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A Crack in the Iron Curtain: Armenia-Diaspora Relations and Soviet Armenian Migration to Los
Angeles County, 1988- 2000s

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in History

by

Gayane Iskandaryan

Thesis Committee:
Professor Houri Berberian, Chair
Professor Susan Morrissey
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2023

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents Vardan and Shogik, and all Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees who experienced the social, economic, and political repercussions of war and natural disaster in the late 1980s, then the continued tribulations and uncertainty after their migration to Los Angeles County.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Crack in the Iron Curtain: Armenian-Diaspora Relations and Soviet Armenian Migration to
Los Angeles County, 1988-2000s

By

Gayane Iskandaryan

Master of Arts in History

University of California, Irvine, 2023

Professor Houri Berberian, Chair

In the late 1980s, the people of Soviet Armenia, like many populations of other Soviet republics, sub-republics, and territories, experienced increasing dissociation from the Soviet Union as the USSR steadily crumbled under the weight of corruption, lukewarm reforms, and rising nationalism among its ethnic populations. Concurrently, the Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO), which had been granted to Soviet Azerbaijan decades before, pressed to join Soviet Armenia because of continued unsafe conditions and persecution under Azerbaijani control. It was under tempestuous, shifting circumstances – the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988-1994) erupting between the people of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, and subsequently, Armenia; the devastating 1988 earthquake in Northern Armenia; and the impending collapse of the Soviet Union – that caused a large wave of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants to emigrate out of Soviet Armenia to join the seemingly ever-present and polarized Armenian diaspora. Further, these events led to mass mobilization in Armenia and the diaspora. Although numerous works exist about the large and intricate Armenian diaspora, most focus on Armenian diasporas from Western Armenia (Eastern Anatolia) that became displaced by the 1915 genocide. There is little scholarship about the

transformative impact of late 1980s developments on US-USSR relations, Armenia-diaspora relations, or Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian migration to Los Angeles County.

Utilizing Los Angeles-based US and Armenian newspapers, this thesis explores the conditions, settlement, and experience of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees in the United States. This study contributes to our understanding of Armenia-diaspora relations and the impact of Armenian refugees and migrants on the history of California and Los Angeles County. It illustrates how Soviet Armenian migration and the subsequent Armenia-diaspora relations and mobilization breached the Iron Curtain, prompted travel and relations between the USSR and the US, altered the face of Los Angeles County, and reimagined and transformed the Armenian diaspora physically and symbolically. Through an exploration of Armenia-diaspora relations, this thesis argues that the strife and instability of the late 1980s and 1990s – the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and war, the 1988 devastating earthquake, and the rising national independence movement – cracked the Iron Curtain that had severed relations between Soviet Armenia and the diaspora. They served as catalysts goading Armenia and the diaspora together, bringing the diaspora “home” and spurring a mass exodus out of Soviet Armenia. However, despite the diaspora reconciling with and mobilizing on behalf of Soviet Armenia, tensions and divisions, rooted in the early twentieth century, persisted within the complex and nuanced relationship between the Los Angeles County Armenian diaspora, especially between previously settled Armenians and the “new” Soviet Armenian diaspora.

Introduction

On February 20, 1988, the Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) officially appealed to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to allow for a peaceful transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) from Soviet Azerbaijan – whose neglectful reign had normalized unsafe living conditions and systemic, violent persecution against Karabakh Armenians – to Soviet Armenia.¹ Two hundred miles away in Yerevan, Armenia SSR, Armenians showed support for Karabakh Armenians through “well organized and peaceful protests,” invoking the USSR’s policy of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness and transparency) associated with Mikhail Gorbachev, general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.² Within days, anti-Armenian pogroms carried out by Azerbaijanis 350 miles away in Sumgait, Azerbaijan SSR, sent shock waves throughout the USSR. For several days, Azerbaijanis targeted, beat, and killed Armenians in the streets and their homes in what would become “the first mass murders on ethnic grounds within the Soviet Union.”³ Thousands of Armenians, no longer welcome in Azerbaijan, fled in busloads for Soviet Armenia. The Azerbaijani population of Armenia also unwelcome and subject to ethnic hostility left Armenia in thousands as conflict and violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis increased.⁴

¹ Artsakh is the ancestral Armenian name for the territory called Nagorno-Karabakh. In this thesis I will be referring to Artsakh as the internationally recognized name of Nagorno-Karabakh.

² Nikolay Rijkov, “A Brief Historical Survey of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” in *Western Media Coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in 1988-1990*, ed. Hayk Demoyan (Yerevan: Armenian Genocide-Museum Institute, 2008), 171.

³ Anna Matveena, “Nagorno Karabakh: A Straightforward Territorial Conflict,” in *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*, eds. Paul van Tongeren, Hans van de Veen, and Juliette Verhoeven (London: Boulder, 2002), 56.

⁴ Krista A. Goff, *Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 221; Please see *Parts of a Circle: History of the Karabakh Conflict*, directed by Levon Kalantar, Ara Shirinyan, Mirsadig Agazade, and Raul Mallerman (2019; Conciliation Resources, 2020), <https://www.c-r.org/news-and-insight/parts-circle-nagorny-karabakh-conflict-documentary-series>. The compiled summary film documents the nuanced lead up to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as the experiences of ethnic animosity and violence experienced by both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The original docuseries is divided into three parts and gives a more detailed account of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and

The shock of the pogrom reverberated throughout the USSR, Soviet Armenia, and the international community at large. However, most significant were the reverberations that sent fissures through the Iron Curtain that separated the substantial and longstanding Armenian diaspora from Soviet Armenia. The escalating difficulty that Soviet Armenians faced – policing and suppression by Soviet authorities, the pogroms in Soviet Azerbaijan, continued persecution of Karabakh Armenians, and the protests in Nagorno-Karabakh and Soviet Armenia – transcended more than 7,000 miles. The large diaspora community of Southern California stood alert. For the first time since Armenia officially entered the Soviet Union in 1922, the diaspora community that had been steadily growing in Southern California, still plagued with memories from the 1915 Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman state, responded to the struggle of Soviet Armenians against ethnic and territorial-driven attacks. Old wounds that had festered for decades without the healing salve of recognition and reparations from the Republic of Turkey reopened as the news of Soviet Azerbaijan’s massacres reached the Armenian population of Los Angeles County as well as other Armenian diasporas worldwide. Concurrently, the Soviet Union, facing instability internally and pressure externally due to international sanctions, began to foster relations with the United States, leading to a delicate game of Cold War politics. Thus, relations began between the long-estranged Armenian diaspora and Soviet Armenia, which increased as the mass migration of Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants out of Armenia ensued. Most Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees entered the United States, the majority of whom settled in Los Angeles County. Los Angeles’ ever-shifting medley of ethnic migrants and refugees has long since been the subject of academic inquiry and study. The sudden rush of

war. The documentary and docuseries were “jointly produced” by Armenian and Azerbaijani organizations; Media Initiatives Center, Internews Azerbaijan, and Humanitarian Research Public Union. *Parts of a Circle* was supported by Conciliation Films and funded by the European Union.

Middle Eastern and then Soviet Armenians that arrived started in the 1970s are no exception and should be thoroughly considered and studied.

Historiography

As a result of diverging centers of power in the Armenian “transnation,” Armenian historiography is often demarcated between the study of Armenia and the diaspora.⁵ There has been meaningful engagement by scholars exploring the connections between Armenia and the diaspora; however, limitations in the historiography exist. Existing literature on the Armenian diaspora and Armenia-diaspora history and relations tends to neglect Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians or lacks in-depth research and analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet contexts. Further, the general historiography of twentieth-century Armenia, both in Soviet and post-Soviet contexts, similarly fails, for the most part, to rigorously analyze and include diaspora communities. The former tends to prioritize the histories of Western Armenians and Armenians from the Middle East who migrated to California and Los Angeles County, while the latter primarily lacks the inclusion of both Middle East and Soviet Armenian diasporas and the ways they shaped and participated in the transformations of Soviet then post-Soviet Armenia.

Sociological studies dominate the scholarship on the diaspora Armenians in the United States. The works of Aram Serkis Yeretjian, Aghop Der-Karabetian, and Armine Proudian Der-Karabetian study Armenians in Los Angeles County, privileging Western and Middle East Armenians. Armenians who fled the Genocide and their descendants that settled in the Middle East made up the majority of Armenian migrants from the early twentieth century through the early 1980s. Anny Bakalian’s work explores Armenian diaspora communities in the United

⁵ Khachig Tölölyan, “Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 107-136.

States. However, she similarly focuses on Western and Middle East Armenians on the East Coast, with little to no inclusion of Soviet Armenians.

Maria Koiniva, Monique Bolsajian, Tigran Torosyan, and Arax Vardanyan's essays interrogate Armenian diasporas based in the US; however, their works also examine Armenia-diaspora relations. Articles penned by Razmik Panossian and Khachig Tölölyan inform my study of broader Armenia-diaspora relations and divisions, emphasizing centers and institutions in the Armenian diaspora. Finally, Ronald Grigor Suny, Gerard J. Libaridian, Simon Payaslian, and Irina Ghaplanyan, though they include brief mentions of the impact of the diaspora in their works, inform my understanding of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia. Although rich in their study and assessment of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia, they do not rigorously consider and include the impact and participation of the longstanding Middle Eastern Armenian diasporas and relatively newly formed Soviet Armenian diasporas in Los Angeles County. The one outlier that touches upon all three themes is Razmik Panossian's comprehensive Armenian history text published in 2007. Panossian's work explores many themes and topics, starting from Armenian ethnogenesis up until 1987. As a result of the vast number of topics Panossian undertook in his work, some essential histories and considerations are either left out or not studied rigorously. In his conclusion, Panossian lightly touches upon the Karabakh movement of 1988, the impending war, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union; however, the post-1987 period is left unexplored.

A deeper exploration of sources, even those that predate my focus on the 1980s, is necessary for a foundational understanding of the diaspora in Southern California and Los Angeles County and Armenia-diaspora relations in the twentieth century. One of the first studies of Armenians in California and Los Angeles was penned in the early twentieth century. In 1923, Aram Serkis Yeretjian authored "A History of Armenian Immigration to America with Special

Reference to Conditions in Los Angeles,” a dissertation exploring the Armenian immigrant experience in the US in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yeretian focused on the history, demographics, and descriptions of Armenian settlement in California and Los Angeles, noting that he aimed to remedy the “very little” research that existed on Armenian immigration in the English language.⁶ Despite its reliance on archaic methodology, writing, hearsay, and questionable historical sources, Yeretian’s essay is seminal in that it is one of the first studies exploring Armenians in Los Angeles. The study’s strength lies in providing the demographic and historical context for Armenians’ relationship to Los Angeles and background on Armenians from Western Armenia and “Russian Armenia,” which is helpful for understanding the shifting Armenian population in Los Angeles County.⁷

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the population, demographics, and number of Armenians in California had metamorphosed and grown substantially. Aghop Der-Karabetian and Armine Proudian Der-Karabetian produced a 1981 study of California Armenians at the behest of the California Council of the Armenian Assembly (today’s Armenian Assembly of America, a non-partisan advocacy organization based in the US). This study emulated the same demographic study that Yeretian undertook but with improved source collection and methodology.⁸ Physical surveys were randomly distributed to Armenians in the US via mail to gather demographic information, ethnically oriented behavior, and ethnically relevant attitudes among Armenians of varying residency status (native-born, early immigrant, recent immigrant) and age (younger adult and older adult).⁹ Although the bulk of Soviet Armenian refugees entered

⁶ Aram Serkis Yeretian, “A History of Armenian Immigration to America with Special Reference to Conditions in Los Angeles” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1923), vii.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Aghop Der-Karabetian and Armine Proudian Der-Karabetian, “California Armenians: A 1981 Survey,” *The Armenian Assembly: California Council and Resource Center, report no. 3*, (Fall 1981): 2, 3.

⁹ Ibid.

California in the late 1980s, this study notes that the influx of Armenians from the Middle East and the new stream of Armenians from the Soviet Union precipitated this study. The survey brings to the fore the social and political attitudes of Armenians from California and Los Angeles County. Thus, the survey is especially useful for understanding relations between newly arrived Soviet Armenians in California in the late 1980s with those Armenians primarily from the Middle East who settled in the starting in the late 1960s and continuing until the early 1980s. This study, released in 1981, seven years before the major rush of Soviet migrants and refugees to Los Angeles County, could not rigorously consider Soviet Armenians.

The first sociological study employing quantitative and qualitative data to study Armenianness, assimilation, and “ethnic maintenance” among Armenian Americans came in 1993 with Anny Bakalian’s “Armenian Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian.” Bakalian predominantly focuses on the Western Armenian diaspora on the East Coast of the US, especially those that have been in the US for generations.¹⁰ While Bakalian “fill[ed] the gap” through her study, as very few social studies existed about Armenian Americans or the Armenian diaspora at the time, her analysis is not comprehensive, thus leaving room for the study of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian populations.¹¹ Her work is more of a focused research on primarily Western and Middle Eastern Armenian communities who had been settled in the East Coast for generations than an extensive and comprehensive study of the Armenian diaspora in the US. This thesis aims to remedy the lack of inclusion and “fill the gap” within the historiography by not only centering Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians (those with roots in modern Armenia) but also

¹⁰ Anny Bakalian, *Armenian Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 16, 454.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

tracking the ripples made by the new additions joining the already existing Armenian diaspora communities in the US.

In 1990, two years into the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and the start of the mass exodus of Soviet Armenians, Khachig Tölölyan published “Exile Government in the Armenian Polity.” Tölölyan explored “Armenian political culture in exile” and its many iterations throughout history, starting from the Cilician Armenian Kingdom until the twentieth century, when Armenians scattered throughout the USSR, Soviet Armenia, and throughout the diaspora.¹² Tölölyan ends his piece by proposing that the Armenian “transnational nation” will be transformed in years to come due to the many shifting and devastating circumstances beleaguering Soviet Armenia.¹³

When Razmik Panossian published “Between Ambivalence and Intrusion: Politics and Identity in Armenia-Diaspora Relations” in 1998, the demographics of the Armenian diaspora had shifted substantially with the influx of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians. Nevertheless, Panossian’s article, which explores Armenia-diaspora relations and the “politics of division” focusing on the time period from 1988 until 1998, prioritizes the Armenian diaspora with historical roots in Western Armenia.¹⁴ It provides, however, a meaningful discussion of Soviet Armenian migration at the beginning of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the start of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1988.¹⁵ Panossian’s longer historical work, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*, delves more deeply into the Armenian

¹² Khachig Tölölyan, “Exile Government in the Armenian Polity,” *Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 1 (November 1990): 124.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁴ Razmik Panossian, “Between Ambivalence and Intrusion: Politics and Identity in Armenia-Diaspora Relations,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 149-196.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 152. It is important to note that these waves do not represent all iterations of Armenian migration.

diaspora, Armenia-diaspora relations, and Soviet Armenia.¹⁶ In this exhaustive text, Panossian grapples with defining diaspora, understanding Armenian identity (both in diaspora and Armenia), and offers a crucial discussion of how Armenia and its diaspora had a distinct identity development. Panossian's discussion of "Differing identities: Soviet Armenians, Diaspora Armenians (1921-1987)," the overview of "major developments in and in relations to" Soviet Armenia, and its relation to identity formation in the diaspora, is of particular use to understanding the diasporan consciousness before the migration of Soviet Armenians.¹⁷

The changes within Armenia and the diaspora during the post-Soviet era were entirely in effect by the early to mid-2000s. The Soviet Union had ceased to exist, creating a power vacuum that was filled by remnants of authoritarianism and corruption, which thrived in state institutions at every level.¹⁸ By the year 2007, wherein Tölölyan's subsequent studies were published, Armenia, now an independent post-Soviet state, was under the control of an oligarchical kinship network that was actively militarizing and privatizing many Armenian industries for monetary gain.¹⁹ Tölölyan examines the decade following the mass departure of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians who changed the makeup of the existing Armenian diaspora. The passage of time and the convergence of Armenia and diaspora allowed for a more nuanced discussion of diaspora power and influence on Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia. Tölölyan's first work, "The Armenian Diaspora and the Karabagh Conflict since 1988," goes more in-depth into Armenia-diaspora relations and how Armenia and diaspora had diverging experiences and identity formation.

¹⁶ Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 291-95.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Stephan H. Astourian, "From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia," Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Working Paper Series, (Winter 2000-2001), 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-13, 16; Anna Martirosyan, "Privatization, State Militarization through War, and Durable Social Exclusion in Post-Soviet Armenia" (PhD diss., University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014).

Tölölyan explores how and to what extent the Armenian diaspora affected the modern Karabakh conflict that started in 1988 between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, and by extension, Armenia, through a focus on the mobilization, influence, and exchange between Armenia and the diaspora.²⁰ He utilized historical primary and secondary sources and his observations from interviews with experts about Armenia-diaspora relations and the split in diaspora identity construction.²¹ Appearing in the same year, Tölölyan’s “Stateless Power and the Political Agency of Diasporas: An Armenian Case Study” explores the “stateless power” and influence possessed by the Armenian diaspora via diaspora mobilization and lobbying.²² Essentially diaspora agency (or stateless power) and the resulting action or inaction are relevant to both “home states” or host countries of diasporan Armenians and the homeland.²³ Tölölyan’s discussion of diaspora, power, and “stateless power” of the Armenian diaspora is indispensable to my study of diaspora influence and mobilization in Los Angeles County and budding Armenian-diaspora relations after 1988. This thesis questions what “stateless power” is and interrogates how it transforms after the mass migration of Soviet Armenians into the diaspora. Tölölyan’s work provides crucial context that allows this thesis to explain why Armenian diaspora aid and support to Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia were conditional and influenced by diverging identity construction.

Maria Koinova’s “Diasporas and Secessionist Conflicts: Mobilization of the Albanian, Armenian, and Chechen Diasporas,” appearing a few years after Tölölyan’s articles in 2011,

²⁰ Khachig Tölölyan, “The Armenian Diaspora and the Karabagh Conflict since 1988,” in *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or Peace-wreckers*, eds. Hazel Smith and Paul Stares (New York: United Nations University Press, 2007), 106-128.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Khachig Tölölyan, “Stateless Power and the Political Agency of Diasporas: An Armenian Case Study,” in *Opportunity Structure in Diaspora Relations: Comparisons in Contemporary Multilevel Politics of Diaspora and Transnational Identity*, ed. Gloria Totoricagüena (Nevada: Center for Basque Studies, 2007), 215-234.

²³ Ibid.

provides a comparative study of diasporas' involvement in secessionist conflicts in their respective "homelands." In the Armenian case, Koinova focuses on diaspora mobilization in support of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, exploring how Armenian diasporas, including Soviet and post-Soviet diasporas, participated in the First Nagorno-Karabakh war and conflict.²⁴ Ultimately, the Albanian, Armenian, and Chechen cases had stark "differences in diaspora communal" characteristics – how long each diaspora had existed (that contributed to how "institutionalized" each diaspora was) and types of conflicts (secessionist vs. irredentism).²⁵ Unlike the Albanian and Chechen cases, Armenia had a longstanding diaspora with the most institutionalism. No matter the differences, Koinova concluded that Albanian, Armenian, and Chechen diasporan mobilization shared a similar "pattern of mobilization," which Koinova illustrated through visual graphs.²⁶

Appearing between the 2016 Karabakh conflict (the "Four Day War") and the most recent Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (the "44-Day War"), in 2020, Monique Bolsajian's 2018 piece "The Armenian Diaspora: Migration and its Influence on Identity and Politics" focus on the Armenian diaspora, migration to the United States and identity formation. Bolsajian argues that it is impossible to separate the diaspora's identity from the complex historical and political development of both the US diaspora experience and Armenia itself. Bolsajian utilized sources from the two most prominent Armenian American lobbying organizations, the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), to track Armenian American identity and relationship to Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.²⁷

²⁴ Maria Koinova "Diasporas and Secessionist Conflicts: Mobilization of the Albanian, Armenian, and Chechen Diasporas," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 2 (February 2011): 333-356.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Monique Bolsajian, "The Armenian Diaspora: Migration and its Influence on Identity and Politics," *Global Societies Journal* 6, no. 1 (2018): 29-40.

Both these lobbying and political institutions played roles in the events that unfolded in Soviet and then post-Soviet Armenia starting in 1988 and impacted the migration of Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants to Los Angeles County. Further, many journalists consistently covered and interviewed the Armenian Assembly of America and the ANCA in both US and Armenian newspapers and magazines in Los Angeles County. Thus, Bolsajian's analysis imparts crucial background for this thesis.

These works provide meaningful context, research, and foundation about the Armenian diaspora in the US, Armenia-diaspora relations, and Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia; however, I aim to challenge the oft-separated studies of Armenia and the Armenian diaspora. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to fill the gap within Armenian historiography. It aims to highlight and study Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants and interrogate under what contexts they migrated and joined existing diaspora communities with already established culture, identity, and history in Los Angeles County. This thesis highlights how national identity and solidarity, nationhood, and diaspora, are created and perceived through the nuanced case of Armenians in Los Angeles County.

Argument

This study's social-historical focus on Los Angeles County, as well as its concentration on Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees, sheds light on a population that is understudied and makes up a significant part of diaspora agency and power. Through the study of the emergence of Armenia-diaspora relations beginning in the late 1980s, the mass exodus of Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees into the US, and the continued interplay and connections between different generations of Armenians in Los Angeles County, this thesis makes three contributions.

First, it enriches Armenian diaspora studies by examining Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees in the US, a largely unexplored population. Next, it expands and connects the shared history of Armenia and the diaspora, which was spearheaded mainly in the late 1980s and is similarly unacknowledged in both study of Armenia and the diaspora. Lastly, it also adds to the history and research of the US, California, and Los Angeles County by considering US-USSR Cold War relations and the role the US played in the mass exodus of Soviet Armenians. By focusing on Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian migrant and refugee populations who settled explicitly in Los Angeles County starting in the late 1980s, I aim to contribute to the relatively understudied post-Soviet Armenian era and diversify the study of Armenian diasporas which tend to focus on post-Genocide diaspora populations. This study makes two interrelated arguments.

First, I argue that starting in early 1988 because of the First Nagorno-Karabakh war (1988-1994) and conflict involving Nagorno-Karabakh, Soviet Azerbaijan, and subsequently, Soviet Armenia, the crushing earthquake in late 1988, and the continued social, political, and economic instability of the Soviet Union, cracked open the Iron Curtain and served as a catalyst to simultaneously bring the Armenia diaspora “home,” while also sending tens of thousands of Soviet Armenians into the diaspora. This “crack” in the Iron Curtain, demonstrated by the Soviet Armenian case, complicates conceptions of the history of the Cold War. For the first time in seventy years, the Armenian diaspora mobilized via protests, petitions, and mass fundraising campaigns to support the people of Soviet Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh against a perceived existential threat. However, sources illustrate that diasporic support for Soviet Armenia proved to be limited, as it did not extend to espousing migration from the “homeland” to the United States. Simultaneously, research suggests that Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia did not support migration

from the diaspora to the “homeland.”²⁸ The discord and difficulty faced by Soviet Armenians spurred the movement of people across the previously unbreachable borders of the USSR. Not only did Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants broach the Iron Curtain, but individuals and organizations from Armenia and the US traveled through the crack, further splintering the divide with each passing. The US government had initially jumped at the opportunity to accept Soviet refugees and migrants to emphasize its benevolence and the Soviet Union’s ills in an apparent propaganda campaign. Similarly, the Los Angeles Armenian community and its prominent Armenian diasporic organizations concurrently mobilized to support Soviet Armenians, while also engaging in politically motivated propaganda against the USSR. Those affiliated with or sympathetic to the major diasporic political party, the ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), protested Soviet Armenian migration and verbalized their vehement support for changing US policies towards Soviet Armenian migration. When the US strategically halted Armenian migration (leaving thousands of Soviet Armenians in limbo), stopped designating Armenians as refugees, and revoked federal aid and resources for Soviet Armenian migrants, renegeing on their original undertaking, the Los Angeles County Armenian community – especially the ARF, ANCA, prominent Armenian diaspora figures, and others – supported the US policy. A close reading of Armenian-based media reveals that diaspora Armenians in the US were not a monolith. Not all diaspora Armenians shared the same nationalist and politically driven opposition towards Soviet Armenian migration held by self-proclaimed leaders and prominent political institutions featured in US and Los Angeles-based newspapers. The US’s unwillingness to extend further aid and the Los Angeles County diaspora’s support of denying

²⁸ Anahit Mkrtychyan, “The Problem of Adaptation of the Diaspora Armenians in Transition Armenia,” *Transition Studies Review* 15, no. 4 (2008): 701-712.

Soviet Armenians access to migration and aid arguably hindered access and opportunities for Soviet Armenians.

Second, even though Soviet Armenia and the diaspora had “unified” for a common cause and struggle, I argue that the division and tension among different factions of the diaspora persisted throughout every stratum of the Armenian diaspora in Los Angeles County. There existed a complex and nuanced relationship between different generations of Armenian migrants from both the Middle East (Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Syria, etc.) and Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia throughout the twentieth century and especially after the 1980s. Once Soviet Armenians arrived in Los Angeles County, division continued among the “new” Soviet Armenian diaspora and the “old” primarily Middle Eastern Armenian diaspora. Regardless of diaspora opposition, the US continued to accept Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants, albeit on an inconsistent and conditional basis, as the situation in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh escalated. The US was unprepared and seemingly unwilling to support migrants, leaving state and local institutions to deal with aiding the settlement of Soviet Armenians. Most Soviet Armenian migrants settled in Los Angeles County in Southern California – primarily in Hollywood and Glendale. There were unsuccessful attempts by cities, most notably Glendale, to deter and block Soviet Armenians from settling. Ultimately, cities yielded to the influx of Armenian migrants, although local animosity persisted.

As local institutions struggled to support migrants, the state officially (and unofficially) depended on Armenian Americans and Armenians who had previously settled in the US. For the first time in decades, Soviet Armenian and diaspora Armenian lives coalesced even as intra-diaspora tensions remained. The absence of state support, the differences in national and identity development, and the hyper-individualistic and highly racialized US society caused friction

between Armenians of different backgrounds, political affiliates, and generations. The strained relationship was ideologically and politically motivated, as well as due to the underlying superiority that previously settled Armenians, most of whom were from the Middle East, felt over newly-migrated Soviet Armenians. A close reading of newspaper articles based in Los Angeles County – *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, and *Glendale News-Press* – reveal the intricate and fluctuating relationship that characterized both Armenia-diaspora relations as a whole and, more specifically, relations between “new” and “old” Armenian migrants from Los Angeles County. Although Soviet Armenians and previously settled diaspora Armenians converged, their complex and nuanced relationship, with its roots traced back to the original Armenian-diaspora split from the early twentieth century, continued.

Sources

This thesis required many secondary and primary sources in order to marry existing historical scholarship with new historical findings. This work primarily drew upon historical and sociological works – books, journals, articles – all of which were in English, and most of which were published in the diaspora. The primary sources – newspaper and magazine articles, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, interviews, and advertisements – utilized in this thesis are from US and Armenian American publications.

The bulk of the US newspaper sources – *Los Angeles Times*, *Glendale News-Press*, and *Los Angeles Daily News* – were based in Los Angeles County. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Daily News* serve Los Angeles at large. Utilizing their pieces gave a more general perspective of Los Angeles County demographics, news, and opinions. Further, the *Los Angeles Times* has been in circulation since the late nineteenth century, and the *Los Angeles Daily News*

has been running since the early twentieth century. These newspapers provide a wealth of sources about Armenians in Los Angeles dating back over a century. The *Glendale News-Press* similarly has been in circulation since the early twentieth century; however, it specifically serves and reports on Glendale and La Crescenta-Montrose. Articles from the *Glendale News-Press* provide this study with a more focused perspective on a city that was arguably the most impacted by Armenian migration and harbors a large Armenian population until today.²⁹ The changing content, news coverage, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, etc., in the *Glendale News-Press*, illustrate the changing ethnic demographic of Glendale. A vast majority of articles were accessed in the form of physical newspaper clippings that were unsystematically collected and stored at the local library in Glendale, California, throughout the last few decades.³⁰ Very few of these articles were accessed via online search engines or directly from newspaper websites. The *Los Angeles Times* articles were most accessible online.

The *Armenian International Magazine* (AIM) was an independent, politically unaffiliated publication “conceived by a group of Armenian businessmen” and in “worldwide circulation” from 1990 until 2004.³¹ Everything from articles, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, and even

²⁹ La Crescenta-Montrose is an unincorporated area in Los Angeles County that borders the city of Glendale, California.

³⁰ I had the opportunity to comb through full versions of scanned newspapers based in Los Angeles County; however, I settled on primarily utilizing the “archive” of physical newspaper clippings assembled many years ago by previous employees at the Glendale Central Library. Archives have the potential to communicate and reveal information and attitudes of the institutions and people who compiled them. This “archive” was not an exception, as its organization (or lack thereof) tells of the period of its assembly and the potential perspectives of those who compiled them. The “archive,” if it can even be referred to as such, was a box labeled “ethnic/racial” that contained clippings, haphazardly organized in folders, that dealt with ethnic people/people of color, including Black and African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Armenian Americans, etc. There were distinct folders dedicated to Armenians, but the folders were tremendously disorganized by date and had many articles of other racial and ethnic groups (including Iranians, Latinos, and others) mixed throughout. The gracious and helpful library employee who gave access to the “archive” acknowledged the outdated and archaic labeling and noted that the newspaper clippings had likely not been touched since they were compiled in the early 2000s. Unsurprisingly the “archive” that contains letters, photographs, and newspaper clippings that illustrate the nuanced story of the diversification of Glendale, which historically has privileged its predominantly white Anglo-Saxon population, remains disorganized and neglected.

³¹ “A Note from the Publishers,” *Armenian International Magazine*, July, 1990, 4.

advertisements provided a wealth of information and context about this publication's conception, but also the attitudes of politically affiliated and unaffiliated Armenians. Lucille Haroutunian, the spokeswoman for AIM, told the *Glendale News-Press* that "initial investors" started to discuss the magazine in 1988, the same year wherein the strife in Armenia and the increasing migration of Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants cracked the Iron Curtain.³² At the time, Los Angeles County's Armenian population was on the rise, and "Glendale's population [was] extensively filled with Armenians," making it "centrally located" for AIM's operations.³³ The mass arrival of Soviet Armenians began in 1988, meaning their migration was a contributing reason for AIM's creation. In their inaugural issue released in July 1990, the AIM publishers explained in their "Note from the Publishers" that "recent events in Armenia and the Diaspora," as well as the drive to print "the pros and cons about Armenians and Armenian issues...without prejudice or fear of stirring controversies" were the driving force for AIM's conception.³⁴ As this thesis demonstrates, there was an ongoing struggle within the diaspora (even before the migration of Soviet Armenians) because of conflicting politics, ideology, issues of assimilation, etc. At first, issues of AIM were solely in English. Starting in December 1991, issues in Western Armenian were also released. AIM claimed to be for Armenians all over the world, although it seems diaspora Armenians were the intended audience. AIM's first issue, which featured pieces from renowned Armenian historians like Richard G. Hovannisian, Ronald Grigor Suny, and Levon Marashlian, demonstrates that AIM endeavored to produce intentional, well-researched, even scholarly, pieces. AIM ceased to publish issues by 2004, which likely was a result of waning

³² Sarah Downey "New Magazine AIMS to succeed," *Glendale News-Press*, June 8, 1990.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

diaspora urgency and support for the independent Republic of Armenia, as increasing corruption severed most material and symbolic support.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter of this thesis lays out the historical context and position of Armenians in the early to mid-twentieth century – caught between the ever-shifting Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian empires and then torn between autonomy or survival with the emerging Soviet regime. It concurrently sets up the split between Soviet Armenia and politically centered segments of the Armenian diaspora who fled Soviet Armenia due Soviet persecution and their opposition to the Soviet takeover. Socio-historical context is provided about Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and the contested decision to grant it to Soviet Azerbaijan that would continue to affect Armenian-Azerbaijani relations through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Most importantly, this chapter explores the conception of Armenia SSR, how Soviet nationalities policies impacted the different ethnic populations of Soviet republics and territories with a special focus on Armenians, and how Soviet Armenia was created and transformed through waves of repatriation of Armenians from the diaspora.

The second chapter interrogates how decades of building tension within the USSR, in particular the plight of Karabakh and Soviet Armenians against neglect and mistreatment by both Soviet authorities and Soviet Azerbaijan, culminated in mass protests and calls for secession starting in 1987. Pogroms by Azerbaijanis targeting Armenians and a concurrent earthquake that devastated Armenia exacerbated the social and political world of Soviet Armenians. This chapter demonstrates that the newly relaxed Soviet migration policy, combined with the strife Soviet

Armenians faced in the late 1980s (which continued well into the 90s and on), led to a mass exodus of Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants to Los Angeles County. The chapter highlights the initial support and mobilization undertaken by the US as well as the long-estranged Armenian diaspora of Los Angeles County, to support Soviet Armenians.

The last chapter begins by comprehensively tracking the history and Armenian presence in Los Angeles County in the twentieth century, especially the 1970s and 1980s, as a means to understand the social context Soviet Armenians would be joining. Before Soviet Armenians headed for the US, the arrival of Armenians from the Middle East to Los Angeles County had already transformed and invigorated the existing Armenian community. This chapter discusses the ideological differences and the diverging identity and cultural development between the Armenians of Los Angeles County before and after the arrival of Soviet Armenians. It investigates the ongoing competition between Armenian diaspora organizations and political parties that were vying for control over the ideological consciousness of the diaspora. This thesis argues that Armenian nationalist consciousness in Los Angeles was revitalized and strengthened by the arrival of Middle East Armenians, primarily Lebanese Armenians, in the 1970s. The ultimate goal of the main political party of the diaspora, the ARF, was to eventually take diaspora Armenians “home,” as in the imagined unified Western (Eastern Anatolia) and Eastern (South Caucasus) Armenian lands. The mass exodus of Soviet Armenians into the diaspora did not align with these nationalist goals, so the Los Angeles County Armenian community (especially those who were affiliated with nationalist political organizations and parties) concurrently reached through the cracks of the Iron Curtain to support Soviet Armenians in the homeland, while also opposing and directly combating Soviet Armenians’ access to aid and refuge in the US. This chapter explores and interrogates how newly arriving Armenians were

subject to animosity from the largely white Anglo-Saxon populations and some previously settled Armenians and Armenian Americans. Armenians also experienced “ethnic friction” and conflict with other ethnic populations. New migrants and refugees, whether Middle Eastern Armenian or Soviet Armenian, were subject to an unfamiliar, highly racialized space that often demanded ethnic and racial categorizations and designations that the vast and nuanced Armenian experience did not easily fit. It provides a brief history of the changing presence of Armenians in Los Angeles through the lens of housing and schools in Glendale and Los Angeles County. This chapter reveals how the pendulum shifted from the dominance of a xenophobic American society, which grew increasingly intolerant as conceptions of a majority Anglo-Saxon society were challenged, to ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. However, tensions and conflict between different ethnic groups and intracommunal tensions between the “old” and “new” Armenian diasporas persisted.

Chapter 1: Constructing Modern Armenian Consciousness and Homeland

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were tumultuous and transformative as empires broke into nation-states and clashed for supremacy. Armenians were not immune to the rapid changes that came with shifting ideologies, territorialization, and nationalism, coupled with rapid advances in communication, mobility, and war-making. Weakened by the 1915 Ottoman Genocide of Armenians and the seizure of ancestral Armenian lands in Eastern Anatolia, Armenians either dispersed into the diaspora or joined the Armenian republic, a small fraction of historic Armenia. After a failed alliance with neighboring South Caucasian countries and the creation of the first independent republic of Armenia (1918-1920), the Armenian Republic was subsumed into the USSR. Soviet Armenians and Armenians in the diaspora were separated by the Iron Curtain and conflicting ideologies. Yet, they forged their identity through their

contrasting experiences and in direct relation to each other. These tensions and divisions persisted throughout all Armenian communities, whether in “homeland” or diaspora.

Between Empires: Ottoman, Romanov, Qajar, and the Armenian Diaspora

At the start of the twentieth century, Armenians were ensnared between the Ottoman, Russian (Romanov), and Iranian (Qajar) empires.³⁵ The number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire remains contested and “open to question” among scholars because official numbers, based on sources of the Ottoman state and the Armenian patriarchate (recognized as the head of the Armenian millet), conflict.³⁶ Vahe Sarafian estimated that there were 2,998,000 Armenians in the Ottoman Empire by 1908, while Levon Marashlian utilized several conflicting sources to estimate that there were 2,000,000 Armenians in the Ottoman Empire by 1912.³⁷ By 1897 the Russian Imperial Census estimated 1,200,000 Armenians out of the 6,000,000 total population of the Caucasus, although census numbers fluctuate from year to year.³⁸

In the Ottoman Empire, most Armenians were concentrated in the six Armenian provinces in Eastern Anatolia and the more metropolitan centers of Istanbul (Constantinople) and Izmir (Smyrna).³⁹ In the Russian Empire, Armenians lived primarily throughout the Caucasus, with large concentrations in Tbilisi (Tiflis) and Baku and a smaller population in Yerevan.⁴⁰ In Iran, Armenians “constituted a very small minority,” at around 70,000.⁴¹ Armenians were active,

³⁵ Hourì Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911: “The Love of Freedom has no Fatherland”* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 15-16. Armenians lived in the Qajar empire although their numbers were significantly smaller than those in the Ottoman and Russian empires.

³⁶ Ibid. Please see page 16 for a succinct discussion of varying numbers as well as debate among scholars.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For a synthesized discussion of varying and contested population numbers, and a concise overview of Armenian communities in the Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian empires see Berberian, *Armenians*, 15-29.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

longstanding members and contributors to their “host” empires. So much so that Armenian revolutionaries participated in the Russian (1905), Ottoman (1908), and Iranian (1905-11) revolutions.⁴² At the turn of the century, global economic and political transformations destabilized and undermined the position of these once flourishing “empires,” causing them to struggle to keep up with the Western powers’ monopoly over capital and industrialization. Concurrently and directly connected to rising unrest within these empires, political consciousness, and revolutionary activity were brewing among imperial subjects, including Armenians in both the Ottoman and Russian empires.⁴³ The borders between empires – in this case, the Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian empires – were much more fluid, and modes of mobility and communication were rapidly advancing, which allowed for the dissemination of revolutionary thought and literature, increased mobility of revolutionaries, and the transfer of arms.⁴⁴ As Armenians were members of all three empires, they directly participated in the impending transformation of each society.⁴⁵

Armenians had coexisted with other imperial subjects within the Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian empires (albeit with tension and conflict); however, interethnic animosity grew. Burgeoning nationalism, territorialization, and the emergence of nation-states contributed to the Ottoman and Russian empires viewing certain ethnic populations, including Armenians, as

⁴² Houri Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries: Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Worlds* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

⁴³ The burgeoning political consciousness of Armenians was due in large part by young Armenians who travelled abroad for education and returned with social and political ideas that directly challenged Ottoman rule and the status quo within the Armenian community. In the Ottoman empire, Armenians primarily studied abroad in Italy and France. Ottoman Armenians would bring home with them “ideas of liberty, fraternity, and equality.” In the Russian empire Armenians studied abroad in “Moscow, St. Petersburg, Dorpat, Leipzig, and Berlin.” See Berberian, *Armenians*, 17-18, 21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

perceived threats.⁴⁶ In 1915, and for several years thereafter, Armenians of the Ottoman Empire were subject to a systematic Genocide organized and perpetrated by the Ottoman state and its local agents, killing over a million Armenians, displacing hundreds of thousands, and leaving behind a legacy of cultural Genocide and denialism.⁴⁷ Those who physically survived the Genocide either arrived in the newly formed and short-lived Armenian Republic (1918-1920), where hardships and challenges continued or scattered across the globe, primarily to the Middle East, as part of the Armenian diaspora, thus creating the largest wave of Armenian migration to date.

With the Russians preoccupied with the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917, the people of Armenia – and inevitably Georgians and Azerbaijanis – faced encroaching Turkish troops from the west.⁴⁸ Although South Caucasian relations were strained due to persisting ethnic tensions, there was an attempt to form a Transcaucasian Federative Republic by South Caucasian Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians. This short-lived alliance lasted a few weeks, as it had no real power, resources, or capacity to hold off the Turkish or Red armies. Further, the South

⁴⁶ The rise of Russian nationalism in the mid to late 1800s, coupled with the political awakening of Armenians, led to increasing animosity towards Armenians by both Russian and Ottoman states. The policy of Russification in the Russian empire impacted Armenians as the Russian state appropriated, seized, and closed Armenian church properties, philanthropic societies, and libraries starting in the late nineteenth century and continuing into the early twentieth century. See Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries*, 21-24; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Towards Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 89; Panossian, *The Armenians*, 196, 220-221.

⁴⁷ Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries*, 21-24. Although Armenians were the focal point of the genocide, Assyrians and Greeks of the Ottoman empire also became victims because they, too, were perceived as threats to Turkish nationalization and territorialization. Although the exact number of Armenians living in the Ottoman empire is debated, there were approximately “2.1 million Armenians ... on the eve of the First World War.” By the early 1920s there was approximately 70,000 Armenians left in Turkey, all of whom were in Istanbul. This means that no Armenians remained on the ancestral and historic lands of Eastern Anatolia/Western Armenia.

⁴⁸ Suny, *Looking Towards*, 124. Azerbaijanis were not as concerned by Turkish advancement as, “Azerbaijanis stood to benefit from a Turkish victory that would eliminate the Armenians threat and restore Baku to the control of Muslims.” According to Walker, Turkish forces killed more than 20,000 Armenians during the Turkish “liberation” of Baku from Bolshevik control, thus facilitating control over the city “backed by Ottoman Turkish forces.” See Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 261-262.

Caucasian peoples, and their emerging “national” leaders, remained torn by internal conflict rooted in ethno-nationalist and territorial disputes.⁴⁹ Georgia was “promis[ed] support” by Germany if it became an independent state, and Azerbaijan had the support of the Turkish state, so they left the alliance for assumed national interest and security.⁵⁰ The Transcaucasian Federative Republic crumbled as the amorphous South Caucasian states attempted to emerge as newly formed nation-states. The emerging nation-states of Georgia and Azerbaijan declared independence, and Armenia followed suit. Thus, on May 28, 1918, the Republic of Armenia emerged, led by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). Armenia’s population faced epidemic and starvation, and its streets were inundated with refugees, who comprised one-third to one-half of the population, as the Turkish army continued to advance.⁵¹ Kourken Kahandjian, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide and one of thousands of Armenian refugees who fled to the newly formed Armenian republic at the beginning of the twentieth century, told the *Glendale News-Press* in 1990 how “his family and most of the town’s people fled from Van to Yerevan.”⁵² When they arrived in Yerevan, the Kahandjians “slept on the steps of [a] church in Yerevan.”⁵³ They were able to buy food and shelter with “gold his father had sewn into his mother’s clothing.”⁵⁴ The Kahandjians lived in Yerevan for years but were “forced from their home when communism reigned,” and so they moved to Lebanon, after which “more wars forced [them] to the United States.”⁵⁵ The two years of the first Republic of Armenia were rife with challenges; however, the republic itself and a number of extraordinary military victories fought by “soldiers,

⁴⁹ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 291-295. Georgians and Azerbaijanis held resentment towards Armenians who had prominent social and economic positions in Tbilisi (Tiflis), Batumi, and Baku.

⁵⁰ Suny, *Looking Towards*, 125.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵² Jennifer Burry, “Armenian Genocide remembered,” *Glendale News-Press*, April 24, 1990.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

irregulars, peasants and other ordinary folks” against the Turkish army in Bash-Abaran, Sardarabad, and Gharakhilisie (Vanadzor), influenced and helped create Armenia as a nation-state in the twentieth century. These battles have become symbols of Armenian statehood, autonomy, and nationalism.⁵⁶

As Turkish troops regrouped, the Armenia Republic was once again under threat; with no power to withstand Turkish forces nor the Red Army, Armenia and countless other countries, including those in the South Caucasus, surrendered control to the Red Army. On December 2, 1920, a tiny sliver of what was once historic Armenia was officially declared an “independent socialist republic” by a representative from the Armenian government and Soviet Russia, wherein control would be ceded to a Revolutionary committee composed of ARF members and Communists.⁵⁷ Existing institutions were overturned and replaced, many Armenians – particularly those associated with the national army and the ARF – were arrested or exiled, and War Communism was enacted.⁵⁸ War Communism was a Soviet policy that lasted from 1918 until 1921 and entailed the nationalization of “banks and major industries” and the confiscation of resources, food, and grain from “peasants and townspeople.”⁵⁹ War Communism, “now discredited throughout the Soviet world,” would later be replaced by the “considerably more moderate” New Economic Policy (NEP).⁶⁰ In 1921, as the Red Army marched for Georgia, the ARF attempted a takeover.⁶¹ When the Red Army returned, the ARF “and thousands of civilians fled into the mountains of Syunik (Zangezur).”⁶² Some escaped South into Iran; however, many

⁵⁶ Ibid., 244, 251.

⁵⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 347-348.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 139-140.

⁵⁹ Ibid.; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 112.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 350.

others were persecuted, jailed, and killed.⁶³ Although the ARF takeover failed to deter Soviet communists, it served to change how the Soviets treated Armenians, leading the Soviets, at the behest of Lenin, to compromise and soften the harshness of Soviet rule against Armenians.⁶⁴

Although the emerging nation-states of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan entered the Soviet Union, a persistent territorial dispute continued. Debates surrounding land “ownership” continued as the borders of republics, sub-republics, and territories were demarcated. This shift in land “ownership” – though territories were historically shared and cohabitated between different ethnic groups outside of just Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis – resulted in instances of ethnic cleansing and displacement of populations. Despite the demarcation of borders, the republics and territories of the Soviet Union remained ethnically diverse. Ultimately, Soviet Armenia was granted Lori, Akhalkalak(i) was left to Soviet Georgia, and Soviet Azerbaijan was “awarded” both Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh.⁶⁵ Both Nakhichevan (primarily Muslim) and Nagorno-Karabakh (predominantly Armenian) were historically inhabited by a majority of Armenians and smaller Muslim populations; however, Armenia’s “limited resources of an impoverished agrarian society” paled in comparison to the “economically stronger” Azerbaijan.⁶⁶ Nagorno-Karabakh and its Armenian population remained annexed until calls for secession, and independence arose in the late 1980s.⁶⁷

⁶³ Suny, *Looking Toward*, 139-140; Touraj Atabaki and Denis V. Volkov, “Flying Away From the Bolshevik Winter: Soviet Refugees across the Southern Borders (1917-30),” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 2 (March 2020): 1900-1922.

⁶⁴ Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 351.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 352-353.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 351, 353.



Map 1. Map of the Caucasus, accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.mapsof.net/uploads/static-maps/Caucasus_regions_map.png.

In December 1922, under Lenin’s insistence, the infant nation-states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia officially joined the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).⁶⁸ Soviet rule in Armenia led to a deep ideological rift for those affiliated with the ARF after their expulsion from Soviet Armenia. The ARF became a state in exile and a pillar of diasporan Armenian identity.⁶⁹ The ARF, and those affiliated or sympathetic to their view, continued steadfast protest and opposition to Soviet Armenia, openly viewing Soviet Armenia as “traitors”

⁶⁸ Ibid., 354.

⁶⁹ Tölölyan, “Exile Government,” 124.

for ceding the “homeland” to the Soviet Union. The Armenian-language periodical press in the diaspora, especially during the 1920s and through the 1950s, was in constant battle with pro-Soviet Armenia factions much further on the left as well as centrist parties.⁷⁰ The Hnchakian and Ramkavar political parties, which remain based in the diaspora, were more sympathetic and supportive of Soviet Armenia. The support for Soviet Armenia (or lack thereof) resulted in a schism within diaspora communities.⁷¹

Soviet Armenia maintained similar disdain for the ARF. Razmik Panossian’s analysis of an Armenian history textbook for eighth graders in Soviet Armenia, published in 1964, reveals how the diaspora was presented within the education system.⁷² The textbook divides the diaspora into two factions; “the progressive element,” those who supported Soviet Armenia, and “the reactionary element,” those who opposed Soviet Armenia.⁷³ According to Panossian’s research, “no opportunity was missed to denounce the ARF.”⁷⁴ Not only did Soviet Armenia and the diaspora diverge in terms of their Armenian national identity development, ideology, and experiences, but the diaspora itself was internally split due to diverging support of Soviet Armenia.⁷⁵ Association with and support for Soviet Armenia was a crucial point of contention for diasporic Armenian communities and remained so until Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh came under threat in the late 1980s.

⁷⁰ Conversation with Hourii Berberian based on her recent findings of the study of the diasporan Armenian-language press.

⁷¹ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 365-366.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 346-346.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Tölölyan, “Elites,” 107-136.

Creating the Soviet Socialist “Homeland”

With the social and political shifts occurring in Armenia post-1915, many Armenians left Armenia and Soviet rule to live in the diaspora. Meanwhile, Soviet Armenia, and those who remained, forfeited their autonomy, and Armenia “ceased in any real sense to be a sovereign state,” according to historian Ronald Grigor Suny.⁷⁶ It is crucial to recognize that modern conceptions of nation-states or nationhood were created in the early twentieth century, and that “nations” are not indefinite entity’s that last through time. Subsequently, the “Armenian nation,” which is often (and incorrectly) used as a blanket statement to assert that Armenia exists as one, monolithic entity throughout history, is a modern, social construct. The “Armenian nation” was constructed throughout the twentieth century, and processes and events like the Ottoman Genocide, Soviet occupation, and even the implementation of Soviet nationality policies and practices during the USSR, created the modern understanding and view of the “Armenian nation.” According to Rogers Brubaker “the upsurge in nationalism,” especially in the early twentieth century “should not lead,” to the reification of states.⁷⁷ Meaning that nationalism, the existence of nation-states, and modern conceptions of nationhood “should be understood without invoking ‘nations’ as substantial entities.”⁷⁸ The forfeiture of autonomy was in no way unique to Soviet Armenia but impacted other republics, territories, and ethnic populations. Soon began the arduous and complex task of figuring out how to divide the peoples, ethnicities, and territories that joined (willingly and otherwise) the, soon to be called, Soviet Union.

⁷⁶ Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 355.

⁷⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7-8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

The Soviet Union did not have a predetermined “model for the governing of a multiethnic state at its conception.”⁷⁹ Thus ensued the creation of Soviet nationalities policies, although policies were often unclear, contradictory, and sometimes existed in ‘theory’ and not in ‘practice.’ There have been some historians who have challenged the existence of an official Soviet nationalities policy. Jeremy Smith argues that no coherent nor official nationalities policy existed in the Soviet Union outside the initial consideration of nationalities in the 1920s.⁸⁰ However, the “coherence” of a policy does not negate its existence. Historians, including Terry Martin, Yuri Slezkine, and Krista A. Goff, demonstrate and evidence how Soviet nationalities policies – like ethnoterritorialism and *korenizatsiia* (nativization or indigenization) – were implemented (albeit inconsistently) and how these policies and practices impacted the many peoples of the USSR.

During the early years of the Soviet Union, it was recognized that the former subjects of the Russian empire “needed assistance to evolve past the historical phase of national consciousness,” and so, as elucidated by Stalin in the 1920s, the Soviet Union would “undertake the maximum development of national culture.”⁸¹ According to Krista A. Goff, the “maximum development of national culture” resulted in an ethnoterritorial structure that divided the USSR into national territories, including republics, sub-republics, and districts often named after the “titular, or principal nationality,” which made up the area.⁸² However, there were ethnic populations, like Yezidis, Talyshes, Kurds, etc., or “nontitular” peoples who had no nationally recognized territory and often lived throughout the Soviet Union in other republics, sub-

⁷⁹ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 414-452.

⁸⁰ Jeremy Smith, “Was There a Soviet Nationality Policy?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 6 (July 3, 2019):1-22.

⁸¹ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*

republics, or territories.⁸³ The policy of *korenizatsiia* encouraged nationalities to relocate from within the USSR or diaspora to their respective republics and run and develop the administration, economy, education, literature, theatre, etc., in their native language. This policy, however, could not be applied to ‘nontitular’ populations. In theory, all Soviet subjects, whether “titular” or “nontitular,” were initially guaranteed “equal political, economic, state, cultural and social rights.”⁸⁴ However, as demonstrated by Goff’s research, “nontitular minorities” were subject to suppression and double assimilation, wherein they would experience increasing pressure to assimilate by not only the Soviet authorities (who were Russian dominant) but also the titular republics in which they lived.⁸⁵

The USSR launched a mass literacy campaign in the 1920s, created a new school system for cities and villages, and encouraged national “historiography, national art, and literature, language, textbooks, and education, monuments and rituals, the church, and more broadly speaking national(ist) intellectuals.”⁸⁶ But they also enacted oppressive policies, including antireligious campaigns, mass assaults against the peasantry, increased authoritarian and police rule, and criticized and repressed nationalist expression.⁸⁷ Many Soviet republics and territories, and in this case, Soviet Armenia, experienced a “renationalization” in the 1920s per the nationalities policies. According to Brubaker, the USSR repressed nationalism, but encouraged nationhood and nationality.⁸⁸ Soviet Armenia had “a period of rebirth, experimentation, and new creativity” via an art, literature, and music renaissance, but also because of the culture that

⁸³ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 262, 319; Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 356-357; Suny, *The Structure*, xiii.

⁸⁷ Attacks on Armenian peasantry were done in order to mold the Armenian economy to fit preordained notions of a transition from feudal to a socialist state. Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 350-355.

⁸⁸ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 8.

Armenian “repatriates” brought to Soviet Armenia.⁸⁹ Even though Soviet Armenia and the Armenian diaspora developed separately, Armenia and the diaspora converged through Soviet repatriation campaigns. The “first generation of the new Soviet Armenian nation” was made up of tens of thousands of Armenian refugees and migrants from Eastern Anatolia, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Greece, the Middle East, France, and even neighboring “peasants...from the [Armenian] countryside.”⁹⁰ This “new urban population” spoke in varying dialects and brought with them different customs, foods, and experiences, and subsequently, “Armenia became more Armenian.”⁹¹

This policy occurred again in the 1940s (and later in the ‘60s and ‘70s), when a mass campaign was implemented to encourage repatriation from the diaspora to the “homeland” in an attempt by the Soviet Union to amass a new working population that would also bring new skills, materials, and goods along with them.⁹² “Large-scale Soviet recruitment” campaigns were deployed to convince diaspora Armenians, most of whom had no connection to the land or people of Soviet Armenia, that their homeland awaited with readily available accommodations and work.⁹³ Armenian “repatriates” and migrants to Armenia in the 1920s struggled in the newly created Soviet Armenia; however, they ultimately integrated and mixed, creating the first generation of Soviet Armenians. Those who repatriated in the 1940s and after experienced a new set of challenges. By 1949, around 90,000 Armenians had “repatriated” to Soviet Armenia.⁹⁴ Although most, if not all, “repatriates” had neither been to nor had roots in South Caucasian

⁸⁹ Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 356-357.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Jo Laycock, “Belongings: People and Possessions in the Armenian Repatriations,” 1945, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 518-519, 523.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 517.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Armenia, their arrival was propagandized via Soviet repatriation campaigns as a “homecoming.”⁹⁵

To the disappointment of repatriates, the promises of success and belonging were fruitless, mainly due to the “inconsistency and sometimes ambivalence” of Soviet authorities.⁹⁶ Instead of a “bountiful homeland,” repatriates were met with animosity from local Armenians who derogatorily referred to the new arrivals as *aghpars* (a derivative of brother in Armenian used to distinguish outsiders from Soviet Armenians), as well as suspicion and censorship from Soviet authorities.⁹⁷ Ironically, most local Soviet Armenians had either repatriated decades prior or were descendants of repatriates. Repatriates were met with “poor housing, poverty, and isolation” and “political repressions of the late Stalin period.”⁹⁸ Around 12,000 Armenian repatriates were deported upon arrival, targeted for being “Dashnaks” (those affiliated with ARF) or nationalists.⁹⁹ Although Soviet repatriation campaigns and propaganda framed repatriation as “an opportunity to unite the whole Armenian nation,” research shows that the repatriation campaigns were an attempt to “attract those who were able to contribute to the reconstruction of society and economy” especially during the post-World War II era.¹⁰⁰

According to Pauline Pechakjian’s research and interviews with Armenian repatriates and their descendants, who had “repatriated” to Soviet Armenia in the 1940s, the lack of resources, accommodations, and housing provided by the Soviet government directly contributed to

⁹⁵ Ibid., 511-512.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 517.

⁹⁷ Susan Pattie, “From Centers to Periphery: Repatriation to the Armenian Homeland in the Twentieth Century,” in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, eds. Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004), 117.

⁹⁸ Laycock, “Belongings,” 512.

⁹⁹ Ibid. There were an estimated 12,000 Armenian repatriates who were targeted for being ‘Dashnak’ (affiliated with ARF) or nationalists and were deported.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 518.

heightened animosity between the newcomers and Soviet Armenians.¹⁰¹ Pechakjian’s research reveals that repatriates’ positive or negative view of their repatriation was directly correlated to their financial status or whether status – access to healthcare, job opportunities, etc. – was lost or increased during the move.¹⁰² According to Jo Laycock’s study of Armenian repatriates in the 1940s, those who could creatively transform their physical and material belongings stayed; however, many repatriates, disenchanted by unmet promises, joined the diaspora once again.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, these waves of “repatriation” and migration enriched and diversified the Soviet Armenian experience, and the exploration of these populations challenges popular notions that Russian and Caucasian Armenians were the sole inhabitants of Soviet Armenia. Some of these same “repatriates” remained in Soviet Armenia and later dispersed into the diaspora – including Los Angeles County – as Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians.

News of the largely disappointing experiences of diasporan “repatriates” spread to the diaspora at large, which did not help Armenia-diaspora relations, as those affiliated explicitly with the ARF still held an ideologically centered grudge against Soviet Armenia for their “betrayal” in joining the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴ According to Susan Pattie, Soviet Armenia had “lost its appeal” for a large segment of the diaspora, particularly those who “sympathized with the political party” – the ARF– “that had led [Armenia] as a free state.”¹⁰⁵ These divisions, with roots in the early twentieth century, persisted, affecting the relationship between new Soviet Armenian migrants and the existing Armenian diaspora in Los Angeles County once Soviet and

¹⁰¹ Pauline Pechakjian, “The ‘Akhpars’: A Social History of the Mass Migration of Diaspora Armenians to Soviet Armenia, 1946-49” (Master’s thesis, University of California, Irvine, 2020), 32. Soviet Armenians were forced to house “repatriates” in their homes “against their will” and with little to no support from the state.

¹⁰² Ibid., 32-34.

¹⁰³ Laycock, “Belongings,” 527, 535-536.

¹⁰⁴ Pattie, “From Centers to Periphery,” 111.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

post-Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees began to settle in the diaspora during the late 1980s and continuing in the 1990s and on.

Chapter 2: Soviet Armenian Mobilization and Entangled Independence

After the initial years of the USSR, Soviet Armenia, among many other Soviet republics and territories, experienced the contradictory nature of Soviet policy that concurrently encouraged the revival and development of each republic while also staunchly perpetuating authoritarian and police violence. The predominantly Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, granted to Soviet Azerbaijan in the early twentieth century, had continued to experience neglect, discrimination, and violence from Azerbaijanis for decades. Following an escalation in conflict and persecution, Karabakh Armenians voted to secede from Soviet Azerbaijan in the late 1980s. The peoples of Nagorno-Karabakh, Soviet Armenia, and Soviet Azerbaijan mobilized as protests ensued. The people of Soviet Armenia launched a large-scale protest movement supporting Karabakh Armenians. The people of Soviet Azerbaijan responded violently, sending ripples through the USSR and throughout the world, awakening the Armenian diaspora. Concurrently, the US strategically stepped forward to accept Soviet Armenian refugees to further Cold War politics in their favor. In tandem with the eruption of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Northern Armenia experienced a debilitating natural disaster. The rising instability and strife, coupled with the US move to accept Soviet refugees, led to a mass exodus of Soviet Armenians to the United States, namely Los Angeles County. The years that followed 1988 presented a labyrinthic unfolding of Cold War politics, inter-Armenian political and ideological struggle, and the fleeting and conditional aid that impacted Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants.

Strife in Soviet Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh

Relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the South Caucasus had been characterized by coexistence and conflict in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived together within a multi-ethnic, multi-linguist, and multicultural society and even toiled side by side in creating and transferring revolutionary ideas, actions, and arms during the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman revolutions of the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ Armenian and Azerbaijani relations were nuanced and concurrently characterized by solidarity and cultural exchange, as well as ethnic and territorial conflict and tension. A discussion of the persisting conflict is necessary to understand the turbulent context of the 1980s.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Armenians lived dispersed between three major empires: the Ottoman, Russian, and Qajar empires. In the Russian empire, Armenians were mostly scattered across the South Caucasus. Although the South Caucasus is often presented as containing Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis, it is crucial to note that many other ethnic populations have and continue to populate the diverse multi-ethnic region. The South Caucasian peoples had coexisted together for centuries within empires, although their relationship was rife with conflict and tension due to competing ethnic and territorial claims. Armenian dispersion broadened Armenians' success in commerce and mercantilism throughout the South Caucasus, including Tbilisi (Tiflis) and Baku, to the dismay of some Georgians and Azerbaijanis, who often made up the working class.¹⁰⁷

By the end of the eighteenth century, the “hostility and disdain” held by Georgian elites against the largely middle-class Armenian population in Tbilisi (Tiflis), who formed an increasingly successful “urban artisan and merchant class,” had permeated through Georgian

¹⁰⁶ Berberian, “Nest of Revolution,” 95-121.

¹⁰⁷ Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 31.

society.¹⁰⁸ The “long-suppressed resentments by displaced Georgian nobles and nationalist intellectuals” continued as the prominence of the Armenian “merchant capital” grew, resulting in some instances of violence and conflict.¹⁰⁹ In the early twentieth century, Georgian authorities strategically used “socialist slogans and legislation,” citing class warfare as the sole reason, instead of the reality of escalating nationalist sentiment, as a means to end “Armenian predominance.”¹¹⁰ By the late nineteenth century, a “violent upsurge of Russian chauvinism and Armenophobia” had spread in the Caucasus.¹¹¹ Further, Armenian and Muslim relations were at a “critical level.”¹¹² In the same way that Georgians used nationalist ideology as a basis to usurp the Armenian position of power, Azerbaijanis, who “had developed little ethnic consciousness until the early twentieth century,” became ever-suspicious of the “perceived danger of armed Armenians.”¹¹³ Azerbaijanis rallied to push Armenians from the forefront of “the petroleum industry of Baku.”¹¹⁴ Relations came to a head with the inter-ethnic violence and clashes of 1905 between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, which resulted in thousands of casualties and solidified a legacy of continued conflict.¹¹⁵

The independence of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia after the failed Transcaucasian Federative Republic proved to be fleeting as the three emerging nation-states were eventually subsumed into the Soviet Union once the Red Army arrived.¹¹⁶ Indeed, during the early years of the Soviet Union, relations were overrun with territorial disputes among Armenians, Georgians,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 31, 37.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 81; Richard G. Hovannisian, “Armenia’s Road to Independence,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, Volume II, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 355.

¹¹⁰ Hovannisian, *Armenia’s Road*, 277.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 81.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 277, 278; Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 27

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Suny, *Looking Toward*, 27.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.; Hovannisian, *Armenia’s Road*, 291-295.

and Azerbaijanis, often leading to violence.¹¹⁷ During this time, from 1920 continuing until 1923, authorities demarcated the borders of each Soviet Socialist Republic and divvied up territories among Armenia SSR, Georgia SSR, and Azerbaijan SSR. Loss and gain of territory in the South Caucasus became and remained significant points of conflict and contention between South Caucasians, persisting throughout the run of the USSR.

Throughout over seventy years of Soviet rule, authorities repeatedly oscillated between allowing and encouraging nationalist expression and condemning it, promoting leniency and imposing authoritarian measures. The fluctuations of Soviet rule left the peoples of each Soviet Republic, sub-republic, and territory, including Soviet Armenia, increasingly disillusioned, which only fueled their nationalization. Soviet Armenians, hopeful and enthusiastic about Armenia's potential future within the brotherhood of the USSR and encouraged by Soviet policies, gave rise to new Armenian historians, literati, artists, theatre, and filmmakers, which was a time of "rebirth, experimentation, and new creativity."¹¹⁸ The Soviet Union pushed for nationalities, specifically "titular" nationalities, to head their respective republics and encouraged the use of national languages and culture. Widespread literacy campaigns and a new school system in major cities and rural villages boosted literacy in Armenian.¹¹⁹ However, the Soviet agenda remained supreme, so Armenia also experienced "antireligious campaigns," leading to the closure or seizure of churches and rising censorship, control, and policing.¹²⁰ Years into the establishment of the Soviet Union, especially after Stalin's rise to power, Armenia SSR was subjected to increased "police rule" to enforce the will of the Soviet state.¹²¹ The same state

¹¹⁷ Hovannisian, *Armenia's Road*, 316-317.

¹¹⁸ Suny, "Soviet Armenia," 357.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 355-356.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 357-358.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 359-360.

officials, creatives, literati, and artists who rose during the “rebirth” of Soviet Armenia were condemned, censored, and murdered during the Stalinist purges. These disorienting measures and policies caused major disillusionment and distrust of the Soviet government.

The Soviet authorities’ disconnection from its people was further illustrated when a seemingly minor event held in Yerevan in 1965 to commemorate the fifty-year mark of the Armenian Genocide was met by unprecedented large-scale protests demanding justice and land reparations from Turkey.¹²² Soviet authorities, shocked by the abrupt display of nationalist action, quickly condemned the protests, but the ethno-nationalist consciousness and action continued.¹²³ No matter how leaders following the reign of Stalin tried to mend relations, loosen controls, and restructure, they could not stop the disconnection between the Soviet Union and its people that facilitated the USSR’s disintegration in the years to come.

For Karabakh Armenians, increasing persecution from Soviet Azerbaijan compounded the problem. The predominantly Armenian-populated *oblast* of Nagorno-Karabakh, strategically ceded to oil-rich Soviet Azerbaijan in the early twentieth century, remained under Azerbaijani rule and grew increasingly restless under a neglectful regime.¹²⁴ Karabakh Armenians were subject to a “dual burden” of Stalinist policies and the “pressures of Azerbaijani nationalism often fueled by Pan-Turkic or Pan-Turanic ideological schemes” that resulted in “underdevelopment, social inequality, political repression, and ethnic/religious

¹²² Panossian, *The Armenians*, 320.

¹²³ Commemoration of the genocide was not permitted in Soviet Armenia up to that point. Tsitsernakaberd was erected only after these widespread protests, which illustrates both Soviet Armenian “zartonk” as well as how unprepared the Soviet Union was to handle nationalities and ethnic tension.

¹²⁴ Mark Saroyan, “Beyond the Nation-State: Culture and Ethnic Politics in Soviet Transcaucasia,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 15, no. 1 (January 1988): 219- 244.

discrimination.”¹²⁵ The issues raised by Karabakh Armenians were “not purely territorial or secessionist” but also based on ethnic, cultural, and economic oppression and discrimination.¹²⁶

In 1967, Karabakh Armenians again penned a letter of appeal to Soviet Armenia, the Central Committee, and Soviet authorities. Karabakh Armenians detailed not only the unsafe conditions and “fanatic persecution against us and our children” that dominated their lives under Azerbaijani rule but also Moscow’s “total silence” to “hundreds of requests” or implicit protests.¹²⁷

A year and a half ago, in front of the Party Regional Committee of Shushi two Azerbaijanis stopped a communist agronomist of Karabagh and said, “We were going to kill an Armenian at this moment. You turned up.” And they shot him on the spot. To this day, the criminal remains unpunished because he is a relative of the Azerbaijan prosecutor...

The chief of the Martuni Region Sovkhoz, Grisha Solomonian, was killed and his body thrown on the side of the road. Two other youths, tractor drivers, were killed at night.

They killed the 10 year old son of the chief of the local Martuni Sovkhoz, Benik Movsesian; they mutilated and violated his body. This time, too, the government was not able to “apprehend the criminals.” They would never have apprehended if people’s patience had not been exhausted and the family of the victim itself had not apprehended the villains... The state police responded to the anger of the public by spraying sewage water over them with fire engines. The guards opened fire on the father of the victim... Then there were fatal bullets fired as the father’s family was trying to reach him. Twelve were killed and their bodies have not been brought out yet. Only then did the people, boiling with anger, attack the criminals, kill them, and burn their bodies... The Armenians of Karabagh are awaiting salvation from you, people of the motherland.¹²⁸

By the end of 1987, with the new spirit of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in mind, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh began organizing small protests and petitions addressing

¹²⁵ Gerard J. Libaridian, *The Karabagh File: Documents and Facts on the Region of Mountainous Karabagh, 1918-1988* (Toronto: Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research & Documentation, 1988), 39.

¹²⁶ Rijkov, “A Brief Historical Survey,” 171.

¹²⁷ “[19 September 1967] An appeal by residents of the Mountainous Karabagh to the People and Government of Armenia, Central Committee of the Party and Public Authorities,” in *The Karabagh File: Documents and Facts on the Region of Mountainous Karabagh, 1918-1988*, ed. Gerard J. Libaridian (Toronto: Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research & Documentation, 1988), 47.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

decades of discrimination they faced at the hands of the Azerbaijani government.¹²⁹ By early 1988, after numerous attempts and appeals by Nagorno-Karabakh over several decades to either rejoin Armenia SSR or, at the very least, have improved living conditions and no more fanatic persecution, Nagorno-Karabakh officially petitioned the Soviet Union to join Armenia; both Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan responded.¹³⁰ The people of Soviet Armenia launched large-scale protests in support of Nagorno-Karabakh and its predominantly Armenian population – ranging from airport and transportation protests to sit-ins and even armed action.¹³¹ These protests developed into the Pan-Armenian National Movement, soon leading to calls for independence from the Soviet Union. The people of Soviet Azerbaijan responded to Nagorno-Karabakh’s calls for secession from Azerbaijan with outrage, large-scale protests, and riots which transformed into the Sumgait (1988) and Baku (1990) pogroms, in which ethnic Armenian citizens were attacked on the streets and in their homes, killed, and driven out of Soviet Azerbaijan.¹³² The pogroms sent a ripple through Armenia and its diaspora – evoking the Armenian Genocide – and fueling further protests and calls for Nagorno-Karabakh’s secession from Soviet Azerbaijan.

Existing tensions – ranging from social, political, national-cultural, linguistic, ethno-demographic, territorial, and ideological factors and conditions – came to a head as conflicts ensued between the populations of Nagorno-Karabakh, Soviet Azerbaijan, and subsequently Soviet Armenia – officially developing into a full-fledged war by 1988.¹³³ The First Karabakh

¹²⁹ Rijkov, “A Brief Historical Survey,” 171.

¹³⁰ Libaridian, *The Karabagh File*.

¹³¹ Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 380-381.

¹³² Esther Schrader, “For Americans in Armenian Capital, ‘a Terrible Feeling of Helplessness,’ ” *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 1990.

¹³³ A.N. Yamskov, “Ethnic Conflict in the Transcaucasus: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Theory and Society* 20, no. 5 (October 1991): 631-660.

War lasted from 1988 until 1994, after which a ceasefire was brokered between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is essential to elucidate the many causes and factors that ultimately led to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, crises, and war. A.N. Yamskov’s ethnographic study, published during the start of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, explores the nuanced, underlying causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.¹³⁴ First, Yamskov lays out the four types of ethnic conflict; the first is a socioeconomic conflict, the second is a cultural-linguistic conflict, the third is a territorial-status conflict, and lastly, political conflict.¹³⁵ According to Yamskov’s study, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict/crisis embodies all four types of ethnic conflict.¹³⁶



Map 2. Map of Nagorno-Karabakh (post-1994), accessed on March 1, 2023.
<https://www.rferl.org/a/nagorno-karabakh-/26567727.html>.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 642-657.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 636-637.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 638.

Concurrently, in the harsh winter of “December 7, [1988], at 11:41 a.m.,” a devastating earthquake, followed by aftershocks, struck the northern part of Armenia, primarily the cities of Spitak, Stepanavan, Gyumri (Leninakan), and Vanadzor (Kirovakan).¹³⁷ Over 25,000 Armenians were killed, and hundreds of thousands were left homeless in large part due to “newly built, prefab, and concrete-slab buildings” that did not withstand the quake.¹³⁸ Although the earthquake garnered humanitarian aid from Armenians in the diaspora and peoples of many countries, those devastated by the earthquake were not given sufficient aid, homes, and opportunities which contributed to the mass migration out of Soviet Armenia and into the diaspora. The earthquake destroyed the infrastructure of impacted cities in Northern Armenia. Mass starvation and homelessness spread, affecting the already traumatized survivors and leaving the people of Soviet Armenia in an even more vulnerable position.

Soon, the call for independence rose for many Soviet Republics, including Soviet Armenia, as the years leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union were teeming with social, economic, and political difficulties and struggles. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and war, the 1988 earthquake, and the overall unrest in Soviet Armenia served as catalysts to rouse closer Armenia-diaspora relations (which had been at a standstill since Sovietization). These events set forth a chain of events, leading to the mass migration of thousands of Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants into the diaspora – most of whom settled in Los Angeles County.

The Soviet Union and the United States: Soviet Migration, Refugees, and Fleeting Aid

Given the deteriorating conditions of Soviet Armenia – the war, the earthquake, the instability of the USSR, and the potential for continued social, political, and economic hardships

¹³⁷ Suny, *Looking Toward*, 210; Suny, “Soviet Armenia.”

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

– Soviet Armenians left Soviet and then post-Soviet Armenia in the thousands starting in the late 1980s. Many Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees settled in Southern California, primarily Los Angeles County, creating the second-biggest Armenian community outside of Armenia – the first being Russia – and the largest Armenian community in the United States. A close reading of Los Angeles and Glendale-based newspaper articles illustrate that initial US support for Soviet Armenians was a means to propagate against the Soviet Union and, subsequently, communism, which represented a threat to capitalist ideology in the US. The US accepted Armenian refugees into the United States, allowing approximately 60,000 in the late 1980s. However, support for Soviet Armenian migration waned as the escalating strife in Armenia increased the number of Armenian refugees and migrants trying to enter the US. The US, realizing that it would have to foot the bill for the relocation, settlement, and acculturation of increasing numbers of Soviet Armenian refugees, halted Soviet Armenian migration and reconsidered the designation of Soviet Armenians as refugees, citing a lack of funds as the reason. The following years would see the struggle of Soviet Armenians used as a conduit to advance Cold War politics for the US.

The first significant influx of Soviet Armenians arrived in the late 1980s as President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR continued implementing reforms and policies based around *perestroika* and *glasnost*. Gorbachev aimed to liberalize the Soviet Union, roll out several reforms and policy changes to boost the Soviet economy, appease the rising discontent and nationalist leanings among its many republics and ethnic populations, as well as placate and stave off rising tensions with the West – primarily the United States of America. As the Soviet Union looked to improve trade relations to strengthen and diversify its economy, the United States responded by stipulating that for the US-Soviet trade blockade to soften, the Soviet Union

must also loosen its strict emigration policy.¹³⁹ Until Gorbachev's rule, migration and travel policies in the Soviet Union were rigid and unyielding, save for the ten-year period from 1969 until 1979, wherein hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews were allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev's rule.¹⁴⁰ By October 1987, the "U.S. Embassy in Moscow processed applications from 1,3000 Soviet Armenians."¹⁴¹ By December 1987, 3,500 Soviet Armenians were expected to leave the Soviet Union for the US "in the coming months."¹⁴² Starting in October 1987, "between 300 and 400 Soviet Armenians" applied "each week for refugee status."¹⁴³

At first, the United States was eager to strategically accept Soviet refugees and migrants. Most Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees entering the US settled in Los Angeles and Glendale, joining the already expanding Middle Eastern Armenian community of Los Angeles County. Sheppie Abramowitz, the United State Department's Bureau for Refugee Programs public affairs officer, "reported that some 90 percent of the Armenians seeking to leave" the USSR were "heading for the Los Angeles area, especially Glendale."¹⁴⁴ Los Angeles-based newspaper articles about the developing situation in the USSR propagandized the plight of Soviet Armenians, as Soviet Armenian migration was initially welcomed and viewed "positively" by the US. Articles in late 1987 and early 1988 – when Soviet Armenians were originally granted refugee visas – oscillate between reports detailing and sympathizing with the tyranny experienced by Soviet Armenians and conspiratorial articles condemning the Soviet Union.

¹³⁹ David K. Shipler, "Law on Emigration in Effect in Soviet," *New York Times*, January 2, 1987.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Carol Tucker, "Armenian influx seen in Glendale," *Glendale News-Press*, December 17, 1987.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Los Angeles Times and *Glendale News-Press* articles, in particular, illustrate how the United States, which was nationally anti-Soviet, eagerly attempted to position itself as a benevolent democratic nation aiding the Soviet people in escaping the USSR. A *Glendale News-Press* article published in December 1987 detailed the lack of freedom and heightened suppression that newly arrived Soviet Armenians had experienced under Soviet rule. Ripsik Kiramichyan and Samuel Gasparyan “were among 12 families who joined forces to leave” Soviet Armenia in the early 1980s.¹⁴⁵ Although they were repeatedly denied and arrested, they were eventually granted permission to migrate to the US after years of struggle, appeals, and the introduction of *glasnost*.¹⁴⁶ Gasparyan lamented that “there [was] just a sense of hopelessness and resignation” in the USSR, as “there was a fundamental lack of choice.”¹⁴⁷ The article continued, expressing that “the situation for Soviet Armenians changed dramatically” when Soviet migration policies changed.¹⁴⁸ The report announced that 3,500 Armenians were expected to leave the USSR for “Glendale and surrounding areas.”¹⁴⁹ In another article, Jo Anne B. Barnhart of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) confidently reassured that “these individuals and their families [will] repay [the United States] through their work efforts and their tax dollars” in a report to Congress.¹⁵⁰

Another article released during the initial phase of Soviet Armenian migration included the story of Robert Nazaryan, a Soviet Armenian activist and former political prisoner who arrived in early 1988 with his family.¹⁵¹ Nazaryan co-created the Helsinki Watch Group of

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ “Immigrants increase, funds don’t,” *Glendale New-Press*, September 15, 1990.

¹⁵¹ Laura Bleiberg “Armenia’s Sharansky: Refugee from gulag finds home, new life in Glendale,” *Glendale News-Press*, March 18, 1988.

Soviet Armenia, which resulted in his arrest on December 22, 1977.¹⁵² He was jailed in Yerevan, sent to a concentration camp in the Mordovian republic for years, and exiled to Siberia for two years.¹⁵³ The article details and commiserates Robert Nazaryan’s torturous and brutal treatment at the hands of the Soviet Union and sympathizes with Nazaryans and Armenia’s plight. The article declared Nazaryan the “Armenian Sharansky,” referencing to the Soviet Jewish dissident and activist Natan Sharansky, who the USSR jailed in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵⁴ Nazaryan told the *Glendale News-Press* that Sharansky was his “cellmate for a week” during his time in Soviet prison.¹⁵⁵ At first, condemnation of the Soviet Union led directly to an increase in the number of Soviet refugees that the United States agreed to admit. President Ronald Reagan directed the Department of State to increase the number of accepted refugees from 15,000 to 30,000 by March 1988.¹⁵⁶

The United States striving to undermine the Soviet Union and engage in propaganda glorifying the United States is apparent in the tone and diction used in newspaper articles based in Glendale and Los Angeles. A *Glendale News-Press* article published in February 1988 pointedly chastised US Democrats, seemingly blaming them for not challenging the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁷ The article wrote that “unfortunately, the party that once belonged to John F. Kennedy and Harry Truman,” – the United States Democratic Party – “no longer sees communism as an enemy,” and that the “current crop of Democratic presidential candidates can’t even bring themselves to use the term ‘adversary’ to describe the Soviet Union.”¹⁵⁸ Another article initially

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Josh Meyer, “Increase in Armenian immigration sought,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 31, 1988.

¹⁵⁷ Jake Wirtschafter, “Armenian teens rally for brethren,” *Glendale News-Press*, February 27, 1988.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

published in the *New York Times* and reprinted in the *Glendale New-Press* titled, “Anti-Armenian riots: Were they plotted by Kremlin?” notes that “no conclusive proof has emerged to document such a conspiracy scenario, but much circumstantial evidence suggests,” that “communist party officials actively encouraged the growth of a nationalist political movement in Azerbaijan,” and that “police and the KGB appear to have an advance knowledge of the anti-Armenian attacks.”¹⁵⁹ This article shows that a reputable newspaper was willing to publish unconfirmed conspiracy theories that found the USSR responsible for “plotting” with Soviet Azerbaijan to enact violence and “authoritarian control” against Armenians.¹⁶⁰ Propagandized articles sympathizing with Soviet Armenia and encouraging Soviet Armenian migration influenced public opinion and furthered Cold War politics in the US’s favor. An overwhelming number of articles about Soviet Armenia and the rising number of migrants focus on the ills of the Soviet Union and highlight time and again the benevolence and goodwill of the US for taking in refugees. One article writes of Mikhail Gorbachev’s “heavy-handed approach,” utilized by “czarist and communist” leaders that dismissed “Armenian riots as the work of a group of ‘hooligans.’”¹⁶¹ According to the article, this proved that the “Soviet Union really is [not] a slice of heaven on earth.”¹⁶² Many articles published by prominent newspapers had less to do with furthering the plight of Soviet Armenians and more to do with directly participating in dispersing anti-Soviet discourse and propaganda.

¹⁵⁹ Bill Keller, “Anti-Armenian riots: Were they plotted by Kremlin?” *Glendale News-Press*, February 20, 1990. This was the first issue of the *Glendale News-Press* wherein an article from the *New York Times* News Service was featured. A blurb in this issue *Glendale News-Press* announces that relevant “news analysis, commentaries and other dispatches” from the *New York Times* will be included in *Glendale News-Press* issues moving forward. There is no indication on what basis or criteria relevant articles will be chosen and included.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ “Soviet Union is no heaven on Earth for protesting Armenians,” *Glendale News-Press*, March 25, 1988.

¹⁶² Ibid.

United States aid to Soviet Armenians, which began with offering refugee status to Soviet Armenians starting early 1988, proved to be inconsistent and conditional. By July, the US Embassy ceased issuing refugee visas to Soviet Armenians and stopped migration – due to the exponential and continued rise in Soviet Armenian applicants– citing a lack of funding. This left hundreds of families and thousands of people in limbo, waiting in “cramped rooms caught between the Soviet and U.S. bureaucracies.”¹⁶³ Armenian migrants “had left their jobs, given up their apartments, sold most of their possessions,” only to be left in uncertainty.¹⁶⁴ For several weeks following the decision to stop issuing refugee visas, “crowds of Armenians gathered outside the US Embassy” in Moscow “hoping for word they can [go] to America.”¹⁶⁵ Stranded Soviet Armenians slept “at friends’ homes, railroad stations, or wherever” they could.¹⁶⁶ Abel Kasoyan had been approved to migrate to the US, and so his mother, wife, and two small children arrived in Moscow in anticipation of their final interview on July 19, 1988.¹⁶⁷ Instead, their interview was canceled, and the Kasoyans who had sold their belongings remained houseless and “living in the Kursk railroad station” in Moscow.¹⁶⁸ Gratch Froundjian, another Soviet Armenian refugee who hailed from Yerevan, expressed his disbelief and disdain at the developing situation. Froundjian told the *Los Angeles Daily News*, “If it is possible to find

¹⁶³ Michael Parks, “Emigration of Armenians at Standstill,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1988. The United States strategic acceptance of Soviet refugees and migrants was motivated in part by the US drive to delegitimize and chip away at the ever-increasing vulnerability and instability of the Soviet Union. However, in the case of Soviet Armenians, they were not only fleeing from the USSR, but were experiencing ethnic conflict and pogroms, escalating war, unforeseen natural disaster, the possible threat of nuclear disaster via the Metsamor power plant in Soviet Armenia etc., which caused an unprecedented number of Soviet Armenians attempting to migrate to the US. One of the reasons that Armenian refugee status was revoked in favor of the humanitarian parolee designation was because the United States had not expected such a sheer volume of applications from Soviet Armenia, and essentially, were not willing to expend further funds or effort to aid migrants and refugees as the US had already begun undermining the USSR.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Mark J. Porubcansky, “U.S. stalls Armenian refugees,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, August 14, 1988.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

millions of dollars for the Contras in Nicaragua,” referring to the US-backed and funded right-wing Nicaraguan rebel political group, “they can find money for us.”¹⁶⁹ The US Embassy explained that “federal refugee funds for resettlement ran out,” even though these Soviet Armenian refugees had already been expected to travel to the US in a few days following their last interview.¹⁷⁰ On Friday, August 5, 1988, US Embassy officials announced that Soviet Armenians “scheduled to leave for the United States before September 30” would be permitted to enter the US only if they had someone to “sponsor their immigration by guaranteeing financial support.”¹⁷¹

A US Embassy official told the *Los Angeles Times* that “before, [Armenians] were treated as refugees,” but now “no federal funds [would] be spent for [Armenians] transport or resettlement.”¹⁷² Armenian refugees would have to “guarantee financial support” and were obligated to personally find relatives or a “sponsoring organization,” who had to produce a notarized affidavit of support with bank statements, evidence of income, or an employment offer.¹⁷³ Further, migrants had to privately purchase an airline ticket in the US or Moscow.¹⁷⁴ The “Embassy officials also warned” that migrants, whether through the support of family, community groups, or churches, must privately arrange for transportation, housing, employment, and “introduction to the local community.”¹⁷⁵ So Soviet Armenian migrants, who had lived behind the Iron Curtain with little exposure to the West, had to figure out how to fund and organize a new life in a country they had never been to. Those with relatives in the US had to

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Michael Parks, “Private Funds to Spur Armenian Emigration,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1988.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

rely heavily on them for material support, housing, and even acculturation. If refugees could fulfill these requirements, all documentation would be forwarded to the US Immigration and Naturalization Service in Washington, D.C., for approval.¹⁷⁶ Once the application was approved, officials would schedule pre-departure interviews for final approval.¹⁷⁷ The embassy would only process applications of refugees who had been “scheduled to leave in July, August, and September.”¹⁷⁸ When resettlement funds ran out, the 3,400 Soviet Armenian refugees, who had previously been scheduled to leave for the US, were left in limbo.¹⁷⁹ According to the embassy, “funds were found to finance” 430 Soviet Armenians.¹⁸⁰ However, officials anticipated that only half of the 3,000 remaining Soviet Armenians, who had previously been granted refugee status only to have it revoked, would be able to complete the new procedure of finding private funding, housing, transport, and settlement.¹⁸¹

Indeed, although the United States quickly accepted Soviet refugees and migrants, they were faster in revoking Armenians’ refugee status and federal funding.¹⁸² As of July 1988, the US moved to officially stop designating Armenians as refugees, and by September, Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants arrived under a “humanitarian parolee” designation, making them ineligible to become US citizens.¹⁸³ The United States federal government originally created the humanitarian parolee designation as a means to permit people to enter the US for medical treatments and emergencies.¹⁸⁴ A little over two months after the December 7, 1988

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Laura Bleiberg, “Refugee rules will change for Armenians,” *Glendale News-Press*, September 1, 1988.

¹⁸³ “Immigrants increase.”

¹⁸⁴ Dale Hoppert, “Senator talks with Armenians,” *Glendale News-Press*, April 27, 1989. Please note that this article misspelled Sarkis Ghazarian as ‘Sarkis Ghazatian.’

earthquake in Northern Armenia, the Connecticut-based Americare, an American insurance company, and the Armenian American-led nonprofit, Medical Outreach for Soviet Armenia, airlifted 18 injured children from Yerevan to New York for medical attention.¹⁸⁵ Two years after Americare's initial aid to Armenia, advertisements for the insurance company appeared in several Armenian International Magazine (AIM) issues, launched in 1990.¹⁸⁶ The Americare advertisement in the July 1990 issue of AIM featured a checklist – San Francisco Earthquake, Hurricane Hugo, USSR Gas Explosion, Armenian earthquake, and Hurricane Hugo – deftly blending US tragedies with similarly devastating events in the USSR and Soviet Armenia and strategically targeting Armenian Americans and newly arriving Soviet Armenians.¹⁸⁷

A few days after the December 7 earthquake, through the sponsorship of the nonprofit Project Hope, 37 children and young adults from Armenia arrived at the Andrews Air Force Base outside of Washington, D.C., to receive free medical attention.¹⁸⁸ Although there is no mention of whether these children were granted access to the US as “humanitarian parolees,” the article claims that the children were flown to the US with the expectation of being there for “at least two months and perhaps up to six months.”¹⁸⁹ It is likely that they were permitted to enter the US with the “humanitarian parolee” designation to receive medical aid.¹⁹⁰ The definition of “humanitarian parolee” would soon be altered to include those who didn't need medical attention. What had begun as an attempt to stronghold the USSR into softening their migration policy, as a long-term play to undermine the Soviet Union's position and perpetuate propaganda that highlighted the USSR's authoritarian rule (and the US's benevolence), turned into

¹⁸⁵ Laurence Loewy, “Armenian children get help from Glendale,” *Glendale News-Press*, February 2, 1989.

¹⁸⁶ “Americare,” *Armenian International Magazine*, July 1990, 29.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ “Armenian quake victims in U.S.,” *Glendale News-Press*, February 10, 1989.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

apprehension as tens of thousands of refugees sent applications to enter the US as the conditions of Soviet Armenians worsened.

When the US started to accept Armenians initially, there was no way of knowing that the people of Soviet Armenia would face natural disasters and war in the coming years. Ultimately, the migration of Soviet Armenian refugees became a larger and more expensive undertaking that the US had not anticipated and clearly did not want. By January 17, 1989, “the tragedy,” meaning the persisting devastation from the 1988 earthquake and the continuing war in Armenia SSR and Nagorno-Karabakh, “spurred review of visa policies [and] prompt[ed] President Reagan to announce that more Armenians would receive visas.”¹⁹¹ However, the July 1988 decision to designate Armenians as “humanitarian parolees” stood as “fees for passage and getting settled would not be paid by the United States.”¹⁹² Further, Armenians designated as “humanitarian parolees” were denied access to federally funded relief programs, resettlement aid, and even federally funded English classes. Sarkis Ghazarian, the director of the ARS in Glendale, said in an article, “We’re seeing a lot more people with parolee cards than refugee cards,” and that parolees could “never get green cards or become citizens,” only “get welfare...work [in the US] and...remain in the country indefinitely.”¹⁹³ The federal government had no obligation to provide any federal resettlement funds, support, or aid to Armenians, which left state and local governments to fund refugees and migrants.¹⁹⁴ By July 1988, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to ask the federal government for an additional \$1.4 million in refugee aid.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Suzan Bibisi, “Armenians end mourning: Sadness for quake victims lingers on,” *Glendale News-Press*, January 17, 1989.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Immigrants increase.”

¹⁹⁴ Marlo Jo Fisher, “Hearing targets refugee problems,” *Glendale News-Press*, February 2, 1990.

¹⁹⁵ Mary Ann Milbourn, “County to ask \$1.4 million in refugee aid,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, July 12, 1988.

Southern California was unprepared to fund thousands of refugees and migrants; however, the constant stream of appeals to the federal government made no difference.

Despite agreeing to accept Soviet refugees, the US government, state, and local institutions were unprepared to accept and support new migrants in education, employment, and housing.¹⁹⁶ This trend persisted across different administrations. The Administration of George H.W. Bush followed the precedent set by the Reagan Administration. In a 1989 article, Bruce Whipple, the director of the Los Angeles office of the nonprofit International Rescue Committee, explained that “there is just not enough money and services” to aid the “mushrooming exodus” of refugees from the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁷ The same article states that the newly instated Bush Administration “allow[ed] some...newcomers into the country under a special status,” even though Soviet Armenians had had that designation since July 1988.¹⁹⁸ The federal government was unwilling to continue allocating federal funds and aid for incoming migrants and refugees from the Soviet Union for fear of creating a “permanent welfare class.”¹⁹⁹

Joan Pinchuk, Los Angeles County’s refugee coordinator, told the *Los Angeles Times* that “these people” – meaning Soviet refugees – “need to learn how things work [in the US].”²⁰⁰ Pinchuk continued asserting that many Soviet Armenians “believe that they are entitled to government pensions and feel completely satisfied being on welfare...[and] there is no way to convince them otherwise.”²⁰¹ However, interviews with Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants

¹⁹⁶ At this point the United States was experiencing Soviet Armenian migration as well as continuing to receive refugees and migrants from “war torn” Iran as illustrated by a *Los Angeles Daily News* article “Armenian refugees’ freedom tied in red tape,” from January 31, 1988, written by Carmen Ramos Chandler. Iranians, Iranian-Armenians, and Soviet Armenians were joining the already settled Middle Easterners of Los Angeles County.

¹⁹⁷ Mathis Chazanov and Esther Schrader, “Southland Not Prepared for Soviet Emigres,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1989.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Esther Schrader, “Welfare Crush Seen in Soviet Emigre Proposal,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1989.

²⁰⁰ Chazanov and Schraeder, “Southland.”

²⁰¹ Ibid.

established that many Soviet Armenians were anxiously looking for jobs, even though they had no access to language classes to aid their employment search. In the same article, the Bakhdanyans, a Soviet Armenian family who had been given the “humanitarian parolee” status, explained that they “need a job” as they can’t afford emergency medical bills.²⁰² They told the *Los Angeles Times* that their lack of English language skills made it increasingly more challenging to ascertain a job since the “humanitarian parolee” designation did not give migrants access to language classes.²⁰³ Zabelle Alahydoian, the executive director of the Armenian Evangelical Social Service Center, described how “incomprehensible” the change from “refugee” to “humanitarian parolee” was for Soviet Armenians.²⁰⁴ Alahydoian explained that Soviet Armenians said, “ ‘How can I be different from my neighbor who came last week and is eligible for all these services?’”²⁰⁵ Karl Zukerman, the executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in New York, who was aiding Soviet Jews arriving in the US, thought the “humanitarian parolee” designation was “fiscally motivated since only refugees have any cost attached to them.”²⁰⁶ Zukerman continued by saying, “the change of practice by the American government in the middle of the flow is almost a breach of faith.”²⁰⁷ Federal institutions failed to support Armenian refugees and “humanitarian parolees,” so Los Angeles County soon depended on previously settled Armenians (many of whom had emigrated in the last two decades) to support Soviet Armenians.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Armenians in Los Angeles County in the Twentieth Century

Before the migration of Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees in the late 1980s, Los Angeles County had already seen different waves of Armenian migration throughout the twentieth century. Each consecutive wave of Armenian migration altered the growing Armenian community as well as the landscape of Los Angeles. Armenians who migrated to Los Angeles County in the first half of the twentieth century were largely assimilated and embodied “symbolic” Armenianness by the time Armenians from the Middle East – Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, etc. – started to migrate in more significant numbers in the 1970s. If existing institutions did not serve their needs, the growing Armenian community in Los Angeles County either created new Armenian institutions or revitalized existing institutions. By the late 1980s, as Soviet Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh experienced increasing strife, the booming Los Angeles Armenian community, despite their internal divisions, mobilized to aid their homeland. However, diaspora support did not extend to the migration of Soviet Armenians, causing further tension when the mass migration of Soviet Armenians began. Regardless of their opposition, and mainly due to failing federal support, previously settled Armenians were tasked with aiding new migrants.

The Origins of Armenian Migration to Los Angeles County

Los Angeles County has had innumerable waves of migration, especially in the twentieth century, as advanced modes of mobility and rapid advancements of industrialization throughout the world made travel more accessible. Although the majority of Armenians migrated to the US and Los Angeles County in the second half of the twentieth century, the origins of Armenian migration and settlement in California are foundational to understanding the migration of Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants starting in the late 1980s. This thesis delineates Armenian

migration to Los Angeles County in the twentieth century into five waves; Armenians Pre-Genocide (before 1915), Armenians post-Genocide (after 1915), Lebanese Armenians (1970s), Iranian and Iraqi Armenians (early 1980s), and finally, Soviet Armenians (late 1980s).

Although the 1915 Genocide created the most significant dispersal of Armenians into the diaspora, Armenians from the Ottoman and Russian empires migrated before 1915 (in small numbers) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historians estimate that 65,000 Armenians left the Ottoman Empire headed for the US between 1885 and 1915.²⁰⁸ Most Armenians that arrived in the United States formed communities on the East Coast; however, Armenians soon began to settle on the West Coast of the US. Aram Serkis Yeretzian's ethnographic dissertation, published in 1923, tracks the history of Armenian migration to the US, with a particular focus on Los Angeles.²⁰⁹ As maintained by Yeretzian, the first Armenian migrants settled in Fresno, California, to pursue "agricultural opportunities" in the 1880s.²¹⁰ Within a decade, there were "360 Armenians in the county of Fresno," according to an 1894 census.²¹¹ Armenians from the Ottoman Empire migrated to the US in the late nineteenth century

²⁰⁸ David E. Gutman, *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Sojourner's smugglers and Dubious Citizens* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 4; Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 71.

According to Gutman, Ottoman Armenian migration was a source of suspicion for the Ottoman state. During 1888-1905, wherein half of the estimate population of Armenians that left before 1915, a strictly enforced migration ban was created as Istanbul believed that "migration was directly related to the almost simultaneous emergence and rapid growth of political networks," that "sought greater autonomy and independence for the empires Armenian population."

²⁰⁹ According to Bakalian "the largest Armenian communities in the Unites States," include; Boston, Chicago, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, Washington DC. Bakalian includes Fresno, Los Angeles, and San Francisco as budding Armenian communities. See Bakalian, *Armenian Americans*, 181.

²¹⁰ Yeretzian, "A History of Armenian Immigration," 31.

²¹¹ Ibid.

due to the increased persecution experienced by Turkish and Kurdish violence, as well as for economic opportunities.²¹²

By 1915, however, persecution and Genocide became the cause of the mass migration of Armenian refugees from ancestral Armenian lands in Eastern Anatolia. An article written during the Armenian Genocide by the *Glendale Evening News* told of the “unspeakable Turk [who] is again pursuing the time-cursed amusement of slaughtering the miserable Armenians.”²¹³ It continued, urging that “unless some powerful influence,” like the US, intervenes, there will only be a “mere handful of [Armenians] left.”²¹⁴ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Western countries, like the US, England, and France, were strategically encroaching on the Middle East, including the Ottoman Empire (modern Turkey), in order to gain control, power, and resources. Thus, newspapers and media in the US often relied on sensationalized and Orientalized depictions of Turks to sew propaganda and garner support from US populations. By April 1918, “representative men from the different churches in Glendale” organized an Armenian-Syrian Drive to aid Armenians and Syrians who “endured far more tortures, afflictions, and starvation.”²¹⁵ W.B. Kirk of the Armenian and Syrian Relief committee urged that the drive “is one of pure charity (love)” and that contributing would not “detract one iota from the duty” owed to help the government “win the war.”²¹⁶ In January 1919, another drive was created, in collaboration with the Red Cross (one of the organizations that were stationed in the Ottoman Empire that directly witnessed the Genocide), to “provide relief” to “suffering

²¹² Gutman, *The Politics of Armenian*, 10-11. Gutman challenges the dominant narrative that Armenians from the Ottoman only migrated because of “persecution and violence,” by studying Armenians from Harput/Kharpet who traveled to North America for economic opportunities.

²¹³ “Plight of Armenians in Turkey,” *Glendale Evening News*, September 22, 1915.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ W.B. Kirk “Armenian-Syrian Drive,” *Glendale Evening News*, April 6, 1918.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Armenians and Syrians,” noting that “they are many in Glendale.”²¹⁷ Yeretjian estimated that by 1918, that 16,000 Armenians were scattered throughout California, with the highest populations in Fresno (7,000) and Los Angeles (1,800).²¹⁸ A 1922 *Glendale Evening News* article announced that “Nushon Bader Parsekian, known to his many Glendale friends as ‘Taxi Nish,’ ” was granted his naturalization papers.²¹⁹ ‘Nish’ ascertained citizenship through serving in the US army.²²⁰ According to the article, ‘Nish,’ “Glendale’s newest voter,” came to the US in 1909, settled in Glendale in 1918, and lived at 119 West Broadway.²²¹ Yeretjian asserted that the presence of Armenians in California at the time of this dissertation’s publication in 1923 is “considerably more,” as there were “large numbers of Armenians,” coming “directly from the native lands on account of the last massacres and national tragedy,” referring to the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923).²²² The Genocide and the instability in the Ottoman and Russian empires, wherein Armenians were subject to arbitrary persecution, inevitably led to increased migration of Armenians to Los Angeles County.

Yeretjian noted that the majority of Armenians in Los Angeles consist mostly of those that have been “residents for years,” many of whom came from the East Coast.²²³ However, “in the past 7 years,” leading up to 1923, Armenians from Russia, Turkey, and “fewer still from Persian provinces” began to migrate.²²⁴ By 1923, the Americanization Department of the Los Angeles District approximated that there were 2,500 Armenians in Los Angeles “scattered

²¹⁷ “Armenian Drive: Organized work for relief of suffering peoples to begin January 2,” *Glendale Evening News*, January 4, 1919.

²¹⁸ Yeretjian, “A History of Armenian Immigration,” 31-32.

²¹⁹ “‘Taxi Nish’ Secures Citizenship Papers,” *Glendale Evening News*, July 22, 1922. It is likely Parsekian’s name was misspelled as the article misspelled his place of origin as ‘Ban’ instead of ‘Van,’ a historic Armenian province in Eastern Anatolia.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 39

²²⁴ Ibid.

throughout the city.”²²⁵ According to a “Table of Armenian Families in Southern California,” compiled by Yeretjian, there were 500 Armenian families in Los Angeles (2,000 total), five families in Glendale (20 total), 25 families in Pasadena (100 total), and many others scattered throughout Southern California.²²⁶

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Armenian community that migrated to California, specifically Los Angeles County, founded organizations, schools, and churches.²²⁷ Armenians from both Western Armenia (Eastern Anatolia) and Eastern Armenia (South Caucasus) who migrated to California brought institutions – the church, schools, political parties, etc. – from the “old country” and also created new institutions.²²⁸ The Social-Democrat Hnchakian party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), and the Armenian Democrat Liberal Party (Ramkavar party) were some of the popular political parties in the US, with their headquarters in New York and Boston.²²⁹ Armenian publications sprung up throughout the US, including California, Massachusetts, New York, Chicago, etc. *Hairenik*, later published in English as the *Armenian Weekly*, was founded in 1899 and affiliated with the ARF. *Hairenik* and *Armenian Weekly*'s publications reflected the growing Armenian community in California with bi-coastal articles by the 1980s. It was in Fresno in 1908 wherein *Asbarez* newspaper, “the organ of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation,” was founded.²³⁰ *Asbarez* remains in print today, and its issues have played a vital role in the Armenian community in Southern California, both in Fresno and Los Angeles County. The Armenians in Los Angeles created Armenian societies and organizations, including the Armenian Red Cross Society (1914) and Ladies Aid Society of

²²⁵ Ibid., 41.

²²⁶ Ibid., 38.

²²⁷ Yeretjian, “A History of Armenian Immigration,” 49.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., 23.

²³⁰ Ibid., 36.

Caucasus (1917), as well as the branch of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), founded in 1910 in Los Angeles.²³¹

Although Armenians brought with them and created different Armenian institutions, Yeretzian repeatedly argues that Armenians were eager to adopt the American way of life. Although the claim has no statistical backing, Yeretzian's ethnographic study asserts that "Armenians [became] Americanized faster than any other peoples that c[a]me to America."²³² According to Anny Bakalian's sociological study, earlier generations of Armenians in the US, particularly those who came in the first half of the twentieth century, became "symbolically" Armenian primarily due to the pressures of assimilation.²³³ Many Armenian associations, publications, and organizations fell into disuse or faded considerably as Armenians became more assimilated. Regardless, the early Armenian community in California and Los Angeles set the foundation, institutionally and otherwise, for future waves of Armenian refugees and migrants. Armenians continued to trickle into the US and Los Angeles County for decades after the initial mass migration after 1915; however, the next large stream came in the 1970s. The waves of Armenians from the Middle East, particularly Lebanese Armenians, brought staunch nationalism and the cultural practice of Armenianness that revitalized existing institutions.

Starting in the mid-1970s, largely due to the Lebanese Civil War, Lebanese Armenians and other Armenian refugees and migrants from the Middle East began to migrate to Los Angeles County. As the number of Armenians in Glendale increased, it "warrant[ed] the founding" of St. Mary's Armenians Apostolic Church in 1975.²³⁴ The rising Armenian

²³¹ The Armenian General Benevolent Union, set up a branch in Los Angeles in 1910. According to Yeretzian, "A History of Armenian Immigration," 49; the Los Angeles branch was the "largest and most useful organization."

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Bakalian, *Armenian Americans*.

²³⁴ Larry Gordon "New Church Source of Pride for Armenians," *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1985.

community outgrew the “little one-story nondescript building” on East Carlton Drive in the next decade.²³⁵ Through a number of generous donations by community members, St. Mary’s Armenian Apostolic Church purchased a “\$3 million imposing 950 seat, Colonial-style church building” on Central Avenue.²³⁶ St. Mary’s Church served not only Armenians in Glendale but also those from Burbank, Sunland-Tujunga, and northeast Los Angeles. Police estimated that 8,000 people attempted to attend the unofficial opening on Easter Sunday in 1985.²³⁷ Ara Terminassians, a real estate developer whose family donated \$1 million to St. Mary’s, described the pride he felt, telling the *Los Angeles Times* that “the church has helped [Armenians] to survive as a people.”²³⁸ By January 1988, St. Mary’s was dubbed one of the most active churches in Glendale, with Father Narek Shirikaian asserting that 80% of the estimated 20,000 Armenians living in the Glendale Area attended St. Mary’s.²³⁹ Glendale’s Armenian community had “grown to 700 families,” as Armenian refugees and migrants were “arriv[ing] almost daily” to escape the “unstable political situation in the Middle East.”²⁴⁰ The first article in a series on the Armenian community in Glendale, launched by the *Glendale News-Press*, explored how the “growth of the Armenian community is visible” all over Glendale with new Middle Eastern restaurants, boutiques, and bookstores.²⁴¹ Anoushavan Artinian, an Armenian pastor at St. Mary’s Church in Glendale, attributed the increase in Armenian emigration to the Lebanese Civil War.²⁴² Artinian told the *Glendale News-Press* that the Armenian community “mourns the loss of their

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ruth Brager “Armenian church one of the most active in Glendale,” *Glendale News-Press*, January 24, 1988.

²⁴⁰ “Glendale’s new residents escape from Middle East,” *Glendale News-Press*, August 28, 1976.

²⁴¹ Agness Schipper, “Armenians settling for freedom,” *Glendale News-Press*, August 28, 1976.

²⁴² Ibid.

country...as historic Armenia” had been “absorbed into Turkey and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic.”²⁴³

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Iranian, Iraqi, and other Armenian refugees and migrants from the Middle East arrived in Los Angeles due to the Iranian revolution (1978-1979) and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). The Armenian population in Glendale had grown by hundreds, with an approximated population of 9,000 to 14,000 by the mid to late-1970s.²⁴⁴ An estimated 1,600 Armenian students attended Glendale schools.²⁴⁵ Armenians had started establishing schools like St. Mary’s Armenian School, which had started with eight students in 1976 but had grown to 325 students by 1981.²⁴⁶ By 1983, Vahan and Anoush Chamlian, an Armenian couple from Fresno, donated approximately \$500,000 to St. Mary’s Armenian School, allowing the school to purchase a site originally owned by the Glendale Unified School District.²⁴⁷ By 1990, Vahan and Anoush Chamlian Armenian school, which served “first through junior high” at the time, and St. Mary’s Tufenkian Armenian school, which served “nursery and kindergarten levels,” at the time, were celebrating their 15th anniversary while experiencing “skyrocketing enrollment.”²⁴⁸

By 1967, Sarky Mouradian, now widely considered the “father of Armenian-American television,” created “Armenian Time,” the first Armenian television program which ran for one hour every Sunday to a “captive audience...[of] at least 150,000 Armenians...stretch[ing] from Santa Barbara to San Diego.”²⁴⁹ Lebanese Armenian migrants Abraham “Apo” Jabarian and

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ David Holley, “Armenian Enclave Finds Prosperity in Glendale,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1981.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Al Friedenthal, “Couple donates \$500,000 to school,” *Glendale News-Press*, August 18, 1983.

²⁴⁸ Viken Berberian “Enrollment increases at Armenian schools,” *Glendale News-Press*, November 23, 1990.

²⁴⁹ David Holley, “Armenian Community Served by Own Media,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1981; Harry Kezelian, “In Memoriam: Sarky Mouradian, father of Armenian-American Television, Pop Music,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, March 24, 2022.

Vahan Jansezian, who arrived in the US in 1967, created the Glendale-based Armenians newspaper, *Nor Gyank* (*New Life* in English), a “30-page general-interest weekly newspaper” in English and Armenian.²⁵⁰ According to Jabarian, “it was very obvious...that existing Armenians publications were not up to the satisfaction of the new generation.”²⁵¹ So, just two years after their arrival, *Nor Gyank* was created.²⁵² *Nor Gyank* was “usually filled with international news from the Middle East,” with reprinted articles from Lebanon and Iran, and “unlike many Armenian publications,” it was not “controlled by Armenian political parties.”²⁵³ However, the *Nor Gyank* publication, much like the Armenian diaspora at large, was soon torn by division.

A 1986 *Los Angeles Times* article announced that “the already lively world of Glendale-based Armenian journalism has grown even livelier lately with a blistering feud” between two “rival” Armenian newspapers.²⁵⁴ There was a growing feud between Krikor Shenian, the new owner and editor of *Nor Gyank*, and Abraham “Apo” Jabarian, who ran *Hai Gyank* (*Armenian Life*), which resulted in “the two editor-publishers suing one another for fraud and breach of contract.”²⁵⁵ According to the article, the two newspapers would “attack each other,” with one paper publishing a satirical cartoon illustrating “the other paper’s publisher writing with a pen between his toes.”²⁵⁶ Jabarian and Shenian told the *Los Angeles Times* that their “mission [was] to keep the Armenian language and culture alive” due to “increased fears of assimilation.”²⁵⁷

Although *Nor Gyank* and *Hai Gyank* “unlike some other publications [like *Asbarez*]” pointedly

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Larry Gordon, “War of the Weeklies: 2 Armenian Journals Based in Glendale Don’t Paper Over Their Bitter Dispute,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1986.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

“steer[ed] away from controversies in intra-Armenian politics,” their intra-newspaper feud continued.²⁵⁸

Ovanes Balayan, a Glendale resident who migrated from Iran to the US in 1965, founded the satirical journal, *Kach Nazar*, targeting Armenians in the Middle East and Southern California.²⁵⁹ It included satirical columns written by anonymous Armenians from Iran and Los Angeles County to bring a light, playful take on the otherwise difficult situation that Armenian refugees and migrants were facing.²⁶⁰ The growing number of Armenian refugees and migrants from the Middle East was clearly altering the landscape of the existing Armenian community while also creating bridges between their previous “host” countries and the Los Angeles Armenian community. By 1986, the estimated 200,000 Armenian population of Southern California had access to “14 Armenian newspapers...six weekly newspapers” and many “monthly and semiannual publications.”²⁶¹ If existing institutions did not satisfy, newly arrived Armenian migrants creatively transformed and birthed institutions to serve their needs. Armenian institutions and “social, cultural, and political organizations” in Glendale “help[ed] unify” the growing Armenian community.²⁶²

The older generation of Armenians in Los Angeles County and newly arrived Armenians from the Middle East, continued to grapple with acculturating and fitting into an otherwise unforgiving racialized US society wherein immigrants and ethnic populations were subject to heightened scrutiny. This resulted in some Armenians aligning themselves with the “good immigrant vs. bad immigrant” archetype. At first glance, a 1981 *Los Angeles Times* article,

²⁵⁸ Ibid. *Hai Gyank*, now *USA Armenian Life*, is still in print and online as of 2023, although it is clear that the publication has departed from their non-political stance.

²⁵⁹ Holley, “Armenian Community Served.”

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Gordon, “War of the Weeklies.”

²⁶² Holley, “Armenian Enclave.”

“Armenian Enclave Finds Prosperity in Glendale,” may read as ordinary; however, a closer reading offers potential insight into the attitudes of Armenians and the ever-emphasized “American” population of Los Angeles County. One can assume that this article was not meant for newly arrived refugees and migrants but for the largely white, Anglo-Saxon population that set the standard for “Americanness.” This 1981 article attempted to “humanize” newly arriving Armenians from the Middle East by touting their wealth, capital, and education. It notes that the Glendale Armenian community, “dominated” by Iranian and Lebanese refugees, was “one of the largest and wealthiest Armenian Communities compared” to the “less prosperous Armenian community in Hollywood,” which had more Armenians from Soviet Armenia, Iraq, and Syria.²⁶³ Sarkis Arevian, the Western US head of Homenetmen (the Armenian General Athletic Union affiliated with the ARF), boasted that the Glendale Armenian community was the best organized with “a lot of middle class, upper-middle class and educated” Armenians.²⁶⁴ The Glendale chapter of Homenetmen was founded in 1978, and by 1981 their headquarters was moved from Hollywood to Glendale.²⁶⁵

The US accepted refugees and migrants from the Middle East; however, migrants with greater socioeconomic access were privileged over those who did not possess capital. The Karayans, an Iranian-Armenian couple, fled the “chaos of the 1979 Iranian revolution,” which led them to migrate and join “the stream of Armenians fleeing Middle Eastern war and revolution to seek new lives in the Glendale area.”²⁶⁶ The Karayans, however, were not fleeing Iran for economic reasons or opportunities, as they left behind a newly renovated home with a

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Holley, “Armenian Enclave.”

“servant.”²⁶⁷ Ida Karayan spoke of the “big shock” that was starting everything all over again, but especially the shock of “work[ing]...cook[ing]...wash[ing]...[and] rais[ing] the children..by [her]self.”²⁶⁸ Larry Zarian, who would go on to become the first Mayor of Glendale of Armenian descent in the years to come, informed the *Los Angeles Times* that Armenians from the Middle East with capital had the opportunity to get “permanent resident visas only on the condition that they invest at least \$40,000 in a business and then hire American citizens.”²⁶⁹ Orville Charles, an assistant district director of the Federal Immigration and Naturalization Service in the Los Angeles office, clarified that the category which allowed the migration of people who “invest at least \$40,000 in a business has enabled wealthy individuals” to ascertain permanent residence visas without American relatives (which was a firm requirement for migrants), was created in August of 1978.²⁷⁰ Armik Karayan, who had significant “capital,” was granted a work permit five months after moving to Glendale and “invested a lot of money,” only to lose it.²⁷¹ Zarian attributed the “lost fortunes” and investments to Armenians buying “businesses they were unfamiliar with” and an “unfamiliar...business climate.”²⁷²

There was a class divide among Armenian migrants and refugees from the Middle East who arrived in the US starting in the 1970s. The class divide, and Armenians’ access to capital, became further pronounced with the arrival of Soviet Armenians in the late 1980s as most (if not all) did not possess significant capital. Further, Soviet Armenians arrived in the US having no prior exposure to the “West” while Middle Eastern Armenians usually had more access to Western languages and cultures. Ultimately, Armenian and migrants and refugees, whether from

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid; Martha Willman, “1st Armenian Mayor Chosen for Glendale,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1986.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

the Middle East or the USSR, remained divided (literally and figuratively) based on capital (cultural and otherwise), class, ideology, political affiliations, etc.

Xenophobia, Racialization, and Ethnic Clashes

Armenians, especially those from the Soviet Union, were not privy to the “West” nor the distinct ethnic and racial development of the US. Armenians in Glendale and Los Angeles County were already targeted before the arrival of Armenians from the USSR. The mass exodus of Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants to Los Angeles County, specifically Glendale, led to increased xenophobic and discriminatory backlash from primarily white, Anglo-Saxon populations. Further, ethnic antagonism between ethnic minorities of Glendale rose. Armenians themselves, unaware of the nuances of racialization in the US and indoctrinated with xenophobic conceptions, also discriminated against other ethnic and racial groups. Primary sources evidence the heightened racialization and xenophobia that Armenians were concurrently experiencing and perpetrating.

Although Armenians from wealthier backgrounds were afforded certain privileges over their less economically endowed counterparts, it seems that no matter one's financial status, Armenians experienced racism and xenophobia, or as a 1982 *Los Angeles Daily News* article called it – a “mixed reception.”²⁷³ Alice Petrossian, a Glendale School District official who appeared in many articles in the 1980s, recounted how her father, Hacob Shirvanian, was subject to unwelcoming encounters from neighbors even though his house “was more expensive than others in the neighborhood.”²⁷⁴ Hacob Shirvanian disagreed and disregarded the reality of Armenians being victims of xenophobia, asserting that “Armenians experience a lack of

²⁷³ Jack Cook, “Armenians meet varied reception in Glendale,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 15, 1982.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

discrimination” because they live in more “liberal cities.”²⁷⁵ No matter Shirvanian’s insistence that Armenians were not subject to discrimination, during the Iranian hostage crisis, an announcement was posted on the Glendale Community college campus about a “TransAms for Sale,” asking for people to “ ‘Attend a benefit to raise money for Armenians to take a boat trip home....The money raised will get rid of smelly Armenians.’ ”²⁷⁶

Although most columns and letters to newspapers featured xenophobic rhetoric directed at Armenians and other newcomers, there were exceptions. In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, Lavinia Limon, the Executive Director of the International Institute of Los Angeles, thanked the newspaper for “pointing out the problems [that the Los Angeles] community face[d] in helping immigrants from Soviet Armenia.”²⁷⁷ She continued that Los Angeles “should be welcoming these newcomers with open arms,” yet instead, the community is “scrambling for means” to support Armenians.²⁷⁸ Limon encouraged readers, “especially those...whose families once migrated,” to the US to “show our new neighbors that they, too, belong.”²⁷⁹

Further, Carroll “Mr.Glendale” Parcher, the son of Wilmot Parcher, the first mayor of Glendale elected in 1906, also penned letters empathizing with the struggles of Armenians.²⁸⁰ In 1977, Carroll Parcher was elected as Glendale’s 35th mayor, serving four terms spanning almost a decade.²⁸¹ A *Los Angeles Times* article announced his retirement as Mayor on January 10, 1985, stating that his departure “end[s] 40 years of wielding power,” as Parcher had been a publisher for the *Glendale News-Press*, retiring in 1972, as well as a councilmember in the city

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Lavinia Limon, “Immigrants,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1988.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Martha Willman, “Parcher Says He Will Retire as Mayor at End of Term,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1985.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

of Glendale before his election as Mayor.²⁸² After his retirement, Parcher contributed to the *Glendale News-Press* through his long-running “In My Opinion” segment.²⁸³ When the Armenian community of Los Angeles County held protests in early 1988 at Los Angeles City Hall in support of Soviet Armenians and Karabakh Armenians, Parcher praised the protests. Parcher noted that Armenians, “experts in many fields, [were] especially good at protest marches and demonstrations,” citing that “Armenians scattered throughout...the world...found cohesion in gathering together in demonstrations of solidarity no matter how distant” from Soviet Armenia.²⁸⁴ He mentioned that “six busloads of [Armenians] from Glendale” marched at the demonstrations in Pershing Square.²⁸⁵ After a concise background explaining the historical circumstances that led Armenians in the USSR and diaspora to protest, he finished by wishing Soviet Armenians “and Armenians from Glendale who marched in their support, success.”²⁸⁶

At the time, the discourse surrounding Armenians and the Armenian Genocide were tinged with xenophobic judgment. In a Letter to the Editor titled “I am an American and proud to be one,” Rose Green of La Crescenta criticized the Burbank *Leader* for “continue[ing] to place pictures and articles on peoples who seem to forget this is America?”²⁸⁷ Green continued her diatribe, “Now you have the Armenians...who teach their young to hate and never forget,” – in reference to ongoing efforts of Armenian Genocide awareness and recognition.²⁸⁸ Green continued by urging for Father Anoushavan Artinian of the St. Mary’s Armenian Church in Glendale and “others like [Artinian] to go “back to [their] so-called land.”²⁸⁹ Carroll Parcher,

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Carrol Parcher, “In My Opinion: Good luck in protest to Armenians in Glendale and worldwide,” *Glendale News-Press*, March 22, 1988.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Rose Green, “I am an American and proud to be one,” *The Leader*, April 24, 1985.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

however, took a different approach to understand why Armenians commemorated the 1915 Genocide. In April 1988, in his “In My Opinion...” segment, Parcher patiently explored the history before and after the Genocide, saying that a “long history of persecution, division, and unrest” makes it only “natural that [Armenians] want their succeeding generations to remember their origins and their history.”²⁹⁰

Allen Brandstater, a Glendale resident who also had a reoccurring column in the *Glendale News-Press*, wrote that “reasonable and caring people sympathize with foreigners” and demonstrated said care and sympathy by analogizing Armenians and other “foreigners” to animals.²⁹¹ He wrote, “this is the land of opportunity, not a feeding trough.”²⁹² Brandstater continued, asserting that he recognized that Glendale was becoming more multicultural, but he was not “willing to forsake the values, attitudes, customs, and religion [he grew] up with” and that he felt “anger and hostility” towards his “community being engulfed by cultural mongrelization.”²⁹³ His complaints evidencing this “mongrelization” included; bad drivers, long wait times at stores, unruly shoppers who used carts as “ballistic missiles,” utility company representatives who did not meet his standards of English proficiency, and an experience wherein he berated two teenage bicyclists who had occupied too much of the driving lane.²⁹⁴ He was further bothered by the subsidized housing in Glendale, “eighty languages spoken in schools,” and “hundreds of people lining up for welfare checks every two weeks.”²⁹⁵ Brandstater

²⁹⁰ Carrol Parcher “In My Opinion: Armenians want to remember history and learn from it,” *Glendale News-Press*, April 22, 1988.

²⁹¹ Allen Brandstater, “Rocking Glendale’s cultural boat: America is a land of opportunity, not a feeding trough,” *Glendale News-Press*, June 21, 1989.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

concluded by reaffirming his hostility, writing, “I’m part of a minority... a minority that is white, Anglo-Saxon, respects police officers, waits my turn in line, and speaks English.”²⁹⁶

By the end of 1989, a *Los Angeles Daily News* article reported that the “number of racially motivated crimes against Glendale residents of Armenian descent increased sharply.”²⁹⁷ Agent Chris Loop who compiled statistics on hate crimes for the Glendale Police Department reported that four of six reported hate crimes in 1989 were against Armenians.²⁹⁸ On March 17, 1989, Glendale police reported that two Armenian adults and an Armenian child were attacked by 15 high school students at Brand Park.²⁹⁹ The attack ended with one of the Armenian adults being “forced to offer apologies to his attacker and kiss his attacker's feet,” whereafter he was kicked in the mouth.³⁰⁰ Principal Terry Dutton of Columbus Elementary School also confirmed that he had “noticed a slight increase in the use of racial slurs” and that “somewhere in the community, they are hearing that and repeating it.”³⁰¹

In May 1989, Armenian newspaper publishers in Glendale began to receive telephone threats. Harut Sassounian of the *California Courier* told police that an anonymous caller threatened him and his family.³⁰² Apo Boghigian, the publisher of *Asbarez*, similarly reported receiving telephone threats.³⁰³ On January 3, 1990, a police report featured in the *Glendale News-Press*, discussed that a “42-year-old Glendale man may have been a victim of racism.”³⁰⁴

The report detailed how an Armenian man discovered that someone had deflated his tires “and

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Marilyn Martinez, “Armenians see rise in hate attacks,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, November 5, 1989.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² “Police Report: Armenian publishers report telephone threats,” *Glendale News-Press*, May 10, 1989. Please note that this article misspelled Harut Sassounian’s first name as ‘Harout.’

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

left him a note telling him to go back to Armenia.”³⁰⁵ The next day the *Glendale News-Press* featured another police report which detailed that unknown suspects had thrown rocks and “broke[n] three windows at the offices of the Armenian Relief Society,” an Armenian philanthropic organization that provided crucial aid to Armenian newcomers.³⁰⁶ In June 1990, “racist graffiti against Armenians” was discovered “displayed on the westbound onramp sign on the Ventura Freeway.”³⁰⁷ However, police did not “consider [it] a hate crime because it was not directed at a specific individual.”³⁰⁸

Although Armenians continued to face discrimination, Chris Loop of the Glendale Police Department told the *Glendale News-Press* that “Armenian immigrants [had] shifted from the role of victim in 1989 to attacker in 1990.”³⁰⁹ In 1989, “six of the eight crimes in Glendale were committed against Armenians,” but in 1990, there were three hate crimes committed by Armenians, with “two Armenian juveniles accused of two of three hate crimes.”³¹⁰ In another *Glendale News-Press* article, Agent Loop discussed that the third hate crime committed by an adult Armenian was a “rare incident.”³¹¹ The hate crime was primarily committed by Krist Mardirossian, who was 31 years of age, although there were other men involved in the incident.³¹² Mardirossian “assaulted and spewed racial slurs” at a Black man during a driving dispute.³¹³ Incidents of racially motivated discrimination perpetrated by Armenians were featured in many articles. The *Glendale News-Press* closely followed the Mardirossian case; his plea, pre-trial, and trial in greater detail than any other racially motivated incident at the time.

³⁰⁵ “Police Report: Tires deflated, note left,” *Glendale News-Press*, January 3, 1990.

³⁰⁶ “Police Report: Three windows broken,” *Glendale News-Press*, January 4, 1990

³⁰⁷ “Police Report: More racist graffiti found,” *Glendale News-Press*, June 8, 1990.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Jennifer Burry, “Is it really hate?” *Glendale News-Press*, May 16, 1990.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Judy Shay, “DA files first hate-crime case this year,” *Glendale News-Press*, March 29, 1990.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Burry, “Is it really hate?” Mardirossian’s surname is spelled incorrectly as Mardirusian in this article.

Although many hate crimes, including other racially motivated verbal and physical attacks and threats, continued to affect the diverse Armenian community, Armenians were pointedly singled out in many articles.³¹⁴

In a Letter to the *Glendale News-Press*, V. Spicer of Glendale asked, “Why is it that when some wrongdoing occurs, it is always reported by ethnicity?”³¹⁵ Spicer said that “mentioning ethnicity is unnecessary,” and “anyone could” carry out certain actions – referring to an article that pointedly mentioned that an Armenian man assaulted a nursing home worker.³¹⁶ Spicer insisted that the incident “has nothing to do with ethnic background...But the News Press stated that it was a 66-year-old ARMENIAN man.”³¹⁷ Spicer continued, “We don’t see American names categorized such as ‘Smith from German descent’ or... ‘Jones, whose parents were French,” and that “Every time [Spicer] pick[ed] up the paper, the word ‘Armenian’ [was] there.”³¹⁸ It is likely that the *Glendale News-Press* was overemphasizing ethnicity in their reports; however, that does not negate the fact that Armenians, new to a multi-racial state with a racialized history rooted in Genocide and chattel slavery, and indoctrinated with the Soviet Union’s conception of race, were participating in racial antagonism against other vulnerable groups.

It seems that newcomers were also subject to judgment and scrutiny from members of the Armenian community. Dickran Tevrizian was born in Los Angeles in 1940 to Armenian parents, served as the Los Angeles County Superior court judge from 1978 to 1982, and was later

³¹⁴ Shay, “DA Files.”

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

nominated by Ronald Regan for the US District Court for the Central District of California.³¹⁹ Tevrizian became enraged when the city of Pasadena moved to include Armenians “in the city’s affirmative action ordinance.”³²⁰ Pasadena’s Armenian population had doubled between 1980 and 1985, by “roughly 8,000 people...chiefly from Beirut.”³²¹ According to the article, newcomers, as well as the emboldened political clout of Armenians, largely driven by the Armenian National Committee (ANCA), were “not greeted with universal acclaim in the Armenian community,” as evidenced by Tevrizian’s actions.³²² During a talk given by Tevrizian to a group of Armenian newcomers in Pasadena, a “nationalistic” Armenian man asserted that Tevrizian “didn’t understand [newcomers’] problems” and that Tevrizian “was only Armenian by virtue of eating shish kebab.”³²³ Tevrizian responded to the comment by “taking out [his] wallet and offer[ing],” the newcomer money “to return to the Middle East.”³²⁴ Apparently, according to previously settled Armenians already generations in the US, the newly arrived Armenian refugees and migrants receiving critical aid “sull[ied] [the] positive image burnished by years of hard work and modest behavior.”³²⁵ Armenians who did not possess wealth or capital, like the Karayan’s, were subject to a double hindrance in living in the US, as Armenians with established lives and resources attempted to impede newcomers’ access to aid. As evidenced, both the migration of Armenians, as well as the reception of “Americans” to different waves of Armenian migration, changed throughout the twentieth century. Ironically, some newcomers would harbor

³¹⁹ Mark Arax, “Pasadena Armenian Immigrants, New and Old, Gain Political Clout and Recognition as their Populations in City Soars,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1985.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

similar judgmental attitudes toward Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants within years to come.

In the next few years, the numbers of Armenians grew as the newcomers acclimated to life in the US, and the Armenian community solidified itself within Los Angeles County. Armenian institutions, either created or revitalized by newcomers, started to possess increasing social and political power and, therefore, showed up more and more in US media. The Los Angeles-based Armenian institutions invoked the most in newspapers and media were the ARF; the Armenian Relief Society of Western USA (ARS), which was affiliated with the ARF, handled relief, charity work, and philanthropy; and the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF), the ARF's youth division – all of which were strongly (and at times violently) opposed to Soviet Armenia.³²⁶ As previously mentioned, Soviet rule and Soviet Armenia were a huge point of contention for those affiliated with the ARF, as the ARF was expelled from Armenia– from 1918 until 1920, the first independent Republic of Armenia was established and run primarily by the ARF – when the Red Army entered, and Armenia was subsumed into the Soviet Union. During the Soviet takeover of Armenia, many ARF members were arrested, killed, or exiled. Some ARF members, as well as civilians who either sympathized with the ARF cause or wanted to avoid Sovietization, escaped into the mountains of Syunik (Zangezur), fleeing into Iran and dispersing throughout the Middle East and on.

Among the “Armenian nationalist leadership” were a “broken refugee population” who had a steadfast religious identity but were initially lacking in political consciousness and

³²⁶ “Slain in 187th st. church; Assassins Swarm About Armenian Prelate and Stab Him,” *New York Times*, December 25, 1933. In 1933, an Armenian priest was brutally assassinated via stabbing in full view of a church congregation by members of the ARF who condemned and opposed the priest's “support” of Soviet Armenia.

Armenian language skills.³²⁷ Armenian political and revolutionary parties, especially the ARF, stepped up to fill the power vacuum created by the rejection of Soviet Armenian authority and the “stateless” existence of the Armenian diaspora.³²⁸ By the 1930s, the ARF had, especially the ARF in Lebanon, “asserted itself as the hegemonic party” within the diaspora and so ensued “an intensive propaganda campaign” which focused on instilling the diaspora with the ideals of ARF nationalism and socialism through education, language, and ideology.³²⁹ The Armenian diaspora in the Middle East, particularly the population in Lebanon who were primarily affiliated with the ARF or other nationalist parties, set the definition and “ ‘standard’ by which identity was measured throughout the post-Genocide diaspora (outside the USSR).”³³⁰

Further, diaspora populations’ generally poor experiences upon their “repatriation” to Soviet Armenia during Soviet repatriation campaigns in the early and mid-twentieth century added to tension and distrust between diaspora Armenians and Soviet Armenians. There existed ideological differences as well as rivalry and competition over the political leadership of the Armenian world – both Armenia and the diaspora. It is essential to understand that although Soviet Armenia existed as an official state, the ARF and other political organizations were vying for the control of the equally large (if not larger) “stateless” Armenian population within the diaspora.³³¹ Thus, Soviet Armenia and the diaspora at large, specifically the diaspora invested in gaining political control via Armenian political parties and organizations, diverged in terms of their Armenian national identity and their experiences, as they had been long separated by not only the Iron Curtain but long-established and nuanced political and leadership differences.³³²

³²⁷ Panossian, *The Armenians*, 294.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid., 295.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Tölölyan, “Elites and Institutions,” 107-136.

³³² Ibid.

Association with and support for Soviet Armenia was a great point of contention for diasporic Armenian communities. Substantial action-based and even symbolic support for Soviet Armenia and Armenians living in the Soviet Union was all but ignored by the diaspora until the late 1980s when the striving for independence, the devastating earthquake, and the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh became a reality. It is no coincidence that the largely anti-Soviet diaspora led by mostly anti-Soviet diaspora political organizations was interested in supporting Armenia once the possibility of Soviet Armenian independence became a reality – no matter how far away it may have seemed at the time. The Armenian nationalist movement and the possibility of secession from the Soviet Union invigorated diaspora support, and both independence and the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh became a unifying factor for Armenia-diaspora relations. Until the late 1980s, as strife escalated in the Soviet Union, most mentions of Armenians in Southern California-based newspapers revolved around Armenians commemorating and advocating for genocide recognition, with some articles interviewing Armenians from the Middle East. It was rare to see more than a cursory mention of Soviet Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh, if at all. This separation would not disappear even though great strides were taken to “unify” Soviet Armenia and the diaspora.

Diaspora Mobilization and the Reopening of Armenia-Diaspora Relations

As the US grappled with Cold War politics and the resulting stream of Soviet refugees and migrants, the instability in Soviet Armenia and neighboring Nagorno-Karabakh continued, precipitating a response from the diaspora. Contestation for Soviet rule and Soviet Armenia and inter-diaspora conflict were set aside for the rising threat against Soviet Armenians and Nagorno-Karabakh. Different diaspora political organizations metaphorically and physically came

together under one roof to discuss how they could support Soviet Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.³³³ There was a proverbial crack in the Iron Curtain which, up until the late 1980s, physically, ideologically, and metaphorically separated Armenia and the diaspora at large. Thus, began diaspora mobilization to aid the people of Armenia. Armenians in the diaspora responded with protests, petitions, and appeals for international support for Nagorno-Karabakh and Soviet Armenia.³³⁴ The developing conflicts in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh served as a unifying factor both for Armenia-diaspora relations and within diaspora relations, mobilizing various groups of Armenians. An article published on March 14, 1988, asserts that the “possible reunification of Soviet Armenia” with Nagorno-Karabakh, “after more than 60 years, has galvanized” Los Angeles County’s Armenian community – “uniting those of different cultural and political backgrounds.”³³⁵

The Armenian community in Southern California specifically – which at the time either consisted of those who had been settled in the US for decades or Armenians who had migrated to Southern California from the Middle East within the last decade due to the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Lebanese Civil War – started organizing protests in solidarity with the peoples of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.³³⁶ New institutions and nonprofits were created to aid Soviet Armenians, and existing institutions like the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (with its different branches; ANCA, ARS, AYP, etc.), the Armenian Assembly of America, and other prominent organizations mobilized. Further, Armenians unaffiliated with existing institutions or

³³³ Judy Shay, "Armenian groups combine forces," *Glendale News-Press*, January 27, 1990.

³³⁴ Rijkov, "A Brief Historical Survey," 171.

³³⁵ Laura Bleiberg, "5,000 join protest for Armenian homeland," *Glendale News-Press*, March 14, 1988.

³³⁶ Agnes Schipper, "Glendale's new residents escape from the Middle East," *Glendale News-Press*, August 28, 1976.

political parties also joined the mass mobilization in Los Angeles County and throughout the diaspora.

On February 26, 1988, “hundreds of Glendale teens” who attended the Rose and Alex Pilibos Armenian School in Hollywood organized and took part in all-day demonstrations, waving “flags of red, orange, and blue [and] singing nationalist songs.”³³⁷ Apo Boghigian, the editor of *Asbarez* (an ARF-affiliated newspaper), told the *Glendale New-Press* that “the people believe that under [glasnost], justice will be done” and that “the return of Karabagh is long overdue.”³³⁸ In a statement released in Washington, D.C., the ANCA “express[ed] their deep resentment at the shocking indifference and calculated silence imposed,” by the USSR on the plight of Karabakh Armenians.³³⁹

A February 1988 *Los Angeles Daily News* article recounted that “Armenians living in the San Fernando Valley...are rallying from afar in support of Armenian nationalists,” protesting in the Soviet Union.³⁴⁰ The article estimated that “about 20,000 Armenians live in the valley” and that the “local community [and] leaders of three Valley churches with predominantly Armenian congregations” supported Soviet Armenian protests.³⁴¹ Hratch Tchilingarian, a pastor assistant for St. Peters’s Armenian Apostolic Faith Church in Van Nuys, declared, “Armenians are always ready to fight for justice.”³⁴² Lorig Titizian confirmed that the ANCA “expect[ed] 10,000 locals to demonstrate” the next day in Hollywood.³⁴³ Gabriel Inejikian, the principal of the “first

³³⁷ Wirtschafter, “Armenian teens.” The tri-color flag referenced in the article was the flag used by the First Republic of Armenia (1918-1920), which was primarily led by the ARF. Soviet Armenia adopted a different flag during its time in the USSR. However, the Second Republic of Armenia (1991-present) adopted the tri-colored red, blue, and orange flag after gaining independence.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Michael Szymanski, “Valley Armenians rallying to cause of Soviet protestors,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, February 27, 1988.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

Armenia[n] school in the country” – Holy Martyrs Cabayan Elementary & Ferrahian High School – confirmed that “our children and our families” will be at the protest.³⁴⁴ Second generation Armenian American, Pastor Steve Muncherian of the United Armenian Congregational Church in Studio City, supported Soviet Armenians and affirmed his “interest in [Armenian] culture.”³⁴⁵ Muncherian noted that he “would probably remain in the United States even if an independent Armenia was formed.”³⁴⁶ By March of 1988, consistent protests were organized by the Armenians of Los Angeles County. In one such protest, an “estimated ...5,000 people marched from downtown Los Angeles’s Pershing Square to City Hall,” and interviews revealed the ardent belief among protesters that their participation “from Beirut to Paris will have an impact on the Soviet Union’s Mikhail Gorbachev.”³⁴⁷ A June 1988 protest, “organized by the Western Region of the Armenian National Committee,” drew an estimated 3,500 people.³⁴⁸ Vahig Kabakian, a 48-year-old Glendale resident, told the *Los Angeles Daily News* that the protest was “the least [the Armenian community] could do for the people of Karabakh who [had] been struggling for months.”³⁴⁹

When the devastating December 1988 earthquake struck Northern Armenia in the dead of winter, diaspora mobilization intensified – fundraising efforts, supplies, and even diasporan volunteers, including doctors, engineers, and historians, made their way to Soviet Armenia in humanitarian efforts.³⁵⁰ The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of the US Agency for International Development sponsored flights, specifically three planes carrying personnel and

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Laura Bleiberg, “5,000 join protest.”

³⁴⁸ Laura Flores, “Rally backs Armenian unification,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, June 27, 1988.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Dale Hoppert, “Engineers to study Armenian buildings,” *Glendale News-Press*, March 25, 1989.

aid, to Soviet Armenia.³⁵¹ The first flight on December 10 marked the “first official U.S. aid effort for the Soviet Union since the end of World War II” and carried two Armenian American physicians from Glendale and Orange County.³⁵² Once they returned, Dr. Vartkes Najarian and Dr. Garo Terzagian, who were also the directors of a four-year-old nonprofit called Medical Outreach for Soviet Armenians, held an event on December 18, 1988, at a local Glendale school auditorium to inform and update “more than 2,500 Los Angeles area Armenians,” about the conditions of Soviet Armenia and those impacted by the earthquake.³⁵³ During the event, audience members compared the earthquake’s devastation “again and again...to what is the greatest measure of tragedy for the Armenian people – the Turkish massacres of 1915.”³⁵⁴ Terzagian told the crowd, “as I flew over our homeland in a helicopter, it was as if I were witnessing the genocide again,” while Najarian “urged the audience to help repopulate their homeland.”³⁵⁵

However, it seems that the report by the two physicians “did not satisfy many local Armenians,” and so “three leaders of the local Armenian community” in Los Angeles County took it upon themselves to visit Soviet Armenia to assess the progress.³⁵⁶ Rubina Perroomian of the ANCA told the *Los Angeles Daily News* that “we” – meaning the ANCA (the lobbying branch of the ARF) and other politically affiliated organizations that distrusted the Soviet Union – were skeptical of official Soviet reports.³⁵⁷ Perroomian also noted that “local Armenians” did not trust information “through the media and Soviet government officials.”³⁵⁸ The three leaders

³⁵¹ Esther Schrader, “2 Doctors Tell 2,500 Here of Armenia Visit,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1988.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Jill Schwartz, “Local activists visit quake site: Leaders of Glendale’s Armenian community skeptical of Soviet reports on relief,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, December 22, 1988.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid. Please note that the article misspelled Apo Boghigian’s name as ‘Abo Boghijian.’

were Apo Boghigian, the editor of the *Azbarez* newspaper in Glendale, Vahik Gourgian, the director of the Armenian Center in Glendale, and Hasmik Derderian, a representative of the Armenian Relief Society.³⁵⁹ This article demonstrates the increasing interest and relations towards Soviet Armenia among the ARF, and its affiliated organizations and community, who had directly opposed and boycotted Soviet Armenia throughout the twentieth century. Within two short weeks after the December 7 earthquake, local Armenian organizations fundraised nearly \$3 million, and several tons of medical supplies, equipment, and aid, were placed on planes headed to Armenia.³⁶⁰

An article published in the *Armenian Assembly of America Journal* detailed how East Coast “metropolitan-area Armenians offer[ed] interpretation, words of consolation and encouragement, and [bore] gifts” for the “15 severely wounded” Soviet Armenians being held at New York’s Hospital for Joint Diseases Orthopaedic Institute.³⁶¹ In a September 1989 letter sent to potential diaspora Armenian donors, Hirair Hovnanian, the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Armenian Assembly of America Relief Fund, Inc., updated constituents on how donated money had been used.³⁶² The letter details how the Armenian Assembly was “granted unprecedented permission by Armenian officials” to open a relief office in Yerevan, Armenia, and that the Armenian Assembly successfully “signed the first agreement with the Soviet Armenian government” to pursue reconstruction.³⁶³ The letter continued by asking that “concerned Americans like yourself” can contribute to “bring new hope to the thousands of

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ “Supplies leave LAX for Armenia,” *Glendale News-Press*, December 4, 1989.

³⁶¹ Florence Avakian, “East Coast Armenians Open Hearts, Hands to Quake Victims,” *Armenian Assembly of America Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 1-8.

³⁶² Hirair Hovnanian, “Letter to Donor,” *Armenian Assembly of America*, September 1989.

³⁶³ Ibid.

survivors” of the 1988 earthquake “who are trying to rebuild their lives.”³⁶⁴ Outside of large organizations, Armenian community members like Viken Ghanimian, who canceled his wedding and “donated a portion of the money he would have spent to the earthquake relief effort,” contributed what they could to aid Soviet Armenians affected by the earthquake.³⁶⁵

The Los Angeles Armenian community continued their protests. One such demonstration focused on protesting the Soviet Red Army Chorus and dance ensemble performing in Los Angeles. A Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) official “admitted that police were unprepared for the massive opening night protest,” although they had prior warning through preliminary intelligence reports.³⁶⁶ Commander Ernest Curtsinger of the LAPD South Bureau told the *Los Angeles Times* they anticipated a “smaller demonstration of...no more than 200 people.”³⁶⁷ Harut Sassounian told the *Times* that the Armenian community was “not targeting the American public...not even the Red Army performers.”³⁶⁸ Instead, the protests were “trying to send a message to Moscow,” although the “musical inconvenience” was nothing compared to “our brothers being shot in the homeland.”³⁶⁹ Krikor Naccachian, a member of the ARF who organized a community meeting in 1990 to discuss the ongoing war in Nagorno-Karabakh, said that “it took these last couple of disasters to bring organizations together to foster greater communication and cooperation between Armenia and the “diaspora” (Armenians spread throughout the world).”³⁷⁰ However, diaspora support of Soviet Armenia proved to be conditional.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Tamar Manjikian, “Sustaining the Armenian Quake Relief Effort,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1989.

³⁶⁶ Darrel Dawsey and Beth Kleid, “Protestors Again March Against Red Army Show,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1989.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ “Local Armenians clamor for news on the fighting,” *Glendale News-Press*, January 19, 1990.

Armenians from Los Angeles County signed petitions, raised funds, and protested the government for aid. However, their support for Soviet Armenia had a limit as Armenian diaspora had a budding opposition to the migration of Soviet Armenians to the United States. As early as March 1988, a month into the start of First Nagorno-Karabakh and months before the devastating earthquake in Northern Armenia, Armenians of Southern California expressed their disapproval for the anticipated Soviet Armenian influx. Lorig Titizian of the ANCA said, “we do not encourage people to leave Soviet Armenia because they are leaving their homeland.”³⁷¹ The head of the “Lebanon-based wing of the Armenian Apostolic Church,” Karekin II, “applaud[ed the] U.S. decision to stop issuing refugee visas to Soviet” Armenians and was “quite happy that the U.S. policy was being reviewed,” as he believed Armenians should not be permitted to leave their ‘motherland.’”³⁷² Ironically, Karekin II would himself “[run] into a bureaucratic stonewall” when “he sought a visa to visit his mother in Canada,” in July of 1988.³⁷³ The ANCA contacted Nareg Keshishian, a field deputy for Senator David Roberti, to “intervene on the pontiff’s behalf,” and “help get a visa for the Catholicos.”³⁷⁴ Canadian Consul General Joan Winser responded, “We don’t look at titles...If you are from Lebanon, you need a visa to come to our country.”³⁷⁵ M.G. Benoit, the head of the Canadian consulate’s immigration office, bypassed the in-person request required for a visa and granted Karekin II his visa.³⁷⁶ Keshishian told the *Los Angeles Daily News* that Karekin II “had never had a misunderstanding like this and couldn’t understand the problem.”³⁷⁷ Winser astutely concluded that “it’s not what you know, it’s about

³⁷¹ Laura Bleiberg, “Armenian influx from homeland disturbs leaders,” *Glendale News-Press*, March 31, 1988. Please note that the original article misspelled the name of Lorig Titizian.

³⁷² Laura Flores, “Karekin II backs moratorium on refugee visas for Soviets,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, July 13, 1988.

³⁷³ Laura Flores “Karekin II becomes versed in visa snarls,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, July 14, 1988.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

who you know.”³⁷⁸ Unfortunately, Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants did not harbor such privilege while attempting to migrate to (or even visit) North America. Countless other diaspora Armenians cited fears of Soviet Armenia becoming depopulated and a desire to preserve Armenian culture as reasons why they opposed the US giving refugee status and aid to Soviet Armenians.

Harut Sassounian, the editor for an independent [but quite nationalist] Armenian newspaper, expressed understanding for Armenians trying to leave “war-torn Iran and totalitarian governments” like the Soviet Union; however, he did not want to see “[the US] aid their departure.”³⁷⁹ Sassounian “roundly condemn[ed] the president and Secretary of State George Schultz for trying to raise the number [of Soviet Armenians] allowed” to enter the US.³⁸⁰ He continued by saying, “if [the president and Secretary of State George Schultz] were really friends of the Armenians, they would have supported a commemorative bill in the Congress that would have designated April 24 as a memorial for the Armenians killed 73 years ago.”³⁸¹ Sassounian continued his urgent indignation towards the US decision to allow Soviet Armenian migration by comparing it to the 1915 Genocide.³⁸² He finished by claiming that “what the Turks tried to accomplish in 1915, through massacres, is what Reagan and Shultz are pursuing through different, albeit more subtle means.”³⁸³

Primary sources evidence that the Armenian diaspora of Los Angeles County, particularly those affiliated with the ARF, was invigorated by the potential of Soviet Armenia

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Laura Bleiberg, “Why Armenian-Americans oppose mass exodus from the Soviet Union,” *Glendale News-Press*, April 5, 1988.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

gaining independence from the USSR. The sudden rush of mobilization for Soviet Armenians was likely due to the increasing likelihood that the ARF could further pursue nationalist goals of gaining more control in Armenia, and potentially unifying Eastern and Western Armenia, which remains a major goal for the political party. The devastation experienced by Soviet Armenians reopened the fear of Genocide and ethnic cleansing that had plagued Armenians since the Ottoman Genocide. While the Armenians of Los Angeles County, whether affiliated or unaffiliated with nationalist political parties, mobilized to aid Soviet Armenia's, most supported the US halting Armenian migration and revoking Armenian refugee status – directly backing policies that led to hardship for Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees.

Mass Migration of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians

Regardless of the opposition by diaspora leaders to Soviet Armenian migration, the United States had already accepted thousands of Soviet Armenians, many of whom settled in Los Angeles County. A 1988 report estimated 85 percent of Armenians entering the United States settled in Los Angeles County— primarily Hollywood and Glendale – stating that “the Armenian immigration would be the largest influx of an ethnic refugee group to Los Angeles County since the resettlement of Vietnamese ‘boat people’ in the late 1970s.”³⁸⁴ Even though the US had seen many waves of migration from migrants and refugees worldwide, it was still seemingly unprepared to receive and accommodate Soviet Armenian migration.

According to the 2000 Census, 385,488 Armenians lived in the US, which showed exponential growth since 1990 (308,096) and 1980 (212,621).³⁸⁵ Of the total population in the

³⁸⁴ Esther Schrader, “The Melting Pot: Schools Reeling from Influx of Armenians,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1988.

³⁸⁵ Jerry Wong, “The Armenian Population,” *US Census Bureau*, 2000.

US, 204,631 Armenians lived in California, with the number growing between 1990 (151,340) and 1980 (66,264).³⁸⁶ In 2000 the total population of Armenians that lived in Los Angeles was 152,910, with the population increasing from 1990 (105,333).³⁸⁷ The growth rate of the Armenian population in Los Angeles County between 1990 and 2000 was 45.2%.³⁸⁸ The Armenian population in Glendale grew from 31,402 to 53,840 between 1990 and 2000.³⁸⁹ By 2000, “persons of Armenian ancestry” in Glendale accounted for 35.2% of all Armenians in Los Angeles County, 26.3% of all Armenians in California, and 13.9% in the United States.³⁹⁰

In 1989, officials in Glendale estimated that there were “at least 35,000 Armenians in the city.”³⁹¹ The Armenian population in Glendale grew from 31,402 to 53,840 between 1990 and 2000, with a growth rate of 71.5%.³⁹² The mass migration of Soviet Armenians to Los Angeles County led to housing issues as cities scrambled to accommodate newcomers. The impact of new Armenian migrants could be seen in the increase of subsidized housing assistance applications provided by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development that Glendale experienced in 1989.³⁹³ In 1989, city officials utilized two Glendale recreation centers, in Sparr Heights and at Maple Park, to pass out subsidized housing applications for “elderly, disabled, and low-income residents.”³⁹⁴ Both centers were “besieged” with around 400 applications, yet “fewer than 125 housing units [were] expected to become available during the next year.”³⁹⁵ It was later

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Alexander Donnel, “Police Called as Immigrants Seeking Aid Jam Centers,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1989.

³⁹² Wong, “The Armenian Population.”

³⁹³ Alexander Donnel, “Housing Scramble Shows Armenian Community Needs,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1989.

³⁹⁴ Marla Jo Fisher, “3,000 line up to get on waiting list,” *Glendale News-Press*, June 13, 1989.

³⁹⁵ Donnel, “Police Called.”

confirmed by the Community Development and Housing Department that 916 subsidized rental units would be available due to the recent increase in housing money allotted to cities.”³⁹⁶ The number of applicants, however, surpassed 3,000, and the waiting list exceeded 2,000.³⁹⁷ Whether intentional or not, this clearly illustrated the housing scarcity in Glendale at the time.³⁹⁸

A *Glendale News-Press* article that primarily focused on the Sparr Heights location noted that the rush of applications meant that those “on the city’s waiting list for rental subsidies won’t get the help they are eligible for until 1992.”³⁹⁹ Subsequent reports estimated that most rentals would not be “available for as long as five years.”⁴⁰⁰ The unpreparedness of the US, as well as the anxieties of Soviet Armenians for subsistence, were palpable at the Maple Park location in particular, wherein the Glendale Police Department and Glendale paramedics were called to “restore order” as hundreds of Armenian immigrants and refugees reportedly stormed the recreation center amid rumors of housing being on a first-come basis.⁴⁰¹ Sonia Zinzalian, a social worker affiliated with the Armenian Relief Society (the philanthropic branch of the ARF), explained to the *Los Angeles Times* that Soviet Armenians were under the impression that being at the end of a line meant they would not receive anything as that was the norm, “in their country.”⁴⁰² This incident made apparent the scarcity mindset in which Soviet migrants were functioning as well as how ill-equipped Los Angeles County was in supporting a population they did not understand.

³⁹⁶ Donnel, “Housing Scramble.”

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Donnel, “Police Called.”

³⁹⁹ Fisher, “3,000 line up.”

⁴⁰⁰ Donnel, “Housing Scramble.”

⁴⁰¹ Donnel, “Police Called.”

⁴⁰² Ibid.

A follow-up article ruminated that there was “an immediate and growing need for housing in Glendale” and that “the would-be recipients don’t hail from the city,” referring to the growing Armenian population and other newcomers.⁴⁰³ According to Los Angeles County’s refugee coordinator Joan Pinchuk, “an average of 2,000 Soviet Armenians a month [had been] settl[ing] in Southern California, most in Glendale and Hollywood” since the Soviet Union had softened its emigration policies as of October 1987.⁴⁰⁴ By 1988, a moratorium was implemented on apartment and condominium construction in Glendale.⁴⁰⁵ Two years later, in a 1990 *Glendale News-Press* article, Pinchuk expressed her “increasing concern about the numbers of Soviet immigrants flooding into Glendale and Hollywood.”⁴⁰⁶ Glendale took steps to limit and “stop the rampant population growth” that had led to “overcrowded schools” and “clogged streets in South Glendale” as “Soviet Armenian refugees continued to flock” to the city.⁴⁰⁷ City officials had “temporarily” stopped the construction of apartments in Glendale and planned to cut the number of housing units being built.⁴⁰⁸ The article continued to single out Armenians, noting that recent studies had found “35 percent of Glendale’s apartment- and condo- dwellers [were] of Middle Eastern or Armenian extraction,” even comparing the average number of Middle Eastern and Armenian persons residing in an apartment to the average number of “Anglo extraction.”⁴⁰⁹ Pinchuk mentioned that Armenians’ lack of refugee status and their designation as humanitarian parolees were the “biggest problem,” leading the city to go to great lengths to stop Armenians from accessing housing in Glendale.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰³ Donnel, “Housing Scramble.”

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Laurence Darmiento, “Consultants comments raise ire,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, November 4, 1990.

⁴⁰⁶ Marla Jo Fisher, “City’s plans may not deter immigration,” *Glendale News-Press*, February 5, 1990.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

By the end of 1990, the city of Glendale received some pushback from the Armenian community as a result of comments made by a Glendale city consultant J. Lawrence Mintier, who had justified a city-wide moratorium on apartment and housing construction by saying that “ethnic groups occupying the newer, multifamily units” – namely Armenians – “have a cultural tendency to use city park facilities in greater proportions than the population citywide,” which had “created more vandalism...litter...and misuse of alcohol.”⁴¹¹ However, Mintier confirmed that there was no formal data or evidence to substantiate his declarations, even though his uncorroborated comments had been used to justify and defend the city’s moratorium on apartment and condominium housing.⁴¹² Considering Soviet Armenians were the population that began to settle in Los Angeles County in inordinate numbers by 1988, it is apparent that the moratorium, as well as attempts to deny accessible housing, may be considered as targeted discrimination of Armenians, in particular Soviet Armenians. In 1993, the federal government’s Fair Housing Enforcement Branch opened an investigation into claims by a Glendale couple who claimed they were fired as managers for an apartment building for “fail[ing] to obey instructions not to rent to Armenians and Koreans.” The Ellison family, the owners of the apartment building, denied the claim.⁴¹³ The alleged grievances against the apartment building owners reflect tensions around Armenian migration. Whether this particular landlord made such discriminatory comments, it is clear that some Glendale residents reflected the city’s disdain for Armenian migration.

A 1984 *Los Angeles Times* article asserted that “a walk through [Glendale Community College’s] campus is an international experience,” with “small clusters of students,” speaking

⁴¹¹ Darmiento, “Consultants comments.”

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Judy Shay, “Housing bias allegation investigated,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, December 22, 1993.

Spanish, Vietnamese, Armenian, Chinese, and Korean which “blend[ed] with English in a polyphonous background melody.”⁴¹⁴ According to the article, Glendale Community College (GCC) was “still 77% white” as of 1978.⁴¹⁵ However, since 1978, the “numbers in every minority category” have “more than doubled.”⁴¹⁶ The English as a Second Language (ESL) Program at GCC offered “only three or four ESL classes...several years ago.”⁴¹⁷ As of 1984, 54 ESL classes were being offered per semester.⁴¹⁸ Further, enrollment records from Los Angeles County schools illustrate the rise in student enrollment that the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the Glendale Unified School District (GUSD) experienced as thousands of Armenian families migrated from Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia to the US.⁴¹⁹ In 1996, within less than a decade, an estimated 10,000 newly-immigrated Armenian children enrolled in schools in the Glendale Unified School District and around 20,000 in the Los Angeles Unified School District.⁴²⁰ These figures do not include Armenian students who were fluent or proficient in English.

LAUSD and GUSD were not prepared for the flood of new student enrollment, especially given the lack of Armenian educators, administrators, as well as teaching materials and resources. Even before the rush of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian students in 1988, there were state and local attempts to acquire more funds and hire more Armenian staff at schools to accommodate them.⁴²¹ Several 1986 articles discuss GUSD’s attempts to create an Armenian cultural program by funding books and media about Armenian culture to better support the

⁴¹⁴ Doug Smith “The Changing Face of Glendale College: Ethnic Diversity Now Marks Campus That Was Once the Domain of Local White, Middle-Class Students,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1984.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ “GUSD seeks Armenian funds,” *Glendale News-Press*, November 4, 1986.

growing population of Armenian students.⁴²² In the same year a *Los Angeles Times* article discussed how “foreign-language collection [were] growing rapidly” in the “Glendale and northeast Los Angeles area.”⁴²³ According to Jennifer Lamblet, the adult services coordinator for the Los Angeles City library system, told the *Times* that there was rising demand for Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese books.⁴²⁴ Glendale Central Library’s “foreign-language collection [had] grown from 6,087 books in 1980” to 8,789 in 1986, with “sharp increases” in demand for Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, and Vietnamese books.⁴²⁵ Glendale Central Library’s collection of Armenian-language books had “grown more than sixfold” between 1981 and 1986.⁴²⁶

By 1988, as the Soviet borders became more malleable due to loosened migration laws, Los Angeles County was “hard-pressed for Armenian teachers.”⁴²⁷ By 1989, the Glendale Unified School District had “begun to aggressively recruit” educators of “different ethnic backgrounds.”⁴²⁸ According to California state figures from 1987-1988, “82 percent of all California teachers were white.”⁴²⁹ In 1988, 94 percent of Glendale Unified School District teachers were white.⁴³⁰ In 1978, 3.56 percent of GUSD’s student population was Middle Eastern.⁴³¹ By October 1988, 20.49 percent of GUSD students were Middle Eastern, “which includes Soviet and Lebanese Armenians.”⁴³²

⁴²² Roy H. Campbell, “Schools Seek Money to Study Culture of Armenians,” *Los Angeles Times*, November, 27, 1986.

⁴²³ Denise Hamilton, “Local Libraries Are Taking On a Worldly Air,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1986.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Laura Flores, “Glendale schools hard pressed for Armenian teachers,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, November 27, 1988.

⁴²⁸ Rob Ritzenthaler, “In search of minority educators,” *Glendale News-Press*, April 17, 1989.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

In countless articles, Alice Petrossian, GUSD’s intercultural education director, was featured discussing the scramble the district and schools experienced – funding, new hires, parent-teacher meetings – to support newly arrived Armenian students.⁴³³ In 1987 Alice Petrossian told the *Glendale News-Press* that GUSD had “always had the largest percentage of Armenian speaking students” and that the district “has the personnel and materials” to support Armenian students.⁴³⁴ However, once the Soviet Union opened migration, and Soviet Armenians started to leave the USSR for Los Angeles County, Petrossian’s confidence in resources diminished. When the federal government stripped Armenians of refugee status in favor of the fiscally cheaper “humanitarian parolee” designation, GUSD lost crucial funding from federal programs.⁴³⁵ Petrossian told the *Glendale News-Press* that funding dropped from \$200 per student to \$60 once Soviet Armenian students’ refugee status was revoked.⁴³⁶ By 1990, “Armenian [had] replaced Spanish” as the “predominant foreign language” in GUSD, as Armenian students, “most of whom [were] immigrants and speak only limited English,” had “more than doubled” since 1988.⁴³⁷ The state and federal government, ill-prepared to support incoming Armenian students from the USSR and the Middle East, heavily relied on Armenian Americans and previously settled Armenians to make up for all the ways the US failed to fund and provide resources for newly-arrived refugees and migrants.

Matilda Mardirussian, an educator in Glendale, told the *Los Angeles Times*, “Not only do I have to be teaching Armenian and English at the same time, but I have to be a counselor, a friend to parents, a part of their family...They trust everything to me – their problems,

⁴³³ Suzan Bibisi, “School officials hold special meetings for newcomers,” *Glendale News-Press*, February 28, 1989.

⁴³⁴ Tucker, “Armenian influx.”

⁴³⁵ Hector Gonzalez, “Armenian students’ needs examined,” *Glendale News-Press*, May 9, 1990.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Lori Grange, “Schools Look to Future and See a Tower of Babble,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1990.

their...checks, their children.”⁴³⁸ Outside of her responsibilities as an educator, Mardirusian, and most likely other Armenian educators, aided Armenian parents by translating and explaining how to read, use, and cash checks.⁴³⁹ As most Armenians, particularly those with “humanitarian refugee” status, did not have access to English language classes or other resources for acculturation, they needed help translating and guidance on how the US bank system worked. Although Armenians traditionally hail from a more community and collectivist conception of education, the labor expected of Armenian educators went beyond their job description. The numerous articles, as well as Mardirusian’s statement, reveal the struggles that Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees were facing acculturating and transitioning into US society, as well as illustrate the added unpaid labor (physical and emotional) that previously settled Armenians and Armenian Americans had to undertake. Most Armenians in Glendale had themselves immigrated a decade or so prior, meaning that the Middle Eastern Armenians, although more settled, were still struggling with their settlement. Clearly, US institutions were not prepared to expend monetary aid, nor could they provide comprehensive aid in acculturating and educating the new arrivals in the US.

As federal and state institutions scrambled to accommodate the rush of immigrants and refugees, local agencies were saddled with integrating new migrants into American society. Soviet Armenians did not have established groups to fund their resettlement. While some Soviet migrant populations, like Soviet Jews, had established communities in the diaspora who tirelessly advocated for their emigration from the Soviet Union and raised substantial funds for support and resettlement in the United States, Soviet Armenian migrants and refugees had no such resources. Further, the state’s heavy reliance on previously settled Armenians to integrate

⁴³⁸ Bibisi, “School officials.”

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

new arrivals and the state's view of Armenians as a monolith rather than a heterogeneous people with deeply rooted ideological, cultural, and identity differences led to further friction between different factions of the Armenian community of Los Angeles County.

“New” and “Old” Armenian Diasporas Meet

As federal, state, and county institutions failed to fully serve the new and incoming Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants, the “old” generations of the Armenian diaspora in the US were officially (and unofficially) tasked with helping “new” migrants adjust to life in the United States and Los Angeles County. The “old” generations of diaspora Armenians consisted of mostly Western Armenian speakers who had been settled in the United States for generations as a result of the 1915 genocide, Armenians from the Middle East who had migrated to the US due to the Lebanese Civil War in the 1970s and Eastern Armenian speakers who had fled the Revolution in Iran followed by the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

Institutions and organizations were tasked to support and “speak” for incoming Soviet Armenians. It is clear that the state expected Armenian-Americans and Armenians who were already settled in the US to assimilate and acculturate newly arrived Soviet Armenians without understanding the political, cultural, and even language barriers that existed between them. Further, the state depended on the unpaid labor of previously settled Armenians to support and acculturate incoming Armenians when recently settled Armenians from the Middle East also struggled with subsistence, acculturation, support, etc. The “old” generation of Armenians settled in Los Angeles County, especially those affiliated with prominent Armenian organizations and groups, some of whom had little to no connection to Soviet Armenia, were seen as the “spokespeople” or the voice of the new migrants and often spoke for and over Soviet Armenians.

Most articles that address the influx of Soviet Armenians do not mention nor interview those who belonged to the new migrant population. Instead, it seems the state, American institutions, newspapers, and media deferred to Armenian Americans and established Armenian organizations to speak for new migrants. This obvious imbalance and existing friction led to complex and persisting tensions between different generations of Armenians in Los Angeles.

Most, if not all, articles discussing Soviet Armenian migration, even those years after the initial migrations of 1988, favored quotes and opinions from settled Armenians. A rare article from 1987 included direct quotes from newly arrived Soviet refugees Samuel Gasparyan and Ripsik Kiramichyan, who were members of the twelve Soviet Armenian families that had fought to leave Soviet Armenia in the early 1980s.⁴⁴⁰ Kiramichyan noted that settling in Los Angeles County posed challenges as Soviet Armenians “have to begin from absolute zero.”⁴⁴¹

A 1990 interview with a newly arrived Soviet Armenian family in Glendale, California, illustrated the hardships Soviet Armenians experienced in the USSR, as well as the continued tribulations new refugees and migrants continued to face in the US. The interview also sheds light on the diversity and multiplicity of Armenians within the Soviet Union. This nuance is often lost when lumping Soviet Armenians into a reductive “Russian Armenian” category. In the interview, the Petrosyan family recounted its repatriation to Soviet Armenia from Iran in the mid-1970s during the third wave of repatriation campaigns undertaken by Soviet Armenia to persuade diaspora Armenians to move to their “homeland.”⁴⁴² “We will return to our country when Armenia is free,” they asserted in their interview, citing their grievances with the Soviet government and their deep discontent with the lack of support for Armenia’s economic freedom

⁴⁴⁰ Tucker, “Armenian influx.”

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Suny, “Soviet Armenia,” 347-387.

as the reason why they left Soviet Armenia.⁴⁴³ The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh was most pronounced along with deep concern for Armenians in Azerbaijan who had experienced bloody pogroms in Baku, Sumgait, and Kirovabad amid Nagorno-Karabakh's appeal to join Soviet Armenia.⁴⁴⁴ This sentiment was equally shared by most, if not all, Armenians in the diaspora who had been previously settled in Los Angeles County. No matter their disappointment at not finding employment due to their lack of English proficiency alongside their dependence on welfare, the Petrosyans, indignant about Soviet rule, were prepared to struggle in the United States rather than return to stifling Soviet rule.⁴⁴⁵ Although Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians were interviewed or quoted in some articles, most media centered on the voices of previously settled Armenians, particularly the voices of "Armenian leaders in the U.S."⁴⁴⁶

One such "Armenian leader" interviewed and quoted in dozens of articles was Harut Sassounian, the editor of a nationalist Armenian American newspaper called the *California Courier*, wherein Sassounian openly discusses his nationalist and ARF-affiliated views. Sassounian added that the "United States (and Soviet) officials are not doing us a favor when they facilitate the departure of more Armenians from Soviet Armenia."⁴⁴⁷ Berdj Karapitian, the director of the Armenian National Committee Western Region (ANCA-WR), emphasized that pressure must be put to improve conditions in Soviet Armenia "so Armenians are not forced with the decision of having to emigrate out of their homeland."⁴⁴⁸ Unlike most articles that simply list off facts and numbers, the abovementioned *Los Angeles Times* piece points out the "irony" of "thousands of Soviet Armenians leaving their native country while some Armenian leaders in the

⁴⁴³ Santiago O'Donnel, "A Land Divided," *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1990.

⁴⁴⁴ Suny, "Soviet Armenia," 347-387.

⁴⁴⁵ O'Donnel, "A Land Divided."

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

U.S. are fighting to create an Armenian homeland,” noting that this ARF imagines a homeland that “consist[s] of Soviet Armenia and a part of Turkey.”⁴⁴⁹ This article demonstrates the nuanced and conflicting views and actions of Soviet Armenians and diaspora Armenians of Los Angeles County. Soviet Armenians were concerned with leaving authoritarian rule and gaining freedom. It seems the majority of Armenians in the Los Angeles diaspora affiliated with the ARF were concerned with taking advantage of Soviet Armenia’s instability to advocate for the “unification” of the lost lands of Western Armenia and Eastern Armenia and achieving political goals once that the Iron Curtain was increasingly vulnerable.

Even while discussing the situation of Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants, many ARF and ANCA interviewees would divert the conversation toward Genocide recognition and the reunification of Western and Eastern Armenia. The competition had persisted between Armenian diasporic organizations and political parties who had previously competed over control of the diaspora’s ideological consciousness in opposition to Soviet Armenia. Since the Iron Curtain was breached and consistent Armenia-diaspora relations were established, competition ensued for influence over shaping public opinion among the growing Armenian community on issues pertaining to the diaspora and Soviet, then post-Soviet Armenia. The ARF and its lobbying branch, the ANCA, exiled from Soviet Armenia in 1920, saw an opportunity to reassert itself into Soviet Armenian, then post-Soviet Armenia’s politics. Letters to *Armenian International Magazine* (AIM) illustrate the tumultuous relations and the disagreements between the Armenian community in the US. In a letter to AIM, Kevork Keushkerian from Pasadena wrote, “Diaspora Armenians cannot be in position to pass judgment on what leaders in Armenia can or cannot do,” – referencing the uproar in the diaspora about President Levon Ter-

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

Petrosyan's strive to establish trade ties with Turkey.⁴⁵⁰ Keushkerian continued, "I don't condone [the Armenian government's] decision, but I feel that we shouldn't be interfering with their internal affairs anymore."⁴⁵¹

In the March 1991 issue of AIM, Viken H. Evereklian of Havertown, Pennsylvania responded to a November 1990 article penned by Harut Sassounian which voiced opposition to Armenia having relations with Turkey. Evereklian criticized "adventurist and irresponsible elements among Armenians who clamor for the 'return' of 'our' lost lands."⁴⁵² Evereklian proceeded – "the recent flare-up in Karabagh has caused Armenia enough damage."⁴⁵³ Rosemary Aprizian from Watertown, Massachusetts, wrote to AIM expressing "bitter disappointment in AIM Magazine!"⁴⁵⁴ Aprizian continued that AIM had advertised as non-political, but "all you have written about are Ramgavars, Dashnags, Hunchaks, etc."⁴⁵⁵ Ara Topouzian responded to Rosemary Aprizian in the July 1991 issues of AIM, writing that "its these organizations" – the ARF, the Ramkavar Party, and the Hnchakian party – "that are helping our relatives in Soviet Armenia and elsewhere survive."⁴⁵⁶ Nelly Der Kiurghian from San Francisco praised AIM for their April Cover Story, which explored the Armenian lobby in the US.⁴⁵⁷ Kiurghian asserted that it was "unfortunate that despite tremendous individual efforts, mediocrity" was the state of diaspora Armenians' "collective contribution."⁴⁵⁸ Kiurghian urged the "Armenian lobby" to

⁴⁵⁰ Kevork Keushkerian, "Letter," *Armenian International Magazine*, January 1991, 5-6.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Viken H. Evereklian, "Letter," *Armenian International Magazine*, March 1991, 6.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Rosemary Aprizian, "Letter," *Armenian International Magazine*, May 1991, 6.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Ara Topouzian, "Letter," *Armenian International Magazine*, July 1991, 9.

⁴⁵⁷ Nelly Der Kiurghian, "Letter," *Armenian International Magazine*, May 1991, 6.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

“establish contact with the Armenian public at large” and “not just the big donors or the people on Capitol Hill.”⁴⁵⁹

Diran Zeytounian of New York, in reference to an AIM article that explored diaspora donations, called out the “so-called ‘intellectuals’...[and] Armenian media” for their silence on the mismanagement of donation funds to Armenia.⁴⁶⁰ Zeytounian continued, “Is this a cover-up?...I am extremely disappointed with the leadership of our church,” to which people “entrusted their money and donations.”⁴⁶¹ Arda Mouradian McCarthy from Tinton Falls, New Jersey, responded to an article in the June issue of AIM titled “Coming to America...”. Mouradian McCarthy was “outraged” that “once again...some of our Armenian community leaders decide the fate of the rest of us.”⁴⁶² Mouradian McCarthy singled out a line from the article – “...the Armenian National Committee of America, spurred by concerns depopulating the homeland, urged for exclusion of [Soviet and post-Soviet] Armenians from the Lautenberg Amendment.”⁴⁶³ Mouradian McCarthy continued “the same individuals who decide not to support such issues,” enjoy “the freedom and luxury,” of going abroad.⁴⁶⁴ She asked why migration should not “be the choice of Armenians in the homeland?”⁴⁶⁵ Mouradian McCarthy then “invite[d] them” – those who took direct action to oppose and hinder Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian migration – “to move to the homeland themselves.”⁴⁶⁶

Los Angeles-based newspapers also continued their centering of institutions over the voice of Armenian newcomers. In a similar tactic used by the US government and media to

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Diran Zeytounian, “Letter,” *Armenian International Magazine*, May 1991, 6.

⁴⁶² Arda Mouradian McCarthy, “Letter,” *Armenian International Magazine*, August/September 1991, 6.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

emphasize the benevolence of America in contrast to the Soviet Union's ailments, diaspora organizations and political parties continued to position themselves as benevolent savior tasked with dealing with the suppressed Soviet Armenians. According to Zabelle Alahydoian, the executive director of the Armenian Evangelical Social Service Center, had "difficulty understanding the value of... hard work" because "they lived in a communist society where people [were] stuck in the same, low paying jobs for life."⁴⁶⁷ Another 1992 article by Tamar Mashigian, who was affiliated with the ARF, asserted that the ARS building in Glendale is "well known...to people living more than 7,000 miles away in Armenia, one of the Soviet Union's breakaway republics."⁴⁶⁸ Soviet Armenians were likely aware of the resources that the ARS provided as the ARS has a long history of charitable support in Armenia and throughout Armenian communities in the world; however, given the Cold War context and Iron Curtain that physically and figuratively separated the development of Soviet and diaspora Armenians, some claims in the article are likely exaggerated.

While some, like Stella Grigorian, an Armenian American from Houston, Texas, who was studying at Yerevan University in 1990, believed that "[Armenians] just have this tiny country, and we've got to try to protect it," other diaspora Armenians did not share that sentiment.⁴⁶⁹ Gilbert Baghramian, who had emigrated to Los Angeles County in the mid-1970s from Iran, maintained that he was "not from there," meaning Armenia, and he did not "consider it [his] homeland."⁴⁷⁰ "I never had a homeland. I don't see it as anything. I buy property [in the US]; that's my land," he told a journalist from the *Glendale News-Press* in 1990, just a few

⁴⁶⁷ Maria Jo Fisher, "Hearing targets."

⁴⁶⁸ Tamar Mashigian, "Armenian Community Helps its Own Adjust to Life in the US," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1992.

⁴⁶⁹ Schrader, "For Americans in Armenian Capital."

⁴⁷⁰ Jennifer Burry, "Down, maybe but never out!," *Glendale News-Press*, July 16, 1990.

months after Stella Grigorian’s feature in the Los Angeles Times.⁴⁷¹ Even though Baghramian asserted that he was “more of an Armenian than an American,” he went on to say that although “Armenians are ‘generally nice people, they have [an] ego problem... think they are the best...and even think they are better than other Armenians.’”⁴⁷² The article does not clarify who Baghramian is referring to when he says “they”; however, considering the stark distinction Baghramian draws between himself, his Armenian identity, and Soviet Armenia, one can presume that he may have been referring to Soviet Armenians.

The diaspora and Soviet Armenians had come together, collaborated, and “unified” for the first time since Soviet Armenia entered the Soviet Union; however, even the strife and subsequent migration of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians could not eradicate the inter-diasporan division. Through the 1990s and into the 2000s, Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians continued to enter the diaspora, as the people of the Second Republic of Armenia (1991-present) continued experiencing hardships in the wake of rising post-Soviet instability. As years passed, mobilization and protests by the Armenian community in Los Angeles County declined. Armenia and Azerbaijan called a ceasefire, stalling the First Karabakh War in 1994. As years passed, the infrastructure in Northern Armenia lay destroyed, with no conclusive resolve over where donated money went. Further, post-Soviet Armenia experienced the emergence of a corrupt oligarchical kinship network that imbued Armenia at every level of government, militarizing and privatizing Armenia for monetary gain. The people of Armenia, and many other post-Soviet states, experienced a rise in poverty, food insecurity, and police and authoritarian rule. Armenian newcomers in the diaspora, Soviet, post-Soviet, and Middle Eastern Armenians, became overwhelmed with subsistence and building a life in Los Angeles County. Prominent

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

Armenian diaspora institutions and political parties, with footing in independent Armenia, continued the strive to maintain power in Armenia and the diaspora to further their political and nationalist goals. One thing that remained constant in the Armenian community in Los Angeles County, which had one of the most diverse Armenian communities who hailed from all over the world, was concurrent solidarity and division. Although Soviet Armenians and other newcomers would further integrate into life in the US, the Armenian community in Los Angeles County, the US, and throughout the world would continue to experience contradicting tension and unity in the coming years.

Conclusion

In 1920, struggling to position itself as an independent state under ARF leadership and its streets inundated with refugees fleeing the Ottoman state's Genocide of Armenians, the first Republic of Armenia had no choice but to submit itself to Soviet Rule. After a failed coup, the ARF was driven out of Soviet Armenia, where they never reconciled with Soviet Armenians' "betrayal" in ceding independent Armenia to the Soviet Union. Concurrently, the Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was strategically ceded to Soviet Azerbaijan, where it would begrudgingly remain until decades of discrimination and negligence would culminate into calls for secession in the late 1980s. Thus, Soviet Armenia and the diaspora at large developed their national identity as well as their political ideology separately and, oftentimes, in opposition to each other. Save for Soviet Armenia's repatriation campaigns calling for diaspora Armenians to "repatriate" to their homeland – which arguably further hurt Armenia-diaspora relations – Soviet Armenia and the diaspora at large had little to no contact.

The landscape of Los Angeles County, especially during the twentieth century, was subject to different waves of migration from different populations. Although Armenian presence in the US and Los Angeles County is traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, beginning in the late 1960s, Los Angeles County saw wave after wave of Armenian migration from the Middle East. Between the late 1960s through the early 1980s, the Armenian community and its institutions in Los Angeles County were revitalized by Armenians from the Middle East who invigorated Armenian institutions and imbued the stalled community with cultural and nationalist action. When the people of Soviet Armenia erupted in protest in support of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh in late 1987, the Iron Curtain separating Soviet Armenia and the diaspora cracked. As the strife in Armenia continued, with a devastating natural disaster in Northern Armenia, and the instability of the Soviet Union, relations between Armenia and the diaspora increased. For the first time in seventy years, the diaspora would mobilize via protests, petitions, mass fundraising, and campaigns to support Soviet Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh amid worsening existential threat. However, diaspora aid for Soviet Armenia proved conditional, as support did not extend to the potentiality of Soviet Armenian migration to the United States. At first, the US government jumped at the opportunity to accept Soviet refugees and migrants to emphasize their benevolence and the Soviet Union's ills in an apparent propaganda campaign. However, the US halted Armenian migration (leaving thousands of Soviet Armenians in limbo), stopped designating Armenians as refugees, and revoked federal aid and resources for Soviet Armenian migrants once Soviet Armenian migration proved to be too expensive. The diaspora, particularly those affiliated with the ARF, verbalized their support for the US decision to hinder or stop aid to Soviet and post-Soviet Armenians.

Regardless of diaspora opposition, the US had already accepted Soviet Armenian refugees and migrants and would continue to do so, albeit on an inconsistent and conditional basis, as the situation in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh escalated. Most Soviet Armenian migrants would settle in Los Angeles County in Southern California – primarily in Hollywood and Glendale. Local institutions struggled to support migrants, and the state officially (and unofficially) depended on Armenians who had previously settled in the US to acculturate new arrivals. For the first time in decades, Soviet Armenians and diaspora Armenians coalesced, and thus began the process of Armenians with different backgrounds and experiences grappling with coexistence and tolerance.

Further, Armenians began to struggle with heightened racialization in the US. Armenians of Glendale also continued to deal with racist and xenophobic attacks, whether verbal or physical, by the largely white, Anglo-Saxon population of Glendale and surrounding areas. Moreover, tension and conflict between different ethnic populations continued to rise, developing into gang violence in the years to come. Soviet Armenians, and other Armenians who continued to arrive, experienced double discrimination from white, Anglo-Saxon populations and some Armenian Americans who had adopted discriminatory behavior disguised as patriotism.

Even though Soviet Armenia and the diaspora had come together for a common cause and struggle, the division and tension within different factions of the diaspora persisted. Divisions continued within the complex and nuanced Los Angeles Armenian community, especially among “new” Soviet Armenian diaspora and the “old” primarily Middle Eastern Armenian diaspora. However, tension was not unique to “new” and “old” generations of Los Angeles County Armenians. Division existed throughout every stratum of the Armenian community. Closely reading newspaper articles from Los Angeles County – *Los Angeles Times*,

Los Angeles Daily News, and Glendale News-Press articles – reveals the nuance in the Armenian community. Some previously settled Armenians exhibited underlying superiority over newly-migrated Soviet Armenians, while others dedicated time and effort to supporting and aiding the new arrivals. Although Soviet and previously settled diaspora Armenians converged, their complex and nuanced relationship characterized by division, with its roots traced back to the original Armenian-diaspora split from the early twentieth century, continued.

Eventually, Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian migrants would, for the most part, settle into life in the United States. Armenians' relationship continued to be one of community, coexistence, division, and tension. Travel and communication increased as technological advances soared, however, the diaspora community and institutions remained largely silent about the struggles faced by Armenians in the Second Republic of Armenia. In a historical parallel, Azerbaijan launched an attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, which had been ceded to Armenia following the First Nagorno-Karabakh war (1988-1994). In September 2020, the diaspora – which had largely stayed silent as a monopolistic oligarchical kinship network spread throughout all Armenian institutions, exploiting the Armenian peoples for monetary gain – once again mobilized to support and aid Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in the face of existential threat.

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