercial banks and exchanges are headquartered in Yerevan. Yerevan also houses all diplomatic missions to Armenia, as well as the head offices of international organizations that work in Armenia (Yerevan Municipality 2009a). The Municipality of Yerevan, overseen by the city's Mayor, governs the city¹⁰. The city is further divided into 12 “neighborhood communities,”¹¹ each of which is led by an elected “Community Head” (Yerevan Municipality 2009a).

In this chapter I outline the history of Yerevan, familiarizing the reader with the milieu. I focus on the 19th and 20th centuries in particular, describing the historical events that have created the socio-political context in which my research took place. As I retell

¹⁰ The city's political and administrative structure has undergone considerable changes in recent years. Armenia's 1995 Constitution established the status of Yerevan as that of an administrative region, or *marz* in Armenian. *Marz* leaders are headed by officials who are appointed by the President at the recommendation of the Prime Minister, and the President reserves the right to remove *marz* leaders at any point. Yerevan was given *marz* status by the 1995 Constitution, which meant that its mayor would be appointed by the President, who would be free to remove him/her at any point. Under this arrangement, the city was governed by the mayor, four deputy mayors, the Yerevan Council, and the heads of the administrative districts. The status of Yerevan as a *marz* has been repealed by amendments to the Constitution in 2005, which instead gave it a status of a “community” or *hamaynq* in Armenian (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia 2010). In addition to classifying Yerevan as a “community”, these Constitutional amendments implied changes in the manner in which Yerevan's mayor was to be chosen. The new Constitution allows for laws to be passed which prescribe for the Mayor of Yerevan to be chosen in direct or indirect elections. Therefore, instead of being appointed by the President at the recommendation of the Prime Minister, the post of mayor is now an elected position (NARA 2010; Government of the Republic of Armenia 2010).

¹¹ Also known as *hamaynqner* in Armenian. They are: Adjapnyak, Avan, Arabkir, Davtashen, Erebuni, Kentron, Malatia-Sebastia, Nor-Nork, Nork-Marash, Nubarashen, Shengavit, Kanaker-Zeytun. Kentron, which includes downtown and the surrounding areas, has the largest population of 179,000 and a territory of 14.2 square kilometers. Malatia-Sebastia has the largest area—25.8 square kilometers, and a population of 150,000 (Yerevan Municipality 2009a).

pertinent historical facts about the city, I also bring in vignettes about important events in the history of Armenians (such as the Armenian Genocide of 1915) as they relate to the construction and imagining of Yerevan as a national capital and the development of Armenian national identity and nationhood. Throughout the chapter I examine the ways in which Yerevan has been imagined and constituted as representing Armenian identity, and how its landscape has been portrayed as an embodiment of Armenian nationhood. But first, I turn to a brief account of the Armenian Genocide and of the Armenian diaspora, both pre- and post-Genocide.

The Armenian Genocide and the Armenian diaspora

The Armenian genocide plays a central role in 20th century Armenian history. This section gives a brief overview of the Armenian Genocide, with special attention to its symbolic importance and imagery as they apply to the construction of Yerevan as an Armenian national capital. Attention to the Armenian diaspora is important for this dissertation as well, as there are about nine million Armenians in the world, and only three million, or 1/3, live in Armenia proper. Especially after independence, the diaspora has played an important role in Armenian affairs, as many wealthy diasporic Armenians have invested funds into the developing economy of Armenia, and its real estate sector in particular.

Armenians have had diaspora communities for over 1,700 years (Panossian 2006, Pattie 2000). At times when the Armenian homeland was ravaged by wars, famines and the yoke of conquering powers, the diasporic communities (as well as the Armenian

Church) were among those who safeguarded the Armenian language, culture and ethnic identity. Numerous works on the history of Armenian diasporic communities are available (Panossian 2006; Pattie 1997 and 2000; Shirinian 1990, 1992 and 1999; Tololyan 2002 and others), and I will not treat the subject in detail here. Suffice it to say that the Armenian diaspora has played a large role in the construction and preservation of Armenian ethno-cultural identity during periods of Armenian statelessness, as well as during periods of Armenian statehood. The Armenian diaspora is by no means homogeneous and a distinction between the pre-Genocide diaspora and the post-Genocide diaspora is usually made. The pre-Genocide diaspora extended to most of Eurasia, with communities scattered throughout Europe, the Middle East, and as far as India. Panossian (2006) writes of the important role that several pre-Genocide diasporic communities played in the promotion of Armenian cultural and ethnic identity, and, in the mid- to late 19th century, in the “nationalization” of Armenian ethnic identity and the eventual creation of Armenian nationalism. He describes how Armenian merchant communities, which emerged in the 14th-16th centuries, among other places, in Europe, India, Constantinople, New Julfa (Persia), Tiflis (Georgia) became “centres of [Armenian] culture and learning themselves, or financed individuals and organizations elsewhere” (Panossian 2006, 87). Those merchant communities became “the intellectual ‘centre’ of the [Armenian nation] until the second half of the nineteenth century when a significant intellectual movement emerged in Armenia itself, complementing the efforts of the diaspora” (Panossian 2006, 76). Panossian then describes the paramount role that the [Armenian] Mkhitarist Catholic Brotherhood based in Venice and their intellectual work played in the later “national awakening” of Armenians by systematically

researching Armenian history, literature, geography and language and publishing their works. According to Panossian:

“Mkhitarists did not create or invent the Armenian nation, but retrieved it—and in the process helped to reshape it for the modern period. By reprinting the generally inaccessible works of the early medieval Armenian historians, and writing their own histories based on them, these Catholic monks produced works which did nothing less than *lay the foundation for the emergence of secular Armenian nationalism*” (Panossian 2006, 107, emphasis in original).

Panossian goes on to write how the pre-Genocide Armenian diaspora, namely the Armenian merchant communities in Europe, Asia and the Middle East and the Mkhitarist Catholic Brotherhood paved the way for the “national awakening” of Armenian nationalists in the 2nd part of the 19th century and their struggle for liberation of Armenian lands (see Chapter II).

Even though several diasporic Armenian communities had been established prior to the Armenian Genocide of 1915, as a result of it the Armenian diaspora expanded considerably. The Armenian Genocide was an abrupt and painful event, a rupture in the lives of all, but mainly Western Armenians. Those who survived were forced to flee and establish residence in various foreign countries. The history, memory and pain of the Armenian Genocide is an incredibly important reference point for all Armenians, but especially for those who were uprooted and moved elsewhere to go on with their lives, forming the post-Genocide Armenian diaspora. I will explore the connection of the post-Genocide diaspora to the cultural landscape of Yerevan in later chapters. I now return to the story of the Armenian Genocide.

The Armenian people have occupied the Armenian Highland (sometimes referred to as Anatolian Highlands or Eastern Anatolia) for centuries. Armenian history has been retold elsewhere (Balakian 2003; Hovannisian 1987, 1992 and 2007; Redgate 1998; Suny 1993a and 1993b, and many others). For the purposes of this dissertation I will begin at the end of the 19th century, when the Armenians, stateless since 1375¹², lived as subjects of the Ottoman and Russian Empires in the Western and Eastern Armenian provinces, respectively (Suny 1993a). Armenians of the Western provinces (also referred to as Western Armenians or Ottoman Armenians), located on Ottoman territory, lived as an ethnic and religious (Christian) minority, and though many of them were successful businessmen, were considered an underclass and often discriminated against. Meanwhile, in the middle and end of the 19th century the age of “national awakening” swept across most of Europe, and these sentiments did not circumvent the Armenians nationalists, especially those who were studying in Europe in Russia, and were influenced by this “age of nationalization.” Panossian describes this “national awakening” as the time that the Armenian ethnic community gained “national consciousness” and began to struggle for liberation and for an independent Armenian state. The “national awakening” (Suny 1993a, 102) of the 19th century and the ties of Western Armenians to the relatively large Armenian diaspora in Europe and Russia contributed to the push for reform “of the more repressive Ottoman institutions, like tax farming, guarantees of equality under the law, and perhaps autonomy under a Christian governor for the Anatolian provinces” (Suny 1993a, 102). In the 1880’s and 1890’s anti-Armenian sentiment had escalated, and several Armenian revolutionary factions formed out of the need for self-defense. The

¹² The last Armenian state prior to short-lived pre-Soviet independence in 1918 was the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, which was located in Western Armenia, 1080 to 1375 AD (Balakian 2003).

Hnchaks emerged first as the most prominent among Armenian revolutionary groups, and their resistance movement was met with the atrocious massacres of 300,000 Armenians under the Sultan Abdul Hamid II at the hands of the officially sanctioned Kurdish military, or the Hamidiye, between 1894 and 1896 (Hovannisian 2004; Suny 1993a).

Armenians and other minorities in the Ottoman Empire were glad to see regime change and welcomed the Young Turks' (also known as the Committee of Union and Progress, CUP) ascent to power in 1908. Dashnaktsutyun (also known as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF), the leading Armenian political party of the early 1900's was loosely allied with the Young Turks, in hopes that the revolutionaries' more liberal policies would benefit the Armenian minority. However, as the Young Turk government suffered a series of political and military defeats, they shifted towards a stricter nationalist ideology. As a result of the 1913 coup d'etat the Ottoman Empire would be ruled by the Young Turk triumvirate of Enver Pasha, Jemal Pasha and Talaat Pasha. The following five years of their rule (1913-1918) were fateful for all Armenians (Hovannisian 2004; Suny 1993a), as it was during those years that tremendous acts of violence were inflicted upon the Armenians of the Western Provinces.

The Dashnaktsutyun party maintained its alliance with the Turkish ruling party, and when Turkey entered the First World War, many Western Armenian soldiers enlisted in the Ottoman army. All the same, social and political hostilities towards Armenians persisted. Fighting broke out in the mountainous plateau between Turkey and Russia, in the Armenians' ancestral homeland, and they were in constant danger, living as a minority amongst hostile Turks and Kurds. In 1914 the Young Turks and Enver Pasha (the Minister of War) in particular were eager to fight the Russians on the Caucasian

front. They were hugely successful at first. However, in early 1915 the Russians, accompanied by volunteer Armenian units from the Eastern Armenian provinces defeated the Turkish army, killing and imprisoning nearly 75% of Enver's army (Suny 1993a, 109). Armenians from the rest of the Ottoman Empire sought refuge by fleeing to the areas newly occupied by the Russians, which ignited even more distrust against them and other Christian minorities. Upon his return to Istanbul Enver began to blame his defeat on the Armenian populations of Eastern Anatolia, and, with military necessity as an excuse, the triumvirate decided to "demobilize the Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army and to deport Armenians from Eastern Anatolia" (Suny 1993a, 109). On April 24 of 1915 more than 500 Armenian intellectuals and political leaders who lived in Istanbul were arrested and later killed, inserting this date into history as the day on which the Armenians Genocide commenced (Panossian 2006). In his *"Looking Towards Ararat: Armenia in Modern History"* Ronald Grigor Suny described those events in the following words:

"What might have been rationalized as a military necessity, given the imperial ambitions and distorted perceptions of the Ottoman leaders, quickly became a massive attack on their Armenians subjects, a systematic program of murder and pillage. An act of panic and vengeance metamorphosed monstrously into an opportunity to rid Anatolia once and for all of the one people (the Armenians) that stood in the way of the Young Turks' plans for a Pan-Turanian empire"(Suny 1993a,109-110).

After what Panossian (2006) calls the "decapitation of the nation and...the opening act of the Genocide" (Panossian 2006, 237) on April 24 of 1915, the following two years saw

the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Armenians from their ancestral homelands to the Syrian Desert and Mesopotamian valley. Many perished before, during or after the deportations and the massacres that preceded and accompanied them.

Recalling and honoring the somber memory of 1915, Armenians commemorate the Genocide every April 24. Ronald Suny again:

“Estimates of the Armenians killed in the deportations and massacres of 1915-1916 range from a few hundred thousand to 1.5 million. Whatever the actual number of those killed, the result was the physical annihilation of Armenians in the greater part of historic Armenia, the final breaking of a continuous inhabitation of that region by people who called themselves Armenian” (Suny 1993a, 114).

The Armenians who did not perish in the desert fled to the Eastern Armenian provinces as refugees. In the following years, amongst turmoil and revolution in Russia and the final disintegration of the Ottoman Empire Western Armenian provinces kept changing hands between the two. A return of Armenian lands to Armenians was promised several times, but the 1919 Treaty of Alexandropol established the current borders of Armenia (29,800 square kilometers), leaving all Western Armenian provinces under Turkey’s control (Redgate 1998; Suny 1993a). Some survivors of the Genocide settled in soon to be Soviet Armenia, but many left that part of the world and joined the Armenian diaspora, particularly in Western Europe and the United States. Although Armenians had a relatively large diaspora prior to the Genocide, in its wake the diaspora grew exponentially, establishing large communities in many countries around the world.

After the Genocide Mount Ararat, an important Armenian nationalist symbol, located in the Western Armenian Province of Erzerum, was no longer inside Armenian territorial boundaries. The significance of Mount Ararat as an Armenian symbol (see Chapter V) is tied inextricably to this history of bloodshed. It is because of these excruciating events that Mount Ararat, which stands on the edges of Western Armenia, bears such heavy symbolism for Armenian national identity. It represents the lost lives and lost lands of the 1.5 million Genocide victims, and symbolizes the hope of their surviving heirs of a return to those lands.

The contemporary Armenian diaspora is far from being a homogeneous community, with numerous fractures along political, linguistic and cultural lines. The diaspora got even larger after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when residents of post-Soviet Armenia escaped the uncertainty of regime change, the energy crisis, the economic blockade and the Nagorno-Karabakh War by joining Armenian communities in Russia, Europe and North America (primarily).¹³ This influx of new immigrants has contributed to the fragmentation of Armenian diasporic communities. Despite their internal distinctions, Armenian diasporic communities continue to promote Armenian culture and identity in the world, and many have invested large sums into the transforming landscape of post-Soviet Yerevan. The role of the Armenian diaspora in the contemporary construction of Armenian national identity is extremely important. The diaspora plays a considerable role in promoting and safeguarding Armenian national

¹³ Nagorno-Karabakh War refers to the armed conflict between Armenia and neighboring Azerbaijan over the ethnically Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. The war was fought from 1991 to 1994. A ceasefire was announced in 1994, and Nagorno-Karabakh and some surrounding regions remain under Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian military control. Though Nagorno-Karabakh has declared independence, its sovereignty has not been recognized. It does, however, have the support of Armenia, and Azerbaijan considers Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian-occupied territory. Peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan continue. Nagorno-Karabakh is also referred to as Gharabagh, Mountainous Gharabagh, or Artsakh.

identity outside of Armenia, wherever those communities might live. In the years since the declaration of Armenia's independence, Yerevan has become the national capital of all Armenians worldwide, and the diaspora has been playing a rather active role in the transformations of Yerevan's post-Soviet landscape. The section that follows reviews Armenian history, with a specific focus on Yerevan.

Yerevan in Armenian History

Yerevan from Antiquity to the 19th Century

The history of Yerevan began nearly 3000 years ago. At this time the Urartians, who are considered one of the ancestors of the Armenian nation, were in control of a large part of the Anatolian highlands. Urartu, also known as Bianili, was a powerful kingdom formed by the dominant tribes living in the Anatolian highlands since the 13th century BCE. Originally a loose confederation, Urartu flourished as a unified state from the 9th until the 6th century BCE, with the ancient city of Van¹⁴ as its capital (Lang 1981). Fertile lands surrounded the Urartian capital, and the Urartians' skillful construction of numerous aqueducts, some of which have remained in use until modern times, enhanced the lands' fertility. The prosperity afforded by plentiful harvests allowed Urartians to go on to conquer much of Transcaucasia and a part of present-day Iran, and to build many citadels on the territory of modern Armenia. One of these citadels is Teishebaini, which was built by Urartian king Rusa II in the first half of the 7th century CE (Hakobyan 1977). The ruins of Teishebaini, also known as Karmir Blur, are located in southwest Yerevan.

¹⁴ Van, which was also known as Tushpa, was built on the eastern shore of a large lake by the same name, located in present-day Turkey.

The site is marked by a museum, which displays artifacts found during years of archaeological excavations. But Yerevan's origins are traced to the construction of another Urartian citadel in 782 BCE. It was then that Urartian king Argishti I established the Erebuni fortress (also known as Arin-Berd) in the foothills of the Ararat valley. This date, 782 BCE, is considered to be the birth date of the city of Yerevan, and was marked by a cuneiform tablet, which extolled Argishti's power and proclaimed that the city of Erebuni was "built to declare the might of the land of Biainili and hold her enemies in awe" (Redgate 1998; Russell 1997). The citadel of Erebuni contained a royal palace and a temple with a view over a mountainous expanse. Only the ruins of Erebuni's royal palace overlook the city of Yerevan today¹⁵ (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4).

Urartu's cultural influence was far-reaching, and Urartian artifacts have been found as far away as Greece and Italy. However, with its zenith in the middle of the 8th century BCE, Urartu was persistently weakened by various rival tribes and fell around 585 BCE (Chahin 2001; Lang 1981; Redgate 1998). The conquerors of Urartu included the Scythians, the Assyrians, the Medes and the Hayasa. The Hayasa originated in Central Anatolia, close to the old Hittite state. Historians cite the similarity between the tribe's name and the name that contemporary Armenians have for their homeland—"Hayastan," and maintain that it was the Hayasa who mixed with the Urartians upon their arrival in eastern Anatolia, thereby forging the proto-Armenian ethnic collective. The

¹⁵ Some historians consider the name Yerevan to be a disambiguation of the name Erebuni. However, this is not a singular view and the origins and etymology of the city's name are still disputed. One version claims that it has to do with the Biblical story of Noah and the Ark. According to the bible, Noah landed on the slopes of Mount Ararat after the Great Flood, and, looking northward toward the Ararat plain when dry land finally appeared, exclaimed "*Yerevats!*", which means "it has appeared!" in Armenian. Other Armenian historians maintain that the name Yerevan stems from the name Yervand, which was the first name of the last king of the Yervanduni Armenian dynasty, who reigned around the 3rd century BCE. No version is agreed upon by all experts, and debates about the origins of the name Yerevan continue (Hakobyan 1977; Shahaziz 2003).

first recorded reference to Armenia (Armina) dates back to 520 BCE and is inscribed by the Persian king Darius I on the Behistun rock, which recounts his victories over conquered peoples, the Armenians among them (Panossian 2006; Suny 1993a). Ties of contemporary Armenians to Urartian origins are important not only because of the establishment of the Erebuni fortress, which is considered the birth of the city of Yerevan, but also because the name Urartu is believed to be etymologically linked to that of Ararat. Mount Ararat, though not within Armenia's geographic boundaries, continues to serve as a powerful symbol of national identification and belonging for Armenians (see Chapter V).

Although no written sources documenting the history of Erebuni after the fall of Urartu have been found, archaeological evidence abounds. Workers on various constructions sites in Yerevan have come across archaeological findings on several occasions (Hakobyan 1977). Ceramic tableware and coins dated more than 2000 years old have been found on construction sites throughout the city, many of them by accident and not during archaeological excavations. This shows that even after the fall of Urartu Erebuni continued to be an important agglomeration during the final BCE centuries and the first few centuries of the Common Era (Hakobyan 1977; Shahaziz et al. 2003).¹⁶

The first written mention of Yerevan appeared in the VII century CE, in a collection of written documents titled "*Book of Letters*."¹⁷ Yerevan is also mentioned in

¹⁶ For more information on the Urartian kingdom see Boris B. Piotrovsky, *Urartu* (1967) and *The Ancient Civilization of Urartu* (1969), and Paul E. Zimansky, *Ecology and Empire—The Structure of the Urartian State* (1985).

¹⁷ "*The Book of Letters*" was a collection of documents which detailed the gathering of religious officials in Dvin, called by the Armenian Catholicos Abraam in the early VII century. One of the attendees was David from Yerevan (Hakobyan 1977).

historian Sebeos's "*History*," which was compiled in the VII century CE. In it Sebeos writes about the Arab conquest of the Armenian highlands and about a battle that took place in the vicinity of Yerevan. A stone engraving in the Holy Apostles Church on the Sevan Peninsula is the first mention of Yerevan on Armenia's current territory. In this engraving, dated to 874 CE, there is mention of Princess Mariam Syunetsi presenting an orchard in Yerevan to this church (Hakobyan 1977).

Aside from Urartian and Achaemenid artifacts, the oldest historical heritage relic on the territory of Yerevan was the Church of St. Peter and Paul. Built in the 5th and 6th centuries, which had multi-color and multi-layered frescoes on the walls, with the earliest painted on in the 12th century.¹⁸ In the period between 9th and 13th centuries Yerevan became a relatively large regional trading center, due to its strategic location on caravan routes. During the following centuries Yerevan endured Arab, Persian, Ottoman, Mongol and other foreign domination off and on.¹⁹ In the 1580's it was invaded by the Turks, in the early 1600's by the Persians, and since the mid-1700's was part of the Erivan *khanate* (a Muslim-controlled principality) under the Persian Empire. It was captured by the Russian imperial forces in 1827, during the Second Persian-Russian War (Hakobyan

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the church was destroyed in the 1930's, when the movie theater "Moscow" was being built in this location as part of the urban renewal project initiated by the Soviets (Hakobyan 1977). Recently this part of the city has been the center of debate. The movie theater "Moscow" has two halls, a covered building and an outside performance space known as "summer hall". It is the summer hall that was built where the St. Peter and Paul Church stood, and since the summer hall has in recent years been dilapidated quite a bit, Yerevan's Municipality has proposed to demolish it and to construct the church anew. This proposal has met considerable resistance, especially from young community activists, who have protested and collected signatures in order to make sure that the summer hall does not get razed, as it is part of Yerevan's historic and architectural heritage remaining from the Soviet times.

¹⁹ Much happened in Armenian lands during those centuries. However, since this dissertation deals with Yerevan, the general history of Armenia will only be mentioned when events in Yerevan must be put in context. For extensive accounts of Armenian history see works by Richard G. Hovannisian, George Bournoutian, David Marshall Lang, Elizabeth Redgate and others.

1977). The city was officially ceded to the Russians in 1828 (Bournoutian 1996; Hakobyan 1977). When Imperial Russia established its influence in Yerevan, it was a town of low mud-brick houses and gardens fenced off with clay walls. Yerevan's population remained at less than 20,000, and more than half of it was Muslim. Traces of this part of Yerevan's history can be seen in capital's historic Kond neighborhood.²⁰ Imperial Russia instituted many changes in the city, including a reconstruction of city's road and water networks, built new clinics and schools (Hakobyan 1977).

Following the October Revolution of 1917, imperial rule in Russia ended. Leaders of Armenia, neighboring Georgia and what was to become Azerbaijan joined forces and formed the Transcaucasian Federative Republic (or, Transcaucasian Federation) in April of 1918. However, the federation was short-lived. On May 26 of 1918 Georgia decided to withdraw from the Transcaucasian Federation and declared independence. Azerbaijan followed suit on May 27 of 1918, and, since the Transcaucasian Federation had vanished, Armenia declared itself an independent republic²¹ on May 28, 1918, making Yerevan its capital.²² Nevertheless, the attempts of the three small republics to organize and form strong independent states failed, and by the end of 1922 the entire region was incorporated into the USSR as three separate republics: the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian Soviet Socialist Republics.

²⁰ Kond is situated on a small hill, and had always been a predominantly Armenian neighborhood throughout Yerevan's history. Showing "traces of the city's oriental past" (Gasparyan 2007), Kond was declared a historical preservation neighborhood during Soviet times. Charming, yet quite dilapidated, this neighborhood is one of those targeted by the vigorous urban redevelopment currently afoot in Yerevan.

²¹ This independent republic is referred to as the First Armenian Republic.

²² For a detailed account of the circumstances that led to the declaration of independence of the Republic of Armenia in 1918 see Richard G. Hovannisian's four-volume compilation titled "*The Republic of Armenia*", published between the years of 1971 and 1996.

Historians maintain that the independent Armenian state—the First Armenian Republic—formed in 1918, had failed in large part because Armenian nationalists were reluctant to organize around the small provincial town of 30,000 that Yerevan was then (Hovannisian 1996, 261). In addition, less than half of the 30,000 residents of Yerevan were ethnically Armenian. On the other hand, Tbilisi in Georgia and Baku in Azerbaijan were home to sizeable Armenian elites and middle-class populations, so the selection of Yerevan as the capital of the First Republic was curious. Some historians explain this decision by maintaining that the founders of the First Armenian Republic had no choice but to unite around Yerevan, as it was the only relatively safe and suitable urban area. By the 1920's 1,500,000 Armenians who lived in Eastern Anatolia had vanished at the hands of the Young Turk triumvirate, which came to power in 1913, with the rest of Turkey's Armenian population fleeing as refugees (Lang 1981). Transcaucasian Armenia, with Yerevan in its bounds, was the only place in this part of the world where Armenians felt protected by Russia and enjoyed a small degree of safety.

Once Armenia was absorbed into the Soviet Union, the choice of Yerevan as its capital appeared perfect for the Soviets because the Soviets espoused a certain type of urban organization and morphology (see Chapter II), and it was easiest to achieve those goals starting with a clean slate. With a small population and limited infrastructure, Yerevan, much more so than any other historic capital of Armenia, appeared fit for the task. Yerevan had an established network of streets in what is now Yerevan's downtown area, but the buildings were few and the population small, which made it relatively easy to move people around once plans for a new street network were in motion. The

following section describes the development of Yerevan from a small provincial town into a regional metropolis during the years of Soviet power.

The Making of a Soviet Capital

The construction of Yerevan as a Soviet city and capital is thoroughly described in Taline Ter Minassian's 2007 book titled "*Erevan: La construction d'une capitale a l'epoque Sovietique*" ("*Yerevan: The construction of a capital in the Soviet era*") (Ter Minassian 2007). This section summarizes some of the key developments in Yerevan during the Soviet years, keeping in mind the overall outlook of this chapter—examining Yerevan as the capital of Armenia and an embodiment of Armenian nationhood.

For most of its history, Yerevan had been a rather small provincial town and began experiencing rapid and extensive urbanization only after the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia.²³ In the early 1920's about 90 percent of Armenia's population still lived in rural areas. Soon after the dawn of Soviet power many industrial projects were undertaken, as that was the main thrust of early Soviet policy aimed at modernizing the USSR. Canals were built, irrigation systems were established, and electricity supplies began to reach many parts of the country. Since the state accentuated the importance of industrial production, and industrial enterprises were located mostly in the cities, the cities grew and rural populations steadily migrated into urban areas. Suny described the early years of Soviet power in Armenia using the following words: "Along with agrarian

²³ This point of view is contested by some Armenians scholars and architects. It was promoted as the truth during the Soviet years, perhaps in order to make the Soviet project to construct Yerevan as the Armenian capital seem even more triumphant and important than it already was.

restoration and capital construction, Soviet modernization in Armenia involved urbanization” (Suny 1993a, 143-144).

The Soviet Union placed enormous emphasis on the importance of industrial production, and many cities were built around large-scale mining or heavy industry. Yerevan, the main economic center of the country, was no exception. Industrial production was one of the main economic outputs of the city, and numerous mines extracted various natural resources (aluminum, molybdenum, gold and others) while factories produced chemicals, rubber products, machinery and parts, plastics, textiles and processed foods. Yerevan continues to be the main economic hub of Armenia, but only a handful of those factories are still in operation today (i.e., textile manufacturing and food processing). After the collapse of the USSR the focus of the city’s economic activities has shifted towards the tertiary or service sector (Danielyan et al. 2007).

Though the construction of industrial enterprises was the top priority in Yerevan in the early Soviet years, the city’s infrastructure needed substantial improvement. In the late 1920’s and early 1930’s the Soviet government invested large sums of money into a new master plan for Yerevan, which was aimed at “modernizing” the city’s center and replacing much of the old neighborhoods (many of which had deteriorated quite a bit) and homes with new apartment buildings that were to expand the capital’s housing capacity and quality of life in the city. In addition to improving the city’s infrastructure and housing stock, the Soviet government also set out plans for the construction of several governmental and civic buildings, as well as public buildings, and adding public green space to the city. A young Armenian architect by the name of Alexander Tamanian was the author of the first master plan for Yerevan, modified iterations of which have

guided the city's development until recently (a new master plan for Yerevan was approved in 2005). He was born in 1878 in Ekaterinodar, Russia to Armenian parents, and educated at the St. Petersburg College of Fine Arts. Upon the completion of his degree he began designing and building vigorously. When the Democratic Republic of Armenia (also known as the First Armenian Republic) formed in 1918, he moved to Yerevan and began drawing up a new master plan for the city. However, when the Bolsheviks came to power in 1920 he escaped to Tabriz, Iran for fear of persecution by the new regime. In 1923, after the new Soviet regime gave Tamanian and his family a safety guarantee, he returned to Yerevan and resumed work on Yerevan's first master plan. Educated in the style of Russian classicism, he practiced it in his work, while at the same time using characteristic national elements (Armenian elements for buildings in Armenia, and Russian elements for his designs that were to be built in Russia). Upon his arrival in Soviet Armenia he began taking trips to examine ruins of ancient Armenian temples and medieval churches and overseeing reconstruction projects of historic monuments. During this work he studied ancient Armenian architecture and construction, drawing inspiration from it and incorporating details from it in his subsequent designs (see Figure 3.5) (Manukyan and Tamanian 2005).

In his plan for Yerevan, Tamanian used ideas from two famous urban planners of his time—those of Ebenezer Howard and his “garden-city” movement, and Tony Garnier's idea of functional zonation. He combined those two ideas with the classical architectural style, while at the same time adding Armenian details, which he had studied during his visits to ancient city ruins and medieval churches in Armenia. Therefore, Tamanian's style can be considered an amalgam of Russian neo-classicism, the garden-

city movement, functional zonation, as well as traditional Armenian details, adornments and building materials and techniques. Soviet authorities were particularly fond of Yerevan's garden-city leaning, as providing ample public, especially green, space, for the rest and recreation of the workers was an important element of Soviet city design (see Chapter II).

Soviet Yerevan boasted many urban green spaces, but pre-Soviet Yerevan had large areas of green space as well. Before the Soviet era Yerevan's economic base was grounded in its orchard and garden production, and a considerable amount of those still exist. Dalma Orchards, which is an orchard of fruit trees located just outside of Yerevan's center, is one such place. Currently, controversy surrounds Dalma Orchards, because according to the 2005 master plan for Yerevan, all agricultural activity is to be removed from within the outline of the city of Yerevan. A new neighborhood, which will house Yerevan's diplomatic missions, among other commercial and residential buildings, is planned to take the place of the centuries-old orchards. Residents of Dalma stage vehement protests, but so far their demands have fallen on deaf ears (see Chapter IV). Other agricultural activities within Yerevan include the small home gardens which can be found adjacent to private homes and apartment buildings. Residents grow small amounts of agricultural products, mainly fruits, flowers and herbs, and these activities were particularly widespread during the years of the economic blockade, when agricultural products were grown for subsistence.

While planning for Yerevan's layout Tamanian was not designing just another city. Rather, he was designing a new capital for a newly independent Armenia. Yerevan was to send a message about a new Soviet Armenia, but also about the long history of the

Armenian nation. One of the ways in which he made Yerevan “Armenian” was the use of locally quarried stone—a traditional Armenian building material.²⁴ He translated traditional Armenian architectural forms into contemporary design and showcased them in his designs. One of Tamanian’s most important designs and his personal favorite was the Opera House in downtown Yerevan, the construction of which began in 1926 and because of delays in funding and other barriers, was not fully complete until 1963, well after the architect’s death (see Figure 5.4).

Tamanian’s 1924 Yerevan plan was intended for a garden-city of no more than 150,000 inhabitants. Urban and architectural historians often consider this plan for Yerevan to be thoroughly “Armenian,” as the classically-trained architect habitually included adornments and building details in the form of traditional Armenian ornaments (see Figure 3.5) (Arutyunyan et al. 1968; Rashidyan 2007). The city was to contain many broad thoroughfares, spacious squares, numerous urban parks, vast residential quarters and other areas zoned for specific purposes. Although Tamanian had taken care to preserve as much of the existing street network as possible, the implementation of his radial-circular arrangement required that at least a few neighborhoods and buildings be razed. One such building was a 17th century chapel (known as the Gethsemane Chapel) that was on the territory of what is now Opera Square (see Chapter V). In attempts to preserve the building, Tamanian submitted a proposal to take the building down stone by stone and reconstruct it somewhere else, but, even though the deconstruction was completed before the construction of the Opera House had commenced, the chapel was

²⁴ Quarries of volcanic tuff are located throughout Armenia. Depending on location, quarries produce stones that vary in color, porosity and density. The pink variety of volcanic tuff has been most popular for buildings in Yerevan. Pink tuff was used to construct most of Yerevan’s important public buildings of the Soviet years, which is why Yerevan is sometimes referred to as “The Pink City.”

never rebuilt (Ayanyan 2007). Another destruction of a religious building was the demolition of the St. Peter and Paul church, which was located where Moscow Cinema's summer hall is now. The Gethsemane Chapel as well as the St. Peter and Paul Church were destroyed with the excuse that the new master plan had no place for those buildings in it, and as much as Tamanian struggled to preserve them, they were razed. In a twist of irony, currently the Moscow Movie Theater's summer hall, which replaced the St. Peter and Paul Church, faces destruction—the same fate that the church that it replaced did. Though there is growing opposition to the destruction of the summer hall, the Yerevan Municipality has planned to demolish it and to reconstruct the church in its old spot. In many ways, today's changes in Yerevan's cityscape are yet another cycle of the continued erasure and replacement of old landmarks and cityscapes with new ones. The proposed demolition of the Moscow Cinema's summer hall is another example of this continued recreation and re-imagining of the landscape of Yerevan. As new generations come in, the landscape of the city is also altered.

After the completion of two focal points in the architectural ensemble of the city, Republic Square and Opera Square (see Chapter V), the Soviet government deemed parts of Tamanian's master plan "too expensive and unnecessary," and they were never completed. These drawings were back on the table after independence, as the administration of Armenia's second president, Robert Kocharian, aimed to re-imagine Yerevan and to construct it as a grandiose city, a city in step with the rest of the world. Those included a stone mosaic on the floor of Yerevan's Republic Square, formerly Lenin Square, in the shape of *lavash*, the traditional Armenian flat bread, and Northern

Avenue, a central thoroughfare designed to connect the Opera Square and the Republic Square in Yerevan's center (see Chapters IV and V).

In this chapter I have repeatedly mentioned that the Yerevan of the early 1920's was a small provincial town with only a few streets and stone buildings, that had been constructed after the city was ceded to Imperial Russia by the Persians. The rest of the city was populated by one- and two-storey clay homes. This notion was commonly accepted during the Soviet times, as many historians and guidebooks perpetuated the notion that Yerevan did not begin as a city in 786 BCE, but that it was born in the 1920's, after Soviet power came to Armenia and the first master plan for Yerevan was commissioned. This speaks to a point that a few of my interviewees have mentioned—that the pre-Soviet history of Yerevan is often ignored, discarded, erased and built over. The first major erasure of layers of the already present urban landscape took place when Tamanian's plan was implemented in the 1920's and 1930's. This erasure, much like erasures taking place today, was both material and symbolic—buildings were brought down and streets were paved over and re-directed in order to make way for the Soviet-commissioned plan. At the same time the literature on urban planning and urban history the significance of Yerevan's pre-Soviet history was systematically discounted, belittled, even rendered non-existent. As Gasparyan (2008) and Melkumian (2007) write, this erasure was in many ways necessary, as Yerevan had very little in the way of infrastructure and public services, which would be necessary for the project of making it a capital city. According to archaeological evidence Yerevan had been an urban settlement with a rich historical and architectural heritage, though not until the 20th century did it function as an Armenian capital or had a significantly large population. To

be sure, the Soviet government made major investments into Yerevan's infrastructure, its public transportation, communications, public construction and housing stock, but Yerevan was there before Soviet power came.

By the early 1930's redevelopment of Yerevan had been well underway. Yerevan was developing as an industrial center, and the need for workers resulted in the migration of many rural residents into the new capital. Projects calling for repatriation of Armenians who had left their ancestral homeland or fled it as a result of violence in previous years also attracted new residents to Yerevan. The Soviet regime invested heavily in the healthcare system, which provided for decreased infant mortality and increased life expectancy. Because of these demographic changes Yerevan's population surpassed 150,000 residents by 1935 (Arutyunyan, Hasratyan, Melikyan 1968). As the population size projected by the 1924 master plan had been reached, Armenia's government commissioned a revised master plan for the city. In late 1935 Tamanian began working on a new master plan for the city, but he died in 1936 before finishing it. A Russian urban planning agency continued the design and completed it in 1939. The 1939 plan was titled "The Master Plan for Greater Yerevan," and the part of it which Tamanian outlined in the initial 1924 iteration became the heart of the city, known as "Lesser Yerevan." The 1939 plan guided the city's development for the next 15 years, and planned for concentric enlargement from the existing urban nucleus. To provide adequate housing for the large numbers of in-migrants, surrounding villages of Nor Malatia and Nor Sebastia (located to the northwest of the city center) were included within city bounds, enlarging the city's territory by 7,500 hectares (Arutyunyan et al. 1968). The periodic enlargement of the city's territory by way of absorbing neighboring

villages and towns was common as Yerevan was developing during the Soviet years. The Architecture Department of Yerevan's Municipal Government prepared the third iteration of Yerevan's master plan. This plan was approved in 1951, and it added significantly to the city's housing stock, as the city's population continued to grow in response to the readily-available jobs. The city's residential boom included the construction of scores of four- and five-story buildings, which were to house the families of the workers moving to Yerevan. By the late 1960's Yerevan's population was approaching 750,000 residents and the need for new housing was pressing, and was the need for a new master plan. Yerevanproject (a newly –formed urban planning institute, which employed hundreds of architects, urban planners and engineers) drew up the 4th master plan for “Great Yerevan” in the 1960's, but it was not approved until 1970. By this time construction of buildings surpassing four and five stories had become possible, and Yerevan's outskirts were being blanketed by concrete high-rises ranging between seven and sixteen stories. By 1980 Yerevan's population had surpassed one million residents.

In addition to being built up with residential housing stock, Yerevan was also being continually “constructed” as Armenia's national capital, as well as the capital of a Soviet republic. A particular, Soviet style of ordering urban space was employed in Yerevan, as the city was carefully zoned into government, residential, industrial parts and organized by *mikrorayons* (see Chapter II). A peculiar fact about Yerevan was that many public buildings, though largely imbued with highly nationalistic ideals (such as Tzitzernakaberd, a monument commemorating the Armenian Genocide and Matenadaran, a museum housing ancient Armenian manuscripts) were allowed to be built in Armenia's capital (Ter Minassian 2007). This is yet another example of the paradox of Soviet

nationality policy, which promoted a USSR-wide identity of “Soviet man,” but at the same time allowed and encouraged national ethnic identity, as long as secession was not a part of the equation (see Chapter II).

Yerevan after Independence

Yerevan in the Dark—1991-1996

In the late 1980's the foundations of the Soviet Union were being shaken by Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. In addition to the unstable political situation in the Soviet Union, Armenia was dealing with its share of challenges. In February of 1988 violence against Armenians erupted in the town of Sumgait located in neighboring Azerbaijan, and pogroms in Azerbaijan's capital Baku and other cities (in 1989 and 1990) followed. Thousands of Armenians fleeing the violence in Azerbaijan sought refuge in Armenia, and in Yerevan in particular. Later that year a 6.9 magnitude earthquake rocked the Leninakan (now Gyumri) region in northwestern Armenia. The December earthquake leveled many towns and villages, including Leninakan, the 3rd largest city in Armenia at the time. Over 25,000 people died, and an estimated 500,000 were left homeless. Following the earthquake and the anti-Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijan tens of thousands of refugees arrived in Yerevan, further stressing the city's already scarce stock of residential properties and stretched social services. As a result of the pogroms, as well as Nagorno-Karabakh's struggle for independence, tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began in 1989. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Azerbaijan and Turkey closed their

borders with Armenia, refusing to allow fuel and humanitarian aid to pass through to Armenia. The remaining oil and gas pipelines were routinely rendered defunct by explosions, leaving Yerevan with very little fuel during the cold winters of 1993 and 1994. During this period, commonly referred to as “The Dark Years,” electricity outages were frequent, and electric power was provided to the population for as little as between two and three hours per day. Water was also a scarce resource. Electrical pumps that supplied water to Yerevan’s apartment buildings were out of commission for the great part of winter months. Residents were forced to look for water and fill up any buckets, jugs, kettles and pans they could find, and walk them up the stairs to their apartment homes (elevators had stopped working because there was no electricity to power them). The “Dark Years” also had a large contribution to the decline of the city’s green parks, as people desperate to provide warmth to their homes and families were forced to cut trees in Yerevan and on its periphery. In order to keep warm people burned anything they could, including furniture, books, shoes and tires, which greatly lowered Yerevan’s air quality.²⁵ By the late 1990’s, at least 200,000 residents of Yerevan had left Armenia (NSSRA 2001) as a result of the drastic regime change, the economic blockade and extreme living conditions.

Yerevan Today

The opening of the border with Iran in 1995 finally broke Armenia’s economic blockade. A reactor of the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, which was built in the

²⁵ During the harsh winters of early independence it was rather common to walk out on a crisp winter morning and see a layer of soot on the fresh snow that had fallen just the night before. Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller describe “The Dark Years” in their 2003 poignant ethnographic account titled *“Armenia: Portraits of Survival and Hope.”*

vicinity of Yerevan in the 1970's, was restarted in early 1995, and the electricity it produced helped Armenia overcome the considerable energy shortages, which had crippled Armenia's economy in the years since the fall of the Soviet Union. The power plant had been shut down in 1988, for fear of malfunction after the Chernobyl meltdown, and after the 1988 earthquake in Armenia. Though the plant continues to provide electric power, it is rather outdated, and there are plans to refurbish the functioning reactor and/or to build a new reactor (Yershova and Wells 1996). Yerevan's supplies of electric power come from thermoelectric power stations, hydroelectric power stations, and the Metsamor nuclear power plant, which supplies nearly 40% of Yerevan's electric power needs (Danielyan et al. 2007).

Though on a slow road to economic recovery, Armenia has come a long way since 1991, and one of the most apparent indicators of change have been the numerous new buildings that have joined Yerevan's skyline and the myriad construction sites that currently punctuate the city's streets and avenues. By early 2000's considerably large sums were invested into Armenia's construction sector, and urban renewal of Yerevan's downtown neighborhoods began to accelerate. In order to structure the process of rapid urban renewal already underway in the capital, in 2005 the Armenian Parliament approved a new master plan for the city of Yerevan. The new master plan is calculated for a population of 1.2 million residents and "is based on the principles of sustainable development and is aimed at ensuring equal conditions for [the] development of social, economic and ecological sectors" (Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe 2005, 6).

Aside from a few sites from antiquity (such as Erebuni and Teishebaini) and medieval churches, evidence of Yerevan's age is almost untraceable in the landscape of the city. Throughout centuries, powerful earthquakes struck and hostile powers invaded the area, destroying settlements and buildings. At the time of its establishment as the capital of Soviet Armenia, Yerevan had a small population and a limited infrastructure, which afforded the Soviets the chance to plan a city almost entirely from scratch. Major characteristics of Tamanian's 1924 master plan still dominate the landscape of Yerevan today, especially in the center of the city, although the green spaces envisioned by the designer have shrunk quite substantially (see Chapter IV). With the exception of newly constructed "elite" buildings and neighborhoods, the urban layout of Soviet times still dominates the landscape of Yerevan. The majority of the city's residential, administrative and industrial buildings were built during the Soviet years, and, along with those, independent Armenia's leaders inherited a severe shortage of residential and commercial real estate apparent in Yerevan throughout the Soviet years. The construction boom of the early and mid-2000's was in part an attempt, though half-hearted, to fill this gap. In addition to the physical landscape of the city, independent Armenia's leaders inherited the layers of meanings, narratives and symbolism that were imbedded in the urban landscape of Yerevan during the Soviet times. This is the canvas that Armenia's present-day leaders aim to reinvent as that of a capital of an independent Armenia. By constructing Yerevan as a representation of independent Armenian state- and nationhood, they add new dimensions to the story of Armenian national identity and consciousness and express them through the urban landscape of Armenia's national capital.

The processes of abrupt urban renewal and the policies which result from the master plan worry many *Yerevantsis*. What further changes are expected in their capital's landscape? How are the residents' concerns about public space and green space, shortage of public transportation and traffic jams, worries about construction dust and noise and the seismic safety of the newly constructed buildings going to be addressed? How will the transformations that have already happened, as well as those that are afoot alter *Yerevantsis* perception of their city? What has changed and what keeps changing in the landscape of Yerevan, and how do those transformations alter *Yerevantsis* perceptions of their city? What message about contemporary Armenian national identity do these transformations contain? The chapters that follow will further examine those questions.

Figures for Chapter III: Yerevan and Armenian History



Figure 3.1: Tzitzernakaberd, the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan. The memorial was built between 1965 and 1967, shortly after the April 24th protests that took place in Yerevan in 1965.



Figure 3.2: Building of Matenadaran, Museum of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan. A statue of Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian alphabet, and his devoted apprentice are in the foreground.



Figure 3.3: Ruins of Erebuni Fortress.



Figure 3.4: Wide view of ruins of Erebuni Fortress.



Figure 3.5: Ornamental adornment detail on a building in Yerevan. Note the grape (considered a traditional Armenian fruit) in the center of the decoration.

IV.

YEREVAN'S ENDANGERED SPACES

The cityscape of Yerevan has undergone drastic changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. During the early 2000's the volume of construction in Yerevan was rising steadily, and, according to the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, the total monetary volume of construction in Armenia's national capital had increased five-fold from 1995 to 2006. During much of the first decade of the 21st century construction was the fastest growing sector of the Armenian economy, and just in the second quarter of 2006 the volume of construction rose to \$US 374 million, representing 31.8% more than it was during the first six months of the previous year (NSSRA 2006). Though this trend is no longer as pronounced due to the worldwide financial crisis that commenced in 2008,²⁶ the large-scale conversion of urban space that followed as a result of the construction boom continues to affect the daily life of residents of Yerevan. Long-time residents of Yerevan's downtown neighborhoods are displaced and their homes, as well as buildings vital for the preservation of Yerevan's historic heritage, are torn down to make way for new construction sites, which become high-scale residential and commercial real estate, unaffordable to most of Yerevan's residents. This construction boom is coupled with the drive towards commercialization and subsequent re-profiling of urban green parks and other public spaces. In the years since the USSR's collapse the total area of Yerevan's green space has declined from 30.6% in 1986 to 3.6% in 2006;

²⁶ During the second quarter of 2009 the volume of construction in Armenia fell 56.4% as compared to the second quarter of 2008 (NSSRA 2009).

out of that 1,000 hectares of public green space have been lost to construction between 1995 and 2002 (Social-Ecological Association of Armenia 2005). Investors continue to utilize the city's public spaces for private interests, and hundreds of for-profit enterprises such as cafes, restaurants and entertainment complexes have compromised the city's parks, providing seats and repose only for paying customers.²⁷

The proliferation of construction sites, the addition of new office, commercial and residential real estate, as well as the propagation of retail stores, cafes and other entertainment complexes, have caused certain spaces important to *Yerevantsis* to disappear or hover near the brink of extinction. I have identified three key types of endangered spaces in Yerevan. They are: a) old and historic neighborhoods in the center of the city, and “black buildings” in particular; b) interior courtyards, known as *baks*²⁸, and c) green spaces of various types and sizes (including urban green parks). Out of the three broad categories of spaces, two in particular—the *baks* and urban green parks—are public and communal ones that *Yerevantsis* use in their daily affairs, and their loss implies continuous shifts in everyday behavior and social life. *Baks*, which are mixed-use communal spaces that are surrounded by residential buildings, play a pivotal role in the life of a *Yerevantsi*. A place rich with connections, this is where children play and interact with peers and adults. It is where the elderly gather to play backgammon or chess, a place where news and rumors are exchanged. But now many *baks* are being taken over by private interests, as individual residents build private car garages to house

²⁷ According to data gathered by the Social-Ecological Association of Armenia (SEAA), the number of entertainment complexes, including outdoor cafés and restaurants in Yerevan's city center has increased from 197 in 1998 to 427 at the end of the 2005 summer season (SEAA 2005).

²⁸ In Armenian, *bak*=singular, *baks*=plural.

their new vehicles, or set aside areas of the *bak* for a private garden. The city's green parks provided valuable public space for rest and recreation (see Figure 4.9). Now most of these public spaces are overrun by cafes, and a favorite past-time of *Yerevantsis* on a hot summer day—taking a rest on one of the benches in the park—has become much harder to do, since free-standing benches have become much more scarce. In the recent decade most of Yerevan's green parks have become café “strip-malls”, where a person walking through is stimulated with a choice of menus and entertainment activities, with “places to just be” all but erased from the landscape of the city. *Yerevantsis* must look elsewhere in order to carry out the activities that they previously carried out in those now rare spaces, or, to amend their activities to fit the new layout of the city.

These rapid transformations of the cityscape are bringing to the forefront fierce debates about belonging and exclusion in Armenia's capital city. Many residents of Yerevan's downtown neighborhoods have been asked and at times forced to leave their homes to make way for the creation of more lucrative real estate. Even if not asked to leave their homes, most *Yerevantsis* feel excluded from the currently developing cityscape because they are not asked for opinions regarding urban development decisions in their city. Solicitations of public opinion are rare at best, and residents seldom learn of a new neighboring structure until ground is broken for a foundation to be put in (Ayvazyan 2005). As a result, many *Yerevantsis* find themselves embittered by their physical and symbolic removal from the developing landscape of Yerevan. In an interview with me a prominent environmental activist described the situation in the following words:

“The city is changing for the better, there are some nice buildings to look at, more places to eat and shop, but very few have the financial stability to benefit from these improvements. The rest of us, and that is the majority of *Yerevantsis*, just look on, we do not participate” (Ovakimian 2008).

Most of the new construction sites that replace the older neighborhoods in downtown Yerevan are so-called “elite buildings.” This category of “elite buildings” includes both residential and commercial real estate. The residential “elite buildings” are usually ten stories or higher, equipped with a set of luxury amenities, including central air-conditioning, heating and 24 hour water supply (which is a luxury in Armenia, since most parts of the city have running water only during the day). Many come with underground parking garages, doormen, fitness centers and yoga studios. Office and retail space is often located on the first two floors of residential “elite buildings.” That lifelong residents of Yerevan are pushed out of their homes in order to make way for “elite buildings,” which, because of their high prices, are accessibly only to the extremely rich, is yet another upsetting factor for *Yerevantsis*.

In addition to feelings of exclusion and loss, when certain spaces, buildings and neighborhoods are destroyed, layers of Yerevan’s history are erased from the palimpsest of the city, and this is especially noticeable in the case of demolition of many “black buildings” in the center of Yerevan. In the words of an architect and historic preservation activist that I interviewed:

“A city is a city due to the cultural and historical layers from different epochs that it contains. When we tear down historic buildings, layers of our history and culture are erased” (Gevorkian 2008).

The endangerment and disappearance of *baks*, urban green parks and historic districts from Yerevan’s landscape have not gone without reaction. *Yerevantsis* have organized and protested against the various goings-on that have endangered their everyday lives. In this chapter I describe the various categories of endangered spaces in Yerevan, explore the causes of their endangerment and address the various civic engagement and protest movements that have sprung up in response to the contentious processes of change in Yerevan’s cityscape. I bring the example of an ad hoc protest meeting known as “One Handful of Soil,” which has resonated throughout Yerevan and is repeatedly referred to as an event that has “jump-started public awareness” (Ovakimian 2008), “woken [us] up from [our] slumber” (Minasian 2008) and has asserted the importance of public involvement and engagement. I chronicle the endangerment of *baks* and urban green parks, and how that has affected the everyday life of *Yerevantsis*. First, I turn to the struggles surrounding the destruction of old downtown neighborhoods and of “black buildings” in particular.

Struggles for Historic Preservation and Property Rights in Downtown Yerevan

As detailed in Chapter III, the urban settlement that became Yerevan has a 3000-year history. Despite its age, most of Yerevan’s current urban form contains buildings from the Soviet period and the present cityscape bears very few references to the city’s age and history. Only a few structures reminiscent of Yerevan’s ancient and medieval

history remain.²⁹ The Erebuni and Teishebaini fortresses (located on the outskirts of Yerevan), which date back to the 8th century BCE, remind of the early human occupation of Ararat Valley. Churches³⁰ scattered in the city attest to the continuous importance of Christianity throughout Armenian history, though there are also a few mosques (for example, the Blue Mosque on Mesrop Mashtots Avenue, which has recently been renovated and is open for worship). The center of the city is dotted with buildings from the period of the latest Persian occupation (1600's—early 1800's), and buildings from the Russian Imperial period (late 1820's—late 1910's).

The buildings built during the Russian Imperial Period and the brief period of independence known as the First Republic (1918-1920) are collectively known as “black buildings,” as their facades are built out of black and dark red volcanic tuff, which was locally quarried and readily available at the time (see Figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5). Usually no taller than two stories, many were built for wealthy families, as residences and properties to be rented out, while others, such as the Women's and Men's Gymnasiums, built along Amiryan (then Nazarovskaya) Street, were used for civic purposes. Upon the dawn of Soviet power in Armenia they were nationalized by the state and were later utilized as government office and museum space, and, in some cases, partitioned into several smaller residences (Gevorkian 2008).

²⁹ In addition to buildings destroyed during hostile occupations, many structures perished as a result of a powerful earthquake that rocked the Yerevan area in 1679. Armenia is located in a seismically active zone, which partially explains the fact that few structures have remained standing throughout the ages.

³⁰ St. Zoravor, late 17th century; St. Hovanes, 17th century; Katoghike, 17th century; St. Poghos and Petros, 10-11th century, which was razed during the construction of Moscow Theater.

Located in the small center of Yerevan, many black buildings and other smaller, primarily one-story residences³¹ occupied land that became highly valuable for real estate development upon the dawn of capitalism (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). As a result, when Yerevan's construction boom ensued, many of those buildings were deemed "inappropriate for occupation" and subsequently demolished. Official government records of how many black buildings there were and how many of them were torn down were unavailable, but according to a historic preservation specialist that I interviewed, nearly 100 black buildings stood along Abovian, Terian, Pushkin, Tumanian, Arami and Buzand streets (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2) before the construction boom started (Gevorkian 2008). Many of the black buildings and nearly all of the smaller, one-story residences that stood in the way of Northern Avenue, Main Avenue, the projected Old Yerevan Street and other large-scale construction projects were first cleared of their residents and later razed.³²

In order to understand the dynamics surrounding the evictions of residents from the smaller private residences, as well as the black buildings, a quick retelling of Yerevan's early Soviet history is necessary. Prior to the dawn of Soviet power most homes in Yerevan were private one- or two-story homes (stone and adobe construction), with *baks* and gardens adjacent to them. With the approval of Tumanian's master plan for Yerevan, this construction was slated for demolition, in an effort to update and expand

³¹ Yerevan inherited the small, primarily one-story residences from pre-Soviet times—those were privately-owned homes that the Soviet regime left in the hands of their owners, even though private property was frowned upon under Soviet law.

³² According to interviews with municipal officials published in newspapers, a similar fate awaits many buildings in Yerevan's Kond neighborhood. Yerevan's Kond neighborhood is one of the city's oldest and traditionally Armenian quarters, which has long been on the agenda for reconstruction.

the city's housing stock. Many of these homes were razed and replaced by taller and sturdier stone and concrete buildings. Tamanian's 1924 plan set out for some of these neighborhoods to be replaced by Northern Avenue, a wide pedestrian thoroughfare, that would connect two pivotal spaces in the heart of the city—Opera Square and Republic Square (see Figure 4.1). However, the Soviet authorities never approved funding for Northern Avenue, and the private homes which occupied that territory remained standing through the Soviet times. With each new version of the Yerevan master plan, plans for demolition and update of these neighborhoods were set out, but as of Armenia's independence in 1991, they were still there. Continuous disinvestment (on the part of the government as well as on the part of its residents) in this neighborhood led to considerable deterioration of conditions of those homes, which in turn led to depreciation.

Although these homes and neighborhoods had not been updated in quite some time, and were in considerable disrepair, their location in the heart of the city made them extremely valuable for their residents (Poghosyan 2008). Traditionally, and throughout Soviet history, real estate in the center of the city had been more valuable than in other districts of Yerevan, and living downtown carried (and, to a large degree, still carries) a certain aura of prestige. Therefore, being asked or forced to leave their homes in a prestigious area of town without adequate compensation was that much more difficult for the residents.

To summarize, in early 2000's many residents of black buildings, as well as of smaller private residences were asked or forced to leave their homes to make way for then-President Robert Kocharian's flagship project—Northern Avenue. As demolition of buildings which stood in the way of highly lucrative real estate began, the people who

lived in those neighborhoods were forced out. Starting in 2001, when urban renewal of Yerevan's neighborhoods began where Northern Avenue is today, (and moved on to Arami and Buzand Street within a couple of years), people who had been living in the buildings slated for demolition were served eviction notices. Contracts were offered to the residents, via which they would be provided certain compensation, but, according to numerous interviewee allegations in many cases the compensation was much too low for the residents to purchase property of a comparable size in a comparable neighborhood (Kharatian 2008; Poghosyan 2008). According to interviewee allegations and various newspaper reports, residents of buildings that stood on Abovian, Terian, Pushkin and Tumanian streets—streets that Northern Avenue crosses—were offered anywhere between US \$100-700 per square meter of living space. At that time a square meter of property in the vicinity hovered around US \$1,000, and a square meter in a newly constructed, “elite” building was projected to fetch upwards of US \$2,000 (Poghosyan 2008). Nevertheless, some residents agreed to the terms, and, according to data released by Yerevan's municipal government, more than 1,000 contracts were signed with former residents of Northern Avenue and Main Avenue in preparation for ground-breaking (Poghosyan 2008). However, there were others who reached no agreement with the investors, and some of those who had not signed the contracts rescinding their property rights were literally thrown out of their homes, with the threat of the demolition equipment at their doorstep (Ishkhanyan 2005a, 2005b and 2009).

Many such instances have taken place when Northern Avenue was being constructed. During the summer of 2008 I attended a protest meeting which gathered residents rallying for various causes. I spoke to several residents of where Northern

Avenue is today, both of whom said that the compensation offered to them with the eviction notice was so low, that upon acceptance they were only able to purchase a home on the outskirts of the city. It is not that these residents are against the “elite buildings” in principle. In the words of one of the protesters:

“We are not against the development of Armenia and the beautification of our city. We just want things to be done lawfully and want to be justly compensated for the sacrifices that we have been asked to make” (Poghosyan 2008).

As Poghosyan’s quote demonstrates, despite gross disinvestment in those neighborhoods and the poor shape of many homes, very few residents of what is now Northern Avenue left their homes willingly or satisfied. In fact, in the end most of them took the money offered to them, however little it was, because they were told they would receive that amount or nothing at all. It was the years of disinvestment in these neighborhoods that devalued these properties and became one of the developers’ excuses for their demolition.

The former residents of Northern Avenue, as well as Aram and Buzand streets, who are still struggling for just compensations for the homes that they were asked or forced to leave, have formed a non-governmental organization called “Victims of State Needs,” and this organization fights on behalf of those residents of Yerevan who have felt that they have been disenfranchised by the development process in downtown Yerevan. In the words of one of the members of “Victims of State Needs” NGO:

“We do not know whether anything will come of our struggle, but we fight for our lost homes, we fight for justice” (Seropian 2008).

“A Feeling of Old Yerevan ”: Constructing a Historic Preservation District

With the loss of many of Yerevan’s black buildings, which were characteristic of mid- and late-19th century construction, a push for their preservation was set in motion in Yerevan in early 2000’s. Most black buildings were designated as heritage sites and were protected under Soviet law (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4). The latest Soviet list of historic and cultural monuments in Yerevan was approved in 1983. After the USSR’s collapse, this list was not officially recognized by the new regime, and only in 2004 did Armenia’s Prime Minister order the compilation of a new list of historic and cultural monuments. It took nearly three years to compile the list, and it was finally approved in 2007 (Government of RA 2010). The list is titled “List of Governmentally-Owned Immovable Historic and Cultural Heritage Sites of the Republic of Armenia” and specifies 512 heritage sites with protected status in Yerevan (Government of RA 2010). The list is populated with diverse entries—it includes monuments to leaders, writers, composers and national heroes, burial sites, archaeological sites, outdoor sculptures, museums, notable buildings and other places of historic and cultural importance. Some black buildings have found a spot on the list, but many of them are on a sub-list, which catalogs the buildings that have been or are to be deconstructed stone by stone and rebuilt in a neighborhood designated as a site of historical heritage, colloquially known as “Old Yerevan Street”. There are some buildings that are of historic and cultural value that are not being moved, and are being restored in place, such as, for example, Hanrapetutyuan 51 and 53 (See Figure 4.7), Abovian 1/3 and Arami 58 (168 Hours Weekly 2007).

Old Yerevan Street is a project aimed at concentrating a set of buildings of historic, cultural and architectural importance on a block in the center of Yerevan, on

Arami and Buzand Streets, between Abovian and Koghbatsi Streets (see Figure 4.6). The street will become home to 19 “historic monuments”, as they are addressed in pertinent government decrees, five of which still stand on the street block, and 14 will be reconstructed there after having been taken down stone by stone in their original locations. The intention of this project is to recreate the atmosphere of early 20th century Yerevan, and the buildings will house art galleries, showrooms, artist studios, shops, restaurants, etc. The inner courtyards of the buildings will be planted with trees and shrubs and will become publicly-accessible spaces for Yerevan’s residents and visitors, reminiscent of the inner courtyards with which private homes of that period were surrounded (Aysor.am 2009; Gevorkian 2008).

Opinions regarding Old Yerevan Street vary. In general, Old Yerevan Street is accepted as a good idea because it allows for the buildings, or at least for their façades, to be preserved in the face of a rapidly changing cityscape in the center of Yerevan. This project would allow for the black buildings to co-exist together in the same neighborhood, and walking through that space might inspire a feeling of being in Old Yerevan once again. On the other hand, and according to many of my interviewees (architects, environmental and community activists, journalists, pundits), this project would never embody the authenticity that those buildings possessed in their original form and initial location (Minasian 2008; Ovakimian 2008; Papikyan 2008; Tonoyan 2008). Reconstructing the buildings on one street is an attempt to recreate the ambience of late 19th-early 20th century Yerevan would only approximate the genuine textures of those places. Many opponents of this idea maintain that simply rebuilding the buildings in a particular spot in Yerevan would be like constructing a movie set reminiscent of that

time, like constructing a street for display in a theme park such as Disneyland, as if having “buildings on display like animals in a zoo” (Tonoyan 2008). The place would not be the same, and that would make the mere construction of the buildings less valuable. Rebuilding those buildings somewhere else would signify the disappearance of the “place” itself, and even though the facades might be reconstructed, the place itself would be lost with this relocation. In the words of an architect and activist that I interviewed:

“Yes, the program is in the works, but I don’t approve of it, because it is going to be fake, [and] a large part of the value of those old neighborhoods was the street itself, the place, also of course the interior courtyards (*baks*). But the street itself is important, not just the façades. The museum style will not do” (Papikyan 2008).

However, according to Yerevan’s Chief Architect Samvel Danielyan and many other architects and historic preservationists, this is the only way to preserve at least a few of the black buildings, and the only hope of preserving at least a small portion of Yerevan’s architectural and historical heritage from that time period (Aysor.am 2009). In the words of an architect and historic preservationist that I interviewed:

“This is the only place in Yerevan where we can preserve the feeling of Old Yerevan, this is the *only* city block that still remains relatively intact. So, the reconstruction of the buildings taken down stone by stone is supposed to be done according to the originals plans of the buildings, which is really good, because a building is not only its façade, the interior plan of the building is very important as well. Again, this is our only chance at preservation of a small part of Old Yerevan, because there is no other street that still has a few black buildings left,

all of them are being razed to make way for new construction” (Gevorkian 2008; emphasis by interviewee).

Even though Gevorkian spoke out in favor of Old Yerevan Street, during our conversation she also mentioned that she wished there were no need for an Old Yerevan Street, and that the historic “black buildings” were left standing where they had been built nearly 100 years ago.

The decision to number the stones on a standing building, then to take it down stone by stone and to reconstruct it somewhere else requires political will and a considerable amount of funds. Why did Armenia’s political elites go to great lengths to do so? It was widely published in Armenia’s press and often alleged by my interviewees that the reason many of the “black buildings” were taken down was to clear the areas where they stood for more lucrative construction, for taller residential and office buildings (Gevorkian 2008; Tonoyan 2008). Many wondered why the buildings could not have been left where they stood, in the place where they were built and the context for which they were intended, Armenia had not “followed the example of many European countries, where old mixes with the new, creating a mosaic of epochs and styles” (Gevorkian 2008). The general perception was that the reason that many “black buildings” were razed was because their two stories would not have sufficed as an acceptable source of income for the investors that wanted to recover the capital invested into construction on those vacated lots.

According to interviews with Yerevan’s Chief Architect Samvel Danielyan, published in July of 2009, the Old Yerevan Street program is in the works, and construction was to begin by the end of 2009. Some remaining obstacles are the one-story

privately owned residential homes, owners of which still have not agreed to the terms in their eviction contracts. Financing the construction is another issue. Even though the government has mandated that these black buildings be reconstructed on Old Yerevan Street, funding mechanisms for it have not been established, and, according to answers given by city officials in public interviews, private capital will be solicited in order to complete this project (Aysor.am 2009; panorama.am 2009).

The experience of black buildings and their planned reconstruction as Old Yerevan Street is an example of the political will it takes in order to promote a specific urban development scheme that prioritizes accumulation for private investors and developers. It also raises serious questions about belonging and erasure in the changing urban landscape of Armenia's capital. The development plans for various neighborhoods in downtown Yerevan, outlined by the 2005 master plan and supporting legislative and executive documents, claimed various older neighborhoods of Yerevan as "victims," and the residents of those neighborhoods suffered as well. Thus, this redevelopment, this "civilizing of the city center" takes a toll on the residents of those neighborhoods, as well as on the historic layer that those neighborhoods represent. These debates and struggles are ongoing, as Northern Avenue and Main Avenue were only the beginning of this large-scale reconstruction in Yerevan, and other neighborhoods will follow. According to an article published on Armenianow.com, having "not yet settled all [the] problems with...Northern Avenue...[Yerevan's municipality has already] initiated the construction of a new residential complex" in Noragyugh, which is a district home to 1,500 residents just outside of Yerevan's small center (Abrahamyan 2010). This complicated process of urban renewal, large-scale construction, private accumulation and contested landscape

changes continues. These multi-layered processes have led to debates about which spaces “belong” in Yerevan’s landscape and often resulted in the destruction of certain neighborhoods and erasure of landscapes. Simultaneously, these transformation processes have excluded certain residents, either by limiting access to previously publicly-accessible places, or worse yet, by pushing them out of their homes, which happened to stand on land that became too valuable to be occupied by only one or two stories. The section that follows describes how the transitions of recent years have endangered another place important in the life of *Yerevantsis*—Yerevan’s *baks* (interior courtyards).

Baks (Interior Courtyards)

One of the most important spaces in a *Yerevantsi*’s everyday life, the traditional inner courtyard, known as *bak* in Armenian, is shrinking and in danger of disappearance. A *bak* is the internal common space framed by the surrounding buildings, an inner courtyard intended for the communal use by the residents of those buildings. In other words, it is accessible to the larger public, but is generally used only by the residents of the immediate vicinity. Nearly all older buildings in Yerevan have access to a *bak*.³³ This area is intended for rest and recreation, often planted with trees that cast shade and bear fruit. Some *baks* have gazebos with benches, which serve as the location for casual conversation and backgammon tournaments, and provide a place to sit for the elderly and the young, who exchange news and views with their neighbors. This is where children play, the elderly rest, information and gossip between neighbors is exchanged. This is

³³ With the exception of the newer, “elite buildings,” which, at times, are even built in obstruction of other buildings’ *baks*.

where the “minutiae” of everyday life plays out. In that, the *bak* is an extremely important space for the reproduction of Armenian society.

The *bak* is an essential space in the life of an Armenian. Having grown up in Yerevan I remember spending countless hours in the *bak*, playing with my friends, climbing mulberry trees, playing hopscotch, jump rope, hide and seek, or simply hanging out. On early summer mornings our *bak* is washed in sunlight. The air is incredibly fresh on summer mornings in Yerevan. After a day of scorching heat and an evening of gale-force winds, cool air descends onto the city from the mountains, as if to ease existence during the hot, un-air-conditioned summer months. On weekdays, people walk through the *bak* on their way to work, parading new outfits, and old ladies sitting in the gazebos discuss their style choices. Old men gather in those gazebos later during the day, to compete for the *bak* backgammon title. Street vendors set up shop and spread out the fruit and vegetables they have brought for sale. Sometime during the day a visit is paid by the “bleach guy”, who sells concentrated chlorine bleach, and advertises by yelling at the top of his lungs “*Javeli Spirt! Javeli Spirt!*” (Concentrated Bleach!). In fact, an array of vendors offering varying goods and services come through our *bak* on a daily basis. In addition to the bleach salesperson there is a vendor who offers concentrated hydrogen peroxide, a person who offers to sharpen knives and scissors, a fruit-vendor with a trunkful of watermelons, and villagers selling an assortment of dairy products, including homemade yoghurt and cottage cheese.

The *bak* where I grew up faces a church built in the 17th century, and near it beggars gather hoping that church-goers and other passers-by will spare some change. Here weddings are celebrated, funerals processions are begun, and all of these events are

observed by neighbors and residents, whose favorite pastime is to look out the window at the *bak*, as if observing life unfold on stage. Looking out the window to the *bak* is an activity that arguably all residents engage in at least for some part of their day, whether to have a smoke, to check on one's child playing outside, or simply, to pass time (see Figure 4.10). So, participants of these and many other events that take place in the *bak* are not just those who actually are outside in the *bak*, but also those who are watching, perched from their windows, who play their role by watching. So, each event in the *bak* has more participants than just those whose bodies are involved in those certain actions. Those who watch, perched from their windows, are also participating, watching and oftentimes at the same time relaying information about whatever is going outside to other family members.

There is a sort of a "*bak* ballet" that happens in this space, much like the "sidewalk ballet" that Jane Jacobs described in her famous "Death and Life of Great American Cities" (Jacobs 1961). By participating in the everyday movement and minutiae of life residents construct and participate in a particular type of life, an identity, an "Armenianness," and children who play in the vicinity learn by watching and taking part in the various rituals. By engaging in the "*bak* ballet" residents construct the landscape of *bak* itself through their embodied practices. Most who have grown up in Armenia during the past 80 years or so, especially in Armenia's urban areas, have spent countless hours in the *bak*, playing, talking and learning just what it means to be Armenian. Friendships formed in the *bak* last a lifetime, but this is also where tense conflicts between neighbors form and play out. However, usually the *bak* is considered a uniting feature, so Armenians consider people who live in the neighboring building that

faces out into the same inner courtyard, “from the same *bak*”, and that is a designation that defines a lasting connection with one’s neighbors.

So important is a *bak* in a *Yerevantsi*’s life that a three-part comedic series titled “*Mer Bak*” (translates as “our *bak*”) has documented this space and the relationships that are built in it, around it, and because of it (Sharm Productions, “*Our Bak*”, 1995; “*Our Bak 2*”, 1997 and “*Our Bak 3*”, 2005). The three-part series ponders the everyday existence of *Yerevantsis*, their coming to terms with the collapse of the Soviet Union, their dealing with the economic blockade and energy crisis in the mid-1990’s, their learning the ropes of living in a new economic reality of the market economy, and their adapting to a new, globalized world. These large-scale processes are examined by taking an intimate look at how life in a particular Yerevan *bak* unfolds, at how relationships among neighbors form and develop, at how residents deal with newcomers, weddings and funerals, happy times and sad times. Recently the producers of the film have also created a video game called “*Our Bak: The Game*,” during which the player appears as the film’s lead hero and helps solve problems and gives advice to the neighbors from his *bak*.

But now many of these *baks* are being destroyed as the push for more private rather than public space is becoming more and more pronounced. Many *baks* surrounded by Soviet-era buildings are being taken over by garages and other privately-owned structures. Car ownership has grown considerably in the years since 1991, and by the end of 2005 the total number of cars registered in Yerevan was at 250,000 (Meliksetyan 2007). In the following year, a total of 26,000 cars were imported into Armenia, and most of those were expected to remain in Yerevan, thereby expanding the amount of cars in the

city by 10% (Rashidyan 2007). Though representatives of Yerevan's City Hall vow that no new private construction is to be allowed in *baks*, and that any private car garages and small buildings are to be taken down, obstruction of *baks* continues to take place. It is widely believed that if a high enough bribe is paid, a permit to construct a private garage in a *bak* is sure to be secured.

Moreover, most of the newly built "elite" buildings do not even have *baks*. To make matters worse, they are often times constructed in obstruction of other, older buildings' *baks*, thereby jeopardizing their existence and the right of the residents already living there to this important, and very "Armenian" public space. Put in the words of Ovakimian, an environmental activist:

"Yerevan's *baks* have become extremely un-cozy, they have lost all of their appeal. They used to be very cozy, they were practically children's playgrounds. Children grew up there, played with one another, there was a lot of human contact. The *bak* used to be a space where neighbors communicated with one another. Now that function has ceased, neighbors don't know one another. I think that's very bad. People must interact with one another. When we say "nation," "people," it's not just people at a meeting or demonstration, but everyday contact, connectivity. For example, in our *bak* we are unable to choose a headperson. People don't know one another, people don't trust one another, and most importantly, it seems people have divided the *bak* up for [private] garages, etc. For me this is most painful. I think this is one of the most important and painful losses in Yerevan. And the new buildings, they have no *baks* at all! So, we have lost our *bak*" (Ovakimian 2008).

In the preceding quote Ovakimian points to something very important, specifically that with the loss or grave endangerment of this common space, where Armenianness was created and perpetuated, a community was created, a nation was created, and that the *bak* is one of the essential places where national identification and nation-belonging begins, with children playing, watching and learning the rituals and traditions of everyday Armenian life. *Baks* are an institution in the life of an Armenian, and the loss of those spaces from the city's everyday life will come with immeasurable consequences.

Disappearing Green Space

The loss of green space and its conquest by private enterprises is an everyday complaint of Yerevan's residents. Ask most *Yerevantsis* about the status of green spaces in the capital, and they will voice their concerns with the rapid contraction of Yerevan's green spaces (and urban green parks in particular) nearly in unison. The media report on the subject regularly, and prominent environmentalists continue to wage their struggle in attempts to remind the municipal government of the need to protect and enlarge Yerevan's green spaces. The municipal government maintains that it has plans to protect all public green spaces in the capital, and in a 2008 interview to the press Yerevan's then-mayor Yervand Zakharyan said that he saw Yerevan as a much greener city in the future (Gevorkian 2008). According to the 2005 master plan and other planning documents, the amount of green space in Yerevan has grown in recent years, and more trees are to be planted. The popular perception, however, is that Yerevan's green spaces keep shrinking, and that without a concerted effort to stop the "conquest of green space," Yerevan will

soon be devoid of public green space. There are many types of green spaces in Yerevan, public (urban green parks, the Botanical Garden, forest parks on the hills that surround Yerevan, and other green spaces), private (home gardens and other green spaces on private land) and semi-private. In the sections that follow I describe two categories of green space, the shrinking of which has generated much worry among *Yerevantsis*: 1) the publicly-accessible urban green parks, scattered throughout the city, which have been endangered by the burgeoning café culture and the construction of other private enterprises in the city's parks, and 2) the Dalma Orchards, a historic agricultural area, located within city bounds and now subject to re-profiling. Before I describe these spaces, the forces that are responsible for their contracting, and the efforts to reverse or slow down these processes, first it is necessary to provide an historical overview of green spaces in Yerevan.

Before Soviet power came to Armenia, Yerevan had very few territories of publicly-accessible green space, although privately-owned gardens, orchards and agricultural areas were rather widespread. According to a late 17th century description of Yerevan by a French traveler Jean Chardin “the city is in the valley, with two rivers flowing through, and most of it is covered with orchards and vineyards” (Chardin, from “The Travels of Sir John Chardin”, quoted in Grigoryan 1983). After the arrival of Russian Imperial power in 1850's a public green space called “The English Park” was established near the center of Yerevan. In addition to the English Park, there were two other publicly-accessible green spaces in Yerevan, but all three were very poorly maintained and not frequented by the city's residents (Grigoryan 1983).

Soon after Armenia became a part of the USSR, the Soviet government commissioned architect Aleksandr Tamanian to design the city's first master plan as capital of a Soviet republic. During his studies at the St. Petersburg College of Fine Arts Tamanian was exposed to various design theories of the time, one of which was Ebenezer Howard's "garden-city" theory (Howard 1965). Upon his arrival in Yerevan and the commission to draw up the first master plan for Armenia's new capital he used elements of the garden-city design theory in his work. According to Howard, garden-cities are usually small, planned for no more than 50,000 residents, but in planning Yerevan Tamanian was designing a capital and a city for 150,000 residents, and in order to do this he had to step away from a blind following of Howard's tenets, and instead use the prescriptions that were most useful for Yerevan at the time. The tenets he accepted were: functional zonation of the city territory and the call for abundance of green spaces in the city and around it. By greening the city's territory, Tamanian aimed at "softening" the climate of the city, alleviating its aridity, and making it a more pleasurable place to live. Yerevan is located in an arid environment and the winds that come out of the north bring dust into the city, and Tamanian wanted to minimize their effect by providing green barriers to dust and other air pollutants (Manukyan and Tamanian 2005).

Tamanian's 1924 master plan for Yerevan planned for a city with a population of 150,000 residents and with a territory of 1,105 hectares, 140 (12%) of which were to be set aside for green space. He planned to distribute the green territories in three concentric circles of green spaces in and surrounding the city center. The first and closest to the city center was Circular Boulevard, which surrounded the city center with an open circle of public-access green parks with abundant benches and water fountains throughout. The

second circle of greenery was to be a set of “forest-parks” planted on the hills that surround Yerevan’s center, which would consist of trees being planted in places where construction was not feasible. Those “forest-parks” were to join with the Dalma Orchards and the Tzitzernakaberd Park (located in the city’s south-west and western parts). The third circle was to be a large green zone, 1,000 hectares (not included in the 1,105 hectare territory of the city proper) and 250 meters wide, which would encircle Yerevan outside of its city proper bounds (Grigoryan 1983). In the 1930’s and 40’s large-scale greening operations were held, and the hills of Nork, the Arabkir Plateau, the Tsitsernakaberd area and other hills surrounding the city center were soon covered in trees and bushes. These were additions to the first and second circles, but because the city grew rapidly, the areas that were to be planted with the third circle of greenery were consequently slated for development instead.

Under Soviet law urban green spaces were partitioned into four categories: general access, restricted access, special access and miscellaneous (this classification scheme was adopted by independent Armenia after the Soviet Union’s collapse). Urban green parks and the trees/bushes planted along city streets fell under the general access category. Green space located on university campuses, inner courtyards (*baks*), and around government buildings were considered restricted access. Green spaces inside the Botanic Garden, the Zoo, in cemeteries, on the territory of military bases were considered special access. The miscellaneous category encompassed the trees and bushes not accounted for in the rest of the classes (Maksapetyan 2008). Soviet authorities aimed for an increase in the amount of publicly accessible green space with each new planning cycle, and a provision to enlarge the city’s green parks was included in each iteration of

Yerevan's master plan (Grigoryan 1983). This echoes the irony inherent in Soviet socialist planning in that on the one hand, Soviet planning stood for industrial development at all costs, including human and environmental, and, on the other hand, stewardship of the land and protection of green areas for rest, recreation, as well as for their very preservation were also widely practiced (Weiner 2000).

In the mid-1960's the total area of green space in Yerevan was around 1990 hectares (of which 501 hectares were designated as general-access) and in the early 1970's—nearly 6,857 (of which 791 were general-access). According to a 1986 YerevanProject planning document (which was quoted in the “Greening of Yerevan” section of the 2005 Master Plan) green space was projected to take up nearly 10,000 hectares by 2000, 3,487 of which would be designated as general-access (Yerevan Master Plan 2005). In view of circumstances of the years that followed, that number was never reached.

The early 1990's and the economic blockade that plagued Armenia were most destructive for Yerevan's green spaces. The energy crisis forced the city's residents to cut down trees in pursuit of fuel wood, and most of the cutting was done in green areas designated as general-access, since they were most accessible to people looking for fuel-wood without having to leave the city. I remember going for walks in Yerevan's parks on crisp winter afternoons, and seeing branch after branch shaved off, tree after tree cut down. At one of the lowest points in the energy crisis I remember hearing conversations of cutting down the line of stately planetrees, which flanked the edges of Mashtots Avenue and had become an icon of this central thoroughfare. A movement to save those

trees was galvanized by environmental activists, and the planetrees were spared and continue to shade the avenue today (see Figure 4.8).

During the years of the energy crisis the amount of trees within the city’s green spaces was greatly diminished, but the construction boom that followed soon thereafter contributed a great deal to the destruction of Yerevan’s green spaces as well. Estimates of the amount of green space lost as a result of the energy crisis and the construction boom range between 20 and 40 percent. Table 4.1 shows an official estimate of the amount of green space lost in the years between 1990 and 2004, which was the year when green spaces were measured and accounted for as part of the preparations for the release and approval of the 2005 master plan.

Table 4.1: Amount of green space in Yerevan in the years 1990 and 2004.

Functional type of green space	1990 (in hectares)	2004 (in hectares)
1. General use and access	928.3	540.3
2. Limited use and access	2,395.2	2,951.3
3. Special meaning	2,288.7	1,460.1
4. Miscellaneous	-	-
TOTAL	5,612.2	4,951.7

Unofficial estimates place the loss of green space were much higher, as, for example, in a study carried out by the Social-Ecological Association of Armenia, where they cite a tremendous reduction of public green space from 30.6% of Yerevan’s total area in 1986 to 3.6% of Yerevan’s total area in 2002 (SEAA 2005). The following section deals with

the consequences of the great diminution of the amount and size of urban green parks in Yerevan.

Yerevan's Shrinking Green Parks

The takeover of Yerevan's intra-urban green parks by a burgeoning café culture has been a primary concern for residents of Yerevan. During a period of seven years (1998-2005) the number of cafes and restaurants in Yerevan's center tripled (SEAA 2005), coming at a cost to the city's green parks and other public spaces. As café operators set up umbrella tables and plastic chairs, or, in some cases, pour concrete and build permanent structures in the city's green parks, ever less green space is left for residents to enjoy without having to pay for a cup of coffee.

Yerevan's designer, Aleksandr Tamanian, envisioned Armenia's capital as a garden-city, with large swaths of green space and numerous urban parks. Even though not all of his plans for Yerevan became reality, Yerevan was a rather green city during the Soviet times, with many trees and shrubs lining its streets and urban green parks meandering through the city's neighborhoods (see Table 4.1). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union Yerevan's green spaces have greatly diminished in amount and size. Two factors have contributed to the staggering loss of green spaces in Yerevan in the past two decades. First, during the economic blockade and energy crisis of the mid-1990's many of then-present green areas suffered greatly because residents were forced to cut trees for fuel-wood purposes. And second, the fast-paced construction boom that Yerevan has experienced in the past decade lessened the amount of already thinning green space quite a bit.

The first post-Soviet document to address issues of adding green space to Yerevan's territory is the city's 2005 master plan. According to Yerevan's municipal government, there is a considerable amount of greenery being planted in public spaces, and cutting down trees without a permit is a fineable offense (Maksapetyan 2008). The 2005 master plan has planned for an increase in public green spaces in the city as well, but oftentimes the plan foresees public green space in many places that are currently occupied not only by seasonal, but also by permanent and semi-permanent cafes and entertainment complexes (Ajarian 2008; Devoyan 2008; Ovakimian 2008). Even though the master plan designates those areas as green space and counts them as part of the projected amount of green space, the areas utilized by private enterprises will in likelihood not be returned to the public realm. Table 4.2 shows figures of green space currently present in Yerevan, as well as green spaces planned to be planted by 2020.

Table 4.2: Amount of green space in Yerevan in the years 2004, 2007 and 2020 (projected)

Functional type of green space	2004 (in hectares)	2007 (in hectares)	Projected by 2020 (in hectares)
1. General use and access	540.3	772.3	2,382.0
2. Limited use and access	2,951.3	3,664.3	3,245.3
3. Special meaning	1,460.1	2,143.9	2,310.0
4. Miscellaneous	-	167.3	-
TOTAL	4,951.7	6,738.4	9,397.7

There is a widespread belief among *Yerevantsis* that the decrease in the amount of green space in Yerevan has negatively affected the health of Yerevan's residents. The view that trees, shrubs and other green plants are extremely important for a climate such

as Yerevan's in that they cleanse the air, supply more oxygen and lessen the amount of dust in the air is widely accepted in Armenia, both by scientists and laypersons. A study carried out by the Center for Ecological-Noosphere Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia investigated the dust-trapping properties of various tree species, and concluded that Yerevan's trees were overburdened with the amount of particulates suspended in the air, and recommended that more functional greening be undertaken in order to ensure better air quality in the city (Center for Ecological-Noosphere Studies 2007). Scientific investigations aside, the popular perception in Yerevan is that the air quality since the collapse of the Soviet Union has worsened greatly, and that has happened as a result of the diminution of the city's green spaces.³⁴ In the words of Hakobyan, a scientist on staff at the Center for Ecological-Noosphere Studies in Yerevan, "since the construction boom began I have heard of an increase in allergies and asthma, and I think this is due to the fact that Yerevan's green spaces have shrunk considerably" (Hakobyan 2008). This statement illustrates the commonly held belief that the thinning of Yerevan's outer green belt and its intra-urban green parks has dramatically increased the amount of dust in the city, and this in turn has increased the amount and severity of allergies and respiratory diseases. Such concerns, as well as worries about decreased access to and the shrinking of the city's urban green parks have ignited widespread protest in Yerevan. To understand the source of these protests we need to understand the use of urban space under Soviet rule. Before the establishment of Soviet power Yerevan

³⁴ This may not in fact be true. During the Soviet times Yerevan was an industrial center, with several large factories and plants releasing unfiltered pollutants into the air. The general perception, however, is that during the Soviet times, even with the industrial enterprises running, the air was still cleaner than it is today, and this decrease in quality is attributed to the greatly diminished size and distribution of the city's green parks.

had few public green spaces. There were private green territories in the form of gardens, orchards and agricultural fields, but the concept of a public green space to the degree that it permeated Soviet Yerevan was introduced to the city only with Tamanian's designs. It is those public green spaces that environmental activists are struggling to preserve today. However, it seems that they are not fighting for the preservation of green space just for the sake of green space. In my opinion there is more to their efforts, and the preservation of trees and greenery is not their only goal. The protest marches and movements represent a struggle against powerful sets of forces that have in recent years converted large swaths of previously publicly-accessible space into privatized space, effectively excluding at least a portion of the population that enjoyed unrestricted access to those public spaces in the past. As these activists struggle for protection of Yerevan's trees, they at the same time struggle for justice and equitable access.

Now that Yerevan has become a post-socialist city, a new set of rules about rights of access and use has been established. As Yerevan's intra-urban public green parks are lost or re-profiled, many *Yerevantsis* have risen up to protest. Takeover of public green space by private enterprises has been especially visible in the center of the city, and such activities have prompted continued criticism of the government, as well as outbursts of public protests. One such event, known as the "One Handful of Soil March," is described later in this chapter.

Dalma Orchards

Another green area that is endangered by current transformations of Yerevan's cityscape is Dalma Orchards. Dalma Orchards is an agricultural area located in the city's

southwestern portion, just outside of Yerevan's small center. These orchards have been there for nearly 3,000 years, having been initially planted around the Teishebaini fortress.³⁵ Various fruit trees and grape vines have been cultivated here since antiquity, and archaeologists have discovered wine cellars and other evidence of wine production in the area, as well as an irrigation canal dated to the 8-7th centuries BCE, which is still used for watering the orchards. Dalma Orchards is one of the largest continuous green areas within the bounds of the city, with the total size of the area estimated at about 533 hectares. Estimates of the actual size of Dalma Orchards vary between 300 and 760 hectares (Kharatian 2008). According to various environmental activists and residents of Dalma Orchards, various attempts at finding out and documenting the total area of the orchards by the Greens Union of Armenia and other NGO's were left unanswered by Yerevan's municipality (Kharatian 2008).

During the Soviet times the area of Dalma Orchards was incorporated into a collective farm under the jurisdiction of the Shahumyan (now Malatia-Sebastia) District of Yerevan, and agricultural production continued. In 1989, two years before the USSR's collapse, Dalma Orchards were included in the Plan for Preservation and Use of Historical and Cultural Monuments, to be administered by the republic-wide Department for Preservation, Use and Exploration of Historical and Cultural Monuments. With this decision Dalma Orchards were included in the list of Yerevan's historical and cultural monuments, guaranteeing the ancient orchards protection (Kharatian 2008).

³⁵ Also known as Karmir Blur, Teishebaini is one of the two remaining Urartan fortresses on the territory of Yerevan. The other fortress is Erebuni (aka Arin Berd) the establishment of which in 782 BCE by Urartan King Menua is considered the birth of the city of Yerevan.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the territory of the Orchards was divided and leased to nearly 1,800 farmers, who continued to grow agricultural crops in the aged agricultural area. The diverse group included farmers who had worked at the collective farm, long-time residents of Yerevan, migrants from Armenia's rural areas, as well as refugees, who had escaped the escalating violence against Armenians in neighboring Azerbaijan. The heritage monument status of Dalma Orchards was not recognized by the new regime, and in the years between 1991 and 2005 the land-users were instructed to draw up and sign land lease contracts with the district governments (Malatia-Sebastia and Kentron), which would allow them to use the land they were on for various terms ranging between 10 and 50 years. However, after the ratification of the 2005 master plan for Yerevan, according to which all agricultural activity was to be re-profiled or removed from within the city bounds entirely, the territory of Dalma Orchards was to be partitioned into a set of development zones, with only 256 hectares remaining as a "forest-park" and the rest slated for development. The Dalma farmers began to hear from land developers, who had been awarded lease contracts for various parts within the territory of Dalma Orchards. When the farmers responded that they had signed land-lease contracts with the district governments, Yerevan's City Hall's response was that the farmers contracts had been rendered null and void, since they had failed to register them with the cadastral authorities (this information was not made explicit to the farmers when the contracts were signed), and that only the new contracts signed between Yerevan's municipal government and various land developers were now valid (Kharatian 2008). The farmers were asked to vacate their land plots, as the Dalma Orchards were slated for re-profiling, splitting the area into a "forest-park" and a development zone, set aside for

the construction of a shopping and entertainment center, tentatively known as “Dalma Orchards Mall” or “Dalma Mall” (Khojoyan 2009).

Struggling for their land rights, the residents of Dalma Orchards formed a protest movement and have received help from a few NGO’s in Armenia, including the Sakharov Center for Protection of Human Rights, and Armenia’s Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center. During my 2008 research trip to Yerevan I had the opportunity to visit Dalma Orchards with one of Armenia’s most prominent environmental activists, and got a tour of some parts of the historic orchards. Parts of the orchards are still cultivated, but many of the land plots that are closest to the city center have been turned into busy construction sites. Even though many farmers have given up the fight, some are still involved in the struggle to restore their rights of use. As recently as June of 2009, Armenian news agency A1+ reported that once again Dalma Orchard residents protested outside of the National Assembly building demanding that their property rights be restored and they be allowed to cultivate the lands once again. However, as of October of 2009, during a public presentation of the proposed “Dalma Orchards Mall” developer Alexander Harutyunyan stated that the farmers had been compensated and ground for the new entertainment and shopping center would be broken in the near future.

“Fighting for Our Spaces”: Protest Movements and Community Activism

In response to the diminution of public green spaces, the increased utilization of public land for private purposes, forced evictions of residents and demolition of their homes, a number of protest movements have sprung up in Yerevan in recent years. In

most cases these movements are organized by representatives of the group of people most disenfranchised by the protested actions, such as the set of protests organized by the residents of the Dalma Orchards, who gather in front of the Prime Minister's office every Thursday. However, there are other types of movements, which are organized by community and/or environmental activists, often with backing from NGO's, which consist mainly of younger citizens who campaign for various causes, including environmental protection and historic preservation.

Every summer Thursday morning a group of protesters vying for a number of different causes gather on Republic Square, around Government Building One, the site of Armenia's Prime Minister's office. They carry signs decrying the actions of the government, blaming those in power for allowing the destruction of their livelihoods and demanding justice, yelling through a loud-speaker for the Prime Minister to step out of his office and answer to them (see Figure 4.12). A line of gloomy-faced policemen face the protesters, separating them from the Government Building. The Thursday protests have become a tradition, and a group of protesters with various demands gathers there. In addition to the residents of Dalma Orchards, the former residents of Arami and Buzand Street, who were asked to leave their homes in order to make way for more lucrative construction, are also present. In the words of a protester: "We are here to fight for our spaces, for our right to justice" (Poghosyan 2008). Most recently these protesters were joined by various organizations protesting the destruction of the Teghut Forest. The Teghut area has a copper and molybdenum deposits, and recently an Armenian-Canadian joint venture has purchased the rights for its exploitation. The area where the mine would be is forested land, and the "Save Teghut" movement has formed in an effort to stop

mining explorations and leave the forested area intact. This movement, unlike the Dalma Orchards protesters and the former residents of Arami and Buzand streets, is led by young environmental and community activists, who rally against the destruction that they maintain will be brought on by copper and molybdenum mining in the Teghut area.

Some of these movements, such as the Dalma Orchards and the Teghut Forest movement, have secured the support of non-governmental organizations and often communicate with the government via prominent spokespersons. The Dalma Orchards movement has received institutional support from the Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center and the Sakharov Institute of Human Rights (Kharatian 2008; Ajarian 2008). However, even the support of non-government organizations and the oratory skills of prominent environmental activists have not helped the land-users of Dalma Orchards, whose contracts have been rendered invalid by changes in land ownership legislation. Even still, the Dalma farmers continue to wage a battle for rights to cultivate their land.

Many protest movements, such as the “Save Teghut” and the Dalma Orchards movements are relatively regular, meeting as often as once per week. Others, such as the “One Handful of Soil March” are sporadic, one-time events, usually organized by non-governmental organizations and/or environmental and community activists. The “One Handful of Soil March” was a one-time protest march organized by the Alliance of Social-Environmental Organization in protest of yet another café proposed for construction around the territory of the Opera Square in downtown Yerevan.

The territory of the Opera Square, oftentimes simply referred to as “Opera” in Yerevan, is a block bounded by Tumanian, Terian, Sayat-Nova Streets and Mashtots Avenue in the very heart of Yerevan (see Figure 4.1 and Figure 5.17). The territory of

Opera Square is home to the Opera House, which is surrounded by an open plaza, at one time flanked by abundant public green space and a human-made lake along Terian Street, known as Swan Lake. Much of the green space surrounding “Opera” has been compromised to make way for cafes, dance clubs and other entertainment complexes, which have, in addition to lessening the amount of green space, restricted access to this public space. Walking through the space is not prohibited; however, only paying customers have access to seats, whereas in the past Opera was dotted with benches, which were available for anyone who was passing through.

On the afternoon of July 26, 2007 a group of Yerevan residents gathered at the foundation hole dug next to Swan Lake and Arno Babajanian’s monument. Each of the participants carried a handful of soil in the palm of their hand, throwing it ceremoniously into the foundation hole in a symbolic gesture of refilling it. The gathering quickly attracted attention, and when asked whom the protesters represented, a unanimous response was given: “We are all *Yerevantsis*, citizens of Armenia” and that they were there to protest the prospective construction of yet another café in the vicinity of Yerevan’s Opera Square. Donning signs that read “No to the destruction of green space!” and “No more concrete,” the protesters called for the return of Circular Boulevard and other green spaces in the city, and the demolition of cafes and restaurants that had overwhelmed Yerevan’s urban parks (Ajarian 2008; Devoyan 2008; Ovakimian 2008). In the words of one of the participants of the “One Handful of Soil” March:

“We found out that a foundation hole was dug by the Babajanian monument next to Opera Square in front of the Old Yerevan restaurant complex. When we tried to find out ... what was going to be built there, who gave the permission...we never

received any official information, no responses. [Since nobody knew anything about this] we (the Alliance of Social-Environmental Organizations) decided to act, to stage a demonstration, in order to help the municipal government battle this illegal construction. So everybody [who] came by brought as much soil as they could, there were about 100-150 people, and each person brought a small plastic bag of soil, some people brought a big sack, some people just a handful. And we walked to the foundation hole and began filling it in with the soil that we brought. Of course, the hole was very deep and we couldn't fill it with the small amount of soil that we had, but we attracted considerable attention" (Ovakimian 2008).

Ovakimian went on to tell me that the foundation hole had been dug for a one-story covered café for the people who attended the skating rink at Swan Lake during the winters. Even after the media frenzy that the "One Handful of Soil" March attracted, the questions of who had given the permission for yet another café to be built in the vicinity of Opera Square, or to whom the permission had been given remained unanswered. However, in response to the protest march, the municipal government brought a bulldozer and filled the hole with soil, literally covering up the controversial decision (Ovakimian 2008).

The "One Handful of Soil March" is considered to be a great success and is a proud example brought up by many of my environmental and community activists. Even though the march itself was a one-time event, the activists involved with it and the organizations they represent are in constant dialog with Yerevan's municipal government, asking them difficult questions about issues of diminution of green space, pollution and congestion in the city center, and other environmental and quality of life

issues. The “One Handful of Soil March” is a fascinating example of a protest movement organized by a group of non-governmental organizations in response to the proposed construction of yet another café on the block of Opera Square, on the territory that already contains at least 13 cafes, five of which have a concrete foundation, including, in some cases, two- or three-story buildings (Mirzoyan 2007). As of summer of 2009, the protested café still had not been built, and the spot where the foundation hole was was sown with grass (see Figure 4.11).

Yerevan’s Endangered Spaces: An Uncertain Future

The endangerment and disappearance of black buildings, *baks* and public green spaces has produced a general air of dissatisfaction with the manner in which the city is handled by the authorities, and this has led to protests and other expressions of dissent by many of Yerevan’s residents. The role of environmental activists in the process of struggle is noteworthy, as noted by this employee of Yerevanproject, the planning agency responsible for the creation and implementation of Yerevan’s 2005 Master plan:

“Environmental activists, through their struggle to protect dwindling green space in Yerevan, have ignited the spark of protest, and through their activism and the example of “One Handful of Soil” have learnt that even though the authorities might try to silence their voices, at least some of their protests will be heard (Minasian 2008).

In addition to these three broad categories of endangered spaces in Yerevan, there is a general feeling of loss of the image of Yerevan, of the “feeling of Yerevan,” a drastic

change and a painful loss of what Yerevan used to mean to its residents. However, the disappearance and the re-profiling of these spaces have led to a new landscape in Yerevan, one that is slanted much more towards consumption of goods and consumerism. As stated in concluding chapter of the city's 2005 master plan, according to an official decree dated August 1 2002, five areas of the city—Main Avenue, Kond, 33rd district (also known as Firdusi), the area around Ararat wine factory and the area around St. Gregory the Illuminator church—have been proclaimed as areas to be rebuilt (Yerevan Master Plan 2005). Another such territory is the Noragyugh neighborhood in Yerevan, which is located within a 5-minute ride from the small center of Yerevan, and there plans to construct in this are a new complex of residential and commercial real estate, and a diplomatic center in particular. This neighborhood is considered to be a perfect location since it is within minutes from the small center of Yerevan, and Yerevan's Chief Architect Samvel Danielyan described those homes "quite dilapidated" in an interview to the press in February 2010 (Abrahamyan 2010). There have been promises from Yerevan's Municipality that the residents of those homes will be treated much differently than the residents of Northern Avenue and Main Avenue. The residents themselves, however, are doubtful that they will be given adequate compensation and fear that their fates will be similar to those of the residents of Northern and Main Avenues, and members of the "Victims of State Needs" NGO (Abrahamyan 2010). Actions and promises such as these raise questions about belonging and exclusion within the landscape of Yerevan—both symbolic, as well as quite literal (i.e., residents being unceremoniously kicked out of their homes which stand in the way of a lucrative real estate development opportunity). The agenda of Armenia's current leaders seems to be

that old, dilapidated, and historic homes along with their residents do not belong in the landscape of the city, while new, sleek and shiny neighborhoods that cater to foreign investors and the newly-rich locals are to be part of the future image of Yerevan.

As for the city's green spaces, the struggle for their preservation continues. Not only is it problematic that there are less trees in Yerevan, but the urban green parks that used to be publicly accessible are being compromised by private establishments, and that presents perhaps a larger problem than the diminution of the number of trees per se. The Yerevan municipality might have plans to plant more trees along Yerevan's streets and on surrounding hills, but plans to preserve, much less to create, more public space are low on the list of priorities. As time goes by, there is less and less public space available to *Yerevantsis* for rest and recreation free of charge. Thus, perhaps the struggle for trees, green spaces, and the environment has become conflated with the struggle for justice, and a demand of at least a partial return to the accessibility of public spaces within the landscape of Armenia's national capital.

The fate of one of Yerevan's green parks, the Pushkin Park, was different from that of many other green parks in Armenia's capital. While most parks in the city were experiencing the onslaught of cafes, both temporary and semi-permanent, Pushkin Park was in disrepair for quite a few years. In 2005, with the help of a large donation from the Boghossian Foundation, a philanthropic organization run by wealthy diaspora Armenians Jean and Albert Boghossian, the park was renovated and transformed into a flagship public space in Yerevan. Pushkin Park had been renamed "Park of Lovers" in the mid-1990's, but after the donation was in place, a campaign to promote the park and its new name began. The park will be sponsored by the Boghossian Foundations for at least

another 20 years, and it is the hope of the organization in charge of the park's renovation and upkeep that Yerevan Park of Lovers will become an example for the other parks and investors to follow (see Figure 4.13).

Described to me in an interview as “a green park after the greatest green parks in the world, such as Central Park and Hyde Park” (Papikyan 2008), the Park of Lovers is a new type of public space of Yerevan, one which is renovated and maintained by a large philanthropic donation rather than by Yerevan's municipal government. Though the park is gated, entrance to it is free of charge. Signs specifying rules of usage and fines assessed for disobeying them are posted throughout the park, and some areas of the park are under video surveillance. After plans about renovation of Pushkin Park were announced, a great debate about the Yerevan Park of Lovers ensued in the press. Many negative opinions about it were expressed. Others were refreshed by the novelty of this approach and were excited that for once it was not another takeover of public space by cafes, even though many writing in Armenia's press about Yerevan's Park of Lovers were suspicious that this was yet another scheme to annex one more urban green park in Yerevan. Perhaps the future public green space in Yerevan will look less like a Soviet-style urban green park, and more like the Yerevan Park of Lovers, where the space is maintained by a private entity for public use and strict rules of conduct are enforced.

Though part of the same general trajectory of globalization and connected to the undulations of the global real estate market, the forces that are transforming various spaces in Yerevan are disparate and distinct from one another. The forces that are transforming Yerevan's *baks* are different from those that are transforming downtown neighborhoods and rebranding them as sleek new districts such as Northern Avenue, the

soon to be constructed diplomatic enclave in the Noragyugh District, and so on. As the conversion from socialism to capitalism continues, capital investment (on the part of foreign as well as local investors) in the city's real estate follows a general trend of "branding" Yerevan and advertising it to foreign visitors, oftentimes letting the needs of Yerevan's residents go by the wayside.

Figures for Chapter IV: Yerevan’s Endangered Spaces

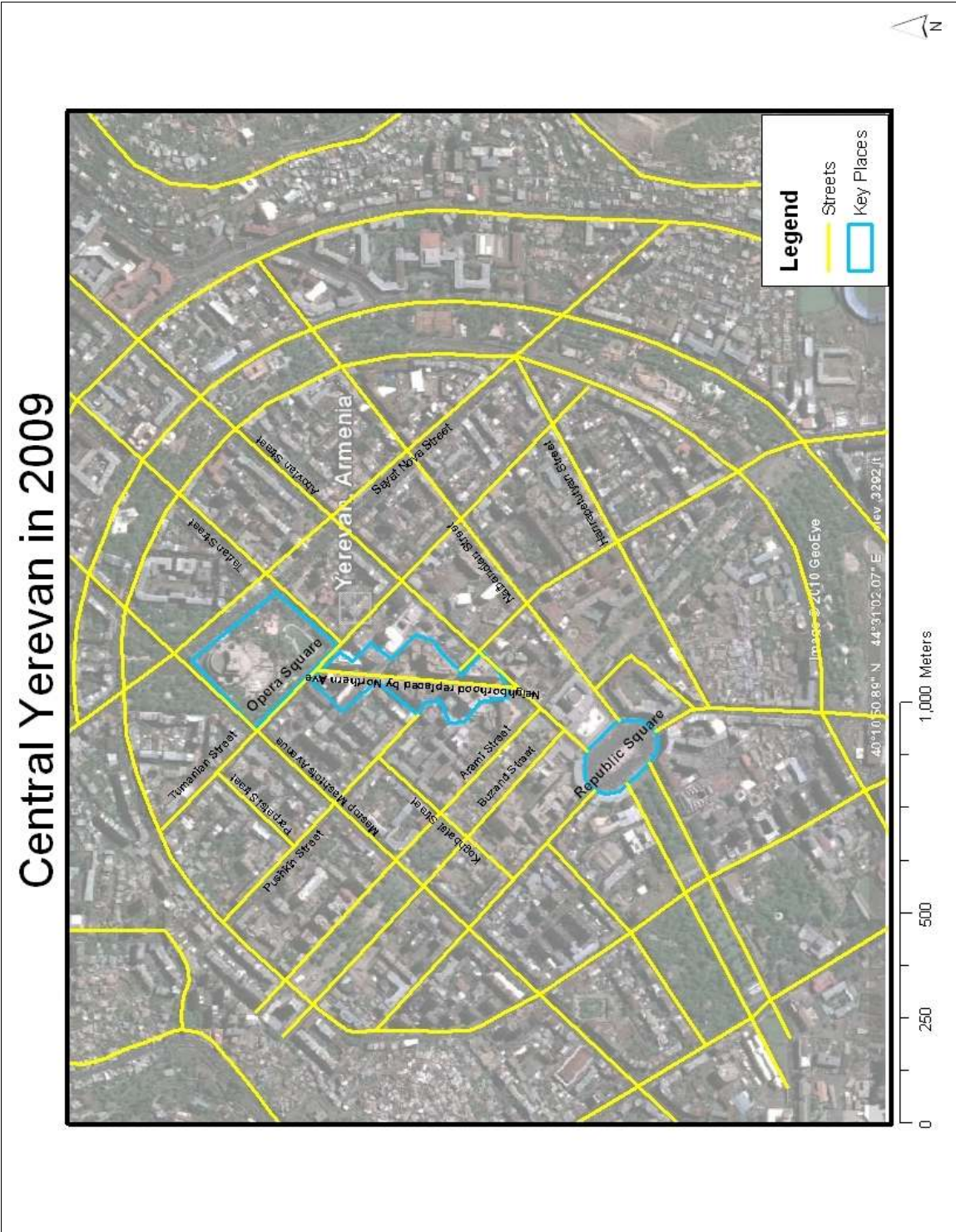


Figure 4.1: Aerial image of central Yerevan in 2009. Opera Square, Northern Avenue and Republic Square are highlighted. Source: Google Earth.



Figure 4.3: A "black building" on Buzand Street.



Figure 4.4: A "black building" on Buzand Street. The plaque reads "protected by the government" and designates protection under Soviet law.



Figure 4.5: A "black building" with its façade stones numbered.



Figure 4.6: View of Arami Street, proposed site of Old Yerevan Street. The buildings in the foreground on the left are "black buildings". The two-toned building on the left, Sil Plaza, was restored and turned into an upscale department store in the late 1990's.



Figure 4.7: A "black building" on Hanrapetutyán Street. This building is being restored on site.



Figure 4.8: Planetrees along Mashtots Avenue.



Figure 4.9: Urban green park in Yerevan. On a hot summer afternoon, *Yerevantsis* enjoy the shade on a bench in one of Yerevan's urban parks. Spaces such as these are increasingly more rare, as public space within urban green parks is usurped by private enterprises.



Figure 4.10: View of our *bak* from our third floor window. The spatial organization is typical of a Yerevan *bak*.



Figure 4.11: Site of "One Handful of Soil" protest march. The foundation hole has been filled and covered with gravel, but a rendering of the proposed project is still attached to an adjacent tree. The signs reads "Cafe Odeon".



Figure 4.12: At the weekly Thursday protest on Republic Square. The protesters in the foreground are former residents of downtown neighborhoods, who were unceremoniously evicted from their homes in order for their neighborhoods to undergo rapid urban renewal.



Figure 4.13: Gated entrance into Yerevan's Park of Lovers.



Figure 4.14: Open-air cafe along Mashtots Avenue.



Figure 4.15: Open-air cafe along Terian Street, on Opera Square.

Dalma Orchards and Center of Yerevan

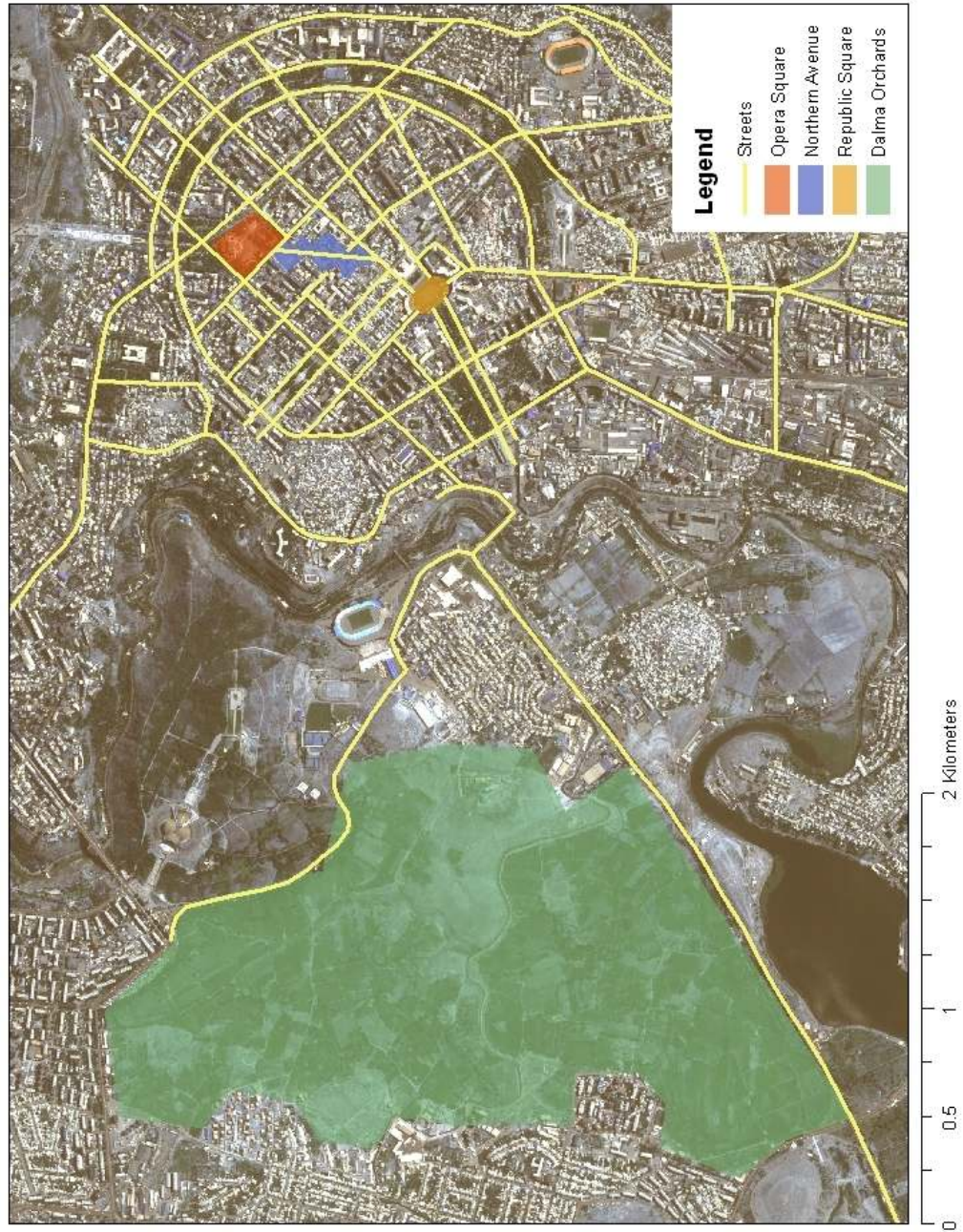


Figure 4.16: Dalma Orchards, Opera Square, Northern Avenue and Republic Square.

URBAN SYMBOLISM AND NARRATIVES OF THE NATION IN YEREVAN'S
POST-SOVIET LANDSCAPE

While waiting to interview the director of Armenia's National Museum-Institute of Architecture in Yerevan, I passed the time looking through an exhibit titled "The Development of Yerevan from Ancient Times until Today." The exhibit included posters proposing new architectural solutions for various neighborhoods in Yerevan and photographic collages of traditional Armenian architecture as exemplified by churches in the capital, and architectural models of notable Yerevan buildings—built, in the process of construction, and those in the planning stages. One of the first items in the exhibit was an oversized poster. It showed a panoramic view of Yerevan on a sunny summer day, with a massive rendering of the snow-covered twin peaks of Mount Ararat in the background. The caption on the poster read: "The Biblical Mountain of Ararat Dominates the Landscape of the Capital Yerevan" (see Figure 5.1). Not only did Mount Ararat, as claimed by the poster, dominate the landscape of the capital Yerevan, but the mountain also visually dominated the paper space of this relatively large display. The geographic position of the mountain was correct, but the graphic designers had greatly enlarged the mountain out of proportion with its actual size. Thus, the poster visually exaggerated the size of Ararat in order to communicate its symbolic importance in the landscape of Yerevan. Ararat was the first thing that caught one's eye, towering over Yerevan's cityscape, as if watching over it.

On my walk home after the interview I returned to thinking about the symbolic importance of Mount Ararat in the landscape of Yerevan as Armenia's national capital, and for Armenian identity in general. Ararat is a dormant volcano. This geologic formation has two peaks, the taller of which is estimated to be nearly 3.5 million years old, and the shorter—nearly 200,000 years old. The peaks are called Masis (5,165 meters above sea level) and Sis (3,925 meters above sea level), or simply Big Ararat and Small Ararat (Azatyan 1989, 158). Yerevan is located in the northeastern portion of the Ararat valley, and the southern section of the city center's semi-circle opens up to face Mount Ararat. On crisp winter days the mountain can be seen from many high-rise apartments and city streets in Yerevan, and the twin peaks are ever present. One might think that Ararat is a defining characteristic of the Armenian landscape, a point of pilgrimage, a place which each Armenian must visit and spend some time exploring. The first statement is true—it is a defining characteristic of the Armenian landscape, both in the physical sense, as the two-headed giant looms over the Ararat valley and looks onto Armenia's capital Yerevan, but also in a symbolic sense, as images of the mountain appear everywhere, from jars of jam for export, to "Visit Armenia" commercials that play in foreign countries. Armenia is often called "the land of Ararat" by diaspora Armenians and the mountain makes frequent appearances in patriotic songs. Photographs and artists' renderings of the majestic mountain are abundant both in Armenia and in homes of diaspora Armenians.³⁶ The name Ararat and the mountain's images are on postcards, souvenirs, paintings, in the names of Armenian businesses, on cover pages of business reports, and in the title of world-famous Ararat Brandy Factory (see Figure 5.2). Ararat

³⁶ Martiros Saryan is especially famous for frequently depicting Mount Ararat on his colorful canvases.

was even allowed for use as an Armenian symbol by the Soviets, as it appeared on Soviet Armenia's Coat of Arms.³⁷ After independence it has remained on Armenia's Coat of Arms, and its image or name sometimes even appears in some Armenians' signatures and license plates. And yet, even though Ararat's symbolism and its images are ever-present within Armenia and as a representative of all things Armenian to the rest of the world, the mountain itself is located just outside of Armenia's borders, a mere 36 kilometers away from Yerevan, on the territory of neighboring Turkey. Even though the mountain is visible and ever-present in the Armenian self-imaginary, it is painfully unattainable, as if taunting just from the other side of the border.³⁸

Nevertheless, politically unreachable though it may be, Ararat continues to be a powerful symbolic representation of Armenia and Armenianness (in a familiar "nature representing nation" manner), especially in light of its role in the Armenian myth of origin, the Haik and Bel story. This myth, taught to young Armenians in primary schools both in Armenia and in diasporic Armenian communities, establishes the geographic area around Mount Ararat as the ancestral homeland of Armenians. According to the story, Haik, the father of all Armenians, descended from Japheth, Noah's son. Haik rebelled against Bel, the evil leader of Babylon, and moved away with his clan to the vicinity of Mount Ararat in the mid-3rd century BCE (Panossian 2006). Unwilling to accept their

³⁷ A popular anecdote told in Armenia claims that after an image of Mount Ararat, as seen from Yerevan, was placed on Soviet Armenia's Coat of Arms, Turkish officials contested Armenia's right to display a mountain, which was not on their territory, but rather on the territory of Turkey. Soviet officials responded with a contestation of Turkey's right to display an image of the crescent moon and a star on their flag, since those were not on their territory either. Soviet Armenia's right to display Ararat on its official Coat of Arms was retained.

³⁸ There is a saying in Armenia that Ararat only looks beautiful from the Armenian side (facing North East) and that the Turkish side (facing South West) of the mountain is not nearly as picturesque. This is a creative attempt at denying the fact that the mountain is geographically located outside of Armenia's borders.

secession, Bel followed Haik and his clan, and during a battle between the Armenian and the Babylonian leaders Bel was killed with the sharp arrow of Haik. Haik and his family lived on in the area, making “Mount Ararat the national symbol of all Armenians and the territory around it the Armenian homeland from time immemorial” (Panossian 2006, 51-52). As Panossian (2006) argues, the symbolic weight of this story, as “mythical” as it may be, “is just as important for modern Armenian nationalist thinking as any “objective” history” (51).

The powerful symbolic components of the Haik and Bel story insert Mount Ararat into the Armenian national imaginary. In addition, the symbolic significance of Ararat is heightened by the very fact of Ararat’s exile and the feelings of longing and loss associated with it. This “expatriate” status of Mount Ararat, especially in the context of its paramount importance as a symbol in Armenian national identity, requires a recollection of Armenian history of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the Armenian Genocide. The significance of Mount Ararat as a symbol of Armenianness is tied inextricably to the atrocious events of early 20th century.

The Armenian Genocide of 1915 is a traumatic event in Armenian history. However, even though it is an agonizing memory, this event has incredible symbolic importance as a uniting factor for all Armenians. The significance of Mount Ararat as an Armenian symbol is tied inextricably to this history of bloodshed. Though it had been present in the Armenian national imaginary before then, it is because of this excruciating event that Mount Ararat, which stands on the edges of Western Armenia, bears such heavy symbolism for Armenian national identity. It represents the lost lives and lost lands of the 1.5 million Genocide victims, and symbolizes the hope of their surviving heirs of a

return to those lands (which seems more and more unlikely as history moves on). Mount Ararat is such an important symbol of Armenian national identity and Armenianness precisely because it is located in Eastern Anatolia, on ancestral Armenian lands. It is representative of the lives, livelihoods and lands lost as a result of unspeakable violence waged against Armenians of the Western Provinces, and its symbolic image embodies the yearning to return to it. The longing for Ararat is the longing for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and for historical justice. Some survivors of the Genocide settled in soon to be Soviet Armenia, but many left that part of the world and joined the Armenian diaspora, particularly in France and the United States.

Ararat continues to be an extremely important symbol of Armenian national identity and Armenianness because it is geographically tied to the history of displacement of the Armenian people, it is spatially located on the lands that the Armenians lost (even though by no means it is the only place that Armenians lost). In recent history, Ararat has been a ubiquitous representation of Armenianness, and one that continues to be used in articulations of national identification among Armenians, despite the fact that the mountain itself is currently located on the territory of neighboring Turkey.

Ararat is perhaps the most powerful symbol of Armenianness in the national imaginary, but the landscape of Yerevan bears many other potent symbols of national identity as well. These symbols and symbolic spaces are located both in the heart of Yerevan, as well as on the city's outskirts, and just outside, as is the case with Ararat. Some of them are old, remaining from antiquity and the Middle Ages (i.e., Urartan fortresses of Arin-Berd and Teishebaini and churches scattered throughout the city), while others were built during the Soviet times, when a careful sifting through the

meanings and purposes of symbols still allowed certain “national” symbols to be constructed (i.e., the Matenadaran Museum of Ancient Manuscripts and the Armenian Genocide Memorial). Powerful symbols of nationhood are inserted into landscapes of national capitals in attempts to ignite and sustain national consciousness. They are embedded as code words into the larger text of the city.³⁹ In the case of Yerevan, now that the post-Soviet Armenian political elites are faced with the tremendous task of re-imagining Yerevan as a post-Soviet capital as well as with the task of crafting a post-Soviet Armenian national identity, their choices and the ways in which these processes are orchestrated speak volumes about their governance style. These choices will also mean a great deal for the future of Yerevan, both its landscape and residents. How have Armenia’s leaders appropriated the urban landscape for their version of Armenianness, and what symbols are they using in order to accomplish this task? Which symbols do they keep, which do they remove, and which do they imbue with new meanings? What messages about socio-cultural orientation, identity and belonging in the capital of Armenia do these symbols project? How do Ararat and other national symbols play into the contemporary articulation of Armenian national identity? And furthermore, how is the narrative of Armenian nationhood symbolized through the official public landscape of contemporary Yerevan? In this chapter I address symbols, symbolic spaces, and their meanings in the landscape of Yerevan. I deal with old symbols, new symbols, lasting symbols, fleeting symbols, the changing meanings of the symbols that are already present, as well as of those that are in the process of being constructed and contested. I also examine narratives of national identity and belonging that are being constructed and

³⁹ Reading the city as a text is way of understanding urban landscapes put forth by James Duncan in his 1990 *“City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom”*.

inscribed onto the landscape of Yerevan by Armenia's contemporary political elites, the symbols that they are inserting, removing or re-appropriating, particularly in the face of currently raging debates regarding the place of Armenia and Armenians in the region and in the world. I turn first to a discussion of symbols in landscapes of national capitals, and review key works on the role of urban landscapes in narratives of nationhood (and vice versa).

Urban Symbolism and Narratives of the Nation

Works on the connections between landscapes of national capitals and narratives of nationhood are numerous within human geography and cognate disciplines (Cosgrove 2003; Duncan 1990). Here I highlight key works upon which I build in conceptualizing the role of urban landscape in the construction of national and ethnic identities. These are works on symbols and symbolic spaces within landscapes of cities, and national capitals in particular, and the narratives of nationhood that they bear, construct and embody (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998; Bell 1999). A subset of this literature contains works by scholars who have written about transformations of the landscapes of post-Soviet (and post-Socialist) cities and the ways in which post-independence elites have rethought, re-inscribed, re-ordered, re-appropriated and re-imagined symbols in national capitals and what messages about post-national identity those elites promote and inscribe onto the cityscapes (Bell 1999; Bitusikova 1998; Burnett 2005; Forest and Johnson 2002).

Urban landscapes are vivid composers and transmitters of contemporary culture; they are expressions of the societies that create them, and in turn play a significant role in

the development of those societies (Cosgrove 1984; Czepczynski 2008; Duncan 1990). The built environment of a national capital in particular is a key instrument in the construction of national identity, and political elites often use urban spaces to re-create and embody regional and national identities. Cosgrove writes: “The capital cities of every nation-state are designed landscapes whose patterns of roads and open spaces, buildings and monuments invariably inscribe foundation myths, public memory, constitutional structures and heroic individuals into an iconography of nationhood” (Cosgrove 2003, 264). Vigorously engaged in the process of imaginative construction of the nation, reigning political elites inscribe landscapes of national capitals with narratives about nationhood and national belonging (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998; Bell 1999; Bitusikova 1998; Burnett 2005; Forest and Johnson 2002).

Landscapes of national capitals are important sites for the study of narratives of national identity and belonging. These urban spaces are full of symbols and symbolic spaces which are inscribed with meaning by the nation’s ruling elite, and at the same time are read and imbued with various meanings by the popular imagination. Though the elites are largely responsible for the construction of landscape images dealing with national identity, these images are consumed, interpreted and contested by other groups within the state, exemplifying the fluid and fragmented nature of political and cultural identity formation (Jackson 1989; Johnson 1995). In their article that deals with the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument (or Vittoriano) in Rome Atkinson and Cosgrove (1998) write about the carefully calculated construction of this monument for the purposes of fixing and memorializing *Italianness* in the heart of Rome, Italy’s national capital. By constructing this memorial landscape the Italian State sought to ground the construction

of the national narrative in space and to “concretize the always fluid and elusive idea of *Italianness* through locating, constructing and using the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument as an iconic national monument” (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998, 30) and to “define national identity and purpose through the monument’s design, its location in urban space, and the performance of state rituals within and around it” (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998, 29). This attempt to pin down what exactly it meant to be Italian and to represent it in stone has been met with considerable resistance, and various interpretations of this memorial landscape’s meanings have sprung up in Rome. One of the most frequent reactions of Romans to Vittoriano is mockery, and this hotly contested symbol, intended as an embodiment of the Italian nation, has experienced continuous reinterpretation since its inception (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998).

The polyvocality of meanings and interpretations surrounding the Vittoriano is characteristic of public structures and monuments, especially those located in capital cities. Writing about the Basilica of the Sacre Couer in Paris in his 1979 “Monument and Myth” David Harvey wrote about the contested symbolism and meaning of this important component of the cityscape of Paris, paying special attention not to its peaceful origin, but to the deep divergences that accompanied its construction (Harvey 1979).

Public monuments are important elements of urban landscapes and play a major role in conveying narratives of national belonging and identification. In her article titled “Cast in Stone: Monuments, Geography and Nationalism” Nuala Johnson (1995) argues that public monuments are “a vehicle for conceptualizing the nation-building process” (Johnson 1995, 52), and are representative of debates surrounding national identity.

Public monuments are placed in highly visible spaces, and, the elites hope, will promote a

particular narrative of nationhood and togetherness to the everyday passerby, but are often subject to vehement reinterpretation and, at times, critique.

Regime change subjects public monuments from previous eras to yet more scrutiny, reinterpretation and/or replacement. The collapse of the Soviet Union represented a critical juncture in the history of ex-Soviet states, and offered the post-Soviet elites a host of opportunities for the re-interpretation of official public landscapes of capital cities and for the retelling of narratives of nationhood. Everywhere streets named after revolutionaries, Bolshevik leaders and Soviet heroes were renamed after national figures, their memory retrieved from historical texts or invented anew. Many statues of Vladimir Lenin, present in nearly every city, were toppled, some in front of cheering crowds, others under the shroud of night (Bell 1999; Grigor 2007). In their “Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow” Forest and Johnson (2002) write about the efforts of the political elites to appropriate “places of memory” in Moscow for the construction of a post-Soviet Russian national identity and the elites’ project to “impose their visions of a [new] Russian national identity in the symbolic landscape of the capital” (Forest and Johnson 2002, 525). In his article titled “Redefining National Identity in Uzbekistan: Symbolic Tensions in Tashkent’s Official Public Landscape” James Bell (1999) writes about the attempts of the Uzbek political elites to re-inscribe the landscape of their national capital with a new sense of national belonging, one independent of Soviet articulations of Uzbek nationhood. Bell writes of the symbolic tensions that are evident in Tashkent’s official public landscape, as the elites exercise caution while removing or re-profiling icons of the

Soviet past and “forgetting” Uzbekistan’s Soviet history, so as not to completely delegitimize the very regime that educated them and brought their ascent to power.

Similar processes of re-inscription, re-interpretation and re-imagining are underway in Yerevan. Armenia’s political elites have taken to the post-Soviet re-imagining of the cultural landscape of Yerevan with great fervor. The transformations of the capital’s landscape are large-scale and far-reaching, and the meanings with which these changes are imbued are hotly debated and contested. There are three places in Yerevan that command special attention in terms of their symbolic importance, and the elites’ attempts to construct and/or re-imagine them in Yerevan’s post-Soviet landscape. They are: Opera Square, Northern Avenue and Republic Square. All three are located in the heart of Yerevan’s center (see Figure 5.17), and are a large part of the “image of the city,” and their transformations have long-lasting effects on the relationships that *Yerevantsis* have with their city. These places have rich histories, and, especially in the case of Opera Square, are symbolically linked with the political independence of Armenia. Two of these three places (Opera Square and Republic Square) are already vested with much symbolic meaning, and their re-inscription with new ideals and new narratives of Armenian national identity are hotly contested, while Northern Avenue, a recent addition to Yerevan’s landscape, is a blank canvas onto which the elites are free to inscribe new narratives. The recent construction of Northern Avenue and the changes that Opera Square and Republic Square have undergone are part of the promotion of a new post-Soviet Armenian national identity.

Re-Imagining Yerevan’s Landscape in the Post-Soviet Era: The Trio of Symbolic Places in Yerevan’s Center

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and several years (1993-1995) of extreme economic hardship, the Armenian State embarked on a project of re-imagining the landscape of Yerevan and investing it with new meanings. Political power changed hands and in 1998 a more conservative and more nationalist government of Robert Kocharian came to power. Since the late 1990’s Armenia’s political elites have been busy rethinking and appropriating symbols, adding to and subtracting from the iconography of the national capital, renaming streets,⁴⁰ re-inscribing cultural landmarks with amended meanings, building high-speed roadways, constructing new neighborhoods and gentrifying dilapidated ones—all part of a concerted effort to refashion Yerevan as a new post-Soviet and “modern” city,⁴¹ and to promote a new narrative of a post-Soviet Armenian national identity in the process. A new master plan to direct the city’s development was approved by Armenia’s Parliament in 2005. This planning document aims to modify the city, and besides serving a utilitarian function of addressing the missteps of the past and adapting the city to new demands of a capitalist economy, it also performs a symbolic function of rethinking the city and imagining it as a post-Soviet national capital, a city in step with the rest of the world.

⁴⁰ Most streets that bore names of Soviet and Socialist leaders were renamed shortly after independence. In some instances, however, the names of some streets were reverted back to those they bore during the Soviet Union, as was the case with Amirian Street. Amirian was a Soviet Armenian leader, and the street, which is one of the main thoroughfares in central Yerevan, still bears his name.

⁴¹ In this instance “modern” implies a normative statement, taken to mean “contemporary”, “with the times”. “European” and “Western” are often used in this context as well.

In order to tease out the meanings with which Armenia's political elites have imbued the landscape of Yerevan, I take a closer look at three places in the center of Yerevan. These three places—Opera Square, Northern Avenue and Republic Square—are heavy with symbols and bear witness to the narratives that are produced and promoted by Armenia's political elites, as well as the responses to those narratives from the residents of Yerevan. In other words, through tracing the evolution of these three places in the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union we gain insight into the core values behind the elites' narrative of post-Soviet Armenian nationhood and the ways in which it is promoted. By studying these three places in the heart of Yerevan we can peer into the Armenian State's orchestration of identity politics and narratives of a new post-Soviet Armenian national identity via the built landscape of the national capital.

In this chapter I study the transformations of these highly visible and symbolically dominant places in the center of Yerevan by critically reviewing public statements (speeches and interviews to the press) of Armenian government officials and their representatives, as well as the premier planning document for the city of Yerevan—the 2005 Master Plan for Yerevan. Reactions of *Yerevantsis* and their reactions to the actions of the government are represented via opinions expressed in printed articles and interviews conducted in Yerevan. In delivering sketches of these highly symbolic places, I will keep the following three questions in mind. How have Armenia's leaders appropriated the urban landscape for their version of Armenianness, and what symbols are they using in order to accomplish this task? Which symbols do they keep, which do they remove, and which do they imbue with new meanings? And furthermore, how is the

narrative of Armenian nationhood symbolized through the official public landscape of contemporary Yerevan?

Place of Resistance and Hope: Opera Square

Opera Square is a block in the center of Yerevan, bounded by Tumanian, Terian and Sayat-Nova Streets and Mesrop Mashtots Avenue (see Figures 5.16 and 5.17). Located in the very heart of the city, Opera Square is an important site for social interaction. This block, colloquially known as Opera, is home to Yerevan's Opera House (see Figure 5.4), which faces an open pedestrian plaza on one side, and an automobile roundabout (known as Square of France) between Mesrop Mashtots Avenut and Sayat-Nova Street on the other side. The official name of the pedestrian plaza is Independence Square, and it is further surrounded by green space, which was designed and built as a publicly-accessible urban green park during the Soviet times. A human-made lake, known as Swan Lake (see Figure 5.5), also located on the territory of Opera Square, faces Tumanian and Terian streets. This small artificial lake, shaped like Lake Sevan (a freshwater lake in northeastern Armenia), is known as Swan Lake because for some years it was home to black and white swans who lived on the island created in it. "Swan Lake" is also a nod to the famous ballet by the same name composed by famed Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky. For the past three years, in winters Swan Lake has turned into a skating rink, providing for a new mode of interaction on Opera Square.

Yerevan's Opera House was designed by Aleksandr Tamanian in the early 20th century. It is a bi-cameral building, one side of which is intended for productions of operas and ballets, and the other is intended for symphonic concerts. In the early 1920's,

after Armenia became part of the Soviet Union, Soviet authorities commenced the task of redesigning Yerevan into a Soviet republic capital. Large infrastructure projects were initiated, and one of the civic structures that Yerevan lacked was a venue for theatrical productions and other gatherings of large groups of people. By 1926 a few architectural competitions had taken place, but none had yielded a satisfactory design, so the task of designing a new venue fit to house a few thousand people for entertainment fell to Tamanian. He took to the task with great fervor. It took him years to come up with a design that was both to his liking and would get approved by the Soviet bureaucrats (Manukyan and Tamanian 2005). One of Tamanian's designs was finally approved in June of 1927, but construction did not begin until the early 1930's, and the building was not fully complete until 1963, though performances had begun taking place in it decades before then (Manukyan and Tamanian 2005). Yerevan's Opera House after Aleksandr Spendiaryan (a famous Armenian classical composer) remains one of the city's premier entertainment centers, home to many classical and contemporary performances.

Going for walks around the plaza facing the Opera House and in circles around the Swan Lake has been a favorite pastime of *Yerevantsis* for years. As a teenager I remember looking forward to meeting my friends and going to Opera, which was the place to be seen and to see people. *Yerevantsis*, young and old, walked around the open plaza and in circles around Swan Lake, eating sunflower seeds and popped corn, at times sitting down on the surrounding benches for a quick rest. In recent years the green area on Opera Square and around Swan Lake has been converted into some 13 cafes, some of which are temporary, with plastic chairs and table umbrellas, and operate only during the warm summer season, while others have built semi-permanent and permanent structures

and enclosures. These activities have appropriated the city's public space for private and commercial purposes (see Chapter IV). Many *Yerevantsis* are very discontent with the state of affairs in the area surrounding Opera Square. Two recurrent complaints are that Opera Square has lost its image as a space for free and open public interactions and communication and that one is no longer able to sit down on a park bench in the vicinity of Opera and take a rest. These days, with the exception of only a few benches, repose is only available to customers who are willing to pay for a cup of coffee or another beverage. Many interviewees echoed the following quote by a young architect and community activist:

“My friends and I spent our youth in Opera Square, and [now] Opera Square has been taken away from us. This causes me so much pain that I try to avoid the area at all costs. So, if I avoid Opera Square...[then] what's the use of living in Yerevan at all?” (Papikyan 2008).

Opera Square and the territories adjacent to it have always been an important spot for social interaction, for all age groups. Old men sit on benches in the shadows of plane trees and alternate their discussions of Armenian and world politics with intermittent games of cards, chess or backgammon. Young couples walk, holding hands, in circles around Swan Lake, and sit down on the benches for a quick rest or a snack. Young parents go out for walks with their children, and at times entire families spill onto Opera Square, especially on cool summer evenings. Concerts and other large-scale celebratory events are often held in Opera Square, that is in addition to the performances and concerts that take place inside the two performance halls of the Opera House. With the addition of cafes and other entertainment complexes to the territory of Opera, many *Yerevantsis* that

come to spend time there sit down to have a cup of coffee and get a refreshing treat for their children. The cafes on Opera Square are always full, and one would be hard-pressed to find a spot to sit down on a summer evening. Yet these cafes are some of the most resisted constructions in contemporary Yerevan, and there are constant battles to stop the construction of yet another café on the territory of Opera Square. An example of resistance to the further takeover of public space around Opera is the “One Handful of Soil March” (see Chapter IV). Yerevan’s 2005 master plan lists the territory as green space, and the city’s municipal government maintains that there is a law prohibiting any new construction on the territory of Opera Square. Government bureaucrats maintain that once the current land leases of the café owners expire, they will be forced to close up shop and to plant the territory with trees and other greenery, in order to return it to the public sphere (Zakharyan 2008). A prominent environmental activist commented on this plan in my interview with her:

“They [Yerevan’s municipal government] say that once the café owners’ leases run out, the space that the cafes now occupy will be planted with trees and returned to the green fund of the city. But, who knows, how it will be done, when it will be done, or whether it will be done at all” (Ovakimian 2008).

Another interviewee, an architect by training and an employee of a government agency charged with developing and enforcing master plans for Yerevan expressed the following feelings about changes in Opera Square:

“The Opera Square must be preserved, all of the cafes must be removed from the green spaces surrounding the Opera House, all the [advertisement billboards] must be removed, in order for Opera Square to [return to] the same look and feel.

I need for my city to stay my city, but presently I have lost many aspects of my city, its image” (Minasian 2008).

These and other interviewee responses demonstrate the serious misgivings that *Yerevantsis* have about the changes that are taking place on Opera Square. In a way, the café culture on and around Opera Square contribute to the sense of community that has developed around this space, but at the same time the fact that this previously publicly accessible space is now available for consumption only after paying for at least a cup of coffee upsets many *Yerevantsis*. In the words of a biologist and director of a leading research institution:

“I wouldn’t mind a couple of cafes, that would even be nice, to be able to sit down and have a drink or some ice cream, but blanketing all of green space surrounding Opera with cafes, one crowding the other, that is too much” (Simonian 2008).

In addition to its importance as a place for social gatherings, Independence Square (the pedestrian plaza facing the Opera House) has been a key place in the struggle for Mountainous Gharabagh in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s (see Introduction), as well as in the efforts for Armenia’s independence. In the waning years of the Soviet Union people by the thousands gathered for protests held on Opera Square. During these protests, known simply as “meetings,” people shouted slogans about Mountainous Gharabagh’s independence from Azerbaijan, and later for Armenia’s independence from the Soviet Union. I remember walking past Opera Square, hearing the shouts of thousands of people, chanting “Gharabagh is ours, but it’s in the hands of the Turks, all Armenians unite, bring back Gharabagh to us” (translated from Armenian). Opera Square

was the initial space of resistance, a space out of which the fight for Gharabagh and the fight for Armenia's independence from the Soviet Union mobilized. Throughout the years of independence it has continued to serve as a place for gathering and voicing discontent. A place for protest meetings by day, Opera Square would usually revert back to its status as a place for rest and recreation in the evenings.

In 2008 Opera Square became the stage for the ruling government's violent crackdown on its opposition, and has since been under constant surveillance and control. After the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections that took place in February 2008, opposition rallies and marches were started on Independence Square, thereby upholding the status of Opera Square as the initial place of resistance. The government of Robert Kocharian staged a violent crackdown on the opposition, and after these events the plaza in front of the Opera House was declared off limits to public assembly, and men in uniform patrolled Independence Square at all hours. During the summer of 2008, a few months after the uprising of the opposition in March, Opera Square was announced a "children's playground", and various children's games and toys were brought in, so as to make public protest in this space even less likely (see Figure 5.4). As a result, the oppositioners moved their tents and their sitting strike a few hundred meters, to Northern Avenue, and set up shop in front of Western store fronts, the likes of Guess, Ecco and Steve Madden (see Figures 5.10 and 5.11). This act, in the opinion of a university professor and community activist:

“...began to change the symbolism of Northern Avenue from a space of bitterness and a space of denial of property rights (of the people who were dislocated from their homes in order to make way for new construction), into a

space of struggle for democracy and hope for a better future” (Atinyan 2008).

These events on Opera Square show its complicated history and the multi-layered symbolism. It is the place where resistance to the Soviet regime first manifested, it is the space of struggle for independence of Nagorno Karabakh, and after independence it became an important public space for social interaction and communication (although it had always been an important public use space, throughout Soviet history). It then overgrew with cafes and entertainment complexes, which has ignited dissatisfaction and in some cases protest from residents of Yerevan (i.e., the “One Handful of Soil” March), who call for no more construction in the vicinity of Opera Square. In the summer of 2009 the plaza facing the Opera House was a construction zone once again, as the construction of an underground parking garage was in full swing. In my conversations with *Yerevantsis* many wondered whether this was not just another move by the government to keep opposition forces from gathering in Opera Square and starting yet another protest movement.

Opera Square is a place in the center of Yerevan that has always been dear to the heart of many *Yerevantsis*. It has been a space for social gatherings, as well as a space for voicing discontent and “speaking back” to the state. Throughout the years its role as a space of resistance has been “disciplined,” first by the construction of many cafes, and second, by the most recent conversion into a construction zone for underground parking garages. Questions over the meanings, symbolism and acceptable uses of Opera Square will continue to be debated in Armenian society.

“Civilizing the City Center”: Northern Avenue

Northern Avenue (see Figures 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10) is the newest of the three symbolic places under consideration here. It was conceived by Tumanian in the first (1924) master plan for Yerevan as a wide pedestrian thoroughfare that would connect the two dominant spaces in the heart of Yerevan, Opera Square and Republic (then Lenin) Square (see Figure 5.17). Its diagonal placement was also significant, as well as the direction in which it pointed—it was supposed to open up a view to Mount Ararat and lead gazes from Opera Square, down the avenue, towards Ararat, which would be seen in the perspective of Republic Square. Northern Avenue was never built during the Soviet times because of budgetary and other constraints. One of the main reasons was that on the territory of Northern Avenue there were residential neighborhoods, with people living in one or two-story (almost all of them pre-Soviet) homes, and the issue of moving those residents out and providing them with adequate housing to replace their dwellings proved to be too difficult of a task. Throughout Soviet times, plans to raze those neighborhoods and finally construct Northern Avenue kept surfacing, but no proposal made it past the planning stage (Arutyunyan, Hasratyan, Melikyan 1968). It was not until Armenia’s independence, and the government of Robert Kocharian in particular, that plans to finally build Northern Avenue were put back on the table.

During my visit to Yerevan in the summer of 2001 I found the intersection of Terian and Tumanian streets blocked off and closed up by a blue tarp, in preparation for ground-breaking on Northern Avenue. Finally bringing the Northern Avenue project to fruition was to accomplish a few various goals—to “civilize the city center,” and give it a neighborhood of “adequate” residential, and most importantly, office space for various

foreign, as well as Armenian companies (Zakharyan 2008), and to set on the course of rebuilding and rebirth of the city on which Armenia's second president and administration set out. Construction of Northern Avenue was a conscious effort on the part of Kocharian's administration to build, to create, to construct a new city street, and a grand avenue at that, flanked by large-scale buildings, which would add much-needed residential and office space to the center of the city. Needed though the space may be, whether it is accessible to the population is another question. Homes in most of the newly constructed buildings on Northern Avenue are extremely expensive, being advertised for upwards of US \$1,500 per square meter, which is far out of most *Yerevantsis*' reach.

Northern Avenue symbolizes the attempts of the Kocharian administration and of independent Armenia's elites to show their perceived superiority to previous regimes in their ability to materialize the eventual completion of Northern Avenue, and by doing so, to bring Yerevan into the ranks of contemporary, modern, western cities, which would attract foreign investment and tourism. The avenue officially opened in November of 2007, even though many of its buildings, especially those closer to Republic Square, had not yet been completed, and were in their skeletal stages. The opening of the avenue was begun by a walk-through of a triumphant then-President Robert Kocharian, and ended with a speech in which he touted Northern Avenue as a new center for business and global commerce in Yerevan, and a "business card for contemporary Yerevan" (Kocharian 2007). Since completion, Northern Avenue has figured prominently in the official iconography of the Armenian capital. For example, the avenue and its buildings played an important role in a promotional video that Hayastan All-Armenian Fund

produced for its 2008 Telethon.⁴² Their 2008 video for a song called “I Love My Country” featured young Armenians, their faces painted the colors of the Armenian flag (red, blue and orange), running around Northern Avenue, throwing red, blue and orange paint onto blank canvasses from buckets. Enormous pieces of fabric the color of the Armenian flag are thrown from the top of one of the buildings on Northern Avenue, and the youngsters are filmed peering down from the top of the buildings, as if they are on top of the world. This video is representative of a vision of Armenia that evidences and espouses new construction, new beginnings, and Northern Avenue represents an important part of that vision.

There are many negative opinions about Northern Avenue, as well. The general feeling about Northern Avenue is that it was not built in the manner that was intended by Tamanian, that it looks too much like neighborhoods in other European cities, that there is little “Armenian” about it. A famous actress was quoted in a newspaper as saying:

“When you walk on Northern Avenue, you do not feel that you are walking in Yerevan. Why have our architects forgotten about our national architecture? When we say that Yerevan has a unique image, feel and aura, we mean its Armenian architecture. And today we are losing that. Many old buildings, which gave the capital its unique feel, have been destroyed. [City Hall] must stop all these processes, otherwise they will go too far and we will never be able to recreate our beloved city” (Mnatsakanyan 2008).

⁴² Hayastan All-Armenian Fund is a not-for-profit organization, endorsed by the government of Armenia, which solicits donations, mainly for diaspora Armenians, for development projects in Armenia and Mountainous Gharabagh. The Fund holds a yearly telethon in the United States on Thanksgiving Day.

Alluding to the fact that Northern Avenue was initially thought up as a wide pedestrian thoroughfare, and ended up being quite a bit narrower than Tamanian intended, an architect and community activist said in an interview:

“...I think that Northern Avenue was Kocharian’s biggest mistake, in an architectural, as well as in an organizational sense. It was constructed incorrectly” (Papikyan 2008).

A descendant of Aleksandr Tamanian and the director of a museum dedicated to the architect’s work and memory had the following to say about this newest addition to Yerevan’s landscape:

“It completely dwarfs the already present architectural foci of central Yerevan, Republic Square and the Opera House” (Tonoyan 2008).

Another architect and historic preservation activist had an even harsher opinion:

“[I think that Northern Avenue is]...a slap in the face to Tamanian’s style. The arches and decorations are copied from his earlier work, but these are clones, and they are less than satisfactory in comparison to the originals” (Gevorkian 2008).

Here a question arises of what makes a building Armenian. This was a question that I asked of many of my interviewees, and many of them cited Tamanian’s style as the quintessential Armenian style. Others cited historic Armenian churches as the benchmark of stylistic “Armenianness.” And mostly interestingly, a journalist who reports primarily on architecture, urban planning and historic preservation in Yerevan, responded to my question with the following phrase: “...[a] building is Armenian if it was built in Armenia, and by Armenians (Martirosyan 2008).

It is not just the image of Northern Avenue that upsets many *Yerevantsis*. One of the first steps in the Northern Avenue project was the relocation, indeed the displacement, of residents who lived in the neighborhood of small one and two-story pre-Soviet construction on the streets where Northern Avenue is today (see Chapter IV). Though today Northern Avenue is complete, and many businesses have opened up first-floor storefronts on this newest addition to Yerevan's landscape, many of the previous residents of this neighborhood still wage a bitter struggle, demanding restitution and adequate compensation. A non-government organization, called "Victims of State Needs" has been formed to advocate for the rights of previous residents of Northern Avenue (as well as residents of Buzand and Aram Streets, and other neighborhoods which stood in the way of new construction projects). On most Thursday mornings, representatives of "Victims of State Needs" are joined by a group of citizens picketing for various causes in front of the Government Building Number 1, the seat of the Prime Minister of Armenia on Republic Square.

The construction of Northern Avenue was an orchestrated effort to transform space to fit the narrative that the Armenian state wished to communicate. This narrative followed a sort of an "out with the old, in with the new" approach, and in the course of this project homes were razed, people were evicted, and so on. As Atkinson and Cosgrove (1998) write, "[after completion] the Vittoriano was still obscured by the Palazetto Venezia. As a consequence, . . . this structure [was] demolished brick by brick and rebuilt one hundred yards to the west—thereby clearing the space before the Vittoriano" (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998, 36). A similar process of numbering and taking down stone by stone of "black buildings" that stood in obstruction of Northern

Avenue took place in Yerevan, and plans for reconstructing them on a street that will serve as a museum of Old Yerevan are still in the works today.

Northern Avenue is a flagship project of Armenia's current political elites, particularly the administration of Robert Kocharian, which aimed for it to be an example of what his government would do for Armenia, "bring it into the 21st century," by providing a first-class business and residential neighborhood. At the same time, it bears the stamp and the memory of violence inflicted upon the people and the private property rights that were violated during the process of relocation of residents before construction on Northern Avenue could begin. Though nearly completed, the Northern Avenue project continues to figure in public debates, especially as plans to re-design four other neighborhoods in the city move closer to realization.⁴³

Absence and Hesitant Presence: Republic Square

Republic Square is the final important symbolic place in the landscape of Yerevan, but it is by no means the least important of the three. Called Lenin Square during the Soviet times, this focal space in the center of the city was conceived as the main civic square of the Armenian Republic, and, like most central squares in Soviet (and socialist) cities, sported a large-scale monument to Vladimir Lenin. Republic Square is where two important government buildings stand, Government House 1 and 2, and Government House 3 is located just behind it. It was where military parades extolling Soviet prowess ended on days like May 1st (Workers' Day), May 9th (Victory Day) and

⁴³ According to the 2005 master plan for Yerevan, five areas of the city, namely Main Avenue, Kond, 33rd district (also known as Firdusi Street), the area around Ararat wine factory and the area around St. Gregory the Illuminator church, have been proclaimed as areas to be rebuilt (Yerevan Master Plan 2005).

November 7th (Day of October Revolution). The square is a large open public space, but it is also open to automobile traffic. The pedestrians are restricted to pedestrian spaces that flank the square itself, while the center plaza is reserved for automobile traffic. This part of the square is also important for a certain tradition. After a couple is married, either in church or in court, traditionally on the way to the reception the car that carries the newlyweds drives to Republic Square and drives around the roundabout three times, and this is considered to be good luck for the couple. For various occasions, such as, for example, the celebration of Yerevan's 2,750th anniversary in 1968, extravagant celebrations were staged on the square, and the statue of the first Soviet leader loomed as parades entered the square and ended there (Arutyunyan, Hasratyan, Melikyan 1968). Upon Armenia's independence the square was renamed Republic Square, to honor the status of Armenia as a democratic republic, and many changes have taken place on the square in the years since.

In the early 1920's Tamanian began working on a master plan for Yerevan, and the main square of the city was one of the first elements that he designed. Though Yerevan was a small city, there was still a network of streets in what is today the city center, and Tamanian had to contend with what was already there while designing Armenia's new capital city. Bounding the city center by the shape of an open circle (see Figure 5.17), he anchored the design of the city in two major open spaces—Republic Square (then Lenin Square) and Opera Square. Lenin Square was to be the main public space of the city, a place where military parades on major Soviet holidays would end, showing the might and power of a republic constituent of the USSR. One of Tamanian's most celebrated designs, Government Building 1, was one of the first to be built on

Republic Square. After a few years upon completion of Lenin Square the question of where to put a Lenin monument was raised. In 1938 a USSR-wide competition for a Lenin monument was announced. Sergei Merkurov, a famous Soviet sculptor, won the commission for the monument, and architects Peremuzova and Vartanov won the commission for the pedestal (Rashidyan 2007). The monument complete with the pedestal was installed on Lenin Square by early 1941 (Grigor 2007). The monument was placed not in the center of the square, but off to the side, facing the site of the planned National Gallery of Arts, and soon gained considerable acclaim as a great piece of monumental art.

The Lenin statue became one of the main foci of the square but after the Soviet regime collapsed, the monument was toppled in the mid-1990's by the changing regime. After the monument to Lenin was toppled the balance of Republic Square was thrown off, and the empty space left where Lenin used to stand has been subject to various design proposals, but none have succeeded. Shortly after the monument was toppled, the pedestal on which Lenin stood was dismantled soon thereafter, and the space stood empty for the next three years. Proposals to fill in the gap left by the missing statue and pedestal surfaced, but none were brought to fruition.

On December 31, 2000 a giant 24 meter cross lit by light-bulbs was erected in the space left empty by Lenin's pedestal. The construction of this new monument had been quiet, and the cross seemed to appear suddenly, without much public discussion or debate about its placement or intended meaning. This installation was completed on the eve of the year of 2001, which was when the Armenian state and Armenian Apostolic Church celebrated the 1,700th anniversary of being a Christian nation (Christianity was accepted

as the state religion of Armenia in 301 CE). The cross was lit by 1,700 highly symbolic lamps, and continued to be at the center of celebrations that continued throughout the year of commemoration. However, at the end of the year the period of celebration ended and the cross was quietly dismantled. Since it was a temporary fixture, there was little discussion preceding its erection, as well as after its dismantling. A few more years of emptiness for Lenin's old standing spot followed.

In 2004 a billboard-sized television screen playing advertisements for various organizations and products appeared in that space, providing the ultimate contradiction to what the initial occupant of the space, Vladimir Lenin, espoused. In fact, both monuments that followed Lenin after his expulsion—a religious symbol and a television screen promoting consumerism—were a direct contradiction to what Lenin and the Soviet Union were supposed to stand for. This was a sort of a pendulum effect, with which previously Soviet Armenian swung back towards religiosity and capitalism. The television screen was removed in 2006 and, even more interestingly, the emptiness and absence left behind by where Lenin used to stand looms large, as Armenians are struggling to find a symbol which would be fitting for filling Lenin's shoes, a symbol that would have enough "symbolic capital" to unite Armenians, if not all Armenians worldwide, then at least Armenians of Armenia. A few competitions about picking a monument, a symbol for Republic Square, have been announced, but none have yielded satisfactory results. None of the designs proposed have even made it past the special task force established by the Yerevan Municipality, let alone gone to a public referendum in order to be held up or shut down by a public vote. The inability to pick a symbol that will adorn the most important civic space of the Republic, and certainly of Yerevan, points to

the fact that the Armenians have serious disagreements about what it means to be Armenian in a post-Soviet world, and these disagreements are especially palpable between Armenians who live in Armenia and those who are part of the diaspora. In her article on the Lenin monument on Armenia's Republic Square art historian Talinn Grigor quotes a taxi driver conversing with a diasporic Armenian passenger as saying, "It matters little who we select, as long as we remain univocal" (Grigor 2007, 123). In the case of picking a symbol to replace Lenin's monument on Republic Square, Armenians are not univocal, and it is difficult to say whether there is any symbol that they might agree on at all. In his book on the development of Republic Square architect Garri Rashidian writes that there have been proposals to move the David Sasuntsi, or David of Sasun monument, which is currently located slightly outside Yerevan's small center, to Lenin's old spot. David Sasuntsi is a national Armenian hero, a hero of an epic novel titled by his name and is famous for having fought against Arab invaders in the 8th and 9th centuries (Panossian 2006). With an updated pedestal, Rashidian writes, "David of Sasun might be the best solution for replacing Lenin as the central and focal point of the most important square of our republic" (Rashidyan 2007, 110). It is true, David of Sasun is a national hero, a hero of an epic, and is a fundamentally apolitical figure, and one who would continue to be relevant to Armenian history for years to come, because it is a symbol recovered from antiquity. This would be a "safe" choice, one that would hark back to Armenian history, and at the same time stay away from political claims and accomplish the task of keeping the Armenians of Armenia and of the diaspora united under the auspices of this shared national hero. This perceived potential of David of Sasun to unite all Armenians is due to the fact that this story comes to us from an ancient

past and predates the problems of modern Armenia, thus making its symbolic significance expressly apolitical and acceptable by most Armenians. However, the relocation of David Sasuntsi from his current spot in front of Yerevan's Central Train Station seems unlikely.

One of the first changes that took place on Republic Square was the installation of a stone mosaic in the shape of *lavash* (traditional Armenian thin bread) in its center. This design was also conceived by Tamanian, but was never started because Soviet funding constraints. With a donation from diaspora Armenians, namely Kirk Kirkorian's Lincy Foundation, the project was started in 2001. The donation from the Lincy Foundation also provided for the restoration and renovation of the Opera House and other performance centers, as well as for the streets of Yerevan, particularly in the center, to be re-paved. The stone mosaic was built and has been open for a few years now, but it is in the center of the plaza, and cut off from pedestrian traffic by automobiles that circle the roundabout of the square. During the Soviet times a large aquatic basin with "singing" fountains (the water moved in sync with playing music, and color was also projected) was built on the square. These fountains, in front of the National Gallery of Art and Museum of History (then of Soviet history, now of Armenian History), were in considerable disrepair and were set for renovation in 2005. The fountains reopened in 2007 (see Figure 5.15), with a retooled mechanism, a new light show, and impressive projected holograms.

The symbolic importance of Republic (formerly Lenin) Square lies with its status as the central civic square of Armenia. Conceiving of it as a focal representation of Armenianness in the landscape of Yerevan, Tamanian designed it with a view that would

open to Mount Ararat. In the end, the square was not positioned to face the mountain head on, and construction around it quickly obstructed what view it might have had of the mountain. The “elite buildings” that have mushroomed around Republic Square in recent years crowd the square’s architectural ensemble even more.

Republic Square is a space that represents the ambivalence Armenians have about their collective identity. It is a space where the Armenian state keeps putting on shows, celebrations, such as the celebration of Yerevan’s 2,780th anniversary, promoting togetherness, but still unsure of what symbol can represent Armenia as a coherent nation, Armenian identity as a coherent national identity. One example of this ambivalence is the story of looking for a fitting symbol to replace Lenin’s monument on Republic Square. The symbols that have graced Republic Avenue since independence have done so only for short periods of time, attesting to their hesitant presence and the lack of their “staying power.” Thus, in the absence of a new unifying symbol and the half-presence of various ideas, the emptiness left behind by Lenin looms large on Republic Square.

The Image of the City: Yerevan as a National Symbol

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia, like the rest of the former Soviet republics, has been faced with the enormous tasks of restoring political order, rebuilding the economy, and, not least, the tremendous task of redefining its national identity. The Soviet regime played a very important (though not the only) role in the promotion of contemporary Armenian national identity, but after 1991 the process of identity construction has gained renewed importance. Armenia’s political elites and residents

alike have looked back into history, in attempts to recover and rekindle narratives about the genesis of the Armenian nation, and are busy representing them and retelling those stories to fellow Armenians and to the rest of the world. During this process of national rebirth, Yerevan, the capital city, has become a large part of the national iconography, itself being represented as a symbol of the nation and the capital of all Armenians in the world.

In the early 1920's Tamanian took to the task of redesigning Yerevan with great fervor, and gave the job great meaning. Although he was educated in St. Petersburg and had already built in the neo-classical style (see Chapter III), upon his arrival in Armenia he studied literature on the history of Armenian architecture and visited various architectural monuments, to familiarize himself with traditional Armenian architecture. The process of designing Armenia's new capital was a process laden with deep national symbolism, especially in light of the collection of traumatic events that Armenians had experienced in the recent past (see Chapter III). In an opinion piece published in a Yerevan newspaper in 2007 famous architect Karen Balyan described Tamanian's design process:

“Tamanian was building a city...[that would] become the embodiment of the rebirth of a nation, which was on the brink of disappearance. Yerevan became the representation of national rebirth and the focal point of the Armenian nation. It became the central element that attracted all threads of Armenianness from all over the world, regardless of ideology. A city that would save the nation” (Balyan 2007).

It is perhaps the very purpose with which Tamanian was building, and the set of circumstances that Armenia and Yerevan were in at the time (ravaged by war and famine, full of refugees from the Western Armenian provinces) that placed Tamanian's designs firmly in the camp of "true" Armenian architecture. He designed the center of the city as a semi-circular amphitheater, which opened up to Mount Ararat, the most important of Armenian symbols, in perspective.

Thus, in these very early stages of the Soviet regime in Armenia, Yerevan had already entered the Armenian national iconography. Although in the past it had had little "symbolic capital" in comparison to previous Armenian capitals, by the early 1930's Yerevan and its landscape had become a decidedly important part of the set of national symbols, and of the collective national imaginary. Even though Yerevan was the capital of a Soviet republic, its landscape was planned with expressed and explicit Armenian symbolism.

Today's Yerevan is experiencing similar processes. Armenia's leaders are "updating" the landscape of Yerevan, maintaining that during the last years of the Soviet regime and during the first ten years of Armenia's independence no public construction was completed, and that the only type of construction taking place was private (such as people building additions to their homes). A concerted policy of the current government is also a battle against those very private construction projects that took place during the waning years of the Soviet regime, and during the first few years of independence. The government is busy soliciting investors to build various new neighborhoods in the city, to renew the residential building stock in the city, and is touting these large-scale projects as its achievement. Thus, it seems that in the process of updating the look and feel of

Yerevan, the elites are promoting a new type of Armenianness, one that is tied to progress, “westernization,” and that the new Armenian identity should be westward-looking, but at the same time mindful of Armenia’s history and its place in the world.

In the process of post-Soviet refashioning of the city landscape the Armenian elites have decided to remove many symbols that were popular in Yerevan, such as the Youth Palace, the Sevan Hotel, and the tens of black buildings (some of which were “spared,” taken down stone by stone and will be rebuilt on a separate “Old Yerevan Street,” see Chapter IV). They are busy inserting new buildings designed in cutting edge contemporary styles into the landscape of the city, hoping that they will become new symbols of Yerevan. The elites now appear less worried about what details make a building “Armenian”, and rather seem to have the opinion of “build it, and it will become Armenian,” echoing a quote from a journalist famous for his opinion pieces on the development of Yerevan--“if it was built in Armenia and by Armenians, that means it is Armenian” (Martirosyan 2008). It seems that the elites, as well as the public, are unsure of what exactly a new narrative of Armenianness is, and one of the manifestations of this ambivalence is the inability to pick a symbol for Republic Square, a symbol which will grace the main square of the Republic, representing a uniting Armenian symbol, to all Armenians and to the rest of the world.

The attempt is to keep building, to keep soliciting investments, and hoping that *Yerevantsis* will accept the new construction and the new layout and landscape of the city. As for promotion of a post-Soviet Armenian national identity, there is a strange amalgam of a westward gaze, one that advocates moving in step with the rest of the world, and one that harks back into history, asserting the historic weight of the Armenian

nation and its continuous presence in the same place. The concluding chapter will deal with this issue, the search for a renewed Armenian national identity, and how the search is reflected and written upon the landscape of the national capital of Armenia.

Figures for Chapter V: Urban Symbolism and Narratives of the Nation



Figure 5.1: Poster at the National Museum-Institute of Architecture in Yerevan. The enlarged size of the mountain and the caption in the bottom half of the poster draw attention to Mount Ararat, accentuating its importance in the landscape of Yerevan.



Figure 5.2: The building of the Ararat Brandy Factory in Yerevan. The word “Ararat” graces the top of the building, and a spectacular view of the mountain opens up from the factory.



Figure 5.3: View of Yerevan from Cascade Monument. A faint outline of Mount Ararat can be seen in the background.



Figure 5.4: Opera House with the open plaza that faces it. Note the children's playground, added after this plaza, known as Independence Square, was pronounced off limits to public protest after the violent crackdown that followed the Presidential Elections of 2008.



Figure 5.5: Swan Lake on Opera Square. Northern Avenue begins with the tall buildings in the background.



Figure 5.6: One of the many cafes on Opera Square. This green space was designed to be accessible to the public free of charge, but, as a result of proliferation of cafes and other entertainment complexes, has become increasingly exclusive in the past decade.



Figure 5.7: Northern Avenue, close to completion



Figure 5.8: Northern Avenue in the summer of 2009. The Opera house, seen in the background, is dwarfed in the perspective of the newly constructed buildings.



Figure 5.9: Buildings on Northern Avenue. In the summer of 2009, they were in various stages of completion.



Figure 5.10: Northern Avenue in the summer of 2008. On the right side of the photo the tri-colored Armenian flags are hung where protesters of March 1st elections carried out their sitting strike. The building of the National Gallery of Arts, located on Republic Square, can be seen in perspective.



Figure 5.11: Storefront on Northern Avenue. A sign posted to the columns reads "Free the 76 political prisoners!"



Figure 5.12: Protesters on Northern Avenue. The sign calls for passers-by to sign a petition to charge former president Robert Kocharian with crimes against humanity.



Figure 5.13: Republic Square.



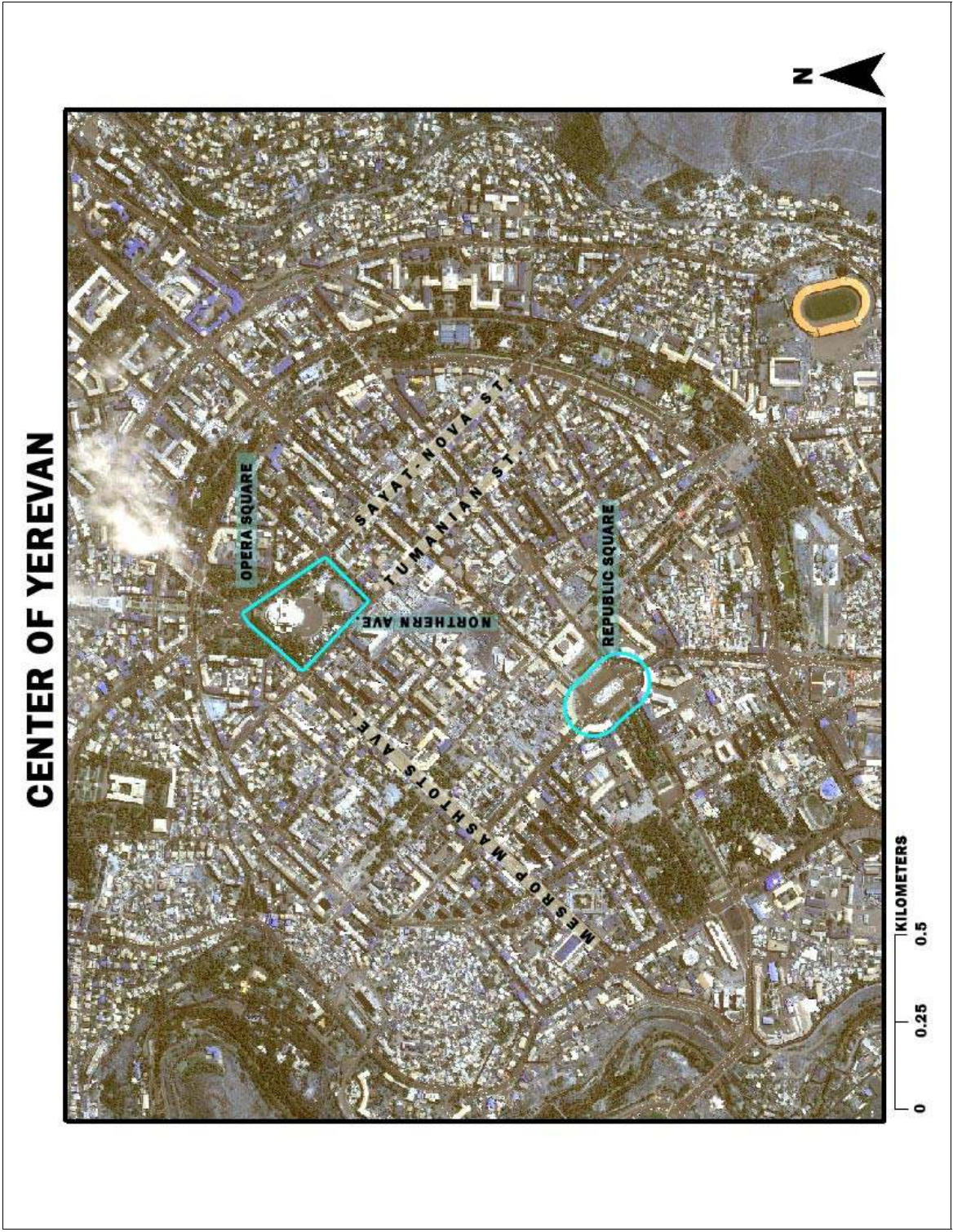
Figure 5.14: Republic Square; Lenin's statue and pedestal missing.



Figure 5.15: Republic Square, in anticipation of the nightly "colored fountains" show.



Figure 5.16: Aerial image showing Opera Square, Northern Avenue, Republic Square. The round plaza in front of the Opera House on the left of the photograph is Independence Square, and the bean-shaped figure is Swan Lake. Northern Avenue is located in the center of the photo, with tall buildings and 45 degree angles. Republic Square is the elliptical open space close to the top right corner of the image. Source: Google Earth.



CENTER OF YEREVAN

Figure 5.17: Map of Central Yerevan. Opera Square, Northern Square and Republic Square are highlighted.

VI.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation is about the rapid transformations sweeping a post-Soviet city, the construction of a post-Soviet Armenian national identity and what we can learn about these processes by “reading” the urban landscape of a national capital as a text. As in any national capital, symbols of nationhood (monuments to national heroes, streets and plazas named after famous writers and politicians, and so on) are scattered throughout the city of Yerevan. Moreover, the urban landscape itself is one of the most important representations of the nation. To be sure, contemporary Armenian identity is being constructed via the education system, the media and the country’s nationality policy, but the construction and maintenance of Yerevan as a national capital and the meanings and symbolism with which its landscape is imbued carry important messages about the maintenance and development of Armenian national identity in the post-Soviet era. In this chapter I summarize the findings of this dissertation.

Current and ongoing transformations of Yerevan’s space construct, affect and reflect contemporary Armenian national identity by inserting various symbolic messages into the landscape of the national capital. A case in point is Northern Avenue, which at the time of its opening was described as “a new business card for contemporary Yerevan” by then-President Robert Kocharian (Mirzoyan 2007). The promotion of Northern Avenue as a “new face for Yerevan” is laden with meanings. This view promotes the stylistic and organizational structure of this new thoroughfare as the new Armenian ideal, whereas many of my *Yerevantsi* interviewees expressed discontent, even aversion, toward

this newest addition to Yerevan's landscape. Thus, there is a disconnect between the intended and received symbolic meaning of Northern Avenue, and its representation is contested on various levels. Armenia's leaders promote it as a glossy addition to Yerevan's landscape and an homage to Tamanian's neo-Armenian style, one that will provide the city with high-end residential, retail and office space, will attract foreign investment and tourist dollars. In responses from the general public these messages are contested and resisted, as Northern Avenue is described as "a slap in the face to Tamanian's style" (Gevorkian 2008), "the [government's] biggest mistake, in an architectural, as well as an organizational sense" (Papikyan 2008), and "soulless, without national belonging" (Tonoyan 2008). Fascinatingly, however, Northern Avenue was used as the place where protesters of the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections of 2008 staged their sitting strike, and thus was cast, at least by some of my interviewees, as a place representing new hope for a better, more democratic Armenian nation. At that time Northern Avenue was not fully complete, and some of its buildings were still in their skeletal stages. In a parallel sense, Armenia's aspirations for democracy were only partially complete and only partially realized. Northern Avenue is complete and open for passage and for business, and the opposition movement continues to operate in Armenia, challenging election results, putting up candidates for various elections and, in general, serving as a sounding board for dissenting opinions.

Symbolic messages, both intended and unintended, produced by the post-Soviet spatial reconfiguration of Yerevan's landscape include the "symbolic capital" around Northern Avenue, as well as the transformation of Opera Square from a space of public assembly, protest and resistance into a space "disciplined" by a novel economic regime of

capitalism, represented by myriad cafes, entertainment complexes and other spaces of consumption. After the opposition rallies and protests of 2008, a crack-down on public protest indicates a new light in which Armenia's current elites want to cast this space—as one controlled by them, and not necessarily as a space where an everyday citizen can voice concerns freely. In addition, the ambivalence that surrounds the choice of a symbol to replace Lenin's statue on Republic Square signals an uncertainty regarding unifying symbols on the part of Armenian elites and the general public. Though in certain places Armenian elites are willing to be forceful (such as on Northern Avenue), on Republic Square they are a bit more careful, or at least uncertain, having yet to pick a monument that will grace this highly symbolic space in the center of the city. Also, the current transformations in many cases are a result of foreign investments on the part of diaspora Armenians. Their investments have a direct effect on the ways in which the landscape of the city is changing, as well as on the way that Armenian national identity is developing. This argument continues Panossian's (2006) assertion about the "multi-locality" of development of Armenian national identity. Not only are diaspora Armenians creating and promoting Armenian national identity in the foreign countries where they live, but also contributing to the changing landscape of identity and belonging in Yerevan, the national capital of Armenians worldwide. Diasporic direct investment into the city's infrastructure and sponsorship of various large-scale renovation, reconstruction and new construction projects have altered the landscape of Yerevan significantly. In addition, as diasporic Armenians buy property in Yerevan and either return there, or make it their second residence, they now play a much greater role in shaping the future of the Armenian capital.

In this study I also focus on the multi-level transformations of an urban agglomeration after an abrupt shift from socialism to neo-liberalism and investigate how spaces shaped by socialism are changing under the new regime. A vivid evidence of this stark change is the appropriation of large swaths of green and other public space in central parts of ex-Soviet cities for private and commercial interests. In Yerevan this trend is evident in the transformation of urban green parks, and Opera Square in particular, into café “strip-malls” of sorts. The general shift away from public space and a focus on private space is also accentuated.

What effects do the spatial transformations have on the residents’ connections to Yerevan’s landscape? The drastic shrinking of Yerevan’s urban green parks from and their re-profiling as café and entertainment “strip-malls” has left many unhappy with the quality of the living environment in the city, as well as with the lessened availability of public space in general. The squeeze of *baks* by private parking garages and other private constructions have affected this important space for Yerevan’s social life in adverse ways, and the fact that newer “elite buildings” have no *baks* or at times are even constructed in obstruction of other, older buildings’ *baks*, alter the spaces in which future generations of *Yerevantsis* will grow up. These spatial transformations have resulted in feelings of alienation and loss on the part of many *Yerevantsis*, and have sparked protests, such as the “One Handful of Soil” march, and so on. The spatial transformations of Yerevan’s landscape are affected by sets of forces. Though arguably part of the same trajectory of post-Soviet transformations of Soviet space, globalization and “westernization”, the forces that transform the *baks* (i.e., drastic increase in car ownership and lack of adequate parking space) are different from the forces that transform urban

green parks, such as the one surrounding Opera Square (i.e., re-profiling of public space accessible to all free of charge into commercialized space accessible only to those who are able to pay). In turn, these forces are different from the forces that transform Dalma Orchards and the neighborhood that stood where Northern Avenue is today (i.e., injection of private capital and redevelopment of “dilapidated” neighborhoods). In general, a trend toward privatization and commercialization of spaces is apparent, which perhaps should come as no surprise, as the introduction of a real estate market into a system previously controlled by central command continues.

Re-naming streets and various landmarks in the city is part of the continuous recasting and re-imagining of Yerevan’s landscape. One of those recently renamed is a small street that meets Northern Avenue. The new name of the street is Old *Yerevantsi* Street, which honors the residents who were born and raised in Yerevan, many of whom have expressed strong dissenting opinions about Northern Avenue, the numerous construction sites throughout the city, and the general direction in which Yerevan’s development is going. Honoring “true *Yerevantsis*” by naming a street located right next to Northern Avenue, the construction of which was fraught with controversy and resulted in violation of numerous citizens’ private property rights is ironic, an attempt on the part of the Armenian elites to “forget” what really happened here, projecting the power of a new name onto Yerevan’s urban space.

The events that I have described in this dissertation are connected. For example, the Thursday protests on Republic Square are an avenue for citizens unhappy with the state of affairs to voice their concerns and their dissatisfaction with the way in which the government is handling certain issues. It joins those who struggle for individual property

rights (i.e., former residents of what is now Northern Avenue and other new construction sites, as well as farmers of Dalma Orchards), environmental activists struggling for the preservation of public green spaces in Yerevan and outside of Yerevan (i.e., the proposed Teghut mine, which, if opened, is claimed to pose serious environmental risks), and other citizens protesting against cruelty in the military, and an array of other issues. In a sense, these protests represent the citizens speaking back to the state and in the process hoping to affect policy and decisions, because even though the government does not take into consideration all the issues brought up by the protesters, they are faced with the protesters weekly and forced to consider those issues from the perspective of the everyday citizen. In addition, those who picket for the preservation of green spaces are struggling for more than just trees, but for rights of access, justice and transparent democracy.

The maps included in this dissertation visualize many important spaces in Yerevan and the transformations that those spaces are undergoing. They represent the transforming landscape of Yerevan, as well as the changing connections of Yerevan's residents with their city. On the map showing Northern Avenue and the neighborhoods that were replaced by it, the violation of property rights is visualized. In displaying Dalma Orchards the transformation of a large area of green space within the city bounds is visualized. The same map (See Figure 4.17) outlines the three key places in the center of Yerevan—Opera Square, Northern Avenue and Republic Square—and the symbolic changes that those places have undergone. In general, the maps, which combine the QuickBird images and the GoogleEarth images, show the stark modifications in the landscape of the city just in the past ten years.

In preceding pages I have worked on deciphering the symbolism with which the landscape of contemporary Yerevan is imbued. Which spaces are erased and which are allowed to remain? Which symbols are accentuated, and which are subdued? What symbols are resurrected and applied anew? What do these decisions tell us about the future that Armenia's political elites foresee for the city? How do all of these decisions reflect on the development of Armenian national identity? The promotion of contemporary Armenian national identity is ambiguous, and this ambiguity is illustrated by the inability to pick a unifying symbol for Republic Square. However, the lean is definitely traditionalist, although connections with the West are also accentuated. For example, currently there are debates in Armenia about banning foreign-language schools, and this seems to be a new vein of promoting national identity in a more forceful manner. The set of actors who currently reinvent and promote Armenian national identity now includes the Armenian state apparatus, the Armenian diaspora, and the Armenian Church.

The processes described in this dissertation are far from over—they are ongoing. For example, the cycle of destruction, demolition and replacement of older buildings continues, as an important architectural landmark of the Soviet years, the Summer Hall of the Moscow cinema hall, is currently slated for demolition. The proposal to take down the Summer Hall, which is an outdoor performance and cinema viewing space, was put forth in hopes to rebuild the church that stood there before the Moscow Cinema Complex was built. St. Poghos and Petros Church, built in the 10-11th centuries CE, was the oldest standing church in Yerevan. However, the decision to now demolish the Summer Hall has caused widespread protests. *Yerevantsis*, and especially young community activists, have risen up and circulated petitions in order to keep the Moscow Theater Summer Hall

standing, and to find another spot for the church to be reconstructed. They argue that the destruction of the Summer Hall would come at a detriment to Yerevan's architectural and historical heritage, even though the Summer Hall itself was built after an older historical landmark, the original St. Poghos and Petros Church, was razed. Along with traditional methods of reaching supporters of the petition, they have used social media websites to garner support and achieve their goal of as many signatures as possible. It is also widely reported in Yerevan's newspapers that the residents of the neighborhoods that are currently slated for demolition are very worried about their fate, because of the experience of former residents of what is now Northern Avenue. Former residents of Northern Avenue, as well as former residents of Dalma Orchards, continue to wage their struggle, all the while developers present plans on what is going to replace their neighborhoods, orchards and their livelihood.

The case of Yerevan is a great lens through which to look at how a nation deals with the transition from socialism to capitalism/neoliberalism on the scale of the national capital and how it deals in the process with the shifts in identity. It is also an interesting case study due to the characteristics of the Armenian nation and the fact that most Armenians in the world live outside of the country's current borders and are members of the Armenian diaspora. In the years since independence the Armenian diaspora has had a large role in the process of transition, in terms of help with rebuilding and investment, especially in the landscape of Yerevan. Thus, to use Panossian's (2006) term once more, the "multi-local" characteristic of Armenian national identity lives on, as Armenians in the diaspora continue to promote Armenian national identity where they live, as well as in Armenia itself, via vigorous involvement in the development of the nation's capital.

Since independence, however, they now have a chance to affect the way in which one of the most important symbols of nationhood, their national capital, is developing, and many of them have done so. The development of Yerevan's landscape and of contemporary Armenian national identity are ongoing and parallel process. Their relationship and further development will provide fascinating research material for years to come.

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PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

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- Armenian Graduate Students' Association Colloquium, 2009. UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.
- 9th Annual Central Eurasian Studies Society Conference, 2008. Georgetown University, Washington DC. "Vision for a New Yerevan: Post-Soviet Urban Transformations and National Identity in the Armenian Capital".
- FIU School of Architectural and the Arts Study Abroad Program in Genoa, Italy. 2007. "Yerevan's Changing Cityscape After the Break-up of the Soviet Union".
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