Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia

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On April 24, 1965, an illegal demonstration brought an estimated twenty thousand people to Yerevan's central Lenin Square to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey.[1] The crowd called not only for official recognition of the genocide—a taboo subject in the Soviet Union for a long time—but also demanded the return of the "Armenian lands" in Turkey and Soviet Azerbaijan, thus challenging both international and intra-Soviet borders. The demonstration then split up to proceed to different parts of the city before reassembling in the evening at Yerevan's opera house, where a closed ceremony for the republic's political and intellectual elite was to take place. As the crowd demanded access to this ceremony and smashed some windows, the authorities hastily evacuated the theater and broke up the demonstration.

This demonstration is traditionally seen as a first sign of national unrest or even as a dress rehearsal for the daily demonstrations that took place in 1988 and 1989 on Yerevan's Opera Square to insist on the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to the Soviet Republic of Armenia. Among others, Ronald G. Suny identified the events of April 24 in his book on modern Armenia, written shortly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, as the first manifestation of a semilegal or extralegal "dissident nationalism" in Soviet Armenia.[2] Suny noted a complex interplay between this "dissident" and "official nationalism" and thus pointed to the very fine line between allowed and forbidden expres-

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1. The number given for the size of the demonstration varies: Omari Chechoian, one of the main organizers of the demonstration, states 20,000 participants; the Russian human rights activist Liudmila Alekseeva speaks of 100,000; the French-Armenian historian Claire Mouradian provides the number of 200,000; and the Russian historian Elena Zubkova found the figure given as 3,000 in documents sent to Moscow. See Omari Khechoian, "Revoliutsiia v umakh," *Aniv* 1, no. 1 (2006): 7; Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights* (Middletown, 1985), 123; Claire Mouradian, *De Staline à Gorbatchev: Histoire d'une république soviétique, l'Armenie* (Paris, 1990), 224; and Elena Iu. Zubkova, "Vlast' i razvitie etnokonfliktnoi situatsii v SSSR 1953–1985 gody," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 4 (2004): 22.

2. Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington, 1993), 186–87. For a similar assessment of developments in the North Caucasus, see Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography* (Chicago, 2005), 97, 105, 108.

sions of national sentiment. Yet, his language for describing the history of the postwar decades in Soviet Armenia nevertheless juxtaposed the national and the Soviet: with his characterization of the demonstration as a form of "dissident nationalism," he used a term, still unchallenged at the time, that suggested that the participants in this demonstration thought differently and opposed the Soviet Union's dominant faith—socialism.[3] While Suny hinted at Soviet modernization and Armenian Russophilia as stabilizing factors for Soviet rule, he still presented national sentiments as an almost primordial entity that had been "seething below the surface" in Iosif Stalin's time. As "an explosion [of national passions] was always possible," the national acquired here the character of a residual force of resistance. After 1953, national "passions and tensions bubbled slowly to the surface," as Armenians "*had to learn* once again how to express openly their own national interests."[4]

I cite these older quotes from one of the most versatile and innovative inquirers into the ambivalences of nation and empire in Russia and the Soviet Union because they mirror the conceptual and retrospective biases that still accompany much of the research on Soviet nationalities, including my own.[5] Relying on Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an "imagined community," Suny and others underscored that the Bolsheviks attempted to "make," not "break," nations through what Terry Martin went on to call "affirmative action" policies toward national groups.[6] But if one looks at the research on nationalities in the Soviet Union, it seems as if, in the long run, the "affirmative" rather than the "imaginative" part of defining nationality in the multiethnic Soviet Union took center stage: with Soviet scholars helping define borders, languages, histories, and literatures, the Bolsheviks eventually succeeded in creating nations, even if their social categories and emancipatory visions initially led to both creative misunderstandings and open resistance.[7] But while Central Asian nomads in the 1920s and 1930s often had very different ideas of belonging than the Bolshevik state, they knew that

3. For discussions of Soviet dissent and dissidence, see Anke Stephan, *Von der Küche auf den Roten Platz: Lebenswege sowjetischer Dissidentinnen* (Zurich, 2005), 22–27; Serguei Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," *Public Culture* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 191–214; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2005), 103, 106–8; Kevin M. F. Platt and Bendzhamin Natans [Benjamin Nathans], "Sotsialisticheskaia po forme, neopredelennaia po soderzhaniiu: Pozdnesovetskaia kul'tura i kniga Alekseia Iurchaka, *Vse bylo navechno, poka ne konchilos'*," trans. N. Movnina, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 101 (2010): 167–84.

4. Suny, *Looking toward Ararat*, 161. Emphasis added.

5. In fact, Suny himself addresses this recently in general terms in his "The Contradictions of Identity: Being Soviet and National in the USSR and After," in Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly, eds., *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities* (Cambridge, Eng., 2012), 17–36.

6. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford, 2001); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, 2001).

7. Adrienne L. Edgar, "Genealogy, Class, and 'Tribal Policy' in Soviet Turkmenistan, 1924–1934," *Slavic Review* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 266–88; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, 2005); Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, 2004); and Jörg Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus* (Munich, 2003).

they were Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Kazaks in 1991.[8] This, along with the continued practice of listing Soviet citizens' nationality under category 5 in Soviet passports, the unquestioned existence of national republics, and the role of nationalist movements in the disintegration of the Soviet system, reaffirmed "nationality" as a central identity marker as much as a conceptual hallmark of historical analysis. Over all, it appears as if the Bolsheviks were very successful in "making nations" but failed to also Sovietize them.

A similar perspective is evident in more recent studies that venture into the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods. Although stating a general acceptance of "real existing socialism," they nevertheless underscore that nationalities, particularly on the western borderlands, never became completely integrated into the Soviet state. National identity appears over and over again not only as the key element in the "ideological failure" of the Soviet project but also as mostly unaffected by decades of Soviet experience.[9] While citizens on the national periphery "learned to adapt" and made "fragile compromises," their sense of nationality ultimately became a "time bomb" that was—as it would for any empire—to prove fatal for the Soviet empire.[10]

The 1965 and the 1988/89 demonstrations in Yerevan seem to be a case in point. Yet, as I interviewed a retired biochemist in 2005 who had had a small part in the logistical organization of the 1965 demonstration, I was in for a surprise. Throughout the interview, he presented himself as a steadfast nationalist, called the Soviet system "totalitarian" and "absurd" and made a point to differentiate between the "national feelings of the people" and "indoctrinated party members." As he accompanied me to the door of his apartment, however, he told me, "Lenin was right!" When he noted my bewilderment, he insisted, "Yes, one has to read Lenin. Even today."[11] For him, nationalism and reverence for the founding figure of the Bolshevik state was no contradiction. A look at the interview transcript reveals that his reasoning closely followed the logics of historical materialism. Other interviewees also explained their past and present to me with the help of a seemingly contradictory mix of nationalist statements and excerpts of socialist discourse, sometimes resembling to a great degree the phrases in party protocols and letters to Soviet authorities I

8. Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, 2004), 1–2, 265; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 348.

9. See, for example, Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Baltimore, 2010), 4.

10. Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto, 2004), 11; William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), 11, 55. For a critique of the disproportionate concern with "nonconformist views," see Zbigniew Wojnowski, "De-Stalinization and Soviet Patriotism: Ukrainian Reactions to East European Unrest in 1956," *Kritika* 13, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 802–29.

11. Roland Vardanian, interview, Yerevan, October 12, 2005. Vardanian, born in 1943 to two military doctors, was raised partly by his grandmother, a genocide survivor. This interview was conducted as part of a more general inquiry into national identity and socialism since 1945 based on archival material and half-structured interviews with members of a broadly defined urban intelligentsia. All interviewees' names are pseudonyms.

found in the archives.[12] This was the case with a former apparatchik as well, who declared, "I am a patriot, not just a patriot of Armenia, but I was a patriot of the Soviet Union. When we lost to the Czechs in ice hockey, I cried in front of the TV set. [. . .] I was a patriot of my country, and then patriot of my nation . . . Nationalism is a harbor for scum."[13] Interviewees like Tat'iana, an Armenian Russian-language teacher who stressed that her parents had never joined the party due to their experiences with the terror and deportation, likewise formulated a dual allegiance to the Soviet Union and Armenia: "We lived in the Union and also in Armenia." Tat'iana, who declared herself to be a "Soviet person," proved to be a rather creative in her understandings of the socialist creed. This resonated not only in her struggle to understand the demise of the Soviet system, despite her active participation in the 1988 demonstrations (a feeling shared by most of my other interviewees), but also in her interpretation of the friendship of peoples, as for her, "[Russians] and [Armenians] were friends and will always be friends, because we are Christians and they are Christians." At the same time, she never understood the lessons "of scientific communism . . . the fusion of nations," as everything was already shared in the common treasure of world culture.[14]

These interviews are as retrospective as historiographical works on the role of national movements in the Soviet system's demise. However, these former Soviet citizens' use of Soviet vocabulary and reference points outside a context that would have obliged them to "speak Bolshevik" turns our attention toward language—not only as an essential tool of imagination but also as a central device of analysis.[15] Thus, historiographical assessments of illegal demonstrations as "dissident" and "anti-Soviet," national feelings as a "time bomb," and my own surprise at a declared nationalist's reverence for Vladimir Lenin are stark reminders of the preconceptions that affect our reading of archival sources.[16] Considering the preeminence the nation takes in the

12. In this respect, the reading of archival sources and interview transcripts resembles much of what Yurchak describes in chapters 3 and 6 of his *Everything Was Forever.*

13. Pavel Gukasian, interview, Yerevan, April 26, 2007. Gukasian, born 1951, was an apparatchik with the Armenian Komsomol and the Ministry of Culture.

14. Tat'iana (born 1958), interview, Yerevan, May 10, 2005. Her father had been deported to Central Asia from Nagorno-Karabakh in the aftermath of World War II; after his release, in 1953, he came to Yerevan to live among friends he had made in the camps. Her mother's family fled the 1915 genocide to settle initially in Rostov-on-Don before moving to Yerevan.

15. On "speaking Bolshevik," see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995), 223–25.

16. See, for example, Jan Plamper, "The End of the Soviet Union? Origins and Legacies of 1991, 19.05.2011–21.05.2011, Bremen," *H-Soz-u-Kult*, July 9, 2011, at hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=3712 (last accessed October 17, 2014). On such preconceptions' impact on analysis, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen, 1990), 270–90. In a way, historians' dealings with archival sources and writing history are similar, if more distanced in terms of time, to the effect the anthropologists' presence has on the field they are researching and thus the ways they "write culture." James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, 1986). See also Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 119–46.

analysis of "imagined communities" in the non-Russian national republics in general, it is apparently still difficult for us to consider how world views and a sense of belonging transcended the nation on the Soviet periphery. Despite the nation's centrality to Armenian self-understandings, my interviewees' formulations prompt the question as to how far we have to take other factors into consideration if we want to understand not only how "community" was imagined in the late Soviet Union but also how an increasingly heterogeneous Soviet society cohered.[17] Moreover, with people formulating belonging not just in national terms but also interweaving it with socialist teachings (however ambivalently), what, then, is to be considered "nationalist," "socialist," and, eventually, "Soviet"?

In this article, I argue that the 1965 demonstration was in fact an expression of a very Soviet hybrid of national and socialist elements that I call "apricot socialism." As with Vera Dunham's pink and orange lampshades reflecting the tastes of the late Stalinist elite and Alexei Yurchak's allegory of pink and purple as the true colors of communism for late Soviet Komsomol activists, apricot socialism refers to yet another variation of the revolutionary red in the Soviet everyday.[18] The apricot, being the Armenian national fruit, whose skin often samples the whole color spectrum between crimson red and light orange, serves me as a metaphor for how people in Soviet Armenia imagined the rules and goals of the Soviet community. As a highly group-defining event, the April 24 demonstration not only showcases the importance of the national past but also reveals how Armenians made sense of the Soviet project.

This concern with the formulation of belonging and the definition of community in the Armenian room of what Yuri Slezkine has called the Soviet "communal apartment" results in a neglect of high-level decisions made in Moscow over what evolved on the local level.[19] Likewise, I focus on the definition of the Soviet project put forward in letters written by Armenians to Soviet authorities, in publications at the time, and in the discussion of the demonstration in the Armenian Central Committee, rather than searching for "strategy" or "duplicity."[20] To understand the preconditions and the consequences of this illegal demonstration, one also needs an idea of the space in which this demonstration *took place*, as this not only points to the connection between people's habitus and their built habitat in a Soviet capital but also reveals how Yerevan's cityscape quite literally provided its inhabitants with perspective.[21]

17. Tara Zahra has recently pointed out that "even as historians assert that national groups are imagined communities, [we] have continued to write the history of Eastern Europe . . . as though [national] collectives were self-evident entities." Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 96–97.

18. Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham, 1990), xix, 104, 131, 245; Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, chap. 6.

19. Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 414–52.

20. See also Suny, "The Contradictions of Identity," 17.

21. Pierre Bourdieu, "Physischer, sozialer und angeeigneter Raum," in Martin Wentz, ed., *Stadt-Räume* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991), 32.

A Room with a View: The April 24 Demonstration, Revolutionary Tradition, and the Socialist Promise of Yerevan's Cityscape

To choose Lenin Square for an illegal demonstration might seem a bold challenge to the party's monopoly over public space. Organized by word of mouth by students of the institutes of physics and oriental studies at Yerevan State University, the demonstration brought mainly young people to Lenin Square, among them many Komsomol members, as the authorities were to notice, but also passers-by. Chants of "*hoger, hoger*" (lands, lands) were heard, while some older citizens who had escaped the genocide in 1915 told the students to go to "Western Armenia."[22] The crowd also demanded the release of six students who had been arrested the year before for forming a group to protect the purity of the Armenian language.[23] These elements certainly gave the demonstration a very "dissident" nationalist appearance.

A closer look at the crowds' behavior within the symbolic geography of the Soviet Armenian capital, however, reveals perspectives on nation, state, and Soviet community that mark the demonstration as a particular, national affirmation of Soviet traditions and the promises of socialism. This is already resonant in the choice of Lenin Square over other potential locations, like Opera Square, whose namesake building had dominated Yerevan's landscape since 1933. Lenin Square was apparently so obvious a venue that the slogan "At 10 on the square" did not need specification. In the very heart of the city, it connected all parts of Yerevan via its arterial roads. It was also where people usually went to take part in official Soviet celebrations. Thus, the choice of Lenin Square resembled the combination of geography and tradition that had established Znamenskaia Square in St. Petersburg as the main meeting place for revolutionary demonstrations in 1917. Unlike the hefty equestrian statue of Alexander III on Znamenskaia Square, however, the Lenin statue in Yerevan did not become a target of iconoclasm.[24] Even though many speakers used the pedestal of the Lenin statue—which usually accommodated the party leadership on Soviet holidays—as a rostrum, they did not question Lenin's authority. On the contrary: when one of the speakers pointed to the statue and said that their requests would never be fulfilled as long as "this northern raven" stood there, the crowd demanded he stop that kind of talk.[25]

22. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), fond (f.) 8131 (Prokuratura SSSR), *opis'* (*op.*) 36s (*Otdel' po nadzoru za vedeniem seldstva v organakh gosudarstvennoi besopasnosti*), delo (d.) 5728 (Tovmasian A.S.), list (l.) 49. "Western Armenia" represents territories mainly in Anatolia that had once been part of the medieval Armenian Kingdom before being conquered by the Ottoman empire; in the late nineteenth century, the Anatolian regions of Kars and Ardahan, integral parts of "Western Armenia" for Armenians, became part of the Russian empire before being ceded again to Turkey by the Soviet government in 1921.

23. Grant Ter-Abramian, "Erevanskaia gorodskaia sreda i inakomyslie," in Ekaterina Gerasimova and Nino Lezhava, eds., *Iuzhnii Kavkaz: Territorii, istorii, liudi* (Tbilisi, 2006), 20. Ter-Abramian interviewed the core group who organized the demonstration.

24. Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, 1999), 31, 37.

25. Grant Ter-Abramian, introduction to his "Gorod i inakomyslie" (PhD diss., Yerevan State University, 2006).

Instead of questioning the legitimacy of Soviet order, the people on Yerevan's Lenin Square in fact reenacted what they knew from the official Soviet holidays and their school books.[26] As with the yearly celebrations in May and November, they brought along large posters—most of which were confiscated by otherwise overwhelmed militiamen—that, instead of depicting Soviet leaders or party slogans, featured prominent genocide victims, Holy Mount Ararat, or the number "50," as a reference to the genocide anniversary. Self-made black memorial badges with a "50" on them were another typical Soviet festival prop adapted by the crowd. And even the demonstration's demands followed Soviet custom, as the authorities were presented with a petition and Soviet-style slogans, such as "Spravedlivo reshite armianskii vopros."[27] Tellingly, one of the students who had procured black cloth for the memorial badges recalls that he and his fellows "felt like revolutionaries . . . about whom [they] had read so much in the party books on the Bolsheviks."[28] Thus, while the crowd's goals bore strongly nationalist undertones, its actions and language were not only shaped by the official idiom but inspired by the Bolsheviks.

The composite of territorial demands and performative affirmation of the Soviet revolutionary repertoire at the demonstration did not unfold within a vacuum but corresponded with the messages inherent in Yerevan's cityscape. Fundamentally altered since Armenia's Sovietization in 1920, this Soviet national capital was at once a "theatre of memory" and a "theatre of prophecy."[29] The city's built environment puts the world into perspective for its inhabitants, as the eye is consistently guided south toward the most important, but inaccessible, symbol of the Armenian nation, Holy Mount Ararat.[30] On clear days, this 5,137-meter mountain towers over the Ararat valley like a mirage. Just fifty kilometers from Yerevan's city center, the mountain became a symbol of all the "Armenian lands" lost in Anatolia after the Soviet Union ceded it to Turkey in 1921 along with the provinces of Kars and Ardahan.[31] However, the mountain also embodied a promise, as the Soviet project was apparently to include Mount Ararat in the future: it adorned the coat of arms of the newly founded Soviet republic of Armenia, with a red star and the ham-

26. Robert Hornsby, "Voicing Discontent: Political Dissent from the Secret Speech to Khrushchev's Ouster," in Melanie Ilic and Jeremy Smith, eds., *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev* (London, 2009), 169. On the relevance of performative reenactment of Soviet traditions, see Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 74–76, 96–98, 124–25.

27. Hayastani Azgayin Arxivi (Armenian National Archives, HAA) Hasarakakan-qaghaqakan p'astat'ght'eri bajhin (Department of Social-Political Documents, HQP'), f. 1 (TsK KP Armenii), op. 45 (Materialy TsK KP Armenii 1965 goda), d. 2 (Vtoroe zasedanie UP Plenuma TsK Kompartii Armenii, 29 aprelia 1965), l. 41.

28. Vardanian, interview.

29. Dolores Hayden, *Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 11.

30. An architectural guide published in 1968 described the city's twentieth-century layout as one of a big amphitheater facing Ararat. See V. M. Arutiunian, M. M. Asratian, and A. A. Melikian, *Erevan* (Moscow, 1968), 93.

31. The Soviet-Turkish Treaty of 1921 reduced the territory of the Armenian republic to a third of what the Treaty of Sèvres had granted the independent Republic of Armenia before its Sovietzation in 1920. See Suny, *Looking toward Ararat*, 131.

mer and sickle looming above the mountain. Yerevan's built environment, which celebrated national culture with folklore themes on its tuff facades, repeatedly opens onto Ararat's two peaks. Thus, Yerevan's cityscape became an expression of "mind in matter," as the "Soviet" and the "national" were inextricably intertwined.[32]

This is also the case with the architectural ensemble on the elongated oval of Lenin Square, completed in the 1950s. The square is dominated by the building that housed the art, literature, and history museums on its broad northeastern side. This palladium of national culture faced the Soviet-Turkish border, with two buildings of socialist rule on its sides—the house of the Soviet Armenian government and the Administrativnoe zdanie, housing the offices responsible for Soviet Armenia's economy. This triptych of cultural and political might faced the Lenin statue, on the broad southwestern side of the square, that had been inaugurated on the twentieth anniversary of Armenia's Sovietization, in 1940. The statue was flanked by buildings that underscored Soviet Armenia's connection to the world: on its left, the Hotel Armenia was to greet visitors from around the world, while on its right, the arch connecting the buildings of the central post office and Soviet Armenia's labor union allowed a glimpse at Mount Ararat's smaller peak.[33] Thus, on April 24, 1965, the crowd was calling for genocide recognition and for the Armenian lands on a square that fused territorial claims, national culture, and history with revolution, class struggle, and internationalism.

The arterial roads emanating from Lenin Square likewise integrated the national with the socialist, as they were named after nineteenth-century Armenian writers and revolutionaries such as Khachatur Abovian (1809–48), the first writer to use the eastern Armenian vernacular as a literary language; Mikael Nalbandian (1829–66), a revolutionary democrat praised in Soviet historiography as an associate of Aleksandr Herzen; and Stepan Shahumian (1878–1918), the "Lenin of the Caucasus" and leader of the Baku Commune. The particular double bind of the national and the socialist is most resonant in the example of Prospekt Hoktemberian. This street was not only named for the October revolution but led to a small town in the Ararat valley where the troops of independent Armenia had achieved one of their major victories over the Turkish army in 1918. It was onto this particular thoroughfare that Soviet holiday demonstrations exited from Lenin Square, with Mount Ararat in full view. Thus, the national past and the revolutionary legacy became entangled stories in a cityscape the Bolsheviks had intended to use to "stamp . . . collective identity."[34]

The demonstration of April 24 interpreted these perspectives in diverse ways. Part of the crowd headed north on Nalbandian Street to shame university employees who had locked students into their auditoria to prevent them

32. Hayden, *Power of Place*, 33.

33. Most of this architectural ensemble remains in place today. Only the Lenin statue was removed after 1991, and the postsocialist urban development has led to, among other things, an obstruction of the perspective onto the smaller peak through the arch connecting the post office and the building formerly housing the labor union.

34. Sharon Zukin, *The Culture of Cities* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 3.

from joining the demonstration. They then proceeded to Yerevan's main radio station, in the northeast of the city. Onlookers and radio employees greeted them and vendors offered them water and something to eat, as shop owners had done during the February revolution.[35] This seemingly playful reenactment of revolutionary fervor and support nevertheless had a distinctive goal: genocide recognition. This was made clear when demonstrators literally marked the anniversary on the city's walls by painting "50" on them with crayon and toothpaste.[36]

The majority of those who left Lenin Square, however, took to Prospekt Hoktemberian and proceeded south, toward Mount Ararat. Yet, despite the territorial claims voiced at the demonstration, the Armenian lands the crowd seemed to be headed toward appear to have been less of a concern: One part of this crowd accentuated the demonstration as a mourning procession in the aftermath of genocide rather than making a claim for lost territories by leaving the main route to assemble at the grave of a prominent genocide victim, the monk and composer Komitas.[37] The remaining group going south did so under calls to mobilize the workers in the city's southern districts, again linking national claims to sources of socialist legitimacy. If the workers were to support them, this would be a true demonstration of the people. While posing a potential challenge to Soviet authority over urban space, the demonstrators articulated national concerns by reenacting, and thus reaffirming, revolutionary traditions. They accentuated the messages already inherent in Yerevan's symbolic geography, but not in the radical way this geography might have allowed for.

The most radical move was the behavior of what official reports identified as "three hundred hooligans" who that evening broke into the opera house, where a closed memorial meeting of the republic's elite was to take place.[38] However, it was not only the authorities who drew a line here; other participants also denounced this act as "hooliganism," the main marker for unacceptable behavior at that time.[39] Moreover, the authorities did not react as if a serious revolt had erupted. They made sure to evacuate the theater and used water cannons instead of weapons to disperse the crowd—a quite gentle approach compared to the upheavals in Novocherkassk, Groznyi, and Tbilisi which had been put down by armed forces just a few years prior.[40] A handful

35. Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 34.

36. Ter-Abramian, "Erevanskaia gorodskaia sreda i inakomyslie," 20; Vardanian, interview.

37. HAA HQP′, f. 1, op. 45, d. 2, l. 41. Komitas (born Soghomon Soghomonian), a monk of the Armenian Apostolic Church, transcribed Armenian folk songs from Anatolia and turned them into choir music that was well received in the Ottoman empire and Europe. He was imprisoned in Istanbul on April 25, 1915, the day after the start of the genocide, and subsequently lost his mind; he died in a Paris asylum in 1935.

38. HAA HQP′, f. 1, op. 45, d. 2, l. 38.

39. Vardanian, interview; HAA HQP′, f. 1, op. 45, d. 2, l. 38, 49–50. On the role of hooliganism in the 1960s, see Brian LaPierre, "Making Hooliganism on a Mass-Scale: The Campaign against Petty Hooliganism in the Soviet Union, 1956–1964," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, nos. 1–2 (2006): 349–75.

40. Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962* (Stanford, 2001); Vladimir A. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion*

of students arrested after small skirmishes with the militia later in the evening of April 24 were "chased away" a few days later, apparently without official charges brought against them.[41]

Genocide Recognition and Territorial Claims as a Question of Solidarity

These arrests might have been a formative experience for a few students who formed underground organizations after 1965 and whose demands for restitution of the Armenian lands and the protection of Armenian national culture and language certainly unsettled some Armenian communists.[42] The story of Armenian popular concerns with genocide recognition, national culture, and territory is, however, more complex than a simple dichotomy between die-hard believers and radical sceptics. Interestingly, both sides' arguments also resemble the interpretations of official discourse brought forward by letter writers as well as Armenian historians and writers who spoke up as Soviet citizens. As in Yerevan's built environment, their arguments, language, and references bore a particular, national character while being firmly grounded in Soviet master narratives.

Master Narratives: Soviet Solidarity and the Genealogy of Genocides

The two main Soviet master narratives developing in the 1960s—the victory over Nazi Germany and Soviet solidarity with the so-called Third World's struggle for independence—were not only ever present in the Soviet public sphere but were particularly meaningful issues to Armenians, as letters written to Soviet authorities in the months before and after the illegal demonstration on April 24 show.[43] Explicit reference to American troops' crimes in Vietnam can be found, for example, in a letter signed "Youth of Armenia" which made an emotional case for genocide recognition by presenting photographs of dead children and skulls from the Armenian genocide. Declaring "profound solidarity" with the war victims in Vietnam, the letter compared the actions of the U.S. military in Indochina to the crimes committed by Adolf Hitler's Germany and the Young Turks. The latter, however, seemed to have been forgotten by the Soviet press. Therefore, this letter deemed it essential

in the Post-Stalin Years, ed. and trans. Elaine McClarnand Mackinnon (Armonk, 2002), 109, 124.

41. Ter-Abramian, "Gorod i inakomyslie."

42. Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 123–33; Suny, *Looking toward Ararat*, 186–87; GARF, f. 8131, op. 36s, dd. 5728, 6182 (Arshakian A.T.); and Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI), f. 5 (Apparat TsK KPSS), op. 58 (Otdel' organizatsionno-partiinoi raboty TsK KPSS), d. 19 (Materialy otdela Zakavkaskikh respublik), l. 72.

43. Calls for solidarity with Vietnam's struggle against the American invasion, the general support for decolonization, and the official remembrance of World War II were omnipresent in the Soviet press in March and April 1965. On the Soviet press providing its readers with meaningful frames and schemata for interpreting the world around them, see Jeremy Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 2000), 21.

to remind the Central Committee, *Pravda*, and *Komsomolskaia Pravda* that "along with the death camps of Auschwitz, the gas chambers of Buchenwald, and Dachau, the year 1915, Western Armenia, and the 1,500,000 murdered Armenians have to be remembered."[44]

While questioning the Soviet media's silence on 1915, this underground group identified common ground in referring to a connection between 1915, the fight against fascism, and postcolonial conflicts. This group, whose self-designation potentially challenged the Komsomol's claim to be the sole representative of Soviet youth, thus chose a point of departure that was not only firmly rooted in official discourse. It also defined Armenians as part of a larger community that would express empathy toward the fate of others while also expecting to receive adequate help and solidarity in their own plight.

In its call to extend to Armenian genocide victims the solidarity constantly invoked regarding WWII and support for decolonization, this group was not alone. A letter by a certain M. I. Gasparian from Yerevan criticized the contradiction between Soviet press reports on the Congo, Vietnam, Cyprus, and Aden and their silence on the "greatest crime in human history—the Armenian massacres, about which not only the Russian people but also all people of the Soviet Union know nothing. I think that all peoples should know about this tragedy, whose authors were the Turkish pogromists, whose methods were then applied by the German aggressors."[45] To reinforce his argument, Gasparian also attached eight photographs of the Armenian genocide. The visual impact and importance of these crimes were explicitly connected in this letter to the emerging Soviet war cult, as its author negatively compared the caption "We will neither forget nor forgive" underneath pictures of raped and murdered women in Smolensk published in the Soviet press to the silence on the Armenian genocide.[46]

Thus, these letter writers took issue with what they perceived as a blatant inconsistency while nonetheless subscribing to the ethics of official Soviet proclamations. Along the way, they marked Armenians' feeling of belonging to Soviet society, for whom the experience of WWII had become a fundamental reference point.[47] Establishing a genealogy of genocides, Armenian letter writers invested the Soviet project with additional meaning. For example, as M. A. Simonian, an economist writing from Tbilisi, declared to his "dear comrades" in the Central Committee that his letter sprang from his "feelings of deepest love for our Great Socialist Homeland in general and for my people in particular," he put forward a particular, yet nonantagonistic, local perspec-

44. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 68 (Pis'ma sovestkikh grazhdan o velikoi tragedii armianskogo naroda 1915 g. i ob uvekovechnii pamiati pavshikh v rezul'tate genotsida armian), l. 13.

45. Ibid., ll. 6, 7.

46. Ibid., l. 5. It is unclear which particular article and photographs he was referring to. *Pravda* featured an article on March 10, 1965, with the headline "Ne zabudem, ne prostim!" See also "Ne dopustit' amnestii ubitsam!," *Pravda*, March 11, 1965.

47. Amir Weiner, "The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity," *Russian Review* 55, no. 4 (October: 1996): 638–60.

tive while underscoring his belonging to the larger Soviet community.[48] For Armenian letter writers, the commitment stemming from this shared past translated into a duty to warn Moscow of the danger Turkey posed to Soviet safety. According to Simonian, "The Turks have always been blood thirsty and perfidious. In case of a NATO attack on the socialist camp, Turkey will be on the front line."[49] After all, Turkey had joined the fascist camp in 1943 "to complete the extermination [of Armenians they] started in 1915."[50] He thus linked past Armenian suffering to a shared Soviet history of overcoming outside threats and the menace of NATO powers so present in the Soviet press. A similar association of visions of national and socialist enemies is also prominent in other letters whose references to "Turkish henchmen," "beasts," "imperialists," "barbarians," and "exploiters" established a firm dividing line between an overarching Soviet "us" and a Turkish "them."[51]

This identification of Armenian with Soviet concerns could be read as a cunning exploitation of the official discourse. And considering the number of Turkic nationalities living in Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus, these visions of "Turkish henchmen" certainly seem at odds with the proclaimed friendship of the peoples.[52] The question is, however, if this equation of national and sometimes xenophobic perceptions with Soviet goals challenged Soviet ethical and political hierarchies or whether it automatically distanced these Armenian letter writers from Soviet society as such. I argue that even if the invocation of "barbaric Turks" seems to contradict socialist teachings, it parallels the duality of affirmative nationality policies and racial profiling inherent in past official campaigns against potentially disloyal nationalities;[53] at the same time, in their communications with Soviet authorities, Armenians appear to have differentiated between "Turkish enemies" and "Azerbaijani brothers," even as the latter were criticized for their lack of solidarity and reluctance to relinquish Karabakh. Yet, by putting forward locally defined notions of solidarity and belonging, Armenians subscribed to the Soviet project as much as they ascribed new or additional meanings to it. In the process, they used a language that can be seen as a hybrid of two, seemingly contradictory social discourses—the national and the socialist—that, two generations into the Soviet project, had merged into "a historically evolving language" that made sense on the local level.[54] This hybridization involves conscious and

48. HAA HQP', f. 1, d. 45, d. 68, l. 16; note also the similarity here to the interviewees' statements quoted in the introduction to this article. Weiner, "The Making of a Dominant Myth," 660.

49. HAA HQP' f. 1, op. 45, d. 68, l. 19.

50. Ibid., l. 13. This concern correlates with Soviet border policy, which defined border regions as "front" districts. See Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 320.

51. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 68, ll. 2, 3, 6, 12, 18, 19. See also Sarah Davies, *Public Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), 124–44.

52. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, chap. 11.

53. Frank Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten: Juden im Sowjetstaat, 1941–1953* (Cologne, 2008); Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 313–16, 320, 325.

54. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), 361.

unconscious aspects, which never can be fully separated as they are "two phases of the same movement, which constantly overlap and interweave."[55] At the same time, hybridizations such as the apricot socialism under discussion here can potentially, but not necessarily, challenge official hierarchies, as it contains in itself a double logic that evades either/or conventions.

This hybridization of Soviet narratives and national concerns was no exceptional or singular phenomenon to be found in a handful of letters. It correlates with the topics and the tone found in literature published in the Soviet Union and Armenia since the late 1950s. A widely read epic poem on the life and suffering of Komitas by Paruir Sevak, for example, presented the monk's death as a victory—a stance that was typical for Soviet literature addressing the terror or WWII during the thaw.[56] Similarly, the first Soviet publication of Franz Werfel's 1933 novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, about a group of villages in northern Syria that had resisted deportation in 1915, resonated with the new self-image of a younger Armenian generation that wanted to see suffering addressed but also looked for instances of national resilience and self-defense with which it could more easily identify.[57] This corresponded to central elements of the image of the new Soviet man as much as the Soviet war hero, who had suffered but, most importantly, were to overcome their plight.[58]

The Law of Solidarity: Empathy and Entitlement

Letter writers marked their belonging to a Soviet community by also voicing a sense of entitlement that derived from their sense of being Soviet citizens. This entitlement came in different guises. Letter writers insisted on a unanimous moral stance toward all victims of violence, as the "law" that proclaimed that one must not forget "the mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters who fell victim to the fascist thugs" also applied to those who had been murdered by the "Turkish fanatics fifty years ago."[59] The Armenian people, at least, "cannot condone all those who caused this evil, as the people cannot condone the

55. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 304–5, 358, 360; Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London, 1995), 199. See also Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, 1995), 24, 27; and Kien Nghi Ha, *Hype um Hybridität: Kultureller Differenzkonsum und postmoderne Verwertungstechniken im Spätkapitalismus* (Bielefeld, 2005), 55–56.

56. Polly Jones, "Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw," *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2 (April 2008): 352.

57. HAA HQP', f. 1, d. 44 (Materialy TsK KP Armenii 1964g.), op. 108 (Dokladnye zapiski), l. 31; RGANI, f. 5, op. 58, d. 19, l. 24. The print run of the first Armenian edition of Werfel's novel amounted to 40,000 copies. RGANI, f. 5, op. 58, d. 19, l. 64f.

58. On suffering as a "Soviet" virtue, see Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca, 2003), 113–27; and Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh, 2008), 40–41. The serialized contributions of "K 20-letiiu velikoi pobedy" in *Pravda* likewise emphasized the overcoming of odds as a victory.

59. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 68, l. 12.

fascists."[60] Merit and respect was another issue brought forward in references that alluded to the Armenian contributions to the Soviet victory. After all, Armenia had been a "faithful ally of the Russian people [and] contributed to the victory of the Russian forces in every possible way."[61]

This commitment to the Soviet community also translated into a feeling of entitlement that was expressed in legalist terms. If Nazi Germany's war crimes had been condemned and were even to be persecuted without temporal limitation, why were the Turkish cruelties of 1915 not avenged yet?[62] Letter writers made sure to explain to the apparently ignorant Soviet authorities in Moscow why this judiricial term also applied to the massacres of 1915, providing extended histories of Armenian suffering.[63] A certain Grigorian from Yerevan demonstrated his knowledge of international law by explicitly referring to the "accord of the General Assembly of the UN of December 9, 1948, on the persecution of genocide." He then admonished that "many initiators of genocide remained unpunished. No wonder that genocide continues even today."[64] In this manner, he replicated official Soviet criticism of western policies during the Cold War—for example, the lax persecution of Nazi war criminals in West Germany—and demanded consistency from the Soviet leadership, whose own rhetoric would imply condemnation of the Armenian genocide.[65] For the Youth of Armenia, Moscow's placating policies toward Turkey amounted to a sanctioning of the Armenian genocide.[66]

The very use of the term *genocide* differed considerably from the covert allusions to "what had happened in Turkey" employed in previous decades or the official dictum of the "Armenian phoenix risen from the ashes" that was to point to the bright future and leave the dark past behind. Yet, this matched Armenian historians' tone and arguments, most notably that of a widely read PhD dissertation by Dzhon Kirakosian (1929–85), as a KGB official remarked in a 1966 report to Moscow.[67] Tellingly, Kirakosian was not only the son of a renowned Armenian Bolshevik from Tbilisi, a friend of the poet Paruir Sevak, and an aspiring historian working at the Armenian Academy of Sciences but also the head of the Armenian Central Committee's propaganda division.[68] His doctoral thesis, "The First World War and Western Armenians (1914–1916)," focused directly on the genocide; according to the dissertation, thanks to the October revolution the Armenian nation survived the "cannibalistic politics of pogrom" and "inhuman massacres" brought about by the "barbaric Young Turks." As in the letters, Kirakosian integrated the genocide into the Soviet experience of WWII and the condemnation of Nazi Germany for the Holocaust: he noted that Hitler reasoned that the *Endlösung* would

60. Ibid., l. 13.
61. Ibid., l. 18.
62. Ibid., l. 4.
63. Ibid., ll. 2–4, 12, 13.
64. Ibid., l. 4.
65. See, among others, "Ne zabudem, ne prostim!," *Pravda*, March 10, 1965.
66. HAA HQP′, f. 1, op. 45, d. 68, l. 13.
67. On the dissertation's popularity among students, see RGANI, f. 5, op. 58, d. 19, l. 24. On its use in other students' work, see GARF, f. 8131, op. 36s, d. 7528.
68. HAA HQP′, f. 1, op., 123 (Otdel′ kadrov), d. 5531 (Kirakosian Dzh, S.), l. 9.

not necessarily be detrimental to German interests in international relations given that no one remembered the massacres of the Armenians in Turkey.[69] Likewise, he took on a juridical perspective in quoting a decision of the Supreme Soviet of the SSSR of March 4, 1965: "The Nazi criminals 'are liable to go to court and their conviction is independent of time elapsed since the crime was committed.'"[70] Thus, not just Armenian letter writers but also a promising young apparatchik who held a key position in the Armenian CC raised the bar for the Soviet authorities, as genocide recognition and juridical persecution became the ultimate proof of their own claims.

A Sensible Request: National Territory, Internationalist Solidarity, and Communist Consciousness

Besides WWII and legal implications, the letters also connected the widely publicized post-Stalinist support for decolonization with their own situation:[71] "The '50s and '60s of the 20th century are seen as the years of the liberation of numerous people from foreign rule. Even savage tribes of less than 300,000 people have gained independence. Why are the five million Armenian people denied the right to ask for the liberation of their homeland from Turkish rule?"[72] The letters all eventually turned to the delicate issue of national territory. The term *independence* in the passage quoted above might prompt expectations that Armenians were disaffected with the Soviet Union.[73] But while this and other letter writers insisted repeatedly on Armenia's entitlement to territories in Anatolia and the Southern Caucasus and were impatient with the Soviet government's inconsistencies, they identified themselves throughout as Soviet citizens.

The letter writers saw not only Armenian rights but Soviet sovereignty as at risk, as the Soviet government extended a "hand of friendship" to a state that had not only not been convicted for its war crimes but was also "valued by the leaders of the western powers": "We, apart from relinquishing the whole of Western Armenia, even concede primordial Armenian territories to Turkey, the regions of Kars and Ardahan that are so vital for Soviet Armenia."[74] Refer-

69. Dzh. S. Kirakosian, "Pervaia mirovaia voina i zapadnye armiane (1914–1916gg.): Aftoreferat" (Yerevan, 1965), 3–4. Letters to Moscow authorities also referred to Hitler's quote, "Who remembers the massacres of the Armenians in Turkey?" See HAA HQP', f. 1, d. 45, d. 68, l. 12.

70. Kirakosian, "Pervaia mirovaia voina," 4.

71. Decolonization had been repeatedly endorsed by Nikita Khrushchev since the late 1950s. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005), 66–72.

72. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 68, l. 19.

73. It seems as if Armenians echoed the official statements in the Soviet press on the independence of Asian nations in order to make the issue relevant to the Armenian claim for national territory. See, for example, a statement by the Soviet government addressed to the United States about Vietnam, published in *Pravda*, which declared the "right of the peoples to independence and sovereignty." "Zaiavlenie Sovetskogo pravitel'stvo pravitel'stvu SShA," *Pravda*, March 5, 1965.

74. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 68, l. 18.

ring to other territories that had been under Turkish rule in the past, Armenian letter writers continued to lament Soviet inconsistency, asking rhetorically whether "*we* would return the Crimea and Batumi" if Turkey asked for it. After all, the Soviet Union had already given in to "Turkish demands [regarding] two other Armenian regions, Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh, [which] were wrested from Soviet Armenia and given to Soviet Azerbaijan."[75] Here, the powerful Soviet Union had caved in to "Turkish vandals," disregarding its citizens' vital interests. Tellingly, the collective pronoun "we" still located the author on the Soviet side, despite his strong critique of the Soviet government's policies.

The letters saw a remedy to this issue, however. While the Youth of Armenia protested that in 1921, "three-quarters of Armenia's territory were given away without regard for the opinion of the people," it also declared that the Armenian people would consciously refrain for the time being from demanding "Western Armenia" back. This demonstration of sensitivity, which other letters also emphasized, entailed a sense for what was possible and "logical." But since the question of Nakhichevan and Karabakh was an internal problem, it should be resolved then.[76] Other letters promoted the same idea while linking their sense of entitlement to the ethics of internationalism and communism: "As far as Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh are concerned, communist morality and socialist internationalism dictate that Soviet Azerbaijan returns these territories to its brother, Soviet Armenia." More importantly, the Armenian people were "a vanguard in the construction of communism" and therefore "owned the right in the Soviet present to be master of its own territories."[77]

Reports to Moscow identify this issue as one of importance, especially for the educated elite in Soviet Armenia.[78] A year after the April 24 demonstration, an editor of an Armenian publishing house insisted in a letter to the Armenian CC that the question of Karabakh and Nakhichevan needed to be resolved: "The faster the better, for the brotherhood and friendship the two people [of Armenia and Azerbaijan and] the better for the Leninist nationality policy."[79] In a more measured tone, 1,906 eminent writers, scientists, and artists petitioned Moscow in 1966 for the transfer of Karabakh to Soviet Armenia in the name of socialist liberation and Soviet internationalism. They were "convinced that the resolution of this question will strengthen the friendship of our peoples . . . and show the western world that under the socialist skies the spirit of concord reigns, that all possible interethnic questions are decided on the highest level of communist consciousness."[80] These claims on national

75. Ibid. Emphasis added. On Turkish influence on the territorial division of the Soviet Caucasus in the 1920s, see Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall*, 244–45.

76. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 68, l. 13.

77. Ibid., l. 20.

78. For similar sentiments, see petitions and leaflets from Nagorno-Karabakh in HAA HQP', f. 207, op. 26s, d. 140, ll. 1–6; and RGANI, f. 5, op. 58, d. 19, l. 25.

79. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 46 (Materialy TsK KP Armenii 1966 goda), d. 66 (Perepiska s TsK KPSS), l. 112.

80. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 46, d. 65b (Obrashchenie obshchestvennykh deiatelei), ll. 1–4. See also HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 68, ll. 12–13.

territory certainly posed a challenge to the Soviet government. Tellingly, officially sanctioned publications, such as Kirakosian's dissertation and Sevak's and other writers' books, instead alluded to the "Armenian lands." But while letter writers articulated a sense of entitlement along with an expectation of solidarity, they also put forward meaningful interpretations of Soviet rhetoric and official declarations. The challenge they voiced directly to Moscow came not from a position outside the official discourse but from an affirmative, if confrontational, stance within the Soviet repertoire.

This local hybridization of the official discourse is thus not simply evidence for Armenian "dissident nationalism" or duplicity vis-à-vis the ruling party. The interpretations of official discourse in these letters and writings rather reveal in the official Soviet idiom what Salman Rushdie has observed regarding another language of domination: "English is no longer an English language, it grows from many roots," and while those speaking this language carve out "large territories within the language for themselves," its use makes them part of English culture.[81] Two generations into the Soviet project, the ideological language of socialism was no longer a recently acquired language but had developed into a local dialect that varied the official idiom as much as it affirmed it.[82]

Good Communists, Dedicated People: Discussing an Illegal Demonstration in the Armenian Central Committee

Tellingly, this particular dialect was spoken not only by Soviet Armenian citizens but also the party elite, as records of the plenary session of the Armenian CC a few days after April 24, 1965, show. With an illegal demonstration to explain to Moscow and likely repercussions looming, Armenian communists put the event itself and the issues at hand into perspective. First Secretary Iakov Zarobian justified the memorial ceremony since, in the months before April 24, "the question of the slaughter of the Armenians had been on the mind of all for a long time."[83] He stated that the steps taken by the party leadership to channel the anniversary of the Armenian massacres in the right direction had been mostly successful—not mentioning that several measures that had just been approved by Moscow in March had not been implemented, such as an academic conference, radio broadcasts, and the erecting of an obelisk to commemorate "the Armenians who perished during World War I."[84]

81. Quoted in Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990), 48.

82. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 223–25. For other, even more unlikely groups' adaptations of the socialist idiom, see Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts*; Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, 2009), 12, 116; and Maike Lehmann, "A Different Kind of Brothers: Exclusion and Partial Integration after Repatriation to a Soviet 'Homeland,'" *Ab Imperio* 3 (2012): 171–211.

83. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 2, l. 38.

84. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 44, d. 54, l. 64–65. These measures were the result of an initiative by Dzhon Kirakosian and the directors of the Armenian institutes for Marxism-Leninism and for oriental studies, who had, in July 1964, started to lobby the Armenian CC to officially commemorate the Armenian genocide. The Armenian CC supported this and tried to gain support in Moscow. See ibid., ll. 66–73.

But while Zarobian saw it as a success that only "a few nationalistic and demagogic elements" had turned to the territorial questions, others attacked the Armenian CC precisely for the measures not taken. Even though it would have been too late to erect the obelisk that had just been approved by Moscow, there should have been a public inauguration of at least a memorial stone. The memorial ceremony at the opera house had been too exclusive an event.[85] The authorities had been too afraid of making mistakes and failed to provide the local party organizations and the younger generation with guidance. Thus, they were reduced to being mere onlookers instead of assuming leadership roles and directing the people's mourning.[86] The militia was criticized for its inability to deal with the situation, as it had been clear that people would gather on Lenin Square and at Komitas's grave.[87] But while most of those present at this plenary session were enraged over the "excesses" at the opera house, no one thought a stricter approach should have been taken in breaking up the demonstration.[88]

The Armenian CC members in fact took every opportunity to underscore the necessity and legitimacy of commemorating the genocide. On the one hand, this need to defend genocide commemoration points to an uncertainty regarding Moscow's stance toward the new role of "1915," just recently affirmed within the official canon, after the illegal demonstration. On the other hand, it reveals yet again a hybrid conceptualization of the Soviet mission, communist duties, and general ethics. Communist morality could only result in recognition of 1915. Here, legalist entitlement turned into duty vis-à-vis the declared Soviet sovereign, the *narod*. While most speakers continued to talk about *massacres* (*resni*), instead of using the legal term *genocide*, the first secretary himself used the former while marking 1915 as an unprecedented event. After all, one must not "ignore that in 1915, . . . the genocidal politics . . . of the sultan's empire at the time resulted in the deaths of 1.5 million Armenians, that is, half of the population."[89] If this "tragedy without precedent in the history of humankind" had not been marked, "the people would not have understood us."[90] This resonated very much with Zarobian's party audience. As an Old Bolshevik was to declare, "Comrades! . . . If we had not observed the fiftieth anniversary of the massacres, we would have been very bad communists."[91]

The party elite also shared many of the same perspectives on Armenian history and its implications for the Soviet leadership which Armenian citizens had expressed in their letters. Speakers at this plenary session maintained that "behind the Turks stood the German capitalists," thus framing Soviet ethics and experiences in a way that again integrated the Armenian past into Soviet enemy rhetoric.[92] Likewise, the anniversary of the 1915 genocide represented for them the particular bond to the mission of a multiethnic Soviet

85. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 2, l. 44.
86. Ibid., ll. 38, 43, 44, 51, 52.
87. Ibid., l. 42.
88. Ibid., ll. 42, 43.
89. Ibid., l. 32.
90. Ibid., l. 48, 53.
91. Ibid., l. 39.
92. Ibid., l. 48.

Union. Had the other peoples of the Soviet Union known more about the genocide, it was reasoned, they would have joined the Armenian commemoration, given their own past experiences with outside threats:[93] "Only Soviet power, only the friendship of the peoples made it possible to us to observe this anniversary. . . . In our fight for freedom we are not to forget the politics of genocide as perpetrated by fascism, Chingis Khan, and the Turkish barbarians."[94]

Here, members of the Armenian party elite made an even broader use of Soviet master narratives than letter writers had. The Soviet common cause sprung not only from the war fought by all Soviet nations against Nazi Germany but extended to outside enemies from the distant past: the Mongol invasion that not only had particular relevance for Russian history but also marked the arrival of Turkish tribes in the Caucasus.[95] These historical perspectives rooted Soviet concerns about enemies, liberation, freedom, and friendship as much in a national past that validated the achievements of the Soviet present and the friendship of the peoples as it did in the national concerns of Armenian Soviet citizens and party leaders. The potential tensions inherent in the comments about "Turkish tribes" and "Turkish barbarians" were apparently not an issue even for members of the Armenian political elite. After all, the events of April 24 had shown that "the Leninist friendship of the peoples [was] inviolate, in particular, the friendship between the Azerbaijani and the Armenian people."[96] Thus, Armenians' commitment to their Soviet brothers was beyond question, while the Armenian leadership in turn identified 1915 as a crucial marker of Soviet solidarity.

At the same time, the Armenian party elite sought to disassociate the label "nationalism" from the events of April 24. Even as Zarobian blamed the escalation brought about by "junkies, drunks, [and] criminals, who with their hooliganism have besmirched the memory of the dead," on liberalism in the ideological education of youth and the intelligentsia, the draft resolution to be sent to Moscow commented on "nationalist and demagogic elements," who had incited the grieving crowd with territorial claims.[97] This met with considerable opposition in the Armenian CC plenum.

Part of the problem was that the demonstration had attracted many Komsomol and party members. But the objections went beyond the concern with the position of party members. One CC member insisted that one could not "call something that is a great uproar and anger against Turkish oppressors nationalistic or nationalism. Our assessments . . . have to be truthful and objective," and thus it was not permissible "to call the lone, asocial deeds of hooligans nationalist."[98] Others insisted that the demonstrators were "dedicated

93. Ibid., l. 37; see also ibid., ll. 43, 44.

94. Ibid., l. 38; see also ibid., l. 49.

95. On the role of Chingis Khan in Soviet propaganda, see David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 147, 163–64. For the Caucasian historiography on the issue, see V. A. Shnirel'man, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka, 2001), 60–61.

96. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 45, d. 2, l. 32.

97. Ibid., ll. 32–36.

98. Ibid., l. 49–50.

people void of any nationalist disposition" and that one should "not look for nationalism where there is none."[99] In the end, hooliganism was not to be confused with nationalism: "To speak of nationalism when some windows get smashed . . . goes too far."[100] This issue was of such importance that the plenum refused to vote on a resolution that featured the term *nationalism*. Even as Zarobian reminded his comrades of the need to find a consistent explanation for Moscow, they only voted for a watered-down version, with one abstention, when the plenum reassembled the next day.[101]

The speeches by several CC members also reveal how mainstream the demonstrators' and letter writers' views on the territorial issue were. Speakers at this plenum even disapproved of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which "was so afraid of the Turks" that delegations to Turkey would not mention "anything dispensable," such as "the word 'massacres.'"[102] The chairman of Yerevan's city committee criticized those comrades "who do not deem it wise" to discuss territorial claims, "as if they could be better dealt with tomorrow."[103] Other speakers maintained that "to speak of nationalism where . . . [the Armenian] territories are concerned is a bit of a stretch."[104] The territorial issue even caused amusement when a representative from Leninakan reported an encounter with one eager youth in his city: "A few people have written leaflets, but can you call them leaflets? I came upon a fellow who just tried to fix such a leaflet to the wall. Written on it was: 'We claim the Turkish and Persian territories' // laughter in the auditorium// He did not even know which territories were concerned. One cannot put the label 'nationalistic' on that one."[105] While this anecdote at least indicates a normalization of international borders among the younger generation, it was nonetheless cause for ridicule among the political elite. For the latter, the territories concerned were essentially Armenian. To call them otherwise was stupid, not nationalistic.

Thus, members of the Armenian political elite identified unresolved issues and policies that, in their view, lay at the heart of the party's promises of solidarity, justice, and political representation as being in the best interests of the Soviet community. As even high-ranking party officials read the official discourse in a selective and particular way, socialism and its promises emerge not as doctrine, whose purity was a matter of mere decision making in Moscow. Rather, these interpretations point to a meaningful and thus affirmative view of socialism, whose features, however, varied in color.

Long Lives Apricot Socialism: The Aftermath of 1965

Letter writers and the Armenian party elite continued in subsequent years to insist on what they perceived as imperative for the successful realization of the Soviet project. Although the Armenian authorities prevented another

99. Ibid., ll. 39, 48.
100. Ibid., l. 38f.
101. Ibid., ll. 55–62.
102. Ibid., l. 45.
103. Ibid., ll. 51–52.
104. Ibid., l. 39.
105. Ibid., l. 38; see also ll. 46, 49, 54.

demonstration from taking place a year later, the new first secretary, Anton Kochinian, informed Moscow in September 1966 that it was increasingly difficult to explain to an otherwise very "reasonable" population the issues at hand concerning a "return of Karabakh and Nakhichevan to the Soviet Republic of Armenia."[106] They did not, however, just report on the popular mood but reflected it by insisting on a "just solution of this artificial situation . . . brought about by the provocation of imperialist powers and the reactionary, rightwing forces of Turkey." It was "a well-known historical fact," he stated, that "forty-six years ago, the government of the Azerbaijani SSR published a declaration recognizing these territories as integral parts of the Armenian SSR." But due to "Turkey's pan-Turkish goals," these territories were "still under Azerbaijani protectorate." Considering that 85 percent of Karabakh's population was Armenian, the Armenian party leadership considered it entirely justified to "pose the question of incorporating Nagorno-Karabakh into the Armenian SSR."[107]

While successive commissions failed to solve the territorial issues, Armenians were to witness a sustained affirmation of both their national concerns and their identity as Soviet citizens in the cityscape of Yerevan. After 1965, the city became subject to a monument-building boom that revealed not only the new presence of the genocide in Soviet Armenia's public space but also its continued, hybrid conjunction with the Soviet project. Busts and statues of Armenian revolutionary leaders adorned Yerevan's streets, emphasizing Armenia's subscription to socialist tradition. As part of the emerging official Soviet commemoration of WWII, a Mother Armenia statue was erected in 1968 in Yerevan's Victory Park on one of the hilltops above the city center where, until 1962, the largest Stalin statute in the Soviet Union had overlooked the Ararat valley and the border with Turkey.[108] While praising the Soviet victory, it also nationalized it: the towering figure, vested in garments that referred to archeological discoveries in the Ararat valley, holds a battle sword horizontally in front of her body, making the statue resemble a giant cross. It thus marked Soviet Armenia's resilience vis-à-vis outside threats coming from the west and from Turkey. Two years later, Armenian dedication to the Soviet project found its expression in a monument to the fiftieth anniversary of Armenia's Sovietization—a stele adorned with Zoroastrian symbols, thus rooting the Soviet promise in the pre-Christian Armenian past. Armenians were consistently invited to view the Soviet project through apricot-colored glasses.

The hybrid continuum between the national and the socialist was nowhere as present as with the first genocide memorial ever built on Soviet soil. Set aloft, on yet another hilltop above Yerevan's city center, this memorial was rich in allusions to the suffering and the lost territories beyond the Soviet-

106. HAA HQP', f. 1, op. 46, d. 65a (Pis'mo Kochiniana A. i Muradiana B. v TsK KPSS po voprosu prisoedinenii NK k ArmSSR), l. 3. Iakov Zarobian was "promoted" in 1966 from his post as First Secretary of the Armenian Central Committee to Deputy Minister for Electrification in Moscow.

107. Ibid., ll. 1, 3, 5, 7.

108. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, 1994).

Turkish border, while it was poignant in referencing Soviet WWII memorials. Like many of those memorials, it featured an eternal flame that, according to an architectural guide from 1968, was "surrounded by a rotunda mausoleum consisting of twelve inward-leaning basalt pylons" next to which "rises an obelisk of forty meters that symbolizes the resurrection of the Armenian people."[109] While this "resurrection" matched the official rhetoric on the genocide, the obelisk also alluded to the territories lost: it was split into two parts, the larger part symbolizing Soviet Armenia and the smaller symbolizing "Western Armenia." Another feature was a long wall running up to the mausoleum on which were listed the major sites of Armenian life and suffering in the Ottoman empire and which resembled Soviet memorials enumerating Soviet hero cities, such as that on Moscow's Kremlin wall.[110] The whole complex opened onto the panorama of Mount Ararat, thereby laying claim to those territories as it grieved for the victims and celebrated their heroism. As such, this memorial became part of Yerevan's hybrid matrix of memory and prophecy which integrated national and socialist concerns in a locally meaningful manner.

The monument was in fact to lend new meaning and legitimacy to the Soviet project, in terms of both official memory politics and popular practice. Inaugurated on the forty-eighth anniversary of Armenia's Sovietization, in 1968, the genocide monument became the destination of a yearly procession held every April 24 to lay down red carnations and lilacs at the mausoleum to honor the dead. This procession established itself as an annual fixture without official permission but silent approval. As with other Soviet public holidays, people ascended the hill to the memorial together with their work collectives and classmates. They were not only supervised by the KGB but soon joined by the Armenian party leadership, beginning in the mid-1970s. Although never declared an official holiday, April 24 now heralded the Soviet holiday season, putting Armenian genocide remembrance on a continuum with Labor Day, on May 1, and Victory Day, on May 9. More than just a security valve, the genocide memorial as well as the toleration of this annual procession contributed much to the legitimization of the socialist mission, as it confirmed the local, apricot-colored interpretation of the Soviet project.

These local understandings of community, understood both in national and socialist terms, further evolved over time to eventually shape even the nationalist demonstrations of 1988/89 and the post-Soviet narratives I encountered in the recollections of my interviewees as late as 2007.[111] Beyond retrospective interest in why the Soviet Union eventually failed, Armenians'

109. Arutiunian, Asratian, and Melikian, *Erevan*, 236.

110. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 127.

111. See Harutyun Marutyan, "Iconography of Historical Memory and Armenian National Identity at the End of the 1980s," in Tsypylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba, eds., *Representations on the Margins of Europe: Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States* (Frankfurt am Main, 2007), 94, 105, 123. Nora Dudwick, "Memory, Identity and Politics in Armenia" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 262–78, 379; Mayis Vardanian, *Nachalo: Erevan 1988—125 fotografii* (Yerevan, 1998), 8, 10, 20, 28, 32; and Maike Lehmann, *Eine sowjetische Nation: Nationale Sozialismusinterpretationen in Armenien seit 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 2012).

meaningful local editing of what the Soviet project was about not only provides us with hints for why it "worked" for so long. These local reinterpretations are also a reminder that communities—not only the nation but also other communities such as the Soviet Union—remain subject to constant reimagination and that how these communities were imagined deserves renewed attention as research delves deeper into the workings of an increasingly heterogeneous late Soviet society.

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