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THE “*AKHPARS*”: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MASS MIGRATION OF DIASPORA
ARMENIANS TO SOVIET ARMENIA, 1946-49

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts
in History

By

Pauline Pechakjian

Winter 2020

The thesis of Pauline Pechakjian is approved:

Dr. Susan Morrissey

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18 December 2019

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This thesis is dedicated to all of the migrants who endured the “repatriation” of 1946-1949, including my grandparents, Ani, Levon, Azniv, and Krikor.

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ABSTRACT

THE “*AKHPARS*”: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MASS MIGRATION OF DIASPORA ARMENIANS TO SOVIET ARMENIA, 1946-49

By

Pauline Pechakjian

Master of Arts in History

After the close of World War II, the Soviet Union sponsored a so-called “repatriation” campaign to assist diaspora Armenians in migrating to what was crafted and perceived to be their “true” ancestral homeland – the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). Between 1946-1949, nearly 100,000 diaspora Armenians renounced their citizenships in their respective countries of residence in order to become Soviet Armenians. Although narratives of the migration, particularly those told by Soviet officials and patriotic nationals of the ASSR, depicted the campaign as a success, personal testimonies of migrants indicate otherwise. This thesis is based on a collection of personal narratives obtained by the author via twenty-five interviews with migrants or their direct descendants in the United States and Armenia. It broadens the scope of existing scholarship on the migration that focuses mainly on official, structural, or theoretical aspects of the “repatriation.” By analyzing these testimonies against a backdrop of Soviet, contemporary Armenian, and diasporan scholarship, this thesis emphasizes the complexity and variability in the experiences of the so-called “*akhpars*,” an often-derogatory term used to distinguish migrant Armenians from “native” Soviet Armenians in the ASSR. This social history of the “repatriation” as experienced by the migrants themselves considers the following themes: questions of belonging, cross-cultural clashes, diaspora versus “homeland”

relations, and the implications of migration in a globalized world. This study highlights nuances in migrant experiences throughout and after the “repatriation,” suggesting that influences during life in the diasporan communities of origin affected the processes of acculturation in the Soviet Armenian “homeland.” Interviews revealed the notion of a certain cultural literacy, especially for diasporan Armenians raised in the idiom of a particularly nationalist discourse, that affected their ability to properly feel at “home” in the ASSR, where the very markers of their conception of Armenian identity were challenged and contested. Thus, in its attempt to bring in diasporan Armenians from a number of host countries to the Soviet Armenian republic, the “repatriation” campaign inadvertently introduced varied, and sometimes, contrasting, understandings of Armenian identity in the ASSR, leading to different interpretations and conceptions of belonging. Through highlighting these nuances and conceiving of these distinctions in identity and belonging, this thesis intervenes current research on the “repatriation” by using migrant voices to better articulate the experiences of diaspora and “homeland” relations.

Introduction

After the end of World War II, between 1946-1949, approximately 100,000 diaspora Armenians heeded the Soviet Union's calls for their "repatriation" to their "true" homeland – the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). I refer to "repatriation" in quotation marks to denote the misnomer of the term itself, as well as the symbolic understanding of "homeland." The vast majority of Armenians "repatriating" to Soviet Armenia did not, in fact, belong to the nation-state carved out by the Soviet Union as the ASSR, and instead were predominantly the descendants of Ottoman Armenians who had escaped genocide during World War I (save for migrants originating from Iran). This large number of Armenians living in the global community that comprised the Armenian diaspora gathered up their families, closed up their established businesses, sold or abandoned their homes, and renounced existing citizenships in order to embark on the voyage to the Soviet Armenian "homeland." This influx of individuals into the Soviet Union, which took place almost immediately after the high death tolls of World War II, or the "Great Patriotic War," heralded what was arguably one of the greatest population transfers into the USSR throughout its seventy-one-year duration. This mass migratory event has been documented through various histories written by scholars of Soviet, Armenian, and diasporan history, as well as through journalistic and documentarian efforts to capture the "everyday" experience lived by the migrants themselves.¹ This present study aims to combine both

¹ For official or structural histories of this mass migration, see Hovik Meliksetyan, *Hayrenik' -spyurk' arnchut'yunnere ew hayrenadardzut'yuně* [Homeland-Diaspora Relations and Repatriation] (Yerevan: YSU Press, 1985) and Sevan Nathaniel Yousefian, "The Postwar Repatriation Movement of Armenians to Soviet Armenia 1945-1948," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011). For more recent social and cultural-focused histories, see Jo Laycock, "Armenian Homelands and Homecomings, 1945-9: The Repatriation of Diaspora Armenians to the Soviet Union," *Cultural and Social History* 9, no. 1 (2012): 103-123; Jo Laycock, "Survivor or Soviet Stories? Repatriate Narratives in Armenian Histories, Memories and Identities," *History and Memory* 28, no. 2, (2016): 123-151; Maïke, Lehmann, "A Different Kind of Brothers: Exclusion and Partial Integration After Repatriation to a Soviet 'Homeland,'" *Ab Imperio* (2012): 171-211; Armenuhi Stepanyan, *XX dari Hayrenadardzut'yune hayots'in'nut'yan hamakargum* [Repatriation of the XX Century in the System of Armenian Identity] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2010)7. For documentarian and journalistic interviews, see the « Museum of

historiographic considerations of the “repatriation,” as well as efforts to document the personal narratives and stories experienced by those who lived through the migration and their direct descendants. Thus, through the utilization of interviews conducted with migrants and descendants in both the United States and Armenia, this thesis pieces together elements from former works conducted on the migration of diaspora Armenians to Soviet Armenia, while also presenting novel information obtained through a series of focused questions tailored to encapsulate key moments of the migration, the assimilation processes, and the postmemory of the “repatriation.”

This social history of the “repatriation” probes the lived consequences of migration and interrogates notions of belonging (or lack thereof) held by migrants through juxtaposing these individuals’ conceptions of identity with the overall understanding of “Armenianness” as propagated in the Soviet Armenian republic. Due to contrasting centers of authority in the Armenian transnation, one being the diaspora, and the other being the ASSR, the “repatriation” introduced variance in understandings and interpretations of Armenian identity as lived and experienced in the Soviet Armenian republic. Often times, conditions in diaspora, such as the influence of political organizations, clubs, and religious associations, which helped to foster a sense of Armenian patriotism and nationalism in migrants, inadvertently led to their feelings of exclusion and alienation in the ASSR, where the very markers of their Armenian identity were challenged and contested.

Through this focused study on migrant lives from diaspora to “homeland,” this thesis expands on the existing scholarship on the “repatriation” through a bottom-up, social history. The works of Jo Laycock, Maike Lehmann, Armenuhi Stepanyan, Sevan Yousefian, Susan

Repatriation, » interviews collected and documented by Tigran Paskevichyan and Satenik Faramazyan on hayrenadardz.org.

Pattie, Claire Mouradian, and Hovik Meliksetyan have thus far produced the bulk of material concerned with the migration itself. Whereas Meliksetyan and Yousefian present the official, organizational, or top-down history of the migration, those of Laycock, Lehmann, and Stepanyan consider cross-cultural interactions, collective memory, and notions of diaspora versus “homeland.”

Meliksetyan, who conducted his work on the “repatriation” as a Soviet scholar, argues the official Soviet narrative – one that can potentially be seen as propagandist in its exclusion of the lived experiences of migrants, instead favoring Soviet claims of a highly successful migration. Meliksetyan, echoing the same verbiage used by the craftsmen of the “repatriation” campaign, proposes that the Soviet Union “saved” the Armenian people in diaspora who had lost their previous homes during genocide and exile. This narrative utilizes the mythos of loss and trauma, which is important for understanding the broader context of the mass migration, but does so in a way that disproportionately places credit on the Soviet Union. Meliksetyan propagates the concept of a *druzhiba narodov* (friendship of peoples) heralded under the banner of patronizing Russian leadership as the saviors and champions of the Armenian ethno-nation – both in the ASSR and beyond.² This selective and exclusionary telling of the “repatriation” clearly overlooks the lived experiences of the migrants themselves, making the need for a bottom-up history all the more poignant.

Yousefian’s dissertation takes the focus to the structural conception and execution of the “repatriation,” detailing how Soviet agents worked both at home and abroad to reign in diasporan Armenians through a series of networks, including elite organizations such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU). Yousefian also uses archival material from Soviet

² Meliksetyan, *Hayrenik ‘spyurk’ arnchut ‘yunnere*.

blueprints and documents to investigate how the campaign was planned and executed – including shortcomings in the ASSR’s ability to house tens of thousands of migrants from the diaspora.³

On the other hand, the works of Laycock, Lehmann, and Stepanyan opt for a more social-cultural approach, emphasizing primary motivations that fueled the campaign – particularly the motifs of “survivor,” “diaspora,” and conceptions of Armenian identity and belonging.⁴ Laycock makes innovative use of secondary literature on memory and survivor narratives, placing the “repatriation” among greater trends in twentieth century history that involve displacement, migration, and diaspora versus “homeland” tensions. Whereas Laycock raises new theoretical approaches to studying the “repatriation,” she does not engage with migrants themselves. Thus, this present study bridges this gap between the theoretical and the lived experiences of migrants as voiced through their memories of the migration, introducing testimonial material into the discourse surrounding narratives of loss and exile.

Further, both Lehmann and Stepanyan focus on individual testimonies in analyzing cross-cultural interactions, paying attention to the differences in language, food, religion, and customs that shaped the ways Armenian “repatriates” negotiated their sense of identity and belonging in their alleged “homeland.” Stepanyan especially argues that many migrants did not feel a sense of belonging in the ASSR by raising the mass emigration of “repatriates” in the 1960s-1970s. This issue is further explored by the testimonial material presented herein, as the majority of interviewees were among those who actually did emigrate during this exodus – as opposed to the migrants Stepanyan interviewed, who were all still residing in Armenia.⁵

³ Yousefian, “The Postwar Repatriation Movement.”

⁴ Laycock, “Survivor or Soviet Stories?”

⁵ Stepanyan, *XX dari Hayrenadarzut’ yune*.

Both Lehmann and Stepanyan approach the topic of “repatriation” through a social and cultural perspective, making use of bottom-up history in order to emphasize nuances in lived experiences and to challenge the official Soviet narrative à la Meliksetyan of a “wholly successful” migration. Additionally, this present study draws and builds on Lehmann’s work in emphasizing the lived experience of migrants to explore the shortcomings, or difficulties, of the “repatriation.” Lehmann interrogates linguistic differences, the deportation of “repatriates” to Soviet prison camps, and cross-cultural clashing in terms of food and clothing.⁶ Although many of these cross-cultural interactions and topics are greatly referenced in the works of Stepanyan and Lehmann, both authors leave room to further divulge differences in understandings of belonging and conceptions of identity, particularly in the aftermath of the migration. In addition, Stepanyan and Lehmann both consider the implications of diaspora life prior to the “repatriation,” but do not directly link the experiences of diasporan life to the consequences voiced and felt by migrants themselves. Whereas their work incorporates some testimonial material from migrants currently living in Armenia, this thesis largely involves migrants who now reside in the United States – furthering implications of diaspora versus “homeland” relations in an analytical scope. Thus, this study makes an effort to hone in on how institutions and influences in the diaspora shaped, challenged, accelerated, or hindered migrants’ abilities to fit in, or belong, in the Soviet Armenian republic, broadening the reach and scope of findings in previous social and cultural studies on the topic. It especially introduces the role of the ARF as a key institution that directly or indirectly affected migrants’ abilities to properly acculturate in Soviet Armenia.

⁶ Lehmann, “A Different Kind of Brothers.”

Beyond the placement of the “repatriation” as an event in modern Armenian and diaspora history, there are greater themes that engage with existing debates in the history of the Soviet Union and particularly its stance on the governing of different nationalities. As an entity with authority over hundreds of different ethnonational groups and identities, the Soviet Union’s policies towards governing, promoting, and harboring the nationalities within its borders is a topic frequently visited by historians. Policies of “korenizatsiia,” or “the creation of local elites in different national regions,” as they were implemented and realized within the republics’ hierarchical sociopolitical structures, were often times in tension with Marxist-Leninist understandings of the nationalities question, posing contradictions for a society built on supposedly egalitarian ideals.⁷ Greater debates on Soviet nationalities policy are largely situated between the works of two seminal historians: Francine Hirsch and Terry Martin.⁸ The latter, who deems the USSR to be an “affirmative action empire,” posits that the Soviet state promoted titular nationalities within its republics in order to quell any anti-Russian sentiment, and after the 1930s, abandoned previously-held Marxist-Leninist conceptions of the nationalities question. Martin expresses this as a “dramatic turn away from the former Soviet view of nations as fundamentally modern constructs,” signaling a move “toward an emphasis on the deep primordial roots of modern nations.”⁹ Martin essentially argues that Soviet authorities dramatically shifted away from a Marxist-Leninist conception of nationality as a tool to usher in eventual convergence of all ethno-nations under communism. In suggesting that the Soviets

⁷ Francine Hirsch, “The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 56, no. 2 (Summer, 1997): 256.

⁸ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 443.

embraced the Stalinist troika of “one nation—one territory—one republic,” Martin proposes that the Soviets did *not* create a uniquely Soviet identity.¹⁰

Rather than focus on the negotiations of national identity within the republics and how authority was delegated to respective titular nationalities for “affirmative action” purposes, Hirsch’s argument instead considers how the Soviet approach to nationalities policy remained true to the Marxist-Leninist ideals upon which the USSR was founded. She argues that the Soviet Union’s ultimate goal was to engage in “state-sponsored evolution” and usher in a timeline of Marxist historical development. This would take place as “feudal-era clans and tribes” were transformed into nationalities, and these “nationalities [were transformed] into socialist-era nations,” which would then, at some point, converge under communism.¹¹ Her argument that the Soviet Union used the tool of ethno-national republics in its strategy for “state-sponsored evolution” is in line with the fact that Lenin “condoned the manipulation of national aspirations as a means for furthering the world revolutionary movement.”¹² Whereas Martin argues that the Soviets embraced the ethno-national republics and worked to incorporate them into a multiethnic, “affirmative action empire,” Hirsch believes that the ultimate goal of the Soviet Union was to supersede ethno-national republics and create a homogenous, new “Soviet” culture.

In understanding these debates within the realm of Soviet history, and particularly the issue of identity negotiation between the greater Soviet system and the multitudes of ethno-nations it governed, this particular thesis poses a case study for interrogating the tension between top-down policy and the lived experiences of Soviet subjects. Further, through the introduction

¹⁰ For more on the Stalinist troika of nation, territory, and republic, see Mark Saroyan, “Beyond the Nation-State: Culture and Ethnic Politics in Soviet Transcaucasia,” *Soviet Union/Union Soviétique* 15, nos. 2-3 (1988): 223.

¹¹ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

¹² Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).

of diasporan Armenians, who were not raised in the Soviet cultural idiom, this thesis provides further nuance in considering the ways in which ethnonational identity was negotiated and propagated at the republic level in the greater USSR. In listening to and analyzing migrant voices, this study argues that although the ultimate goal of the Soviet authorities may have been to create a homogenous “Soviet” culture, much of the everyday experience of Soviet citizens, including the migrants of this study, would reiterate Martin’s point on “affirmative action.” To explicate, the ASSR propagated its own unique brand of “Armenianness,” one that often times contrasted with the diaspora’s understanding of identity, and this tension between the two identities led to complications in feelings of belonging for many “repatriates.” Further, whereas the diaspora promoted a very nationalist sense of Armenian identity with liberationist ideology (due to the influence of organizations such as the ARF), the ASSR maintained a watered-down sense of national identity – one that would not threaten, or undermine, the authority of the Soviet Union. This was, in its very essence, a type of “affirmative action,” which allowed Armenians in the ASSR to maintain their “Armenianness,” but not to the full extent of national liberation – as that would not be tolerated by Soviet authorities. Thus, due to these differences between diaspora and “homeland” conceptions of ethnonational identity, migrant voices seem to suggest that Martin’s analysis of identity promotion and negotiation in the Soviet Union was much more immediate than Hirsch’s conception of eventual “homogenization.” The tension raised between native Soviet Armenians and “repatriates” underscores that each republic was actively engaged in regulating and governing its own ethnonational subjects – distinct from the overarching “Soviet” authority on identity and belonging.

Although these greater debates of governance are distant from the everyday experiences lived by migrants themselves, it is imperative to consider the role in which Soviet nationalities

policy played in influencing their lives as Soviet citizens and subjects following “repatriation.” This thesis emphasizes that the Soviet Armenian republic was often times at odds with the organizations governing Armenian identity and belonging in the diaspora, such as the ARF, providing an opportunity to incorporate migrant voices into debates and considerations on the interplay of greater institutional and political forces. As such, the following analysis will begin with a brief historical background of the events that created the Armenian global diaspora, detailing the timeline leading up to the “repatriation.” There will then be a discussion of data collected from archival documents and interviews, followed by a consideration of possible implications and pathways for further study.

Methodology

The testimonial material on which this study is based was obtained through interviews with migrants who experienced the “repatriation,” or their direct descendants. Interviews were conducted from April 2019 to November 2019 in the Southern California region and in Yerevan, Armenia, in either Armenian or English. For interviews conducted in Armenian, I am fully responsible for translations to English of any and all representation of dialogue or quotes herein. In total, twenty-five interviews were recorded and documented, creating a small archive focused primarily on this particular migration. Out of the twenty-five interviews, twenty-four were with migrants or observers involved with the migration of 1946-1949, save for one family who migrated in 1956 from Bulgaria.¹³ The majority of interviewees were young children during the time of “repatriation,” and thus their responses to questions involve a mix of their own memories and experiences and those as told to them by their parents and other family members. Among the

¹³ Galukyan Family, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview. Yerevan, Armenia, June 26, 2019.

respondents were also individuals who migrated as young adults or adults, and they were able to offer greater detail in certain aspects of their narratives, such as the initial period of 1946-1949. Interviewees who were the children of “repatriates” who did not experience the migration at all wholly relied on memory and their own experiences in the aftermath of migration, making use of postmemory as a means of constructing a social history. Countries of origin included: Lebanon (6), Greece (4), Syria (3), France (3), Turkey (2), Egypt (2), Iran (2), United States (2), and Bulgaria (1). Although the present study is based on the testimonies of twenty-five individuals, interviewees were selected via random sampling, and thus, according to sociological survey methods, can be deemed as representative of a greater population. Correspondingly, the aforementioned distribution of interviewees’ countries of origin, as well as the years in which they migrated, are representative of greater trends pertaining to the “repatriation” – with the majority of migrants coming from countries like Syria, Lebanon, and Greece, and with greater numbers immigrating in 1946 and 1947 as opposed to 1948 and 1949 (Table 1).¹⁴

A primary benefit of constructing a social history via interviews is the ability to obtain information that would otherwise not be found in documentation or archival material – in this case, the lived experiences of “repatriate” families upon settling in Soviet Armenia after their journey from various European, North American, and Middle Eastern countries of origin. My interviews with migrants highlighted nuances in such everyday experiences, and patterns emerged indicating distinctions between those who felt a sense of belonging, and those who did not. It should be noted that due to the nature of these interviews and the subjectivities of migrant perspectives, personal discrepancies, biases, and variances are to be expected. This study addressed the challenge of personal biases and discrepancies by presenting the material as voiced

¹⁴ I thank Susan Morrissey for her suggestion of using a table as a mapping tool to chart the trajectories of migrants’ lives.

by the migrants themselves in order to: 1) respect and represent interviewees' integrity and 2) showcase the existence of variance and nuance that is more apparent in bottom-up histories. However, it would be an oversight to claim that differences in narrative are based solely on distinctions in minute details, as these interviews suggest that greater, institutional, and political forces, sometimes even beyond the understanding or awareness of the migrants themselves, influenced everyday experiences. This thesis instead argues that the conditions in diaspora, and the influence of certain elite institutions with political force and traction such as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, affected not only migrants' desires to uproot themselves and "repatriate" to the ASSR, but also their very ability to reconcile contrasting understandings of Armenian identity – those they had learned and acquired while living in the diaspora versus those propagated by the Soviet Union. As will be demonstrated, the liberationist nationalism that was heralded by diasporic institutions and inspired many Armenians to live in their "true homeland" led to alienation, and even, arrest, upon Soviet soil, where a watered-down, less-threatening conception of national identity was championed.

Throughout the interviews, migrants and their descendants were asked a series of questions pertaining to their personal family histories, motivations for migration, the assimilation and acculturation processes that took place upon Soviet soil, and the ensuing aftermath of the "repatriation." First, migrants were asked where their families originated from, and what compelled them to pack up and "repatriate" to the Soviet Armenian republic. Then, they were asked to divulge their initial feelings on whether or not they conceived the ASSR to be their "homeland," in addition to being asked to describe their journey to Soviet Armenia and the belongings they brought with them. They were then asked to detail the assimilatory process in Soviet Armenia, and how they settled in to their new homes. Migrants were asked to share

whether or not they felt they were living in their “homeland,” as well as initial interactions with other “repatriates” and native Soviet Armenians. Interviewees were also asked about the languages their families spoke, and whether or not they had any issues with distinct languages or literary forms in the ASSR. Further, they were asked to describe whether or not they noted any differences in customs or traditions between themselves and native Soviet Armenians. Migrants shared customs they maintained, in addition to new ones that they learned. They were also asked to disclose whether or not they observed intermarriage between “repatriates” and native Soviet Armenians as taking place. Afterwards, interviewees were asked about emigrating (if they were located in the United States) or remaining in the Soviet Union (if they were located in Armenia). Finally, interviews concluded with asking migrants about how the topic of “repatriation” comes up in memory and discourse, and whether or not they or their family members had ever attempted to document their experiences. All interviews were taped on a recording device, and if allowed by the interviewee, filmed on camera.

This thesis is formulated after several different types of models presenting testimonial material aimed at encapsulating the “everyday” experiences of migrants, including, but not limited to: social histories, oral histories, memoirs, and ethnographies.¹⁵ Unless otherwise stated, the narrative retelling of the social history of the “repatriation” herein is thus completely sourced from testimonial material. Anomalous specificities and peculiarities will be signposted with footnotes attributing the material to the particular interview or file from which it was sourced.

¹⁵ For my primary reference model, see Moya Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement in the Russian Federation: Reconstructing Homes and Homelands* (London: Anthem Press, 2004).

NAME	BIRTH PLACE	BIRTH YEAR	MIGRATION YEAR	RESIDENCE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW
Ani Keshishyan	Beirut, Lebanon	1942	1946	Glendale, CA
Aleksan Khrimian	Alexandretta, Turkey	1930	1946	Glendale, CA
John Boursalian	Beirut, Lebanon	1941	1946	Newbury Park, CA
Hagop Khrimian	Beirut, Lebanon	1934	1946	Valencia, CA
Mari Ghazanchyan	Kessab, Syria	1945	1946	Yerevan, Armenia
Nadya Haroutyunyan	Marseilles, France	1946	1946	San Francisco, CA/Yerevan, Armenia
Azniv Gndoyan	Homs, Syria	1934	1946	Glendale, CA
Grikor Jallatyan	Aleppo, Syria	1932	1946	Hollywood, CA
Rima Israelyan's Parents	Charmahan, Iran	N/A	1946	Yerevan, Armenia
Ani Basmadjian	Cairo, Egypt	1946	1947	Glendale, CA
Sedrak Barutyan	Dörtyöl, Turkey	1938	1947	North Hollywood, CA
Haykanush Bekyan's Father	Thessaloniki, Greece	1919	1947	Yerevan, Armenia
Alis Gevorgyan	Athens, Greece	1941	1947	Yerevan, Armenia
Ani Bedjakian	Marseilles, France	1947	1947	Pasadena, CA
Arusyak Gekchyan	Corfu, Greece	1938	1947	Newport Beach, CA
Naomi Daduryan	Beirut, Lebanon	1934	1947	Hollywood, CA
Aghavni Jivelekyan	Thessaloniki, Greece	1942	1947	Yerevan, Armenia
Nairi Tajiryan	Cairo, Egypt	1935	1948	Yerevan, Armenia
Deran Tashjian	Watertown, MA, USA	1931	1949	Pasadena, CA
Anita Kalpakian	New York City, NY, USA	1937	1949	Tujunga, CA
Siruhi Galukyan	Plovdiv, Bulgaria	1922	1956	Yerevan, Armenia
Khachatur Tatlyan	Yerevan, Soviet Armenia	1953	N/A	Pasadena, CA
Rima Khubesrian	Yerevan, Soviet Armenia	1954	N/A	South Pasadena, CA
Ghلامkar (Manoush) Keshishgherzian	Burq, Iran	1940	N/A	Glendale, CA
Seissil Mahroukian	Yerevan, Soviet Armenia	1950	N/A	Porter Ranch, CA

Table 1

Chapter 1: The Journey to the ASSR

Historical Background of Diaspora

The factors that led to the creation of the modern Armenian diaspora and the ASSR produced the historical context that in turn enabled the “repatriation.” Up until the early twentieth century, the majority of Armenians living in Anatolia and the Caucasus (the historical homeland of the Armenian people) lived under Ottoman and Russian rule, while a small minority resided in Qajar Iran. Nearly all of the “repatriates” were descendants of Ottoman Armenians who were displaced during the genocide of 1915. The Armenian Genocide was essentially the catalyst that led to the creation of the global diaspora as is known today. Following a wave of reactionary Pan-Turkic sentiment and strong Islamic nationalism under Sultan Abdülhamid II in the late nineteenth century after earlier Tanzimat reforms and Armenian appeals to European powers, there was decreased tolerance for non-Muslim minorities in the Ottoman Empire, specifically against Greeks and Armenians.¹⁶ In 1908, the Young Turk revolution led to a “moment of radical disintegration” of the Ottoman state, inciting fifth-columnist fears of ethnic “others” within the empire and their perceived collaboration with foreign powers.¹⁷ These fears were heightened during the Ottoman Empire’s battles in World War I, and Armenians were perceived to be an internal force cooperating with the Russian army. Such anxieties, coupled with more extreme nationalist ideologies and pre-World War I triggers, propelled the Committee of Union and Progress’s policy of “Turkification” introduced in 1910.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else’: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 357-360.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁸ Donald Bloxham, *Der Voelkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah (The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah)* (Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2002), 103.

This increase in nationalism, which led to an effort among the Young Turks to “cleanse” Anatolia of its “non-Muslim ‘tumours’” under the guise of demographic “homogenization,” was coupled with the contingencies of World War I. Prior to the war, the onslaught of the Balkan wars, Ottoman loss of European territory, Muslim migrants, and 1914 reforms helped create the context for a genocidal environment. This resulted in mass deportations, outright massacres, and drawn-out deaths from deprivation and abuse, culminating in genocide beginning in 1915.¹⁹ Consequently, hundreds of thousands of Armenians who survived were displaced from their homes and villages, forced to seek refuge in various countries in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

Although many diasporan Armenians survived and thrived in communities in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, particularly in Syria and Lebanon, they maintained their status as a people in exile. In diaspora, communities of former Ottoman Armenian refugees built communal networks centered on ideas of shared identity, and these were especially fostered by the presence of strong political organizations which influenced not only the public and political spheres of diasporan Armenian life, but also the social and cultural. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), which is particularly relevant in this analysis on the social history of the “repatriation,” was especially significant in fostering a sense of community in the Middle Eastern diaspora, and through its role in community-building, became one of the key components of the diasporan Armenian’s everyday experience.²⁰ The ARF, formed in the late nineteenth century by Russian Armenian students largely influenced by Russian socialist and populist ideology, won support among Armenians from its founding in 1890 to post-1915, particularly for its actions

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Khachig Tölölyan, “Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 107-136.

centered on the national liberation of the Armenian transnation.²¹ The ARF was not “overly concerned with theoretical nuances and rejected the rigidity and determinism of Marxism,” and essentially, “did not place socialism on a par with national liberation.”²² For the party, the “struggle for the nation took precedence over the class struggle,” and as the “predominant Armenian political organisation in the diaspora,” it strongly opposed Soviet authority in the ASSR. The ARF was staunchly anti-Soviet particularly due to its role in establishing the first independent republic of Armenia (1918-1920), which it was forced – under pressure from advancing Turkish and Soviet forces – to cede to the Bolsheviks in 1920.

During and after the Ottoman, Iranian, and Russian revolutions of the early twentieth century that surrounded the Armenian populations of Anatolia and the South Caucasus, the region that would become the ASSR experienced a brief period of independence. The power vacuum created by the Bolshevik revolution led to a “two-year hiatus” of imperial intervention in the South Caucasus, resulting in the three independent republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.²³ The government of Armenia was led by members of the ARF who were opposed to any foreign authority governing the newly independent republic. This commitment to complete and total liberation from any external authority would prove to have lasting effects – as will shortly be discussed in regards to the “repatriation.”

At the close of World War I, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed, transferring the Armenian-populated regions of Kars and Ardahan to Turkey.²⁴ Although the three South Caucasian states enjoyed a short-lived independence between 1918-1920, they experienced

²¹ Hourì Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries: Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Worlds* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 8-10; Tölölyan, “Elites and Institutions.”

²² Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 206-207.

²³ *Ibid.*, 242.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

increasing pressure from the rising powers in their peripheries. Armenia specifically faced Turkish aggression, and even in light of modest achievements in battle against Kemalist forces, the threat of invasion loomed as Communist Russia's influence in the South Caucasus continued to grow.²⁵ Although the ARF, which led the Armenian republic between 1918-1920, did *not* want to be subsumed by Bolshevik forces, the challenge of survival in the face of Kemalist Turkey only five years after the genocide led them to consider the Bolsheviks as the “lesser evil” of the two imperializing forces and eventually ceded to them.²⁶ In December of 1920, the ARF-led government of Armenia resigned, and it was declared an “independent socialist republic” as part of the Federative Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of Transcaucasia in 1922.²⁷ From this republic, the Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian SSRs would emerge. Further, although the ARF was expelled from Soviet Armenia after 1921, it became the largest political organization in the diaspora, or what Khachig Tölölyan has termed a “diasporic elite,” functioning as one of the key institutions to maintain an Armenian transnation that extended beyond the confines of “homeland.”²⁸ The role of the ARF as one of the key authorities on “Armenianness” in the diaspora, as guardian and savior of Armenian identity outside the “homeland,” and its history of opposition to the Soviet state proved consequential for many “repatriates.”

Registration and Enthusiasm for “Homeland”

The conditions in diaspora that instilled in migrants a sense of patriotism and nationalism created much enthusiasm and facilitated the process of registration for the “repatriation” as

²⁵ Ibid., 245.

²⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 95.

²⁷ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 245-246.

²⁸ Tölölyan, “Elites and Institutions.”

envisioned by its Soviet architects. Because the Armenian Genocide fueled diasporans' desires to "repatriate," it provided an opportunity for the craftsmen of the migration campaign to reign in Armenians living in countries "foreign" to their own. Save for the families from Iran, nearly all of the interviewees noted their family's history as being survivors of genocide in motivating the desire to "repatriate." In fact, migrant Deran Tashjian, whose family "repatriated" from Watertown, MA in 1949, noted that his mother, a genocide survivor, wanted to get "revenge" on the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide and viewed the move to Soviet Armenia as a way to express her, and in extension, the Armenians', survival.²⁹ Tashjian's mother's notion of "avenging the perpetrators" of the genocide, and essentially, the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, was heightened by the specific narrative of "lost lands," which Soviet authorities used in regards to the Turkish provinces of Kars and Ardahan on the Turkish-Armenian border.³⁰ These two formerly Ottoman provinces, which were obtained by the Russians during the Russo-Turkish War of 1878, and later by Turkey with the *Treaty of Kars* in 1921, had a history of being volleyed back-and-forth between the two states during political disputes and wars, leaving Armenian inhabitants in the middle.³¹ In continuing this tradition of volleying the two provinces for geopolitical gain, this propaganda was published in 1945 through articles circulated by Armenian and Georgian scholars reinforcing claims to Kars and Ardahan, and these articles were absorbed into the "repatriation" campaign's discourse of the Soviet Union as the "champion and preserver" of the Armenian people.³² Thus, the displaced formerly Ottoman Armenians of the

²⁹ Deran Tashjian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Pasadena, CA, September 18, 2019.

³⁰ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 242.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 120, 247.

³² Farid Shafiyev, *Resettling the Borderlands: State Relocations and Ethnic Conflict in the South Caucasus*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), 178. To note, a lot of work, especially produced by Turkish and Azeri scholars promoting claims of Soviet and Armenian aggression during the 1940s-1960s, has exaggerated the importance of Moscow's alleged claims to Kars and Ardahan. Although the articles did bolster rhetoric about Armenian notions of homeland and "lost lands," there is little evidence to suggest that the Soviet Union was actually considering the geopolitical strategy of invading Turkey and annexing the two Anatolian provinces for their

diaspora, who did *not* originate from the land that was carved out as the ASSR, imagined a “return” to their homeland in a purely symbolic sense (a *true* return would have entailed migration back to Anatolia, which was at that point the Republic of Turkey).

This process of forced dispersion, the trauma of genocide, and a loss of “home” fueled nationalistic desires to return to one’s “homeland.” The genocide also provided an opportunity for the Soviet craftsmen of the “repatriation” campaign to leverage collective trauma and displacement as a means of recruiting diaspora Armenians for an imagined return.³³

Interviewees, cognizant of the fact that the genocide was the root cause of their, and all other former Ottoman Armenians’ global dispersion, directly linked their desire to “return home” to the trauma caused from being uprooted and exiled in 1915.

This sense of loss, which was materialized through a love and longing for visions of “Armenia,” were verbalized in interviews as *‘hayrenik ‘i karotĕ,’* or the “longing for the fatherland.”³⁴ Ani Keshishyan, a migrant from Beirut, was the daughter of a “repatriate” who had survived the genocide and had grown up in orphanages, like many other interviewees. This sense of loss had instilled in her father, Hagop, a love and longing for his homeland. When the “repatriation” campaign was announced, he was eager to go to Armenia, and promptly registered for migration when the first caravan was being organized in Beirut. Ani Keshishyan noted that

Armenian republic. In his unpublished dissertation, Sevan Yousefian notes that “news of Soviet interest in annexing Kars and Ardahan” rallied further support among diaspora Armenians who were favorably considering migration to Soviet Armenia, and it “elicited a very positive reaction from Armenian parties and organizations.” See Sevan Nathaniel Yousefian, “The Postwar Repatriation Movement of Armenians to Soviet Armenia, 1945-1948,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011), 54. Such reactions to news of potential annexations of “lost lands” speak towards what Mark Saroyan termed as an “obsession,” or ‘fascination,’ with the glorified “Western Armenia” in the Armenian mythos of post-1915 in his “Beyond the Nation-State: Culture and Ethnic Politics in Soviet Transcaucasia,” *Soviet Union/Union Soviétique* 15, nos. 2-3 (1988): 219-244.

³³ SCAHCH, 362.2.50, 2.

³⁴ Ani Keshishyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Glendale, CA, April 4, 2019; Rima and Vahen Israelyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Yerevan, Armenia, July 2, 2019; Hagop Khimian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Valencia, CA, August 11, 2019.

the “longing for the fatherland” was calling them, a family of former Western Armenians dispersed to Lebanon, to migrate to Soviet Armenia.³⁵ Similarly, Anita Kalpakian, a migrant from New York City who “repatriated” in 1949, related how her father, Manouk Kazarian, a genocide survivor from Sebastia (today’s Sivas in central Turkey), wanted to go back to his homeland and envisioned the ASSR to be like the Armenian town in which he grew up and remembered.³⁶ Of course, Soviet Armenia was *nothing* like what his life as a young Ottoman Armenian from a wealthy family was in Sebastia. The fact that diasporan Armenians idealized any notion of an Armenian homeland enough to overlook the obvious geopolitical differences between the Ottoman villages from which they came and the Soviet republic suggests the strength of patriotism, nationalistic ideals, and a longing to *belong*. Often times, interviewees reported that this very longing was the primary reason informing their “return,” corroborating previous theories that patriotism was the “primary motive” of the diaspora that made the “repatriation” possible.³⁷

This symbolic nature of such an imagined return exemplifies why the term “repatriation” is a misnomer, and in a broader sense, how diasporan Armenians conceived of their migration to Soviet Armenia. The Armenian term for the “repatriation,” which is “*nerkaght*,” is more in-line with the word “immigration,” and thus more removed from symbolic notions of “return.”³⁸ As such, during interviews conducted in Armenian, interviewees, who had migrated up to three or four times in their lifetime, would regularly get confused as to which “*nerkaght*” I was referring to, as there is no Armenian word to name the mass migration of 1946-1949. However, the

³⁵ Ani Keshishyan.

³⁶ Anita Kalpakian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Tujunga, CA, May 14, 2019.

³⁷ Susan Pattie, “From the Centers to the Periphery: ‘Repatriation’ to an Armenian Homeland in the Twentieth Century,” *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*. Ed. Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson, 2004: 114.

³⁸ Jo Laycock, “Armenian Homelands and Homecomings,” 106.

Russian, and thus official Soviet, term for the migration according to official state documents, was “*repatriatsii*” which directly translates to “repatriation.”³⁹ To add, migrants who originated from English-speaking countries, such as the United States, confirmed that they also used the word “repatriation” in dialogue to describe the move, in addition to referring to themselves and other migrants as “repatriates” upon Soviet soil.⁴⁰

The “repatriation” campaign captured the hearts and minds of many hopefuls seeking to migrate to Soviet Armenia, but in hindsight, many interviewees used terminology like “brainwashing” and “propaganda” to indicate a sense of being lied to, or *tricked*, by Soviet authorities.⁴¹ Interviewee Nadya Haroutyunyan notes that back in France, prior to migrating, her family heard propaganda that in Soviet Armenia, the fountains were “running with milk,” and that “hens were laying eggs under the walls” – imagery meant to illustrate a prosperous, booming country.⁴² Arusyak Gekchyan, a migrant from Greece who had also heard the same propaganda about Soviet Armenia, shared an ironic tale.⁴³ Gekchyan, who migrated as a nine-year-old with only linguistic knowledge of Greek, arrived at her new home in Soviet Armenia with her parents as they departed their car. Dressed in a pretty outfit from Greece, Gekchyan looked at the kids playing on the street, dressed in shabby clothing and with tangled hair. The kids came up and asked “What’s your name?” in Armenian, but Arusyak did not understand and could not communicate. Responding in Greek, she said, “Where are the fountains?” The kids, confused, asked her mother to translate. One little girl took her to the water fountain on the street.

Gekchyan noted that she was not thirsty, but she wanted to see the milk that was supposed to be

³⁹ SCAHCH, 362.2.17, 88.

⁴⁰ Anita Kalpakian; Deran Tashjian.

⁴¹ Nadya Haroutyunyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Yerevan, Armenia, July 9, 2019; Arusyak Gekchyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Newport Beach, CA, May 23, 2019; Rima Khubesrian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, South Pasadena, CA, April 12, 2019.

⁴² Nadya Haroutyunyan.

⁴³ Arusyak Gekchyan.

flowing from it – as they were told back home. Of course, no such milk flowed from the fountain, and when the kids on the street found out why she inquired about the fountain, they laughed at her reasoning. This tale not only encapsulates the difficulty in settling in a new home with no working knowledge of the spoken language, but also highlights just how strong and pervasive Soviet propaganda was about the ASSR among the diasporans who gave up everything to call themselves “repatriates.”

Although the role of propaganda and the ability of the Soviet authorities to enlist the help of diaspora organizations, such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Armenian Progressive League, in inciting migrants to “repatriate” cannot be understated, it must be emphasized that the primary motive and desire for most was instilled in them far before 1946.⁴⁴ Throughout interviews, many noted patriotism, a love for the Armenian people and culture, a desire to live in one’s “homeland” rather than among “foreigners,” and to give children an “Armenian life” and “Armenian education” as key reasons for migrating. This sense of patriotism, and the particular Armenian nationalism echoed in so many interviews, emphasizes the strength of diasporan institutions and communities in sustaining a cultural literacy informed in the tradition of certain elite organizations, such as the ARF, creating the perfect context for the “repatriation” campaign to take hold. As the Beirut-born Naomi Daduryan noted, “everyone said *hayrenik* (homeland), so we ran and went to the *hayrenik*.⁴⁵” Additionally, Greek-born Alis Gevorkyan mentioned how her father had said, “We’re Armenian, we must live in Armenia.”⁴⁶ Further, Nairi Tajiryan, who migrated from Egypt, said that her family was excited about living among Armenians and not in a country among “foreigners” who spoke a “foreign” language –

⁴⁴ Sevan Yousefian, “The Postwar Repatriation Movement.”

⁴⁵ Naomi Daduryan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Hollywood, CA, May 20, 2019.

⁴⁶ Alis Gevorkyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Yerevan, Armenia, July 4, 2019.

i.e., Arabic.⁴⁷ Ultimately, migrants expressed great enthusiasm for the “homeland,” and even in the face of gossip or rumors that conditions in Soviet Armenia were not as they seem, they decided to go ahead with plans to “repatriate.” Aleksan Khrimian, who migrated from Beirut after living in Sebastia, said that even though people heard negative things about the ASSR, the idea of living in their “homeland,” in addition to feelings of loss from the genocide, compelled them to move to Soviet Armenia.⁴⁸

Archival material also indicates a strong desire on behalf of diaspora Armenians to “repatriate,” in addition to or perhaps even beyond that caused by Soviet enticement. The National Archives of Armenia hold numerous letters that were sent to Babken Astvadzaturyan, the president of the Committee for the Reception and Settlement of Armenians from Abroad, or the Repatriation Committee, by diasporan Armenians expressing their eagerness to migrate and their *gratitude* to the Soviet Union for aiding the Armenian ethno-nation. Further, letters from places populated with fewer Armenians, such as one addressed from a diasporan Armenian living in India, indicate the global reach of the campaign and the genuine, bottom-up desire of thousands of people living in diaspora to become Soviet Armenian citizens.⁴⁹

Some interviewees expressed confusion as to *who* was behind the “repatriation” campaign in the diaspora. Generally, most reflected the realities of a combination of patriotism, love for one’s alleged “homeland,” and Soviet propaganda, but a few instances in interviews seemed to indicate confusion reflecting our previous discussion of oppositional forces of authority for the Armenian global community. For example, Rima Khubesrian, the native Soviet Armenian wife of a “repatriate” from Beirut, said that growing up in the ASSR, she had heard

⁴⁷ Nairi Tajiryan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Yerevan, Armenia, July 6, 2019.

⁴⁸ Aleksan Khrimian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Glendale, CA, April 6, 2019.

⁴⁹ SCAHCH, 362.2.19.

that the ARF had organized the “repatriation” campaign.⁵⁰ Such hearsay, although not historically accurate, reflects anxieties pertaining to the orchestration of the migration, and perhaps, as these interviews were conducted in hindsight, hint at attempts to blame certain institutions for what would go on to be a less-than-total-success. Although rumors like the one stated by Khubesrian reflect a certain type of anxiety about the origin of the “repatriation,” the role of the ARF in the diaspora did, albeit indirectly, create the conditions in diasporan Armenians that would allow for Soviet authorities to attract such high numbers of eager migrants.

Essentially, as the leading “diasporic elite” institution, the ARF, through its sphere of influence including schools, clubs, and associations, was able to instill a sense of love for the Armenian nation in diasporan Armenians, particularly those individuals who had come of age in orphanages or with a sense of loss and disillusionment. Thus, although the ARF served as a foil to the authority of the Soviet Armenian republic, many card-carrying members of the ARF, such as Khachatur Tatlyan’s mother in France, politicized diasporans and encouraged them to “repatriate.”⁵¹ Such sentiments were echoed in interviews with Rima and Vahen Israelyan, whose families had lived in Iran prior to migrating. The Iranian Armenians stated that certain ARF members would motivate other Armenians to migrate, saying “let’s go live on our land among our people” rather than live among Persians who spoke a foreign language.⁵² Lastly, Ani Basmadjian, a migrant from Egypt, mentioned that in the diaspora, there were two different sentiments among those eager to migrate: some people “repatriated” due to a sense of ARF-inspired patriotism, whereas others simply wanted to live in Armenia.⁵³ Although on the surface,

⁵⁰ Rima Khubesrian.

⁵¹ Khachatur Tatlyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Pasadena, CA, April 22, 2019.

⁵² Rima and Vahen Israelyan.

⁵³ Ani Basmadjian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Glendale, CA, August 9, 2019.

these two reasons may seem identical, or indifferentiable, it will be seen that greater political motivations, and even a sense of cultural literacy, were attached to those migrants who “repatriated” due to living and engaging with a very ARF-oriented conception of patriotism and national liberation.

Gendered Aspect of Migration

Migrant voices suggest greater nuance in quite an unexpected realm – the gendered aspect of migration. “Repatriates” belonged to a highly patriarchal culture that more or less operated within certain parameters of misogynistic behavior, and thus, it was common for migrants to share that often times, the “men” of the household, such as the husbands or fathers, were the primary reason for migration – even against the wishes of their wives, mothers, or daughters.⁵⁴ As Anita Kalpakian shared, the “main reason [for migration] was my dad.”⁵⁵ Further, Alis Gevorkyan shared a rather common point, that her father pushed their family to migrate even though her mother was upset and did not want to “repatriate” with such young children (her sister was only one year old).⁵⁶

However, it would be an oversight to claim that each migrant’s family dealt with a patriarchal figure who forced everyone to “repatriate,” as there were a few instances where the *women* in the family were the primary motivators for migration. For example, Khachatur Tatlyan shared that his mother, who was an ARF member in Marseilles, motivated her husband, who was *opposed* to migration, to “repatriate” to Soviet Armenia.⁵⁷ He stated that his father had read about the dire situation in the Soviet Union and the ASSR, and begged the family not to go, but

⁵⁴ Ani Basmadjian.

⁵⁵ Anita Kalpakian.

⁵⁶ Alis Gevorkyan.

⁵⁷ Khachatur Tatlyan.

his mother was so “*hayrenaser*” (patriotic) that she insisted on “repatriating.” Another similar instance occurred with the family of Deran Tashjian, whose patriotic mother motivated her reluctant husband and family to migrate.⁵⁸ Tashjian noted that his father, who was a businessman, was “dead against” migrating to the communist Soviet Union. However, as his wife was a genocide survivor, her patriotism and motivation eventually persuaded the family from Watertown to migrate. Such stories challenge the overarchingly patriarchal narrative and more usual understanding of gender roles in a typical Armenian family at this particular period in time, emphasizing how nuance is underscored through the medium of interviews as a source of social history.

All Aboard: Tales of Transport

Once migrants were registered for the “repatriation,” they would pack up their belongings, and depending on where they lived, would make their way towards the ASSR. Save for the migrants from Iran, which were brought over with cars, all of the “repatriates” were transported via ship voyages to the port of Batumi, Georgia. From Batumi, they were then taken to and settled in various cities in Soviet Armenia in cattle transport cars or freight trains, called “*tovarni boyezd*” in Russian.⁵⁹ The main ships that brought over the first couple of caravans were the *Rossiya*, *Pobeda*, and the *Transylvania*, which took most of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean migrants from their respective ports through the Dardanelles and finally to Batumi. For most migrants in these locales, the ship voyage took about three days, in addition to

⁵⁸ Deran Tashjian.

⁵⁹ John Boursalian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Newbury Park, CA, May 21, 2019; Grikor Jallatyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Hollywood, CA, June 6, 2019. Ani Keshishyan; Arusyak Gekchyan; Nairi Tajiryan.

staying on the docked boat an additional three days to one week at the port of Batumi.⁶⁰

“Repatriates” from the United States, as told by Anita Kalpakian, took a ship to Genoa, Italy, and from there, sailed through the Dardanelles to Batumi.⁶¹ For migrants coming from farther away, including the United States, the ship voyage and transportation to Soviet Armenia took about a month in total.

In retelling the journey to Soviet Armenia, many migrants noted that the ship voyage to Batumi offered them their first glimpse at life under Soviet rule – and it was quite the jarring experience. Migrant Hagop Khrimian, who “repatriated” from Beirut, mentioned that when passing through the Dardanelles, Turks on nearby ships warned them about where they were headed.⁶² Grikor Jallatyan, a migrant from Syria, echoed this in his interview, noting that when the Turks saw them headed to Soviet Armenia, they laughed and said “Go, go.”⁶³ At the time, the Armenian migrants perceived such warnings as ill-intentioned comments from negatively-perceived people, but in hindsight, migrants acknowledged these as warnings that they failed to understand – until it was too late.

Once they got to Batumi, several moments in migrant testimonies stood out as key factors in shaping the “repatriates” first experience upon Soviet soil. Interviewees told how they were forced to toss all of their foodstuffs into the ocean after being told it was “quarantined” by Soviet authorities, and thus, the image of foods floating upon the waters at the port of Batumi is a recurring motif in “repatriate” narratives.⁶⁴ The images of the overabundance of food supplies thrown overboard in these testimonies is juxtaposed with the lack of enough food in Batumi, and

⁶⁰ Hagop Khrimian.

⁶¹ Anita Kalpakian.

⁶² Hagop Khrimian.

⁶³ Grikor Jallatyan.

⁶⁴ Sedrak Barutyian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, North Hollywood, CA, April 10, 2019; Nadya Haroutyunyan; Hagop Khrimian; Ani Keshishyan.

later, Soviet Armenia, heightening sentiments of regret and guilt among the “repatriates” and their families. In addition, they were given “black bread,” which Aleksan Khrimian noted would “leak water.”⁶⁵ The bread was paired with cheese “covered in worms,” according to Nairi Tajiryan.⁶⁶ The “black bread” in question seems to refer to regular Russian black bread, but is of significance in these narratives because the “repatriates” were served exceptionally low-quality bread, finding the stale, musty baked good to be representative of poor living conditions in the Soviet Union.

The experience in Batumi proved to be negative for most “repatriates” beyond the issues with food and “black bread.” As Aleksan Khrimian remembered, “Armenians, Georgians, and Russians in Batumi would shake their head, as in why did you come?”⁶⁷ Evidently, some Soviet citizens did not attempt to hide their less-than-welcoming attitudes towards the hopeful migrants upon arrival. Arusyak Gekchyan furthers this fact, and in her testimony, noted that the first real shock, or disappointment, that led “repatriates” to realize the grim realities of their new lives took place in Batumi.⁶⁸ Grikor Jallatyan recalled an anecdote to summarize his family’s negative experience, highlighting the use of humor as a coping mechanism to deal with the realities of hardship plaguing the “repatriates” in Batumi. Jallatyan shared that his uncle, also a “repatriate” from Syria, went to use the bathroom in Batumi, finding that the “toilet” was essentially a hole between two meager pieces of wood, covered with a cloth as its “door.” Upon returning from the Batumi “bathroom,” he told his family members that they had fallen “two feet in shit” by migrating to the Soviet Union – an image that was quite apt in encapsulating the early

⁶⁵ Aleksan Khrimian.

⁶⁶ Nairi Tajiryan.

⁶⁷ Aleksan Khrimian.

⁶⁸ Arusyak Gekchyan.

experiences for many migrants, both at the port city and in the times to come in the ASSR.⁶⁹ For the “repatriates,” the journey to the ASSR, whether aboard the ships or at the port of Batumi, offered them their very first taste of the Soviet experience – and it proved to be quite a bitter one, at that.

⁶⁹ Grikor Jallatyan.

Chapter 2: Settling in the “Homeland”

After the initial process of registering for the “repatriation” and embarking on the arduous journey to the Soviet Armenian “homeland,” migrants began the process of settling in to their new homes. For many, this entailed not only material and financial hardships in the war-torn ASSR, but also resulted in an ability to feel truly and comfortably at “home.” Through considering their initial period of assimilation and acculturation in Soviet Armenia, migrant testimonies bring up the distinction of assimilating and belonging – one that will continuously be raised long after the initial period of “repatriation.”

Material and Financial Hardships

Once they arrived in Soviet Armenia, conditions did not improve for the majority of the “repatriates.” In fact, many of them faced a great deal of material and financial hardship, forced to live in makeshift homes in dire conditions, often in cramped, uncomfortable situations.⁷⁰ Many migrants, who had previously lived in big, cosmopolitan cities and metropolitan centers, were ill-prepared to live and work on state-sanctioned farms in remote villages, and some migrants, such as Ani Keshishyan’s father Hagop, insisted upon living in Yerevan.⁷¹ Other migrants, perhaps those with less attachment to living in bigger cities, were settled in villages and places like Kajaran, Hrazdan, or Armavir, where their families often went to work on a sovkhoz (Soviet state farms) or kolkhoz (collective farms).⁷² Frequently reiterating that the Soviet Union had just come out of a devastating war, interviewees would stress the broader lack

⁷⁰ Ani Bedjakian shares how in her family, thirteen people were cramped in a one-room accommodation. Ani Bedjakian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Pasadena, CA, April 22, 2019.

⁷¹ Ani Keshishyan.

⁷² Sedrak Barutyian; Rima and Vahen Israelyan; Azniv Gndoyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Glendale, CA, November 20, 2019; Hagop Khrimian.

of resources available to be allocated to the new immigrants. Aleksan Khrimian shared a story about how his family was settled in one bedroom in a two-bedroom unit, and the “repatriates” were forced to share kitchens and bathrooms, if they were *lucky* enough, with the native Soviet Armenians.⁷³ Due to this lack of housing, many Soviet Armenians with two bedrooms or two floors had to give up half of their accommodations, against their will, to house the “repatriates,” and this created, or exacerbated, tensions between the two groups. Unsurprisingly, Soviet Armenians viewed the “repatriates” as straining their already-lacking resources, generating animosity and hostility towards the group that they would deem to be the “*akhpars*” – a derogatory term given to the migrants based on the Western Armenian (read: diasporan) pronunciation of the Armenian word for “brother.”⁷⁴ Khrimian shared that the angry Soviet Armenian neighbors retorted, “Instead of you, they should’ve brought a wagon of coal,” expressing tense relations due to the ASSR’s inability to properly house and accommodate the large influx of migrants.⁷⁵

Arusyak Gekchyan also recalled her lived experiences of animosity with Soviet Armenian neighbors, highlighting the tensions caused by material and financial hardship as a result of the “repatriation.”⁷⁶ Her family was housed in a town with people who had immigrated to Soviet Armenia in 1932 during a previous, but drastically smaller and less consequential, “repatriation” campaign that had taken place to recruit diaspora Armenians. Gekchyan’s family was given a room in a two-story house with a family that had migrated in 1932, once again, against the will of the established tenants. Gekchyan remembered how the woman who lived

⁷³ Aleksan Khrimian.

⁷⁴ The proper literary form of the word “brother” in Western Armenian is “*yekhp’ayr.*” However, “*akhpar*” is the dialectical form of the word “*yekhp’ayr.*”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Arusyak Gekchyan.

there would often give them dirty looks and say things like “you shouldn’t have come.” One day, she kicked them out and put them in the backhouse, which was essentially an empty stable after the host family killed and ate their last cow during the era of dekulakization. The empty stable, already a reminder for the host family of their financial hardships and strained resources under life in the Soviet Union, exacerbated the “repatriates” difficulties in settling in their new home. Frustrated, Gekchyan’s mother told the lady, “You’re Armenian and I’m Armenian. You came in 1932, and we came now” – expressing her anger at being treated as a foreigner by a fellow Armenian migrant. However, tensions continued to rise, and eventually, the KGB became involved and interrogated the woman’s husband for “not having kept his wife in check.” In addition to highlighting the gendered hierarchy in families at the time in the ASSR, Gekchyan’s story emphasizes the tensions felt between Soviet Armenians and “repatriates” due to the lack of proper housing accommodations, causing many like the woman in her story to view the newcomers as a strain on their already-strained resources.

In addition to the lack of proper housing, “repatriates,” who more often than not had experienced comfortable living conditions in diaspora, had to adapt to a decrease in financial and material status. These conditions were especially shocking for “repatriates” who had come from far better conditions in the United States or France, such as American migrant Anita Kalpakian, or for those who came from wealthy families in the Middle East.⁷⁷ As Kalpakian lamented, the communist country was not ready to accept people from the United States or France. She detailed that perhaps migrants from the Middle East, who had also experienced the difficulties of war and revolution, would have an easier time assimilating because of an increase in security and stability in the Soviet Union, but for those that came from the U.S. or Europe, they experienced a

⁷⁷ Anita Kalpakian.

worsening in “status,” leading to greater culture shock. This notion of social and financial “status” as being a factor in determining the degree to which migrants, particularly “repatriates,” assimilate in their new countries is theorized in the work of Remus Anghel, and is supported by several testimonies as related by interviewees such as Kalpakian.⁷⁸ Anghel suggests the importance of social (and by extension financial) status and prestige, and how such a loss or increase of status or prestige can dramatically influence, alter, and affect the way migrants perceive their sense of belonging in the recipient country versus their countries of origin.

Whereas Kalpakian’s family experienced a *loss* of status upon migrating from the U.S. to Soviet Armenia, which shaped a more negative assimilatory process in the initial stages of “repatriation,” Sedrak Barutyan’s family experienced an *increase* in status, which led in turn to more positive understandings of the migration. Barutyan expressed that his father experienced worsened professional prospects in Syria and was unable to find work later in Beirut, leading him to feel burdened with having to take care of his family. In addition, Barutyan’s father faced a number of health troubles due to the stress of his financial situation, and after having a stroke, was faced with hefty medical bills that exhausted all of his money and jewelry reserves. His father, who had heard of miracles being done by Soviet medical experts, had hopes of being healed of his ailments in Soviet Armenia, and the free healthcare and guaranteed employment reassured stability and security in ways that life in Syria and Lebanon was unable to provide.⁷⁹ Thus, for Barutyan’s family, who experienced an *increase* in status upon migration to Soviet Armenia, the overall attitude towards “repatriation” was a lot more grateful and positive than in those, such as Kalpakian’s, who experienced a *loss* in status. Moreover, although Barutyan

⁷⁸ Remus Anghel, *Romanians in Western Europe: Migration, Status Dilemmas and Transnational Connections*, (Latham: Lexington Books, 2013).

⁷⁹ Sedrak Barutyan.

acknowledged *some* difficulty in the initial processes of settling in their new “homeland,” he reiterated that “the Soviet government was not at fault, the country had just gotten out of war.” Whereas other interviewees were keen on placing blame on the Soviet authorities for their haphazard organization of the “repatriation,” Barutyan was careful to express gratitude and avert any negative sentiment towards the Soviet state.

Further expressing changes in their status in the ASSR, migrants would detail how they had to grow accustomed to new ways of living and being – including standing in bread lines, receiving rations, and frequently being turned away when supplies ran out. Seissil Mahroukian, the daughter of “repatriates” from Lebanon, shared how one day, her mother, frustrated with the dire situation in the bread line, ran out of the queue and took the bread of the person in front of her in order to ensure that, on that day, her small child would eat.⁸⁰ Although this incident was quite out of character for Mahroukian’s mother, the interviewee felt it important to share just how the circumstances took their toll on “repatriates” who had essentially migrated due to perceptions of a “better” life in their “true homeland.”

Although migrants were clearly having a hard time settling in the war-torn republic, Soviet authorities wanted to ensure that no negative news got out about the conditions in the ASSR, and according to testimonial material, actively published propagandist material promoting the “wellbeing” of “repatriates.” As Anita Kalpakian shared, her older brother Walter, who was around twenty years old at the time, was taken in by authorities and asked to be interviewed as an American “repatriate” in order to say good things about Soviet Armenia.⁸¹ He was instructed to say how there was always a table full of food and that everything was supplied in abundance. Walter came home crying that day, expressing his frustration and his refusal to

⁸⁰ Seissil Mahroukian, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Porter Ranch, CA, May 16, 2019.

⁸¹ Anita Kalpakian.

participate in such an article. Kalpakian expressed how her brother was *lucky* for not being sentenced to jail due to his refusal to cooperate with the authorities.

Although the Soviet authorities heavily censored whatever outgoing letters and mail left the ASSR, interviewees recalled that they attempted to warn relatives and friends in the diaspora from attempting to follow their steps in “repatriating.” Seissil Mahroukian noted that they would use cryptic ways to communicate that conditions were bad, such as using sick or dead people’s names in letters.⁸² For example, they would tell a relative in Beirut that they are “living the life of” someone known to mutual parties as a dead or sick person, indicating to the recipient that conditions were unfortunate. Grikor Jallatyan also shared his family’s means of secretly indicating poor conditions in the ASSR, noting that they would write their letters and say phrases like “sorry we’re writing in black ink, there are no red pens in Armenia,” or “if you come to Armenia, bring a shovel with you.”⁸³ Such phrases were meant to indicate their status and warn others from potentially making the same “mistake.” The need to warn others from migrating was necessary, as they did not want to cause hardship to loved ones by being the reason that they made the move to the ASSR. In detailing such a situation, Ani Bedjakian notes how her mother, who had briefly lived with her rich minister uncle in Tbilisi, Georgia, had not realized the dire situation of the Soviet Union and had prematurely written a letter back home to Marseilles indicating that “everything was great.”⁸⁴ As a result, a number of friends and neighbors were motivated to immigrate to the ASSR, and consequently, once they experienced the realities of the “repatriation,” they blamed Bedjakian’s mother for the letter she had written.

⁸² Seissil Mahroukian.

⁸³ Grikor Jallatyan.

⁸⁴ Ani Bedjakian.

Belongings

In the process of settling in their new “home,” migrants had to negotiate all they had in order to get by during the difficult times of post-war Soviet life. The issue of belongings is relevant for this history of “repatriation” for a number of reasons. First, as suggested by Jo Laycock, possessions and belongings, and the difficulties migrants experienced in keeping their own objects and heirlooms, is indicative of greater overarching narratives of loss and exile in the Armenian mythos of the last century.⁸⁵ Laycock proposes that greater narratives in the diasporan Armenian’s psyche, particularly those of genocide and loss, contributed to the pain and trauma experienced by migrants in the ASSR – making their time in the Soviet Union all the more challenging. Certainly, migrants experienced “loss” in regards to their possessions, both during the journey to Soviet Armenia, and in the initial assimilatory process. For example, Anita Kalpakian shared that her family had packed up their belongings and stored them in crates from New York City, but these crates did not arrive with them, and rather came in sparse packages at various times, with some items arriving damaged, and other items not arriving at all.⁸⁶

In addition to these types of “losses,” migrants also “lost” many of their belongings and possessions when they were more or less forced to sell them on the black market in order to get by, as the meager salaries and wages they were given were insufficient for supporting the family members that had all come from abroad.⁸⁷ For example, Kalpakian recalls how her father and brother had to sell the family’s washing machine, refrigerator, and clothing.⁸⁸ Further, in a rather somber vein, Seissil Mahroukian recalls the story of her mother selling her wedding china set at the black market in order to have extra money to buy food for her family. A local woman

⁸⁵ Jo Laycock, “Belongings: People and Possessions.”

⁸⁶ Anita Kalpakian.

⁸⁷ Aleksan Khrimian; Anita Kalpakian; Seissil Mahroukian; Rima Khubesrian; John Boursalian.

⁸⁸ Anita Kalpakian.

reportedly asked her mother, “How much is this, *akhpar?*” After her mother replied, “one hundred and twenty rubles,” the local woman cursed at her, and shattered the plate. Ani Bedjakian also shared a sobering story regarding the loss of belongings, recounting how her mother had to sell her car in order to pay for funeral costs to bury her deceased son, who died from malnutrition due to poor conditions in the ASSR.⁸⁹ The reality of having to sell one’s own personal belongings and possessions in order to merely survive, along with the hostility many experienced at the black market, made these “losses” all the more poignant for many “repatriates,” who clearly remembered how some of their family’s most treasured items from the “old countries” were sold to their unwelcoming Soviet Armenian neighbors.

Migrants who were fortunate enough to keep some of their belongings from their countries of origin explained how they were able to enjoy what many fellow Soviet Armenians were lacking. For example, Deran Tashjian’s family brought with them American materials and furnishings for their new home, including their hardwood flooring, toilet, shower, sink, kitchen set, electric-range washing machine, television, wiring, windows, doors, locks, and furniture.⁹⁰ According to Tashjian, the only Soviet materials used in the construction of their home was the rock, sand, cement, and single-tile roof. Due to these American accommodations, Tashjian’s family experienced drastically different living conditions from other “repatriates” and Soviet Armenians, who faced a shortage, or complete lack, of many such amenities and furnishings in their homes. Further, Tashjian notes that he also had brought a hardtop Buick Roadmaster from the States, which he was eager to drive as a young American man. However, similar to tales told by others, the car was repossessed by Soviet authorities when the First Secretary of the Communist Party took a liking to his vehicle.

⁸⁹ Ani Bedjakian.

⁹⁰ Deran Tashjian.

Further, some migrants faced the fear of arrest due to the belongings that they had brought along, and thus, had to either keep them hidden, or get rid of them altogether. For example, many of the “repatriates” migrated as people with certain artisanal crafts and skills, which they intended to contribute to the economy of the Soviet Union and the ASSR. For example, Nadya Haroutyunyan’s parents brought along machinery and equipment from their business back in Marseilles to continue their profession in Soviet Armenia.⁹¹ However, as they soon came to learn, private practice was illegal under Soviet rule, and any additional freelance work was done in secret in order to avoid interrogation, arrest, or confiscation. Syrian “repatriate” Azniv Gndoyan also shared how her family members were interrogated and beaten by the KGB for owning a typewriter in their home, which they used to publish journals on Armenian nationalism and liberation awareness.⁹² As such, belongings were illegal not only for threatening the Communist economy in which every business and transaction was state-sanctioned but also for the possibility of posing a threat to the authority of the Soviet state.

This was also the case for “repatriates” who brought along literary material, such as books, that were outlawed or banned in the ASSR and Soviet Union. Ani Keshishyan remembers how one day, her mother, who had brought literature from their home in Beirut, closed the curtains of their home and crying, burned books considered “anti-Soviet” that would incriminate them as potential “enemies of the state.”⁹³ Not only does this underscore a certain type of cultural literacy in the diaspora that made it harder for migrants to assimilate and belong in the ASSR, but it also highlights contrasting points of authority in the Armenian global nation and how Soviet Armenia marked certain materials, such as cultural books highly regarded in the

⁹¹ Nadya Haroutyunyan.

⁹² Azniv Gndoyan, .

⁹³ Ani Keshishyan.

diaspora, as potentially “anti-Soviet” material. The bringing of belongings from migrants’ respective countries of origin exacerbated or highlighted the difficulties in settling to life in Soviet Armenia, especially for those who were forced to sell belongings, give them up, or get rid of them for the sake of avoiding possible arrest.

Forever in Exile

Although assimilation and acculturation in the war-torn ASSR was difficult due to financial and material hardships, economic concerns proved to be the least of many worries for those “repatriates” who were exiled to Siberia or Central Asia several years upon arrival in the Soviet Union. Maïke Lehmann posits that nearly half of all “repatriates” were exiled to Siberia, and although such a figure seems strikingly high, the frequency with which exile comes up in testimonials broadly supports such an estimate.⁹⁴ Although Lehmann’s data warrants further research, and the archival material of arrest records does not necessarily summarize the experience of all migrants, exile, whether the actual experience itself or the fear of it, was an inevitable aspect of the “repatriation.” This was all the more difficult because the way these migrants were often rounded up for exile was reminiscent of the forced marches and expulsion experienced by genocide survivors (many of whom were “repatriates” themselves). Soviet soldiers would barge into their homes in the middle of the night, allot a few minutes for the deportees to gather up essential belongings, and then drive them to stations in crammed cars where they would await their journey to the Far East. The sheer insensitivity of the Soviet Armenian authorities, who had so opportunistically capitalized on the traumatic memory of the genocide to recruit “repatriates” to the ASSR, is noteworthy. This haphazard treatment of the newcomers by Soviet Armenian officials, as well as the lack of effort in attempting to

⁹⁴ See Lehmann, “A Different Kind of Brothers,” pp. 173.

successfully assimilate the migrants, helps contextualize why so many migrants never felt “at home” in the alleged “homeland.”

“Repatriates,” who sold their homes and businesses and renounced their existing citizenship in their respective countries of origin, were viewed as “potentially disloyal nationals” that warranted exile to Siberia.⁹⁵ To be clear, there is no singular reason behind Stalinist repression and deportation, and one explanation cannot be derived from the sampled narratives of interviewed individuals. However, certain trends arise from which we can deduce some relevant information. According to several testimonials, the majority of those who were exiled were sent to Siberia in June 1949. None of the interviewees were exiled themselves, and whenever there were eligible individuals who had “repatriated” and endured exile, they related that the pain of their memories were too much to relive, even for the purposes of historical research.⁹⁶ This date of June 1949 is even reflected in interviews with “repatriates” who were not themselves exiled but woke up to find that their entire neighborhood had been rounded up and exiled overnight.⁹⁷ Nairi Tajiryan recalls that at night, “repatriates” were scared to turn on the lights in their homes in order to not draw attention from Soviet Armenian neighbors or anyone that could “turn them in” to the KGB.⁹⁸ Further, Azniv Gndoyan related that the only reason her family was spared from exile in 1949 was because her father was the veterinarian for livestock in Hrazdan, and the authorities decided that exiling him would put too many people out of work.⁹⁹ Many of the migrants interviewed shared their constant fears under the consistent threat of exile, particularly up until the death of Stalin in 1953, and as Aleksan Khrimian noted, people would be

⁹⁵ Ibid., 173.

⁹⁶ As in the case of Rima and Vahen Israelyan’s in-laws, who were Iranian Armenian “repatriates” that endured exile.

⁹⁷ Aleksan Khrimian; Nairi Tajiryan; Aznig Gndoyan.

⁹⁸ Nairi Tajiryan.

⁹⁹ Azniv Gndoyan.

scared to say “the bread is black” for fear of being sent to Siberia.¹⁰⁰ Hagop Khrimian also echoes this, relating that “you couldn’t say the bread was black – everyone lived in fear.”¹⁰¹ The motif of the “black bread” comes up in these narratives as a means of representing distaste with the Soviet state and system, and the fear of acknowledging the realities of hardship in the face of the threat of punishment and arrest.

Further, many “repatriates” were exiled under the suspicion that they were either former ARF members or had strong nationalistic and patriotic sentiments. One poignant example is John Boursalian’s family; three of his family members were exiled on account of being “Dashnak sympathizers” (the term for an ARF member) who expressed strong patriotism and allegedly spoke of national liberation.¹⁰² This is rather paradoxical, of course, because patriotism and nationalism were among the primary motivators for “repatriation” in the first place, and the language of patriotism was *used* by the Soviet organizers of the mass migration as a vehicle to foster desire to relocate to the perceived Armenian “homeland.” Although the ARF was exiled from Soviet Armenia in 1921 after the dismantling of the first independent Armenian state, the Soviet authorities would have known of the organization’s reach and influence. As “repatriates” were among some of the most nationalistic and patriotic diaspora Armenians, they would have presumably had some ties to the largest political organization vying for Armenian national liberation in the diaspora, whether they were card-carrying members or not. However, this created an issue for the Soviet authorities, who condemned such movements as being “bourgeois nationalist.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Aleksan Khrimian.

¹⁰¹ Hagop Khrimian.

¹⁰² John Boursalian.

¹⁰³ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 8.

This begs the question as to *why* the Soviet Armenian authorities allowed so many former ARF members to “repatriate” only to exile them on the grounds of *former* party membership upon migration. Did the Soviets aim to indiscriminately recruit as many able-bodied and well-off diaspora Armenians as possible, only to weed out potential “enemies” later? Or was former ARF membership or alleged pro-ARF sentiment merely an easy narrative to propagate when filling up the secret police’s quota targets for exile round-ups? Although the Soviet state’s views of these alleged ARF or pro-ARF individuals is outside the scope of this study, the fact that the majority of “repatriates” were exiled during the first two weeks of June 1949 seems to suggest that there were quotas to be filled. It is also probable that “repatriates” were more likely to be targets of denunciation in the atomized society of Soviet Armenia, as they were frequently met with distrust by both the government and their fellow Armenians.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ For further discussion on “atomized” Soviet society, see Jan Gross, *Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Chapter 3: Do We Belong Here?

In responding to questions about whether or not interviewees felt that they were living in their “true homeland” after “repatriating” to Soviet Armenia, the answer was almost always, without a doubt, “yes.” As Khachatur Tatlyan commented, “of course they accepted [Soviet Armenia] as their homeland.¹⁰⁵ Further, Ani Keshishyan shared, “No matter how many hardships we had, we felt we were in our homeland... The strength of our homeland was able to overcome the hardships and lead to better, happier days.”¹⁰⁶ Although interviewees unanimously agreed that Soviet Armenia *was* their homeland, there was drastically more variance in the degrees of acculturation, or a sense of belonging, experienced by the migrants. To elaborate, all of the migrants agreed that because the Soviet republic of Armenia was carved out as “their” land, they had a claim to it as their “homeland,” and felt that this was substantiated by their migration. *However*, not all migrants felt a sense of belonging, revealing a distinction between an almost mythical, “biological” notion of one’s “homeland” and the conception of one’s sense of “belonging” at “home.”

To understand why such a distinction occurred, we can discuss the perception of being “*akhpar*,” or “foreign,” a label that many migrants were unable to escape.¹⁰⁷ Aghavni Jivelekyan, who migrated from Greece and currently lives in Armenia, commented that “on our foreheads ‘*akhpar*’ is forever written.”¹⁰⁸ Azniv Gndoyan shared that the sociopolitical climate very much felt like there was a constant dichotomy between “*akhpars*” and “*teghatsis*” (the

¹⁰⁵ Khachatur Tatlyan.

¹⁰⁶ Ani Keshishyan.

¹⁰⁷ Haykanush Bekyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Yerevan, Armenia, July 8, 2019; Alis Gevorkyan; Nadya Haroutyunyan; Khachatur Tatlyan; Anita Kalpakian; Seissil Mahroukian;

¹⁰⁸ Aghavni Jivelekyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Yerevan, Armenia, June 26, 2019.

word for native Armenians/Soviet Armenians).¹⁰⁹ Others shared a sense of embarrassment, or even shame, due to being labeled as a “foreigner” in their own alleged “homeland.” John Boursalian lamented that some of his friends would say, “You’re not at all like an “*akhpar*,” you’re a very good guy.”¹¹⁰ This would make him feel “like there was a division between immigrants and Armenians in Armenia,” and he would question if he was “better than his parents” for seemingly being “less” of an “*akhpar*.” Boursalian continued that the “repatriates” felt “like they [native Soviet Armenians] don’t want to accept us as we are.” However, Boursalian, and other migrants, emphasized that these negative sentiments and the people who voiced them were simply a “product of the society in which they grew up,” placing the blame on the system rather than the people of the ASSR. Additionally, Seissil Mahroukian expressed, “we were second class citizens... I was embarrassed to say my parents were Lebanese Armenians.”¹¹¹ Ani Basmadjian also revealed that she felt an uneasiness when native Soviet Armenians did not distinguish her as an “*akhpar*’s daughter” or as someone who came from an “*akhpar*’s family,” and although she acculturated well, she felt such a distinction due to the use of these labels and ways of thinking.¹¹²

Interviewees also shared that native Soviet Armenians would frequently ask them *why* they came to the ASSR, saying, “Who asked you to come here? Did we send a red apple after you?”¹¹³ This phrase, which was commonly told to “repatriates,” was essentially an attempt to express the unwelcoming attitudes of some native Soviet Armenians towards the migrants, underscoring the sentiment that they were not necessarily wanted by all of the constituents of the

¹⁰⁹ Azniv Gndoyan.

¹¹⁰ John Boursalian.

¹¹¹ Seissil Mahroukian.

¹¹² Ani Basmadjian.

¹¹³ John Boursalian; Galukyan Family.

ASSR. The red apple signifies something that enticed migrants to “repatriate,” and by retorting this phrase, native Soviet Armenians would point out that they did *not* invite the diasporans or entice them to come to their republic. Mari Ghazanchyan, a migrant from Syria, noted that “they called us *akhpar*, and said we were *akhmakh* (stupid) for coming” to the ASSR.¹¹⁴ In a similar vein, Grikor Jallatyan shared how “repatriates” would use humor to respond to retorts by hostile Soviet Armenians, and when addressed as an “*akhpar*,” he would say, “we’re *akhpar*, and you’re *akhmakh*.”¹¹⁵ In addition, Jallatyan shared that native Soviet Armenians would ask, “where you’re from, were there donkeys there?,” and the “repatriates” would answer, “no, all of the donkeys came to Armenia.”¹¹⁶ Although such exchanges of dialogue showcase instances of hostility and barriers to belonging experienced by some migrants, they also exemplify the use of humor in making light of one’s hardships and coping with the circumstances of difficult migration.

Whereas some migrants emphasized the differences between themselves and native Soviet Armenians, others, such as Sedrak Barutyan, shared that they did not feel any cultural differences between their families and Soviet Armenians at large.¹¹⁷ Those who expressed more positive experiences in assimilating to Soviet Armenian culture tended to also hold a more positive view on feelings of belonging.¹¹⁸ However, for the majority who expressed difficulties in belonging, the label of “*akhpar*,” and thus, “foreign,” was something that stuck. Ani Keshishyan said, “I moved to Soviet Armenia when I was four years old, I grew up, graduated, married, and even my own child, they regarded as an *akhpar*’s child, which was very hurtful for

¹¹⁴ Mari and Gayane Ghazanchyan, Interview with Pauline Pechakjian, Personal interview, Yerevan, Armenia, July 6, 2019.

¹¹⁵ Grikor Jallatyan.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Sedrak Barutyan.

¹¹⁸ Vahen and Rima Israelyan; Naomi Daduryan.

us as we left our homes in foreign countries due to the love we had for our homeland, but in our homeland, they viewed us as *akhpars*.”¹¹⁹ This notion of the “*akhpar*” label being inherited generationally was also evident with the Galukyan Family, who still reside in Yerevan since migrating from Bulgaria in 1956.¹²⁰ The great-grandson of the eldest “repatriate,” Alen Galukyan, is still called an “*akhpari chut*” (chick), even though he and his parents were all born and raised in Soviet Armenia and the Republic of Armenia. The consequences of being labeled as “*akhpar*” by their Soviet Armenian counterparts were significant: “repatriates” with strong Middle Eastern and European cultural influence experienced difficulties acculturating to life in Soviet Armenia. Issues of language, customs, and culture created a divide between the “repatriates” and their Sovietized fellow Armenians.

Language as a Differentiator

Russian and Soviet-standardized Eastern Armenian linguistic and cultural dominance was a significant problem for many “repatriates” during their earlier years in the ASSR. Language differences posed a barrier to belonging for many migrants, as the majority of formerly Ottoman Armenians of the diaspora spoke, read, and wrote in the Western form of Armenian, which has different pronunciations and linguistic rules than Eastern Armenian. Not only did Soviet Armenians speak, read, and write Eastern Armenian, but orthographic reforms of the early 1920s also posed an additional hindrance. Ani Basmadjian shared that the Eastern versus Western Armenian issue was a “big problem” for many migrants, and that she would “get teased” if she spoke Western Armenian.¹²¹ Further, due to the ages of most of the interviewees who

¹¹⁹ Ani Keshishyan.

¹²⁰ Galukyan Family.

¹²¹ Ani Basmadjian.

participated in this study, the majority of migrants were young or adolescent children when they migrated to the ASSR, and thus, had more of an opportunity to adopt Eastern Armenian. Thus, many of the interviewees were able to code-switch between Eastern and Western, depending on the circumstance, and this fluidity in literary form was in-line with the malleability, or versatility, that they felt in regards to their own identity as Armenians.¹²² As Ani Keshishyan shared, they would speak Western Armenian at home with their parents, and Eastern Armenian in their social, professional, and public spheres outside of the home.¹²³ Further, John Boursalian noted that “Every time they [the “repatriates”] opened their mouth, everyone knew they were Western Armenians, newcomers.”¹²⁴ Boursalian expressed his own ability to speak both Western and Eastern Armenian, which made it hard for others to decipher his background and origins – a common experience for the children of “repatriates.” Interviewees who migrated as young adults or adults, in contrast, spoke more or less in complete Western Armenian, indicating how age, relative to language, also affected one’s sense of identity and belonging.¹²⁵ Further, interviewees shared their own difficulties adjusting to language differences in school and in the workplace. Nairi Tajiryan shared that she would have difficulty with the Western-to-Eastern crossover of some hard consonants, indicating language issues in the workplace.¹²⁶ Ani Bedjakian also shared a similar story, relating how in the classroom, she would have issues confusing the two forms of Armenian, as she had learned Western Armenian growing up.¹²⁷ The contestation of Western Armenian as a legitimate literary form in the ASSR affected the acculturation process for many “repatriates,” particularly those who originated from communities where language, and

¹²² Hagop Khrimian; Alis Gevorkyan; Seissil Mahroukian.

¹²³ Ani Keshishyan.

¹²⁴ John Boursalian.

¹²⁵ Aleksan Khrimian; Galukyan Family; Nairi Tajiryan; Naomi Daduryan.

¹²⁶ Nairi Tajiryan.

¹²⁷ Ani Bedjakian.

specifically Western Armenian, was stringently upheld as the “common denominator” or “unifying element” in the global diaspora.¹²⁸ Migrants felt disillusioned that their traditional, often patriotic, use of Western Armenian was invalidated upon Soviet soil

In addition to the problems posed by the distinct literary forms and the subsequent vilification of Western Armenian in the ASSR, migrants also found that they needed to learn the Russian language, the lingua franca of the Soviet Union. Their lack of knowledge of Russian would severely hinder their professional, educational, and social prospects. Because the vast majority of “repatriates” migrated to Soviet Armenia in order to give their children a chance at an “Armenian upbringing” and education, this situation was largely unexpected and led to differing outcomes. Migrants who came from especially patriotic backgrounds, such as Ani Keshishyan and her husband, Levon, tended to perceive Russian as an imperial language and regard it in generally negative terms.¹²⁹ Other interviewees, however, reported how they came to learn Russian, whether it be through school, the public sphere, neighbors, or Russian film and television.¹³⁰ Those migrants who had previous knowledge of certain languages noted an easier ability to pick up on Russian and Cyrillic script. For example, Arusyak Gekchyan, who learned Greek as a child in Greece, had more ease with Russian than Armenian in her schooling due to the similarity of Cyrillic letters and script.¹³¹ Members of the Galukyan family, who spoke, read, and wrote Bulgarian prior to migration, also related the ease in picking up Russian due to their knowledge of Bulgarian, which shares a similar linguistic structure and script.¹³² Even Deran Tashjian, who migrated as a seventeen-year-old American boy with no knowledge of Armenian,

¹²⁸ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 299.

¹²⁹ Ani Keshishyan.

¹³⁰ Ani Bedjakian; Kachatur Tatlyan.

¹³¹ Arusyak Gekchyan.

¹³² Galukyan Family.

noted that Russian was a lot easier for him to pick up due to its script being closer to English.¹³³ Tashjian, who was employed as an Olympic coach in the Soviet Union, largely engaged with others who mainly spoke Russian to one another, and thus, developed a greater knowledge of Russian than Armenian.

Diasporan Armenians, whose families typically spoke an array of languages, including Arabic, Turkish, English, French, Greek, and Bulgarian, were often made to feel “illiterate” for their lack of Russian and Eastern Armenian knowledge. At the same time, due to the manner in which “repatriates” were settled in communities and towns with other “repatriates,” such as in the town of Nor Aresh in Yerevan, many migrants were neighbors with migrants who came from completely different places. As Haykanush Bekyan remembered, people would speak and pick up different languages from one another, whether it be Turkish, Arabic, or so forth.¹³⁴ Arusyak Gekchyan also shared such a story, noting that she would maintain her knowledge of Greek by reading the Greek journals and magazines her neighbor – originally from Greece – had brought along.¹³⁵ In an interesting side note, many “repatriates” would not voluntarily admit to their or their family members’ knowledge of Turkish, unless prompted by the interviewer or another family member. This sense of *shame* attributed to the knowledge of Turkish, which is understandable in the context of modern Armenian history, was verbalized by Seissil Mahroukian, who noted that her brother accidentally spoke Turkish in the ASSR one day, only to be scolded by their mother.¹³⁶ As such, being an “*akhpar*” was bad enough, but speaking the language of the “enemy” would have further alienated and linguistically differentiated the “repatriate” family from Lebanon.

¹³³ Deran Tashjian.

¹³⁴ Haykanush Bekyan.

¹³⁵ Arusyak Gekchyan.

¹³⁶ Seissil Mahroukian.

Differences in Customs

Beyond differences in language and dialect, interviewees shared differences in customs, such as food, religion, tradition, and clothing, which further served to distinguish them from their native Soviet Armenian counterparts. However, these differences were sometimes viewed in a positive light, and both parties involved in this study, the native Soviet Armenians and the “repatriates” of the ASSR, expressed benefitting from the cross-cultural exchanges that took place after the mass migration. There seemed to be an implication that “repatriates” enabled an almost “civilizing” process in the war-torn Soviet Armenian republic through the introduction of new and various customs from the diaspora. Additionally, both native Soviet Armenians and “repatriates” alike emphasized that they learned new ways of being from one another, whether it involved food, clothing, or other traditions. Whereas customs like food and clothing tended to be discussed in a more positive regard, traditions that held more cultural weight, like religion, music, or literature, opened up issues of difference. Essentially, some of the key markers of “Armenianness” in the diaspora, including hallmarks of identity and tradition such as long-standing religious practices or revolutionary songs and literature, held less authority in the Soviet Armenian republic, consequentially serving as reasons that hindered some diasporans’ sense of belonging. Through the exploration of differences in customs as voiced by migrants themselves, we are able to better understand the nuances experienced by “repatriates” as they navigated their new identities as Soviet Armenians.

Food

Differences in food customs were perhaps some of the easiest, and most peaceful, aspects of cross-cultural exchange and clashing that took place among “repatriates” and native

Soviet Armenians in the ASSR. As Aleksan Khrimian noted, Soviet Armenia had just gotten out of World War II, and was generally lacking in many departments, including basic foodstuffs, which contrasted to the more elaborate and diverse food offerings of the diaspora.¹³⁷ Sedrak Barutyian shares that both “repatriates” and native Soviet Armenians alike would learn each other’s foods and customs, teaching each other new things and diversifying the cultural landscape of the ASSR.¹³⁸ Rima Khubesrian, a native Soviet Armenian, noted that “repatriates’ foods were “better and more tasty,” and thus, many Soviet Armenians were eager to pick up on their new neighbors’ traditions of Middle Eastern and Ottoman Armenian cooking.¹³⁹ Mari Ghazanchyan, whose family was from Kessab, noted that they still make *ishli kufta* (stuffed meatballs) and other Ottoman Armenian dishes to this day in the Republic of Armenia.¹⁴⁰ Interviewees commonly shared that while they and their families brought novelties like *sourj* (Armenian/Greek/Turkish coffee), eggplants, lentils, and an array of Ottoman Armenian and Middle Eastern dishes such as *lahmajoun* (meat pie) and *chikufta* (raw meatballs) to the ASSR, they picked up on one, unanimously Soviet Armenian (or rather, Soviet) dish from their neighbors: *borscht*.¹⁴¹ As Aghavni Jivelekyan remarked, “they learned *sourj*, and we learned *borscht* and cabbage dolma (stuffed cabbage leaves).”¹⁴²

Further, in quite a humorous exchange, Seissil Mahroukian recalled how one day, at the bazaar, her mother was buying an eggplant, when a Soviet Armenian woman approached her and asked, “*Akhpar*, what are you buying? What is that black thing?” Mahroukian’s mother, disillusioned with “repatriation” and feeling mischievous, told her to eat it raw in order to have a

¹³⁷ Aleksan Khrimian.

¹³⁸ Sedrak Barutyian.

¹³⁹ Rima Khubesrian.

¹⁴⁰ Mari Ghazanchyan.

¹⁴¹ Azniv Gndoyan; Aleksan Khrimian; Anita Kalpakian; John Boursalian; Arusyak Gekchyan.

¹⁴² Aghavni Jivelekyan.

face of glowing skin.¹⁴³ Although eggplants were available for purchase in certain markets in the ASSR, they were not a staple in the traditional cuisine of most Eastern Armenian homes. Not only does this anecdote highlight differences in food customs and consumption but also highlights the use of humor, and perhaps some resentment, in making light of difficulties in migration and the presence of cultural differences and tensions between migrants and native Soviet Armenians. The bazaar and marketplace as a point of differentiation in food customs also came up in the interview with Azniv Gndoyan, who remarked that native Soviet Armenians would not cook with the spices, red pepper, black pepper, or eggplants that her Aintabtsi Armenian family from Syria was used to. Thus, when her husband would go to the grocery store in order to buy such items, native Soviet Armenians would remark that his basket was indicative of a “repatriates” shopping habits.¹⁴⁴ Essentially, although differences in food customs served to further distinguish “repatriates” from native Soviet Armenians, the shared enjoyment of delicious food items and dishes allowed for the two groups to learn and grow from one another, broadening the cultural variation of the Soviet Armenian republic.

Traditions

As “repatriates” came from a variety of different countries and cultural backgrounds, they brought along with them a host of different customs.¹⁴⁵ As Deran Tashjian related, everyone was “praising the country that they came from” and reminiscing about the cultures and environments that they had left behind. Mari Ghazahnchyan, whose Kessabtsi Armenian family was very proud of their unique roots, said that they had a “genetic memory” of how life was good back in

¹⁴³ Seissil Mahroukian.

¹⁴⁴ Azniv Gndoyan.

¹⁴⁵ Deran Tashjian.

Kessab – making their sense of belonging in the ASSR more difficult to achieve.¹⁴⁶ Many migrants would try to keep customs from their “old lives” while also accommodating to life in the ASSR. For example, Ani Keshishyan’s father, Hagop Keshishyan, who had grown up listening to English and Western radio, would refurbish old radios and each year, during the holiday season, tune the radio to European and American channels in order to listen to English and Western Christmas songs.¹⁴⁷ Arusyak Gekchyan also shared that her Greek family would continue to listen to Greek music, and to this day, she can still read Greek and sing Greek songs.¹⁴⁸ There were instances when holding on to old customs was met with hostility from Soviet authorities and neighbors, such as when Azniv Gndoyan and her siblings were told not to sing songs they had learned in diaspora as schoolchildren.¹⁴⁹ Instead, they were called to a meeting with teachers in Hrazdan, where they were instead taught to sing kolkhoz songs and songs dedicated to Stalin.

Like with food, however, “repatriates” and native Soviet Armenians picked up on one another’s customs, learning new ways of living and being from one another and consequently diversifying the lived experience in the ASSR.¹⁵⁰ A number of interviewees noted that Soviet Armenians were exceptionally hospitable people, as neighbors, friends, and coworkers, and thus, this tradition of hospitality was appreciated and acquired by the “repatriates.”¹⁵¹ Ani Bedjikian and Seissil Mahroukian emphasized an appreciation for this type of hospitality, commenting on how native Soviet Armenians would spread out whole tables worth of food and pastries when guests would come over for a cup of *sourj* or how they would go to all of their neighbors’ homes

¹⁴⁶ Mari Ghazanchyan.

¹⁴⁷ Ani Keshishyan.

¹⁴⁸ Arusyak Gekchyan.

¹⁴⁹ Azniv Gndoyan.

¹⁵⁰ Anita Kalpakian.

¹⁵¹ Ani Keshishyan.

for holidays and New Year's celebrations in order to promote good spirits and cheer among the newcomers.

Religion

Religion was one particular aspect of cross-cultural differences that stood out, especially due to the dichotomy that existed between Armenians as a traditionally and historically religiously devout culture (with patriotic claims to being the first Christian nation) and the staunchly atheistic Soviet system. In addition, this binary between religion in the diaspora and in the ASSR followed a longstanding trajectory of division that was initiated with the thirteenth-century schism of the two *Catholicosi* and churches, Ejmiatsin and Cilicia.¹⁵² The ASSR maintained Ejmiatsin as its religious center, whereas the diaspora was under the leadership of Cilicia – first in the Ottoman Empire, and later in Lebanon after the genocide. This historical context of conflict over religious authority in the Armenian transnation influenced, if not directly exacerbated, cross-cultural clashes in regards to religious traditions and customs in the case of the “repatriates,” as the majority of these migrants had grown up under the authority of the Holy See of Cilicia prior to their time as Soviet citizens.

Whereas for Soviet Armenian Rima Khubesrian, no such religious differences existed on the surface because everyone “was Christian,” diaspora Armenians, who had grown up and come from far more devout communities operating under the realm of the diasporan Armenian Apostolic Church, emphasized the *lack* of religion in the ASSR.¹⁵³ As Seissil Mahroukian

¹⁵² Panossian, *The Armenians*, 319.

¹⁵³ Rima Khubesrian; Seissil Mahroukian.

remembered, religion was not as highly regarded by native Soviet Armenians, stating how “priests in black clothing were called demons” by the local population.¹⁵⁴

In the Soviet Armenian republic, perhaps due to the Soviet nationalities policy of “affirmative action,” Armenians were allowed to *nominally* practice religion, and to a certain extent, their Christianity was maintained.¹⁵⁵ However, as John Boursalian notes, Western Armenians from the diaspora were far more keen on going to church, and held on to more religious customs than their Soviet Armenian counterparts.¹⁵⁶ Further, religious ceremonies held less weight in the Soviet Armenian republic, with Rima and Vahen Israelyan noting that Soviet Armenians would marry without going to church – a custom not familiar to the Iranian Armenians back in their home country.¹⁵⁷ Ani Keshishyan also recalls that many “repatriates” had to maintain their religious customs at home. For example, people wouldn’t go to church to christen their children, and thus, they had to bring priests over to their homes in order to do christenings.¹⁵⁸ In addition, Ani Bedjakian states that as a university instructor, she was not allowed to wear a cross around her neck, and had to keep her churchgoing a secret from her Communist Party peers.¹⁵⁹ However, with changes in the 1960s which allowed for greater cultural and national freedoms, more Armenians, both “repatriate” and Soviet alike, began to enjoy greater opportunities to freely practice religious traditions.

Clothing

¹⁵⁴ Seissil Mahroukian.

¹⁵⁵ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*; Panossian, *The Armenians*, 351.

¹⁵⁶ John Boursalian; Rima and Vahen Israelyan; Nadya Haroutyunyan.

¹⁵⁷ Rima and Vahen Israelyan.

¹⁵⁸ Ani Keshishyan.

¹⁵⁹ Ani Bedjakjian.

In addition to food, customs, and religion, clothing served as a physical differentiator that distinguished “repatriates” from native Soviet Armenians. Ani Bedjakian notes how her mother, who briefly settled in Nagorno-Kharabakh upon immigrating to the Soviet Union, had difficulty assimilating to village life, particularly as she stood out for her European-style clothing such as dresses and high heels.¹⁶⁰ Haykanush Bekyan also noted how her grandfather would dress in stylish European clothing, differentiating himself from how native Soviets dressed in the ASSR.¹⁶¹ American “repatriate” Deran Tashjian noted that in the beginning, people would question their clothing choices, mentioning that the migrants from the United States “stood out” due to the “way we acted, the way we dressed up.”¹⁶² American migrant Anita Kalpakian also recalled an instance of “standing out,” remembering one particular incident in the classroom.¹⁶³ Young Kalpakian, who was wearing an American-style dress rather than a Soviet uniform, had her geography teacher point her out and say, “Oh look, children, see what nice clothes she’s wearing! She’s from America!” That day, the young “repatriate” went home and told her mother she didn’t want to wear her dresses anymore due to the attention she received in class and asked her mother to sew her a uniform like everyone else. Not only does this tale emphasize how clothing was a physical differentiator for “repatriates,” but also the power of uniformity.

Interviewees shared that they would often get teased for their distinct style of dressing, such as Grikor Jallatyan remembering that he would get laughed at for wearing a tie and a hat.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, Ani Keshishyan related that her Lebanese Armenian father would get teased for wearing shorts, as apparently, this was something foreign at the time in the ASSR.¹⁶⁵ Bulgarian

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Haykanush Bekyan.

¹⁶² Deran Tashjian.

¹⁶³ Anita Kalpakian.

¹⁶⁴ Grikor Jallatyan.

¹⁶⁵ Ani Keshishyan.

Armenian Gevorg Galukyan also remembered getting teased for wearing short trousers, even in the late 1950s.¹⁶⁶ Although migrants recalled clothing as a point of differentiation which often led to them being teased during their initial years in the ASSR, Ani Bedjakian noted that dress was another aspect that benefitted the Soviet Armenian republic, and that Soviet Armenians had told her: “We learned all this from you [the “repatriates”] – how to dress, how to act – the people were wild, we taught them how to be.”¹⁶⁷ This anecdote implies how “repatriates” broadened the cultural landscape of the Soviet Armenian republic by bringing along new clothing traditions from their host countries. However, it also hints at the migrants being perceived as a civilizing force by native Soviet Armenians, suggesting a social hierarchy in which “repatriates” were seen as more “cultured” than their counterparts. This indicates nuances in dichotomous social hierarchies that more or less transferred over to diaspora beyond merely the ASSR – on the one hand, native Soviet Armenians held more authority in the republic, and the migrants were felt to be “foreigners.” On the other hand, “repatriates,” and diaspora Armenians in a broader sense, were perceived to be more “cultured” than native Soviet Armenians, implying a distinct hierarchy that hinges on and emphasizes cultural literacy and knowledge beyond that propagated by the ASSR.

Intermarriage

Intermarriage, or the lack of, between native Soviet Armenians and “repatriates” provided another opportunity to better understand the lived experiences of migration after the initial period of settlement, allowing greater insight on diasporans’ life in the ASSR. When asked whether or not intermarriage occurred, migrants answered with more variety compared to other

¹⁶⁶ Galukyan Family.

¹⁶⁷ Ani Bedjakjian.

questions, suggesting that their own perception of what was or was not commonplace was very much colored with what they had seen or experienced in their own lives. For example, migrants who married native Soviet Armenians were more apt to say that intermarriage was commonplace, whereas those who did not would hesitate to comment on it as a frequent practice. As Hagop Khrimian, a “repatriate” who intermarried with a native Soviet Armenian, said, the older generation of migrants were opposed to intermarriage, but younger people were more open to the idea.¹⁶⁸ John Boursalian, on the other hand, noted that there was “no problem” with intermarriage between migrants and native Soviet Armenians.¹⁶⁹

Interviewees told personal stories in order to answer this question, and Rima Israelyan anecdotally shared that generally, native Soviet Armenians would want to marry Iranian Armenian women, but Iranian Armenians wanted to marry with only each other.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Nairi Tajiryan, who was older upon migrating, shared that in general, Armenians would try to marry people from their villages back in the Ottoman Empire, so intermarriage across any “other” group was difficult, regardless of “repatriation.”¹⁷¹ Ani Basmadjian reiterated this notion of wanting to preserve one’s very unique cultural heritage, explaining that on average, “repatriates” would not want their children to marry native Soviet Armenians.¹⁷² Others expressed more hostility towards intermarriage, such as Aleksan Khrimian, who commented that people did not intermarry because “we [the “repatriates”] knew what kind of people they [native Soviet Armenians] were.”¹⁷³ Such an attitude against intermarriage was also reflected in the testimony of Ani Bedjakian, who shared that her father, a man from Nagorno-Kharabakh (and

¹⁶⁸ Hagop Khrimian.

¹⁶⁹ John Boursalian.

¹⁷⁰ Rima and Vahen Israelyan.

¹⁷¹ Nairi Tajiryan.

¹⁷² Ani Basmadjian.

¹⁷³ Aleksan Khrimian.

thus a native Soviet Armenian himself), did not want her to marry a native Soviet Armenian.¹⁷⁴ He wanted a “repatriate” man to keep her well, but *not a Halebtsi* (from Aleppo) or *Beirutsi* (from Beirut) because according to him, men from the Middle East were “backwards” – especially in terms of gender norms. Bedjakian agreed with this statement, remembering how she had been “wanted” by a man from Aleppo, but he had wanted her to leave college. This anecdotal evidence represents the cognitive dissonance of gender in the ASSR, especially between the peculiar progressiveness of gender in the Soviet Union relative and the patriarchal Armenian community in and outside of the “homeland.”

Lastly, the Galukyan family in Yerevan provides an interesting example of the long-lasting effects of the “repatriation” with regard to intermarriage.¹⁷⁵ “Repatriate” Gevorg Galukyan married Alvina, a native Soviet Armenian, and although the two have a happy marriage with many children and grandchildren, the emphasis of difference in terms of intermarriage became a topic of conversation during the interview. Alvina mentioned that when she initially found out her husband was a “newcomer” prior to their marriage, she was worried as this was something she had considered not ideal for native Soviet Armenians. Further, their grandchildren mentioned how their native Soviet Armenian grandmother would often remark on them being the descendants of “*akhpars*,” demonstrating that even in a “mixed” Armenian family, the aftermath of “repatriation” is long-lasting – even after many decades. The topic of intermarriage revealed a nuanced picture in which personal experiences peppered migrants’ perceptions and the retelling of their histories. Their memories and anecdotal stories of intermarriage allow us to probe greater issues of belonging, or lack thereof, as felt and experienced by migrants in the ASSR, emphasizing how for some, they were able to fully feel at

¹⁷⁴ Ani Bedjakian.

¹⁷⁵ Galukyan Family.

home among the native Soviet Armenians, and for others, they would forever remain “foreigners,” they would always be “*akhpars*.”

Diaspora vs. Homeland Tension in the ASSR

Many migrants who specifically noted an inability to feel like they “belonged” in Soviet Armenian culture or who perceived a certain distance between themselves and native Soviet Armenians tended to hold stronger liberationist beliefs than those who experienced an easier assimilatory process. Although many of these migrants would not call themselves card-carrying Dashnaks, their liberationist beliefs along with more negative sentiments towards the Soviet government and people were likely instilled in them through their exposure to the ARF and other diasporic elite organizations during their lives as diasporan Armenians in schools, churches, and clubs prior to migration. Whereas the official ARF was staunchly anti-Soviet and opposed “repatriation” efforts, many families who made the move to Soviet Armenia had members who previously had belonged to organizations such as the ARF, and only relinquished their membership status upon registering to migrate to the ASSR.¹⁷⁶ Once many of these migrants, either with former ties to the ARF or the social, cultural, or professional clubs operating in the sphere of the ARF’s influence, arrived in the Soviet Union, they were at much greater risk of being exiled to Siberia or experiencing discrimination, and even violence, at the hands of fellow Soviet Armenians due to their allegedly “treacherous” allegiances.

John Boursalian told how almost all of the males in his family were exiled to Siberia in the late 1940s and early 1950s on allegations by the Soviet police that they were involved in spreading anti-Soviet (read: Dashnak) propaganda and performing anti-Soviet agitation.¹⁷⁷ The

¹⁷⁶ Ani Bedjikian; Rima and Vahen Israelyan; Siruhi Galukyan.

¹⁷⁷ John Boursalian.

Boursalian family story is indicative of many accounts of “repatriates” being targeted by the Soviet government for having allegiances to the ARF or for spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. The liberationist influences of the ARF in the diaspora may have colored people’s personal political beliefs even after arrival in the Soviet Union, though this is not possible to establish definitively. This presence of the ARF, and perhaps even the conflation of liberationist ideologies with the political organization, resulted in many of these “repatriates” being further socially and even physically alienated in the Armenian “homeland.”

Sometimes socio-political tensions could lead to violence. The interviewee Haykanush Bekyan told how her father was shot dead by native Soviet Armenians for publicly singing songs dedicated to Andranik Ozanian, or “General Andranik.”¹⁷⁸ General Andranik was heralded, particularly in the diaspora, as a national hero due to his leadership in preventing the Turkish takeover of the First Republic of Armenia at the Battle of Sardarabad in 1918. Although the official ARF was against the “repatriation” effort, patriotism and nationalism were still among the key factors motivating the migration, and many “repatriates” were either former members or a kind of fellow traveler with strong nationalistic ties to ARF’s ideologies. Essentially, migrants were primarily motivated by patriotism and love for the perceived “Armenian homeland” rather than communist ideologies or any other political or cultural allegiances. In other words, “repatriates” may have not been “Dashnak enough” to stay in the diaspora and serve as “proper,” card-carrying members of the ARF, but many of these “repatriates” with such strong nationalist sentiments, especially upon arriving in the ASSR, may have been “too Dashnak” to assimilate in their new environment. These individuals likely experienced particular alienation as well as targeting by the Soviet government and their fellow Soviet Armenian citizens.

¹⁷⁸ Haykanush Bekyan.

Such “repatriates” did not feel that they fully belonged in the ASSR due to alienation from Soviet authorities and neighbors. There is a strong indication from these interviews that this lack of belonging was in part due to a cultural and political awareness influenced by the role of the ARF in instilling liberationist ideologies during the migrants’ times in diaspora. The stories of these individuals contrast markedly with those of interviewees who seemed to have a more straightforward time assimilating in the Soviet Armenian republic, not only due to personal openness and optimism, but also due to having had less exposure to the ARF and other elite organizations in diaspora. A term that came up several times throughout interviews was “*graget*” – the Armenian word for literate.¹⁷⁹ Interviewees who used this word would claim that they and their families were not “*graget*,” or “literate,” when asked about the preservation of markers of cultural difference or the greater experience of assimilation. Of course, the interviewees did not actually mean that they or their families were “illiterate,” but they were suggesting a sense of cultural or political awareness that was lacking in their immediate social and cultural circles – perhaps one that allowed them greater assimilation with their native Soviet Armenian neighbors than those who did have this “literacy.” Throughout these interviews, my interpretation of this sense of being “literate” supposes a very specific literacy – one that means being knowledgeable and influenced by the social, cultural, and political idiom of the ARF and its sister organizations in the diaspora.

This literacy would tangibly translate to strong familiarities with national liberationist literature, music, heroes, and ideologies. Essentially, “repatriates” who migrated to Soviet Armenia with a strong national “literacy” were alienated by the ASSR’s lack of appreciation for what they were brought up to perceive as the pinnacles of Armenian culture and nationalism,

¹⁷⁹ Sedrak Barutyan; Rima Khubesian.

whether it be the songs of Andranik or the words of ARF military heroes and martyrs. For example, Aleksan Khrimian shared that he would frequently read Western Armenian literature, something that was uncommon in the Soviet Armenian republic.¹⁸⁰ Further, Ani Keshishyan lamented that native Soviet Armenians were not as aware of Komitas, Makar Yekmalyan, and other very influential Armenian composers and writers of the diaspora up until the ethnographic and cultural dissident movements of the 1960s.¹⁸¹

Those who held on to this literacy found it difficult to assimilate to an alleged “Armenian homeland” where the key markers of their “Armenianness” were lacking, or worse, contested and undermined by the authorities and civilians. These “repatriates” were thus more inclined to emphasize the differences between themselves and native Soviet Armenians, heightening tensions and thus undermining their ability to assimilate even further. Interviewees who came from such families were keen on emphasizing differences throughout their interviews and would frequently stress the label of “*akhpar*.” In contrast, “repatriates” who self-reported as lacking this sense of “literacy” suggested higher rates of assimilation, and their responses seemed to indicate that they were more open to fitting in with the native Soviet Armenians than their “more literate” counterparts. Several times, such interviewees proclaimed that no such differences existed between their families and those of the native Soviet Armenians, and that at the end of the day, everyone was “Armenian.” This would suggest that the less one held on to liberationist ideologies and staunchly ARF beliefs, the more inclined they would be to minimize differences between themselves and native Soviet Armenians and consequently experience greater degrees of assimilation.

¹⁸⁰ Aleskan Khrimian.

¹⁸¹ Ani Keshishyan.

Based upon my collection of interviews, the countries of origin of “repatriates” had less influence on their actual degree of assimilation than did their involvement or “literacy” with elite organizations such as the ARF. For example, interviews with American Armenian “repatriates,” who migrated to the ASSR with little to no knowledge of “Armenianness,” suggested similar rates of assimilation with “repatriates” from Beirut, a heavily-populated “hub,” if not focal point, in the Armenian diaspora.¹⁸² However, country of origin seemed to play less of a role in determining migrants’ overall feelings of belonging as opposed to other factors. Specifically, the collection of interviews suggests that the major distinction influencing migrants’ degrees of assimilation is the level of “literacy” in cultural and political awareness in the aforementioned sense. An illustrative case is that of a seventeen-year-old American “repatriate” from Watertown who barely spoke a word of Armenian. While he presumably had far less in common with Soviet Armenians than with an Armenian-speaking migrant from the Middle Eastern diaspora, this American was better able to assimilate than a migrant who grew up with heavily ARF-influenced ideals and beliefs.¹⁸³ Essentially, the primary factors influencing whether or not migrants would experience greater degrees of belonging in Soviet Armenia were related to the amount of exposure, or “literacy,” they had regarding the elite organizations of the diaspora, particularly the ARF, and the national and political culture it produced and dominated.

¹⁸² Anita Kalpakian; Deran Tashjian.

¹⁸³ Deran Tashjian.

Chapter 4: Aftermath of “Repatriation”

To Emigrate, or To Stay?

Migrant narratives suggest that after the initial hardships of the assimilatory process, and after the death of Stalin in 1953, conditions in the Soviet Armenian republic started to get better for “repatriates” and locals alike, and eventually, newcomers were able to more or less find themselves at “home.” However, despite migrants verbalizing that Soviet Armenia was indeed their “homeland,” many of them applied to emigrate in the late 1960s and early 1970s for two primary reasons – family-based migration and political disagreement with the Soviet Union. Those who cited political disagreement especially emphasized how they felt a lack of “upward mobility” due to not being native Soviet Armenian or not belonging to the Communist Party.¹⁸⁴ John Boursalian echoed this reason for emigrating, stating that he realized that he would not be able to get clearance as an economist in industry due to being related to men who had been exiled on accounts of “anti-Soviet agitation.”¹⁸⁵ He said, “I grew up here, I graduated college, but suddenly, I had no place to go and nothing to do.” Boursalian, who was fired from a job because his superior was the same person who had interrogated his cousin in the KGB, opted to emigrate when possible in order to have a chance at life outside the confines of the Soviet system. He stated that his primary reason for leaving was purely political: “Had I known, one day, that Armenia would be free, I probably wouldn’t be here [in California].”

Interviewees who emphasized family-based migration as their reasons for emigrating generally left after the fall of the Soviet Union, usually following in the footsteps of adult children seeking better socioeconomic conditions than Armenia could provide in the 1990s and

¹⁸⁴ Khachatur Tatlyan.

¹⁸⁵ John Boursalian.

early 2000s.¹⁸⁶ Those migrants who chose to stay in Soviet Armenia, and later, the Republic of Armenia, expressed that they never really felt a desire to uproot their families and go to foreign lands, instead relishing in the comfort of their own culture and “homeland.” As Vahen Israelyan stated, he did not want to go and live among “foreign people” and instead chose to remain in Armenia.¹⁸⁷ Further, although many of the migrants living in Armenia were honest with the hardships they had endured under difficult political and economic conditions after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they continued to emphasize their love for the “homeland” and their hopes for a better future after the Velvet Revolution of 2018. As Mari Ghazanchyan of Yerevan said, Armenia is “our land, our water. We love our country, our city.”¹⁸⁸

“Repatriates” who did opt to leave during the 1960s and 1970s effectively decided to voluntarily place themselves, yet again, in a state of diaspora. As much as this study is on the “repatriation” of diaspora Armenians to Soviet Armenia in the 1940s, it is also a study on migration and the notions of diaspora and homeland. For these “repatriates,” the lines were truly blurred between the two. As interviewee Ani Bedjakian so succinctly put it, “we [diasporans] are like gypsies, we build a home, we take down a home... this is life, it’s circular. You spin and spin, you land in the same place.”¹⁸⁹ Once many of these migrants managed to leave the Soviet Union, some of them also had to come to terms with a new identity in diaspora, as they had missed out on decades of diaspora-style nation-building and were bombarded with all sorts of labels and presuppositions. For example, Bedjakian notes that one day, in the United States, she and her mother were buying groceries, when a Lebanese Armenian woman approached them and asked, “Ma’am, where are you from?” Bedjakian’s mother said “I came from Armenia,” to

¹⁸⁶ Sedrak Barutyanyan; Naomi Daduryan; Grikor Jallatyan; Nadya Haroutyunyan.

¹⁸⁷ Rima and Vahen Israelyan.

¹⁸⁸ Mari Ghazanchyan.

¹⁸⁹ Ani Bedjakian.

which the woman angrily responded, “Just say you’re a *Hayastants* ‘i, then!” To note, the term “*Hayastants* ‘i,” which denotes a native person from Armenia, was sometimes used in a derogative sense by members in the diaspora. Bedjikian’s mother, who had experienced the plight of the diasporan in her frustration in belonging neither here nor there, responded, “Lady, Armenians are Armenians. We went to Armenia, we became ‘*akhpars*,’ we came here, we became ‘*Hayastants* ‘i?’” Although this anecdote underscores issues with the need to typify and categorize people into neat packages, it more so highlights the problems migrants faced, and continued to face, as a people who belong to neither diaspora nor “homeland” – a poignant issue for communities such as the Armenian global ethno-nation where the two have a history and tradition of contestation and challenge.

Postmemory of Migration

As these testimonies have demonstrated, the “repatriation” of diaspora Armenians challenges conventional ideological notions of “homeland” versus diaspora, particularly in narratives where migrants indicate a lack of belonging or feeling at “home.” The “repatriation” in postmemory – essentially, how it is remembered, discussed, and regarded in the memories and minds of migrants and their family members, seemed to indicate that for many individuals, they felt forever trapped in a state of “in between.”¹⁹⁰ However, like the topic of intermarriage, the memory of “repatriation” prompted diverse responses, naturally colored by their personal experiences and perceptions. Many regarded the “repatriation” as a mistake, or an event that had the potential to be successful, but was ultimately handled in a way that caused more initial harm than good. Aleksan Khrimian summarized this sentiment, stating:

¹⁹⁰ For more on postmemory, see Marianne Hirsch, “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile” *Poetics Today*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Creativity and Exile: European/American Perspectives II, (Winter, 1996): 659-686.

They [the Soviets] didn't organize the "repatriation" properly. They had just gotten out of war, they didn't have homes or places. Their economic system was very different from capitalism. And all at once, they took in about 60,000-70,000 people in a year. Their own people didn't have much, and the "repatriates" further strained resources.¹⁹¹

Even in acknowledging the pain and shortcomings associated with the "repatriation," many migrants reiterated their love for Armenia, such as Sedrak Barutyán, who said, "If we didn't love our homeland, we wouldn't have moved from Syria to Armenia."¹⁹²

Migrants seemed to emphasize the reality that migration is *always* difficult, no matter the circumstances, as people leave behind old lives and grow accustomed to new ones in foreign territories.¹⁹³ Despite a broad understanding that everyone was experiencing hardship together, the difficulties of assimilation in the initial period had long-lasting effects, with "repatriate" couples often fighting and blaming each other about whose fault it was for migrating to Soviet Armenia in the first place.¹⁹⁴

In considering how the memory of "repatriation" was preserved, or forgotten, in families, migrants expressed a mixture of trauma, nostalgia, happiness, and sadness. Some, like Anita Kalpakian, noted that the memory of "repatriation" was not something that came up in much discourse or conversation.¹⁹⁵ Others, like Grikor Jallatyan, noted that no one wanted to keep the memories of "repatriation" or document them in any way, because they were too negative and painful.¹⁹⁶ Further, whether or not the memories of "repatriation" were actively documented or preserved in migrants' families had more to do with personal preference than any overarching

¹⁹¹ Aleksan Khrimian.

¹⁹² Sedrak Barutyán.

¹⁹³ Rima Khubesrian.

¹⁹⁴ Khachatur Tatlyán.

¹⁹⁵ Anita Kalpakian.

¹⁹⁶ Grikor Jallatyan; Ani Bedjakian.

pattern. Some interviewees, like Sedrak Barutyan, mentioned that they simply had no inclination to write down their experiences.¹⁹⁷ Others, perhaps with more peculiar or unique life circumstances such as Deran Tashjian, Azniv Gndoyan, and Rima Israelyan, took active roles in preserving their memories, going so far as to publish books about their experiences.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Sedrak Barutyan.

¹⁹⁸ Deran Tashjian; Rima and Vahen Israelyan; Azniv Gndoyan.

Conclusion

The present study has attempted to document, present, and analyze the testimonies of migrants and their direct descendants who lived through the “repatriation” of diaspora Armenians to Soviet Armenia in 1946-1949 in order to interrogate nuance and variance in feelings of belonging and interpretations of identity. Through the presentation of interviewee narratives, this thesis supposes that the conditions in diaspora that allowed for the “repatriation” campaign to take place simultaneously created challenges for many of the migrants once they were upon Soviet soil. Essentially, the traditions of patriotism, and particularly liberationist nationalism, as exercised in the diaspora under the authority of cultural elites like the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, made it difficult for especially patriotic “repatriates” to reconcile contrasting notions of “Armenianness” in their “homeland.”

The explication of the everyday experiences of migrants, from their early days in diaspora to their time in the Soviet Union and beyond, indicate that personal perceptions and circumstances shaped the ways in which the migration is remembered based off of each unique migrant voice. However, through this sample of twenty-five voices, the reader can better understand the consequences of a highly patriotic and nationalist diaspora, as influenced by the ARF, when it is juxtaposed with a highly contrasted, “affirmative action” interpretation of national identity as practiced in the Soviet Armenian republic.

This thesis began with considering the historical context that created the two binaries of diaspora and Soviet Armenian “homeland” as foils to one another, as well as detailing narratives of loss and exile that were propagated especially after the Armenian Genocide which helped make the “repatriation” all the more appealing to former Ottoman Armenians. It then followed the migrants on their journey to the ASSR as they came into their first contacts with (less than

satisfactory) Soviet life aboard the ship to Batumi and at the port city. We then visited the issue of assimilation in the initial period in the war-torn Soviet Armenian republic, as many “repatriates” once again experienced trauma and exile through the loss of belongings and the threat, or reality, of deportation to Siberia. The issue of exile reiterated the greater consequence of contrasting notions of Armenian identity, as many “repatriates” were specifically targeted for being “Dashnaks” or “bourgeois nationalists.”

After detailing their initial period of hardship, testimonies were explored for their implications of cross-cultural exchange and clashing, highlighting both the process of migrants broadening the diversity of the Soviet Armenian republic, as well as the issue of feeling alienated and challenged in their interpretations of Armenian identity as previously practiced in the diaspora. Whereas topics like food and clothing customs indicated that native Soviet Armenians actually *learned* from the migrants, issues like religion and tradition, especially in regards to cultural literacy as informed by diasporic elite institutions, highlighted the fact that many key markers of Armenian identity in the diaspora were indeed challenged, or vilified, in the ASSR. The topic of intermarriage posed yet another issue where migrants expressed varying degrees of belonging, and feeling accepted, by their native Soviet Armenian counterparts.

Through considering these testimonials on the everyday lived experiences of migrants, this thesis concludes that one of the key factors influencing “repatriates” feelings of belonging in the ASSR was a certain sense of cultural literacy, particularly in the tradition of elite institutions such as the ARF. “Repatriates” who had a strong understanding of this literacy and who were brought up in the cultural idiom of national liberationist ideology tended to face greater challenges in reconciling their conceptions of a “free and independent Armenia” with the Soviet Armenian republic. These migrants, who heralded military figures and heroes, sang

liberationist songs, and read nationalist literature came to realize that their conception of Armenian identity was very much at odds with the watered-down, titular understanding of “Armenianness” as allowed by the Soviet authorities in their policies of “affirmative action,” à la Martin.

The implications of this research can be utilized in greater studies that broaden the scope of our understanding of the social history of “repatriation,” perhaps incorporating an even varied array of voices in order to greater excavate issues of diaspora versus “homeland” relative to this mass migration. In addition, the social history of migrants and the tensions between a long-standing diaspora and a newly-formed “homeland” can be potentially studied in a comparative context, such as in the case of Jews from the global diaspora migrating to the constructed “homeland” of Israel after 1948.

Although this study presented the potencies of nationalism and patriotism, particularly for the global imagined community that is the Armenian transnation, it also highlighted the multitudes of variation and the “bottom-up” narrative that would otherwise be excluded from archival materials or official state documents.¹⁹⁹

In conclusion, through the creation of a small archive, this study has aimed to bring to light interviewee voices in order to better understand the lived experiences of migration and particularly tensions between diaspora and “homeland” relative to notions of identity and belonging. As we have seen, the “*akhpars*” of this study, who will forever be “neither here nor there,” are representative of the “in between,” existing in a liminal space where authority over identity is continuously contested, and thus, continuously negotiated.²⁰⁰ Through their malleable

¹⁹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

²⁰⁰ Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

and versatile identities, the everyday stories of the “*akhpars*” piece together the lived consequences of greater political and institutional forces, bringing into focus the very experience of belonging to a global community beyond the confines of diaspora or “homeland.

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